



I'm simply learning much more...

How European Union Funds have assisted Community Projects in the area of Skills Development





## The London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium (LVSTC)

was established as a voluntary organisation in 1989 with the specific aim of assisting community and voluntary sector organisations access European Structural Funds to support training for unemployed and vulnerable employed people.

Through a contract with the Government Office for London LVSTC receives Technical Assistance (TA) Funds from the London Objective 2 Programme in order to facilitate the involvement of the community and voluntary sectors in all aspects of the Programme.

The Chair of the LVSTC Executive Board represents the community and voluntary sector on the London European Programmes Committee and senior LVSTC staff represent the sector throughout the management

structures of the Programme and actively support the development of Programme infrastructure, particularly in relation to the Community Economic Development strand in the Programme.

LVSTC performs a key role in providing support to individual applicants for Objective 2 Funds and in supporting Project Managers once funding has been secured. Support is offered through workshops and conferences, 1:1 surgeries or project visits, telephone Helpline, policy briefings and website access.

Technical Assistance Funds are matched by funds from other non-European sources: in the case of our work on ESF in Objective 2 during 2002 to 2004, by a two year grant from the Bridge House Estates Trust Fund.

This publication is based on a survey of project participants, and project managers, carried out between February 2002 and January 2004

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
Effective Grass Roots Actions	4
European, Nation and Regional Policies	4
London Objective 2 Programme 2000-2006	5
<b>THE BENEFICIARY SURVEY</b>	
Aims	6
Methodology	6
Impact Focus	6
<b>THE BENEFICIARIES</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>THE PROJECTS</b>	<b>8</b>
Project Objectives	8
Project Profiles	8
Asian Action Group – The GOALS Programme	9
College Arts – Community Arts Programme	10
Development & Training Agencies Ltd – E-learning Neighbourhood	11
Enfield Arts Partnership – Arts Development & Teaching	11
NEWTEC – Closing The Childcare Gap	12
Ozone Friends – Ozone Friends Training	12
<b>RESEARCH FINDINGS</b>	<b>13</b>
What beneficiaries said	13
Participants Survey Overview	13
What project managers said	14
Project Managers Overview	14
<b>EVALUATION OF PROVISION</b>	<b>15</b>
Integrated Learning, Support & Progression	15
Support for Neighbourhood based Learning	16
<b>KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM EVALUATION</b>	<b>17</b>
Participants Perspective	17
Project Delivery	17
Outcomes	17
Project Management Perspective	17
Strengths of current practice	18
Accessing and managing ESF	18
Coordination and information sharing	18
Sustainable Funding	19
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ESF FUNDED PROGRAMMES</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>22</b>

# INTRODUCTION

“We have become aware of the extent of activity by NGOs (non-governmental organisations) which deliver services and run programmes that are in keeping with recommendations of the European Employment Strategy (EES). It seems to us that this is too little recognised at the moment, particularly since it can really be seen as another part of the UK’s EES success story”.  
(New Policy Institute, July 2004)

## Effective grass roots actions

This report is based on a survey of individuals who have benefited from activities run by community and voluntary sector organisations in receipt of the European Social Fund (ESF), under the London Objective 2 Programme 2000-2006 over a two-year period 2002-2004.

The analysis focuses on the impact on beneficiaries\*, in answer to two questions: do ESF funded activities help individuals into employment and/or encourage them to take up further educational opportunities? and What is it about ESF-funded provision that makes it different and effective?

The report examines some of the barriers faced by beneficiaries within their socio – economic environment and their views on the support they have received; provides project case studies which illustrate both the type and range of community and voluntary sector organisations that receive ESF funding and the projects they run; and summarises the views of project managers based on their experience of using the European Social Fund.

Finally, the report evaluates ESF provision as experienced by the beneficiaries surveyed and draws conclusions for moving forward in meeting the skills needs of those living in some of the most disadvantaged areas of London.

We hope this evaluation will be used to inform decision-making, at a regional and national level, about the allocation of future EU funds for community skills development, capacity building and community empowerment at a neighbourhood level, and workforce development, especially within community businesses and social enterprises.

## European, National and Regional Policies

This report acknowledges the European Employment Strategy, UK Employment Action Plan and the London Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action as key drivers in addressing the skills development needs of disadvantaged Londoners and recognises the importance of the European Structural Funds as a vital instrument in combating social and economic exclusion.

At a national level the UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion, National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and the Learning Curve Agenda also provide a key policy context for skills development at a neighbourhood level, while “*Sustaining Success: Developing London’s Economy*”, London’s Economic Development Strategy prepared by the London Development Agency for the Mayor of London, places skills development in the context of local economic development.

These policies provide a clear strategic framework within which a strong sustainable community and voluntary sector can participate and complement the impact of the European Social Fund.

\* a beneficiary is an individual who has taken part in any activity – usually some form of training or learning – which is part-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF)

## The London Objective 2 Programme 2000-2006

European Union Structural Funds have provided approximately £160m over 7 years 2000 -2006 to support activities in designated parts of 13 London boroughs with the aim of tackling three broad issues:

