

GETTING STARTED WITH COMMUNITY LEARNING

A MANUAL OF SUPPORT PRODUCED BY THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF DEVON

JOHN WILLIS, MARCH 2008

Introduction

Who and what's this for?

This is for YOU if....

- You want to see some learning in your community
- You want to help your community improve and develop
- You are planning to run a workshop or series of events
- You want to help your friends and neighbours increase their confidence, their job skills, or just what they can get out of life

Who wrote it?

Over the last five years, community organisations in Devon have run projects to start new learning in rural communities. This guide is based on what worked for us. We hope you can use it and adapt it so that it works for you.

Where do you start?

We have organised the guide in two parts, to help you to ...

PART A - DECIDE IF IT IS FOR YOU

- Find out what people want
- Decide what sort of learning you could run in your community

PART B - START PLANNING

- Work out how to go about it
- Advertise your new opportunities
- Fund and pay for them
- Assess your achievement

PART C - CASE STUDIES

PART A - DECIDE IF IT IS FOR YOU

1. Finding out what people want

Many people think of “learning” as what happened to them when they were at school, and nothing to do with their lives now. If they feel they failed at school, they will be even more reluctant to think about learning again. The courses that colleges and adult education centres advertise sometimes seem too far away, at awkward times, too expensive or difficult to get to, or not quite what they wanted anyway.

But actually, we “learn” all the time. In our work, and in our personal lives, we are always picking up new information and solving new problems, often by “feeling” rather than by “thinking”. And sometimes, we benefit from doing this with other people, especially with people we know or like. If we can organise something like this in our communities, it can make people feel great, positive, able to do things they could not do before, even change their situation or improve things in the community. This is a bit different from what the colleges offer.

But how do you know what people might want to learn? If you just put up a poster or publish a general invitation, asking people what they want to learn, it will be probably be too vague and you won't get any response – or if you do, it will be 10 people asking for 10 different things!

Instead you could try talking to people you know. People are much more likely to join an activity if they do it with their friends, especially if they are lacking in confidence and need a stepping-stone to other things. So word of mouth is critical in getting people interested in a particular subject. For example:

- Ø If you are in a group of parents running a pre-school, raise it in a committee or general chat session – what would everyone like to do better with their children? E.g. playing, reading, dealing with illnesses, first aid...?
- Ø If you are on a local council group – how could you do things better, what do you need to learn more about in order to make good decisions? E.g. running meetings, planning rules, using email...?
- Ø If you help to run a village hall or community centre – what groups do you want to attract to the centre (such as younger people, members of ethnic minorities) and what might they want to learn? E.g. making video, music, language classes...?
- Ø If you are in a social club or support group – what would people like to do for fun (though it might help them with jobs as well)? E.g. making jewellery, computing, digital photography...?
- Ø If you are self-employed or in a business association – what skills or qualifications would help you and your fellow businesses be more successful? What would help

people to start up new businesses? E.g. Food Hygiene for tourism businesses, marketing for farmers, computerised accounts...?

- Ø If you are a charity or voluntary organisation – do your users want recreational courses, or something to help them get into work such as basic computing, or do your volunteer helpers need training to help them to work better or even progress their own careers...?
- Ø Or is there an issue in your community that needs fixing? Perhaps there is a shortage of facilities for young people, and some people would like to help them set up a Skate Park? In this case, a special course might be run on designing, fund-raising and building such a Park, which young people themselves might join.
- Ø Are there people locally who just want to better themselves – improve their English and Maths, get more confident, learn more about themselves, learn about going to college or university? These are often women who are looking to return to work after bringing up children, or anyone who feels they are in a dead end and wants to improve their career.
- Ø Do you have a growing number of immigrants in your area, e.g. migrant workers on a local farm, and some who can act as interpreter? This could help to ascertain their learning needs and ideas for helping them integrate better with the local community.

If you are a member of an organised group – that is, one that has a constitution, maybe provides a service or employs some one, or is reasonably stable, you can go into this exercise in more depth. You can look at where your organisation is going, what its strengths and weaknesses and opportunities are, and we have devised a Training and Development Needs Toolkit which you will find attached as Tools 1 and 2.

