



*CLIF Impact Project*

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# Community Learning and Employability

Ian Bond

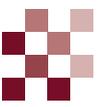
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# Acknowledgements

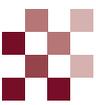
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# 1 Overview

This report presents the findings of work to identify the impact of community learning on employability, undertaken as part of the Community Learning Innovation Fund (CLIF). The evidence gathered from CLIF projects shows how even modest amounts of investment can produce significant outcomes for individuals, families and communities, and confirms that community learning can make a tangible difference to people's prospects for employment, building confidence and motivation and giving them the skills and knowledge that will help them get work. This report will be of particular interest to national and local policy makers and commissioners of public services. Community learning providers in local authorities, colleges and third-sector organisations, and managers of employability organisations and initiatives will also find the report helpful in supporting their work and in making the case for community learning's impact on employability.

With grant funding from the Skills Funding Agency, CLIF supported the delivery of 96 new community learning projects across England to run from September 2012 to August 2013. The projects aimed to empower adults, particularly those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, to improve their own lives and those of their families and communities. Through new partnerships and a wide range of creative approaches, CLIF projects engaged more than 15,000 learners, many of whom were from groups that are among the most excluded and least likely to participate in learning. Most projects have firm plans in place to continue at least some elements of the work initiated through CLIF, highlighting the way in which diverse sources of funding can create sustainable opportunities for learning in communities.

This report is one of a series of six thematic reports, produced by NIACE as part of its management of CLIF, which demonstrate the contribution of community learning to key policy areas.<sup>1</sup> NIACE is the National Institute of

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<sup>1</sup> See also the thematic reports on *Digital inclusion*, *Families*, *Health*, *Socially vulnerable groups* and *Volunteering*.

Adult Continuing Education, the national voice for lifelong learning. It is an internationally respected development organisation and think-tank, working on issues central to the economic renewal of the UK, particularly in the political economy, education and learning, public policy and regeneration fields. As part of its commitment to strengthening the role of learning in communities, NIACE has contributed to the development of a wide range of activities linking learning and employability. This work has included supporting a range of local authority-led initiatives to promote employability and a leading contribution to the employability strand of the Community Learning Trust initiatives.

## 1.1 Key messages

- 1. Community learning is strategically important in local efforts to promote employability. It needs to form a part of national and local strategies to encourage and support employability, particularly among those who are furthest from the labour market.** It is important that the learning and skills system works as a continuum, and community learning has a role to play within that complex ecology. It can make an important contribution to the delivery of local and national strategic priorities, engaging those who, typically, are least likely to participate in education or training. Recognising the role of employability-focused community learning is crucial in reaching those most in need of intervention.
- 2. Partnerships are critical for enabling the potential contribution of community learning to the local growth agenda to be realised.** For example, one project in Shropshire developed strong links with Jobcentre Plus staff which enabled unemployed learners to make much better use of new online job-seeking resources and gain the skills that will help them secure jobs and progress in work. Success of this sort was common in CLIF projects and the lesson for policy makers and planners is clear.



3. **Community learning delivers positive employment and employability outcomes for learners, helping them to improve both their vocational and 'soft' skills.** The projects supported a wide range of people who faced different kinds of employment challenges, many of whom had given up hope of getting into sustainable work. For example, the LEAP project in Gateshead transformed the job prospects of a group of disabled adults who, as a result of their participation in the project, reduced their reliance on day care services and became new entrepreneurs. Gateshead Council is now providing mainstream funding to upscale this delivery model to empower more of its clients.
4. **Where learners have access to volunteering opportunities as part of their learning programme, or are supported by volunteers, enhanced employability outcomes are achieved for both learners themselves and volunteers who work with them.** This is demonstrated, for example, by the Swindon Community Radio CLIF project which successfully engaged with learners and volunteers, and provided them with appropriate support that led to a large number of successful job outcomes. This is also demonstrated by the Milton Keynes Executive Job Club, which thrives on the pro-bono voluntary contributions from individuals who are employed in a range of sectors, who provide job-coaching and mentoring support for unemployed middle and senior managers.
5. **Embedding information, advice and guidance into community learning programmes is vital for enhancing learners' employability and supporting them to progress to vocational learning, volunteering and paid work.** It provides a structured process through which learners are empowered to reflect on what they have learned; identify the full range of skills that they have gained; recognise how these are relevant achieving their aspirations; and understand how to communicate their skills and achievements to others, including potential employers.

## 1.2 Actions

### 1.2.1 For policy

- **Local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) should include community learning in their plans to build local employability skills.** LEP decision making should recognise the critical role of employability-focused community learning in reaching the most excluded and least job-ready amongst the local community. To get maximum benefit from local intelligence and better co-ordinated provision, the local partnerships of community learning and stakeholders being developed through the Community Learning Reform agenda should be involved in LEP planning processes.
- **The freedoms and flexibilities for providers, driven by government policy, are crucial to the development of local solutions to the barriers facing excluded learners. One size cannot fit all in this context.** Providers, working with local and regional partners, will be most effective when they target interventions where they are most needed.
- \* **The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has a key role to play in ensuring that the contribution which community learning makes towards delivering the policy priorities of other departments is recognised.** Innovative projects such as those funded by CLIF represent an excellent example of the 'invest to save' concept in practice, and demonstrate the potential impact of targeted public funding on wider policy areas such as employability.
- **To ensure that the impact and legacy of public investment in these projects is not lost, their innovative and transferable approaches to delivery should be disseminated to support their integration into mainstream practice nationally.** A significant return on investment could also be realised by investing in some of the existing CLIF projects in 2014–15 and beyond, in order to up-scale their contributions to the employability of the most disadvantaged adults.

