

## **1. County Durham Local Initiatives and Development Fund Projects 2004 – The Workers Educational Association**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In January 2004 I was directed by the Northern District Secretary of the Workers Educational Association (WEA) to undertake a three-month research project funded by Local Initiatives and Development Fund (LIDF) County Durham. The project was to review and evaluate the experience of male learners in WEA Community Provision in County Durham, in particular under the European Social Fund (ESF) REBUILD Project during 2003. This was to be compared in limited ways with non-ESF WEA provision and relevant experiences of parent organisations.

I was to then recommend ways to improve this provision, directed to review and consider the best practise to include men, and to review and consider perceived and actual barriers to provision and educational progression routes for this group of learners. In doing so relate this to the learners' overarching demands and needs with the most suitable information, advice and guidance support. I was also to identify the best way to publish and advertise courses for these learners and the most appropriate methods to recruit and support them.

This was to be achieved by comparing WEA's ESF and other targeted provision with that of other providers in County Durham.

Finally, I was to review the best practice countywide that would result in a more focused strategy for male learners in future WEA projects in County Durham and for other WEA areas and other providers in the County if relevant.

### **1.2 The Workers Educational Association and Widening Participation**

The WEA is the UK's largest voluntary provider of adult education. Ever since it was founded in 1903, in order to support the educational needs of working men and women, the WEA has maintained its commitment to provide access to education and learning for adults from all backgrounds and in particular those who have previously missed out on education. Historically its roots lie within the cooperative movement and the Trade Unions. It is one of the UK's biggest charities and is supported by the Government through funding from the Learning and Skills Council in England and in Scotland by the Scottish Executive and Local Authorities.

The WEA operates at local, regional and national levels. Thirteen Regional Districts in England, a Scottish Association and over 650 local Branches make up the WEA's National Association. Through these local and regional centres the WEA runs over 10,000 courses each year. These courses are created and delivered in response to local need, often in partnership with local community groups and organisations. The WEA believes that education is life-long and should continue beyond school, college and university. There is a proud tradition of voluntary and democratic practice within

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the Association, which is at heart controlled by its members. At Branch, District and National levels voluntary members are involved in the planning and provision of courses, as well as the governance of the Association itself.

Its approach involves:

Organising courses and other activities aimed at stimulating and satisfying the demands of adults to learn about a wide range of subjects

Providing in particular for the needs of working class adults and those who are socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged

Developing educational programmes for organisations concerned with the collective needs of adults in the community and workplace

The WEA's approach to learning includes targeting people who have benefited least from the educational system. It makes use of and values learners' life experience, involves learners in organising and planning their own learning, offers good quality learning experiences and collaborates with other organisations and agencies to meet the needs of the learner.

### **1.3 The European Social Fund REBUILD Project 2003 and the 2004 – 2006 Bidding Round**

The WEA has run sizeable ESF Objective 3 projects in County Durham since the colliery closures in 1993. These projects successively called REBUILD (Rebuilding North East Communities) aimed to assist in the regeneration of deprived communities in County Durham. The most recent REBUILD project ran for eighteen months from July 2002 to December 2003.

The WEA entered the 2004 to 2006 Objective 3 bidding round for the three-year period. In this process it has become clear that very substantial changes were required compared to the project bids submitted in the previous ten years.

In the previous REBUILD projects the "needs and wants" were to organise course hours in County Durham in the project curriculum areas of Family Learning, Health and Disability, Information Technology, Capacity Building/Citizenship.

However, in the bidding round 2004-2006 the County Durham Learning and Skills Council (LSC) have added the caveat that there is a need to achieve a minimum of 65% of the total ESF Project outputs (See Appendix A), a 60% rate of external accreditation (NVQ or equivalent) for courses in County Durham **and a final output of 60% of the learners being male**. It became clear that in order to meet the requirements of the 2004-2006 round and the LSC intent. The WEA would have to address a number of fundamental issues and change its approach significantly in regard to male learners. These included:

- Course/curriculum for delivery

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- The course, the curriculum and its publicity with a regard to men and fathers
- An attitude change for staff, tutors and volunteers to men and fathers as learners
- A closer working relationship with partners with regard to the provision of courses for male learners
- Assess financial viability of ESF projects, to pursue funding and co-funding possibilities for the ESF project with WEA led projects and outside providers of funds
- Assess financial impact of project outputs and milestones on future funding under ESF
- Devise project timetable, including planning project delivery with tutors each term within the project life span
- In addition there is now a need to develop the proposed 2004-2006 ESF project in County Durham and the WEA as a whole into a more men friendly organisation

### **1.4 The Role of the WEA ESF Development Worker**

It has become apparent during my research that many of the WEA partner organisations are unclear as to the role of a WEA Development Worker within the organisation. To clarify this the function of Development Officer for the ESF Project is to:

- Organise, develop and teach courses, throughout County Durham, under the curriculum/target areas of Family Learning, Health and Disability, Information Technology and Capacity Building/Citizenship, and provide courses that open a pathway to educational progression and life long learning and that can offer better employment prospects.
- Take the courses to the community and provide courses that the learners want, at the time they want them and to be inclusive with equal in opportunities for all. Ensure that the quality of the courses, tutors and resources meet all the needs of all the learners and provide information, advice and guidance to learners and signpost them to further learning opportunities.
- Build voluntary involvement into the courses and communities to empower the learners and their community and that establish partnerships and networks with other providers and communities in particular with voluntary or community networks.
- Develop workable exit strategies for the end of the funding period and to seek new funding for future projects

I have been the Development Worker for the 2002-2003 period of the REBUILD project that terminated 31 December 2003. I have become increasingly concerned over the eighteen months of the project about the limited number of male learners. My efforts to raise the percentage of male learners were only very partially successful, showing that a new approach was needed.

### **1.5 The ESF REBUILD Project Learner Profile 2003**

The predominant ESF REBUILD Project learner profile during the last project period has been identified as those learners who are classed as long term unemployed, who are often fragile, reluctant and disaffected learners and who have had adverse experiences of education.

The majority of the ESF learners in County Durham were white females aged between sixteen and fifty-eight and unemployed. They were mainly single parents or partners in relationships. Their houses were rented from local authorities and generally had fewer rooms than persons.

A typical learner was a single mother living in rented accommodation who had been unemployed and in receipt of benefit for most of her adult life. The course on which she had enrolled would have been facilitated by Sure Start or a local community organisation and was not initially perceived by the learner as educational.

It has been established that the perceived threat of accreditation or structured learning will often be a deterrent to learning for the ESF learner. Once on the path to learning however, the learner will be willing to return for more courses, eventually opting for accreditation.

The male learners were predominantly white, between sixteen and sixty and unemployed; the majority aged thirty plus were either on the first rung towards life long learning or wished to develop their ITC skills. These learners are analysed in more depth at paragraph 3.2.

## **2 The Research Process**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In order to undertake a three-month research project to look at and evaluate the experience of WEA community provision with male learners, it was necessary to systematically gather the views of those working within WEA including staff, tutors, volunteers, the learners themselves and others e.g. project partners and appropriate individuals within the scope of the research:

- I carried out the research between 01 February and 30 April 2004, with preparatory work in January 2004.

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- I established that no other areas of research into male learners' provision had been commissioned or conducted in the WEA nationally. I confirmed this with key WEA individuals at the start of the research process.
- I established what is defined as "Community Provision".
- I conducted a review of the current provision for male learners.
- I interviewed tutors who had worked under the ESF project to establish their views on the provision of courses for male learners.
- A cross section of male learners who had participated on ESF funded courses during 2003 were also interviewed by me and asked their opinion of the current WEA course provision.
- I interviewed a number of key individuals -who were not WEA staff - involved with community provision for male learners e.g. Dads workers, Sure Start staff and other members of staff of partner organisations.
- As a result of the above research I have written this report with its recommendations that aim to satisfy the needs of the learners and meet the aims and outcomes of the Research Project.

My process of consultation was planned and systematic. In some cases this was done in a group session, such as when I was interviewing partners, particularly Sure Start Dad's workers, staff and management who had partnered with the WEA REBUILD project in providing courses for fathers in the 2003 period. Other consultations were carried out by one-to-one interviews with WEA tutors, staff, volunteers, past male learners and other key individuals.

I set up a common framework for the interviews in order that the same questions were asked of each individual within the groups interviewed e.g. learners and tutors, ensuring consistency within the process. A documented copy of these interview questions for the aforementioned is at Appendix B.

