



EVALUATION REPORT



PROJECT TITLE: Community, Education & Employment

PROJECT REF NO: ESF/0203/069

LEAD ORGANISATION: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Overview of the Project Activity and Partners

The project met the overall aims detailed in the Activity Summary of the project proposal. Four Guidance Development Officers were employed to work intensively on an outreach basis with disadvantaged adults who faced barriers to accessing current services. In order to do this effectively, staff had to initially network with other organisations to find out what services they were offering locally, carry out a mapping exercise to identify gaps in service provision and establish how IAG could be delivered in community venues.

The project targeted individuals from some of the most deprived areas of Blackburn with Darwen, with emphasis on reaching people who fell into the LSC Lancashire's target groups for this measure.

Information about the service was given to individuals through intensive marketing in venues such as both Blackburn and Darwen markets, Library, Community Centres, Sure Start Centres and various events held by other organisations or departments. Further Advice and Guidance was given to those clients who decided to participate in the project as a result of the initial information given.

More specifically, staff networked with various groups/organisations in order to try to make contact with their clients or groups of clients who met for specific activities. This was by far the most successful approach for both clients and our partners also benefited.

The Prince's Trust referred volunteer mentors and young people aged 19+ for guidance and progression.

Activities were organised with groups of people through T.H.O.M.A.S. and Blackburn with Darwen Foyer.

Links were made with Sure Start and Jobcentre Plus to provide a 'drop-in' facility and multi agency approach to providing advice.

Staff worked with Social Services Supported Employment Team to support a client with specific needs into employment and Hancock Street Day Nursery's Parent & Toddler group participated in 'relaxation' activities delivered on a barge, which was a new and innovative way of encouraging clients to participate in the activities that also included improving confidence and team building. Staff from Hancock Street Day Nursery, are now considering other activities that they can arrange for their clients.

Links made with Lancashire Council of Mosques, identified groups of men and women who wanted to participate in group activities, but not mixed groups. This was arranged and several people successfully completed First Aid courses and Hair and Beauty courses. Childcare arrangements were made and the costs met by the project.

The project met the aims and objectives of the organisation. Providing IAG and supporting vulnerable adults is our goal. Until this project, we were unable to deliver the service in the heart of the community for the community, reaching people who lack the confidence or even know or understand what is on offer and how it will benefit them. Increasingly we see the value of

consultation with both residents and organisations in the community. This gives a sense of ownership and leads to an increase in participation and retention rates.

Achievements of the Project

The project was successful in engaging with people from some of the most disadvantaged groups and areas of Blackburn with Darwen. Once contact had been made, the client or groups of clients decided what they wanted to participate in and helped to shape the way in which activities were developed. For example, Lancashire Council of Mosques identified 4 men and 4 women who wanted to do a first aid course but who did not want to participate in mixed group activities. This was arranged and promoted to other groups of people, primarily people of Asian Heritage. Parents at Hancock Street Day Nursery's Parent and Toddler Group wanted to do relaxation activities but away from the nursery setting. One of the staff organised, through his contacts, to hire the Borough barge, which proved to be a very popular experience for most of the group as they had never been on a barge before.

Outputs

OP1 Beneficiaries assisted – target 480 – achieved 487

OP2 Female beneficiaries assisted – target 125 – achieved 310

OP3 Beneficiaries receiving ESF training – target 240 – achieved – 128

Many learning activities were arranged through this project, however, because of the networking, mapping, negotiation and consultation exercises that had to be carried out, this did not begin to take place in force until August/September. Once underway, the momentum increased and activities carried on up to the end of the project.

OP4 Female beneficiaries receiving ESF training – target 125 – achieved – 84

As above.

OP6 Beneficiaries working towards a qualification – target 160 – achieved – 388

Substantially over achieved target due to submitting many clients towards the Credit Framework qualification.

Outcomes

OC1 Positive outcome on leaving – target 300 – achieved – 411

Over-achieved on this target. The majority of clients who received substantial support through either individual guidance and support or through participation in group learning activities were a positive outcome. Many of these people would not have had the opportunity to progress in terms of personal development had it not been for their participation.