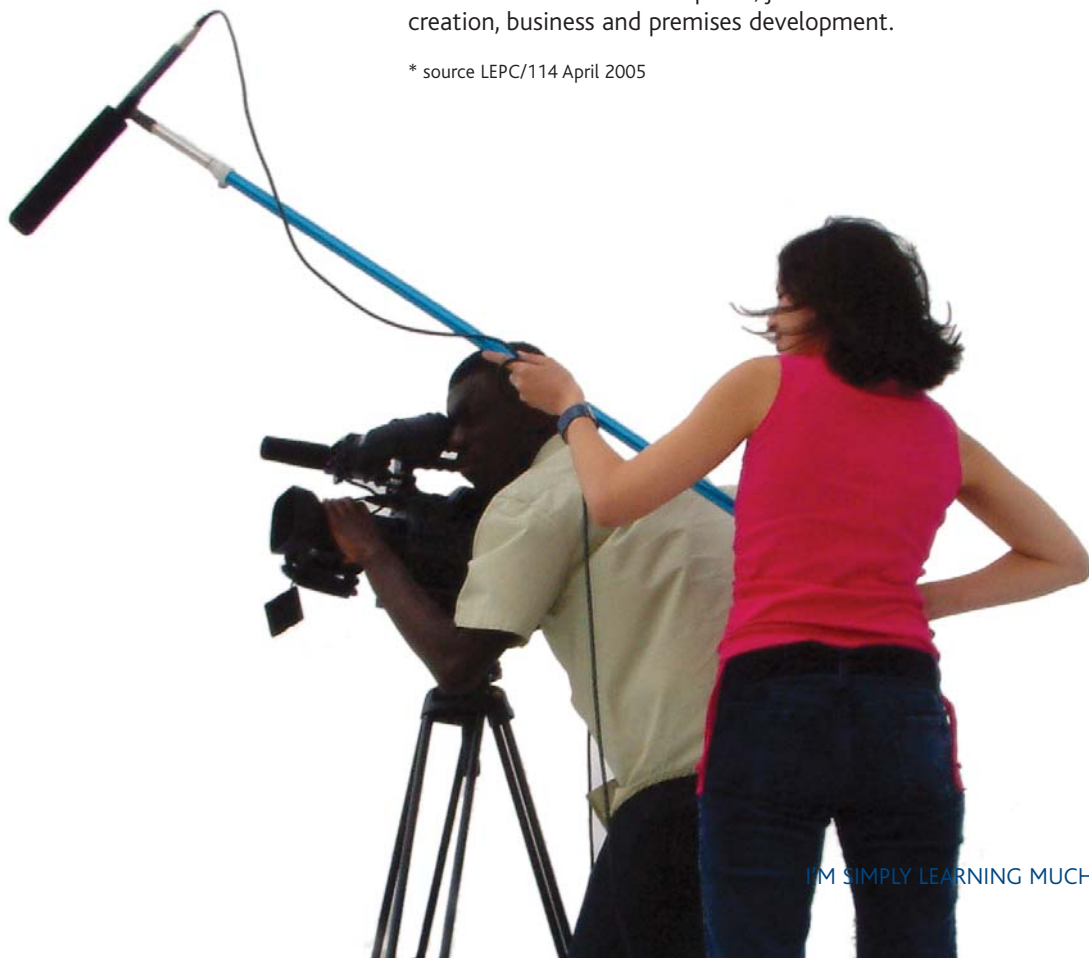
- 1 How to ensure that people living and working in the Programme area can be empowered to benefit from regeneration activities
- 2 How to ensure that new and existing businesses in the Programme area are supported to grow and become more competitive
- 3 How to overcome the physical limitations that inhibit business growth and deter businesses from moving into, or staying in, the Programme area.

Within the Objective 2 Programme 12% of the Structural Funds – approximately £19.7m\* – are from the European Social Fund (ESF) and devoted to specific actions relating to skills development, which target three key areas:-

- 1 **Community Skills Development:** ensuring that people living in the most disadvantaged areas have the opportunity to develop whatever skills they need to play a full part in local regeneration activity; and/or the chance to develop a range of personal and vocational skills which will help them to access job opportunities created in, or accessible to, their communities, establish new community businesses or social enterprises, or become self-employed.
- 2 **Workforce Development:** providing higher level skills and/or management training ensuring that workers employed in local businesses have the skills that will help the businesses thrive and remain competitive.
- 3 **Ensuring Local Benefit:** providing local people with the skills needed by major new developments created within the Programme area so that new jobs go to local people.

In all cases, project activities funded under Objective 2 ESF are required to be developed in support of activities already funded under the complementary European Regional Development Fund which provides approximately £140.8m over the period 2000-2006 for actions directed at capacity building local communities, community businesses and social enterprises, job creation, business and premises development.

\* source LEPC/114 April 2005



# THE BENEFICIARY SURVEY

## Aims

This Survey aimed to explore the experience of learners on projects funded by ESF within the Objective 2 Programme. The following objectives were identified:

- to explore beneficiary satisfaction
- to identify the difference learning has made to employment and further education opportunities
- to assess the impact of quality of life issues on beneficiaries' ability to take up learning opportunities
- to examine access to facilities and services
- to ascertain the extent of project involvement in the local community

The research is complemented by an exploration of project managers' views on the impact of the Objective 2 Programme, and an examination of the capacity of the community and voluntary sectors to support the needs of London's most socially excluded communities through use of the European Social Fund. The conclusions of this research are supplemented by the recommendations of an LVSTC conference ~"Positive Action for Social Inclusion" ~ held in October 2003 under the auspices of the London Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA), which are summarised on page 20.

## Methodology

The research was undertaken by LVSTC Objective 2 ESF Adviser, Wayne Deane, in conjunction with Ellen Ryan, Consultant. Interviews were set up to reflect a range of experiences and dimensions:

- learner groups
- areas of London
- type of learning provider
- curriculum focus

LVSTC has used an evaluation methodology based on both quantitative and qualitative information in order to assess the impact of ESF-supported activity on beneficiaries. The evaluation of impact is based on evidence

gained using both direct interviewing of beneficiaries, discussions with project managers, and a series of follow up telephone interviews. The views of a sample of 23 beneficiaries and 6 project managers were sought.

The target audience of beneficiaries were learners who had either completed their training programmes, or were continuing with learning.

Researchers asked a series of open questions, and through listening and encouragement, facilitated a process whereby beneficiaries felt comfortable in elaborating on their feelings and experiences. Project managers were invited to attend a focus group discussion, aimed at encouraging debate on the usefulness and effectiveness of ESF within the Objective 2 Programme. The focus discussion was substantiated through a series of telephone interviews with other project managers.

## Impact Focus

The evaluation of beneficiaries' experiences focused on the following areas:

- Learner needs
- Reasons for choosing the provision
- Range and content of provision, including qualifications
- Progression routes
- Delivery mode and appropriateness
- Staffing
- Quality Assurance
- Location of learning
- Impact on expectations and future opportunities

The evaluation of the impact on community and voluntary sector organisations focused on the following areas:

- Organisational activities
- Partnership
- Sustainability
- Capacity Building
- Quality Assurance
- Contact with LVSTC
- Future ESF funding

# THE BENEFICIARIES

Twenty-three beneficiaries aged between 20-60 years were interviewed; 43% were men and 57% women. 61% were from black and minority ethnic communities. 17% stated they had a disability. At the time of the survey 39% had already completed their training.

Beneficiaries were asked what barriers to finding work or undertaking further learning they had experienced prior to starting their training.

