



Working in Derbyshire Dales Villages

This report concludes the evaluation of ROWA!'s development of two ICT based learning projects for adults, funded by the European Social Fund via Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council between April 2002 and August 2004. The experience of the first project, "The Keeping up with the Kids ICT project" (KUWK ICT) and recommendations from its evaluation in January 2003 (Almond Associates), led straight into this second "Derbyshire Dales Family Learning ICT Project", which has further refined and developed the emerging delivery model in three isolated rural communities offering, in addition, a more advanced Step Ahead of the Kids (STAK) ICT course. An interim evaluation was completed in January 2004 (Almond Associates).

The Project's aim has been:

To further develop a sustainable model of promoting and improving ICT, literacy and numeracy in six rural isolated communities, with the objective of increasing confidence and self-esteem, increasing knowledge of ICT and improving literacy skills.

Developing a sustainable community learning model:

The Partnership

As a result of recommendations from the KUWK ICT evaluation, a partnership team lead by ROWA!, with Derbyshire Dales Adult Community Education and the Derbyshire Information Advice and Guidance Partnership, was established to oversee the project. From the reports received so far, key partners in this project are working well together, with evidence of regular meetings, shared objectives, sharing of information and a sense of shared responsibility for the success of the project.

Community Agents

Community Agents worked 6 hours per week in three isolated rural communities in the Derbyshire Dales between September 2003 and July 2004. Trained (Level 2 certificate of adult learner support), managed and developed by ROWA! in conjunction with one of the original Community Agents from the KUWK ICT project, the aim was "to maximise the adult education and family learning opportunities available to local residents". With support from the project partners, Community Agents worked to meet seven "SMART" targets during the year to meet the aim. They covered: initiate and maintain contacts, map local learning provision, undertake

local learning questionnaire, organise open family learning "development" event, a Books for Babies event, organise "presence" at local summer fair and undertake supervision and achieve City and Guilds 9295.

The key advantages identified by the study of a "Community focused approach" through the Community Agents were:

- to have a local person, from the community and identified as being "one of us" providing a bridge between the "demand" and the "supply" for learning opportunities;
- to provide an "inside perspective" on the needs of the community, and also the knowledge of why some things worked and others didn't, eg the way a venue is perceived, or the timing of an activity in relation to other time pressures;
- the added value of an "extra pair of hands" which were focused on just one area, and working to a fairly tight brief;
- the benefit of recruiting people with "personality" who could get to grips with the role and make it happen;
- the "push" effect - at least one (ACE) Programme Manager mentioned the benefit of having someone pushing him to carry through activities and ideas.

The Learners

For learners this project aimed to "increase confidence and self-esteem, increase knowledge of ICT and better literacy skills".

This study found from KUWK ICT course participant feedback in the three communities that 88.5% understood better how computers are used in schools, 88.5% had gained increased confidence in supporting their child's learning, 96% had been encouraged to find out about other courses to attend and 74% had been encouraged to become more involved in their children's school. The feedback from the "Step Ahead of the Kids" course demonstrated similar levels of increased confidence with 93% appreciating the future usefulness of its accreditation to them. In both cases participants had gained additional skills and knowledge with progression being demonstrated from KUWK to STAK and CLAIT.

The feedback from learners provides confirmation that there is a demand for learning opportunities and a willingness to take part if barriers to learning are removed, or at least reduced in size. Features of the project which may be picked up and transferred to other projects where there is a need to encourage participation are:

- the role of the Community Agent as an encourager;
- the need for the learning environment to be easily accessible, and if possible to provide a crèche;

- the importance of the tutor and fellow students, as well as a professional Learning Adviser, in helping participants think about their skills and future.

The Delivery Model

The study finds that, to stimulate the growth of learning in selected isolated community, a combination of a dedicated project manager working through key stakeholders, with effective community agents, the use of a mobile learning facility including a crèche and high quality courses is a delivery model that works. Group discussions amongst partners, funding bodies and participants, at a final project seminar in early July 2004, confirmed this.

Further Details ...

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