Learning is fun for its own sake; but it is also the key to changing lives and communities – once we have learned how to do things, we can get out there and do them!

2. Deciding what to run in your community

So – you now have some ideas! But will there be enough people in the community who will commit themselves to help you put them into practice? What to do next?

(1) Enough people?

- Are there any plans in your community which could benefit from your learning programme? For example, a survey or appraisal for your local Parish Plan, or a business survey, could have identified a need for more Child Care (through childminders and others): if one of your ideas is for training in First Aid or Creative Play, then you could get support from others who were involved with the Plan (if it is the Parish Plan you should contact your Council in the first instance to find out who

is responsible). Or if your community is trying to promote renewable energy, your own ideas of training in sustainable living may find a wider audience.

- Are there other organisations who are already asking for learning? They may already have done something like a Training and Development Needs analysis, and even used our Toolkit from Tools 1 and 2.
- You could carry out **your own survey**, which asks everyone in your community to choose their interests, or any skills they would like to improve, from a list of what you think might be possible. To get a good response, you could include it on a flier in a local magazine, in libraries and post offices, and send to organisations you know. For an example, see Tool 3.

(2) What to do next?

- **Other community organisations** may already be offering training similar to what you were thinking of – for example, the University of the Third Age may already have some computer training or arts and crafts, or a school may already be running Family Learning or Food Hygiene classes. So you may be able to combine with them, or use their experience to run another class of your own. Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) may also have a programme for voluntary groups on committee work or fund-raising, for example, and you may be able to arrange special sessions with them.
- Are there **local people who have got the skills you are looking for**? There may be a computer or marketing consultant who would like to do some training, a gardener or a craftsperson who would be happy to impart their knowledge. If you don't know anyone like this, you could advertise in shop windows or magazines.
- **Colleges, adult education centres, or training providers** may have your preferred subject in their prospectus - though it might be a longer course with a qualification, or run at inflexible times or locations. Are you sure that this doesn't suit your community? A simple solution might be to ask if they would be willing to send a teacher out to you to run an introductory course, or a special one tailored for you. There are many specialist training providers, from the county Family History Society to St John's Ambulance to private companies – you can discuss your ideas with them. For suggestions and useful contacts, see Tool 4.
- **Networking**: Some of these learning organisations will be part of a Community Learning Network and may be able to put you in touch with others in your situation, and hopefully some one who has done it before! A good resource worker from a community organisation or college is worth their weight in gold. Talking to people like this, having them there to talk you through problems, is worth ten of these guides!

PART B – START PLANNING

3. How to go about it?

Now you have decided what activities you think you will offer, there are some questions to consider.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| WHO TO RUN IT | Have you decided on your tutor / leader? Is a college or training provider going to run it for you, or are you employing some one yourself? And if so, have you checked what you need to do as an employer? (See Tool 5.) Is this person planning things with you? |
| WHO TO ATTEND | Have you targeted particular types of people for your course or activity? You need to know this <u>before</u> you decide where to advertise (section 7), where and when to hold the course, charges you can expect to make, etc. However you shouldn't plan to exclude anyone either - this should be spelt out in your policy of Equal Opportunities. |
| WHERE | <p>Do you know where you want the activities to happen? Is your proposed venue accessible to everyone - can people with disabilities enter and use the facilities?</p> <p>There are Local Authority lists and even national websites if you have an open mind on this - try venues.org.uk or places-to-be.com.</p> <p>Is the location easy to reach for your target group, and near a bus stop if you are recruiting from a wider area? Convenience is a key factor in attracting learners.</p> <p>Is it warm, comfortable, large enough for what you are planning, will all sorts of people be happy to go there?</p> <p>If you book for a whole day, are there kitchen facilities?</p> <p>Is it available - you may need to book months in advance - and affordable?</p> |
| WHEN | <p>Have you consulted your friends and neighbours on the timing? Plan well ahead, and if possible avoid school holidays (unless you are actually targeting school-age young people).</p> <p>If it is to be in the late afternoon or evening, will it be possible for learners to get child care and should you include something for this in your budget?</p> |
| HOW LONG | Courses are often in two-hour sessions, with say 5 or 10 sessions in all, but this will depend on the subject - practical or outdoor activities, for example, may take up one or more full days. It would be better to call these "workshops" rather than courses. |
| SUBJECT CONTENT | Has the tutor / leader got a plan - what subjects are being covered on what days, what the learning objectives are, how they are going to do it, what resources they need? Will some learners have difficulty with the literacy or numeracy demands of the course, and how will you support them? (See Tool 6) |

