

Foundations in Maintenance

Introduction:

Foundations in Maintenance was initially set up in 2004 as a pilot project. It is managed by a partnership co-ordinated by Gwalia Housing Group. Other partners are Swansea Bay Racial Equality Council, City & County of Swansea Employment Training, C&CS Lifelong Learning, Construction Skills (CITB) and Clase & Caemawr Community Partnership. The pilot was part funded by the Welsh Assembly Govt. through its BME Social Housing Grant.

Gwalia Housing Group had overall responsibility for project management and administration of budgets and a Community Development Worker was attached to the project throughout.

Tai Cymdogaeth HA (part of the Gwalia Housing Group) provided a 3 bed property in the Clase area.

Swansea Bay Racial Equality Council assisted in identifying 6 suitable candidates from the BME communities in Swansea and thereafter provided support and mentoring to ensure their continued participation in the project.

Clase & Caemawr Community First Partnership assisted in identifying a further 3 candidates from the local community to learn alongside the BME trainees.

City & County of Swansea Lifelong Learning provided training in Basic Skills, ICT, and assisted the trainees in compiling portfolios over a 6-month period.

City & County of Swansea Employment & Training Centre provided H&S and First Aid training and seconded an experienced trade-skills trainer for one day per week. It also supported trainees in finding other training opportunities at the end of the pilot project.

Construction Skills (CITB) supported the project through its STEP programme and provided a link with the construction industry.

The Strategic Framework:

- ◆ Both Gwalia Housing Group's and the City & County of Swansea's BME Housing Strategies recognise the need to actively encourage BME contractors to apply for registration on approved lists, and for all contractors to comply with basic race equality standards.
- ◆ However, initial investigations by Gwalia and SBREC have identified a shortage of BME-led contractors locally, and no training opportunities within building maintenance or construction specifically targeted at introducing members of the BME communities in Swansea to the industry.
- ◆ Research by the CITB shows that ethnic minorities represent only around 2% of the construction workforce nationally. Research by SBREC also shows clear evidence (Empowering Disadvantaged Ethnic Minority Communities - 2002) that overall the unemployment rate for BME communities in Swansea and Neath & Port Talbot was 45.6%.
- ◆ The City & County of Swansea is currently engaged in a Neighbourhood Renewal project in the Hafod area, which has the highest concentration of BME population in Swansea.
- ◆ Clase & Caemawr is a Community First area. A Social Audit by the University of Glamorgan (Dec. 2002) identified youth training and employment opportunities as a key need to be addressed.
- ◆ Establishing good race relations in the area has already begun through the formation of a local youth football team participating in the Zebra League recently created by SBREC with sponsorship from Gwalia.
- ◆ The project links with CITB 'Step into Construction' programme which seeks to recruit more members of the BME communities into the building industry.
- ◆ The project is a pilot that can inform the development of future Lifelong Learning objectives in relation to delivery of training to the BME communities.

Aims and Objectives

- ♦ To address the lack of opportunities locally for members of the BME communities to train in building maintenance, and develop their employability and capacity.
- ♦ To establish improved links between people of different communities in Swansea through a mutually beneficial project, which can form the basis for lasting relationships and future racially integrated projects.
- ♦ To gain useful feedback on the obstacles that deter young members of the BME communities from considering training and careers in building maintenance and construction.
- ♦ Within 9 months, to create a show-case that can be used to encourage local contractors to provide further practical work experience.
- ♦ To produce a final report identifying and highlighting good practice in this field.
- ♦ To act as a pilot project to inform future training developments.

Method:

- ♦ 9 candidates were enrolled from differing racial and ethnic backgrounds (6 identified by SBREC and 3 by the Clase & Caemawr Community Partnership).
- ♦ A hard to let 3-bedroom property requiring extensive repair and refurbishment was made available in Clase, Swansea by Tai Cymdogaeth Housing Association (part of the Grŵp Gwalia).
- ♦ Over a period of 7 months, once a week, each participant received supervised training in a variety of building maintenance trades. These included painting & decorating, plastering, bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing and landscaping. Training was practical and gradually resulted in the refurbishment of the property to a high "show-house" standard.

