



An Excellence Gateway case study

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Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service: Developing a partnership approach to supporting people from the traveller community to engage with and succeed in learning

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Outline the aim

The aim of the project was to develop a targeted partnership approach to supporting people from the traveller community to engage with and succeed in learning. We wanted to develop our skills to work with a new group of underrepresented adults. –Irish Travellers. In Wirral we have a number of newly settled traveller families, living in houses on one of our more deprived estates. The adults have very low levels of literacy. This has been identified by the service, a local school, through Irish Community Care (ICC), a voluntary group and local Job Centre. This is a minority group who are not currently engaged in adult learning and who face a number of barriers to integrating into the local community and into work, including their lack of previous education.

The challenge

The project aims to bring together a number of services to ensure these people can participate in and achieve in local adult and family learning opportunities as a first step in learning.

Partnership organisations

Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service Project co-ordinator, adult tutors, support workers and volunteers.

Wirral Minority Ethnic Achievement Service- provided support, advice and links to primary school.

Irish Community Care Merseyside - key contact and link to traveller community. Also provided valuable awareness training to all partners.

Holy Spirit Primary School- supported the recruitment for Family Learning Workshops.

With support from Leasowe Children's Centre Family Support Team and Job Centre Plus Community Outreach Co-ordinator.

The outputs

Traveller Focussed Cultural Awareness Training delivered by Irish Community Care Merseyside to 22 staff from organisations across the partnership.

Expected - 6 new learners from the traveller community engaged, in adult learning

Actual -

Family learning activity -There was a change in emphasis from the original idea of an event celebrating traveller culture as this was felt by the families involved to be too much of a spot light on them. A short course to enable the families to work alongside other families in a practical context where their lack of literacy would not be apparent was very successful. Two traveller families attended Family Learning Gardening Workshops at Holy Spirit Primary School mixing with 9 other families – 'enjoyed it -me and my lad working together'.

Two travellers attending Literacy Buddies every week for one-to-one help with reading- supported by volunteers.

Ten travellers – from the Elders group- attended a 5 week Basic IT course and will continue next term for a 10 week progression course.

Actual total engaged and achieved - 14

The impacts and outcomes

The main planned outcome of this project was to develop a partnership approach to working with travellers. This has worked very effectively with the awareness training for staff and the joint work and activities to support travellers and their families.

Actual Outcomes

The project raised awareness of the barriers facing travellers to staff and partner organisations. The developing partnership with ICCM staff provided ongoing practical advice support and advice for any concerns identified throughout the project which helped support staff and learners. Good links have been developed with ICCM and with the traveller communities and the engagement of adult learners from different generations of traveller families has established a level of trust between the community and the Lifelong and Family Learning Service.

Staffs have a greater understanding of the real emotional impact of social exclusion on travellers plus knowledge and confidence to better engage with the traveller community and to remove any barriers they have to engaging with learning. This has enhanced our service delivery and equalities practice.

This practice will be embedded into the planning for the future for all the organisations involved.

Good partnership working to support this group will continue and work is planned to offer family literacy at Holy Spirit School who have just enrolled 8 new children from traveller families who all lack literacy skills.

With a view to helping the traveller families to feel valued and enabling them to contribute to the local community we are planning input on traveller culture as part of a Celebrating Diversity event - July 2012 in Holy Spirit School and involving all the partners. The event will target children and families from the school.

Good links with ICCM have led to discussions about a drop in session based in the Adult Learning Centre to make potential new learners feel more comfortable about coming into learning.

Working relationship with LSIS

Working with LSIS has enhanced our delivery and quality and has enabled us to focus on the needs of this group of learners who require a different approach to engage and support.

Good value for money

Through working in partnership we have been able to share expertise and resources across organisations. Staff training has been run at minimal cost for a mixed group of staff from different settings.

Through links with ICCM and the school we have been able to reach new adult learners from the targeted groups without much initial financial outlay and all partners have worked well together and agreed to contribute to further joint activity.

The wider impacts of helping travellers to integrate with other local people within family and adult learning courses will be a greater understanding from both sides and positivity developing community cohesion.

Senior managers involvement

Regular meetings with Steering Group of all partners included the Head of Service

Stakeholder involvement

Leasowe Early Years Family Support team were an additional partner who wanted to be involved to develop links to the families to support pre-school children

Learner involvement

Learners were involved in identifying what they were interested in learning, the IT course for the 10 learners were set up after discussion with the elders group.

Raising awareness

The project has been reported to the Lifelong and Family Learning Steering Group, Wirral PCDL partnership and ESOL planning group, Greater Merseyside Quality Improvement Network and SfL Curriculum improvement group. The final project will be reported to the NW LEA FEA group.

Continuity of project, after LSIS funding

- 10 learners continuing on IT course next term.
- Planned literacy sessions with traveller mums at Holy Spirit Primary school following on from family learning gardening workshops.
- Two learners continuing to work on a one-to-one basis with volunteer reading buddies
- Irish Community Care partnership – possible drop in at Leasowe still to be confirmed.
- Links to Men's Hub newsletter and Elders group newsletter.
- Celebrating Diversity event in July.

Did you experience any difficulties in implementing the project and how did you overcome these?

Gaining trust- Irish Community Care- very protective of the Traveller community

Some learners were initially scared to join courses as they did not want to share their details.

We found that once one or two travellers trusted us- the numbers engaged escalated quickly through word of mouth.

We had to be flexible and develop trust. A visit to the elders group took time to arrange but time spent talking to them was successful in gaining new learners and promotion for learning within the community.

The lessons learned

Respect and value all communities and cultures. Be flexible and respond to their needs at their pace.

Doing some research and making contacts is an important first step. It is important to link with other partners who may have more knowledge of communities and to listen to them before taking action.

Sustainability – lasting legacy

Strong partnerships continue to develop holistic flexible approach to meet the needs of the traveller community.

Demonstrating impact – evidence of short and long term impact

Short term impact – new adult learners have been involved in courses. This will have a positive effect on their own skills and aspirations and on their understanding of how to support their children and motivation to encourage them to attend school.

Staffs from all organisations involved feel more confident about working together to support the needs of travellers through a partnership approach

Longer term people from Irish travellers communities will feel more confident to access services. The new children who recently joined the primary school came from relatives of the original families that were involved. The children and adults in these families had little or no previous experience of learning, but they felt comfortable to approach the school and adults were keen to find out how to help the children.

Additional comments

Although this was a short term project it has laid a very successful foundation for future work.

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