- QUALIFICATIONS** Do you want to offer qualifications? If so, the course must be run by an accredited trainer who is used to organising this. Or will you give your own certificates for completing the course ?
If you are working with a college, it may be possible to accredit some short courses specially, through the Open College Network. This would provide a unit of credit which the learner could build on in the future - but you may find this is a step too far, and that the paperwork makes it not worth while. (see Tool 6)
- PROGRESSION** Do you have an idea of what previous knowledge your participants Should have (this will need to be included in your advertising)? And what they could go on to do afterwards - this could be another course that you run, or something that a college runs elsewhere. If this is an issue for you, your learners would surely benefit from having Information, Advice and Guidance from an expert. (See Tool 7)
- RESOURCES** Have you got the facilities you need to run the activity, or are you expecting an outside organisation to bring them in? With computer courses, this is especially important to plan for, e.g. Where are the power points? Is there an internet connection? Is the furniture and lighting suitable? If an organisation is bringing laptop computers, they will need time to set them up and take them down, which may annoy learners and take away from teaching time. If your local school or library etc has these facilities, and your tutor is familiar with them, this may be a more cost-effective option.
You may also want projectors, clip-charts, books, hand-outs for everyone etc so make a list and budget for it. (Tool 8)
- HEALTH AND SAFETY** Have you or your tutor done a thorough risk assessment (see checklist 1)? You must be sure that all your learners are in a safe environment: this is especially important if you are using computers or other equipment. Does the tutor know the safety rules for your equipment and is s/he committed to explaining these to learners? Does s/he know the emergency procedures (fire especially), the location of first aid for the building, where to get help locally etc? (see Tool 9)
- CONTINGENCIES** Think in advance of what could go wrong, as something usually does! The venue might have to do essential building work and make you "homeless" at the last minute. Your tutor may fall ill. Have you got a fall-back? Will you be able to cancel without losing money?

HOW MUCH Have you got a budget? Do you know how much you will charge your participants? Don't panic - see next section.

4. Your Budget

If your learning is more like a club, and the tutor is paying the bills and collecting money from the learners direct, you may be able to leave the exact amounts to him or her. But in this case, it will be his or her course, not yours, and you will need to check they are aware of their responsibilities.

Alternatively, tutors and other costs could be paid by an outside organisation. For example, the University of the Third Age runs courses on Current Affairs with guest speakers, and they just pay expenses. Or a Nurse or Health Visitor may set up a course at a Surgery on Parenting, or Child Nutrition, and the whole thing is paid for by the Health Service. For you, this is easy, but you don't have any control over the content of the course.

The rest of this section assumes this is not the case – that it is your responsibility. And besides, having to plan, you will have to have a bank account and a commitment to monitoring how much money you are spending and receiving.

Before you can work out how much money you need to raise, you must have a budget for the course or activity you are planning. These are the most common items, though you may be able to add some special items of your own. For an example, see Tool 8.

TUTOR If an outside provider is running the course for you, they will have their own hourly rates and give you a total bill. If you are employing the tutor yourself, you could use the same rates, or whatever you can negotiate, but make sure you add a figure for the employer's National Insurance contribution.

ORGANISER Are you organising it in your spare time and not charging, or are you or some one else being paid to do it? You will probably have to budget something for this, otherwise there may be no one to advertise the course, fund-raise, answer telephone enquiries, unlock the building, do any paperwork, solve problems on the day, etc !

PUBLICITY Advertising in magazines, printing leaflets, postage... all cost money. Get estimates in advance – you may find a small local printer will save you time, effort and money.

