

Forum for Adult Learning NI

# Northern Ireland Case Study Collection

The Impact of Adult Learning

**The following case studies were collected this summer from Impact Forum members and speakers. They are chosen to illustrate the impact that adult learning, in various offerings, has on the three core themes of work, health and community - sometimes separately and sometimes cumulatively.**

**We know that these are a very small sample of the excellent work that goes on in Northern Ireland across all sectors of provision. We believe that more work needs to happen to pull together quantitative and qualitative data so that the full impact of adult learning can be understood and valued.**

**Our thanks to: Action Mental Health, Allstate, Community Development and Health Network, NOW Group, Open College Network NI, Open University, Reading Rooms, Southern Regional College, Ulster University and Women's Resource & Development Agency.**



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## **AMH Works: Action Mental Health**

AMH Works provides quality mental health training programmes for employers across Northern Ireland to support healthy, resilient workplaces. A range of training options is offered including courses designed to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence of Managers in supporting employees experiencing mental health difficulties in the workplace.

Mental health is the leading reason for workplace absence in NI accounting for almost one out of every three days lost and 39.1% of long-term sickness leave. In 2013, the cost of sickness absence related to mental ill health was approximately £800 million. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a duty of care on all employers to look after the health, safety and welfare of employees at work which includes mental wellbeing.

AMH Works training and consultancy service was launched in 2012 with the aim of supporting employers to reduce the costs associated with mental health in the workplace in both financial and human terms.

AMH Works began as a small-scale initiative working to scope the needs of employers, which then informed the development of a range of training courses. This development work also resulted in the establishment of a consultancy service, which works with employers to support a strategic approach to the mental health and wellbeing of their employees.

The challenges faced include the everyday stigma associated with mental health resulting in reluctance of employees and employers to address issues combined with often limited resources available to employers which, in a climate of financial constraints, can result in employers' focusing on mandatory or technical training. The success of AMH Works lies in the expertise of Action Mental Health to deliver relevant, tailored and quality assured programmes and services: this is demonstrated by a 96% satisfaction rating from training participants and in the feedback from employers who can evidence an improvement in the mental health and wellbeing of their employees including reduction in absences and improved productivity.

To find out more please visit our website:

<http://www.amh.org.uk/services/amh-works/>



## **Belfast Enterprise Academy**

Belfast Enterprise Academy (BEA) is an award-winning, one year, programme funded by Belfast City Council and open to all Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) students in Belfast working towards degree level or higher, and who are living in the Belfast city council boundary area.

Each year the programme has an intake of approx. 30 students. BEA provides workshops and one-to-one mentoring to make sure learners get the support needed to enhance their entrepreneurial skills and take positive steps towards starting a business. This will be a mix of business support and specialist mentoring that is tailored to meet individual needs. This may be a financial adviser, a social media expert or maybe assistance to help to develop a strong brand. Learners get to see real businesses in action and meet the people who run them. BEA sessions happen all over the city. Previous venues have included City Hall, George Best City Airport, the Game of Thrones set, Fablab, Botanic Inns, Titanic Quarter developments and the Northern Ireland Science Park.

Throughout the BEA programme learners will have opportunities to access a range of business experts and business support organisations that will provide them with advice and support. At the end of the programme learners also have the opportunity to present their business idea to a panel of individuals who can provide information and advice to help make the idea a reality.

Students completing the programme can also apply for an OCN NI Level 3 Award in Business Development. Learners can also use it towards The Edge Award (Ulster University), Degree Plus (Queen's University Belfast) and Certificate in Processing Creativity (Belfast MET).

Since the programme was accredited in 2013, 145 graduates have completed the OCN NI Level Three Award in Business Development Skills qualification and 70 new companies have been established in Northern Ireland, generating new jobs and helping to grow our economy.

In recognition for the excellent delivery of this programme, in March 2016 the Belfast Enterprise Academy received an international award for good practice in training towards youth entrepreneurship from the European Training Foundation (ETF). The Foundation was set up to contribute to the development of education and training systems in EU countries, with the aim of increasing prosperity and sustainable growth.

<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/business/businessprogrammes/BusinessProgramme-53836.aspx>



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## **Financial Services Union (FSU) and The Open University (OU) Partnership**

In a local context of projected skills shortages, according to the Northern Ireland Skills Barometer, the FSU and the OU combine forces to provide opportunity for people to prepare to meet those needs and gain the benefits of a degree, with its subsequent career boost.

