

Workplace Adaptability

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Equal Voices



Hello and welcome to issue 8 of the Equal e-zine. In this issue we report on how Equal has assisted participants and organisations involved in the programme over the last six years. We spoke with six people to gain an insight into their experiences, to find out about their involvement and the benefits they perceived.

Round 2 DP News Required!

As they enter the final phase, DPs must now submit project closure reports that describe their activities and expenditure in Round 2. This information will be used by the Equal Support Unit to report on Equal in Great Britain in 2007 to the European Commission. We are keen to highlight successes in dissemination and mainstreaming and to gather case studies of DPs who have secured continuation funding for activities piloted under the programme. Your ESU contact will be in touch to discuss this and chase any evaluation reports you have as part of the closure process.

News from Equal at EU Level

Over the last six months, a number of European Thematic Network meetings and Policy fora took place.

For more information about these events click here.

Full details of upcoming Equal events can be found on the Equal Support Unit's event page at <http://www.equal.ecotec.co.uk/diary>

Equal Works

The successes from Equal continue to be promoted at a range of levels and www.equal-works.com displays the experiences and outcomes from DPs. Each DP has its own microsite on Equal Works that provides an overview of their activities, reports and products.

2007 Customer Satisfaction Survey

Thank you to all the DPs who took part in the Equal Customer Satisfaction Survey in December 2007. Feedback from both the questionnaire and interviews showed that a substantial number of DPs were happy with the level of service provided by the ESU. We will be using the feedback to continue to improve our services here at the ESU.

Equal Policy Briefs

The Equal Support Unit will be publishing new Policy Briefs next month. The policy briefs, aimed at organisations looking to participate in the 2007-13 ESF programme, build on the showcase topics from Day 1 of the Equal Works 2007 conference and are an informative resource about recent policy initiatives and new legislation.

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The **Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust** manages three hospitals and worked with the Adjust the Balance DP to improve the work-life balance of its 5,300 staff. Kathleen Ackah, their Sickness Absence Officer, told us about the implementation of their new strategy and how Equal helped.



Why did your organisation become involved in the Equal programme?

The Trust became involved with Equal through the LSC because we wanted to continue and improve our achievements in the Improving Working Lives initiative. The aim was to improve work-life balance and its communication throughout the Trust to promote flexible working, child care and caring, flexible retirement and healthy lifestyles.

What has been the benefit of working with Equal?

The benefits of working with Equal have been plentiful. The Top Tips booklets have been shared at stress management workshops and the Heart and Soul events have proved very popular. The experience and the sharing of that experience between the partners at the regular DP meetings have been invaluable as it led to new friendships and new business opportunities. On a personal level it has been a turning point in my career.

Do you think the original aims have been met?

Yes, through our CD-toolkit we have managed to give every member of staff information about the Trust that they can access through work or home in an easy familiar format.

What has been particularly innovative about working with Equal?

The CD has been the most innovative way of communicating with staff. We have 5,300 staff on 3 sites and although we have other ways of communicating such as a Trust magazine, e-mail accounts, the Intranet, Chief Executive's brief, posters etc there are some hard to reach groups. We have also set up a link on the Intranet especially for child care, carers and work life balance which is updated on a regular basis.

What activities will your organisation be continuing with as a result of Equal?

The organisation will be looking to update the CD within the next 12 months and all of our achievements will continue now they have been established. The Staff Support Coordinator is very active within the Trust especially with the

newsletters, maternity/paternity sessions and family law surgeries. The "Did You Know" section of the Connect magazine will continue, the Heart and Soul information events will become an annual event and our PFI partners wish to repeat the healthy lifestyle events annually.

What have you enjoyed the most about being involved with the programme?

I personally have enjoyed meeting so many talented and enthusiastic people with such interesting projects. The DP meetings were a great chance to share ideas and even take part in other people's projects. I specifically enjoyed the visit to Brussels for the European Employment Week in 2007.

What are your plans for the future?

I have now been employed by the Trust as the Sickness Absence Officer and feel that I will bring all my experience from the Equal project into the role and be able to help staff achieve work life balance and an improved sickness record.

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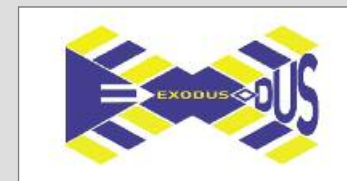
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Anthea is a beneficiary of the **Exodus DP**, a partnership of 122 stakeholders in the prison and probation service across the South East and London led by the South East of England Development Agency. The partnership looked at imaginative ways of extending the use of intermediate labour markets to support the reintegration of offenders into work and community life.

Tell me a little bit about yourself?

My name is Anthea, I have been involved in the Exodus project through Holloway prison. In 2004 I did a few weeks on remand in prison for a number of charges relating to fraud. I had a substance misuse problem for a number of years and things slowly deteriorated - I lost my house, car and job and before I knew it I was living on the streets, it was a means to an end to get money. It was a massive reality check when I was arrested you don't think about the consequences because you are so wrapped up in the life you are leading and I lost contact with all my family and friends.

How did you get involved with the Equal programme?