VENUE Find out the cost when you book – there may be a choice of possible venues and rooms depending on the size of group, but don't necessarily go for the cheapest! Also some venues ask for a deposit. Look at any loss you may make if you have to pay cancellation fees, and work out what you would do in this case.

RESOURCES Do you need to hire anything? Book well in advance as items such as

projectors can be in great demand. Also make an allowance for photocopying and any office materials you may use.

You can ask learners to bring some items of kit, materials, stationery etc with them, which will of course make the activity cheaper overall.

INSURANCE Whoever has responsibility for the course, and the venue, is liable if there is an accident: make sure you sort these things out and pay any extra premiums that are needed.

You can now divide the total of your planned expenses by the number of learners you expect to pay you a fee, and this will give you what you need to charge. This number of learners must be the absolute minimum you need to run with – any fewer, and you will lose money!

It is sometimes argued that, because it is difficult to get viable groups in rural areas, you should cut the number of face-to-face sessions and provide more tutor support in between sessions by phone, email or video-conferencing to enable people to do independent learning as well – for example, with a computer skills course. You could consider if this is possible for you – or desirable!

If you are getting a grant to run the course, that's great – you may not have to charge anything at all – though some community groups argue that you must charge at least a small amount, to make sure people turn up regularly.

If you are working with a college or adult education centre, you may be able to get state funding as long as you can show you follow procedures and every learner completes a full enrolment form. This would reduce the level of fees you have to charge, and make it possible to offer the course free to disadvantaged learners, e.g. those on means-tested benefits. (After all, if a high fee excludes somebody you are not really providing “equal opportunities”, are you?) Just make sure you budget for the time to organise this.

5. Funding

If your own funds enable you to subsidise the course, or people are all willing to pay, that's great, but most organisations find they need to apply for outside funding to help. Besides mainstream state funding, there are all sorts of projects in the voluntary and public sectors that fund learning or rural regeneration, as well as charitable foundations.

A table of some of the main sources of funding at the time of writing is given below. You can find detail on funders on Funderfinder.org.uk – note many charities require you to be a charity yourself – see charity-commission.gov.uk. Specific grants for learners are listed on egas-online.org.uk.

| <i>Fund</i> | <i>Type of Learning Supported</i> | <i>Focus your application on...</i> | <i>Advantages</i> | <i>Disadvantages</i> |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adult and Community Learning e.g. County Council, WEA | Many different types as long as follow procedures | Aim to measure achievement, include Skills for Life | May not require accreditation, tradition of community need | Non-accredited ACL is suffering funding cuts at present |
| Further Education College | Many different types as long as follow procedures | Aim to measure achievement, include Skills for Life | Funding stream as long as related to Government targets (work skills) | Will probably require accreditation related to Government targets |
| Charitable Foundation | Aimed at social goals, disadvantage | Target groups, perhaps fund equipment | Simple application & monitoring | Short-term and limited funds. You may need to be a charity |
| Learndirect – computer-based & distance learning | Restricted Learndirect menu | Show you have your own facilities, technical support, & viable groups | Good for motivated, independent learners | Funding very tight |
| Voluntary sector regeneration projects | Rural or informal learning for disadvantage | Identified need, links, targets | Local support and networking, flexibility | Sometimes paperwork-heavy as with ACL / FE projects |
| Lottery | Aimed at disadvantage | Target groups, show capacity-building | Good level of funding, monitoring not onerous | Highly competitive, long application process |

6. Advertising the New Opportunities

Once you have a plan for a course, don't be shy – advertise!

The best means is word of mouth: make sure everyone in your group knows about it – they contributed to the planning so they are your prime target group for signing up.

But also remember that people need to see things three times before they act! Plan ahead – it's good if you can link your activity to some local or national campaign such as Adult Learners' Week (every year in May). You can run a stall at a local event or outside shops on a Saturday morning, giving at least two or three weeks notice of the course starting. Get people to sign up on a list, with their full contact details.