The partnership aimed to support Financial Service Union members in skills and learning development to improve productivity and to enable them to realise personal and professional goals.

Since 2015, the partnership between The Open University (OU) and the Financial Services Union (FSU) has enabled over 50 banking staff to embark on Higher Education studies through the Access Programme. Of these, 11 have progressed into under-graduate studies including certificates in management, finance and health and social care. In 2017, a new venture has been launched to allow union members to apply for a bursary, provided as partial funding towards Undergraduate module fees. This is an exciting and far-sighted opportunity provided by the Union, as it acknowledges that many banking staff do not qualify for financial support but the costs of study still represent a barrier that could prevent them from pursuing qualifications to boost their careers.

Adult learners face more challenges in completing Higher Education than the traditional school leaver. Many study while supporting families, maintaining work commitments and managing financial responsibilities. The Open University is uniquely designed to meet the study needs of these learners through flexible and innovative teaching delivery and support.

Success, of course, is largely due to the commitment and hard work of participants. The Union and the University sustain ongoing support, encouragement, preparation initiatives and evaluation. A key component of its success has been matching members' desire for life changing learning with the opportunities provided by Open University study.



## **Oceans Project: Southern Regional College**

In 2014 following a report highlighting a deficiency in vocational training especially in NRAs, SRC, working alongside local resident groups, identified a specific area of need and secured funding from Dept of Communities.

The OCEANS programme offered NRA residents throughout the southern region basic offshore safety induction and emergency training to new entrants to the Offshore Oil, Gas and renewal energy industries, as well as essential life skills. It also improved local people's educational qualifications, employability profile and increased self-esteem and confidence.

After an essential skills programme, residents undertook the BOSIET course, a 3 day residential offshore course in the National Maritime College of Ireland in Cork. This provided a basic knowledge of safety and emergency response procedures for working in offshore environments. Residents gained an understanding and awareness of the hazards encountered when working on offshore installations vessels and of the safety regime and management systems in place to control and mitigate hazards.

To assist and support residents the college provided, at no cost, a mentor, transport, accommodation and catering. Essential skills classes were held in local venues and at times suiting residents.

Since 2014, 64 residents have achieved BOSIET / MIST licenses and 21 residents secured employment- though not always in the sector.

The project increased the knowledge, skills and employability of local residents, built confidence, social networks and reduced feelings of isolation. Depending on their skills background, on completion of the OCEANS training, residents were job ready and able to fit into a wide range of roles within an offshore team - Deckhand, Roustabout or Roughneck.

To capture the impact of involvement, a variety of data sources, as part of a collaborative approach, were used including: evaluation forms which were completed by residents; data from one to one meetings; oral feedback from learners and members of the Residents Associations and the 'usual' college's evaluation processes.

A major factor contributing to success was the community support in recruitment and monitoring of residents. The college also offered a flexible learning programme, supported by a mentor, in a conducive environment and assistance to residents in overcoming social barriers (especially accessibility and financial costs).



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## **Switch onto Employment: Start360**

*Switch onto Employment is a project designed to meet the literacy and numeracy needs of 16-24 year old young people who are not in employment, education or training. The programme is funded by the Department for the Economy, through the European Social Fund.*

This programme supports 16-24 year old young people to move into further training, education or employment whilst learning in a fun and creative way. Switch onto Employment is an intensive 26-week programme designed to help young people enrolled, achieve their Essential Skills in English and/or Maths. In addition, to these subjects those programme participants enrolled will also work towards gaining OCN qualifications in ICT, Employability and Personal Development up to and including Level 1. Young people will gain valuable experiences, develop new employability skills and establish and achieve personal goals. Start360 will provide a foundation for life for these young people to discover what direction they would like to travel in the near future in terms of fulfilling their dreams, hopes and personal aspirations of life. Michael Faloon, a recent learner on the programme said – ‘Now I’m doing something good with my life, and it looks like I’ve got a great future ahead of me because of SOE - thank you very much.’

Every year, a group of Start360 young people attends an Arvon creative writing residential at one of their properties in England – a brilliant opportunity which is funded by the McGrath Charitable Trust. Russ spoke about his experience working with Start360 and presented copies of their latest Arvon Anthology to the young people who had taken part.

