

This document has been archived because it is no longer current.

Collaborative project working: Croydon Adult Learning

Date published: 4 March 2011
Reference: 130099

Brief description

This example shows how targeted funding is used to extend family learning, through the expertise and resources of community groups together with central support and management. The case study includes a specific example of engaging young fathers to help to break the cycle of unlawful behaviour.

Overview – the provider’s message



‘One of our strengths is the effective connections we have with a large and diverse number of community groups, both in Croydon and across our neighbouring authorities. The opportunity to bid for one-off funding through a “Big Lottery” project was an appropriate and exciting way to use our collective skills and experience, and with some careful project management, we put in place a range of innovative programmes. Our prime aim was to engage with families who were not being reached through our mainstream programme. Lots of small projects were being successfully delivered, including a programme for young fathers; helping them break a cycle of unlawful behaviour and re-offending by getting them to appreciate the importance of their family. It

was a challenging project but using the expertise of a local specialist community group, ‘The Mighty Men of Valour’, it achieved all the desired outcomes for the young men and their families.

My advice for others? Try something different. One-off projects can be exhilarating and successful, if you manage and support them appropriately and tap into existing local resources.’

Catherine Rhys, Wider Family Learning Manager

The good practice in detail

Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT) run an extensive and high-quality family learning programme. So when an opportunity arose to extend the wider family learning (WFL) programme by accessing a [Big Lottery](#) funded 'Life in London' project, it was a good opportunity to do something innovative, building on their own experiences and tapping into the expertise and resources of their partner organisations.

CALAT entered the bidding process with a neighbouring authority - Wandsworth - and their combined efforts ensured a successful outcome. CALAT and Wandsworth have worked closely together, managing the project through regular meetings, sharing best practice and working in close collaboration. In Croydon, CALAT has used the funding to work in partnership with community groups and organisations to fund and deliver innovative learning initiatives to targeted groups. The approach is articulated in the '[3-way Croydon Way](#)' strategy.

A key priority and focus of the approach is to attract families who are least likely to be involved in learning, such as those with limited social networks, language barriers and family issues. The plans for the new work included setting aspirational targets and building on subsequent work with community groups to fill in the detail. A target of working with 500 'new' families actually resulted in engaging with well over 800 families, and nearly 2,000 adults and children.

Once the joint bid was approved, the hard work started. A project manager was appointed with some administrative support. As the programmes were to be delivered directly through community groups it was also important to get them involved. Existing strong links with local community groups had established a culture of mutual trust and respect. Building on these networks, participants were found through 'word of mouth', meetings, briefings and personal contacts. Simple leaflets, such as a 'Life in London' flier supported this approach. The community groups then contacted the likely participants through their own networks. 'Be prepared to invest time in general conversations with groups who only have a rough idea of what they might do,' says Clair Marsh, the Big Lottery Project Manager. 'They will need a while to firm up their ideas to meet your criteria, but giving them a chance to mull things over pays dividends.'

Groups were invited to submit outline bids. It was important to strike the balance between ensuring that documents were rigorous enough to guarantee the integrity of the process, but keeping it simple so as to relieve pressure on specialist groups who had limited management and administrative resources. The project manager played an important part in preparing some common resources, such as: a facilitators' pack to guide groups through the process; contracts; registers; posters; health and safety criteria; and even a format for lesson plans. Catherine Rhys says: 'A large proportion of the total bid went on central support and resources, such as the project staff, specialist equipment and improvements to accommodation. But this was a cost effective way of getting the most out of a number of groups who only needed a relatively small amount – around £2,000 to £3,000 per project - to get something started.'

The Mighty Men of Valour – an example of a project

While working with unlawful behaviour and re-offending was not an identified priority for CALAT at that time, they had established links with a voluntary group, 'The Mighty Men of Valour' (MMV), who are experienced in this field. This local charity was established in 2002. It is committed to, 'Challenging the negative stereotypes of men in the UK by empowering men to support their children, families and community.' Frederick Clarke, the Executive

Director, went to a presentation about the Big Lottery funds being made available. He felt that he could offer a programme for fathers. The vision was to get young fathers to better understand and value their role as parents.

That general concept led to discussions with the project manager, and an outline agreement in January 2009. The initial meeting was about outcomes, who might be engaged and how many, rather than detailed plans. CALAT was prepared to take a gamble on the final format; it was important that as MMV spoke to potential participants the course could be flexible to meet their needs. MMV visited young offender institutions, used its own database of contacts, and spread the word about the course at various meetings. While it was initially aimed at young fathers, some older parents were also enrolled, and they added to the value of the course by becoming mentors.

Detailed planning was supported by the Big Lottery Project Manager. An eight-week course was designed which included working up to and reflecting on a family outing to a zoo. It was linked with reviewing wider issues such as: the meaning of 'family'; dealing with the past; what to do about a child's future; and a few practical skills such as washing or feeding a baby, taking photographs for mementos, and helping a young child to read. In the latter case, there was a lead into family literacy, language and numeracy courses, if appropriate. The courses were run at MMV locations as they were convenient, and familiar to many participants. CALAT helped with printing and continuing management support. MMV facilitators led most of the sessions, with a few specialist workers dropping in as necessary.

The outcome was a successful programme; certainly in terms of engagement with families who would probably not have accessed other programmes. More importantly, there was a positive effect on the attitudes and behaviours of young fathers. All nine participants stayed for the full course. Feedback from them, and where appropriate, from their partners, was very positive.

The Whole Project

Over the three year duration of the project, CALAT spoke to more than a hundred potential partners resulting in around 25 projects. Nearly all were one-off projects, albeit they sometimes encouraged participants to move on to other programmes. The progress of each project was monitored through monthly reporting. Projects were evaluated using participants' feedback, case studies, the views of coordinators, and the views of head teachers, when the project was linked with a school. It was not critical to the overall success of the project that every project resulted in a programme; the use of central resources and the cost effective spread across specialist groups meant that a few false starts were a price worth paying to maintain the momentum and to keep administration costs down.

Links with the Big Lottery Project Manager were very important, and constant dialogue meant that some projects were enhanced even during the programme itself (for example by the loan of resources, or staff training). A professional dialogue with the community groups was maintained while they retained control of delivery. The work also had a positive impact on the groups themselves by enhancing their feelings of self-esteem and accomplishment. 'Having stand-alone funding for a project like this gives you the chance to be innovative and flexible,' says Clair. 'Just for once, they don't have to worry about detailed initial plans! Once we are confident about the intent of the delivering organisation, they are allowed some leeway to start. We give them lots of support and encouragement and they use what is necessary in terms of schemes of work, registers or outcomes.'

Provider background

Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT) is based in south London and is one of the largest adult learning services in the country. It employs around 300 teaching staff and 200 support staff. As well as accredited courses in 10 subject areas and employer responsive provision, CALAT also provides an extensive family learning programme in partnership with the Borough's early years service, local schools and community groups.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice