LSIS Leadership in Technology (LIT) grant based intervention March 2013

Provider name & contact details	Adult Community Learning Jill Newton Jill.newton2@essex.gov.uk Tel: 01245 216958
LIT Project title	Using the library
The project	

What problem or issue you were trying to resolve or improve with this project?

- To increase the use of the public library by adults with learning disabilities
- To increase confidence in using the library's IT systems, enabling access to information and increasing confidence

This need was identified in 2010 when Maldon library along with a local advocacy group conducted a survey of adults with learning disabilities, and discovered that using the library computer equipment 'did not look very straightforward'. We decided to address this issue through a joint initiative between the library and adult community learning.

Why did you go for a technology-based solution?

Part of the feedback from this group was '*We thought the computers need to be more accessible. People need to be more aware of how to use them; this did not look very straightforward to us'.* Technology is an increasing part of the library service so giving people confidence in using it would make the library more accessible to them.

What did the project cost: LSIS funding + your organisation's contribution?

The overall project cost was estimated at approx. £6,000.00, this matched the funding and took into account staff hours in both organisations, the cost of a mentor, marketing and administration and the purchase of 4 iPads as a more accessible alternative for use with some learners.
Our organisations contribution to the cost was additional hours needed for project management which came to approximately £1,325

Describe what you did and what happened

We have delivered 3 short courses to adults with learning disabilities. These were aimed at increasing the use of the library by this group of people and also increasing their confidence in using the library's IT systems. Four IPads were purchased to make IT more easily accessible for all the learners. The courses were two hours a week for six weeks, two in the autumn term and one in the spring. All learners have observed activities in the library and taken part i.e. taking out books/DVDs, returning books/DVDs and using the computers.

- Independent skills have been developed; in one case a learner became very confident in using the electronic system for taking out a book and he did not want help from desk staff. In fact he refused help.
- Library computers have been used by learners to create PowerPoint presentations based on topics explored in library books/CDs/DVDs
- Computers have also been used to order books from other libraries
- The iPads have been very successful in giving individuals the confidence to use technology as they are not fiddly and are fairly robust. They have been used for taking photographs, video, manipulating digital images, sharing photographs and playing music.
- Several learners are now using the library independently

The benefits and impact

The project has given our organisation the opportunity to pilot a programme that was innovative, offered individuals an opportunity to learn in a supported environment and enabled them to enrich their lives by increasing their independence in the community.

Funding meant that we were able to offer these courses to people with learning disabilities free. The additional project requirement of a mentor enabled the running of the three courses to be more efficient as the main part of that role was to oversee the programme and ensure it ran smoothly and successfully

I feel that the project has had a very positive effect on me personally. This was my first successful funding bid and by being given this opportunity my confidence has grown and I am sure this will have an effect on my motivation to apply for bids in the future. It has been a very positive experience working with the libraries manager and I feel that further opportunities for partnership work are something that I will now approach with confidence and enthusiasm. I also benefitted hugely from the support of the LSIS Associate, who was on hand to give advice and reassurance whenever needed.

What lessons did you learn / what tips would you give to other providers?

Our aim was to offer individuals an opportunity to learn in a supported environment and to enrich lives by enabling more independence in the community. Additionally we plan to create a successful format of learning that is transferable to other locations in the county.

The main challenge with this project was around the time scale. We had planned three consecutive six week courses. This gave limited time to market and recruit learners to the courses. From experience in managing a discrete area for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities I was already aware that most people within this group like to keep to a routine and fill their week with activities. This meant that the time and day we had agreed to run the courses, fitting in with tutor availability and the availability of library staff and computers was not always possible for people to attend and the first course had very low attendance. Reasons varied from a clash with a swimming club, a trip out bowling and other more personal reasons such as 'I always get my Mum's meat for her on that morning'. However a change of time and intensive targeted marketing through support organisations, groups, clubs and care homes plus some media coverage meant a huge increase on recruitment for the second course. I think lesson learnt for future is to allow adequate time for effective marketing and recruitment.

Telling others

What have you done to share /disseminate this project with others in the sector?	
We have been able to create a successful format of learning that is transferable to other locations in the county. The project has been promoted through both organisations and interest has been expressed by other library services. There is an intention to roll the project out to other local libraries and it will be planned as part of the main programme for 2013/14 as a longer course. The press release to market the project was picked up by a national website, 'Learning Disability Today' and promoted. Additional funding has been agreed by LSIS to support the creation of a video to promote and publicise the project within both organisations, this will uploaded to the Excellence Gateway to be shared with the sector.	
Provide a quote on your experience of the LSIS LIT project.	The project has given our organisation the opportunity to enrich the lives of Essex adults with learning difficulties, increasing their independence in the community.
Are you happy for us to use this and your contact details for marketing and publications?	Yes
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