



EVALUATION REPORT



PROJECT TITLE: Discovering IT

PROJECT REF NO: ESF/0203/224

LEAD ORGANISATION: Skill Share

Overview of the Project Activity and Partners

The Project was based in the Ribble Valley, which is a large rural area with very little adult learning facilities. This Project continued 18 years of providing participation in community adult learning with particular emphasis on ICT training. The people who accessed this learning would otherwise have been excluded by way of location, age, finances, disability or other circumstances from other adult learning provision.

The partners in this Project were:

Trinity Community Partnership who provided the IT Centre, the hardware and technical IT support.

The Ribble Valley Visually Impaired Group who provided specialist software, hardware and advice concerning visually impaired learners.

The Partnership team who provided certification and accreditation in the form of AQA units and also provided Progress File to monitor learner's distance travelled.

The roles were exactly as identified in the Project proposal.

A member of the Visually Impaired Group and a member of Trinity Community Partnership Board of Trustees are on the Management Committee of Skill Share and regular meetings were held with Jackie Ettenfield from the Partnership Team in order to monitor the use of Progress File and AQA units.

Achievements of the Project

The Project delivered learning to 161 people from the target groups against a predicted total of 130. Of these, 90 went on to achieve a qualification, or accreditation through AQA units against a predicted target of 60. The total number of early leavers was 20, 10 of these left because they had gained employment.

The Project was delivered within its projected budget.

Value for Money:

The percentage cost for managing the Project was very low because bureaucracy was kept to a minimum; project manager was heavily involved in the delivery of the Project.

The cost per individual was low due to efficient delivery methods and the use of highly trained peer educators. Maximum effectiveness was insured because of many years experience in delivering community education and the continuous updating and revision of course contents.

This project represented good value for money as class sizes were small and learners often received one to one tuition.

The Project met and exceeded all its aims and objectives as detailed in the Project Proposal.

The key milestones which were identified in the Project proposal were:

Recruit specified number of learners on a roll on roll off programme

One tutor to begin training in computer construction and maintenance

One tutor to continue with training in British Sign Language

To support training of one tutor in an FE teaching qualification

To train one tutor in an IT qualification for teachers

Develop a partnership with 2 local employers

Evaluate progress with learners

Evaluate and correct any target shortfalls

Evaluate Project

All of these were achieved except the continuation of training in British Sign Language.

This was due to a lack of appropriate courses.

All activities took place as laid out in the Implementation Plan (enclosed)

Areas of Innovation

This Project provided quality learning in a non- threatening nurturing environment, this was particularly useful to those with a fear of traditional places of learning. It also provided specialist hardware and software for people with disabilities, particularly the visually impaired. Learning for the visually impaired was provided by a volunteer who, is himself visually impaired. He has recently gained his Cert. Ed. and originally came to Skill Share as a student 8 years ago after losing his sight. This type of progression has been a key part of the Project utilising the skills of 6 peer educators who originally enrolled on the Project in order to learn computer skills. Of these, 2 have gained qualification as ECDL Assessors.

This Project developed a unique way of delivering learning in ICT. It enables people to access the learning at any time of the year without waiting for a new term. It also allows instant access for those needing training in order to gain employment. The course is entirely learner led and tailored to individual needs this ensures that learners only learn what they need to and not what is being taught.

The Project also delivered learning in Braille combined with IT skills. The provision of a Braille embosser enabled people to input printed material into the computer and print it out in Braille. A scanner was also used to scan documents and transcribe them into Braille. This service was available to all members of the community.

Identification of Areas of Good Practice and Areas for Improvement

Areas of good practice

Initial assessment sheets were completed with all new learners in order to establish prior knowledge and set aims for the course.

A progress sheet was developed which enabled learners to chart their own progression through the course. This was completed every week at the end of the session and included what had been learnt, levels of confidence and how they felt about the session.

Monthly monitoring sheets were introduced in order to check learners' progress against their personal goals. If the goals had changed new targets could be set and appropriate action taken. This ensured that people were always learning what they want to.

End of course feedback forms were developed in order to collect information about whether or not learners were satisfied with the teaching, environment, course work etc. These were used to make any necessary improvements to course delivery.

Each term all learning materials were evaluated to check effectiveness. Modifications were then made to ensure that all course work maximised learning. All staff were encouraged to note down any changes that they thought would be beneficial and after agreement these were made.