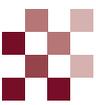


- **Accessible, community-based information, advice and guidance targeted at adults is integral to successfully delivering employability skills and should be part of coherent strategies for local growth.** Without provision of this kind, there is a danger that the economic benefits of learners' newly acquired employability competencies may not be realised, as learners struggle to translate their skills and confidence into sustainable long-term employability outcomes.
- **National and local authorities should recognise and support the social and economic value of volunteering and its links to better learning and employability outcomes.** The cross-departmental value of community learning is clearly demonstrated by the contribution that volunteers can make to learners' employability skills. This activity often improves the employability of the participating volunteers too, and so the value of the volunteers' contributions can display a 'multiplier effect'. Volunteers can act as employability catalysts, helping to significantly improve the impact and the speed of community learning employability interventions.

### **1.2.2 For practice**

- **Specialist and targeted approaches, including appropriate one-to-one support, should be used by community learning providers** to help learners who are furthest from the job market in gaining the skills and confidence they will need to seek and gain employment.
- **Disadvantaged learners' vocational skills and confidence can best be developed by co-designing curricula based on their existing interests and life experience.** A number of projects demonstrated how vulnerable learners with very low levels of self-esteem were able to gain relevant vocational skills by building on subjects they already liked or were familiar with; for example, radio, magazine and television production.

- **Practitioners should consider ways of harnessing learners' entrepreneurial skills and using these to develop their confidence and employability.** This proved a very effective approach in improving the employability of vulnerable adults.
- **Providers with access to Skills Funding Agency Adult Skills Budget and Community Learning funding should explore partnership with other organisations to access wider learner support services and to broker coherent progression routes, and thereby realise the enormous potential benefits that can flow from relatively small levels of investment.** This should include actively building partnerships with organisations that are outside the community learning sector. For example, successful CLIF projects have clearly demonstrated the employability benefits that have flowed to their learners through their active development of successful partnerships between community learning organisations and local businesses, local social enterprises, business networks, chambers of commerce, Jobcentre Plus, voluntary and community organisations, and local authorities.
- **Greater consideration should be given to how access for learners to information, advice and guidance can be ensured, to support both progression into work and progression in work.** This is particularly relevant in view of the fact that there is a severe shortage in the number of low-level and temporary jobs in the economy, and that community learning must support people to develop their capability to get and retain better jobs. This approach will be an effective remedy to tackle in-work poverty and will enhance the employability chances of individuals and their communities. It is important to develop practical and relevant information, advice and guidance interventions that will enable learners to understand the impact of the skills that they have gained and how to articulate their new aptitudes in ways that resonate with prospective employers, for example through appropriate CVs.



## 2. Introduction

This report presents the findings of work to identify the impact of community learning on employability, undertaken as part of the Community Learning Innovation Fund (CLIF). It is one of a series of six thematic reports demonstrating the contribution of community learning to key policy areas, as evidenced by CLIF.<sup>2</sup>

CLIF provided grant funding from the Skills Funding Agency for 96 community projects across England to run from September 2012 to July 2013. The projects, which reached more than 15,000 learners, provided creative learning opportunities that aimed to increase learners' self-confidence and give them a better quality of life, as well as building stronger families and communities. One of the primary objectives was to generate robust evidence on the impact of community learning in order to help strengthen the case at both national and local levels for sustainable and diverse funding for the sector in challenging economic times. NIACE was commissioned to manage the fund. As part of that role, it supported projects to collect, analyse and report evidence on the difference their work made for learners, families, localities and delivery partners.

The evidence on which this report draws comes from two main sources: the final evaluation reports submitted by CLIF projects in August 2013, and the data returned by the 31 projects which opted to take part in an additional exercise to collect quantitative evidence from a sample of learners at the beginning and end of their episode of learning to show 'distance travelled'. NIACE did not stipulate what methods and tools individual projects should use to collect data. Instead, it assisted them in identifying and applying the approaches that were most appropriate for their context, learners and learning activities.

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<sup>2</sup> See also the thematic reports on *Digital inclusion, Families, Health, Socially vulnerable groups* and *Volunteering*.

Projects were, however, required to apply a consistent framework to their evaluation. The *Wider Outcomes Planning and Capture Tool* is an innovative model for identifying the wider social outcomes of community learning.<sup>3</sup> It was developed by NIACE to address the need for resources to support the community learning sector to engage with the growing public policy agenda around wider social outcomes. The tool supports all stages of evidence collection, analysis and reporting, and encourages a clear focus on capturing outcomes in the key areas of mental and physical health, family and social relationships, volunteering, employability, progression and personal agency. This approach has enabled data from multiple projects to be collated to build up a picture of the focus, scope and scale of the outcomes achieved with CLIF funding.

A technical annex, including a detailed description of the additional evidence collection exercise and data charts and tables, is available to download.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.niace.org.uk/communitylearning](http://www.niace.org.uk/communitylearning)



## 3. Policy and research: community learning and employability

### 3.1 Why is this work important now?

The UK economy is grappling with a range of issues relating to long-term unemployment, particularly among hard-to-reach and low-skilled adults and vulnerable groups, such as people with learning difficulties and disabilities. As well as its significant national and local economic cost, long-term unemployment is a major contributor to household poverty and poor physical and mental health. In addition, it has an impact on the children of unemployed adults, affecting their confidence, attainment, attitude to employment and aspirations. This can result in multi-generational unemployment within families, which is extremely challenging to address.