- ◆ The training providers arranged appropriate H&S and First Aid training and supervision throughout the project.
- ◆ The day to day management of the project was planned and managed by the Community Initiatives Co-ordinator from Gwalia. However, the success of the project was largely dependent upon the active involvement of all partners in delivery of various aspects of the project and in ensuring targets and milestones were reached.
- ◆ The Community Initiatives Co-ordinator liased on a regular basis with each partner.
- ◆ Trainees received travelling expenses and lunch. All tools, equipment and protective clothing were provided.
- ◆ Gwalia's Technical Services provided weekly input to assist with work schedules and to ensure the regular supply of necessary building and maintenance materials, tools and equipment.
- ◆ An important element in the success of the project was the high level of individual support and mentoring that the trainees received.
- ◆ Training groups were arranged so that they were multi-racial.
- ◆ Community Development Workers from Gwalia and Clase & Caemawr Communities First Partnership attended at intervals to assist discussion around issues about race equality, community, work disciplines, job applications, interviews etc.
- ◆ Trainees were encouraged to keep individual project journals that recorded progress on the refurbishment of the property as well as their own capacity growth.
- ◆ Trainee input into the development of the project was considered essential to its success and they were encouraged to make decisions on work plans and design.

- ◆ At the conclusion of the project, contractors were invited to an open day at the property and encouraged to accept trainees on work experience placements.

Outcomes

This is a one-year foundation project that will build the capacity of members of the BME community and create an interest in developing building maintenance skills in order to address the current acute shortage of BME workers and trainees. The project will promote racial equality and combat racial discrimination among young people from different areas of Swansea.

- Foundations in Maintenance established a one-year pilot project between July 2004 and June 2005.
- It created a practice of partnership working amongst the members of the steering group. As a consequence, it is intended to develop similar projects in the future, taking on board the lessons learnt from the pilot.
- It stimulated interest amongst members of the Swansea BME communities in training and employment opportunities within the construction/property maintenance industry.
- 6 trainees were identified by SBREC following interviews. 4 (male) trainees attended weekly. 2 (female) trainees were involved occasionally on design matters.
- 3 trainees (2male and 1 female) from Clase were identified by the Clase & Caemawr Community Partnership.
- Attendance rates of trainees was high - a total of 214 days out of a possible 231 (92%).
- All trainees have received training in First Aid and Health & Safety.

- Each trainee has a personal portfolio as evidence for future employers and an understanding of how to prepare CV's and job applications.
- The standard of English language skills and vocabulary, both in regards to social interaction and in the use of construction terms and terminology, improved for all trainees.
- Open College Network (OCN) Moderator's Report highlighted "various examples and evidence of good practice within the programme, particularly:
 - This is a joint venture project for voluntary trainees from a variety of differing backgrounds which included ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and locally based unemployed.
 - The project was managed to a very high standard
 - Comprehensive photographic, video and witness statement evidence is available, and will be within portfolios.
 - Portfolios are being produced both for OCN award credits and also as evidence for the trainees of this superb achievement.¹"
- All trainees have improved their trade skills. The OCN accreditation, personal portfolios and H&S assessments will be used to obtain CSCS Trainee cards. Trades learnt include painting & decorating, plastering, carpentry, bricklaying, decking, plumbing and landscaping and safe handling of tools and equipment.
- A hard to let 3-bedroom property requiring repair and refurbishment has been refurbished to a high standard and has been made available as a community facility, managed by a local management committee.
- All trainees have received advice and support in accessing further training opportunities at the completion of the pilot project. One trainee received a short-term placement with an SME maintenance contractor and subsequently enrolled on further training provided by C&CS Employment Training centre.
- Inspire 2005 Adult Learners Award (NIACE Cymru) - Community Action Award.

¹ OCN Wales Programme Moderator's report 13th April 2005.

- **The confidence of trainees rose visibly as the project progressed, In addition, their understanding of aspects of cultural diversity increased through shared time and casual conversation between them rather than from formal instruction.**

Lessons Learnt

Foundations in Maintenance was established as a pilot project. Undoubtedly, the trainees have improved their skills in construction and maintenance trades as well as raising their self-esteem and employability. The members of the Steering Group have also learnt some important lessons from the pilot:

- **Foundations in Maintenance operated most effectively as a feeder route for progression on to a range of vocational training courses.**
- **Follow up mentoring for trainees was arranged at the very end of the project and required earlier planning both for short and medium term monitoring and support of trainees.**
- **Small to Medium Employer (SME) contractors had limited flexibility to support further training through placements due to the need to maintain productivity levels of employees who could potentially provide training.**
- **Larger contractors with established training programmes need to be involved at an early stage in order to assist progression of trainees into the construction industry.**
- **The decision to seek accreditation from OCN was taken at a late stage and success was largely due to the goodwill of trainers from Employment Training and Lifelong Learning.**
- **There were issues surrounding the enrolment of asylum seekers on the project. Potential employment outcomes were severely restricted due to Home Office rules and dependent upon attaining refugee status or leave to remain in the U.K.**

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