Phone the editors of local newspapers and magazines, and write a press release for them, which is basically an article about your activity starting something like: "For the

first time, people in Smallville have got a way to do basic computer learning....." You can invite journalists to come and see what you are planning to do, maybe try out the craft that you will be teaching, take some photographs.....just use your imagination! A "taster" session would be good for this, and might attract other people who are not sure whether they want to take the plunge. (Local newspapers often have a "community" section where your piece could appear, and a photo gives it more impact; magazine editors may also include your flier in their magazine, for a small charge.)

It is easy these days to design posters and leaflets on a computer, produce on a local photocopier which can produce the quality you need, and put them up in windows and on notice-boards. Circulate these to community groups, women's institutes, lunch clubs etc Your ads should be simple, direct, if possible with some humour and a picture, and at least contain:

- What the activity is, and an idea of what it will contain
- Who it is aimed at
- When and where, for how many sessions etc
- How much it costs, if anything, any concessions
- Who to contact to book a place or find out more
- Telephone number and if possible e-mail

Have you got access to a website to advertise on? If not, ask some in your group who has computer skills to set up a simple one that would carry all the courses you are currently planning, and including your contact details. This may cost you very little indeed.

To ensure you reach everyone in your community, you should:

- Arrange for a large-print version of leaflets for those who are partially sighted - this can be done on a computer very easily
- Ensure you have a contact (e.g. in the local authority) who can help if material needs to be translated into Braille or another language
- Know what you will say if some one says they cannot access the building (consider using a different one?), cannot reach it by public transport, or needs some child care support during the class (depends if you have any funding for this, otherwise you may just have to suggest some local contacts)

Once you have a list of people interested, it is probably worth writing to them asking them for the fee in advance, telling them know what they need to bring with them, and asking if they have any particular interests - the sooner the better. You can send a booking form with this, which might save time in the first session -when you want people to be getting to know each other and getting enthusiastic about the course - or you can keep part of the first session for ensuring you have everyone's details accurately and in a form that funding agencies, colleges etc want.

A sample leaflet and booking form is included at Tool 10.

8. Managing it All

When you are planning your activity, there will be certain critical points where you need to have done things, or checked things, and made decisions. You could just make a list of what you have to do by when, and how many people you think you need to run the activity (most courses would require a very minimum of 8 learners, for example). Or you could use some sort of time line or critical path analysis – for an example, see Tool 11.

With ACL and FE funding, the organisation who funds you will ask you to get all learners to complete a detailed form, and you have to accept this as part of the deal. They will have a policy on fee concessions – you can give the course free to anyone who can prove that they are on a means-tested benefit. They may also require the tutor to have certain qualifications, and your organisation will need to have all sorts of policies and procedures in place, on staffing, learner support, data protection, equal opportunities, health and safety etc. It may be that they actually run the course for you, so that they deal with a lot of these issues – your responsibility would be to recruit the learners and perhaps manage the building that hosts the course.

With Lottery, charity or other independent funding, you may have more flexibility – in theory. But you will still need to make sure you are covered for all sorts of eventualities, and you must allow some time to administer the activities.

Keep your records of enquiries, and actual participants, in an organised way – you will be able to use it for contacting people in emergencies, for producing reports for further funding, and for your own marketing. Use a database, tell people that you are doing that, and keep the records safe.

If you are collecting money, you need a bank account. Keep accurate records of any money that you have taken, and have a refund policy in the event of having to cancel.

9. Seeing if it Works

OK, so the course or workshop has started – is it working?

Have you talked to the tutor? Can you make any changes that h/she wants?

Have you listened to the views of the learners? Are they more confident?

Are they learning what they wanted? Do they want more?

Does everyone have an equal opportunity to participate, have their views heard?

Are there likely to be any complaints and will you have a way of dealing with them?

Are you giving them a form to feed back to you on their experience at the end – this should be designed to help you plan other courses. (See Tool 12)

It may take a while after the end of the course before you know if you have made a difference, and participants may ask for another one in the meantime. You may need to keep up the pressure in your community: you raised interest by advertising the course,

can you write something in a magazine to describe what you think it has achieved, and what else could be done?

