**Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment: Case study on operational project led by Capacity London**

# Introduction

The project focused on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in community settings for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women who are citizens of non-EU countries. This provision, funded by the European Integration Fund (EIF), takes place in the London boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Newham and Tower Hamlets. Learners are primarily from the African, Bengali, Latin American and Turkish communities. The lead organisation for this project was Capacity London, who delivers ESOL through its community partners: Day-Mer, Eritrean Community in the UK (ECUK), Islington Bangladesh Association (IBA) and Unlimited Arts Café CIC.

Three tutors, eight community partner leads and five peer mentors were involved in the project.

The partnership profile for the provision and project is detailed below.

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| **Partner organisation** | **Total learners** | **Learner ethnicity** |
| Arts Café | 35 | Moroccan, Syrian, Egyptian, Algerian |
| Day-Mer | 27 | Turkish, Eritrean |
| Islington Bangladeshi Association | 34 | Bengali, Eritrean, Turkish |
| Eritrean Community Uk | 14 | Eritrean |

**Approach**

The key aim of the project was to identify and extend existing excellent practice in the teaching of English to small and diverse groups of disadvantaged female learners in community settings and to gain further insights into what constitutes outstanding teaching, learning and assessment.

The project also sought to ensure the sustainability of community learning through the development of an innovative peer mentoring model. This model was designed to provide progression opportunities for learners, and to support their integration into wider society.

The rationale for this project was based on the following factors:

* Because ESOL provision takes place in community settings with small learner numbers, it is not realistic or desirable to stream learners by levels. This means that tutors need to develop innovative approaches to meet learners’ diverse range of needs, aspirations and motivations for learning English within the same class.
* The development of learners’ ability to be self-sufficient is of paramount importance, as their progression and employment prospects are severely limited by their inability to access mainstream funding.

Equality and diversity is central to the work of Capacity London and its partners, and this project embraced diversity through:

* Developing approaches to teaching and learning that improve outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable female learners.
* Collaborating with partners to develop a deep understanding of the specific and unique needs of learners in their communities.
* Learner involvement in determining their priorities and needs in relations to their current situations.
* Ensuring all learners have equal access to learning, and providing a safe place where difficulties and barriers can be shared and explored collaboratively.

The project used the Professional Standards as a framework for the approach by:

* Using partnership working to improve learners’ progression and employment opportunities.
* Strengthening community-based information advice and guidance to ensure that learners’ personal, social and emotional needs were met, along with their learning requirements.
* Collaboratively evaluating current practice with community partners, practitioners and learners to provide consistently outstanding learning experiences.
* Involving learners as partners in planning and evaluating lessons and learning.
* Enabling learners to take responsibility for future progress by developing their reflection and metacognitive skills.
* Piloting an innovative peer mentoring scheme that provided participating learners with greater responsibility, and the opportunity to develop and improve their own skills by supporting their peers. This model is detailed in Appendix 1.

The project outcomes and impact have been monitored through a range of methods that include:

* Observations of tutors, learners and peer mentors.
* Discussions with community partners, tutors and learners to evaluate the wider impact of the ESOL provision.
* Reflective evaluations and discussions with tutors, learners, peer mentors and mentees at the end of lessons.

**Outputs, outcomes and impact**

**Outputs**

* Development of a structured process for the recruitment, induction and development of learners to act as peer mentors.
* Increased involvement of learners in the planning, delivery and monitoring of lessons through the use of peer mentoring and reflective practice.
* Development and revision of a reflective process for peer mentors and tutors (appendix 2).

**Outcomes**

* Peer mentees significantly improved their skills and confidence in speaking and listening as a result of having more opportunities to practice with their mentors. Learners said, for example, that they felt more confident to try words for the first time with a mentor than with a tutor.
* Learners became more independent and confident in their ability to learn, and took greater ownership of and responsibility for improving their learning during and outside of lessons.
* The use of peer mentors led to better progress for all learners, as tutors had more opportunities to work individually with learners during lessons.
* Community partners’ improved awareness of the wider impact and value of ESOL learning enabled them to effectively recruit and support particularly hard to reach and vulnerable learners.
* Increased value and impact of learner voice through the reflection process, as tutors gained a much better awareness of what was working and where the issues were.
* Tutors identified and were able to articulate the key factors underpinning the creation of outstanding learning experiences within this specific context.