35% cited lack of the right qualifications, and 17% outdated skills as a barrier; 26% stated there were no jobs available in their locality, while a further 22% cited lack of suitable or affordable childcare as a key factor.

Other factors identified include carer responsibilities, transport issues, lack of recent employment or experience, language and numeracy difficulties.

In terms of what beneficiaries most wanted to achieve by taking up ESF-supported training, 35% wanted more confidence or flexibility and 30% wanted a new job or a better income; 22% were hoping to become self-employed and 17% were hoping for a change of career or to pursue part-time employment.

Significantly, of the 23 beneficiaries, 61% had heard about the particular training course they were on by word of mouth, indicating a high level of connectivity with local communities, and the importance of networking. Only 13% (3 of the 23 beneficiaries) had been recruited as a result of seeing a leaflet, and just 4% through a local newspaper ad. No beneficiary had learned about the project through either the Internet or Community Radio. 30% had reached the Project through "other" methods – four through contact with the local Early Years Unit; one through their local Job Centre.

"Recommendation" from other people about the training provider was obviously important to a number of beneficiaries:

"positive vibes from friends"

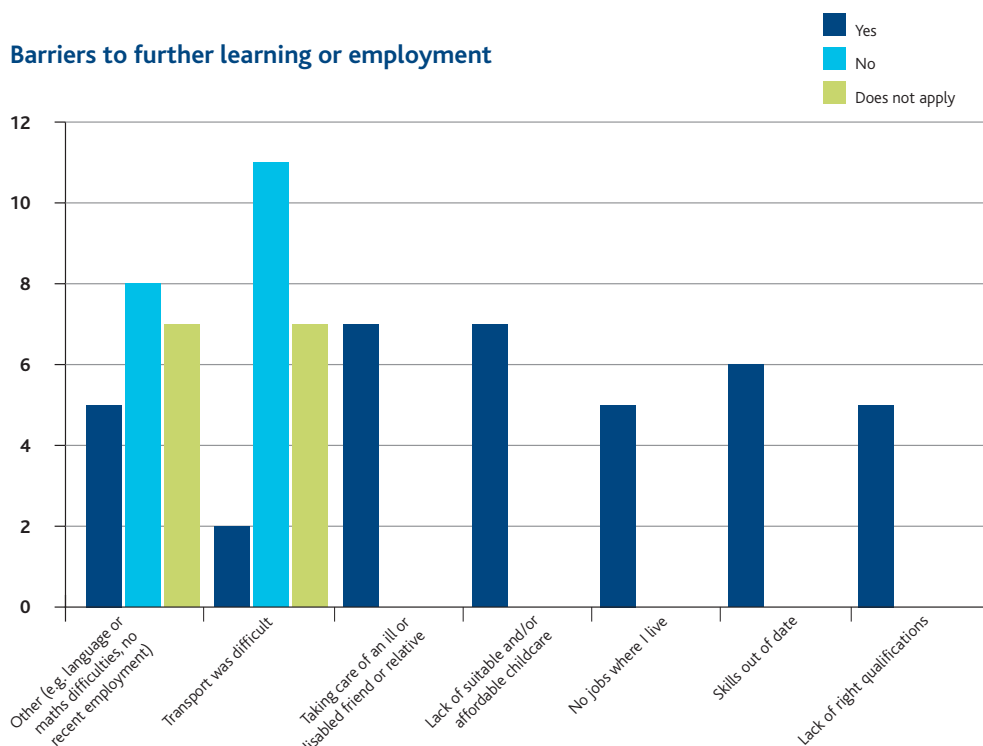
"a friend had a good experience here so she recommended it for me"

"encouraged by a relative to attend this Centre"

"a friend attended this training and recommended it"

"good experience by a friend "

Barriers to further learning or employment



# THE PROJECTS

## “Within a few weeks of learning I improved a lot”

Beneficiaries were drawn from 6 projects

### Project Objectives

The Projects interviewed during the survey have all developed as a result of a local need, i.e. race attacks, shortage of child-care, shortage of youth provision. They all shared a 'bottom up' perspective and have on-going and strong community links. Many of them share characteristics of a community or social enterprise in that they cohere to a model of delivery which enables local communities to take control over local change, enabling the creation of a range of enhanced learning and employment opportunities.

In this respect, they all have the following objectives:

- To create work or learning opportunities for disadvantaged communities
- To provide social and commercial services
- To benefit a clearly defined community
- To be owned by local people who participate in directing the organisation
- To use any profits to create more opportunities locally
- To act as a focus for other forms of social and economic development

Projects stimulated demand for learning through innovative technologies, multi-media, sports and leisure, childcare, ICT skills, with a strong focus on soft outcomes backed by an ethos of pastoral care.

### Project profiles

#### Community Skills Development

Two of the projects featured in this report have been part-funded by ESF available under Priority 1 – Community Economic Development, through Measure 1.3 Community Skills Development.

The aim of Priority 1 is “to draw people out of social and economic exclusion by enabling them to participate fully in economic opportunity”, and has the following objectives:

- To build stronger communities
- To assist local people to gain new skills
- To assist local people to get new and better jobs
- To assist local people to start up their own businesses

Measure 1.3 – Community Skills development – has two strands: it seeks to “address barriers to equality of opportunity in learning and employment within targeted communities that inhibit full access to employment and learning markets, thereby enhancing the economic competitiveness of excluded groups. It will also support training for community organisations and residents designed to build collective and individual capacity to address regeneration needs” (SPD revised July 2004).

## ORGANISATION

### Asian Action Group (AAG)

#### ESF PROJECT

### The Goals Programme

The **Asian Action Group** developed as a direct result of the threat of racially motivated attacks on Asians. The objective of the organisation is to provide support, advice, guidance and awareness raising activities on dealing with racism. Over the years, AAG has maintained this commitment and has expanded its remit to encompass anti-racism and anti-oppression activities.

The organisation is very well supported by an active management committee and employs 5 full-time staff and 2 sessional staff who are further supported by 3 volunteers.