Remember why you were running it in the first place – to meet a need in your community, and maybe to make something happen! Good luck!

10. Case Studies

Case Study A: Stokenham Parish Council

The parish is in the south of the South Hams, 5 miles beyond Kingsbridge and close to the coast. It is a beautiful location but isolated, and comprises several small scattered villages – it is the second largest parish in the country, at 27 square miles with a population of 2113. The Council (through their Clerk Gill Claydon) jumped at the opportunity to offer local training as the journey to larger towns such as Totnes is seen as too long and difficult, especially on winter evenings or for those without cars. The village hall is comfortable and was a popular venue.

The Council began, with project support via the Community Council for Devon, by carrying out a survey of interest across the parish as there had not been any learning provided there before. Through the project basic ICT was offered. The project also helped pay for a computer which is still available on an open access basis at the Village Hall, supported by the Clerk.

A further project funded training in First Aid and IT, and the outreach worker negotiated for it to be met by South Dartmoor Community College and Cosmic respectively. The First Aid was run twice, in two consecutive sessions of three hours (afternoon and evening, to cut the trainer's travel time) for two weeks, and recruited about 12 learners to each group. The IT also ran twice in two consecutive sessions of two hours, to 11 people in each, for six weeks. There were a total of 27 learners who were eligible for project funding.

The project helped them to provide something new, and has given them the confidence to provide more. The First Aid was invaluable for people who work in the tourist industry, run old people's clubs and other community services. It was also regarded as important given the time taken for paramedical services to reach the village. The IT course has also improved local business skills which will contribute to community regeneration – for example through the local Food Awards festival. The funding enabled them to offer a cheap course (though not free – they decided to charge £10 for the IT to make sure the learners continued to turn up) – and to fund a further IT course for which they had a waiting list.

All the IT learners, and most of the First Aid learners, were over 50. They regarded this as an extra reason to keep provision local, and argued that IT training was particularly important for older people. The learners interviewed were so enthusiastic – they regarded the courses as tasters which would lead on to other things. They were

particularly pleased with the First Aid because of the quality of the teaching and the way it had given them confidence. Those on the IT course were slightly critical of the way the course was organised, in that it took a lot of time to set up and pack up the equipment which took away from the teaching time; also certificates took four months to arrive. However, they were pleased with the teaching (good pace, no jargon, good feedback) and reported that one learner, who had not seen a PC before, had now bought one himself and was using it for business. For both business and social contact the email and internet elements were valued.

The IT trainer (at Cosmic, based in Ottery St Mary) brought and set up laptops in the hall. She was asked about the organisational issue, and agreed that they had found it difficult to run the course at such a long distance from their base, and that there were communication problems between trainers which exacerbated this. They felt that this sort of work was beyond what their normal projects would expect. This tallies with the report from the Outreach Worker that it was very hard to find trainers to run this sort of course in this sort of location.

In the final project (ROLI), the Parish Council chose learning that was specific to the needs of Parish Councillors, both in Stokenham and the neighbouring parishes. The training covered roles and responsibilities, structuring of and procedures in meetings. This supported their work as a "quality council". The course ran over 2 days and was attended by 9 people. The ROLI money was used for delivery which they arranged themselves through their own contacts. As well as being directly of benefit to councillors the training helped those who were involved in other organisations, whether formally constituted or not, in terms of managing their business diligently and their meetings effectively. Examples they gave are the Circle of Friends which helps provide transport for those needing medical treatment, the Chillington Community Association and the WRVS Lunchtime Club.

Next, they would like to develop their role a lead on training for a cluster of parishes in their area. One possible type of activity would relate to fitness. Others include food hygiene and more first aid.

One issue which emerged in discussion related to outreach activity in the Parish Hall by Devon ACL. This was regarded as beneficial but there had been no communication between DACL and the Parish about local needs or interest and some competition was developing for use of the Hall.

They have found it increasingly difficult to find trainers willing to work in their area. If anything the capacity of providers seems to be reducing, with the possible exception of DACL.

Access to laptop computers also is an issue since they understand that DACL can no longer offer these.