My research highlighted many areas of synergy between partners, tutors and other development workers both in WEA and in other organisations. Judgement of the current provision as inadequate in respect of targeting and engaging male learners seemed to be consistent. It is also evident that all the groups found the recruitment of male learners frustrating, disheartening and complicated. My research has identified a distinct air of apathy and lip service towards the demands of male learner recruitment, and this will become apparent further in the research report.

Research further ascertained that a complete overhaul of attitudes by WEA staff, tutors and management to male learners' needs was required, particularly if the WEA was to be acknowledged as a men friendly organisation within the ESF project and overall nationally. The same would seem to apply in a range of other organisations engaged in the provision of courses at community level or those partnering such provision.

## 2.2 Research Methodology

My methodology for this research comprised six different methods. These offer three different perspectives and enable triangulation of methods:

- The initial methodology was the collection of data already collated and held by WEA Northern District Office for the 2003 period of the ESF project.
- Then quantitative analysis was made of the statistics. The courses were subjected to analysis by title, curriculum, the number of male learners who had enrolled on WEA courses in that period and why they had enrolled.
- Next I contacted and interviewed a sample of learners following my analysis of the statistics. This was to hear at first hand their experience of WEA REBUILD courses and their views on the provision offered to male learners. I would have preferred to devise a questionnaire and distribute it to a sample of previous WEA learners to attain qualitative information on the current provision. This would be to get a feel, a sense, of whether the learners' needs and wants were being addressed. The questionnaire would also have been used as a method of obtaining a representative view and hopefully attaining a higher percentage of responses. It would have been the most effective way of reaching these learners. The questionnaires would have been anonymous in a bid to encourage responses. Unfortunately the time factor for this research project prevented that method being utilised.
- Then opportunity samples of WEA ESF tutors to be interviewed were identified. Although this is not ideal as an opportunity sample only gives tentative results and it is neither rigorous nor scientific. For practical considerations, time constraints and the availability of tutors, it was the only option available. Nonetheless, I accept that a more representative sample may have resulted in some different answers and a different conclusion being drawn. The timing, location and duration of the interviews were agreed and the interviews were structured with the same open questions asked in each interview as well as additional questions relevant to their viewpoint. All were conducted either on a face-to-face basis, by electronic mail or by telephone conversation as appropriate. This again, was due to the time scale imposed on the research.
- To make this as collaborative a research project as possible, key development staff within WEA County Durham were also interviewed as to their perception of the WEA approach to inclusively of male learners.
- For completeness in my research and to draw comparisons I also interviewed selected development workers who were employed within County Durham by other partners/providers to specifically engage male learners. This indeed produced a more rounded view of what is going on in the field of community provision for men in the county as a whole, and presented an opportunity for WEA to learn from other providers' good practise and mistakes. Two of these have been presented as case studies.

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Finally, further research was possible through my enrolment and participation on the Men Friendly Organisations course developed and provided by Roger Olley and his team at Children North East. The course objectives would be to:

- Enable managers in these organisations to support staff who are working with men
- Enable staff from these organisations to audit skills and approaches to working with men
- Enable staff to evaluate their work in partnership with their male clients
- Enable staff to create a structured approach to work with men that suits the needs of the men and the working environment
- Enable staff working with men to create an appropriate network of other workers and sources of support

These concepts and ideals were reiterated during my attendance at the Working With Fathers: Improving Children's Lives Conference in Newcastle on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2004. The objectives of the conference were to:

- Promote a positive approach to working with fathers through the use of a strengths based philosophy
- Demonstrate that working with fathers has an impact on achieving positive outcomes for children
- Widen policy makers' agendas and practitioners agendas
- Offer opportunities for skill development through speakers and workshops covering international perspectives, feedback from recent research and cutting edge practice

Participation on the course and attending the training event contributed significantly to my professional development as a "men friendly" development worker and has resulted in a number of significant recommendations in this report.

### **2.3 Sample**

The sample included only male learners who had attended ESF funded courses in the 2003 period of the REBUILD project of which four hundred and ninety three were women and one hundred and twenty five were men. The learners' ages ranged from eighteen years to fifty-eight years. The sample was intended to include different ethnic groups, however by far the greater number who enrolled were white and English, these being the majority of learners that enrol on the courses in County Durham. The learners came from diverse backgrounds, were all either fragile and/or

disaffected learners and there were differing learning support needs. They were interviewed to establish their views on WEA provision of courses for men.

### 3. Research Findings

The research findings will demonstrate the structured and purposeful approach taken in this research project. It will cover the action steps and research phases with due consideration to the data collection methods utilised.

#### 3.1 Defining Community Provision

The first step in this research was to clearly define what was understood to be “community provision” and my review of the available literature resulted in this being most coherently and comprehensively explained by Thompson (2002:10) who states that; “*community education is a way of working with people, in the places where they live, in response to issues and aspirations that are important to them, through the activity of learning. This sometimes involves formal learning but is much more likely to involve a mix of non-formal and informal learning*”.

Formal learning is that which is explicitly organised and is controlled by the educational provider through which it is delivered. Non-formal learning is seen as; “*an explicitly organised learning activity which is intended to serve an identifiable group with specific learning objectives and which is substantially controlled by the participants*”. Informal learning is learning that goes on day-to-day and it reflects learning that is “*implicit, ongoing, pervasive and incidental*”. Thompson (2002:10)

Community Education can:

- Build on individuals’ experience by empowering them with new skills and knowledge to make a “*qualitative difference to their lives*”
- Give them the ability to connect “*issues to ideas and understanding to practical actions*” thereby to regenerate and develop their communities
- Develop skills so as to boost employability and confidence or promote participation and a culture of activism
- To develop the underestimated soft outcomes of self confidence and esteem which could help to “*overcome alienation and isolation*” and encourage an understanding of other people and their viewpoints

In conclusion, community provision can become a resource for “*democratic renewal, rather than just crowd control or a progression route to off-the-peg training courses provided by the local college*” J Thompson (2002:10) or indeed other educational providers.

### **3.2 Analysis of Quantitative Statistics of ESF REBUILD Project 2003**

Analysis of the statistics of WEA male learners proves interesting if unsurprising. There were one hundred and twenty five male learners enrolled on WEA courses in County Durham in 2003 of which:

- Forty-three were adults with learning difficulties. These learners participated in art and craft courses, the WEA Down to Earth course and unaccredited basic Information Computer Technology (ICT) courses
- Thirty-five were as a result of the ESF project partnership with the WEA County Durham Mental Health project. These were involved in a cross section of unaccredited courses.
- Nine were from a new group with whom WEA had entered into partnership within the last three months of the project and whose remit was support and provision for a group of physically disabled learners. These learners opted for unaccredited art and craft courses to re-engage in learning.
- Ten were in the category of Life Long Learners choosing unaccredited art and accredited ICT courses. Two of the male learners were anomalies in that the courses - Baby and Child Life Saver - and venues – Family/Community Centres - were not normally attended by male learners.
- The remaining twenty six all enrolled on St John Ambulance courses

Only St John Ambulance courses and ICT courses were accredited courses. All other non-accredited courses resulted in the learners receiving the County Durham Passport to Learning certificate that acknowledged their achievements as either soft outcomes or direct learning outcomes or both.

It is intended however that two of the other courses, Down to Earth (an environmental/gardening/capacity building course) and the Arts and Crafts courses will be offered as accredited courses in the future.

All the male learners appear to have a focus and intent when enrolling on the courses. My research and experience as the ESF development worker has established that those male learners with learning difficulties have educational provision as part of their day-to-day life and it is arranged for them as part of a group activity. There is a similar premise for male learners from the Mental Health project and the new group of physically disabled learners.

The ten life long learners who enrolled will be targeted for interview in my research and thereafter any of the St John Ambulance learners.

### **3.3 Analysis of the WEA ESF REBUILD Project Male Provision 2003**

The current provision for male learners in the community is standard fare for WEA, however it is important to note at this stage that the WEA nationally do not target learners sixteen to eighteen years of age and specifically not on the ESF project.

There are the usual ICT courses from basic ICT skills to Open College Level 3, which is deemed sufficient to signpost the learner to local Colleges or Online Learning facilities. There is the offer of teambuilding, capacity building or citizenship courses for the regeneration of communities. There are also language courses, art courses and health and fitness courses.

However, it must be admitted that the majority of courses offered are perceived by male learners as female orientated or are advertised and promoted in such a way as to imply that the course is predominantly of interest to women, which may dissuade men from enrolling. Another factor that has become apparent during this research is that the WEA are dependant as a provider on meeting the needs of learners recruited by others who may have no male agenda or are unconsciously excluding men. For example a number of Family Centres to which WEA provision has been given are run by women primarily for women and, by default, definitely exclude men.