Statistics show that unemployment, and particularly youth unemployment, is a major issue in England. According to the latest statistical bulletin from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the percentage of people aged between 16 and 64 who were in work in June to August 2013 was 71.7 per cent, lower than before the 2008–09 downturn.<sup>4</sup>

The latest ONS data shows that there was an increase in higher managerial and professional occupational employment between Oct–Dec 2011 and Oct–Dec 2013 from 4.313 million to 4.632 million (an increase of 319,000). Over the same period, however, there was a fall in the number of people employed in routine occupations from 2.861 million in Oct–Dec 2011 to 2.843 million (a fall of 18,000). This shift in the employment opportunities across the economy from low to higher skilled roles is set to continue for the foreseeable future, and this trend strengthens

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<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (April 2014) *Statistical Bulletin, Labour Market Statistics*.

the argument that community learning has a key role to play in providing essential vocational skills to disadvantaged learners to enable them to compete more effectively in the job market.

Overall unemployment has fallen by 320,000 in the two years between Dec–Feb 2012 and Dec–Feb 2014 from 2.634 million to 2.243 million (a fall of 391,000). Nationally, male unemployment is higher than female unemployment, at 1.261 million for men against 982,000 for women (a difference of 279,000).

There were 449,000 non-white unemployed people in Oct–Dec 2013, 242,000 men and 210,000 women.

Of the 51.158 million people aged over 16 in the United Kingdom, 32.632 million are economically active and 18.526 million are economically inactive, comprised of 7.507 million economically inactive men and 11.019 million economically inactive women. Furthermore, 654,000 16–24 year olds were economically inactive, with 235,000 men and 421,000 women. This means that 15.8 per cent of the total 16–24 age range is economically inactive, and the rate has worsened by 0.2 per cent since the previous quarter.

Although the picture is improving, there are still significant weaknesses to the UK's labour market, including 'underemployment', as the ONS report stresses:

*For June to August 2013, there were 1.45 million employees and self-employed people who were working part-time because they could not find a full-time job, the highest figure since records began in 1992.<sup>5</sup>*

This suggests that a significant proportion of the new jobs being created by the economy are low-skilled and relatively insecure, with employees remaining dependent on in-work benefits to achieve a reasonable standard of living. The CLIF evidence shows that community learning is highly effective at enabling the most disadvantaged learners to achieve the

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5 *Ibid.*



vocational skills they need to gain work and to progress to more secure, skilled and higher-value jobs. The beneficial impacts of the transition from long-term unemployment to secure work are experienced by the individual learners and their families and communities – not least in terms of reducing in-work poverty – but also by the local economy and the public purse in terms of direct savings. Together, these highlight the potential role of community learning in complementing other initiatives, such as the Work Programme, which aim to tackle unemployment.

In addition to the points above, earnings have failed to keep pace with prices. Between August 2012 and August 2013, total pay for all employees in the UK rose by 0.7 per cent. During the same period, however, the Consumer Price Index increased by 2.7 per cent.<sup>6</sup> By engaging the most vulnerable individuals – those with the furthest distance to travel to gain qualifications, skills and employment – community learning has the potential to contribute significantly to local and national efforts to tackle long-term unemployment and help people out of poverty.

Helping people to improve their chances of finding work, especially those who have few or no qualifications or specialist vocational skills, is a vital task for the further education (FE) and skills sector. As the Leitch Report stated in 2006:

*'To achieve world class prosperity and fairness in the new global economy, the UK must achieve world class skills. Without world class skills, UK businesses will find it increasingly difficult to compete and innovate. The employment opportunities of the lowest skilled will continue to decline, risking a lost generation, cut off permanently from labour market opportunity.'*<sup>7</sup>

However, the challenges for the government and the sector have intensified as unemployment has risen and competition for jobs has increased. In August 2011, the government launched a new initiative, the 'unemployed unit offer', which invited providers in the FE and skills sector to prioritise labour market-focused training. This aimed to engage more people who are

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.13.

<sup>7</sup> Leitch, S. (December 2006) *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*. HM Treasury.

out of work and help them develop skills that will support their progression into employment. This initiative has successfully supported disadvantaged, long-term unemployed people to access vocationally relevant training, but community learning has an important role to play in successfully engaging the most disadvantaged and disengaged learners to participate in more formal and longer term training interventions.

Even before the economic downturn, global competition and increasing mechanisation were reducing the number of jobs available for people in the UK with low skills. As the CBI has noted, of the 13.5 million jobs that will need to be filled by 2015, 'over half will be for managers, professionals and technical occupations'.<sup>8</sup> Workers in low-technology sectors and those performing low-skilled tasks need to be supported and able to acquire new skills and be adaptable, since they are at higher risk of losing their jobs in today's rapidly changing global labour market. A recent OECD survey of adult skills in England and Northern Ireland notes that only 29.6 per cent of low-skilled adults who score below Level 1 in literacy participated in adult education in the 12 months prior to the survey. This is in comparison with an adult education participation rate of 75.3 per cent for adults who scored at Levels 4 or 5 in literacy in the survey. These results, the report says, 'confirm the vicious circle in which low-skilled workers risk being trapped in a situation in which they rarely benefit from adult learning and their skills remain weak or deteriorate over time, making it even harder for these individuals to participate in learning activities. The key policy challenge is to help low-skilled adults break this cycle'.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, increased competition between job applicants since the economic downturn has given employers scope to raise their expectations of applicant skills levels for elementary jobs. As a report by the Work Foundation showed, individuals leaving skilled jobs have been forced to compete for entry-level jobs, resulting in the employment rate for those with no qualifications falling markedly during the recession.<sup>10</sup> Unsurprisingly, the

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8 CBI (2011) *Mapping the Route to Growth: Rebalancing Employment*.

