

Islington Citizens Advice Bureau Financial Skills for Life (FSfL) project

Project background

Islington CAB already had a contract with the Learning and Skills Council to deliver learning-based initiatives to over 50s at their Over 50s bureau, which has been running since 1974. The bureau had not previously done financial literacy training but was interested in developing this area of work to learners at the over 50s bureau and money advice clients who showed low levels of financial confidence. The project started in September 2003.

Staff

Maureen Smith became financial literacy trainer in summer 2003, following 12 years experience as a CAB debt adviser. Anne Femi, Director of Islington CAB, is the Financial Literacy Project Director. Maureen works at least 24 hours a week on the project and has worked with one volunteer.

Original aspirations and hopes

The aim is to self-empower participants to manage their money affectively. As well as more conventional training methods, the project also aims to use ICT as a way to engage learners and deliver financial skills training.

Scope

The project is aimed at people aged over 50 and their families, in the Islington, Clerkenwell and Finsbury Park areas of north London.

Materials and delivery of training

The training has been delivered to small groups of eight to ten people at the Over 50s bureau.

Topics covered in the course include debt, credit, banking, credit unions, financial planning, bankruptcy, county court claims, in-depth materials from websites, plus client case histories. Maureen stresses the need for a flexible approach. At the beginning of each course she goes through the whole syllabus with the group and is prepared to change subjects to meet their needs.

Setting up the project

The first month of the project was spent compiling a syllabus. A wide range of resources were used, including websites such as www.moneymatterstome.com. Maureen also undertook the Citizens Advice training skills programme for financial literacy tutors.

Barriers and challenges, successes and disappointments

The first challenge was to develop a suitable/relevant syllabus and time was taken to work out a syllabus that met the needs of the learners.

Delivering outreach sessions at community centres, in addition to small group sessions at the bureau, had limited success. For example, Some Age Concern centre clients and workers showed more interest in access to advice services than financial skills training.

An unexpected success has been the development of the relationship with Islington Credit Union. A presentation from the Credit Union is now included as part of the financial literacy course.

Wider benefits

Financial literacy has contributed to existing money advice services by helping debt clients with their future financial decision-making. It has also been possible to engage some members of the public direct through advertising the training at the Over 50s bureau.

Partner agencies

Partner agencies have included:

- IVAC - Islington Voluntary Action Council
- Age Concern
- Alsen Community Centre
- Islington Credit Union

Funding

Funding from Citizens Advice in partnership with prudential plc has covered core staffing and related costs; there has also been some match funding from Islington Council.

Headline figures

Maureen has delivered training to over 288 learners since the project started. The number of hours training received has varied from 'taster sessions' of half an hour during a one-off presentation to 12 hours over a six week course.

Case studies

The following people have worked with the project and are willing to talk about the work.

Claudine D'Souza, who responded to an advert for financial skills course in Islington Gazette, can be contacted through the bureau on the number below.

Mary Brade at Alsen Community Centre can be contacted on 0207 263 0676.

The future

It is hoped that partnerships with Islington Credit Union and the London Chamber of Commerce will continue to have a positive impact, via referrals and opportunities to deliver courses. Maureen will continue to forge relationships with new partners and to seek Government funding via EC1 New Deal.

For further information about the project please contact:

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