



Project Title ADS Learning Skills
Project ref number ESF/0203/108
Lead organisation Alcohol & Drug Services
Policy field/measure 2:1
LSC contract manager Barbara Gill

The aim of the project was: “To widen the access to basic skills provision through the development of innovative and effective ways of providing basic skills directed at those groups disadvantaged, excluded or underrepresented in the workplace”. The project was aimed at people who, due to their alcohol and/or drug problems, are disadvantaged, are lacking in basic literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, excluded from other learning opportunities and underrepresented in the workplace.

The project aimed to address the priority: “Address provider under capacity to deliver basic skills provision within the new basic skills framework”, in that it provided extra provision for the delivery of basic skills to a hard to reach group and in centers not usually used for the delivery of basic skills learning.. The project also aimed to address the priority: “Ensure that learning provision for adults is inclusive, complementary and driven by learner needs” in that it ensured the learning was available to all who wished to access it, formed part of an individually tailored treatment and rehabilitation programme the development of which includes client involvement.

ADS aims to prevent and reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drugs to individuals, their families and the community through the provision of high quality, cost effective and accessible services and by working with others to raise awareness of the harm caused by alcohol and drugs. The project was compatible with and complementary to our aims and objectives. We believe that an individual’s alcohol and drug problems cannot be treated in isolation from their emotional, physical, psychological, social and economical status.

In 2000 Alcohol Concern together with the Basic Skills Unit ran pilot basic literacy and numeracy skills classes within six alcohol services. The findings from these pilot schemes indicated that 1 in 3 people who have alcohol problems also lack basic numeracy and literacy skills, although our prime aim is to address alcohol and/or drug problems we also know we have to address this problems if we are to help individual achieve their full potential.

Initially the project was to provide 70 ADS clients with basic literacy, numeracy and ICT skills at the six alcohol and drug support services managed by ADS in Lancashire and at ADS’ residential rehabilitation home in Preston. The project was intended to

run from August 2002 to December 2003, however contracts were not exchanged until December 2002, which meant the project only ran for 12 months as opposed to the 16 months originally envisaged. This resulted in the project being re-profiled with a reduced number of clients being recruited. Had the project run for the full 16 months we feel there would have been few problems in recruiting the full 70 learners.

The learning classes were provided at the respective centres enabling clients to access learning in familiar, safe and supportive surroundings. We felt this was innovative as other learning classes offered locally required the learner to attend classes at unfamiliar centres. There was the added security for clients in that this meant their caseworker was at hand to give additional support to the client and the tutors. Lack of space in two centres might have caused problems but staff, clients and tutors worked together to overcome this. The classes were divided into smaller groups, some using computers and the others, in another room, working with pens and papers. The groups changed at halftime. Not only did this solve the space problem it also ensured that learners had time to develop their hand writing and spelling without the aid of "spell check".

Alcohol & Drug Services managed the project and external tutors were recruited to deliver the learning classes. It was originally agreed that two times two-hour classes would be held each week at each centre. This was flexible and allowed centres where the most clients were recruited to have additional hours.

The project achieved the objectives of providing easily accessed classes in a familiar and secure environment and offering clients who might not normally access learning classes the opportunity to do so. Clients from the project have gone on to access further training. The project achieved the objective of giving clients the opportunity to acquire basic ICT skills that could help them gain paid or voluntary employment.

All the recruited beneficiaries were clients of Alcohol & Drug Services attending the centres for help with their alcohol and/or drug related problems and therefore met the requirements of the profile in the original application.

We initially experienced problems in recruiting tutors for some of the projects but did eventually run the project at all the centres and for the different services offered within the centres.

In all 49 clients registered for the classes. Of these 34, (70%), were female. Within our services the average male/female ratio is 60/40. The number of female learners was far higher than we anticipated, we felt this was due to a) women being more willing to admit they lacked skills, b) women more likely to talk about the classes and encourage others to attend and c) women were more likely to access classes in order they might help their children with homework. If we gain further funding to continue with these classes we will develop a strategy to encourage more male learners. We were very pleased that such a large percentage of female clients joined the learning classes as many of them suffer from low self-esteem and gaining basic skills boosted their confidence.

