

## **Cheshire East Council – working together to develop numeracy in the workplace**

### **Background**

Cheshire East Borough Council is a new council disaggregated from Cheshire County Council on 1 April 2009. The Lifelong Learning team is now part of a wider Children and Families integrated workforce development team and is funded solely by external funds – Adult Safeguarded Learning including Family Learning, NLDC and PCDL. We also have a First Steps and Train to Gain contract and some ESF (Skills for Jobs) funds.

This project builds on work undertaken during 2008-09 for LSIS under a similar programme and focusing on blended learning within Skills for Life in workplace delivery, and published recently in 'Making it Work'.<sup>1</sup> That project highlighted to us the importance of initial assessment in a blended model, and that blended learning is never a cost-cutting exercise, rather a benefit to learners with busy lives.

A further project focusing on contextualising recruitment and content for the care sector further developed our knowledge on the importance of having sector-specific knowledge. We discovered that at the heart of successful delivery, leading to high retention and achievement, lay a provider's ability to answer learners questions of 'How, when and where can I study?' Offering a blended learning approach with a robust initial assessment process (always delivered face to face), enabled us to design programmes which fitted into a learner's busy life. Having face to face sessions of workshops delivered at or near their workplace encouraged motivation and persistence. We wanted this year to build on this knowledge, and introduce flexible recruitment into the equation.

### **What we did**

Cheshire East Lifelong Learning (CELL) puts the learner first and is linking funding opportunities to encourage progression and self development. With an in-house Skills for Life team and a Family Learning delivery team we work hard to provide learning for social and economic fulfilment. Workforce development for professionals in schools and early years settings has an organised structure encouraging progression and promotion. The catering workforce in these settings do undertake statutory training for manual handling, food hygiene and NVQ's but Skills for Life needs have never been addressed. For a new local authority keen to retain and develop a new workforce the time was right to take a strategic view to try and build a learning culture through a more holistic approach to workforce development.

The project's aim was to develop and deliver contextualised literacy and numeracy courses for school catering staff.

## Skills for Life Support for World Class Skills

The steps:

1. Promotion of courses to share information on what is available.
2. Meet with senior management team to raise their awareness; a presentation was used to give a professional feel to our offer which pointed out the benefits to the business.
3. Set up a steering group consisting of ourselves, our LSIS consultant and members of staff from the catering team.
4. Realia provided by the catering manager helped us demonstrate, using a collaborative approach, how effective a course on maths particularly would be – saving time putting mistakes right, developing better confidence
5. Raising Skills for Life awareness to catering supervisors. We were given 30 minutes at five briefing sessions which were also attended by locality managers and the Skills for Life 'champion' Jo Cooper. The supervisor group were the learners we were after, as they would potentially become champions themselves and encourage further take-up within the teams of catering staff they managed.
6. Invitations to attend the taster session (the first session of a 15-week course) were carefully worded and individually addressed to all the supervisors.
7. The taster sessions were delivered to 20 learners who have all enrolled on the courses.

During the three months we have worked on this LSIS project we managed to deliver recruitment, raise awareness and start the delivery phase on accredited Skills for Life courses for over 20 new learners.

The product is a step-by-step process guide to help other providers to engage with a workforce. We believe this process could be used across almost any sector and the key messages are generic.

Materials include:

1. A presentation to use with managers to raise their awareness
2. A process flowchart showing the steps
3. Examples of realia which have had maths and English questions overlaid onto them as examples which demonstrate the benefits of staff making fewer mistakes, being better at calculations, and more creative in writing menus
4. A skills checklist device
5. A script from the supervisor briefing sessions
6. A letter of invitation template
7. A session plan for the taster session

## Skills for Life Support for World Class Skills

### Impact

The impact on the employer has been evident from the start through the manager as a new Skills for Life champion. She continues to advocate the benefits of Skills for Life support to her staff and in time this may well lead the way to a new strategic focus on a learning culture across all workforces within the council.

New learners who were, to start with, sceptical about their own Skills for Life needs, are now learning new skills beside their managers and bonds are being built through this dynamic grouping. Some, the most sceptical originally, have since confessed to maths phobia. They have surprised themselves by their new found confidence.

For our organisation, the Skills for Life team which lies at the heart of Cheshire East's Lifelong Learning service, lessons learned have sharpened our approach to recruitment.

Key targets ambitiously set in our original action plan of 24 new learners have almost been met, with:

- 24/600 learners – 4% of the entire workforce has been supported through the pilot project to join a literacy/ numeracy class
- 100% of the learners who came to the taster sessions signed up to the class.

Lindsay attended a Family Learning Course and is a catering employee.

**'Before** I attended the Numeracy classes I had spent many years being terrified of Maths. Seeing a page of Maths questions I would instantly panic, not being able to read the questions as fear took a hold. I watched my children also struggle with numeracy. At consultation evenings I would dread teachers discussing Maths.'

**After** the Family Learning class which Linda attended she said:

'The benefits for Numeracy and Literacy were:-

Learning in small groups within a friendly environment

Free courses – no financial pressure

After-school hours

Back to basics only using pen and paper for working out – no calculators allowed

Gaining in confidence

Gaining enough knowledge to help and support year six children for SATs

Multiple choice answers

Practice exam papers available to take home

Exams sat using a laptop

Individual learning plan

Additional qualifications to add to CV

Talking to other adults with the same desire to learn

Support from the Personal Tutor and other group members

Being able to discuss Maths and my child's numeracy skills during parents' evening with confidence

Finally – PASSING ALL PAPERS'

### **What we learned:**

- Start at the top, with benefits to businesses as the bottom line
- Get an advocate who is senior enough to drive the initiative
- Get buy-in from team leaders, supervisors (they will 'sell' it to their teams)
- Be careful with the invitation to attend a course – some employees fear being seen as needing support
- Sell the qualification as a personal achievement which will help future job prospects as well as kudos with their children and families
- Gain sectoral knowledge and use that in developing resources for the courses
- Use learners to recruit more by inviting a colleague, keeping an open three-week window to recruit onto the course so more can join as good word spreads
- Always ask learners when, how and where they want to learn
- Change your script on the hoof if you detect concerns such as using the skills check which might 'find out' a skills deficit
- Report back to senior managers with the successes and encourage testimonies from learners to demonstrate impact
- For school settings, try and engage the headteacher in the process so they can see the benefits which might spin off onto other school-based roles.

---

<sup>1</sup> LSIS (2010) *Making It Work*, LSIS