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Leading learning and skills

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## **PROJECT EVALUATION** **LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEAFBLIND PEOPLE**

PROJECT TITLE: Learning Opportunities for Deafblind Adults

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### **Overview of the project activity and partners**

Lancashire College was the lead partner for the project. The College had previous expertise and experience in delivering learning to people who had a hearing impairment or were profoundly deaf. We also worked closely with Galloways Blind Society to deliver provision to visually impaired or blind people. Galloways Blind Society offer many services and facilities to blind and visually impaired people in the region as well as outreach services to ensure that blind and visually impaired people across the county can benefit from their services.

Lancashire College together with Galloways Blind Society successfully bid for funds to develop lifelong learning provision for deafblind people as this was seen as a previously uncovered area for which both parties felt learners would benefit.

The project aimed to provide flexible and innovative ways to address the learning needs of deafblind people and to create a learning club where

stimulating activities to enhance life quality would be on offer with appropriate and intensive support.

The learning club was based initially at Galloways Blind Society in Penwortham where their supportive environment meant that learning was more accessible for the target group as the centre was already adapted for blind and visually impaired users making it an ideal site to start the project.

The activities have included interest led skills, ICT and life skills incorporating a wide range of different topics and courses. Learners have tried their hand at mosaics, a nativity project, archery, pottery, history, historical talks with tactile objects, watercolour painting, deafblind manual alphabet training, microwave cookery, a variety of healthy and holistic lifestyle subjects and computers using enhanced software. Where appropriate, learners also had the chance to work towards accredited qualifications in their chosen areas and many of them were keen to do this.

As well as providing activities and courses for deafblind people, the project has also provided the tutors, support workers and volunteers, with training from SENSE – a leading professional charity for deafblind people. These course subjects were deafblind awareness, deafblind accredited support workers qualification and communication and guiding skills qualification in the CACDP levels 2 and 3. This has been an invaluable asset to the project as it has increased the number of qualified tutors and support workers county wide who are now able to work with deafblind people in the future.

### Achievements of the Project

At the beginning of the project each learner identified their own personal learning goals as well as learning goals for each activity undertaken. Through observation and assessment, tutors and learners recorded their achievements both informally and formally, evidence of which has been recorded using video tapes, written evidence and photographic evidence. There is also a display of work completed on show at Galloways Blind Society.

Many learners reported that the project had helped to increase their confidence and self esteem and some had direct consequences of their achievements, as in the circumstances of the life skills learners where they were able to lead more independent lives as a result of their achievements. Learners who previously relied on carers or other help

for meals and purchasing shopping items are now able to plan, budget and cook their own meals as a consequence of the courses accessed with the project.

The quality of the learning and the environment meant that motivation to continue was very high, indeed the enjoyment and benefits that the participants felt at being able to partake in these activities became apparent when they directly petitioned the College to continue with the activities.

Learners were also given the choice to work towards the AQA accreditation available to recognise skills that people had learned and to give learners a specific target to work to. All the targets for learners were successfully achieved and in the AQA awards many learners achieved the award for more than one area. Other learners gained certificates for work they had done.

The project surpassed its targets for deafblind awareness meaning that twice as many learners as anticipated were taught communication and guiding skills and gained a basic awareness of deafblind people's needs and requirements. As well as deafblind awareness we were able to deliver levels 2 and 3 in the well recognised CACDP qualifications for deafblind people.

The project was also able to give people whose eyesight and hearing were deteriorating the opportunity to learn vital skills that could support future communication such as manual deafblind alphabet and Braille.

Many learners recorded feeling increased confidence and said the project gave them a better quality of life as they were able to feel part of a team and benefited from the social interaction of the group.

### Areas of Innovation

The project focused on deafblind people recognising the increased support required by this target group. By introducing an innovative 'learning club' which met regularly at specific times and days we encouraged deafblind people to socialise, meet other people, discuss their own situations and ways of coping. This provided the appropriate environment for increasing their interpersonal skills as well as giving them the opportunity to access different learning activities. We focused not only on providing the regular access to the learning club but also on learners own individual learning goals. Learning days at other venues were also arranged which included activities that gave 'hands on'

opportunities and practical activities specifically beneficial for the target group.

Learners were introduced to ICT for the first time using specialist software that enabled learners to use any residual hearing or sight loss to their best advantage. For profoundly deafblind learners Braille templates and later adapted Braille keyboards were made available to ensure the best possible access. Using specialist technical equipment we were able to introduce increased levels of independence for some of the learners accessing our life skills courses, empowering them to use their skills in everyday life.