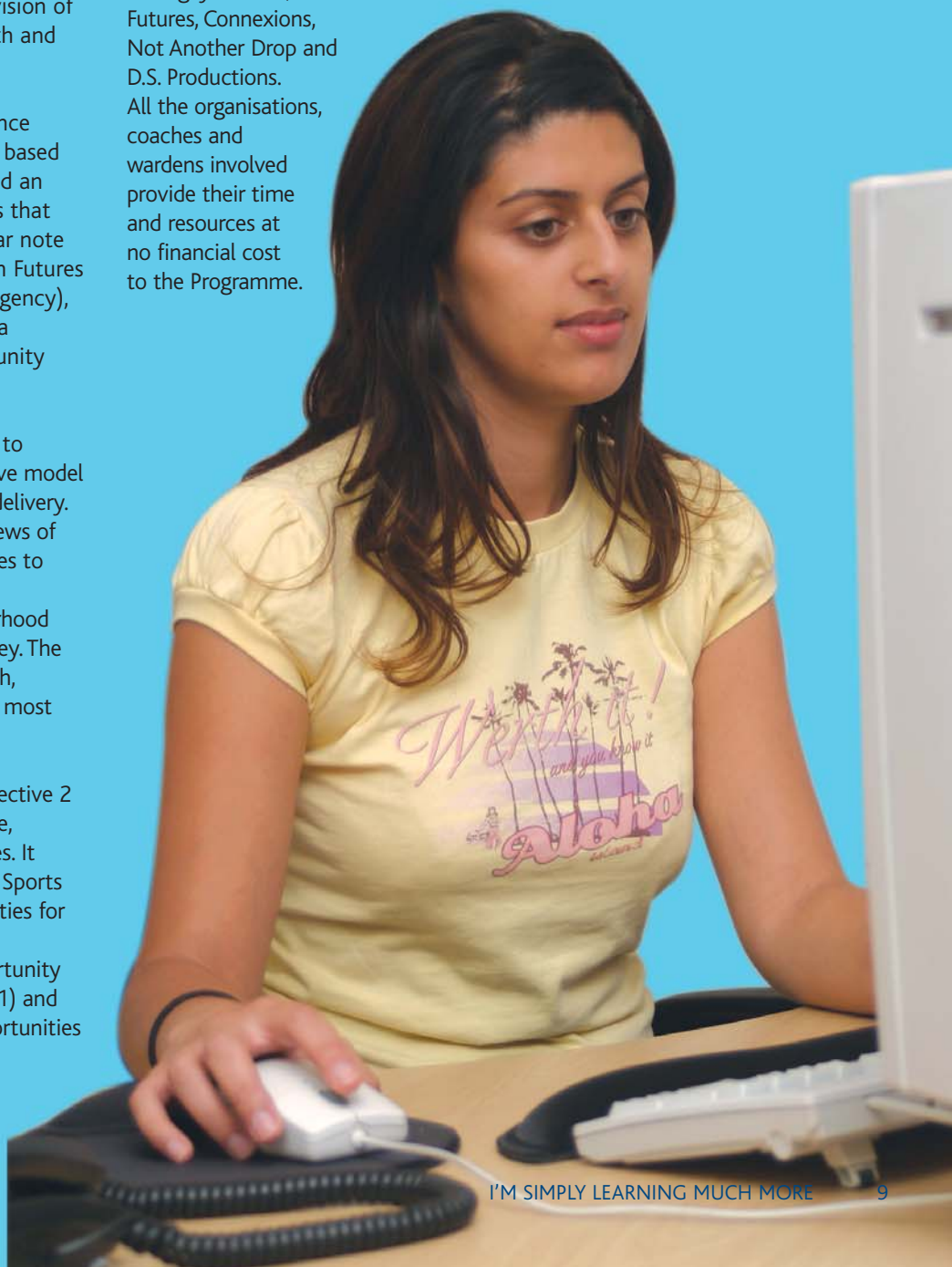
Organisational activities include provision of an advice and guidance service, health and sports based projects as a tool of engagement, sports leadership skills development, team building, confidence building, after school clubs and issue based youth work. The organisation reported an excellent range of active partnerships that support its development. Of particular note are Haringey Training Network, Urban Futures (the Upper Lee Valley Regeneration agency), the Objective 2 Upper Lee Valley Area Partnership and the Haringey Community Empowerment Network.

The Asian Action Group is committed to community-based research as an active model in defining project development and delivery. The organisation actively seeks the views of participants and adapts its programmes to meet changing needs. Recruitment to provision is carried out at a neighbourhood level, mainly focusing on West Haringey. The main tools of recruitment are outreach, advertising, use of local networks and most importantly word of mouth.

The Goals Programme, funded by Objective 2 ESF, provides practical work experience, training and qualification opportunities. It includes training towards Community Sports Leadership Awards, through opportunities for volunteering as Sports leaders in local community groups. The training opportunity leads to Qualifications in Football (FA1) and Basketball (BA1), First Aid, Equal Opportunities and Child Protection.

A number of the beneficiaries involved in the Programme are neighbourhood wardens; others access the GOALS Programme through the mainstream work of the AAG. The Programme developed as a result of the need to organise free half term activities for young people from local neighbourhoods. The AAG and Wood Green Town Management Team took on the role of assisting and supporting project workers in doing this. Half term provision targets young people 11-19 years, and two basketball-coaching sessions are run each day.

A variety of workshops are also provided including drug awareness, sexual health and community safety. Additionally, beneficiaries who have been on previous Goals Programme activities participate as coaches over the half-term period. Partner organisations include Haringey Council, Positive Futures, Connexions, Not Another Drop and D.S. Productions. All the organisations, coaches and wardens involved provide their time and resources at no financial cost to the Programme.



## ORGANISATION

### Collage Arts

## ESF PROJECT

### Community Arts Programme

**Collage Arts**, which has been in existence for over 18 years, is a community-led social action body, which uses the arts as a tool in the regeneration of communities. It started as a small arts-based organisation focused on the borough of Haringey, and has now grown and developed to a stage where it is providing arts based services on a London wide basis. The organisation now employs 12 staff and works with a wide range of partners focusing on the creative industries, providing training and support for those who have difficulty accessing this particular type of career path.

The organisation is currently focused on developing a cultural quarter in Haringey and, with the help of funding from the European Regional Development Fund, has been able to refurbish a derelict building (the Chocolate Factory), which is now being used to provide subsidised accommodation for a Creative Artists Hub. The Hub provides a variety of services ranging from space to business support networks, recording facilities and online services, and includes the thriving La Kera restaurant.



