

# **An Evaluation of the Life Change UK Training Programme**

## **‘Training & Working with Marginalised Groups’**

### **Introduction**

Members are aware of the Government’s increasing emphasis upon the engagement, training and employment of socially excluded groups. Equally, it has long been understood that those working with this client group face very specific challenges in attempting to address the diverse learning and skills needs. In order to achieve success and ensure that the clients do not disengage from their learning, a different style of delivery and support is required.

Currently the prison population possesses some of the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy skills in the country. These educational deficiencies are closely linked to major social and economic problems all of which have contributed to and resulted in high levels of re-offending and incarceration. The successful engagement of this group is increasingly important if we are to meet our Train to Gain targets.

To assist with these requirements, Life Change UK has developed a range of closely related training courses that deal with challenging behaviour and the increasing motivation of marginalised groups, including offenders and other long-term unemployed individuals. This core programme is designed as a “Train the Trainer” course for those staffs working with the highest levels of Basic and Life Skills deficiencies. It is based on the experience of the Life Change UK Directors and their highly regarded residential work in rehabilitating persistent young adult male offenders at C-FAR.

Staff members who lack the necessary training to recognise and deal with the wide range of issues presented by de-motivated and disengaged people run the risk of doing more harm than good. Their own lack of confidence and understanding results in low levels of success and increasing personal stress - the programme aims to rectify this.

Recognising that orthodox methods of tackling the issues have had very little success, the Life Change UK programme utilises a cutting edge approach and provides staff with increased understanding and a range of new skills and tools that greatly improved client / trainee / student motivation and behaviour. Importantly, it also provides staff with improved levels of personal self-esteem and confidence.

**Foundation and Induction Courses – See [www.lifechangeuk.com](http://www.lifechangeuk.com)**

As part of the new QCA revision process, with effect from this month, elements of the programme are available as on-line level 2 Foundation and Induction courses; these will subsequently be developed to levels 3 and 4.

## Background to Training & Evaluation

In order to meet the recognised needs amongst training providers and to further evaluate the strengths and benefits of the training, the LSC agreed to provide funding for one full course. This course ran over a 5 week period between 31 October and 28 November. The training was delivered at the Ockment Community Centre in Okehampton on the Wednesday of each week.

Owing to the strong participative nature of the programme the maximum number of participants was 10. Places were offered to those who were identified as likely to benefit most in their work with front line delivery. In providing training to a broad range of staffs in both the work-based and voluntary and community sectors, it was intended to trial the training across a wide cross section of provision. Those delivering programmes such as Skills for Life, Train to Gain, the Princes Trust, E2E, Prison Work and Skills for Jobs, were given priority; the programme was over subscribed.

Because the selected participants were already engaged in front line work they could reasonably be seen as being the most qualified and experienced workers operating amongst the training provider network. Consequently they had the potential to challenge the programme more than those who had not had any experience with this cohort.

It was decided to evaluate the programme as follows: -

- In terms of its delivery; this was carried out immediately after the training ended
- In terms of the use participants subsequently made of the training and information in their work
- In terms of its potential for future engagement of disengaged groups. In order to do this, follow up evaluation meetings were held and a group evaluation event was held three months later.

**Delivery** - For comparison and benchmarking purposes the following headings were used. The figures in brackets relate to analysis of the scores awarded for all the training which Life Change UK has delivered during the last 9 months. It should be noted that all other training delivered to date has consisted of two-day bespoke courses and is therefore not comparing like with like; however, it does provide a sense of consistency in the scores.

The headline results for the overall training package were as follows: -

Overall evaluation of training	-	8.75	(8.65)
How comfortable with exercises?	-	8.5	(8.4)
Usefulness of handouts	-	9.1	(9.2)

The ratings for the trainers were as follows: -

Knowledge and expertise	-	9.0	(9.3)
Clarity	-	9.0	(9.1)
Appropriateness	-	8.6	(9.1)
Course management	-	8.6	(9.2)
Responsiveness	-	8.6	(9.2)
Presentation	-	8.6	(8.7)

**Summary** - The response to the training was particularly positive and all those who participated indicated how they had benefited from the practical and challenging nature of the delivery. It was always understood that the course would be intensive and demanding. This is reflected in some of the comments – particularly in relation to the time available and the depth of understanding required in some subjects. However, Life Change UK believe that it is the challenging nature of the content – particularly in inviting participants to explore their personal core beliefs, perceptions and thinking – which brings about positive and long-lasting benefits and change.

It was interesting to note individual comments suggesting the potential for much wider delivery and undertaking of the training, including the importance of future participation by those with management responsibilities.

Life Change UK has learned from the experience of delivering the full five-day programme and identified areas for refinement. These include adjustments to the course content and method of delivery. The latter envisages increasing use of practical and participative exercises from which participants claim to derive considerable benefit.

Although many participants had considerable previous experience of working with marginalised groups and challenging behaviour, the evaluations indicate that the training was very well received, enjoyed and deemed of real benefit by all. Life Change UK believes that these outcomes demonstrate that the training has helped to provide the essential foundations that staff members seek. Indeed, towards the end of the training, some participants stated how they are already reaping the benefits of using new found skills, enabling them to work more effectively, both individually and as part of a team, reducing personal stress and anxiety and increasing positive outcomes.

**Impact of the Training** - The participants have all returned to their companies and are now utilising their new skills, though one has been off work to care for his terminally ill wife. The enthusiasm shown by the participants at the end of the delivery phase did not appear to have been

dampened. It was apparent that the high had carried over into their everyday work –

“This was more valuable than any other training I had previously done. I got so much out of it. I have changed the way I work and it has helped me to see the training needs of others in my team”

All the participants commented upon the impact the training had had on their personal confidence and felt that this had been carried over in the way they related to and dealt with their managers, their colleagues and their clients / trainees. Several felt that this was a key outcome since it was a unanimous opinion that there was a lack of importance attributed to the work they were involved in with this client group.