It was recognised that in order to be able to best meet their needs it was important to be knowledgeable about deafblind sensory loss as a separate disability and to be able to respond appropriately to deafblind peoples needs and requirements. The project therefore also provided the tutors, support workers, volunteers and project staff with the opportunity to learn deafblind awareness specific to the target group.

### Identification of Areas of Good Practice and Areas for Improvement

During the course of the project, areas both of good practice and areas for improvement became apparent. Whilst areas for improvement were actioned wherever possible, in some cases this was not always an option available to us.

We found that the idea of running a learning club was very successful and this became very popular and well attended by the target group who found it the easiest way to access the learning activities. By having regular consistent arrangements the learners were able to plan ahead and make arrangements which ensured regular attendance and commitment to the activities. Running the learning club at Galloways Blind Society meant that the venue was already suitable for the target group and Galloways had the added benefit of having many technical aids suitable for teaching this group, such as specific computer software, tactile equipment and talking and tactile life skills equipment.

The organisation of transport for the group was a crucial element in ensuring access to the club and this was organised and arranged prior to each meeting.

The project staff worked individually with all the deafblind people to identify their support needs and to put the required level of support in place. They helped the learners work towards their identified learning goals and monitored the progression of each person. This meant that individuals were able to access the learning that they themselves had identified as a learning goal and that the activities the project ran were appropriate to their needs.

To ensure that support, volunteer and project staff were aware of the needs of deafblind people, prior to arranging the first courses, deafblind awareness training was delivered by SENSE. This continued throughout the project so that the quality of support and delivery of the courses would be of a high standard and so that the best possible support would be provided for the group and individuals. The tutors who delivered the activities and courses for the group were carefully selected and were given deafblind awareness training to ensure they could deliver their subject in the best possible way for the target group taking into account the needs of people with dual sensory loss.

The future communication needs of deafblind people were also considered and identified through Individual Learning Plans resulting in courses on manual deafblind alphabet training. This was very successful as it enabled the profoundly deafblind learners to communicate with others in the group without the need for their interpreter to assist.

We realised at the beginning of the project that identifying the level of sensory loss and the eligibility criteria for deafblind people could be a challenge. All learners were informed about the project and entry criteria and signed a form confirming that they felt they were deafblind and eligible to take part in the project. However project staff did feel in a few cases more stringent rules regarding eligibility should have been applied when defining the term of deafblindness.

The learners attending the programme were mainly blind or visually impaired people who were, as a consequence of their age, also losing their hearing. Some learners were profoundly deaf BSL users who were losing their sight due to Ushers syndrome (a genetic cause of deafblindness) and others included deafblindness as a result of diabetes or other causes.

The learning was very valuable to all of the group but because the biggest cause of deafblindness is acquired, this resulted in many of the applicants being quite elderly. This did not fit well with the requirements of the project. Improvements to this could have involved more targeted

publicity at a younger group, although it should also be noted that this may have affected overall targets.

Publicity information and development of the project had no clear strategy for ensuring widespread knowledge about the availability of courses and activities specifically for deafblind people and contacts that could have been very useful were not utilised until near the end of the project. There were particular difficulties with the sittings of the project staff with the necessary communication and administrative work not always being implemented. Project staff were employed by Galloways Blind Society (the partner of the project), and not by the lead partner which lead to challenges regarding task management and administrative duties. The amount of administrative work required for the project was not clearly understood at the beginning, nor was any advice forthcoming about this area and therefore the input of the manager was far more than was originally envisaged adding to the workload overall and giving little time to contemplate ways to improve and action areas of concern or make progress. Sometimes it appeared that the LSC themselves were unsure about what was required for evidence and data collection.

The target group at their most profound were difficult to locate even though many contacts with different organisations were made. Links to both Sense and Deafblind UK did not prove to be of any advantage to the project.

### Dissemination of Good Practice

After the life of the project ended the staff from Galloways and the College met with other Adult Education Service representatives from each zone to discuss the continuation of the learning opportunities for deafblind people and to disseminate good practice from the project and look to its continuation throughout Lancashire.

### Details of Publicity undertaken

Publicity for the project has largely been by contacting people directly through agencies, Social Services, Sense and Deafblind UK and other charities and organisations. Various leaflets and posters however were sent out to a wider audience and I attach copies of these as well as a press release that was sent out via the Learning Skills Council. Taped information and large print and Braille newsletters were also sent out.

## Views of Customers and/or Partners

Learners were individually consulted and their views about any area of the project or their own learning were recorded by the project staff. This tended to be very positive though and it was rare that negative comments were given. The target group tended to feel 'grateful' for the opportunities given to them and for the support they received. It was often difficult to get any suggestions for improvements from them as they felt so positive about the project. Some were concerned that once the funding ended they would be unable to continue but they were reassured that the learning opportunities would still be provided under different funding.