Like many other rural parishes they have not found it easy to involve large numbers of younger people.

They saw the value, though to slightly different local audiences, of both certificated and uncertificated learning. The different criteria of the projects for both

beneficiaries and outcomes did allow them to do both, but not in the most effective or comprehensive way.

They were convinced that whilst confident learners will always find a way of getting to learning if they want and need it enough, for those lacking confidence local learning amongst friends made all the difference in getting them started.

Case Study B: Blackdown Hills Natural Fibre Group

The Group had learned about the COBRA project through local networking and saw the opportunity to provide training for members. The programme delivered was for livestock businesses to help them undertake worm-testing. They would hope to see further training in future for other members involved in textile businesses. The Group is two years old and the association with COBRA has helped it raise its profile and offer a better service to members, despite concerns about the bureaucracy and limited time to get things going.

The worm testing course was held in a local farm barn, suitably furnished for learning. The morning was mainly theory with the afternoon concentrating on practical work including microscopic analysis of faeces samples brought by participants. The course was enjoyed and practically useful. Subsequently the Group has bought a testing kit which can be loaned to members. There may also be a self-employment opportunity to offer a testing service, which is costly if done by vets. Using this more selective and scientific approach to the use of worm-treatments could save £350 per year for a business. Overall, the course was specific, positive and would not have happened without COBRA support.

Case Study C: South Hams Positive Lifestyles

This organisation supports people with disabilities to lead independent lives. We have two part-time workers and three volunteers and offer weekly drop-in facilities, social events, outings welfare rights information, training, counselling and advocacy. We also lobby for better access for people with disabilities.

People with a range of physical disabilities of varying ages. Often they are bringing up families or supporting their wider family although disabled themselves. Many have acquired disability including brain injuries. We also support carers and offer respite to families.

People would not have been able to afford to access training without this help.

The courses funded were: Explore IT through Meridian College, ACI TP through Cosmic. Resources from the ROLI project were used to help 15 people with disabilities to access learning in Totnes, Langsbridge, Ivybridge and Exeter. Transport and course fees. Courses included Health and fitness, art, wheelchair basketball, jewellery making.

Benefits to families and individuals has been great and also social benefits - getting people out of their homes to mix with others. Physical benefits by improving overall health and fitness. Emotional benefits - feeling good about themselves having learned

new skills, and benefits from using their brains. Integrating people into mainstream courses sometimes with volunteer support, has improved community perception of the needs of people with disabilities. Family pressure has been eased, as people have taken time out to participate in leisure pursuits and improve family relationships.

Case Study D: Winsford Trust

Winsford Trust is an enthusiastic community-led charity based in a Grade 2 listed building which formerly served as the community hospital. It now provides health and social care to the rural community and is also a UK online centre. It is supported by a team of dedicated, skilled and experienced volunteers. On Tuesdays and Thursdays it offers day care facilities for the over 50s. It hosts a weekly GP satellite surgery session and a monthly baby clinic. It hosts various alternative therapy practitioners and disabled groups such as Headway Devon (a brain injury association).

Halwill Junction is a rural community in Torrridge which lies roughly midway between Okehampton 10 miles to the south-east and Holsworthy 8 miles to the north-west (the 2 nearest ACL locations). It is a small but growing community, which draws people from outlying villages and hamlets. It has a good history of community involvement and co-operation. The area is part of Forest Ward which is high in the list of deprived communities in rural Devon. The catchment area for learning extends over neighbouring parishes which together has a population of around 6500. These include Shebbear, Black Torrington, Sheepwash and Highampton.

The Trust was already working with the Community Council of Devon when the CORA project started and when they received information about the project they immediately signed up. The motivation to become involved was to provide learning opportunities for the local community, for fun or to increase the local skills base. Another aim was to improve practice in their own organisation.

The learning offered through the CORA project was Basic Information and Communications Technology, Belly Dancing – Fitness, Flexibility and Fun and SAGE accounts, using a mix of ACL and local tutors. There were 24 eligible learners 35 learners in total and they received a total of £1857 in funding.