This is not a conscious action by those who run the facility but comes about because women are perceived as the primary parent and therefore targeted and recruited; often these mothers/wives/partners can hold sway on the courses selected and negatively affect the attendance of men. From this I conclude there may be a lingering feminist heritage in certain quarters which aims at the recruitment of women, if not exclusively or deliberately, then because there is a perception that women are the prime “movers and shakers” in deprived communities. Also inertia in the drive to recruit learners makes women learners an easy and prime target.

Other providers particularly those in family learning, employ workers who are specifically aiming at provision for male learners but are unable to establish exactly what the men want and what the WEA or indeed other organisations can provide to best meet their wants. This is often due to the reluctance of these providers to allow WEA development workers to attend the Dads’ meetings, and due to an insufficient focus on men as outlined above by the WEA in its currently offered courses.

This is unfortunate, for to allow direct contact to the WEA – and other providers where relevant - would enable an exchange of ideas between the development worker, the provider and the learners that could result in courses being developed that have relevance and meet the needs of the male learner. From interviews with such providers I have surmised that this reluctance is due to a fear of the WEA or other providers “taking over” the group. The partners fail to recognise the contribution the WEA can make to the development of quality and relevant provision, possibly over a protracted period, where the development of the individual learners could be assessed, evaluated and recorded.

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Some providers felt that they “knew best” with regard to the courses the potential learner needed, or indeed were driven by their funding targets to “select appropriate courses” for the learners. These were on occasion not what the learner wanted at all and the courses that the WEA provided subsequently either imploded or struggled on with stressed tutors and disengaged learners.

Another vital issue for the provision of courses to men is the ESF eligibility criteria. Often courses that are advertised in the community are attracting male learners who fall outside of these criteria age limits in particular.

Most individuals who genuinely wish to see the regeneration of their community are often too old or live outside designated postal areas to be eligible to attend the course. In one typical instance the Community and Voluntary Organisations Sedgefield (CAVOS) was forced to “buy in” the WEA to run two teambuilding/capacity building courses in Sedgefield because all the learners, half of whom were men, were not eligible for a course.

Others who wish to learn about or develop their skills in ICT, generally do so in the first instance to increase their workplace skills or are “silver surfers” and again fail to meet the ESF age eligibility criteria. For example an ICT Email and Internet course advertised in Brandon Community Hall was inundated with learners all but four of whom were over the age permitted under the ESF learner eligibility criteria. In the end the WEA General Programme in partnership with New College Durham provided the course.

The one area of reasonable success with recruiting and enrolling ESF eligible male learners is the series of St John Ambulance courses that are funded by WEA. These revolve around health and safety, food hygiene and First Aid and are popular with those involved in the community and regeneration i.e. community hall staff, breakfast club staff and those involved in committees. The exception is the Baby and Child Lifesaver Course which is unfortunately seen as a course for mothers by many male learners.

Analysis has shown that our main provision to male learners under the ESF project has been in partnership with the WEA Mental Health project, courses provided for adults with learning difficulties and ICT courses, although even in this last instance the majority of learners have been female.

### **3.4 Analysis of Interviews of WEA ESF REBUILD Project Tutors 2003**

The WEA ESF tutors in the main have concurred with the above analysis of the provision. All stated that their particular subject matter could engage male learners but required a degree of deliberate conversion for this. This included health courses, alternative therapy courses and family learning courses.

Most stated that they believed that the majority of men in this county may not be attracted to the courses offered as they stand, particularly those that are perceived as

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overtly feminine or have female orientated tones such as alternative therapy, family learning and health courses.

The ICT tutors suggested that the WEA was excessively cautious in avoiding being “in competition” with other providers, particularly local colleges, as regards courses that attract men. They felt that WEA provision should be more vigorous in its offer of the European Computer Driving License course, Driver Theory course and other similar courses to attract more male learners.

None felt that male learners were deliberately excluded but conceded that unconsciously through the provider and/or venue e.g. Families Centres, or indeed the WEA publicity, many male learners may not believe that the course is suitable or aimed at them. This is particularly true of family learning courses.

None of the tutors who responded were Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) trained, although all did their best to provide suitable advice as appropriate to individual learners. It was agreed that to progress male learners there was a need for appropriate and dedicated IAG. Further when asked the tutors stated that they would either prefer an IAG worker to come to their class and deliver a course or to be sent on an IAG course. As an aside, this was of particular interest if this was to become part of any future classroom inspections or a quality assurance issue.

All the tutors stated that they evaluated their sessions but did not look at the bigger picture of the ongoing evaluation of the project. This is despite bi-annual team meetings where ongoing policy, issues and training are discussed. The lack of a developed team spirit within projects appears to be the case across the programmes in County Durham. Tutors appear not to feel part of the team and are not privy to the bigger picture of a project as a whole. This appears to be because primarily they are contracted in to teach in an ad hoc manner. A further problem is that the tutors work for two or three providers with different contracts and demands, for a few hours per week each. As a result in the case of the WEA none had felt any need to emphasise or specifically target male learners or make recommendations to the development worker to do so. It is seen, rightly, as the role of the development worker to target learners.

When asked if they had any recommendation for improvement in the provision of courses, they all agreed that there was a need for the development worker to discuss with the potential learners at the outset what it was exactly that they aimed to achieve or perceived as the outcomes of a course, rather than what the partner/provider perceived as the aims and objectives of the course. If this occurs the tutors are more able to adapt their curriculum to the learners needs from the start- in particular male learners – rather than lose learners at the beginning or during the course because they are unwittingly not meeting the learners’ needs.

In addition most complained bitterly about the learner eligibility criteria as a barrier to enrolment on the courses, regardless of the sex of the learner. Learners recruited in community settings often come as part of a group or with a friend and these criteria work against such groups and make the promotion of learning more difficult.

### **3.5 Analysis of Interviews WEA ESF REBUILD Project Male Learners 2003**

The majority of male learners contacted did not return my calls or declined to discuss the course in any great depth. Those men who spoke briefly stated that the course on which they had enrolled had been satisfactory and/or had met their needs at that time. Those who had enrolled on St John Ambulance courses did so as a one-off and in most cases primarily to capacity build within their communities' e.g. they were caretakers, committee members, handling food or in some other similar role.

Four learners spoke in some depth on the telephone and their responses were all positive about the learning experience. They felt that the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) they had been offered by their respective tutors had been adequate although no specific IAG session had been included in the course programme. The facilities were satisfactory and they were aware of the learner support available. All had enjoyed the learning experience although none had enrolled on further courses with the WEA or any other providers. None of the men had felt excluded when enrolling or participating on the course and did not recall the publicity material as being gender biased. All the learners declined a one to one interview.

I visited two groups of learners with learning difficulties who had been on a WEA art and craft course in one instance and on two ICT courses in another, and the male learners all seemed satisfied with the content and the course itself. The providers/carers were of the opinion that the courses had been extremely successful, especially with regard to the underrated soft outcomes of increased self-confidence and self esteem.

At the request of the Mental Health worker I did not visit any learners from the Mental Health project.

Overall, when questioned, male learners expressed no specific preference for a course that they wanted to enrol on. ICT is a popular choice but most male learners tend to have a preference for Personal Computer (PC) repair courses. However but these are not feasible for WEA because of the need to transport PC's around from venue to venue, and the costs of obtaining PC's that learners could work on.

Genealogy courses were popular but tended to be one-off events as thereafter learners would choose to carry out further research at home. Local history was also popular but primarily by our more "senior" learners therefore often not eligible for ESF on grounds of age.

When questioned the majority of male learners did not express great interest in family learning courses. This is confirmed by a former member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate who stated "*usually (men are) into IT, languages, sport and quasi mechanical stuff*" McGivney (1999:07)

### **3.6 Analysis of WEA ESF REBUILD Project Publicity Material 2003**

I generated all the publicity material for the ESF project and its courses. Therefore to attain an unbiased opinion samples of the leaflets were given to three key workers from outside the WEA who work in community organisations, for their analysis of the suitability of the material.

All three stated that the leaflets were satisfactory in design, easy to read, relatively informative with regard to the provision available, clear about the learner criteria and provided contact details for further information. It was further stated that the publicity was gender inclusive but crucially none of the publicity material was specifically aimed at male learners.