OC2 In work on leaving – target 85 – achieved – 38

We were successful in attracting our key target group, however, many of the clients who participated were not job ready and experienced multiple barriers to learning and work. Staff spent additional time and resources in an attempt to make them job ready. Evidence requirements for this outcome were difficult to enforce, and this is reflected in the overall outcome, although the actual figures were higher.

OC3 Beneficiaries moving into self-employment – target 3 – achieved 1

Although we did actually achieve this target, it was not possible to obtain the evidence requirements in time for the end of the project.

OC4 Unemployed in work after ESF support – target 50 – achieved – 21

As OC2

Milestones

Recruitment of staff – 6

Project review – evaluation will be completed by end January 2004

Beneficiaries by Dec 2002

Reflective interviews March 2003

Beneficiaries by June 2003

Staff induction completed

Certificate presentation – a celebration event is planned for 26th February.

The project fully achieved the target of recruiting beneficiaries and especially targeted individuals who met the profile in the original specification. When evaluating the success of the project, a large number of clients continued to receive further support until they had achieved a positive outcome.

There were however, as with any project, clients who only accessed the support for a limited period of time.

Areas of Innovation

Marketing of the project was carried out at unusual locations such as Blackburn and Darwen Market Halls, Car Boot sales, Blackburn and Darwen Galas and Mela and Livesey Community Fete. Fishing activities to promote team work, confidence, new skills and fun ways of learning were developed with a group of clients who had mental health problems and also through T.H.O.M.A.S. which assists individuals who have substance misuse issues. Many 'stress-busting' and 'relaxation' activities were carried out on the Borough barge, which for many of the clients who participated, they had never had the opportunity before of going on a narrow boat.

Identification of Areas of Good Practice and Areas for Improvement

Good Practice:

Staff consulted with groups of people and facilitators to find out what they wanted. Through this process they engaged with many people who would never, under normal circumstances, have visited an Access Point, participated in learning activities or planned their future and how to progress. During the course of the project, a local company had a large scale redundancy situation. Many agencies were involved in giving advice and support to employees who were under notice of redundancy, including the Access Point Network. In order to meet the demand for services, we decided to run group sessions in 'Interview Techniques' and 'Selling yourself through application form'. This proved to be very popular and we decided to extend this across all areas including the main Town Hall, where regularly, candidates express an interest in applying for Borough vacancies.

Area for improvement:

Completing documentation, especially with clients who had basic skills needs or experienced multiple barriers to accessing service provision became a challenge and in some cases, a barrier. Many of the clients we engaged with were not job ready and therefore would have benefited from longer term support, that due to the short time scale involved, we were unable to carry through on an outreach basis.

Lessons Learnt

Completion of documentation was not always accurate as the coding system was confusing. Some members of staff, although highly skilled in outreach, were not as familiar with project work and the importance of keeping accurate and up to date records ensuring that the client's progress was easily identified and tracked. Changes made to the form and more recent backtracking exercises were time consuming. These were issues that we addressed and resolved, although it took some time to do this.

Evidence requirements for some outcomes were difficult to comply with as many clients did not understand why we should need proof and objected to the intrusiveness and bureaucracy.

Working within a team that was dispersed was problematic and in future we will look at assigning members of staff working on outreach projects, to specific Access Points under the direct supervision and management of the Centre Manager.

Dissemination of Good Practice including Details of Dissemination Materials Produced

Two workshops run by a member of staff were very successful and the decision made to extend this service across all areas of Blackburn with Darwen. The information used to run the workshops, lesson plans, training materials and evaluation processes, were passed on to other members of the team in order that they could facilitate sessions.

Regular team meetings were held to discuss progress, address problems and find solutions and plan for the future. One to sessions with the project manager were held to identify training needs. For some of the activities, staff worked in pairs to support each other in delivering sessions or to help clients to complete documentation.

In addition, externally, networking with other organisations was very important to raise their awareness of the project and also for staff to increase their knowledge on services available in the community.