<http://start360.org/how-can-we-help-you/switch-on-to-employment>

<https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/finding-voices-through-writing>

## **Digital Inclusion: Supporting Communities**

Digital inclusion continues to be a growing area of work for Supporting Communities. Being digitally literate is no longer a luxury for an elite group, it is a must have skill for everyone in order to manage information, communicate, save money, access support and government services. It has become an essential tool for modern day citizenship and participation and no one can afford to be left behind. Digital training have also become increasingly important for people to access a wide range of public services, such as booking GP appointments, taxing your car etc.

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/news/shortage-of-workers-with-digital-skills-hitting-businesses-says-bcc-35602015.html>

The training is delivered by [Supporting Communities](#) as part of their Digital Champion Initiative. This programme enhances [the Go ON NI](#) programme working in partnership with the NI Direct Digital Inclusion Unit. The aim of the programme is to encourage a self-help approach to community development by providing free support, advice, information and training to individuals across Northern Ireland. The training is accredited by OCN NI, one of NI's leading awarding bodies.

Teresa Donaghue who successfully completed the Digital Inclusion training programme said *"When I first heard about the OCN NI IT course, I thought no way. I don't like computers, and they don't like me. But it was the best thing I ever done."*

Colm McDaid, Chief executive of Supporting Communities said "Supporting Communities have been an OCN NI recognised centre for 10 years, this enables us to have the flexibility to develop and deliver several accredited courses, specifically Level 1 & 2 in Computer Essentials. This course has enabled those who are the most digitally restricted gain the skills and the confidence to lead a digital life. With our continued partnership with OCN we hope to play our part in reducing the digital divide in Northern Ireland" To date 700 learners have gained certificates through this programme.

<http://supportingcommunities.org/digital-inclusion/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rAJQU1fz8o>

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## **Learn Day: Allstate**

Allstate is the second largest personal lines insurer in the US. Besides the US the company has a presence in Northern Ireland and India, ensuring the technology is up and running 24/7. During the past 2 years there has been a focus in the technology space (Allstate Technology & Strategic Ventures - ATSV) on leading from any seat with a particular emphasis on 5 values. Relevant to Learning & Development is the value 'Each Other' which states that we have a growth and development focused mindset. Linked to the values are High Priority Initiatives that help move us from strategy to action two of which concern employee development and organisation culture.

Working with our US colleagues and linked to the 'People Strategy' we agreed to pilot a 'Learn Day' event in Northern Ireland across our 3 sites in Belfast, Derry and Strabane. The Learn Day concept was designed and executed to help instil a continuous, self-driven learning culture in ATSV. We decided on bitesize talks, giving people just enough information to get excited on a topic that hopefully they would investigate further in their own time. The 15-30 minute talks were also to entice employees to volunteer to present in an informal, relaxed environment. The event was a great success with 33 talks and around 400 attendees. Talks were a mix of technical and hobbies with topics ranging from Holiday Spanish to the Amazon Echo and from Archaeology to Innovation. While many employees were left asking for more, some of the presenters enjoyed their first venture into public speaking so much they wanted to know if they could speak at the next Learn Day.

One event does not create a culture, but if we continue to promote the Learn Day concept and expand it to include any form of learning one day a month every month then we may have on our hands a 'game changer' that will help us in the drive to become a learning organisation.

<https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/informal-and-social-learning-workplace-allstate-northern-ireland-ni>



## **NOW Group**

Francine Rooney, 25, from North Belfast has a mild learning difficulty and was uncertain what the future would hold when she left college. She knew she wanted to find a job but was unsure what she wanted to do or how to begin her job search.

A friend told her about the NOW Group's employment service and Francine decided to get in touch to find out if it could help her. Thanks to the support she received from NOW Group Francine is now enjoying working at Funky Moneys (a children's activity centre) in a job that uses her skills and that she enjoys. When Francine joined NOW she was offered one to one career guidance with a specialist advisor who discussed her strengths and helped her to develop a plan to get a job she would like. She then had the opportunity to take a number of training courses to help prepare her for work and develop her skills, these included customer service, career preparation and food hygiene.

Francine also joined one of NOW Group's Skills Groups. The group get together once a week and look at job opportunities together, volunteer at events, meet with prospective employers and have the chance to make friends with people in similar situations to them.