### **3.7 Summary**

It has been possible to clearly locate the WEA's ESF provision within Community Provision. A significant factor that has emerged from my research is that including men in community provision by the WEA has a two-handed approach. The first is through Family Learning and the other through Life Long Learning. I have therefore for clarity chosen to address each issue separately.

The statistics for the ESF project in 2003 have shown that male learners within a structured support system have more focused, if sometimes controlled, provision and are more likely to enrol and complete the courses if part of an already established group. The remaining learners enrolled on courses designed to build community capacity or appeared to be Life Long Learners.

The provision offered during the ESF project was adequate and was inclusive of men. It did not however specifically target men as a group of learners, particularly in family learning or with family orientated courses. Instead WEA – and other providers' - responded to the partners/organisations requesting the provision.

Both the WEA and other community providers often think that they are doing well in responding to demand and organising courses in short notice. However it is this reactive response rather than a proactive response to the requests for provision, that has led to the "parachuting in", that is supplying courses on demand, and the "scattergun" approach, that is providing a series of different courses to providers. This can affect the provision of courses. There is a definite need certainly for WEA to develop an effective proactive role including consultation with the learners direct to ensure the provision is based on their perceptions and needs.

The ESF tutors felt that male learners' needs were being met although somewhat restricted by the ESF learner eligibility criteria. Both analyses of the provision and the tutors' responses show a clear need for more collaboration between WEA development workers and partners/providers to ensure the male learners' needs are being met.

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The male learners who agreed to speak to me appeared to have had a good learning experience with the WEA and did not feel that they were excluded in any way from start to finish of the courses. IAG was available, but that and evaluation of projects has been an area of concern and discussion between the WEA County Durham Organiser and me as REBUILD project Development Worker for some time.

The publicity material was deemed by the external development workers not to have a gender bias but neither was it specifically aimed at men. I must admit as the development worker and the producer of the publicity material it never occurred to me to target male learners separately at the time.

Overall it is clear that there needs to be a “*cultural shift in theory, strategy and practice*” Fletcher (Working With Fathers: Improving Children’s Lives Conference. Newcastle Upon Tyne, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2004) in WEA provision for men.

### **4. Other Non WEA Provision and Men**

Community provision targeted at men outside the WEA appears to be primarily through Family Learning in County Durham and Sure Start and the local colleges. An interview schedule of questions is attached at Appendix D.

Research resulted in my identifying two extremes of success with community provision for male learners with quite interesting information on “how to” and “how not to” exemplified in two case studies below.

There is a belief that male workers would succeed where female workers do not, in engaging men. (Fletcher 11<sup>th</sup> April 2004). From my research with Sure Start this is not true. Although it is worth noting that “*one of the primary characteristics of the volunteer sector is that women are more commonly involved than men*”. (Elsdar 1995:22) which may account for female staff members being the predominate number among Dad’s workers at this time. Another contributing factor to the lack of male workers working with male learners may be that the posts are all part time and that male workers are in the main seeking full time work.

#### **4.1 Case Study One**

The experience of one “Dad’s worker” was archetypical of development workers in this area of provision and is an example of worst current practise as regards staff employed to work with men in the community. This worker was specifically recruited to work with men but he was given no job description and at this initial briefing was told he could “do what he wanted” to recruit male learners.

There was no thought to targets and he proceeded with his appointment. After a short period of time his employer began “constantly chipping in with poorly thought out ideas not related to men”. When he came forward with ideas such as “meeting in a pub” there was an immediate negative response from the employer that it “wouldn’t work” and from the partners/wives of the male learners “that I was encouraging them to drink” even though it had not been tried before.

The employing committee were predominately female from a social service background and he felt that however good their intentions, they had no idea about

involving male learners. At the same time the female learners wanted to do everything that he proposed for the male learners or objected with the concept that the male learners were being “rewarded for something women already do”.

Throughout the whole period he felt that no other members of staff were even aware of his role or what he was trying to achieve. He felt that he and his role were “invisible” within the organisation and as the constant demand for statistical evidence of recruitment and enrolment continued the more isolated he became.

When questioned the worker stated that he believed that the post was “a politically correct post” and was “title based”. He concluded that in the end he felt he had been “forced into a corner” by being told that in the long term he would have to integrate Dads and Mums together. He also added that the cohort of male learners he had recruited and developed had since moved on to a more men friendly organisation.

### **4.2 Case Study Two**

This second case study shows a completely different picture of staff employed in provision for male learners. The Dad’s worker was employed following the tenure of two previous workers who had failed to engage male learners in any great number. The new worker was given carte blanche with her methods of engagement and was fully supported by the management in her decisions and work processes.

There was considerable trial and error in developing the group and identifying appropriate provision in the initial few months and she has identified the need to build up a relationship with the learners before introducing the idea of education and courses. This is staff intensive time and can include home visits that may need to be maintained on a weekly basis or the learner may lose interest. In the long term once trust is established the workers role may move out of the defined work remit to becoming involved with information, advice and guidance on personal problems and issues. Nonetheless, she now has a cohort of approximately fifty fathers who meet three times a week, although the dynamics of the group alter frequently as issues such as employment offers and the type of provision being offered affect the attendance of the male learners.

This particular Dads workers conclusions are no different from any other Development Worker in County Durham working with male learners whom I have interviewed for this research or indeed my own conclusions to date. That is that the provision of courses has identified some key factors relevant to male learners with regard to content, time scale and delivery of provision. These are, in no particular order of importance as follows:

- Tutors must be able to manage group dynamics and there should be more group facilitation rather than formal tutoring. The learners dislike the chalk and talk teaching strategy
- Tutors need to be briefed about the learner groups as some of the learners may have issues which could arise during the teaching process e.g. issues between

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learners or involving learners which could end up in a loss of control of the class or learners dropping out

- There must be communication with and feedback between the tutor and the student. It is unsuccessful when tutors deliver the provision with no interaction with the learners. Tutors who pontificate and/or “talk down” to them as learners are also disliked
- The learners appreciate an element of fun in the provision with practical activities, varied resources and material. If the fun element is removed they often cease to attend.
- Provision should be timed for the male learner’s availability due to work commitment. For example many men are employed in part time often not even on the monthly rota, making it difficult for them to commit to regular sessions/attendance. Others have family commitments particularly if their partner is the main breadwinner, or have social commitments particularly major sporting events
- Induction for the courses is quite crucial. They want to know before the course commenced exactly what is its purpose, what will they do and what will they achieve. Failure to deliver means they will cease to attend, men having a lower tolerance level than female learners for poor provision
- Many of the male learners have low literacy skills. They have a dislike of discrete basic skills courses, which they will avoid through embarrassment. However it would appear some would attend basic skills sessions if they were on a one-to-one basis and two do, now that funding has been found
- Male learners are keen on certificates and accreditation. The only way to attain accreditation in most instances with accrediting bodies is following delivery of a minimum of twenty-hours of tutor/learner tuition. This entails courses of ten sessions or more. Male learners overall, my research has found, prefer short courses of two to six sessions and small numbers in the group. This however would provide problems with funding. A ten session course broken into two modules or more, e.g. two hours a week for five weeks, would mean that the “additional” courses would have no outputs for the project
- Research with this and other development workers engaging male learners, indicates that more “learning” occurs with facilitated dialogue e.g. spontaneous chat where a “hidden agenda” can be discussed behind/within an activity, rather than structured courses

Some male learners appear to perceive a threat to lower skill jobs with the expansion of the European Union this year and feel their possibilities of future employment in these employment areas are being reduced by an influx of cheap labour. They are prepared to actively seek training in specific areas of employment however the provision often is unavailable. For example one male learner has to travel with the

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aid of family members from County Durham to Ashington in Northumberland to attend a plastering course.

A proforma was produced, a copy of which is attached at Appendix E, and given to the male learners to establish which courses they would like to see in community provision. These are at Figure 1 and are in no particular order:

<b>Leisure/Hobby</b>	<b>Family Learning</b>	<b>Future Employment</b>	<b>Educational</b>
Outward Bound	Childcare	Youth Work	ICT including building PC's
Football	Drug Awareness	Plumbing	Sociology
Rock Climbing	First Aid course	Car Body Repair and Car Mechanics	Foreign Languages
Yoga	Healthy Cooking	Electrical	English Literature
History (not local)	Food Hygiene	Roofing	Maths
Family Tree	Reading with Kids	Fitness Instructor	CLAIT
Motorbikes	Maths with Kids	Brick Laying	Writing
Build a kite	How to help kids with school work	PSV Training	
Photography	Child Development	Plastering	
Keeping Tropical Fish	Baby and Child Life Saver	Working with the RSPCA	
How to do DIY		Joinery	
Gardening			

*Figure One: Male Learners Course Preferences*

The WEA and indeed a range of other providers can provide all the courses under leisure/hobby with the exception of motorbikes. Unfortunately the courses are non-accredited and rock climbing is financially exorbitant to run not only due to equipment hire but contract of the additional tutors required for health and safety reasons. The family learning course can also be provided and all but drug awareness can be accredited with either St John Ambulance or the Open College Network (OCN).