I relapsed after a probation meeting and ended up inside for a 12 month sentence, although I was released on Home Detention Curfew after 4 and a half months. I was working in the gardens at Holloway Prison when another inmate told me about the Exodus programme; I spoke to St Giles Trust who were working in the prison for Exodus.

What were your main aims and reasons for joining the Equal programme?

I wanted to leave behind my old life, I was really determined to turn my life around and to start again. I then got involved with Exodus in Holloway which provides support in education, training and counselling.

Do you think these aims have been met?

Yes, I have been involved with Exodus for over a year now and it has been a really positive experience. My self-esteem has increased and is increasing from day to day.

How do you think that you have benefited from being involved?

It has really helped me having someone to talk to and support me when I have had set backs. This has kept me on the right path. With my Support Worker I talked about what I wanted to do when I got released and I got 'through the gate support' so I was still involved in the project once I was released.

What have you enjoyed the most about being involved with the programme?

Everything started with housing since I was released, Exodus helped me get a place in a hostel in Islington, and there was a support worker at the hostel as well as meetings with Exodus. I also had weekly counselling sessions which was paid for by Exodus. I decided I wanted to get into this area of work and Exodus have really supported me in this. I did an NVQ level 2 in Health and Social Care: Substance Misuse with Addaction which I finished in March and then I went for some jobs which I didn't get which made me low. Having a caseworker helped me to stay positive during set-backs and to move on. I now work on the Equal Engage project as a Relay Mentor at St Giles Trust which I started not long ago and I'm loving it.

What are your plans for the future?

As for my plans I want to continue in this area of work and help other people in the same situation as me. My self-esteem has increased so much.

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Beighton Community Partnership (BCP) and Beighton Villages Development Trust (BVDT) is a partner in the SEASY DP led by Sheffield community enterprise development unit SCEDU.



Tell me a little bit about yourself?

Beighton Community Partnership and Beighton Villages Development Trust was established to support coalmining communities of Beighton and Sothall, Sheffield. The organisations are representative of the community, run by community volunteers; and are accountable to the community.

How did you get involved with the Equal programme?

The boards of BVDT & BCP increasingly felt that the focus on project and funding streams had led the organisations away from their original core values which were to improve quality of life, and to sustain an economically viable life.

What were your main aims and reasons for joining the Equal programme?

Equal has led us to 're-connect' with our organisational core values and customers i.e. the community we serve. It has assisted with forward organisational and financial planning. It provided a route to establish organisational change based on empirical evidence. It embedded the concept of 'social auditing/accounting' as a core principle

of the organisations. It trained both volunteers and staff to work as a team, and carry out 'social audit'. It empowered both volunteers and staff to undertake a role as community trainers in the 'social audit; and roll out the process to other local community trusts/forums. It trained key organisational members in 'OPERA' a technique to gain consensus opinion of any organisation (an especially useful tool that can be applied within communities to gauge community opinion). It provided the organisation with the final 'Social Audit Report' which forms the benchmark from which future social audits can be taken and measured.

Do you think these aims have been met?

Fully and above - the experience for all involved has been a tremendous learning curve.

How do you think that you have benefited from being involved?

BVDT volunteers have learned a range of skills in actually delivering projects in support of the Beighton Integrated Development Plan which comprises 8 projects aimed at regenerating the community. BVDT is now actively pursuing the

development of its own social enterprises which will lead to expansion of its activities, the creation of new businesses, jobs; and will aid its sustainability as a 'community anchor organisation'.

What have you enjoyed the most about being involved with the programme?

The opportunity of learning through a training package delivered within the community and dovetailed to organisational needs. The programme/training was relevant to communities, and demonstrated that the trainers and the training package understood 'community dynamics'.

What are your plans for the future?

To look at sustainability from March 2008 onwards and look at social auditing as a mainstream corporate function for our organisation to pave the way forward for the future.



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Jason is a beneficiary of the **What Makes the Difference? DP** led by RPS Rainer, which focussed on influencing policy and practice for those in and leaving public care.

Tell me a little bit about yourself?

I am 21; I live with my dad and my step-mom. I am in the process of starting a career with adults with learning difficulties. I enjoy football and I am an avid Man United fan. I like computers, computer consoles and I enjoy watching and creating films. I like socialising.

How did you get involved with the Equal programme?

Over a year ago, my Social Worker rang me up and as she knew I was interested in improving outcomes for young people in care. It was from there that I got involved in the project and helping staff to plan the programme activities. I went down to London for two days and it started from there.

What were your main aims and reasons for joining the Equal programme?

To improve the outcomes of young people and create networks. Half-way through working with WMTD I realised that I had the opportunity to gain a lot of new skills and improve existing skills.

Do you think these aims have been met?

I hope I have improved the outcomes of young people in the work I have been involved in. I can say that I have improved my skills and knowledge as well as gaining skills.

How do you think that you have benefited from being involved?

I got my National Film and Television School certificate and it has allowed me to create contacts within the film industry. It has given me another career path opportunity. I am now a contact within the film industry and it has opened doors for me.

What have you enjoyed the most about being involved with the Equal programme?