The age range of clients was from 25 to 64. Over 12% of the learners were still in their 20's. The male/female ratio within this group was 50/50.

The project was operated on an informal basis with clients able to access at will. We had expected clients to attend for approximately 20 weeks, however, due to their chaotic lifestyles some attended irregularly but for a longer time span. The project was operated in such a way as to encourage learners to join at anytime. The numbers were kept at such a level as to allow the tutors to give individual tuition as well as group tuitions. On average clients spent over 26 weeks on the project, however this was often in separate periods, the clients taking a break and then rejoining.

The flexibility of classes and the irregular attendance of learners might have put the tutors under extra pressure. However they took everything in their stride and became very attached to their new students. Much of the success of this project is due to the skills, talents and patience of the tutors.

Although learner numbers were lower than originally planned there was a waiting list at one centre.

As we were not able to provide childcare facilities the school holidays presented a problem to some learners.

Although we did not have any formal partnership agreements we were able to work very closely with the Nelson and Colne College of Further Education. This was particularly useful in that it enabled our learners to benefit from involvement with the college, with other students and to use the college to help them access further learning and gain recognised qualifications. This relationship was pivotal to the success of the programme at our Burnley Community Alcohol Service where 12 clients are continuing with their learning. Were we to obtain continued funding we would seek at the earliest opportunity to develop relationships with local colleges of further education. This would increase the learning opportunities for clients as well as giving the tutors additional support.

The tutors provided an initial assessment of the learner's needs. These assessments indicated differing levels of need. Some clients had basic skills but lacked confidence in their own abilities; they needed encouragement to use their skills and guidance on how to develop them. Others had very few skills and needed to start with the basis. The learner and tutor together explored the aims and aspirations of the learner and developed a programme of work. This programme, together with the learner aims, was reviewed after the learner had started to make progress.

The use of computers to help with the literacy and numeracy basics allowed learners to gain basic computer skills. It also enabled them to access learning without the added stigma of having to confess to lack of literacy and numeracy skills, the learning classes were described as "Computer Classes." The informality of the classes was also a great aid to encouraging recruitment, learners did not feel intimidated by a formal learning environment and they discovered that learning can be fun.

In their individual work plans most clients expressed a desire to be able to write without making spelling or grammatical errors, to be able to fill in forms correctly and to learn basic computing skills. All achieved this. Some clients had expressed the

desire to help children with homework and, as far as possible, were given advice on how they could help and encourage their children.

The first lesson we learnt was that basic skills tutors are in very short supply, we were fortunate in that we did recruit two tutors who were able to cover all centres. Again we feel that the late start had a negative impact on the recruitment of tutors, we were recruiting halfway through the academic year and many tutors were already committed. An added problem was the fact the learning took place in different centres. Although this was greatly to the benefit of learners it created some travel problems for the tutors.

Secondly we have learnt that proper administrative and support systems must be in place before the project starts. The tutors did talk regularly and exchanged ideas on how to run the classes, assessment and development of work plans and the delivery of the learning classes. There was a lack of consistency in the way the tutors presented their reports, if we were to run another similar project this would need to be more standardised. It would have helped had the tutors and the ADS contract manager been able to meet more often but this was not possible. Basic administration, for example keeping attendance records and ensuring Individual Learning Records for each learner were completed, was undertaken by a combination of centre administrators, tutors and counsellors. Again it would have been better had a more consistent system been developed.

When we started the project we were not aware of the amount of administration that would be required. We accept all the recommendations contained in the project audit and, if we were to obtain ESF co-financed funding again, would be much better placed to administer the project.

The tutors monitored the learner's progress against their work plans and programmes; this ensured that learners moved at a pace suitable to their abilities. By setting attainable targets the learners gained a real sense of achievement when they met their targets and progressed to the next ones. At the same time the tutors had to make sure that the slower learners were not made to feel inadequate, learner feedback has indicated that a good balance was achieved.