Francine was allocated a dedicated Employment Officer who worked with her to find opportunities in the area she was interested. The first role she secured was a 12 week placement with an after schools club in Belfast which gave her some practical experience of working with children and confirmed her passion for this area of work. This then led to her current employment at Funky Monkeys. The key success factors relate to the combination of training and development, career guidance and support in job-search which offered Francine incremental progress towards a placement and then employment.

NOW Group is a social enterprise that supports people with learning difficulties and autism into jobs with a future, find out more at [www.nowgroup.org](http://www.nowgroup.org).

See also <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/finding-path-employment>



## **Working It Out: Action Mental Health**

Action Mental Health's AMH 'Working' it Out project is delivered from 10 AMH sites across NI, with AMH staff delivering programmes on our premises and in community based locations throughout Northern Ireland.

This ESF project delivers a comprehensive programme of specialist training, support and mentoring, leading to an increase in the employability of participants. It enables individuals to access employment or further education/training opportunities and enhances social inclusion, thereby reducing poverty and discrimination.

All participants (young people aged over 16 years of age and adults) will have a mental health condition such as anxiety, depression, psychosis, schizophrenia, drug/alcohol addiction or ASD. Due to the debilitating nature of their illnesses, participants are not currently ready to engage in existing mainstream training and employment preparation provision. They require specialist support within an appropriate environment to assist them to prepare for and progress to employment or further training / education.

The project recognises that a holistic approach is required for this client group and this is delivered through a range of mentoring and support initiatives. Activities include accredited and non-accredited personal development programmes, vocational training and employability training. Participants receive specialist support to assist them through these activity options, building their capacity and readiness to avail of employment opportunities. Specialist employment staff support participants to engage in work based training placements, voluntary work in addition to providing career guidance, and job search towards paid employment.

Since the Project commenced in April 2015, over 1600 participants have been registered on the AMH Working it Out Project. 285 participants have progressed from the programme with positive outcomes including paid employment, further education / training and progression to other Government programmes at a higher level.

**Website:** [www.amh.org.uk](http://www.amh.org.uk)



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## **Building the Community-Pharmacy Partnership : Community Development and Health Network**

This is a long established partnership between the Community Development and Health Network (CDHN) and the Health and Social Care Board. The aim is to strengthen partnerships between local communities and community Pharmacists to address local health needs using a community development approach. This process emphasises the importance of working with people as they define their own goals, mobilise resources and plans for addressing their health needs.

The process also builds social capital by: facilitating bonding between similar people, bridging with people who are from a different perspective and linking to people and groups to obtain access to resources and knowledge. The interface with the Pharmacist builds his confidence in using his expertise and enriches his skills in group work and knowledge of the C/V sector locally.

### **Example**

Cullybackey Development Agency worked with a core group of 15 older people and the pharmacist to explore issues such as Mental Health, Diabetes, Arthritis, diet and fitness, this size of a group allows intimacy to build and powerful sharing can take place.

Twelve sessions took place with the Pharmacist leading on six and co-facilitating six with input from community /Voluntary sector partners from Arthritis Care and Active Communities to Ballymena Borough Council and Policing in Community Safety Partnership. The partnership element of the work is key to the success of the Programme.

The Pharmacist formed a good relationship with the group becoming friends with many. She reported an increase in people coming into the pharmacy for advice and to avail of services instead of going along to their GP. She said that she now *"understand[s] participants' health priorities and issues [that are] important to them [while giving her the] opportunity to develop [her] confidence and improve knowledge in certain areas"*. Furthermore, she was able to gain a better understanding of other organisations in the area that she could signpost people to.

90% of participants now feel more confident about going to the Pharmacist for help and advice.

<https://www.cdhn.org/>

## **Reading Rooms (Older People Programme): Verbal Arts Centre**

Since 2013, Reading Rooms has engaged over thirty one thousand older people in day care, residential and nursing care, community and charitable health programmes.

We work in partnership with statutory and public agencies, as well as community/voluntary and charitable groups. It is a volunteer led programme delivered with older people. The aim is to offer high quality literature to older people most removed from this experience. We transform the practice of reading narrative fiction to become a truly inclusive experience that creates the space for the thoughts, ideas and opinions of participants, using a story and a poem as a springboard to have a conversation. As people age, their world greatly reduces. Conversations become limited and negative adding to isolation and loneliness. Reading Rooms enables people to be heard and to tell their story through carefully selected literature.