None of the courses leading to employment can be provided by the WEA and not all are available at local colleges. Where they are available financial costs, travel costs and institutional barriers to learning may prevent the learner from committing to the course. Finally, WEA and other community providers can provide the educational courses, although English literature and languages would not result in accreditation on the usual course duration with WEA. Progression however involves travel to a college or other centre and may become a barrier to further learning.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, there is still a requirement for the male learners to commit to these courses in sufficient numbers and for the duration necessary and therein lies the rub.

This Case Study Two Dad's worker has worked hard to establish a relationship with the male learners. In doing so she has shown that what matters in establishing groups of male learners is not the gender of the worker, as these two case studies indicate but the focus on male learners' interests, listening to what their needs are and acting on their requests, interests and complaints. The support of her management and their understanding of the issues surrounding male learners have been paramount to her success.

### **4.3. Family Learning and Men**

Government initiatives, which include Sure Start and the Home Office Policy Unit all work towards the inclusion of and provision for an important group of male learners, namely fathers. It is necessary to clarify at this point that Family Learning and fathers is include all those men involved in the parenting role and can and do include step fathers, grandfathers and other male family members with a guardian role

Fathers by virtue of our changing society are becoming more interactive with their children's lives, particularly as more mothers move into the work place. As a result of this the father's role within the family unit has and is dramatically changing. This role reversal has left particular beliefs and attitudes that need to change but will take time to do so. Lloyd (2001) identifies the need to "*approach fathers positively*" to challenge the stereotype of uncaring and disinterested. He believes that there is a need to acknowledge, "*fathers are of benefit to their children*" and that "*they are all ready motivated to be better fathers*". He states that there is the need for "*some professional' attitudes to change that too often professionals too often operate on traditional gender assumptions and fail to recognise (or accept) that changes have or are occurring*". Further, that while they fail to recognise the changes "*many fathers attitudes are changing already*".

June Davison of Family Learning in County Durham has been pivotal in the development of men friendly organisations and the provision for male learners in County Durham. Research has failed to find any overarching strategy for including men in provision in County Durham or indeed a lead organisation offering such a strategy. What has been achieved to meet male learners' needs or addressed with regard to an overarching strategy has been implemented, facilitated and financed by June and her Countywide SRB6 project.

To this end June has provided funding for those within the family learning field to attend the Developing A Men Friendly Organisation course and has supported the Including Men forum. The Including Men forum is now self-governing and chaired by Tom Clark (see Chapter 8). In addition, June has assisted in the setting up of the Active Dads project and supports the Dads and Lads programme (See Chapter 8). Her role is that of facilitator for initiatives towards men due to her commitments to her own project.

Family Learning provision primarily addresses parenting skills and the establishment of parent groups. The majority of these parent groups tend to be female led and female dominated. In an attempt to provide balance and inclusion, those organisations involved in family learning introduce Dad's workers to include male

learners within the provision. The provision is diverse and can include accreditation, although the majority of course outcomes are the soft outcomes of self confidence and self esteem, development of social skills and a better understanding of their roles as fathers.

Research has shown that time is the cornerstone for the development of males to engage and nurture them as learners. In the long term the majority of organisations hope to lead these groups into more structured educational courses, including basic skills, with a few hoping to provide courses which could lead to employment. There was also an acknowledgement that there was a need to progress these male learners to mainstream education services.

A clear factor that has arisen is that family learning affords the opportunity for the child to invite the father to become involved and this *“is a powerful incentive to engage in family learning”* Fletcher (11th April 2004). It is also clear from my research that fathers want to be included and involved with their children and the children’s education and not just academic education either. They want to develop their parenting skills e.g. one father wanted to be taught to plait his daughter’s hair. What is also clear is that working with fathers can have a positive effect on children. This could have a long-term effect on the community as a whole and so make a crucial contribution to regeneration.

For the future, with regard to WEA course provision, it is clear that more direct contact with the father is required to ensure that the needs of the male learners particularly in their parental role are being met and this is the same in all male provision by WEA. In addition there is the need for projects to be very clear about their purpose and also acknowledgement within the projects that the recruitment of male learners, particularly fathers groups *“took time and needed to be sustained”* T Lloyd (2001). These findings are appropriate when engaging male learners for any community provision. There are several examples of successful projects engaging male learners in Trefor Lloyds book *What Works With Father?*

#### **4.4. Life Long Learning and Men**

The provision of Life Long Learning (LLL) courses by the WEA is under the General Programme, albeit that some LLL is achieved indirectly through the ESF project and also through local Single Regeneration Budget project and Rural and Mental Health Projects.

Volunteers who have formed WEA Branches across the County govern the General Programme. The provision is advertised countywide and learners who enrol pay a sliding scale of fees to attend. Many of the courses are held in the county communities and attended by community members. A WEA Branch member who referred to them as *“old style night classes”* gave the most descriptive explanation of these courses.

During 2003 a total of two hundred and seventy three male learners enrolled on these fee-paying courses of which the average age was sixty. With the exception of nineteen all the learners came from West Durham area including Chester-Le-Street

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and Durham City. Those from outside this area travelled from East Durham, Tyne and Wear, Darlington and one learner from North Yorkshire.

The courses on which these male learners enrolled were for leisure, hobbies or to support or develop current personal interests. Art and crafts, followed by languages and then history classes were by far the most popular with the male learners. Other popular courses were singing and alternative therapies. Most of the courses especially those with educational overtones such as languages and local history, were available under the ESF project. Others such as Durham Quilting and singing were not.

These statistics clearly show that there is an interest in education and learning by male learners but only in areas that they choose to pursue.

### **4.5. College Provision**

The four colleges in County Durham are the largest providers for male learners. It is important to recall, when discussing local college FE provision, that the WEA do not target learners aged sixteen to eighteen years of age and that these are the majority of male learners enrolled on the colleges FE provision because:

- They are young
- They are not learning in the community
- They are on specific vocational courses

The other obvious advantages for the male learners attending the colleges are the facilities available within their various real estates. These can include catering, woodwork and metalwork facilities, auto mechanic, drama and media, hairdressing and beauty, ICT workshops, travel and teaching courses. In addition the colleges offer full time and part time education in National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), a more attractive and recognised qualification that has real currency in the market place, rather more than some of the accrediting bodies used in the volunteer sector.

The provision of the courses by the voluntary sector providers in the community outreach sites is difficult and may be difficult even for colleges due to cost of equipment and/or transport problems. Either it is not feasible due to the need to target large numbers of learners in funding bids, or it is impractical due to the lack of space and facilities. All these factors could account for the low take up of volunteer provision by male learners. The courses that the male learners want cannot be provided by the volunteer sector, but the college can, and there is no gain to be made by competing with partner organisations.

While the majority of vocational provision is in colleges and training providers there are avenues for vocational training and education in community setting, and specifically for men.

Among the many interviewees seen, Charmian Walter of Bishop Auckland College made one of the most interesting suggestions for pioneering change in provision. Charmians' role within the college is Community Provision. She has been the driving

force for non-accredited provision in County Durham through the County Durham Learning Scheme, running the innovative County Durham Passport to Learning Scheme which was extremely popular and widely used in the WEA ESF project.

Charmian now suggests taking non-accredited learning a step further, pointing out that non-accredited learning for male or indeed female learners, can lead to employment. The example given and this can be matched to any job of this ilk, was the carpet fitter. A carpet can be purchased but in some instances it can be weeks before it can be professionally fitted in the home. In short carpet outlets need more carpet fitters!

It is suggested therefore that the WEA and/or other providers would need to engage with these employers. It would need to identify the skills that are required for such a specific job and then the course(s) designed to fit the jobs that are available in the community. The skills could be customer relation skills, sales skills, timekeeping, understanding the *need* for health and safety in the work place, any basic skills as appropriate to carry out the tasks.