9 OECD (October 2013) *Survey of Adult Skills First Results – England and Northern Ireland (UK) Country Note*, p. 9

10 The Work Foundation (2011) *The Hourglass and the Escalator: Labour Market Change and Mobility*.



Institute for Fiscal Studies has reported that ‘...it is low-skilled, low-educated and younger workers whose labour market prospects have suffered most as the UK entered recession in 2008.’<sup>11</sup>

Long-term labour market trends underscore the importance of effective interventions to address the skill needs of the most disadvantaged communities so they can not only compete for available employment opportunities but also contribute to economic growth through entrepreneurial activity. New jobs will increasingly require higher skills and qualifications, even for occupations historically regarded as low skilled, and therefore transferable ‘soft’ and vocational skills will be essential for future sustained employment.

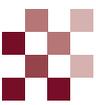
The CLIF evidence shows that community learning enables people to acquire the skills, confidence and outlook needed to get into, and progress in, work. The findings augment data from the Community Learning Learner Survey (2013) by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), which reported that community learning has a motivating effect on learners’ lives and boosts quality of life and wellbeing, especially for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, community learning helps learners – particularly those from deprived neighbourhoods – become better and more confident parents. It develops the skills and confidence of unemployed learners, with 70 per cent reporting feeling more confident about finding a job in the future. And it encourages adults to take up further learning. More than half of the learners surveyed by BIS said they had taken part in a taught course since participating in community learning. According to the OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills:

*‘Low-skilled adults risk getting trapped in a situation in which they rarely benefit from adult learning, and their skills remain weak or deteriorate over time – which makes it even harder for these individuals to participate in learning activities.’*

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11 IFS (2009) *Living Standards During Previous Recessions*.

For this group of learners, the type of provision offered by community learning provision and the projects funded by CLIF can offer a chance to break out of the cycle of low-skills and non-participation in learning described in the quotation. By involving volunteers in an innovative approach to programme delivery, learners' employability skills can be enhanced and their progression supported by access to appropriate information, advice and guidance, in order to assist their progression to sustainable long-term employment.



## 4. What does CLIF tell us?

Evidence from the CLIF projects confirms the critical role of community learning in supporting employability, particularly among people living in the most disadvantaged communities and who are furthest from the labour market. It demonstrates that the focus of certain projects on employability met a real need: participants identified the support they received in this area as being the most significant element of their involvement and the area of learning from which they benefited most.

A small number of CLIF projects explicitly encouraged learners to explore employment opportunities in specific fields of work. For example, the Birmingham YMCA's 'Seeds, Soup and Enterprise' project developed beneficiaries' entrepreneurial skills so that they could progress to establishing their own catering businesses. The Ashley Community Housing project, Renewal and Retrofit, provided beneficiaries with specific skills in construction trades, including gaining a Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card. The Adult Coaching Helpers & Level 1 Coaching Award project, led by the City of Newcastle Gymnastics Academy project, provided all 12 beneficiaries with their Level 1 Coaching Award and supported them to apply for paid coaching roles with the City of Newcastle Gymnastics Academy (CNGA). Seven of the 12 beneficiaries moved on to the CNGA payroll following their participation on the project. The Sew Good project, led by the South Sefton Development Trust, supported 14 out of the 24 starters to work in a sewing-related role. Three women participants went on to set up their own successful business, using their new textile skills. The Blyth Tall Ship Community Learning Innovation Foundation project achieved a 20 per cent transition to employment for previously NEET (not in education, employment or training) beneficiaries who were able to use their new skills in welding and archive and oral history training to support the museum. In most cases, however, the opportunities to develop employability skills were more indirect. By taking part in stimulating, creative activities, learners were able to gain confidence in 'soft skill' areas such as communication, time management and team work, and take their first steps towards more formal training. Government budgets are

tight and every taxpayer needs to feel that his or her tax is wisely invested. So it is important to understand what impact the public investment in community learning has on people’s lives.

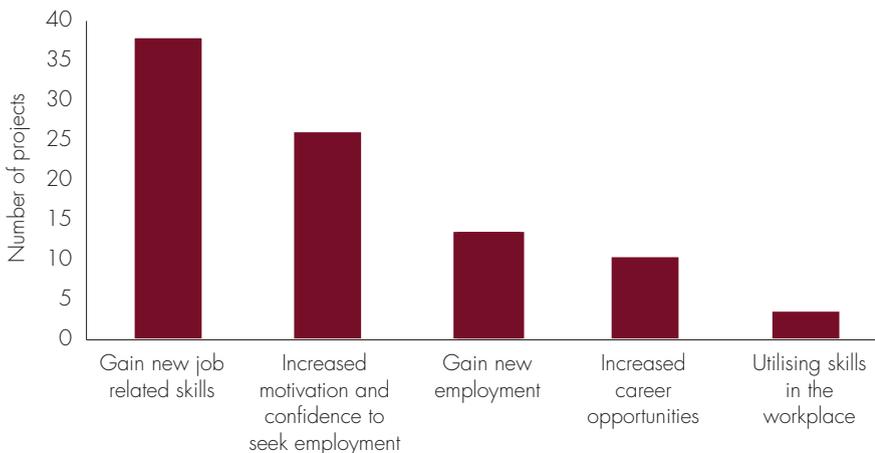
## 4.1 Outcomes for learners

### 4.1.1 Overview of the evidence

Forty-two of the 96 CLIF projects reported positive outcomes for learners linked to employment and employability. Of these:

- 38 reported that their learners had gained new job-related skills;
- 26 had evidence that their learners had increased their motivation and confidence to seek employment; and
- 13 reported that learners had gained employment as a direct result of their involvement in CLIF.

These findings are impressive given the disadvantaged nature of the target learner groups (see Figure 1). This may also explain why very few projects identified utilising skills in the workplace as an outcome for their learners, as many would have been unemployed at the time of engagement.

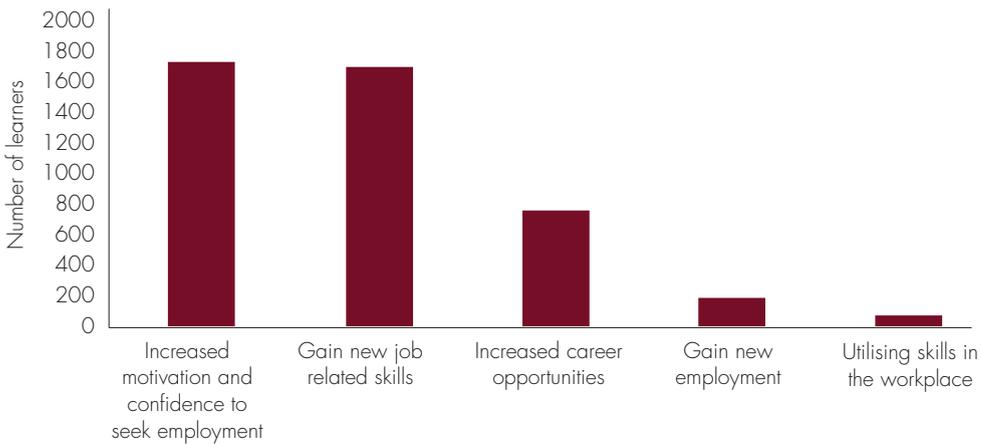


**Figure 1** Number of projects which captured employability outcomes for learners



## What does CLIF tell us?

Projects reporting employability outcomes were most likely to report that learners increased their motivation to seek employment and gained new job-related skills which, in some cases, they were able to use to get work (see Figure 2). Projects reported a range of outcomes linked to participants' employability, with a small proportion of learners (166) actually gaining work during the lifetime of the projects. The 'distance travelled' by the learners in terms of becoming more job ready as a result of their participation in CLIF projects was significant, demonstrating how relatively small investments in projects can have a major impact in terms of supporting very vulnerable and hard-to-reach individuals to enter employment.



**Figure 2:** Employability outcomes experienced by learners

A range of positive outcomes were recorded by the CLIF projects, demonstrating their contribution to employability objectives for individuals and their communities. The positive outcomes have had a profound impact upon the lives of individuals, their families and their communities. For example, the Renewal and Retrofit project from Ashley Community Housing helped 39 of the beneficiaries to either successfully gain employment or actively apply for jobs. A further seven had become self-employed. The examples that follow demonstrate the diversity and richness of employability interventions developed by the CLIF projects using modest amounts of funding.



### **4.1.2 Job-related skills**

CLIF projects offered a range of opportunities for participants to gain job-related skills and qualifications. These approaches were successful because they built upon the interests of participants, developing vocationally relevant skills which drew on these initial interests. For example, the EQUIP project held workshops which, as well as addressing issues relating to employability, such as job searching and CV writing, also dealt with topics like leadership, demonstrating to people that their existing skills could be useful in the workplace, even though they were gained elsewhere.

The Seeds, Soup and Enterprise project aimed to stimulate and inspire young adults with experience of homelessness/entrenched worklessness to achieve their full potential, whilst also creating a stronger, more cohesive community by bridging the divide between generations in Erdington. This project was unique inasmuch as it aimed to educate young people in social enterprise and business planning through the medium of food, where learners could learn and practise business skills as if they were establishing their own soup enterprises. This incorporated understanding about raw products and their origins, and the ethics of production (work on the allotments); recipe design and desirability (market research); budgeting, looking at profit and loss and product yield; and marketing by researching alternative products, identifying customer base and competition. The intention wasn't for learners to complete the programme and establish a soup enterprise, but to enable them to apply their new skills and learning to potential business ideas that they may have in the future. The programme incorporated relevant functional skills, including maths, English and ICT.

### **4.1.3 Career aspirations**

By building upon participants' interests, projects were able to raise the learners' aspirations. For example, the Eagles Radio's Community Media Hubs project reported that around two-thirds of learners felt more confident about their employment prospects, with around a fifth feeling very optimistic that they would be able to secure employment as a result of their involvement in the project. As one learner stated following her participation on the Adult Coaching Helpers & Level 1 Coaching Award project:



## What does CLIF tell us?

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*'Once I attended the Level 1 Coaching course, my confidence levels started to increase. I was enjoying myself, my mentor coach helped and advised me to do the tasks I needed to do from my logbook; she also supported my English skills. In July I took my Level 1 exam, this was the first exam since leaving school, and I passed! Now, while my children are training, I am employed at the academy and earning money, this has eased my financial situation greatly. I do feel fitter and more confident; I'm looking forward to my Level 2 Coaching course.'*