Working in film and getting to know people and meet new people has been fantastic. Oh, yeah and I have made friends within the team and with young people around the country. I now know people from around the country and I don't spend time with friends that influence me to do negative things. I have sorted myself out. I have grown up a lot and I wasn't really doing things for myself. Now I question things.



I went to Poland on a transnational exchange visit and I had a fantastic time. I met young people from the children's home - it was nice to see. Even though some say that the children in the children's home were worse off, I would have loved to have been there instead of the home that I was in. I experienced a new place. I became a minority over there as not many people would fit in my category. As soon as I got off the plane it took me time to remember that in England we drive on the left but it was an amazing culture to experience and be involved in.

What are your plans for the future?

I am going back to college to gain an NVQ 1 in Social Care. I am thinking of moving to London but I want to develop my independent living skills first. My passion is film and eventually I would like to work in this industry.



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Race and Integration

Sylvia is a former beneficiary of the **Aspire DP**. While waiting for refugee status she volunteered for the partner organisation My Time Ltd, where she is currently the Finance Manager. **My Time Ltd**, is an award winning culturally sensitive counselling and psychotherapy service, specialising in supporting individuals who experience barriers to find routes into education and employment. For more information please see **ASPIRE's website**.



Tell me a little bit about yourself?

I came to the UK as an asylum seeker from Zimbabwe 5 years ago. Previously, as a divisional director of a major corporation my family and I were used to a high standard of living. However, it is disturbing how life can change overnight; as we became asylum seekers due to political reasons.

It was traumatic as after everything we had nothing. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work, so you become idle. It affected me really badly as I used to live a very busy schedule. I had two intelligent children who were having difficulties coping with the changes so like every mother I pretended that I was not affected.

How did you get involved with the Equal programme?

I lost all of my confidence and self esteem. The Refugee Council referred me to My Time Ltd where I had counseling sessions and building self-esteem courses which helped me to overcome the trauma and depression. I started volunteering for My Times' drop in sessions which I am managing now.

How do you think that you have benefited from being involved?

Thanks to Equal I am very knowledgeable about ESF/EU funding considering six months before joining My Time I was turned down in some jobs because I did not have experience in ESF/EU funded work. Now 12 months down the line I am overwhelmed by the experience I have gained.

What have you enjoyed the most about having been involved in the programme?

I feel that Equal has helped to raise awareness on these issues although some statutory organisations still have problems with engaging asylum seekers and minority communities. This is because there is not enough being done to identify and address the barriers, such as financial, language and status, to integration and engagement. Changes only happen when you really engage and involve the 'users', and that was what Equal about.

What are your plans for the future?

The Equal programme changed me a lot, it changed the way I see the world. I have developed a passion of making a difference in people's lives and I would like to see myself in an advocacy or in a lobbying role, or being involved in policy-making on social issues.

What would be your message to asylum seekers?

Don't give up and try to integrate! I really think that integration also means the discovery and understanding of the culture of Britain. Integrating is not only about learning the language through an ESOL course, but learning the culture too!



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Employment Needs of Older Workers

East Riding of Yorkshire Council lead the Equal Project Older Workers Employment Network (OWEN) DP, Angel Lawry their Project Manager.



Why did your organisation become involved in the Equal programme & what were the main aims and reasons?

The main aims of working on the Equal programme were to extend the work of the "50+" project, build on its successes and to engage with European partners who also faced similar problems with an ageing workforce and age discrimination. It was also a great opportunity to share best practice, share innovative ideas and exchange information.

What has been the benefit of working with Equal – describe any successes?

The benefits of working on the Equal programme came from the opportunity to share information, use funding that fill gaps in mainstream provision, try new methods of working and develop materials which could be piloted in other Member States. Some of the Successes include the creation of an Employment Agency (On2Work) specifically to support the over 45's into employment. The OWEN DP also took second place in a regional award under the theme "Working Beyond our Shores".

Do you think the original aims have been met?

The main aims have been met with the continued reduction of unemployed people aged 45+ within East Riding. An employer toolkit has been produced and widely disseminated and can be [accessed here](#).

What has been particularly innovative about working with Equal?

There were no other projects in East Riding providing employment support for 45 + age group, which in itself makes it quite innovative. There was also the opportunity to pilot products before they were put into general circulation e.g. accredited higher education modules through Hull University.

How do you think what you have implemented has improved the employment opportunities of others?

Evidently, statistics show that a number of people were able to find work as a result of the support provided by Equal.

What activities will your organisation be continuing with as a result of Equal?

We have successfully gained additional funding from Yorkshire Forward, our Regional Development Agency to continue the OWEN project, but this time access a much larger area which covers the whole of the Humber sub-region.

What have you enjoyed the most about being involved with the programme?

Transnational work has provided an opportunity to network with other countries and to find out about their economic situation in relation to the older worker. It has also enabled best practice to be shared amongst those partners that were involved.

What are your plans for the future?

With the funding from Yorkshire Forward the project will continue to run until March 2009. The project has expanded and now delivers across 4 local authority areas in the Humber sub-region. With challenging targets to meet, the project continues to drive forward, working with participants to improve their employment prospects.