Once the learner has completed the unaccredited course and is in employment, the opportunity to offer further training, this time possibly accredited, would come by progressing the learner appropriately. Again, this could be achieved in partnership with the employer, and County Durham already has in place Life Long Learning Advisors with whom partnerships could be further developed to target employers and learners.

This opens up many avenues of possibilities for community provision for male learners and at the same time regenerates communities through employment. It also may well confirm, *“that instrumental, work related reasons are still the most dominant motives for learning among men”* (McGivney 1999:08).

It must be noted that there is insufficient time in the lifetime of this research project to experiment and come up with any evidence, statistical or anecdotal, that this provision would work.

### **5. Targeting Male Learners**

There is a distinct difference between men and women learners. Men appear to learn only when there is a reason, whereas women learn for a multitude of different ones. Men want the stark facts of the courses, simple clear information of what it is about, what it entails, what the outcomes are and most important of all is it any use to them. Male learners need something tangible and with purpose. This is confirmed by (McGivney 1999:08) who stated that men *“appear to be more single minded, focused and practical in their motivation to learn, seeking to further specific goals or particular interests.”*

Women on the other hand often enrol to get out of the house and socialise as well as learn. They tend to be more clubbable by nature than men and one of the primary soft outcomes of provision for women is the development of conversational skills, the

exchange of ideas, building of self-confidence and self-esteem. Indeed, almost the last thing appears to be the certificate itself.

Whilst it is relatively easy to engage one male learner or even three or four, trying to establish larger classes in a mixed group is more problematic. Mixed gender courses could run and often do, at the current minimum of ten learners to a class. It can be more difficult to engage both men and women on the same course. If the mixed gender class proceeds, more often than not it is female dominated and they often unconsciously exclude the male learner(s) within the class dynamics, whereby they often either withdraw or choose not to progress further with the provider.

It is also necessary for organisations to review their teaching and learning approaches to male learners. This research has shown that often an open and informal teaching style can cause some men to feel uncomfortable particularly if the activity is small group or paired and requires some self-disclosure. Men prefer the whole group approach; clear and structured teaching strategies with practical, activity based learning styles (McGivney 1999).

It is clear in the provision for male learners in education that gender difference does matter though this is not perceived or acted upon in much of the voluntary sector and in community provision, although why I have not been able to establish in this short period of time. What is clear from my research is that our sector suffers through an often-inappropriate wish not to discriminate or be seen to discriminate in recruitment and provision delivery and this *may* be a factor.

It is time therefore “*to develop a negotiating approach to provision*” for men. (Fletcher 11<sup>th</sup> April 2004). It is time to acknowledge that men are also stakeholders in learning, and equity in provision is overdue as community based educational provision “*whether general, academic or vocational, continues to be heavily dominated by women*” (McGivney 1999:05). The statistics for the WEA ESF project 2003 support this claim.

## **6. The Need For Men Friendly Organisations**

There is a clear and identified need for all organisations to adopt a more men friendly attitude to provision. This “*requires great thought, planning and openness to change*” Neville (2001).

Far too many organisations tack on provision for men to an otherwise female orientated core, particularly in family learning, and fail to relate to the importance of fathers and men in children’s lives and indeed securing wider regeneration goals. Bartlett (1999) stated “*Agencies that treat support for fathers as an essential aspect of their work, and not an optional extra, are more likely to inspire commitment in staff and confidence in fathers*”.

Ghate et al (2000) describe three “*orientation groupings*” within centres:

- Gender blind – where male and female learners are regarded as the same and the same provision is offered

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- Gender differentiated Centres – where male learners are regarded as different from female learners and subsequently different provision is offered
- Agnostic centres – where there is no specifically identified approach to male learners

Their conclusions were that men were more likely to attend gender-differentiated centres.

Seeing male learners as a positive aspect to the organisation is not the same as having a gender differentiated approach. This can only be achieved with the involvement and willingness to change provision and delivery from management down.

Communication, interaction and staff attitudes with male learners are key staff training issues in developing and establishing a men friendly organisation. Efforts must be made to interact with male learners particularly in the area of family learning where their role as an active parent is critical to a child's development. Input should be sought from male learners not only about the provision and activities that they may wish to participate in but also about what they want and need from the agency. This could include information about community services for example education and employment assistance or legal assistance. All the staff within an organisation should be able to make referrals for male learners to other agencies, for example domestic violence or employment and training. It is also important that the program services that the organisation offers are planned and implemented specifically for men rather than just incorporating men into existing services for women.

The issue of physical environment for men and fathers should not be overlooked when reviewing and assessing men friendly organisations. It is equally important for the male learner as it is for the female learner that there is a room or area that has been designated as a space for men/fathers even if it just for the duration of the designated weekly meeting/course. This space for socialising or participating in group activities is particularly important when the overall aim of the organisation is to develop a Dad/father/male learner group. A physical environment that has a general feel that it is inviting and welcoming to male learners includes the need for resources for them, as well as ensuring that the literature available is as appealing for fathers as it is for mothers and reflects the services or programs that they might wish to participate in. In addition the organisation as a whole should ensure that positive and diverse images of men and fathers are displayed, that men are welcome and that the organisation does not appear to be a place exclusively for women and children.

There is considerably more to do to develop men friendly organisations but the training is available for all organisations in County Durham through Children North East and Family Learning In County Durham.

What is important to realise is that without engaging men, there are no role models and no dynamics to ensure that there is community regeneration. There cannot be regeneration in a community when targeting or omission excludes 50% of the population.

The effect is not just felt by men. “No men, no role models” will transmit itself to women and children through the home situation, or more actively by disparagement of, or opposition to, education.

### **7. The Need to Work in Partnership**

The WEA have a large number of collaborative partnerships in County Durham. This collaboration includes other educational organisations in the voluntary sector, local schools, community colleges and FE colleges, local people, volunteers and community committees and includes more formal, large-scale partnerships such as the County Durham Learning Partnership and District based learning partnerships.

This collaboration works well in most instances, all having realised how unproductive market competition is in education. Market competition has been defined as a way of working that emphasises the benefits of creating competing providers of services. It is supposed to make for greater efficiency but rarely does in community provision certainly not in the voluntary sector.

The collaboration among the loose networks in the county has been a successful way of drawing together organisations to develop projects for the good of the community and to exchange best practise. WEA have found that the collaboration has worked particularly well as:

- It has reduced or ended dual provision in the community
- Through the synergy of these partnerships resources have been pooled or shared including venues, staff and equipment as well as cost and expertise
- By using the budget enlargement model as a means to enlarge budgets, partnerships have gained additional funds that it would not have been possible to attain alone and the spreading of both costs and subsequently further provision
- Joint bidding

Nonetheless, with the need to include and recruit male learners into community provision it is time to take the next step in partnerships and widen the purpose of these to include getting together to change provision and practices.

This will entail in the case of WEA Provision within the community, partners allowing the WEA development workers to take a step closer to their clients so that there can be direct communication with them to establish and develop courses that the learner would like or need. The discussion would include all three in this new partnership, the WEA, the partner and the male learner. Too often the lack of clear communication between all three has resulted in a negative or unhappy or at least less than optimal educational experience.

Providers both voluntary sector and institutional, rarely have the time for intensive engagement with individual learners and groups prior to and/or alongside a course.

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Community based partners can create the necessary contact and engagement with non-traditional learners and it is a positive process. That is as long as community providers are allowed contact with potential learners beforehand. My research has found that this particular issue is paramount for the success of provision.

Without discounting the experience of partners, the expertise of the WEA development worker is the ability to identify and develop suitable provision and curriculum for educational progression from the taster course to the accredited course. Only too often this expertise is undervalued and under-used.

Working together in partnership can be done by committed evaluation of the partnership. Tett (2003) clearly identifies six key principles to assessing partnerships these being:

- The developing and maintaining of trust
- A clear understanding of the role of the WEA within the process
- Equality of participation within the partnerships
- Clear partnership arrangements
- Being committed and taking ownership, and monitoring and reviewing the organisational working of the partnership.

### **8. Best Practice Countywide:**

Good practice in community provision for the purpose of this research project, is defined as developing a process where male learners who would not normally engage in learning - for whatever reason - become engaged for the first time or re-engaged.

This could appropriately be accomplished through patiently making contact and talking with these potential learners in contexts and settings within which they are comfortable. Well-trained development workers can establish the learning resources and opportunities that would most likely serve the interest of male learners and put the provision in place.

Unfortunately these attempts are often thwarted by management driven by targets and outcomes that do not differentiate by gender and which are mostly quantitative not qualitative, only allowing very limited time for contact and discussions between worker and learner. Providers are using the development workers to stimulate very short-term demand for their services and provision with no long-term strategy. As a consequence, this provision often does not meet the male learners' demands or needs.