### **4.1.4 Gaining employment**

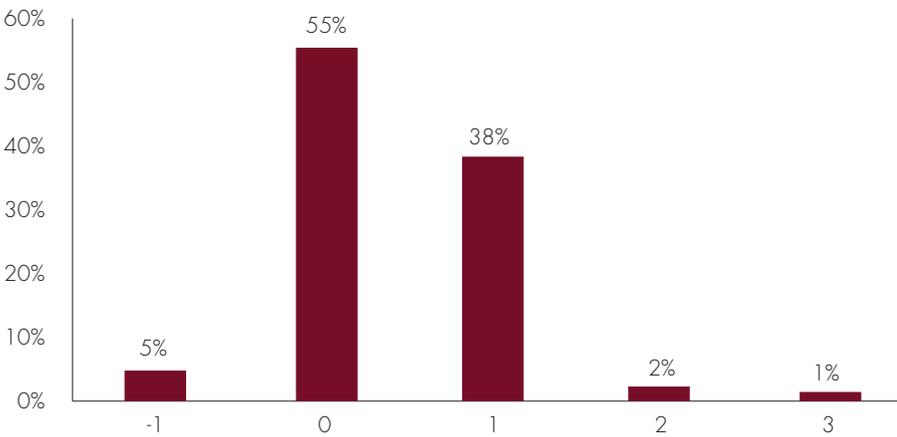
The projects had a realistic focus on the employability aspirations of their learners. Many individuals faced multiple barriers such as homelessness, substance misuse, disabilities and long-term unemployment, which had prevented them from securing work. However, several projects reported that learners had gained new employment following their involvement. For example, Milton Keynes College's People in Action: Transforming Communities project enabled 16 participants to secure new jobs. It focused on unemployed senior and middle managers and executives who had been insufficiently supported by the standard Jobcentre Plus offer. This project provides a strong example of the power of self-organising group learning. By harnessing the enthusiasm and expertise of the participants, the project was able to offer a comprehensive programme of beneficiary support that led to successful access to employment. As mentioned above, the Sew Good project in South Sefton has successfully supported 14 beneficiaries to achieve employment, including three establishing their own new businesses. These beneficiaries faced multiple disadvantages and are based in an area with high levels of unemployment, but they were able to overcome these barriers and to achieve employment success following their participation on the CLIF project.

### **4.1.5 Motivation and confidence**

Many CLIF projects focused on interventions intended to boost the motivation and self-esteem of their learners and reported significant outcomes in terms of confidence to seek work. For example, Our Local

Eating Place recorded that the young parent participants started to aspire to employment or self-employment as a result of their learning. Another project – Recovery Rises: From drugs to digital inclusivity – recognised that, as a result of involvement, learners felt more confident in applying for jobs and accessing employment opportunities online.

Evidence collected by a sample of projects on learners’ attitudes towards their own employability showed a clear improvement between the beginning and end of their participation in CLIF learning. Figure 3 shows the proportion of respondents who reported different degrees of change over time in relation to employability, confidence and skills. Although 55 per cent reported no change, over two-fifths (41 per cent) of learners in the sample reported that they had improved their perception of their employability by one, two or three points on the scale.



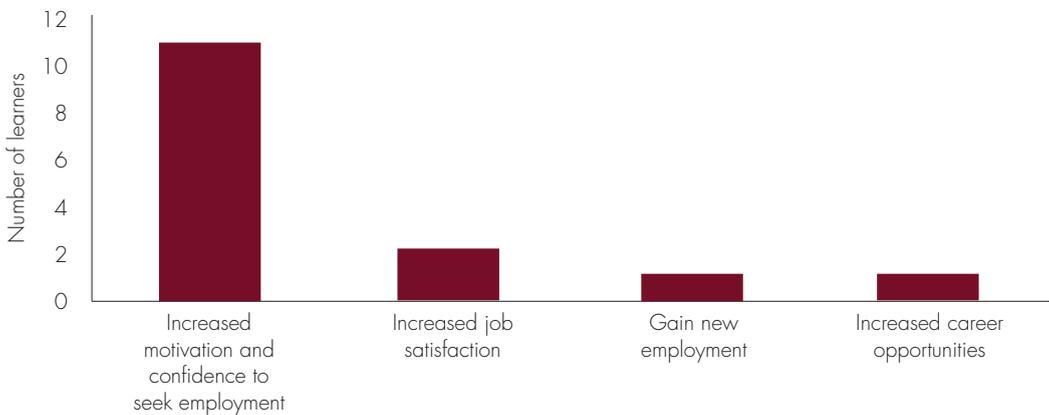
**Figure 3** Change in average scores under the employability domain

Base: all learners = 204



## 4.2 Outcomes for volunteers

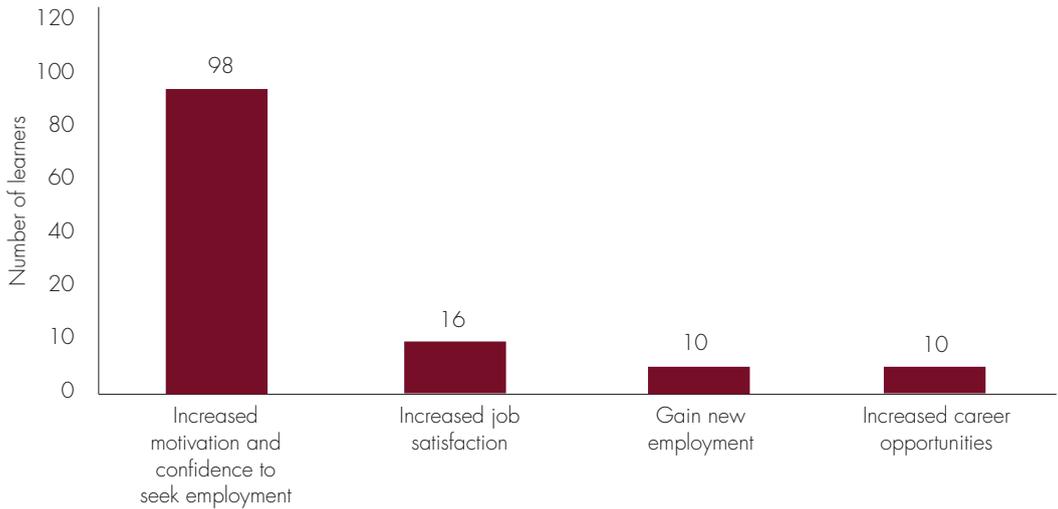
In total, 12 projects captured employability outcomes for their volunteers. As Figure 4 shows, the majority of these projects found that their volunteers had increased motivation and confidence to seek employment. In addition, a small number of projects showed that volunteers had increased job satisfaction, gained new employment or increased their career opportunities. For example, the Time to Learn project demonstrated that through volunteering, beneficiaries gained the skills and confidence to seek and secure paid employment. The Pass it on – Motivate, Educate and Mobilise the Community project led to learners reporting increased self-confidence through volunteering, and some achieved skills that supported them to gain paid work.