### The Community Arts Programme

The Community Arts Programme has used Objective 2 ESF to focus on provision of multi-media training to young people, using video and digital arts as a tool of engagement. Collage Arts is working with the London Development Agency through the LDA<sup>2</sup> funding programme to sustain the project into the future. The organisation reported strong partnership links with Haringey Training Network, Urban Futures, College of North East London, the Connexions Service, London Arts Board, and a host of other partners.

### Developing a Competitive Workforce

*One project participating in this survey was funded under Priority 2, Measure 2.7 – Developing a Competitive Workforce – which seeks to provide quality human resource development and training that supports SME growth, competitiveness, entrepreneurship and innovation. Projects are required to work in business sectors deemed priorities by the London Development Agency, and to provide skills development at the higher level, including management.*

*In the recording studio at The Hub*





Students at the Technology Centre in Edmonton

ORGANISATION

**Development & Training Agencies Ltd**

ESF PROJECT

**E-Learning Neighbourhood**

**The Technology Centre**

Based in Edmonton, the Technology Centre (Development & Training Agencies Ltd) has, since 1986, been delivering mainstream learning and employment programmes, European Social Fund projects targeted at disadvantaged Inner City residents and employees; capacity development of the community and voluntary sector; and provision of advice and business support to micro-businesses in key priority sectors.

**E-Learning Neighbourhood**

E-Learning Neighbourhood is about developing and consolidating operational ICT technical skills in Systems Support, PC Networking, Internet Connectivity & e-Commerce. The project widened the participation of 50 local employers and social enterprises in 'on-line' learning and e-Commerce through outreach technology audit, setting up of 'on-line' learning systems, development of free websites & broadband connectivity.

200 learners of which 50% were female, and 80% from BME communities, received 'on-line' ICT learning opportunities and assistance with job search leading to 150 positive outcomes (including 84 in employment and 60 with ICT qualifications).

**Ensuring Local Benefit**

*Three projects were funded under Priority 3, through Measure 3.4 – Ensuring Local Benefit. The aim of this Measure is to support initiatives that ensure that residents of the Objective 2 area directly benefit from the job opportunities created within new capital developments funded under ERDF Measures 3.1 and 3.2, and other local projects.*

*Activities can include not only vocational skills training but job brokerage, work experience and support into employment to ensure job retention.*

ORGANISATION

**Enfield Arts Partnership**

ESF PROJECT

**Arts Development & Training**

The Enfield Arts Partnership, a Company Limited by Guarantee, offers business advice and support, and continuing professional development and training to individuals and groups, from their base at the Enfield ArtsZone. The ArtsZone, located at Edmonton Green, was developed by the Enfield Arts Partnership as a new arts facility through support from the European Regional Development Fund and the London Development Agency.

**Enfield Arts Partnership** is a member of the Creative Industries Support consortium – a dynamic partnership which seeks to support, strengthen and develop the creative industries in north and north-east London – the other members being Haringey-based Collage Arts and Free Form Arts in Hackney. Each Consortium member offers a range of specialist services for local people who are working, or want to work, in the creative industries.

**Arts Development & Teaching**

Arts Development & Teaching was a pilot project offered at NVQ Level 3 and aimed to create flexible provision for artists in developing the skills of others. It sought to develop a practical approach appropriate to working practitioners and provide a qualitative and flexible avenue for best teaching.

The training is seen as essential in producing a consistent level of quality teaching practice for artists and Enfield Arts Partnership are continuing to build on their pilot project through work on developing a BTEC version of the NVQ in Arts Development & Teaching with a greater focus on the artist and, in response to participants on the pilot project, less emphasis on paperwork.





The NEWTEC team

ORGANISATION  
**Newham Women's Education and Training Centre (NEWTEC)**

ESF PROJECT  
**Closing the Childcare Gap**

**NEWTEC** is a voluntary organisation based in the London Borough of Newham. The Centre has developed over more than 20 years and, with the recent opening of the ERDF-funded East London Childcare Institute, is now based on two sites. NEWTEC identified the gap in training for child-care when Newham was experiencing low numbers of women returning to work due to a lack of quality child-care provision. NEWTEC works in close partnership with Newham Early Years Unit, Newham Childminding Association and local Sure Start programmes in identifying and meeting childcare needs.

**Closing the Childcare Gap**

The Closing the Childcare Gap project offers a total package of support to participants, from essential basic skills to business set-up support following completion of training. A diverse staff team means they are able to offer support in four major community languages. Building on their 85% success rate NEWTEC has been able to source further income from five different funders over a 3-year period. In addition, the success and innovation of the provision has attracted the interest of a number of external agencies, who are keen to commission NEWTEC to deliver programmes of support outside Newham. NEWTEC provision is also featured in statutory provider prospectuses.

ORGANISATION  
**Ozone Friends**

ESF PROJECT  
**Ozone Friends Training**

**Ozone Friends** is a not-for-profit small business, with charitable status, which has utilised ESF to provide training in the repair and recycling of white goods. Objective 2 ESF Funding has enabled Ozone Friends to grow from a staff team of 4 to a current complement of 22, and provides full-time employment for 7 trainees through use of a wage subsidy scheme supported by ESF. Vocational training is offered at NVQ Level 3 and the organisation reports a 75% success rate. By the time the ESF project is completed the organisation anticipates it will have become a financially independent business.



Ozone Friends

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

# “...feeling much more confident about future prospects”

In this section, the findings are presented using an overview of participants' views, complemented by an overview from Project Managers. The aim is to construct an accumulative view of the barriers faced by beneficiaries and examine the range of strategies that have been utilised to overcome them.