It has been difficult to find many examples of best practice in engaging male learners across the county except for the aforementioned. This may reflect the fact that this research has found no existing strategy in County Durham for including men in community provision

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Many providers/partners have considered the best practice that I have found to be revolutionary in tone whereas in fact they are merely commonsense, practical, relevant and appropriate to the development worker at the coalface.

It is the research's recommendation that these main opposing views of management and development worker, particularly with regard to need for time to develop and maintain male learners, acknowledging that male learners are different from female learners and the need for a clearly defined strategy with realistic aims and objectives, must be reconciled, if organisations are to succeed in engaging male learners into community provision. The following best practices in the county are therefore strongly recommended to management and to the development worker:

- The Developing Men Friendly Organisations course currently funded by County Durham Family Learning and delivered by Children NorthEast. This should be a training objective for both managers and staff working with male learners. There is no worthwhile point, as Case Study One proves, in sending just the development worker on the course. The concepts and good practice need to be understood and cascaded down and through the entire organisation.
- Including Men was founded by Family Learning in County Durham and is a forum whose members consists primarily of those workers who have or seek to engage male learners in community provision. The forum meets every two months to share good practice with a view to establish an overarching strategy to engage men in learning.
- Active Dads is a programme for engaging father and child in learning. The father and child agreeing on an activity e.g. (spending a day at a museum or boiling an egg and making bread soldiers) that encourages and establishes dialogue between father and child achieve this. After the activity, father and child reflect on the activities in diaries with a view to promoting the awareness of quality time spent by the father with the child. The Home Office funded the Active Dad programme and it is the intention of the Including Men forum to continue this particularly successful programme.
- The Supporting Families Network (SPAN) is a charity operating in the Stanley and West Derwentside areas providing support and training opportunities to mums, dads and carers. SPAN works closely with other providers across County Durham particularly in the provision of Family Learning. The organisation engages with individual parents to help them find appropriate services and organisations that can offer the help they need and assists particularly when children outgrow Sure Start.
- The District-level Lifelong Learning Coordinators are a key link between different organisations and providers in the voluntary sector and local employers. They support other community activities e.g. Aim High, County Durham Regional Economic Strategy and Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund. They also work in engaging new learners both in the community and workplace.

## 9. A More Focused Project

This research has clearly identified a need for a more focused ESF project, or indeed other projects aiming to engage men in learning in the future and for the provision of community courses for male learners to enable them to do so. The lessons above clearly apply to other providers as well as the WEA

This research has also identified recommendations for how a future project ESF or otherwise, could become more male learner focused. These will be addressed first:

- **Family Learning:** The courses in this curriculum are often focused on dads, or primary carers, in the family. Best practise has identified the curriculum areas that have had most success in County Durham to date. Equally, that Men Friendly Organisations are those whom are most likely to recruit, support and progress male learners. The WEA needs to be proactive by becoming more interactive with the learners as well as the partners/providers in its provision of courses, and IAG needs to be an integral part of the provision rather than a “bolt on” as it is currently. This reinforces the need for an IAG/evaluation worker for any sizable project particularly if targeting men.
- **Life Long Learning:** The WEA General Programme offers a plethora of courses to meet the needs of the male learner who seeks to learn for pleasure as well as educational development. There is no requirement for the ESF or other projects e.g. SRB project, Rural Learning, to compete with this provision and the IAG worker is in the ideal position to identify learners with these particular needs and signpost them appropriately.
- **College Provision:** the local colleges are all meeting the needs of male learners that can not be met by the voluntary sector due to cost and space issues and the need for protracted mostly vocational courses. Again there is no need to compete with these partners and the signposting of learners, as appropriate, should continue. With a fully qualified IAG worker the signposting can be in more depth, including the setting up of appointments for groups or individuals with the colleges and “hand-holding” if needed to get learners through the college doors.
- **Innovative Provision:** The word “innovative” has been used as a requirement by funders for bids to be successful for several years and yet it has become clear from the above research and discussion with other partners/providers that although they are prepared to be innovative, the funders often hinder innovation through requirements on entry, on course requirements, the types of courses funded, numbers of learners on courses and by not acknowledging the value of unaccredited courses and soft outcomes. Provision for male learners in the community needs to be completely reviewed and reshaped. The way forward includes in particular the need to engage with employers and look at new kinds of non-accredited provision e.g. as suggested by Charmian Walter. Further

innovative and successful projects can be found in Chapters Four and Five of McGivney's publication "Excluded Men".

- **Targeting Male Learners:** The WEA, like partners/providers, is often target driven for potential learners so set out to attract the easy to access groups. This is because our target groups are not easy ones. The problem is that output achievement directs us to the easier to get individuals and sections within the target group. Often target pressures lead to men being ignored because as a whole male learners are a difficult group. These hard to reach learners become pivotal when employment may be an overarching outcome in the bid. The WEA and funders will need to reflect and review current targeting of male learners for this project.
- **The ESF Learner Eligibility Criteria:** The ESF learner criterion is now out of date and needs to be reviewed. The idea that women over 59 and men over 63 are no longer actively seeking employment is out of step with current Government initiatives and the social upheaval of this country. Longer life spans for both sexes necessitate continued employment for either financial reasons or because twenty years of retirement is considered "too boring to contemplate" (WEA Life Long Learner 2004). Employers are keen to employ the over 50's and the opportunity to teach them new working skills and/or new skills for life, is being missed by ESF projects due to the age restrictions. A review of this criterion should be considered for the project to be more focused and successful.
- **Learning Skills Council and Adult Community Learning Group:** The Adult Community Learning Group (ACL) has the remit to lead on strategic planning and bring together a range of providers in County Durham with a remit for widening participation. There is no evidence of formal discussion on the low participation of male learners though this has figured in discussions and papers. Charmian Walters shared the concern over absent male learners and made useful suggestions towards future action. (See 4.5 College Provision). However there is no overall evidence of a focus on male recruitment. This is at odds with the LSC strategy in ESF Objective 3 co financing which requires a 60% target of male learners for the next funding period 2004 to 2006.

## 10. Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered and are placed in no particular order of importance:

### 10.1 Best ways to recruit, progress and support male learners:

- Development time is vital before, during and after project provision. As is research into the local area and planning for the setting of realistic targets for both management and the development worker to

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meet from the outset. ESF targets pull in the opposite direction towards delivery of outputs.

- The most suitable IAG and courses progression is to provide pre-course and on-course IAG with more detailed guidance as the courses progress. There should be pre-course induction sessions to ensure that male learners enrol on a course appropriate to their wants and needs at a suitable level. Equally, to ascertain special needs, IT and/or Basic Skills requirements and offer learning opportunities through the project and/or other providers as appropriate.
- To achieve this there should be a dedicated part-time IAG and evaluation worker who would advise learners and support tutors in a basic IAG role. He/she should also sample learner progress and satisfaction and evaluate the project. Evaluation should be continuous, looking at overall progress, recruitment, retention and achievement. He/she should conduct six monthly surveys of past learners by telephone and selective face-to-face contact.
- Many of the community organisations that work in partnership with WEA can also offer learners professional IAG and/or other support. If/when used, this would be in addition to that offered by the WEA. This type of intensive support improves recruitment and retention levels and ensures that appropriate courses are offered. Many of the organisations involved including the WEA, are also involved with the formal County Durham IAG network.
- Most courses should be accredited, applying NCFE/Open College quality systems, Internal Verification and External Moderation. For non-accredited courses County Durham Learning systems will be followed, including the awarding of CDL Certificates & Passports to Learning.
- Partnerships for provision need to take the next step and allow direct communication with the potential male learners to clearly identify their needs and wants to develop appropriate provision. Where this does not happen courses often fail e.g. WEA cancelled four courses countywide last year due to poor enrolment, a mismatch of tutor and learners and the provider failing to identify the course the male learners actually wanted to participate in.
- Where feasible and appropriate community providers WEA included, need to develop into a men friendly organisations. Once that decision has been made the organisation needs to identify, evaluate and review its position with regard to including male learners within it. There is a need for those organisations that work with male learners to review the organisational support. For example does literature and publicity about the organisation reflect a commitment to men? Is funding for men consistent and ongoing? What is the position and reputation of the organisation in the community with respect to male learners?