**Figure 4** Number of projects which captured employability outcomes for volunteers

Base: all projects = 92

Figure 5 shows how many volunteers experienced each of the outcomes in the employability domain. Significantly, volunteers were far more likely to experience increased motivation and confidence to seek employment than any of the other outcomes in this domain.



**Figure 5** Employability outcomes experienced by volunteers

## 4.3 What worked well?

### 4.3.1 Learner engagement

The projects demonstrate that community learning is particularly effective in engaging people furthest away from the labour market – those least likely to be participating in learning or actively seeking work – and in breaking down the barriers they face to gaining employment and improving their employability. Many of the learners who took part in the project would have been reluctant to step inside a further education college and would have felt uncomfortable in a more formal education setting. Taking this first step can be challenging for people whose previous experience of education has been difficult or damaging.

### 4.3.2 Harnessing learners’ interests

Critically, the projects were able to engage learners in their own communities and were careful to adapt their programmes to the real concerns and interests of participants, providing a vital hook in getting people involved in learning for the first time. The Swindon Voices project



attracted long-term unemployed learners by appealing to their interest in radio production and presenting. By developing these interests, learners were encouraged to work together as teams, to plan and deliver increasingly complex projects and to increase their confidence and presentational skills. As a result, learners reported that their attitude and aspirations towards employment underwent a profound change over the life of the project, becoming more open to developing their vocational potential.

### **4.3.3 Building confidence and self-esteem**

Community learning has a crucial role to play in building up the confidence and self-belief of learners, changing attitudes to learning and boosting learners' sense of independence and agency while, at the same time, developing real-life skills which will be useful in progressing to further learning or into employment.

The Milton Keynes Executive Action project was supported by CLIF funding to develop an innovative programme of support for unemployed learners who were dissatisfied with the service that they were receiving from Jobcentre Plus. Specifically targeting the needs of unemployed middle and senior managers and executives, the Milton Keynes Executive Action project provides a good example of the power of self-directed learning. By providing learners with a democratic voice in the content of their learning, and by focusing upon the power of peer mentoring and support, the project developed a programme of networking events and learning opportunities designed to assist in tackling low self-esteem and enhancing job seeking techniques. The project successfully supported over 50 learners to gain increased confidence and vocational skills, and to secure new sustainable employment opportunities. As one learner stated:

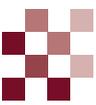
*'MKEA in group discussions also helped individual members to raise concerns about their own strengths and weaknesses and get guidance about things they are unsure of through other member's knowledge and experience. Sometimes I even surprise myself when I discover things that I didn't think I knew.'*



#### ***4.3.4 Focusing on developing employability skills***

As the projects show, community learning is a particularly effective tool in engaging adults who have low-level skills, who perhaps have difficulty with basic literacy or numeracy, and groups of vulnerable people, for example, those with learning difficulties or disabilities, who find accessing the labour market challenging. The CLIF projects helped develop some of these essential employment skills, as well as cultivating softer skills – such as communication and team-working – and giving participants greater motivation to seek work and a greater sense of aspiration. As every family learning practitioner knows, changing adults’ attitudes to work and learning can have a huge positive impact on the attitudes of their children and grandchildren, helping to challenge often very deeply rooted negative intergenerational attitudes to learning and employment.

St Giles Trust’s project, Peer Adviser, works with some of the most disadvantaged learners and has successfully trialled new provision and different approaches. The project demonstrated that developing learners’ skills and learning that are required for sustainable jobs takes time, but has many benefits. The direct involvement of disadvantaged learners in service delivery makes a significant difference in terms of engaging clients and providing role models.



## 5. Case studies

### Case study 1 Recovery Rises

Genie in the Gutter, a non-profit organisation offering creative opportunities and training to substance misusers, led the Recovery Rises – from Drugs to Digital Inclusion project. It offered an online learning recovery programme for active substance misusers, facilitated by tutors, volunteers and learning champions, some of whom are in recovery from addiction themselves. The project aimed to enable addicts entering recovery to:

- explore recovery options and develop their recovery using the digital resource, Breaking Free Online;
- sustain and develop their recovery through other online recovery resources and communities;
- improve the digital media skills of people recovering from addiction; and
- improve ICT access to people recovering from addiction.

As a result of participating, learners increased their ICT access, recovery knowledge, tools and engagement levels through online key working, virtual communities and other online support. They gained the skills and confidence to access IT independently, and marked improvements were seen in health, employability and self-esteem. Some learners re-connected with families and children, and many have become completely abstinent from substances.

