

Embedding Skills for Life in Entry to Employment

■ Gillian Moore, Staff writer

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include

CfBT Education Trust’s **include** programme aims to prevent social exclusion through interventions from age 4 to 25. Among **include**’s projects are work-based learning programmes in community-based settings in Norfolk, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and in County Durham where 12% of 16–18 year-olds are NEET (not in education, employment or training) – significantly more than the England average of below 8%. **include** is a provider that works with those who are most difficult to engage. At its ALI inspection in 2006, it was awarded a grade of ‘outstanding’ for equal opportunities.



Watched by Sue Wright, Skills for Life tutor, learners cut out photographs from magazines in an exercise to raise their awareness of how the media influences perceptions of our bodies.

A challenge for any Entry to Employment (E2E) programme is how to address the whole range of its clients’ complex and interlinked barriers to progression – educational, personal and social. At **include** in County Durham, staff used to focus on the young people’s social needs and buy in educational services from colleges. Since their involvement in the Skills for Life (SfL) initiatives, staff have taken on more and more of the educational role themselves, making for a far more integrated programme. The Skills for Life Improvement Programme (SfLIP) and previously the SfL Quality Initiative has been the driving force for developments that management and staff already knew made sense. It is supporting the next wave of upskilling that brings education right to the heart of **include**’s work, while losing nothing of its personal and social support role.

include has been offering E2E in County Durham since E2E was launched in 2003. One of **include**’s innovations is Bridge-It, launched in Chester-le-Street in County Durham in August 2006 as a ‘waystation’ for those who qualify for E2E but need an even more supportive person-centred intervention, and are very far from

being ready for the experience of work. The aim is for Bridge-It’s clients to move on to conventional E2E when they are ready. Bridge-It offers four full days of activities per week, in and out of the project, mostly with fully integrated Skills for Life, and half a day a week designated Skills for Life work. ‘Our programmes are not qualification driven but people driven,’ affirms Jonny Wright, **include**’s Operations Manager in the North East.

The learners also appreciate the support they receive. ‘Do maths, do English, go home. Do maths, do English, go home,’ is Marianne’s recollection of mainstream E2E elsewhere. ‘Here you do child development, teamwork, key skills... no, I don’t mind the key skills.’



As part of an embedded literacy exercise, a learner types his wish list from a catalogue.



Jonny Wright, Operations Manager for **include** in the North East, on his weekly visit to Bridge-It.



Sue Wright, Skills for Life tutor for Bridge-It

‘There has been general enthusiasm within Bridge-It and across **include** for qualifications which recognise skills that staff are often exercising already’

The LSC-funded programme for 16–19 year-olds, lasting up to 22 weeks, encompasses Skills for Life teaching leading to Entry Level, Level 1 and 2 qualifications, and offers project-based preparation for work and work experience. The main measure of success is progression to a college place, apprenticeship or employment.

One of the success factors of this project is the staff’s professionalism in getting learners to take ownership of their problems and focusing them on the world beyond Bridge-It. Thanks to the guidance from the Improvement Programme, one of Bridge-It’s four staff is now

a fully qualified Skills for Life tutor. The others all have a social or youth work background and are qualified at or working towards the adult literacy and numeracy support award. All are supported by **include**’s fully qualified lead Skills for Life tutor, Sue Wright, who also teaches the Bridge-It learners half a day a week. There has been general enthusiasm within Bridge-It and across **include** for qualifications which recognise skills that staff are often exercising already.

Sue Wright and **include**’s managers are being supported by the Skills for Life Improvement Programme in the revision of **include**’s Skills for Life strategy in time for the new funding year. The two main strands of strategy – the qualifications and experience of staff and the embedding of Skills for Life – go hand in hand.

Through a series of meetings this year with her SfLIP Development Adviser, Sue has become fully conversant not only with the details of imminent changes such as the advent of functional skills, but also with the Government’s drive towards qualified teacher status. It is likely that soon all **include** project workers with a delivery role will work towards full teacher status, and this will be

made clear to potential recruits at interview. However, the ability to motivate and engage with the client group will remain a paramount criterion for hiring, resulting in a flexible, multi-skilled workforce.

The strategy being revised with the help of the SfLIP is likely to include the eventual elimination of all overt Skills for Life teaching other than discrete interventions to address very specific needs. Led by Senior Manager for Quality and Innovation, Nathan Crawley-Lyons, Sue and her colleagues are developing the new curriculum, ensuring that the whole core curriculum for literacy and numeracy is contextualised in other learning activities. Then there’ll be no more cries of ‘Oh God, maths and English’, as Sue puts it.



A learner at Bridge-It