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Importantly do men/fathers in the community view the organisation as a place they can come for assistance/provision? Does the organisation have policies and procedures in place that are inclusive of men? Staff training and resources, physical environment and staff attitudes all contribute significantly to developing men friendly organisations which overall assist male learners into community provision. Three useful tools to assist in this development are the Contin You and Children North East men-friendliness organisational self-assessment and planning tool, an action plan and a draft policy statement for becoming a more men friendly organisation. Copies of these are attached at Appendixes F, G and H respectively. This enables an organisation to identify issues in relation to working with men. Their action plan for becoming more men friendly will assist in identifying the short and long-term action steps an organisation needs to take to become more men friendly e.g. the WEA. This ensures whole team working and to assist in this ensure appropriate team members receive training to become part of a men friendly organisation, and can be taken up by other organisations.

- There is a need to begin to look at males as individual learners and not as a problem group, and identify aptitude and learning styles of the learners. Courses need to be developed which to best serve these needs for successful content, style and progression. There is also a requirement to identify the different needs of male learners depending on their background and circumstances e.g. shift workers or step fathers. The organisation needs to ensure that it meets the needs of male learners who are prime carers e.g. by providing crèche facilities when required outside of the perceived normal hours and baby changing facilities not only in ladies toilets. These issues may have to be built into the costings of funding bids and partners/venues encouraged to address them. Ensure provision and resources must meet the needs of the male learners both young and old. For example with different interests and different learning styles, “off the peg” courses do not suit all groups and all ages.
- Individual and group success should be celebrated through Adult Learners’ Week awards and other events as relevant.

### **10.2 Appropriate means to overcome barriers to learning:**

- It is necessary to provide support to male learners through free childcare, transport and the use of premises compatible with any special need. This provision must be available outside of the normal hours of 9 to 5, Monday to Friday. These out of hours support issues can be expensive particularly childcare, raising the cost of provision. These issues should be addressed in the costings of funding bids.
- To reduce the level of female dominance in family centres or teaching venues, there is a need to develop a more welcoming and positive attitude to male learners by women users and staff. In particular there

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should be discouragement of the tendency of some women from venting anti-male sentiment. The need for a positive and active commitment by these centres and venues to recruit male learners

- Institutional Barriers and the need to respond to resistance to or fear of large buildings, crowds and formal settings must be addressed by providing courses in more user-friendly venues. Also the need to address the expectations of staff/tutors about the range of the male learners' abilities and the use and understanding of educational jargon. If "expectations" are not considered this could demonstrate prejudice and may be reflected in the treatment of learners and in less challenging, less interesting course content, or style. The timing of courses being related to the availability for male learners outside the 9 to 5, Monday to Friday norm, and training and advice for tutors with regard to capacity/needs/problems and preferred learning styles of individual male learners
- Thematic Barriers such as learning disabilities and the need for appropriate materials, teaching methods and goals; a safe physical and social environment must be provided and the need for specialist staff/support must be addressed
- Mental Health issues such as loss of social abilities, inability to interact in a group, cycles of illness and recovery, effects of medication and the need for appropriate teaching methods must be addressed
- Physically Disabled issues such as access/mobility barriers, inappropriate teaching facilities, materials and methods and again the need for specialist equipment must be addressed
- Personal Barriers of which some may be more severe for thematic groups. Others include childcare and family/other commitments and include finance/income, negative family and peer pressure. Poor previous educational experience or fear of formal learning and examinations, low level of literacy and numeracy, IT and/or study skills. Loss of confidence and nervous/shyness and fear of failure/self fulfilment of failure must be addressed. Many male learners have other more specific barriers to learning:
  - i. A phobia to commitment to courses particularly of duration
  - ii. They are sceptical of the reasons the provision is being offered
  - iii. Some do not wish to learn for employment purposes because they do not want or no longer expects to work
  - iv. They resent the perceived "authority figure" behind the offer of provision

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- v. If offered male learners want/expect the provision to be immediately available or interest will wane
- Cultural Barriers in which a project should recruit learners on to courses which interest them, and which do not stigmatise them as people who have problems with e.g. basic literacy and numeracy. Rather than reduce the learners' confidence by concentrating on their problems, the project should motivate them to learn a subject which interests them and build their confidence to tackle areas of learning which they will find more difficult – i.e. revisiting skills which they failed to grasp at school. It will prepare learners for more formal accredited learning.

### 10.3 Provision:

- There is a need for WEA to address the issue of appropriate provision. It is not in the best interests of either the learners, male or otherwise, or the WEA to continue to provide courses in the current manner. There is a clearly identified need for more involvement by WEA development workers with both the providers and learners in identifying appropriate provision. There is a need to deliver across the County a more structured and negotiated curriculum in future projects.
- A structured curriculum affords tutors, learners and partner/providers the opportunity to discuss and plan long-term provision of a more structured nature from which it can clearly record the educational progress and achievement of all the male learners. Both the WEA and partners/providers need to think in more long-term ways about the delivery of the provision. Ideally the curriculum should be planned over the life of the project rather than course-by-course. This notwithstanding, flexibility in delivery is a key factor in community provision, due to the ebb and flow of the male learners and their needs and their desire for education.
- The curriculum developed within community provision should not however be limited to non-formal versions of the off-the-peg courses generated by providers. Too often, taster sessions and minimum consultation with the learner result in provision that fits in with pre-determined courses, resources and teaching material, in short, “off the peg” provision. This is not to say that this form of provision should not be offered but to regenerate particular communities as well as attract specific male learners the curriculum must be relevant, purposeful and constantly evaluated to ensure it remains relevant and purposeful to those particular communities, groups and individuals. It also needs to be fun! Individuals are more likely to engage in learning when they are enjoying themselves and can see the fruits of their labour

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- Using the Swedish WEA motto of “dig where you are”, provision should build on what the individual already knows from life experience and the informal learning that occurs in their day-to-day lives. Any new skills and knowledge should be relevant and introduced when necessary and appropriate
- The provision of contextualised skills for life courses and particularly the provision of one-to-one tuition are two methods of teaching basic skills to male learners that research indicates would be more successful than discrete and group provision
- Development workers should organise teams of tutors, as the development of such teams would result in a better understanding of the bigger picture of the project, although these tutors should be shared across projects. This would enable tutors to then identify their specific role in the project and evaluate their courses more comprehensively, to ensure success in its provision and delivery thereby meeting the projects’ outcomes more easily. By being briefed and continually updated on the objectives of the projects in which they are involved, they will understand the issues that are at stake in meeting not only the project outcomes but also wider issues e.g. learner eligibility criteria. These tutors should teach in a practical, informal, creative and participatory way that “involves” the male learner.
- Evaluation of the progress of both the learners and the project is more manageable when a definable curriculum over a protracted period is in place. This entails developing a portfolio of shorter courses that can lead to longer ones
- IAG can be of more value in developing individual learners’ action plans and continuous professional development when a definable curriculum is in place
- Publicity material should be gender inclusive and if relevant e.g. a men only course designed specifically to attract male learners. WEA needs to review its current publicity to ensure that the material, both in format and information, addresses these points.

## 11. Conclusion

Some of the recommendations made are classic recommendations. It is time to realise that many of the perceived barriers to engaging male learners have been overcome and in many ways the WEA and other providers have done all that can be done in this area, but it is not carried out systematically at all times. It is now time for male learners to empower themselves by enrolling on the provision that is made available or demanding the best provision they want.

This research has ascertained four steps to be taken to engage men in community learning:

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- **Step 1:** There is a need for an overarching strategy for the inclusion of men in community provision in County Durham and to do this, one of the County Durham organisations should lead in the development of a countywide strategy working with input from other providers.
- **Step 2:** The WEA and other providers need to develop their skills in retaining male learners who are attracted to provision. This comprises the need to build on the male learners' interest, skills and experience, consulting with them on the provision offered and progressing them to further/other provision with appropriate and competent IAG by a qualified worker.
- **Step 3:** The need for organisations to develop as men friendly organisations is also a key factor in the success of recruiting, retaining and progressing male learners. In addition the acceptance of the need for time to develop and maintain male learner groups.
- **Step 4:** Funders and funding criteria must set realistic targets for project managers and development workers. Funders must allow the necessary time for best practise to grow and the resources to engage males as learners. A target of 60% male learners as in the 2004 to 2006 ESF Objective 3 is an unrealistic target to impose certainly with no lead in phase, with lower targets.

The one overarching recommendation from this research project is that work to include men in community provision must go on because despite the stalwart efforts of some organisations in County Durham there is still “ *an absence of men, particularly working class men, from post compulsory education*” (McGivney 1999:01)

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