The CORA project enabled the Winsford Trust to forge ahead with a set of learning for which a need had already been identified; intergenerational learning opportunities, Initial ICT training (to fulfil a demand and maximise their ICT facilities) and recreational fun activities to engage with new learners. CORA helped the Winsford Trust to provide these activities sooner than thought possible.

- Raised awareness of what is happening at a local level.
- Attracted new learners and engaged people in their community.
- Established new mini-networks within the community.
- Lovely to have an opportunity to have intergenerational learning, to see mothers and daughters learning and relaxing together (children were welcome to come with mothers to the bellydancing classes)
- The verdict was: "CORA takes time but it is worth it".

Further project funding has enabled further learning opportunities to increase the skills of the local community with in first aid and food hygiene.

Benefits/Impact

- The skills of the local community have increased with a range of benefits from further learning, employment, voluntary work and personal benefits such as a lady who is now able to communicate through her computer with her grandson in Hong Kong.
- For the host organisation the projects have strengthened its status as a community resource but also done something to counter its rather “crumbly” image by attracting younger learners and children into the centre. In turn this has increased awareness of the social activity and other services supported by the Trust.
- Increased social awareness of activities in the village.
- A greater awareness of volunteering opportunities.
- Networking between the different community organisations and generations.
 - Learning together is one of the best ways of meeting new people.
 - Learning is very therapeutic, you find out about yourself and consider new horizons.
 - Some learners found they wanted to progress their skills, notably in ICT to a higher level.
 - Some learners are finding out more about different cultures, costumes and customs as a result of the Belly Dancing, it really has helped to broaden attitudes

Next, they want to run two programmes targeting women - one on personal safety, probably over six weeks and a one-day course to help women prepare for entry or return to work.

Issues

This host said that they preferred the projects that enabled them to progress without tight rules on beneficiaries and with the freedom to do the learning that the community actually wants. They have been able to show people coming back into learning, that it can be fun - with the added benefits of giving them some useful skills eg. spreadsheets and mailmerge to address Christmas cards, and house-hunting on the internet.

Their earlier concerns were:

- Much too much emphasis on ‘economic outputs’ and ‘employability skills’, soft skills like communication and confidence are employability skills.
- Paperwork was a problem, 20 minutes of enrolment in a two-hour session!
- “Be Flexible and imaginative in your approach, and be prepared for the extra time that is needed to get things off the ground.”

They have occasionally encountered difficulties finding tutors or finding tutors with the genuine skills and experience to do the job well.

They would like to see the structure maintained:

"Keep the excellent support mechanisms provided by the Project Workers and the Learning Hosts."

Update: The belly dancers have now formed their own dance troupe, the "Bellylaughs".

Case Study E

Moretonhampstead Development Trust

Moretonhampstead is a small town on Dartmoor, half an hour's travel from the nearest conurbation and struggling to sustain itself as an economic as well as living centre. 12 years ago, the Parish Council set up a Development Trust which has from time to time run computer courses in the local library.

For the last two years, no courses had been run because no college thought it was worth while. However, the ROLI project was able to sponsor a workshop run by Devon Family History Society on Genealogy, and this was seen as extremely successful. It was run in the library and attended by 12 people – more could have been taken if there had been room – all of whom found the course very stimulating.

As a result, other ideas have been generated, leading recently to a whole programme of courses which are supported through Devon Adult and Community Learning. There is a partnership agreement under which the Development Trust has adopted DACL's procedures, enrolment forms, concessionary fees policy etc, and the Trust is paid for the learners it enrolls. Mostly computer courses are still run, with tutors employed by the Trust, but the organiser feels there is a broad social base to the group of learners, and there is a constant demand for more courses, especially as a progression from the earlier ones.

Success seems to be down to building up a head of steam – one successful programme breeds another – with excellent marketing. Advertising was put out in the surrounding villages, stalls were run in the street on Saturday mornings, fliers were posted through doors, and so on. The Trust has an Administrator who does most of this work.

Obviously a concern is whether the DACL support is permanent – but there is every indication that there is provision over the next year at least.

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