



## LSC PAN LONDON ESF PROGRAMME 1

### CASE STUDY – SEPTEMBER 2006

#### ***PROJECT: Employment through learning level 1***

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This *Employment through learning level 1* project, led by the Organisation of Blind Africans and Caribbeans (OBAC), targets long-term unemployed, disabled people and aims to: increase employability levels, reduce isolation and poverty and help learners play an active role in community life. The 1-year project targets excluded, visually impaired African and Caribbean people living in London and develops their learning potential through training opportunities and support into employment.

This target group is affected by isolation and low employment rates due to multiple barriers (e.g. ethnic minority, disability, English as a second language). Through participation in learning, the project helps blind or partially sighted learners to overcome these barriers as well as low confidence to increase their chances of getting a job. Mainstream provision does not often provide the extra, much-needed specialist support that the European Social Fund (ESF) can offer to help this disabled group.

Thanks to ESF, ICT (information communication technology) is used to enable learners to overcome barriers, communicate with their wider environment and participate in training. As part of the 25-week intensive training, IT qualifications are delivered along with basic skills/ESOL (English Speakers Other Languages) accredited courses at Level 1-2. This is made possible thanks to specialist equipment and holistic support.

OBAC's resource centre is fully equipped with the latest access technology for visually impaired people: CCTV (large text enhancement equipment), Braille Embossers, Speech Synthesisers, Magnifiers, Speech Scanner and specialist access software. An important aspect of the project is providing training and support in using these equipments. Additionally, laptops with special software

are available for loan while training delivery through ICT is complemented by audio tapes and printed material (e.g. Braille, large print) where suitable. The training venue is fully adapted for disabled people, including internal design with colour contrast for partially sighted people. Travel expenses (e.g. taxis) are covered which is a key aspect to end the isolation of this target group and the support package also includes 1-to-1 assistance and counselling (where appropriate).

OBAC continues to support learners after the end of the training. This entails assistance with finding work placements, job search support and raising awareness among employers about the needs of this disabled group. This is not an easy undertaking as employers are often reluctant to engage with this target group and lack an understanding of their needs. In many cases, they do not have the resources to adapt their building for visually impaired users (e.g. colour schemes).

The project is led by OBAC, which exists to ensure blind and partially sighted Africans and Caribbean people access relevant services to enable them to overcome barriers that prevent them from becoming active members of the community. It provides training, employment assistance and other support. The organisation is based near Oval, South London.

### ***Project delivery***

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The project is running between January 2006 and December 2006 and its planned outputs/outcomes include:

- 25 visually impaired learners supported
- 25 beneficiaries gaining accredited basic skills / ESOL qualifications (Level 1-2)
- 25 beneficiaries gaining Certificate for IT Users (equivalent to units towards NVQ Level 1-2)
- 10 beneficiaries progressing to employment
- 5 beneficiaries progressing to further training / learning

The first intake of 11 learners completed the training in summer 2006 leading to the achievement of 19 qualifications, including 7 New Clait IT certificates.

Three learners from the first intake have gone into self-employment while two have found a job thanks to OBAC's support. The second intake of 12 learners has recently started the course in late summer and will finish in December 2006. Two more learners are being recruited.

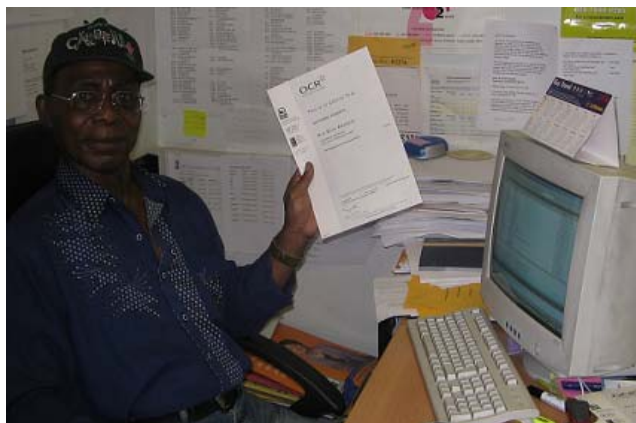
### ***ESF Matters – Making a difference to people's lives***

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#### ***The project's beneficiaries***

Nathaniel Roberts, is a visually impaired Afro-Caribbean, who has just completed training with OBAC and has achieved a New Clait IT Certificate. Prior to the project, he had no knowledge of computers and he was unemployed. He was referred on the course from social services.