Areas for improvement

As the course is flexible and aims to make sure that learners achieve their goals it is not possible to indicate to learners how long the course will last when they start. This creates difficulties when learners want to continue on the course for an indefinite length of time. There are always other learners waiting for a place. In future an explanation of course duration needs to be more specific at the beginning. An end of course certificate will be developed listing learners' achievements and elements covered.

Lessons Learnt

Throughout the lifetime of the Project the Organisation has become much more efficient in collecting information about learners and monitoring their progress. As in the above section.

The main lesson learnt is to meet with the Contract Manager at the start of the Project and agree on what kind of evidence will be required for audit purposes and the eligibility criteria for learners to enter the Project.

This Project was funded retrospectively which meant that the LSC contract was signed in January although the Project had begun in the previous August. This resulted in early learners not completing the forms required by LSC. Relevant forms, logos and other information were not received until 7 months into the project, this resulted in many extra hours of administration time.

Dissemination of Good Practice including Details of Dissemination Materials Produced

Dissemination of good practice has taken place at LACLA network meetings where a member of the Project staff has addressed the meeting on the subject of Progress File and AQA units. Also through Voluntary Sector managers' meetings arranged through CVS. Managers' training events in conjunction with Trinity Community Partnership.

An annual Report was produced which detailed numbers of students, their gender division, ages, achievements and outcomes. This was distributed at the Annual General Meeting of the Skill Share Management Committee. After the meeting an awards ceremony was held at which successful learners received their certificates. This Annual Report (enclosed) contained details for the previous financial year; a report will be produced disseminating the results of this project for our AGM in April.

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

As Skill Share has been established for 18 years it is well known and has a very good reputation. As a result of this the Project did not need to be advertised there was already a waiting list of 50 people wanting to take up learning opportunities. Most of the learners know about our provision through people who have already benefited from attending. Others are recommended through the Job Centre, Citizens Advice, Council for Voluntary Service, the Library and other similar organisations.

Case study

John is 54 and had worked in engineering all his life when in 1999 he was diagnosed with angina and told that he would have to find employment that was less physical. After his initial search for alternative work was fruitless he spent 2 years at home seriously depressed and de-motivated. During a visit to the Job Centre John was advised to take up some kind of training in IT so that he would be better equipped to re-join the labour market. John initially joined a course elsewhere but found the teaching difficult to follow and when the class closed due to lack of funding John approached us.

John was enrolled on the Project in August 2002. He attended on a flexible basis, as he lived nearby he could drop in 2 or 3 days a week whenever there was a spare place. He worked hard and progressed well although he had not been in any kind of learning situation since he left school. By April 2003 the following year John had completed all 7 modules of the European Computer Driving License and received his certificate. He had enjoyed the learning experience so much that he asked if he could join the organisation as a volunteer and help other people to learn. In August 2003 (just 1 year after first switching on a computer) John qualified as an EDCL examiner and assessor. He has also recently gained OCR level 2 in text and word processing with distinction.

Since that time John has been giving his time to the Project 3 or 4 days a week. With support and guidance he has developed excellent teaching skills and shows a great deal of empathy with all learners. He has grown in confidence and self esteem and become a very good teacher. So much so that he is about to embark on a teaching qualification. Skill Share is going to become registered to deliver teaching qualifications through OCR so that John can do his training in house.

John has also joined the Skill Share Management Committee and contributes to policy making and management decisions. He is a very active and valuable member of the Skill Share team. In addition to this he has gained part time employment, which he fits in round his teaching.

This Project has literally changed John's life and given him a whole new outlook. In John's own words:

"Before I visited Skill Share for the first time my main interest was in steam engines. Since being introduced to computers I have discovered a whole new world. The initial trepidation with which I approached learning for the first time since I left school quickly evaporated under the excellent methods of teaching employed by the staff at Skill Share. I have found in myself a degree of motivation that I had not experienced for a long time. This Project has enabled me to assimilate and put into practice new skills which I would not otherwise have had the opportunity to learn."

Views of customers and/or partners

Views of customers were sought in an end of course questionnaire. Copies of some of these are enclosed. Some customers also wished to write to us to express their feelings about the course and what they had learnt. Copies of these also attached. All feedback was positive with learners reluctant to leave and always recommending the course to others.