Lancashire College was the lead partner for the project with Galloways Blind Society as the other partner. The Manager was employed by the College and the Project staff by Galloways. Because the staff and the manager were on different sites, sometimes this led to administrative and communication problems. In particular there were also logistical problems with the individual learner records and learning plans and these by necessity required regular transporting from each site. There were regular steering group meetings of both partners and representatives from other areas to discuss improvements and to consider any suggestions to improve the design of the project or to consider other ways of working.

There were also some difficulties in giving the level of commitment required because of time constraints for both partners. The administrative requirements for the project far exceeded original expectations which detracted from the time available to spend on the project. Both partners however, met regularly, communicating by telephone and face to face to discuss and continually evaluate the project and consider improvements.

## Comparison of how the project dealt with Information Communication Technologies. Equal opportunities and Sustainability

The original plan for the project for Information Communication Technology was to encourage learners to access the ICT suite at Galloways. This had the advantages of having many technical aids available to enable the technology to be accessible for the target group using software and support aids to enhance teaching methods.

It was also anticipated that there would be a laptop loan scheme in operation with full tutor support for learners who had already attained a basic working level on computers or for those who had benefited from the individual tuition on the project. These learners would then be at a level where a laptop could be accessed by them without support by using the enhanced software and adapted keyboards that were available with the laptop machines.

Where appropriate it was envisaged that learners would also work towards accredited qualifications in ICT or other chosen areas. The computer suite at Galloways provided an excellent resource for delivering ICT to the learners and through the use of specialist tutors, technical aids and appropriate software it was planned that the activities would teach many varied and useful skills that are available through computer use.

In reality the expectations of the project did not go according to plan. The computers were purchased for two reasons – one to give people access to computers if the learning took place at a venue without a suitable computer onsite and the other to give access to learners who did not have a computer at home. This has however relied on the willingness and interest of the target group to learn ICT and also on the assumption that some learners who learnt ICT would not already have a computer at home. Unfortunately we have found this was not the case – most of the learners who have accessed the ICT learning already had access to computers at home.

In the event only two of the laptops actually went out on loan to the learners, however these were a valuable resource to the learners concerned and the other three laptops were used mainly onsite at Galloways.

Although the learners on the ICT courses did not progress towards qualifications the benefit of learning ICT with full support was still extremely useful. Many of them once they had started to lose their sight no longer had access to the computers they used at home. The tuition on the enhanced software and Microsoft enlarged print options available on most of the applications clearly demonstrated that for most of them ICT was still accessible.

### Equal Opportunities

The project targeted disadvantaged learners who would find it difficult to access mainstream adult education. This therefore directly responded to

equality of opportunity by providing avenues and support that make it possible for deafblind people to participate in learning.

## Sustainability

Originally it was expected that the continuation of the activities would be implemented by Galloways who would support and encourage the learners to access the community based adult education courses available around the county. It was also anticipated that the College would continue to run its deafblind awareness programme to disseminate awareness about dual sensory loss as a separate disability.

However, because of difficulties with a) access to information b) communication and c) mobility and transport it was felt that this would not necessarily be the best way forward for this group.

The project staff discussed the future of the learning activities both with the learners, partners and existing adult education zone representatives. To ensure capacity building would continue for the group the best option was to have learning clubs located within the three adult education zones. This would improve on original ideas of simply supporting and encouraging existing learners to access community based education as there would be a continuance of the opportunity to access learning activities and there would also be a central point where new learners could come along and access the learning. These would be in all three zones to ensure that learners would not have to travel across the county to take part in the courses.

### Sustainability of the projects activities (exit strategy /mainstreaming)

Mainstreaming for this group of people is challenging because of

- a) access to information
- b) communication
- c) mobility and transport

This group of people rely heavily on support as there are challenges for them in each of these areas. Often room based tuition is also required to be taught at a slower pace to allow for the support workers to communicate what has been said to the deafblind learner. In some cases where loop systems with radio microphones are available, these can be used to aid the hearing of those with hearing impairment.

However if there is a profound hearing loss using the manual alphabet for communication or the 'hands on' method can be much slower than the normal pace of a mainstream class. Transport for the group has to be arranged (People with a dual sensory loss cannot simply pick up the phone and call a taxi) and information about what is available also has to be communicated to the learners in whichever way is suitable for them.

For this reason the project will be looking to continue providing provision for their learners and any future deafblind learners as a discrete group in the first instance. However it is intended that the service will provide encouragement and active support for progression on to mainstream learning wherever appropriate.