We know that the chaotic lifestyles of our clients, especially in the early days of treatment, make it difficult for them to commit themselves to attend classes regularly so we ensured there was flexibility in class arrangements. The tutors were happy to adapt their teaching practices to meet the needs of the clients and liaised closely with the clients' counsellors and caseworkers.

All the beneficiaries were very pleased with the project and expressed great disappointment when the funding ran out and additional funding was not obtained

Feedback from clients has come through personal observations by staff members, comments received by staff members and tutors and written work when clients were asked to write what they felt about the classes. We have not used any formal questionnaires as clients sometimes feel apprehensive about filling-in forms. Not all the learners provided written evidence about the classes and some of those who did were reluctant to have their feedback published. As providers of alcohol and drug

services we have to be especially considerate of the need for confidentiality for our clients so have only attached the comments for which we have permission to do so. To protect the clients' confidentiality we have removed names and addresses.

Clients gained in confidence and gained new skills which helped raise their self-esteem. Some clients gained the confidence to start attending further training which could help them access employment opportunities. Because the classes were very informal clients overcame their fear of learning and were able to admit their lack of knowledge. They found that learning could be fun and worthwhile. At least two clients expressed the view that the classes had helped them help their children.

Despite having to reduce the number of beneficiaries we were able to keep to the agreed budget. We purchased four computers for the classes, two from the LSC funding and two from funding raised by clients. One centre made an application to their Local Safety Partnership for funding for three computers together with desks and chairs. This application was approved due to the fact we were receiving funding from the LSC. At another centre a local college had already provided computers and were happy for these to be used for the learning classes. Thus we were able to use the LSC funding to lever further funding from other sources.

All ADS services operate under an equal opportunities policy and the classes were open to every client. Although the classes were open to every client we are disappointed that no clients from our EDEN (Equality and Diversity for Everyone in Need), project for members of black and ethnic groups in Preston attended the classes. This is another area where we need to develop a strategy to encourage participation.

We were disappointed that our recent application to the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council for ESF Co-finance was not successful but feel that the lessons we have learnt through running the project, the project audit and the evaluation will stand us in good stead and enable us to raise the funding required. As stated earlier Nelson & Colne College are working with our former learners, other local colleges are being approached to encourage our learners at other centres to continue to access training.

We feel the need for this learning has been proved and we will continue to look for funding, either from LSC and ESF co-funding or other sources. We still feel this work is of such importance that it ought to be part of the mainstream funding for alcohol and drug services.

We have featured the learning classes in articles in our quarterly newsletter and our annual report. Although we produced posters to advertise the classes we found the most successful way of promotion was by word of mouth. Clients attending the classes promoted them to other clients, counsellors and administrators made clients aware of the classes and encouraged them to get involved. We feel that if we are to run another project there will be no problem attracting clients to attend classes. Staff at the centres where the project was in operation have promoted the project to other ADS staff and managers, and to

We feel that we as an organisation, as well as our clients, have received great benefit from running this project. We did feel we were disadvantaged due to the late start which meant we were not able to reach our initial target number of beneficiaries. Had

the project started in September 2002 we feel it would have been easier to recruit tutors. We also feel this would have enabled us to attract more clients and run a more structured programme. We felt that a lot of consideration was given to the particular needs and problems of our clients

We had problems with inputting the learner data electronically, we frequently found that we were not able to access the site and when we did so the information could not be inputted. (We accept that some of the fault may be our own lack of skills.) We also felt that some of the information required on the Individual Learning Records could affect our own code of client confidentiality.

While we have found some of the record keeping irksome we appreciate the need to account for the expenditure of the funding and to ensure that projects adhere to the original profile. In hindsight we should have allowed more time for this, now we know the requirements we will in future allocate an appropriate amount of time. All financial records of income and expenditure were kept separately.

I would like to thank our contract manager, Barbara Gill, for her time, consideration and patience.

Linda Crossley
ADS

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