He was motivated to learn new skills as he did not want to be left behind in today's job market. He found the training very useful. He is now able to use a computer and help his children with their homework. Nathaniel feels that a very good tutor and OBAC's support and commitment towards the learners were crucial aspects of the project. He hopes that his newly gained skills will help him to access employment. He finds it very difficult to be at home and would really like to get a job to play an active role in the community. He is back at OBAC every week to get support with his job search.



Left: Nathaniel Roberts with his much-deserved certificate

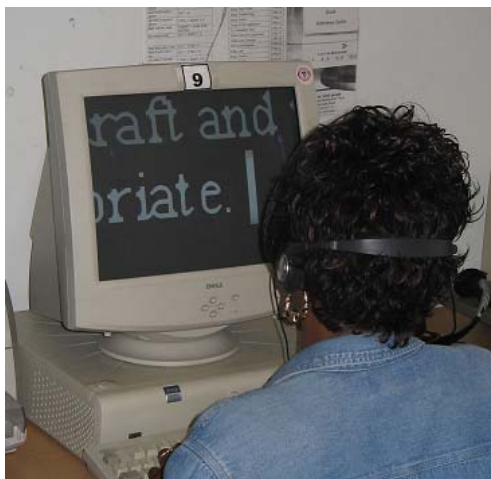
However, it is a challenge for someone like him to get a job as he is visually impaired and from an ethnic minority. He feels discrimination against someone like him is still very much an issue amongst employers. There is also generally a lack of awareness of the barriers faced by those visually impaired. Therefore, he thinks projects like these are important for things to change: *"I think more financial support should go to projects like the one run by OBAC, a lot will be gained by the community"*.

Albert Rush from Hackney has also completed the training in the summer of 2006. The course has helped him to develop his IT, numeracy and literacy skills and to gain related certification. Following the end of the project, he is now working towards his long-term goal of setting up a business selling Caribbean-related merchandise. The skills gained thanks to OBAC have allowed him to gain the confidence to put this vision into practice but also on a practical level. For instance, he has now been able to produce a leaflet to publicise the business through his IT skills. He still facing many challenges in terms of setting up a business as a visually impaired, including lack of funding support and transport needs.



Left: Albert Rush at the OBAC's centre.

Below: 2 OBAC learners using specialist access technology



### ***Funding***

The project has been granted £106,698 of European Social Funding (ESF) under Objective Three (Specification 2.2k). The funding has come through the LSC Pan London ESF Programme 1 co-financing round, more specially the 2005 Underspend Tendering Round. ECOTEC Research & Consulting

([www.ecotec.co.uk](http://www.ecotec.co.uk)) is managing the Programme on behalf of the London region Learning & Skills Council.

***For further information***

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For further information about European Social Funding and the LSC Pan-London ESF Objective 3 Programme, please visit:

[www.esf.gov.uk](http://www.esf.gov.uk)

[www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

[www.LondonO3.ecotec.co.uk](http://www.LondonO3.ecotec.co.uk)

To find out more about the LSC Pan-London ESF O3 Programme, please contact the Pan London O3 Team within ECOTEC (020 7089 1976; [LondonO3@ecotec.co.uk](mailto:LondonO3@ecotec.co.uk)).

To contact Ibukun Olashore at OBAC please phone 020 7735 3400 or email [ibukun@obac.org.uk](mailto:ibukun@obac.org.uk). Further information about OBAC is available at: [www.obac.org.uk](http://www.obac.org.uk).

***Learning & Skills Council***

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The Learning & Skills Council is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds in England (excluding higher education). For any media enquiries about the LSC please contact Bronte Turner (0207 904 0822; [Bronte.Turner@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:Bronte.Turner@lsc.gov.uk)) or Ryan Ansah (0207 904 0796; [Ryan.Ansah@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:Ryan.Ansah@lsc.gov.uk)).