**Impact**

* Significant increase in learner retention (around 15% overall).
* All learners made particularly good progress in developing their speaking and listening skills.
* Peer mentors significantly improved their English skills and confidence, which enhanced their opportunities to progress beyond the course. For example, meeting the English requirements to access mainstream further education courses.

# Lessons learned

The peer mentor role needs to be carefully introduced and managed. Both mentors and mentees need a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. (Some learners saw the mentor as a poor substitute for the ‘proper teacher’, and this was demotivating for both).

The ability of the mentor to ‘reflect’ and then to document this reflection needs to be carefully taught and monitored throughout the process.

Mentor/mentee pairings need to be carefully planned. The model is most effective when both speak different languages, as this forces them to speak in the shared language (English), and can break down barriers between different communities. The exception to this is when learner’s English is virtually non-existent, as peer translation can build initial confidence.

Mentors are most effective when they have training in support strategies and techniques such as supporting without over-helping.

The tutor needs to share lesson planning with the mentor to ensure they understand what outcomes their mentee needs to achieve, and how they can help them to do this.

Tutors need to carefully monitor and analyse the progress of mentors and mentees during lessons as carefully as that of other learners to ensure that all benefit from the learning.

Mentors need to see the value of the role to them in terms of the wider skills they are developing in addition to their English skills. The use of reflective diaries helps learners to recognise the benefits to them as well as their mentees, and formal contracts, expenses, certificates and references helped them to see the importance of the role.

# Sustainability and transferability

The peer mentoring aspect of the project is easily transferable across different contexts and subjects. This particular aspect of the project will be extended in the future to include a greater range of learners.

An extended training programme will be provided for peer mentors to enable them to gain a greater range of skills to undertake their role. This will include a focus on reflection and evaluation as they found this aspect of their role particularly difficult.

The key factors identified as underpinning the creation of outstanding learning experiences will be used to support the continuous professional development of tutors, and as the basis for recruitment and training of future tutors. These factors were defined as:

* The development of a profound understanding of their learners’ personal, social and emotional needs within the context of their specific communities.
* The ability to use this knowledge, along with initial assessment information, to constantly adapt and evolve lessons to meet learners’ changing needs and situations.
* The need to constantly challenge their own assumptions, and those of their learners, with regard to ability and potential (believing with a passion that all can succeed regardless of their starting points, difficulties or barriers).

**Case study written by Jackie Rossa, Peer Advisor**

**Appendix 1 Process of recruiting, developing and using peer mentors**

* Identification of learners who demonstrate the potential to become peer mentors. These learners needed to have a higher level of English than those they would be mentoring (E3 and above), and need to have demonstrated reliability, social skills and confidence.
* Explaining to potential mentors what the role would involve so that they are fully informed before deciding to proceed.
* Training and supporting potential peer mentors to develop the communication and personal skills needed to work effectively with their peers, along with an understanding of some aspects of the learning process.
* Agreeing a contract with the peer mentor. This includes payment for any additional travel expenses incurred.
* Careful allocation of peer mentor to mentee. This needed to be done carefully to ensure that the skills, attitude and approach of both learners were appropriate to the people, the community and the situation.
* Constant support and feedback from tutors before, during and after lessons to enable mentors to develop and improve.
* Collaborative reflection on the mentoring process (tutors and mentors reflect together).
* Provision of a certificate and reference for learners to use when applying for future learning or employment opportunities.

**Appendix 2 Reflective process for peer mentors and tutors during lessons**

At the start of the lesson, the tutor would meet with the peer mentor, and explain what they were trying to achieve with the mentee, and in the lesson overall, and explain what resources and methodologies were to be used and what results she expected.

During the lesson, the tutor would carefully monitor the progress and behaviour of both mentor and mentee, providing feedback to both as the lesson progresses. The use of the mentor did not relieve the tutor of their responsibility to either learner, both of whom needed to make progress.

After the lesson, the tutor would evaluate the lesson with the mentor and mentee, and all three would plan and discuss what the next steps would be.