



Evaluation Report

EVALUATION

<u>PROJECT TITLE:</u>	GRASS ROOTS
<u>PROJECT REF NO:</u>	ESF/0203/110
<u>LEAD ORGANISATION:</u>	LORDS HOUSE FARM
<u>POLICY FIELD & MEASURE:</u>	POLICY FIELD 2 MEASURE 1
<u>LSC CONTRACT MANAGER:</u>	JANET JACKSON

Overview of the Project Activity and Partners

The project has been very successful and has achieved its key milestones, outputs and outcomes. In some areas we have over achieved.

The activities have been wide and varied but included training in basic horticultural tasks from sowing, planting, propagating, growing and harvesting through to amenity horticulture tasks including flagging, building raised flower beds and fencing.

Some of the 'Partners' we have worked with have been agencies such as Social Services, Care Homes, the Probation Service and other similar statutory and voluntary organisations and the project has helped to support and train individuals in their care. In addition to this we have worked with a number of independent beneficiaries who have been enabled to develop their skills in horticulture and a range of employment skills and social skills.

Achievements of the Project

The project has achieved its primary objective in that it has enabled a wide range of disadvantaged people in the community to access at their own speed and level of involvement, a diverse educational programme covering many topics within horticulture. This has been supported on informal learning zone that is less 'strict' and 'inflexible' than a normal college environment. As many of the beneficiaries would not have had the confidence to access learning in a more formalised way it has provided an ideal first rung opportunity to the beneficiaries.

Areas of Innovation

One area of innovation that has worked successfully has been to provide unusual projects for the students to work on which have held their interest. In particular, the development of a miniature cottage garden on site with its own 'cottage' was a very

popular catalyst to encouraging attendance. The finished product formed a permanent feature in our gardens and was photographed by many visitors to the site. The creation of shrub beds in dry stone walling was another experience that gave the opportunity to engage in environmental skills that does not present itself very often in today's modern building techniques with manufactured materials. The additional poly tunnel was erected by students under the supervision of staff and again provided an unusual opportunity for learners to gain new skills.

The fact that the learning could be accessed on an informal and drop in basis is a fairly unique way of working within the education system. Funding and attendance constraints are a major factor in the ability of colleges to offer a flexible programme such as this and the way we have delivered this has been effective in engaging learners who would not have attended on a prescribed time basis.

Identification of Areas of Good Practice and Areas for Improvement

Good practice has been shown particularly in the latter part of the delivery in the effort and commitment that the charity has shown to supporting students who have personal difficulties. The group size has been a very important part of the rate of progress many students have made. Another area of good practice has been the regular awarding of certificates of achievements to learners which has helped to increase self confidence and the desire to push themselves further. Our recent awards ceremony to celebrate success throughout the organisation was an excellent platform to celebrate individual achievements in public and was well attended. For some learners this was the first time that a personal achievement had been recognised and was possibly their greatest success to date.

Areas for improvement could include the production of a 'newsletter' for the project to track the projects development, personal developments of individuals and provide a communication link between participants that attend on different days in the week. It could also market opportunities that arise to participate in other learning within the organisation.

Lessons Learnt

The major lessons learnt were more management than delivery in that we had some difficulties that arose that did not become apparent until some way into the project. As we had recruited qualified staff to deliver the project, part of the remit of their roles were to ensure that the relevant documentation was signed and in place and uploaded on to the LSC database. As the lead tutor had been specifically trained to do this and was confirming that quality data was in place Management did not question this and accepted this as done.

It came to light after the initial audit that some of this data was not recorded and some forms were unsigned and on the whole the quality management process had not been adhered to. If more rigorous internal controls had been in place this would have been picked up much earlier and rectified sooner. Ultimately, auditors were satisfied with the delivery and certainly the financial controls were never in question. As we have slightly over achieved target beneficiaries and outcomes, the fact that several forms

remain unsigned due to the inability to contact these learners it is hoped that the funding is not effected in the long term.

In the second half of the year delivery staff were replaced by very conscientious and efficient new staff who have done an excellent job in ensuring all outcomes, outputs and targets were both reached and documented. There was however, through no fault of our own considerable difficulties in uploading information to the LSC database which made it impossible to sit with an individual learner whilst the information was put on. Much of this was eventually done manually but I believe this was a universal problem experienced by all organisations. This did indeed increase the delivery costs to ourselves as the time taken to upload the data forms was not accounted for to this extent in the original costings and we had to draft in additional administration staff to do this work at considerable extra cost.

Dissemination of Good Practice including Details of Dissemination Material Produced

As this project did not have true partners there was little opportunity to share good practice with others. The organisation that 'used' the service to provide education for their clients did in fact join in the celebration awards and were very aware of the soft outcome this created in itself. Hopefully this will encourage them to use regular celebrations of success as a way to encourage their own clients to achieve in other areas of their lives.

The confidence gained by offering the training in small groups and recognising achievements have led to steps into further education in mainstream and also to gain employment in people who would not have taken these steps before attending Lords House Farm. This professional approach to our students has been emulated by other organisations we have involved in the project so hopefully this is a good example of dissemination of good practice.

Materials produced is not relevant as the majority of the work is of a specific practical nature with materials used not being transferable to other subjects.

Details of Publicity Undertaken

The publicity of the project was done in a variety of ways to ensure good coverage. A copy is enclosed of a flyer that was placed in a wide range of places including public Libraries, CVS Offices, Churches, Town Halls, Shop Windows, Post Offices and also sent to Care Homes, Job Centres, Social Services, the Probation Service Offices and Garden Centres.

We also did several radio broadcasts, had newspaper editorial written and published a newsletter that was sent out to a targeted range of voluntary sector organisations via the local CVS quarterly newsletter.

ICT Equal Opportunities and Sustainability

The ICT element of the project was covered quite well by the fact that during the project we became a UK online centre and had qualified staff delivering basic computer skills and progressing some onto CLAIT courses.

The students learned to produce work for their portfolios on computer and learned to use digital cameras to record before, during and after shots of their own and others work.

Equal opportunities is a major positive delivery outcome from all the work that is undertaken at Lords House Farm. As we work primarily with disabled and disadvantaged adults and children we ensure that no one with a need, that we can support is not able to access our facilities.

One of our particular success stories is a group of 20 disabled Asian ladies from Nelson who regularly come each Friday afternoon were able to help grow plants at the unit and make hanging baskets that were sold to support the sustainability of the project. Many were in wheelchairs and as they lived in urban communities did not get the chance to grow things in their home environment. The fact that they could grow things here and have people buy their products was a wonderful way of providing soft outcomes within the project.

We also worked with a number of ex offenders who gained a great deal from the understanding of the health and safety issues attached to the project that provided them with a better understanding of the need to follow instructions carefully in employment situations.

Sustainability for the project was supported by the sale of goods on site and at local gala shows that helped raise the profile of Lords House Farm and market the new sales opportunities here on site.