

E-learn4Life at Doncaster MBC

www.doncasternorthclc.net/page--E-learn4Life.html

E- Learn4life facilitates local agencies working with people at risk of social and educational exclusion to provide home e-learning for young people and their family.

Tags:

ACL, 14-19, Family Learning, Re-engagement/inclusion, Home Access, Multi-agency

Harnessing technology system outcomes:

Improved personalised learning experiences

Engaged and empowered learners

Sectors:

Secondary (KS3), 14-19, PCDL

Innovation

E-learn4Life exemplifies multi-agency working to support and deliver basic skills through e-learning to whole family units identified as disadvantaged in terms of accessing more traditional forms of education. The approach appreciates the complexity of the relationship between educational and social factors and utilises the specialist expertise of diverse social agencies. The agencies identify appropriate participants for the project and provide ongoing support during the programme.

Background

E-learn4Life ran in 2007-08 in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, and was devised and managed by Ian Archer, a special needs co-ordinator and head of a learning support unit, with assistance from Anjam Aslam, Doncaster MBC Funding Director. The project supplied targeted families with a laptop, educational software, individual learning plans and regular support.

To ensure that the project benefited those it intended to reach, Mr Archer contacted all the local agencies in his area who worked directly with groups of people facing social or educational disadvantage. A diverse range of these agencies participated in the project such as the ethnic minority and traveller achievement services, young parents support services and the hospital education service.



The agencies identified families who were most likely to engage and profit from E-learn4Life. The family and agency then put in a joint application for E-learn4Life. Once accepted the agency provided the tutoring and support for the learners. Individual learning plans were collaboratively agreed by each learner with the agency, supported by E-learn4Life. Learning was closely monitored and when the agreed educational targets were reached the family kept the laptop.

Technology

All laptops were installed with a range of learning applications, covering basic literacy and numeracy, life skills, keyboard skills, word-processing and spreadsheet use. Much of the software was free, with £8,000 spent on the literacy and numeracy licences. Learners also had the option of a separate keyboard and mouse for ease of use.

Each learner could negotiate with their agency worker which of these applications was most appropriate them. Learners kept a logbook of their activities on a memory stick, and were regularly visited by the agency workers, who in turn were supported by Mr Archer.



Teaching and learning

To comply with funding regulations a young person was designated as the named learner in each family. However the educational needs of the whole

family were taken into account and every family member was encouraged to have an individual learning plan. Typically the learners were expected to study for six hours a week for 12 weeks.



Mr Archer sought advice on selecting appropriate software. In particular he tried to ensure that the learners' level of English would not be a barrier to their participation in the project. The courses were not accredited, although some learners were funded to take the European Computer Driving Licence through Doncaster North City Learning Centre (CLC) after their targets had been met. Mr Archer and the agencies involved were aware that the benefits from the e-learning programme far exceeded gaining academic skills. The programme fostered self-esteem, confidence and motivation, which are recognised as key factors in helping tackle educational disengagement.

"This isn't about giving a family a laptop; it's about saying you've got worth. It's about dignity and saying you're worth investing in."

Ian Archer, Project Co-ordinator

Impact

Over the 10 months of the programme, E-learn4Life distributed 102 laptops, representing approximately 300 learners in total. Only one family did not reach their agreed targets, illustrating how well the families were targeted. One family logged over 70 hours of work in one week.

Learners and agencies gave extensive positive feedback, many focusing on the wider confidence issues. One agency reported:

"This initiative has enabled the participants to make tentative steps towards independent learning and the effect it has had on their self-esteem has been substantial".

Agency report

All the participant feedback commented on the educational value of the project in increasing academic skills.



For some learners the project's access to a computer greatly assisted their physical needs.

"I like the laptop because it is easier to write than writing with my hands because it hurts my hand and takes up so much of my energy so I can't be bothered and I can get really frustrated."

11-year-old learner with additional medical needs

Challenges

It was found that referrals through schools tended not to be as appropriate as referrals through agencies, possibly because schools may not be as familiar with the needs of the whole family and may be unable to supervise as closely as other agencies can.

Due to staffing, E-learn4Life was unable to provide a point of contact throughout all working hours. As such, agencies sometimes had to wait for messages to be delivered and dealt with. Mr Archer feels that having the capacity for someone to deal with queries more immediately would have benefited the project.

Sourcing the laptops and software was particularly time consuming. Mel Bryden, the manager of Doncaster North CLC and his staff gave invaluable support in loading the applications and PAT testing the laptops before distribution. The CLC also helped to provide ongoing technical support and storage space.