Area Link Meetings with Blackburn College and the Lifelong Learning Team were set up as a forum to disseminate information, increase networking, discuss referral procedures and tracking of progression and destination.

Details of Publicity Undertaken (attach copies of any advertising/publicity materials produced)

Publicity was organised for all courses that required promotion. Leaflets and posters were distributed at events and through our partners. Press releases organised to reach the wider population. (Copies are attached to this report)

Case study

Lisa attended the 'drop-in' at DAP having picked up a leaflet at Darwen JC+. Lisa wanted a CV to apply for vacancies. Lisa needed assistance to complete her registration forms and the CV stencil. Lisa talked about learning basic computing locally. She wanted to start with the very basics of computing but also wanted to work towards a qualification. She was given full information about basic computer courses that were available through Blackburn College within the DAP building and discussed the different types of courses available, e.g.: ECDL, CLAIT, Learndirect, etc. She was introduced to staff from Blackburn College who work within the building and Lisa was able to enrol on a CLAIT course within the OLC for commencement the following week.

Views of customers and/or partners

Customer feedback questionnaires have been completed by clients. Partners valued the work we did and especially the new ideas that came out of the project to help them move forward and provide new areas of activity. New partnerships were developed with other learning providers to ensure consistency of approach and progression.

Comparison of how the project dealt with Information Communication Technologies, Equal Opportunities and Sustainability

ICT:

All the staff were equipped with laptop computers, complete with guidance software packages such as Adult Directions. This enabled careers guidance to be carried out in the community. Staff were also able to type client's letters, CV's and application forms immediately and, where they had access to Internet connections, they were able to view various job search sites.

Equal Opportunities:

Equal opportunities and diversity practices were built into the project and in addition to taking the services out to clients who perceive difficulties in accessing existing services, staff worked with groups of clients who faced other barriers;

- People with mental health problems
- People with basic skills needs and learning difficulties
- Lone parents
- People from Ethnic Minority groups
- People who suffered through drug and alcohol misuse

Staff worked to develop holistic, individual support packages to overcome these barriers (including provision of language support, childcare) and promote participation.

Sustainability:

The project aimed to work in partnership with other organisations who also work with vulnerable adults and to introduce these organisations to other parts of the Lifelong Learning Service with a view to finding alternative and continuing support. This will be further enhanced at a celebration event where there will be taster sessions and activities that everyone can experience. The main role of IAG will continue to be supported by the Access Point Service as part of the core activity.

Sustainability of the Project's Activities (Exit Strategy/Mainstreaming)

As detailed in the proposal, clients will be able to access service provision through the Access Point Network 'mainstream' activity and all clients who have been involved in this project have been introduced to their nearest Access Point and the services and staff available to continue with their on-going support. We are in the process of seeking alternative sources of funding to extend the outreach provision to continue to reach people who find it difficult to access services. In the interim period we have been able to continue the outreach work as a short term measure due to prudent budget management in this and other projects.

Details of tools used to evaluate the impact of the project

As part of the normal quality management procedures already in operation, which are covered by the MATRIX standards, client feedback plays an important role in evaluating service delivery. Each client is invited to complete a questionnaire. Any issues that are raised as a result of negative feedback are managed accordingly through one to one interviews with staff and staff training and development, or environmental issues that may involve changes within premises. Group activities are evaluated to ensure that the medium used in delivering the activity is appropriate to the client group.

Monthly evaluation of progress against targets takes place and is an agenda item at team meetings of both the staff involved in delivery and the Centre Managers and senior managers.

Additional Information

A celebration event is planned for Thursday 26th February at King Georges Hall, Blackburn. All beneficiaries, guests and partners will be invited. It is intended to include testimonials from clients who have had a positive experience by participating in the project. Councillors, lead members and senior managers have all been invited. Taster sessions have been organised for clients to try and also to give partners ideas on how they can introduce new and innovative ways of learning to their clients as well as a networking opportunity for everyone. This will be a positive end to a successful project.

SIGNATURE:

DATE

