

Chatteris Tuesday 'Learn & Share' Group

Group Evaluation Summer 2014

Background

The Chatteris learn & share group, facilitated by CP Learning Trust's Development Worker, started December 2013. Although initial member numbers were attracted by flyers and simple advertising, as many as 20 have attended the weekly 2 hour session, some travelling from villages across Fenland.



The current membership has settled down to a regular corium of 10 -12 people, ages ranging between 27 and 78, who meet in the Chatteris Library meeting room and enthusiastically share and learn from one another.

Group Evaluation

The evaluation report has been arranged to reflect the evidence in line with the four project outcomes of CP Learning Trust's Big Lottery Funded "Learning for Wellbeing" project.

Outcome One (*beneficiaries have improved confidence, aspiration and self-esteem and are more optimistic about their future*).

The majority of share and learn activities are identified naturally, it is common practice when welcoming someone new to ask what skills / learning experiences they would like to share. This simple act results in benefits for both the group and newcomer alike.

For the group it offers the opportunity to learn a new skill adding to their growing skill set, for someone new to see how easy and natural it is to contribute to several others wellbeing brings with it an enormous amount of satisfaction, this simple act has proved to be a really positive and immediate benefit for those joining, the majority of whom admitted they came with levels of low esteem.

Outcome Two (*beneficiaries have a greater sense of belonging, are treated fairly and with respect and more support for those where they live*)

One of the first impressions on meeting the group is the enthusiasm and closeness of its members, often all talking at once and eager to share what activities they have been involved with since their last meeting.

It is impressive to observe how a mixture of individuals all with different backgrounds and different reasons for attending have quite naturally gelled together, and how eagerly each has provided a contribution that has benefitted them as individuals and the group as a whole. The informality of the meeting occasion is regarded by attendees to be an essential ingredient.

Effective interaction is best achieved when numbers are about 10; however on the occasion when over 20 attended, the extra numbers were accommodated by positioning everyone in a horseshoe table arrangement rather than in groups on separate tables which may have had an isolating effect, another illustration of self empowerment from group members making things work!

Throughout the evaluation interview it was obvious to observe the infectious nature of those present and the importance given to the share and learn concept.

Outcome Three (*beneficiaries have increased basic and life skills and more informed regarding opportunities available to them, socially and economically*).

The group was asked to describe their share and learn experiences and a schedule of skills was presented see attached schedule May – September 2014. This schedule was produced by the group on the single occasion that there was

no facilitator in attendance, in a mood of self-reliance attendees decided to produce a plan of activities which they remain committed to.

Forward planning using the aforementioned schedule provides members with enough time to prepare for their respective sessions and source the materials they require.

Outcome Four (*beneficiary volunteers are positively engaged in the community, there are more active citizens and an overall improved sense of community*).

Evidence of the resourcefulness of the group and how they engage with the local community is illustrated by the sourcing of materials from local retailers, whose generous donations reflect strong support for the group. In turn the group have donated numerous craft items to a range of local charity organisations. It was also evident that at the end of the meeting all those attending left bolstered by another enjoyable meeting and keen to communicate their high levels of satisfaction and fulfilment to friends and family.

Room for improvement

Reaction to a request for any areas of improvement didn't highlight any significant comments other than when advertising for new members the group warmed to the idea of using a case study format; to showcase the group's activity and believed it important to use personal comments from a selection of members. A general view was expressed not to refer to the group as 'drop in' instead better to use the term 'learn and share' which is thought to be much more appropriate and less likely to give the wrong impression.

Individual interviews

Marilyn

Marilyn joined the group having endured a period of illness which resulted in having to give up a high profile career, and the recent bereavement of both parents. Her confidence was very low and her self-worth was a major concern and completely at odds to the senior management role that she held for many years. Joining proved to be a leap of faith for Marilyn but was rewarded with an almost instant level of fulfilment from fellow group members many of whom shared her same levels of anxiety, fitting in proved to be a surprisingly easy task.

Long forgotten hobbies and skills were soon resurrected and shared with the group during the following months. Her attendance at the interview meeting was so important to her that she interrupted a family holiday to be present.

Coming into contact with others after a long period of isolation has acted like a breath of fresh air, the regular meeting occasion has encouraged her to use her organisational skills, and it was Marilyn's suggestion to put together the monthly activity schedule.

She readily admits that her contribution is overshadowed by the benefits she has received and emphasises how the act of sharing makes a real difference to the way she now feels. She has strong views on what contributes to an effective group, she believes that the makeup of a successful group evolves naturally - with people coming and going it eventually settles down into a corium of like minded individuals. Group size is important, her ideal is about 10, this facilitates a strong sense of belonging amongst members and by encouraging their self empowerment it provides an ideal platform to share and learn.

Barbara

New to the area Barbara joined to seek company and to socialise with like minded people. Her bubbly character soon won her over to the group, resurrecting long forgotten skills in crochet, rug making and lace making she was able to share her wealth of knowledge for the benefit of others. As with Marilyn, she feels that the balance of the group is important and achieving it shouldn't require interference from project management 'just letting it happen' seems to work!



Explaining what she gets out of the group proved easy for her, 'my self worth has improved ten fold, the meeting gives me structure to the week, I'm meeting with people who's company I enjoy and I'm having fun'.

Like so many of those attending, Barbara had views on sustaining the share and learn theme in the community. Her suggestion is to provide a 'share and learn bus' which would be equipped with activities, similar to those of the group, and that it should travel throughout the region's fragmented population reaching out to those less mobile, helping them to receive the same experience as her and her colleagues. She is also keen for the success of the group to be a good news story on the radio