### What beneficiaries said

- “I have learnt a great deal, a wonderful learning atmosphere has been created, it has been very inspiring”
- “I am simply learning much more than I anticipated”
- “I am very excited about the impact that this kind of training will have in schools, making young children's lives more fruitful and enjoyable”

- “A free course has aided my skills and education. If it was not free I could not have afforded to take part”
- “Within a few weeks of learning I improved a lot”
- “...feeling much more confident about future prospects ”
- “Because it's free, flexible and locally based”

### Participants Survey Overview

- The majority of beneficiaries reported satisfaction with the training they had received
- There is a particularly high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and support staff – “*Very good leadership qualities shown by very knowledgeable tutors*” and “*The tutor is resourceful and very articulate*”
- A major impact of these projects has been to boost the motivation and self confidence of beneficiaries – “*I am continuing on the course and feeling much more confident about the future*”
- The training opened new doors of opportunity, both in terms of future employment and personal growth and development – “*opened doors to other things possible*”
- There was a marked increase in beneficiary ability to demonstrate both existing and new skills
- Beneficiaries reported a marked change to their perceptions on life, and a resultant increase in expectations – “*it has helped me find out things about myself and made me more confident*”



# “I feel I’m treated more equally here”

- Improved life circumstances and life balance e.g. learners undertaking childminding training are now more confident that they are providing high quality care for their own children, as well as being able to earn a reasonable income as registered childminders “confidence about looking after children other than your own”
- New skills, especially in relation to childcare, have helped to overcome some cultural issues surrounding the role of Asian women attaining employment outside the home
- In general, organisations have met people’s needs both personally and professionally – free provision: no course fees, with support for travel and subsistence making all the difference – “Free course, travel and childcare made it all possible, without this I would not have attended as I have too many financial commitments”
- The provision of crèche facilities is imperative in reaching lone parents, and families on low income

Other aspects that participants found particularly helpful include

- the flexibility in the way courses were delivered – “more friendly environment and flexible hours”
- the ability to work at their own pace – “not obliged to attend every day”
- the particularly supportive environment provided – “The atmosphere is more relaxed and I feel comfortable and able to cope”
- the interactive nature of the courses “the tutor was very interactive”
- the ethos of the organisations providing the training - “I feel I’m treated more equally here”

- the opportunity to access local provision – “close to home”

## What Project Managers said

- ESF “is key to our being able to support learners with childcare and travel costs as well as course delivery”
- “even with good systems in place the bureaucracy is hard to overcome”
- “Partnership works well – brilliant” (in attracting funding to the organisation)

## Project Managers’ Overview

Project managers shared a strong belief that the community and voluntary sectors are best placed to encourage participation from, and work with, excluded groups. Additionally, they contend that the support provided through LVSTC, in terms of active and relevant technical assistance and support for capacity building, is the best form of intervention to support the development of community regeneration policy and practice and, ultimately, the sustainability of local communities.

Interviews revealed the real value of Objective 2 ESF in terms of providing a much-needed service to excluded groups. A substantial number of new learning opportunities have been facilitated alongside a range of resources and the development of new and innovative ways of working. The project managers interviewed shared a commitment to engaging directly with excluded communities and to a focus on continuously improving working methods to best serve these needs. These include innovative curriculae, methods of engagement, outreach provision, crèche provision, language diversity and enhanced cultural understanding.

# EVALUATION OF PROVISION

## “local people are given expert advice and support”

### Integrated learning, Support and Progression

The package of provision delivered through Objective 2 ESF is, in the main, intended to create a primary route into learning for disadvantaged learners, some of whom are considered hard to reach. Many of the courses delivered through the projects identified in the Programme have progression routes to further learning through a provider network, or links to further education establishments.

Additionally, a number of the projects interviewed have also built progression into their own work programmes; for instance, the Asian Action Group deliver a variety of Sports Leadership Skills at NVQ level 1, and have identified funding through other sources to deliver an Enhancing Sports Qualification at NVQ level 2.

*Collage Arts* provide strong pastoral care, and have built a programme of business support focused on skills needed in the Creative

*Ken Livingstone visits Collage Arts*



Industries, whereby local people are given expert advice and support on gaining employment in the creative industries sector.

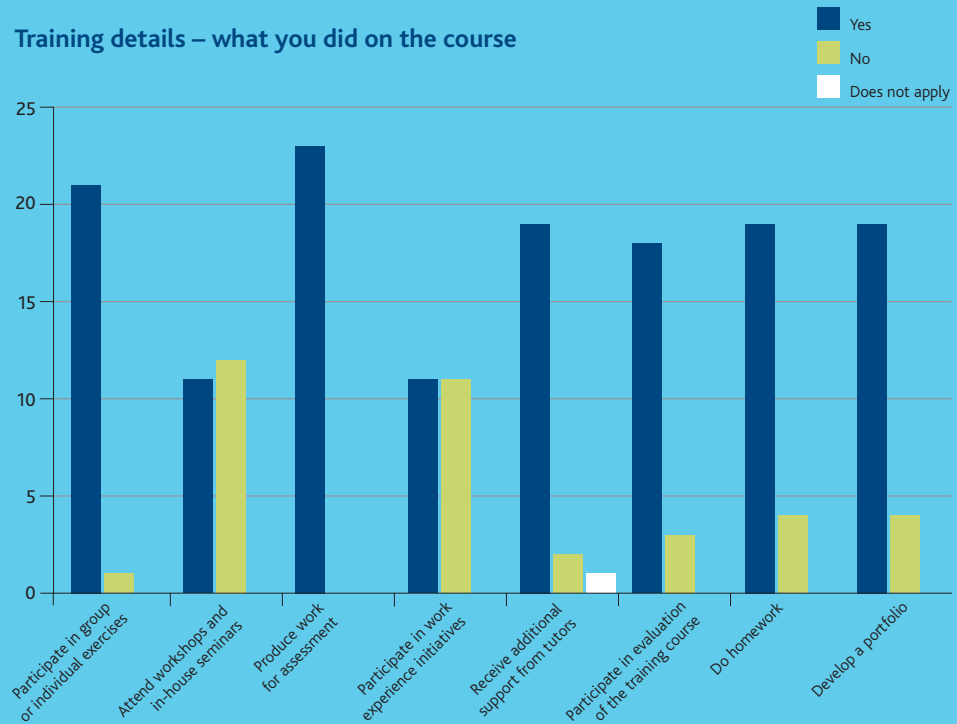
*NEWTEC* have pioneered the development of a local childminding project on an outreach basis, offering a total package of business skills and help with the set up costs of working as a registered childminder. *NEWTEC* also offer progression to NVQ level 3 in Childcare, in partnership with Newham Early Years Unit.

In delivering learning opportunities to beneficiaries the projects aim to recognise the initial needs of, and the journey travelled by, learners. Initial needs and future aspirations are in the main detailed in each learner's Individual Learning Plan. Learners are advised on next steps in terms of progression from the outset: for instance, learners who are initially interested by the offer of pre-childminding qualifications are also informed of the range of progression routes offered through partnerships or direct provision through the provider.

