

## Your Say, Your Way

### Luton Adult Learning (LAL)

#### Introduction

This case study describes an adult learning programme that supported residents to take an active and informed part in 'Your Say, Your Way,' a council community led planning and budget allocation initiative.

The '**Your Say, Your Way**' (YSYW) programme is run by the local authority to give residents the opportunity to help shape community priorities in their local area. Residents can get involved in the local neighbourhood to influence decisions or help make improvements in a number of ways such as community planning days or participatory budgeting events.

The key aims of Participatory Budget (PB) are to engage with local residents, increase transparency, accountability, understanding and social inclusion in local issues. Participatory Budget funds are contributed by the local Council and other partner agencies to empower local groups to deliver against agreed priorities. Luton PB directly involves local people by geographical area (neighbourhood wards). Groups submit applications for projects, linked to locally identified priorities that will benefit, and be delivered, in the local community by the local community. Residents then attend sessions to select projects to be funded. This process also gives local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the funding which informs subsequent PB decisions. Luton Adult Learning supports the process by developing the skills of residents and officers working with them to support successful local participation.

#### The activity

Luton Adult Learning directly supports the YSYW programme by collaborating with Luton Borough Council's Community Development Services (CDS) Team and other partners to work with specific local demographic groups, extend opportunities for informal community learning, and by supporting local groups to engage with communities to develop learning/training linked to local priorities. They do this by:

- attending ward priority/planning/decision days and identifying learning opportunities;
- running workshops to support groups to apply for funds to support local projects (Participatory Budget). The content includes project monitoring, application and presentation skills workshops;
- offering direct funding opportunities to not-for-profit organisations to develop local learning opportunities;
- offering capacity building support as required to community groups, voluntary organisations and individually to local residents.

The Participatory Budget (PB) aspect of YSYW aims to engage residents and community groups at ward level to discuss and vote on spending priorities for allocated budgets. Thus local decisions are informed by local people. Overall 391 residents have attended 16 different events (decision days, development and planning days, presentation skills and application forms workshops).

Luton Adult Learning have contributed in the following ways:

- LAL upskilled the Community Development Services team staff by delivering a bespoke PTLLS course and impact measurement (wider outcomes) workshop to them. This allowed the staff to use their new skills to plan and deliver areas of the YSYW programme and LAL was able to ensure a high standard of delivery
- LAL ran bespoke workshops to support organisations or individuals that applied for funds to support their local projects. Workshop themes included contract and project monitoring, impact measurement (wider outcomes) application and presentation skills workshops.
- LAL also offers capacity building support when required to community groups, voluntary organisations and individually to local residents.

## The differences this approach has made

### Learners

YSYW provided Luton residents with a platform for engaging in informal learning by being involved in prioritising the needs of their own neighbourhoods. They proposed and debated new services and projects and agreed funding spend in a democratic and transparent way. Therefore the process:

- raised residents' awareness of the local community;
- increased their community involvement;
- increased self-esteem;
- improved communication skills ;
- increased opportunities to volunteer in the community;
- built the capacity of local groups as they were supported to write applications, make presentations and review their organisation's constitutions.

More than 400 residents enjoyed this year's festival



### Saints Youth Motivated

The 'Your Say, Your Way' funded 'Motivate Me' community youth festival run by the users' committee at Saints Community Centre was a massive success, bringing together around 400 members of the community, creating better awareness of each other amongst neighbours and of what the community and local services have to offer. Feedback from the festival was really positive and the users' committee volunteers enjoyed the event they were running with the support from the community centre staff which allowed them to learn new skills, boosted their confidence and gave a sense of real contribution to the local community.

Lewsey Farm Learning Centre Trust were allocated £1500 to engage local people in growing their own food and develop interest in vegetable gardening. This project promotes physical activities among the elderly and young people, as well as awareness of the role of diet in the development of healthy living and the prevention of cancer related illnesses. The funding allocated to the project is being used to pay towards gardening equipment, a green house, and the hire of a digger to improve the allotments. Furthermore Barclays Volunteers are keen to work with the Lewsey Learning Trust to make improvements on the allotments. A meeting has been arranged to identify how up to 30 volunteers will plan and implement the necessary work to the allotments.

### **Managers, staff and volunteers**

Involvement in delivering YSYW:

- provided the opportunity for LAL staff and the Community Development Team to form an effective partnership to support YSYW;
- provided LAL with greater opportunities to work more directly with the communities that are most difficult to engage with and support them to deliver learning opportunities for themselves within their own communities;
- raised awareness of the need for some community groups to receive further training if they were to become eligible to receive funding for learning and deliver these themselves;
- provided volunteers with the opportunities to improve their personal, social and employability skills.

### **The organisation**

Luton Adult Learning gained the following benefits as it:

- contributed to the value of informal learning within Luton;
- met a specific demographic of learners (Men and BME groups);
- reached and engaged with a wider audience of adult learners;
- provided more opportunities to work in collaboration with a variety of local community organisations;
- maintained and developed an effective partnership with Luton Borough Council's Community Development Service;
- trained Community Development staff to deliver learning opportunities by achieving the PTLLS qualification.

### **Challenges and solutions**

- Previously the CDS staff had limited teaching experience and no qualifications. LAL trained the team to achieve PTLLS which allowed them to deliver teaching and learning elements of the programme therefore building the capacity of the department. In addition LAL have employed three advanced practitioners and part of their remit is to support the CDS team in delivering the presentation, application workshops and capacity building support for the groups and individuals. They also assist the CDS in monitoring the PB programme. Furthermore the Community Learning Manager from LAL provides strategic support to the CDS team as part of the LAL community learning programme.
- Initially a vast majority of PB applications and presentations were of a poor quality in some cases due to poor literacy and communication skills. LAL staff delivered additional workshops for residents to help overcome these issues. In one session we had 35 attendees to a presentation skills workshop

### **Critical factors for success**

The concept is about empowering local people by allowing them to have a say in what goes in their neighbourhoods. The following factors supported success.

- There was a concerted effort from both organisations LAL and CDS at all levels to provide a programme that would establish an effective and sustainable community learning environment.
- The programme was delivered at weekends which offered residents the opportunity to attend without the pressures of work. Also there was effective use of the local venues in delivering the activities.
- The CDS and LAL were effective in facilitating the workshops in an informal manner therefore removing barriers that may have stopped the community from attending due to previous bad experiences with learning.
- Learners who attended the activities indicated that they enjoyed them, found them informative and made a positive impact on their lives.

### **The "golden moment"**

The adult learning elements, such as improved communication skills, increased community involvement and increased self-esteem. At the decision days residents/groups seeking funding have 3 minutes to present their project via any means apart from ILT. Luton Youth Music gave a rousing performance of the Bond theme to support their presentation - please follow the hyperlink [Friends of Luton Youth Music](#)

### **Contacts for further information**

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