Some of the learners had previously attended other courses in IT but found them difficult to follow. They said that they had felt stupid and had been left behind with more able learners receiving all the attention. These learners were delighted with the individual approach, which was the key to this project. Learners worked at their own pace with no sense of competition or having to keep up. All learners reported that they felt a great sense of achievement and could not wait for their next session. Motivation was high and many people who had initially no intention of taking exams gained qualifications.

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

Information Communication Technologies

The Project utilised 10 networked computers with internet access, CD writing Scanning, laser printing and a wide variety of software. In addition there were 2 stand alone PCs with integrated printers and an additional 2 PCs with screen reader software for visually impaired learners and a braille4 embosser. The equipment was utilised for the core provision of the Project, which was first rung access to ICT for those who would not normally take up learning opportunities.

The provision of ICT learning had the following benefits:

Preventing long term unemployment by equipping recently unemployed people and work returners with new skills.

Tackling skills gaps in the use of technology

Improving competitiveness in local and regional labour markets

Developing a workforce with improved skills

Equal opportunities:

All buildings and areas where the Project took place were accessible to everyone. Computers and software included adaptations to enable use by disabled learners. Two tutors were trained in teaching visually impaired learners and one tutor was trained in British Sign Language.

Transport or travel expenses were provided for those isolated by income or geographical location.

The whole ethos of the Project was that of providing access for those who would otherwise be disadvantaged or discriminated against.

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

The exit strategy outlined in the Proposal was twofold:

To provide training to local industries in return for their support for the centre. The Organisation is keen to develop a commercial side to their provision. Initial research has shown that there is a need and funding is being sought to develop a marketing strategy and materials.

To access core funding for the innovative training of socially excluded groups. Talks are currently underway to establish if this is possible. The Organisation feels that the methods and strategies, which have been developed during the lifetime of this Project and in previous years, are unique. Feedback from learners is without exception positive. The concepts of widening participation and life long learning are key to the Organisation and every effort is being made to ensure that this work will continue.

Details of tools used to evaluate the impact of the project

The initial evaluation tool was a database of learner information. This detailed age, gender, previous qualifications, employment status, start date, outcomes, leave date, whether or not completed. This was used to gather information about numbers of learners, the length of time on the course, achievements etc.

Questionnaires were developed in order to collect views of the learners. The questionnaires were analysed to identify any areas for improvement and also the parts of the course that were working well.

The student progress sheets and monthly monitoring were useful tools to evaluate the progress of learners towards their goals. This enabled staff to make adaptations to the course materials when they were necessary and also to set new targets for learners. The Student Progress Sheets were kept on the learners' own floppy disks so that they could be accessed at the end of each session via the computer. The format was kept simple in order that new learners would not be intimidated and they were asked to consider what they had learnt during the session. Learners also recorded how they had felt and reflected on the distance they had travelled since the start of their course. This was facilitated by the fact that when filling in the sheet they could look back to read previous entries and see how much they had learnt and how their confidence had grown.

The Implementation Plan was displayed in the training room so that all staff could refer to it at any time and check that correct progress was being made against targets. This was a working document, not something that was kept in a file. All staff were aware of the plan and were motivated to achieve the targets set out in it.

Additional Information

This Project represented all that is good in Adult Community Education. It was delivered in a small friendly centre located in an area where a high percentage of the population have poor basic skills.

The learners who took part in the Project would not normally have accessed learning opportunities due to the constraints of finance, transport, childcare, age, disability, lack of confidence, fear or other barriers to entering a learning situation.

The use of the Student Progress Sheet provided staff with the means to evaluate distance travelled and monitor soft outcomes. All learners improved their interpersonal skills due to the relaxed atmosphere and a chance to socialise during break times. Organisational skills increased with an improvement in the ability to prioritise. Time management skills were needed to allow for completing the Student Progress Sheet before the end of the session, this also required learners to analyse their learning. All learners expressed an increase in confidence and motivation.

An outstanding feature of the Project was the degree of flexibility that it offered. This was a role on role off programme that could be picked up at any time during the life of the Project. All learners worked to their individual learning plan and at their own pace. People in need of instant, intensive tuition could start immediately and attend as often as possible in order to gain new skills for employment as quickly as possible.

Advice and guidance was also offered, with learners accessing help to write CVs, fill in application forms, write letters of application and research other courses in order to progress further with their training.

This Project provided a first step back in to learning and/or employment for the people who were part of it and all of those benefited in the ways detailed in previous sections.

SIGNATURE:

DATE