The project has always intended that there will be continued availability for deafblind people to access learning opportunities once the life of the project has ended and talks are now continuing with representatives of other adult education zone areas as well as the two partners involved to look at ways to continue this provision. Some activity has already taken place at Galloways Blind Society and many of the learners accessed this opportunity.

### Details of tools used to evaluate the impact of the project

The evidence collected to help in the evaluation of the project were as follows:

learner progression forms  
attendance forms  
evaluation forms  
learner retention forms  
evidence of achievement –e.g. articles produced, photographs and video tape.  
steering group meetings  
verbal feedback from learners and tutors  
monitoring data.

A copy of the steering group minutes are enclosed with this report.

Did this project have any direct links with any government programmes (excluding new deal) if yes, give details of all government programmes your project has links to.

There were no direct links to government programmes for this project

How did your project fit in with local initiatives? You should describe how far you involved local partners in running or developing the project and how flexible the project was in responding to local needs.

At the beginning of the project Sense had a project worker who was identifying secluded deafblind people in the area and through a referral system it was agreed they would refer them on to us. However unfortunately she left the position and the post was not filled. We did work closely with Deafblind UK who regularly attended the steering group but at that time Deafblind UK did not appear to be actively covering the Lancashire area. Although the Deafblind UK Worker for the North West was enthusiastic about the project and seemed keen to be helpful in identifying deafblind people from Lancashire in the event this support was not provided.

The project worked with Lancashire Partnership Initiative, Accrington Blind Society and Blackpool Blind Society and made contact with Darwin Deafblind Group which draws members from the whole of the East Lancashire area.

Did any part of your project deliver capacity building activities? If yes explain what capacity building activities were delivered and give details of their impact.

It was intended that the project would seek out and identify deafblind people across the whole of Lancashire and provide them with access to learning by providing high levels of support for the group. Training for staff, tutors and support workers in deafblind awareness, with the option to continue to the deafblind level 2 and 3 guiding and communication qualifications, was central to the project. By training as many people as possible in deafblind awareness we expanded the base of people able to work with this group in the future thus contributing to capacity building. By committing to the continuation of the training, we will further expand this area of awareness thus increasing the county's capacity to deliver learning and support for this group of people.

The Project by its sustainability and exit strategies will also build capacity for the target group as it is anticipated that as knowledge of the availability of learning becomes more widespread, many newly identified deafblind people will access the learning opportunities available particularly in the East Lancashire area.

### Project Finance

There was variance in the original and actual spend for the project. Some variation on the costs would obviously be normal – as in the case of purchasing software and laptop computers some parts had been reduced in cost and some had increased in cost. However only three areas showed any significant variance. Learner accreditation costs were underestimated and support costs were also higher than anticipated. Since it was impossible to know the level or degree of support required by the learners prior to the project this was expected. The project finance did spend less however on other areas which compensated for the overspend.

### Additional Information

For the CACDP level two and three deafblind qualifications there were originally eight people targeted to attain this qualification by May 2003. However, although the actual number of people who took the examination exceeded the targets only seven actually passed and therefore the profile for this was changed.

Towards the end of the project however, a further thirteen tutors and support workers took the level two training. For the purposes of the appendix three these were recorded as having achieved the deafblind awareness training only as at that time we did not have the examination results available to the project. These have since been sent to the College with the result of another eight tutors and support workers now having an accredited deafblind qualification. The other people on the course attained a certificate showing they had covered the basic deafblind awareness course.

The project staff worked with the learners to identify, record and provide wherever possible activities and courses that the learners themselves

wished to undertake. On occasion this was difficult to provide because of the restrictions of the venues available for use and the health and safety considerations of the group. Both partners worked well together but both felt that one of the major problem areas for the project administratively were the logistics involved in transporting the paperwork from centre to centre. For future projects we would try to have the project management and the inputting of data collections to the LSC on the same site as the other project staff thereby alleviating the need to constantly transport the paperwork evidence and ILR's.

Evaluation from the learners of the activities and courses was completed by the individual course tutors. Evaluation of the project as a whole was taken from the learners at a presentation day held at Lancashire College on the 12 December 2003. Very few of the learners could complete the forms themselves due to their disability and therefore the project staff took individual evaluations from each person.

The overall findings from the learners supported the intention of the project to continue with the courses and activities through the main core funding held by the three adult education zones in Lancashire. The evaluations were overwhelmingly positive and the need for the people to have access to learning and to meet socially while learning new skills was very apparent. Comments like 'Please keep it going it has made my life worth living', bring home the importance, and value that this type of activity and learning can have. The isolation and boredom can have a very negative effect on people with a dual sensory loss. To have access to new skills and to be able to socialise and make new friends has meant a great deal to many of the group.

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**Galloways Society for the Blind**