#### **Impact on learners' employability**

The project engaged with 195 learners, all of whom improved their employability skills as a result of participating. Learners acquired ICT



skills, gained in confidence, progressed in their recovery, accessed online employment networks, and joined local job clubs. The programme shared information from local employment agencies and facilitated training and visits by employment agencies to meet the learners at the centre. Seven participants are now employed. Typical comments from participants include:

*'When I saw loads of people online who've been through what I have and are now better it blew my mind. I thought I was the only one who felt like this.'*

*'It's been brilliant, I never thought I'd be able to use a computer and now I can.'*

*'...meetings online made me realise there were loads of people who'd got over what I'm going through and made me want to go and try a proper meeting. It's the best decision I've ever made.'*



## Case study 2

# Spark Sunderland Digital Production and Participation Project

### Summary of the project

This project, run by Spark Sunderland – a partnership of the University of Sunderland’s Spark radio and TV channel, Sunderland City Council, Sunderland College and other community partners in Sunderland – used community media platforms to increase digital inclusion for young adults in Sunderland. Working in areas with the highest need of digital inclusion, it involved specialist, student-centred, community-based training and learning activities, placements, and training for tutors in community radio, TV and online production. Recognising that community media can be instrumental in empowering marginalised individuals and groups, it used training in community media to develop confidence and a wide range of transferable skills relevant to employability among participants.

The project’s target learners were socially and digitally excluded young adults aged between 19 and 25 years of age, from various deprived parts of Sunderland, including Pallion, Farringdon, Hendon and the East End. The participants created two, two-hour radio shows, a 20-page magazine and a 13-minute TV production based around the group’s interests and experience.

### Impact on learners’ employability

Skills were taught to a level equivalent to that required for an entry-level or freelance position in community media. The project gave learners the means to publicise themselves and their work to the labour market using mobile devices to which they had access. It became obvious that the project would need to supplement the digital media skills with basic computer literacy (Windows and Mac) and internet safety and social media training. As a result, all 11 learners



who signed on to the project left with these basic computer skills and digital media training literacy.

An in-depth exit survey of learners showed that the eight learners who completed the signing-off activities felt a greater degree of confidence in using digital media and computers. They also felt that this had had an impact upon their ability to work in their chosen industry. Three learners said that they had increased their personal confidence and interpersonal skills and that these had a direct impact upon their employability.



## Case study 3

### Sew Good

#### Summary of the project

This project, run by South Sefton Development Trust, aimed to improve the economic, social and mental health of 20 individuals in Sefton by providing opportunities for people to connect with one another, share ideas and learn new skills so that they would be supported to feel good, function well and flourish. Because of demand, the project engaged 24 learners, 18 of whom completed the entire 26-week course. Of these learners, two went on to set up their own dressmaking businesses with the project's support, one got a job using her dressmaking skills, and ten became involved in setting up Sew Good as a social enterprise to offer training in dressmaking to other people in the area. They have also run a summer club for young people aged between 11 and 14 and secured a grant to offer 25 hours of sewing training to 24 local people.

The primary aim of the project was to provide learning for social and economic wellbeing. The target groups were individuals living in the more deprived areas of Sefton. The project ran two 26-week intensive sewing courses, to bring people with little or no sewing experience to a level where they could make clothes for themselves, as well as providing them with a route to further learning, employment or self-employment.

#### Impact on learners' employability

The most significant evidence of the impact of Sew Good on attitudes to learning and employment lies in what the learners did after participating on the programme:

- Ten learners went on to set up a social enterprise, Sew Good, to offer training to other local learners, having secured their first contract to do so.

- Three learners went on to set up their own businesses as sole traders, and a fourth is planning to do so.
- One learner went back to full-time college to study nursing with a view to becoming a midwife.
- One learner secured full-time work in the industry.
- Five learners have already supported the delivery of sewing classes for 11–14 year olds on a voluntary basis and commenced delivering adult courses from autumn 2013.

Confidence was a critical outcome reported by many of the participants. For example, one learner left school at 18 and had not undertaken paid work while bringing up her young family. Despite being a talented, creative person who made craft items for friends and family, she had little confidence at the start of the course in herself or her ability to learn. Within six months she had designed a range of cushions and bags which Sew Good sold and she went on to mentor young sewers on the summer scheme. She has been commissioned to make a series of Liverpool-themed cushions for a local design outlet. She was among the learners who set up the Sew Good social enterprise.



## Case study 4

### Local Enterprise All People

#### Summary of the project

Local Enterprise All People (LEAP), led by New Vision Learning (a user-led enterprise run by seven individuals with learning difficulties in partnership with Gateshead Council's Access to Employment Service), offered training to unemployed people with a learning or physical disability, and who face barriers to employment. Participants learned how to develop their skills and business ideas and how to transform those ideas into a commercial reality. The project delivered two eight-week Getting into Enterprise courses, a micro-enterprise training programme for individuals with an idea for their own business, and training in first aid and health and safety, which promoted independence and other skills.

The Gateshead Council team, though its commitment to enablement, promoting independence and raising people's economic wellbeing through employment, was investigating the need for a more personalised system of delivery. It decided to explore how to support individuals with a disability to become self-employed, leading to employment tailored specifically to them. The LEAP project was created to pilot this innovative route into employment for the target beneficiaries.

#### Impact on learners' employability

Learners reported back through a series of course evaluations on their experiences of enterprise development. The entrepreneur beneficiaries have fed back about their learning experiences through one-to-one discussions, completing learners' logs and course evaluation. Other methods that beneficiaries used to capture the impact of the project include:



- Course evaluation sheets, following training
- Learner log books / diaries used from the beginning of the project to record high and low points
- Vocational profiles (used at the beginning of the work with entrepreneurs to capture their ideas and starting level of experience and knowledge)
- Testimonials from families and support staff throughout the project
- Recording changes from project workers' observations of the distance travelled
- Questionnaires at the end of a training day, requesting learners to demonstrate their knowledge in the subject area
- Photos and videos of training.

Beneficiaries identified the following achievements:

- increased ability to make a success of their enterprises and to generate income;
- increased productivity and better service provision to their customers; and
- increased staff morale as a result of the changes implemented within the enterprise during the workshops, for example the issue of new uniforms.

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