As such, these projects form the first link in a chain of progression towards other learning: in particular, Sports, Basic Skills and ESOL, Child-care at NVQ Level 2/3 and Learndirect. These projects provide an excellent local service by enhancing existing provision through the development of a comprehensive matrix of learning opportunities for local people. Clearly, the target groups are amongst the furthest from, and in some cases most resistant to, formalised learning.

The projects interviewed displayed excellent recognition of the needs of these groups, being themselves based in and closely involving local communities. A key element in the success of this type of provision is to draw in the target groups through informal, light touch provision.

## Training details – what you did on the course



Some projects place particular emphasis on the identification of basic skills needs and progression to appropriate basic skills learning suited to need and preferred learning styles.

In addition, NEWTEC provides peer-mentoring support to community-based learners before and during new learning, and at the point of progression. Mentors can also be people who themselves have successfully undertaken new learning at NEWTEC.

## Support for neighbourhood based learning

The projects interviewed during the survey have in the main been very successful in attracting a range of funding to develop a neighbourhood learning approach. The network of projects are all based in active community locations and led by key community partners. Each project interviewed has a Business Plan which identifies funding opportunities accessible centrally or locally, for example, Local Authority/ Adult Education Funding, Sure Start, Charitable Trusts, Single Regeneration Budget, Government Office for London, European Social Fund, Active Communities Development Fund and Neighbourhood Renewal Funds.

These community organisations have well developed business planning processes and are experienced in the delivery of similar projects. Haringey and Newham Training Networks have been particularly supportive, at the second tier level, in developing a strong community base for this approach to capacity building and neighbourhood learning. Many of the projects have reported receiving excellent assistance with funding applications, sharing information and building partnerships through the Networks.

Additionally, the Asian Action Group has the support of influential management committee members, who sit on a variety of key local, regional and national partnership boards. They are able to advise the organisation on a variety of national drivers and forthcoming funding opportunities.

Project Managers reported that Objective 2 ESF funding is ideal for the development of a neighbourhood approach to learning as provision is geographically targeted and providers recruit through a variety of means, including flyers, press and most importantly word of mouth. Additionally, the use of new technology as a tool in engaging those who are reluctant to enter more formal educational establishments was identified as a key success in terms of reaching the more socially excluded.

# KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM EVALUATION

“I am continuing on the course and feeling much more confident about the future”

## Participants Perspective

From the participants' perspective ESF-supported activities are getting it right: providing what beneficiaries need in a relevant, helpful and effective way.

- ESF supported training can bring about marked changes to beneficiary perceptions on life, with a resultant increase in expectations
- the successful acquisition of new and relevant skills

## Project Delivery

Themes reflected by a high proportion of beneficiaries as being key ingredients to an effective ESF project included:

- the quality of teaching and support staff and interactive nature of activities
- free provision, with support for travel, childcare and subsistence costs, makes all the difference
- flexibility in course delivery
- the ethos of the delivery organisation
- a locally based and supportive environment

## Outcomes

Key themes were identified as:

- Increased motivation and self confidence are essential outcomes for beneficiaries
- ESF training can and does open new doors of opportunity, both in terms of future employment and personal growth and development

## Project Management perspective

Project Managers' focus was more clearly on the management of ESF: how they access and manage the Fund; and how they can keep abreast of policy developments, develop sustainable funding strategies, maximise opportunities for sharing information, and build on existing good practice to improve and maintain quality project delivery.

In terms of the Objective 2 ESF Programme overall, project managers recognised its considerable strengths in relation to what they as community based organisations are trying to achieve within disadvantaged communities, and demonstrated a strong commitment to local empowerment and inclusiveness in line with the Objective 2 ESF funding ethos.

The following were identified as strengths in current practice actively promoted by the Objective 2 ESF Programme:

## Strengths of Current Practice

- High proportion of black and minority ethnic groups both delivering and participating in training
- Support for the long term unemployed
- Close interaction with learners
- Locally based provision
- Recruitment through neighbourhoods
- Provision aimed at those on a low income
- Embracing cultural needs through childcare training
- Vocational learning improving opportunities for learners
- Provision of translation services
- Encouraging men to take up childcare training

## Accessing and managing ESF

Although all the organisations interviewed had successfully accessed ESF, there was a commonly held belief that EU Structural Funds are far too bureaucratic and caused unnecessary stress in managers as to whether they were managing it correctly.

- Europe seems 'far away and too top down'
- There is an overwhelming need to simplify processes and reduce bureaucracy
- Community values are right but the fear of getting it wrong is so strong e.g. audit trails

- Audit trails are difficult to follow
- The requirement to write bids in a style which merges academic rationale and practical reasoning is confusing
- The use of less daunting language should be encouraged

There is a key and on-going role for LVSTC in unpacking ESF jargon and bureaucracy and assisting both applicants in applying for ESF, and project managers in setting up systems that are appropriate and helpful in establishing the required audit trails.

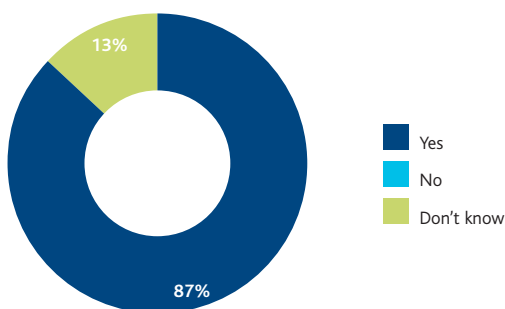
## Coordination and Information Sharing

A key theme to emerge from the focus discussion and interviews with project managers was a desire to ensure improved co-ordination and sharing of information amongst funding agencies, learning providers and community based organisations. This encompassed:

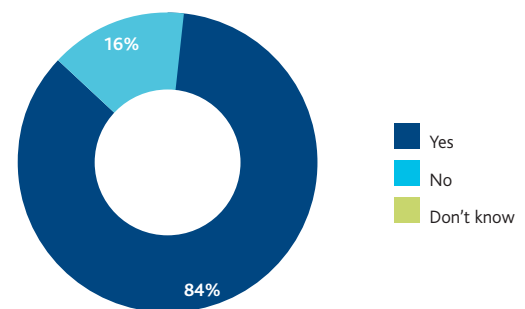
Improved knowledge of funding opportunities

- Linking funding to need
- Making strategic linkages to the 'bigger picture'
- Sharing of information, expertise, training & technical support amongst providers
- Ensuring a uniform and quality learning experience, and providing seamless progression routes and referrals

### Did the training meet your needs?



### Was the pace of the course appropriate for you?



“A free course has aided my skills and education. If it was not free I could not have afforded to take part”

A key priority to arise from discussion with Project Managers is the need for ongoing commitment nationally, regionally and locally to support community providers with technical assistance and provision of training to ensure they can meet the quality standards set by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, and have effective financial management and output tracking systems in place to manage dedicated training Funds.

