

Berkshire Community Learning Network Project Report – Laying the Foundations

Nextstep Berkshire: ‘Extending the Reach’

Introduction

Nextstep Berkshire has a proven track record of working successfully with a range of groups from Black and minority ethnic communities (BME). However in June 2007, the IAG Board noted the relatively low level of activity with African and Caribbean communities, citing lack of engagement and lack of knowledge of services available as key issues.

Purpose: The purpose of the project was to -

- work in partnership with Black and Minority Ethnic communities
- develop capacity to access hard-to-reach learners
- **extend the reach** of information, advice and guidance into these communities in an innovative and sustainable way

What we did

| Objective in Development plan | Achievement of Objective |
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| Organise and run 3 events September - November 2007 | Events held on the evenings of 5 th Sept and 3 rd Oct at Osa Rika African Caribbean Restaurant, Reading, and 7 th Nov at nextstep drop-in centre, Reading, with hot food provided by Osa Rika African Caribbean Restaurant |
| Invite 30 representatives of BME communities to each event | 40+ people attended each event; on 7 th Nov many more came than were registered to attend and greeters on the reception desk had difficulty taking names |
| Raise the profile of nextstep and IAG services | The first and second events included presentations on the services provided by nextstep, highlighting free advice, workshops and courses, outreach work and bursaries to support learning. At the third event, many took the opportunity to look at resources available at the nextstep centre, talk to advisers and take away information |
| Take representatives who attended the events through their own IAG journey | The second event included a ‘taster’ of the psychometric package Myers Briggs Type Indicator with explanations about how it helps individuals as well as teams or groups they may work or link with. The networking at all three events created a conducive atmosphere such that attendees shared their IAG journey |
| Complete 60 additional IAG sessions for the BME community | Nextstep advisers who themselves have BME backgrounds provided additional appointment slots; the number of callers also increased |
| Showcase 3 successful organisations working with African and Caribbean groups | The events showcased the following with examples of work with the communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Social Enterprise Berkshire ➤ Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations ➤ Thames Valley Police ➤ WEA and their range of courses In addition, the third event focused on a theme ‘work in the media’ with speakers who were successful BME role models from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Radio Berkshire ➤ Skillset ➤ Urban UK |

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| Run a bespoke accredited introductory IAG 'Learning Adviser' course for people from African and Caribbean communities | The tailored course took 3 days in January/February 2008 and 13 people booked to attend from 7 different organisations. The course was accredited by Open College Network and all participants rated it as either 'excellent' or 'good' |
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Learning: Identified outcomes included -

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| The learner voice Feedback collected from the three events and the Learning Adviser course | The diversity of the African/Caribbean cultures was apparent and the differences within the BME community need to be more widely recognised by learning providers, funding bodies and supporting organisations Many voiced concerns for young people, particularly young men aged 18-25 who were under-achieving at school and lacked motivation |
| Case studies Newtown Information Centre and Spaak Educare Learning Centre | In depth case studies showed how these local community organisations are providing information and family support services and a learning resource for young people who are struggling with mainstream education. Both are keen to expand their activities and extend the provision of IAG to local BME people |
| Barriers to learning Identified by those attending the events and the Learning Adviser course | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Difficulties with written/spoken English/English as a second language ➤ Poor or no qualifications ➤ Qualifications achieved overseas which are not recognised here ➤ Housing issues/lack of privacy at home ➤ Poor understanding of the education system ➤ Difficulties in gaining visas and citizenship ➤ Difficulties in finding suitable employment ➤ Difficulties in funding/loans for studying |
| Critical success factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The community recognised nextstep as an independent organisation, impartial in its operational delivery ➤ Members of the Adult IAG Board who were themselves from BME communities provided significant support ➤ Events held in the evening with full hot buffet, hosted by a prominent member of the local BME community ➤ Central locations in Reading, served easily by public transport ➤ Friendly environment with a positive and welcoming atmosphere ➤ New partners willing to engage and network ➤ Enthusiasm and commitment by all partners, willing to be flexible and deliver outside the working day |

Conclusion

The project encouraged mutual aid and support between local BME groups and successfully moved IAG within reach of individuals by offering services through community links. Those organisations who wished to work more closely, e.g. Thames Valley Police, reported an increase in engagement.

Recommendations

- ◆ Maximise the impact by working with BME partner organisations who are keen to take the model and approach back into their own communities and groups
- ◆ Work with community groups to help them find ways of engaging young people through IAG services and invigorating them with a 'can do' attitude