

North East Women's Forum – Women Making a Difference

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the Women Making a Difference programme funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by the North East Women's Forum.

Introduction

The Women Making a Difference programme was run by the North East Women's Forum (NEWF).

The project built on a previously successful project delivered in 2003. It involved the implementation of a training programme, designed by Engender to give women the skills, knowledge and confidence to make a difference in their communities. This programme was adapted to make it more relevant to women in the North East in partnership with Engender, and was delivered in a number of locations in the North East.

Aim and objectives

The aim of the project was to increase the confidence and skills of women through the Women Making a Difference programme, to enable women to have a more positive view of themselves, to engage with issues within their communities, and work towards addressing them and bringing about social change.

The objectives were to:

- raise awareness of the political decision-making processes

- raise awareness of barriers to equality
- develop participants' skills to make a case about an issue they felt strongly about
- develop lobbying and campaigning skills
- develop the strategic thinking skills of participants

Funding

A grant of £30,000 was awarded in July 2004. The project ran for 12 months from August 2004 to August 2005 and was match-funded by the European Social Fund.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were to:

- deliver 12 Women Making a Difference courses to women in the North East
- deliver the course to 120 women participants
- to successfully adapt the programme for women in the North East
- increase confidence, skills and knowledge to enable women to make a difference in their communities

How successful was the project?

Overall the project achieved all of its key objectives and targets. The evaluation was undertaken by Jean Bareham from Oxfam. The main methods used to measure the success of the project were desk research incorporating the main findings from the 2004 evaluation, personal interviews with NEWF and Engender personnel, telephone or personal interviews with course trainers, participants, as well as trainers' and participants' organisations.

Both the women who delivered the courses and those who attended were very positive about its impact. Participants felt more confident about their ability to take an issue forward, and found the information about political structures and decision making extremely useful. Trainers reported that they enjoyed delivering the courses, and felt that the flexibility of NEWF in allowing trainers to decide how to deliver the courses was beneficial, as they could tailor the delivery of courses to suit the needs of the women in their area.

The project delivered the following:

- 12 courses were delivered
- 127 participants were recruited of which 108 completed the course
- nine women were recruited to become trainers of which seven completed the course
- the programme was adapted to make it more relevant to women in the North East

Good practice

A number of areas of good practice can be identified:

- the flexibility of the course format meant that trainers had the freedom to adapt the programme to local needs
- by using experienced trainers regardless of their field of expertise meant that once trained on the programme courses were delivered to a high quality
- the active encouragement of women to interact with decision-makers or to become decision-makers themselves has meant that over 72% of women completing the course have taken their issue forward, and one has become a parish councillor
- the practical learning element of the course allowed women time to plan how they could take their issues forward – this gave them the opportunity to put the course into practice immediately
- the political structures aspect of the course was valuable in showing women how the political process was relevant to them in their everyday lives and individual issues

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following:

- trainers and participants felt that the pack needed to be refreshed and suggestions included using less jargon, simplifying the information on

political structures and making it more visual

- although the flexibility of NEWF in allowing trainers to tailor the courses to local needs was a strength, there were some concerns over the consistency of content across all the programmes
- trainers and participants felt that there should be more follow-up on women and organisations completing the programme to provide ongoing support and measure longer-term impact
- feedback suggested that more time be spent on confidence-building at the start of the course, as this was a reason why some women did not complete the programme
- trainers felt that they needed more training on political structures and decision-making processes, as many participants found the information too complex, but understood the benefit of this knowledge in taking their issue forward

Further information

For further information about this project please contact

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Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of the Electoral Commission can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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