One stated: -

“This group don’t fit into the conventional mainstream delivery requirements, they aren’t nice and tidy, and when we attempt to meet their requirements it causes a lot of issues with our managers in particular around funding and the amount of administration which they generate”.

Another: -

“ Since the course, I have felt much more able to positively influence the development of policy and practice in the organisation in which I work. Assertively and professionally, I have made my voice heard!”

The desire for their managers to do part of the programme was widely endorsed.

Changes in the actual methods of delivering to the learners had already been instigated on the back of what had been learnt. Those working with groups of challenging learners had been trying to change the dynamics of the groups and channelling strong personalities. Clients / trainees were said to have been very receptive to more informality and responsibility, it wasn’t what they had expected and they had responded well. It was clear that training in dealing with poor relationships and anger management had been particularly beneficial, one group member spoke of retention having already increased and outcomes were following suit.

Several said how refreshing it was to be involved with a programme that was delivered in a ‘hands-on’ practical level by people who really understood and cared about the clients and believed in what they were doing.

“ What was also useful to me is the training was presented in a way that most people could understand and even though it has some very in depth and historic research/work having not had the benefit of a University education I feel able to transfer the knowledge gained on the course to my own work practice quite a comfortable one.”

They learnt numerous techniques to use to help them with their clients, 'the drama triangle', role play, anger management, group dynamics - forming, storming and shaping, and many more which have been taken and used in face to face delivery. All felt that there were a lot of charlatans operating in this field and the need to professionalise it was very real.

As one participant said: -

" The greatest compliment I can give is that is the kind of work that I would like to be good enough to do myself."

Another major outcome from the programme concerned the well being of the participants. Everyone talked about how it had helped them to reduce their personal levels of anxiety and stress allowing them to enjoy their work more fully. Several had taught their own teams how to operate more safely. Staff had been taught how to establish and maintain clear boundaries. One participant had been given a slot on his college's staff training day to help other staff deal with such issues. Self-care markedly increased which was already showing falls in the levels of sickness. In the long run it was expected to result in less staff burn out (very common in this sector) and the subsequent loss of key staff.

### **The Way Ahead**

It appears that the views of those who engaged in the programme were overwhelmingly positive. With that in mind, it is essential to identify where such training needs to be focused in order to maximise its impact in the years ahead. At the heart of the training is staff confidence. All good teachers and trainers understand that the learner recognises when you are on top of the situation and they respond accordingly. When a trainer is intimidated by a learner or appears nervous, this is likely to result in limited learning being achieved.

Where is the need for increasing trainer expertise and confidence most apparent?

- The social inclusion agenda is resulting in an increasing number of ex offenders, people with social problems, people with mental health issues, miscreants and deviants being channelled into the mainstream training programmes, in particular E2E and Train to Gain.
- Many of the staff working in these areas lack the specialist training necessary to work effectively and are worried both by their own inexperience and the negative stories promoted through the media. Their nervousness results in poor performance, an unwillingness or inability to fully engage with the learner and consequential failure in both recruitment and delivery. The shortcomings in both sign ups and success rates in the Skills for Life section of Train to Gain are in part attributable to such issues. A programme such as this may well enable

trainers to reach those difficult learners they had previously not been willing to try to hard to get on board.

- The moves to raise the school / training leaving age to 18 are already under way and are going to result in a marked increase in the number of learners who are having to engage in training despite not wanting to. Dealing with such a potentially large disaffected group at one time will potentially prove very challenging, particularly as it appears likely that the majority will depart school, leaving only the training dimension open to them. It is therefore important that our staffs are sufficiently equipped to deal with this cohort before they arrive, rather than after when it will already be too late.
- Growing pressures to re-integrate ex-offenders, allied to the growth in the prison population and increasing numbers of offenders being subject to probation and community service orders, have all thrown the limited providers lack of expertise into sharp relief. Even companies and colleges engaged in training in the prisons have been asking for more specialist training in this field. Similarly, providers working with those who have returned to society have made it clear that staff lack expertise, with all the consequent failures of the service that brings.
- The growth in the numbers of migrant workers operating in our sectors has resulted in increasing numbers coming on training programmes. In some sectors the numbers are significant and staffs have to work in more challenging environments where the culture of the majority of their groups is different from their own. Many of the skills learnt from the Life Change UK training are transferable and can be applied to this work.

The advent of the new Teacher Training qualifications, and the new CPD requirements to maintain an individual practitioner's licence to practice, provide an ideal opportunity for the roll out of the training delivered by this programme. With trainers / teachers being required to undertake 30 hours of CPD per year, it is important that appropriate training is available. Since the Life Change UK programme is centred around careful self-reflection and concentration on the impact of the training, it dovetails particularly well into the Institute for Learning's self-reflective log requirement.

The training programme is not cheap, but is of high quality - (£1000.00 per day for up to 12 participants. Course length varies from 2 – 5 days, depending upon user needs.)

A key issue identified in the evaluation was openly stated by those on the programme, suggesting that most providers' senior management do not value as much as they should the work being done by their staff in this sector. From this it has followed that historically there has been a lack of investment in the necessary training, resulting in a dearth of relevant programmes being developed and the continuation of the vicious cycle of poor recruitment, poor delivery and poor results.

It is suggested that funding bodies consider adopting a more pro-active position in requiring providers in this key sector to undertake such training. Pump priming delivery in certain areas would raise awareness and help to develop a skill base amongst providers, setting an example and allowing results to speak for themselves.

At the same time it is necessary for networks and others to raise the profile of such programmes and encourage providers to invest in the development of their own staff.

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