There is a further role for LVSTC in co-ordinating a regular forum – and related e-mail communications – for project managers and partners to ensure that they get have access to the required level of information on, and support for, the range of issues that impact on quality and on-going project delivery.

There is a need to supplement this with a more formalised platform for information sharing. This would enable Partners to 'catch up' if they miss partnership meetings, and provide an opportunity for a cumulative information base to be developed, perhaps through the LVSTC web-site and those of related training networks.

Such actions might also provide the basis for discussions and sharing of information between partners who have specific and shared interests. Individual partners want their autonomy respected but are also keen to work together within a structure which is mutually beneficial and constructive. In terms of achieving this, on-going funding was raised as a key issue.

### **Sustainable Funding**

Objective 2 ESF provides time-limited, effectively targeted and highly valuable revenue funding. However, partners need more certainty than is currently provided by the cocktail of funds on offer on a short term basis, and it is important that decisions relating to the future of the EU Structural Funds in London are taken earlier enough to ensure that projects have on-going access to funding to continue to build on the type of provision developed within the current London Objective 2 Programme.

Whilst lobbying is on-going to try and secure revenue streams at a national level, and the LSC will continue, at least initially, to be a key source of funding for the more generic training focused on disadvantaged individuals, there is a need for a regional focus which continues to support the type of provision currently funded by Objective 2 ESF, complementing the LDA Economic Development Strategy and the Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Curve Agenda.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EU-FUNDED PROGRAMMES

# “Improve the presentation of information and simplify the use of language”

- Ensure a place for neighbourhood learning and community skills development
  - Retain the added value brought to training by ESF in terms of beneficiary support costs
  - Ensure that training is needs led and allows a focus on the acquisition of soft skills
  - Improve the presentation of information and simplify the use of language
  - Develop systems, through on-going delivery of targeted Technical Assistance and local training networks which provide reassurance to partners on ESF audit trails, including the provision of mock audits
  - Continue to build the capacity of local training networks, to enable provision and dissemination of information prior to funding rounds
  - In parallel, progress strategic links with other key partners in each area for networking, progression of learners and sustainability
  - Through training networks, provide greater assistance to partners in identifying match funding opportunities
  - Ensure that all learning meets the requirements of the Adult Learning Inspectorate:
  - Build stronger partnership links with Further Education and other statutory providers for progression, and for the provision of information, advice and guidance
  - With assistance from local training networks, partners should identify specific policy agendas to which organisational vision and strategy have the closest alignment, in order to develop innovative ways forward, providing exemplars for, and new ways of delivering, mainstream learning
- These recommendations have a strategic fit with key messages emerging from the FRESA Conference “Positive Skills for Inclusion” which were as follows:
- The main funding agencies, all of which are identified as being members of the London Skills Commission, should take steps to bring coherence and continuity to funding policy for London
  - A London Wide Network with both a virtual (i.e. web-based) staffed presence would be welcomed. The Network’s role, remit and operations should be transparent
  - It is important that the significance of local, informal networks, which are closer to learner needs, is fully recognised
  - Issues such as the acknowledgement of soft skills and recognition of community strengths and skills need to be specifically addressed if the principle of empowerment is to work.

# SUMMARY

This evaluation has confirmed a positive perception amongst practitioners of the general usefulness of Objective 2 ESF, and the specific support of LVSTC, in empowering local communities and community/voluntary organisations. The funding has been effectively targeted at the most disadvantaged and provided quality learning experiences which have led to enhanced life opportunities, increased confidence and new employment. Additionally, the funding has been instrumental in harnessing a 'learning culture' and a thirst for new knowledge and skills at a very local level.

Whilst recognising that ESF funding processes involve many bureaucratic processes, which are off putting and daunting to community providers, the funding has also been instrumental in building capacity. The direct Technical Assistance offered by LVSTC has helped to demystify some of the jargon and enabled communities to engage in real funded activities.

ESF funding has also enabled projects to build strategic linkages with regeneration activities within their sub-region and to develop robust project proposals which can withstand a level of scrutiny in terms of both implementation and delivery. Additionally, the organisations in this Survey report that success in delivering ESF funded projects has given them a new sense of confidence to source funding from new areas and to facilitate approaches to other major funders such as the London Development Agency and the Learning and Skills Council.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LVSTC would like to thank the following for their contributions to this publication:

- Bridge House Estates Trust Fund for their support for the ESF element of LVSTC's work with the community and voluntary sector engaging with the London Objective 2 Programme
  - The Government Office for London and the European Social Fund for the support provided to LVSTC through Objective 2 Technical Assistance
  - The 23 beneficiaries who willingly gave their time to completing the questionnaire through an interview with the LVSTC Objective 2 ESF Adviser
  - The 6 project managers who attended the Focus Discussion Group and/or responded to the telephone follow-up:
- Wayne Deane, Objective 2 ESF Adviser at LVSTC, who co-ordinated the research, devised the questionnaire and carried out most of the 1:1 interviews with beneficiaries
  - Ellen Ryan, Ellen Ryan Consultancy Services Ltd, who assisted with development of the questionnaire, facilitated discussions with project managers, and produced the final full evaluation report
  - Martin Ward for supplying the photographs
  - Barbara Deason, for providing an Objective 2 perspective to this report and drafting this "popular" version

LVSTC  
July 2005

A more detailed version of this Report, with appendices, is available in pdf format on the LVSTC website at [www.lvstc.org.uk](http://www.lvstc.org.uk)





The Print House  
18 Ashwin Street London E8 3DL  
Telephone 020 7249 4441  
Fax 020 7923 4280  
Email [info@lvstc.org.uk](mailto:info@lvstc.org.uk)  
Website [www.lvstc.org.uk](http://www.lvstc.org.uk)



Supported by  
BRIDGE HOUSE ESTATES  
TRUST FUND