For example, using the Story and Poem combination, *Mr Know All* by W Somerset Maugham and *Migrations* by Moya Cannon, facilitated conversations about how some care homes staff believe that everyone gets on and we discussed what the residents could do if they were not mobile, but seated next to someone they did not like. The poem talks about the need to nest wherever we go and this led to discussing what we might take into residential care. It also enabled conversations about loss and the many forms this can take e.g. independence; control; home furnishings; identity.

### Outcomes and impact

- Relaxing, creates calm, eases agitation.
- Care staff get to know their residents as they share their own story.
- Builds Peer Relations
- Values and encourages Person-hood. This is eroded when older people are no longer given the opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions. Reading Rooms provides that opportunity to be heard and acknowledged.

The model works, due to our attention to the needs of older people as they age. We adapted delivery ( e.g. use of gesture /expression) to reach those with limited cognitive function. We learned the model could be structured to enable purposeful, pleasurable, customisable shared decision making in care homes. A new pilot programme is currently exploring this.

<https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/intergenerational-reading-rooms>

## **Capturing Craigavon Community Research Programme: Brownlow Festival committee and Southern Regional College**

In 2016 Southern Regional College (SRC) was invited to work with Brownlow Festival committee, Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon Borough Council (ABC Council) and PLACE (Planning, Landscape, Architecture, Community, Engagement) on the Capturing Craigavon programme to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of Craigavon town.

One element of the programme was to develop a booklet that would explore and document the history of Craigavon, charting the events, stories and implications of its founding, from its conception in the 1960s, through the decline of the 1980s and 90s and on through the renewal of the 2000s up to the present day.

The SRC community team and the College's School of General Studies delivered an accredited level 2 course to train local people from the Brownlow area in researching, documenting, archiving and developing new ways to share the story of Craigavon.

The residents learned to manage living memory research; that included interviews, historical reminiscence sessions, documenting oral history, gathering memorabilia and uncovering artefacts that fit the stories.

The work was connected to Neighbourhood Renewal initiatives and so impact was captured in multiple ways, including College evaluation forms and Neighbourhood Renewal processes. The programme increased the knowledge, skills and employability of local residents, built confidence, social networks and reduced isolation.

Some learners requested further learning related to research including photography, specialist software and audio equipment. Conversations with the School of Creative Studies has been held to open doors to further progression opportunities.

A professional published booklet was produced and distributed during celebratory events and other occasions.

### Critical success factors

The flexible learning approach provided by SRC helped the residents achieve the level 2 qualification. The college provided learning in a community venue, brought resources to the venue and worked at times and days that suited the lifestyles of residents.

## **A Woman's Guide to Controversial Conversations (Good relations; anti-sectarian and anti-racist education workshops): WRDA**

The gender neutral nature of community relations policy has been critiqued by the women's sector in a number of consultations which noted "*the exclusion of women from official policy and structures is a perennial problem..... They appear ignorant or dismissive of the positive role played by women in good relations and conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.*"

The project aimed to enable women to engage meaningfully in peace-building within and beyond their communities, by facilitating the knowledge and understanding of what sectarianism and racism actually are, their historical roots and modern day manifestations, and to explore how to challenge and combat these deeply ingrained societal problems to build towards a peaceful and stable future.

There were 2 x 3 hour interactive workshops exploring the above issues. It is non-accredited and key learning resources include Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (community relations section), diversity quiz, and women's lived experiences. Women were recruited through established organizational relationships, social media and newsletter publications disseminated regionally. The self-selection of the groups is key to success.

The main challenges were that peace-building and intercommunity work are not static events. Relationships ebb and flow and are regularly impacted upon by the bigger political picture. However relationships need to be nurtured with alternative narratives and work to continue to build peace in a post-conflict society.

The outcomes were confident knowledgeable women actively involved in peace-building and good relations within their communities and society as a whole. To date 150 women have taken part. It has also led to women taking part in various activities within their communities such as organizing events (summer schemes, education classes, study visits) and/or local decision-making processes (residents associations, community groups, women's groups). Formative and summative oral and written feedback were used to assess impact.

The critical success factors were exploring sensitive issues in a challenging and supportive environment from a gender perspective - creating space for women to learn and speak openly of their experiences. It required an experienced facilitator unafraid to challenge, but not embarrass, and moving from regional examples to local and personal narratives.

<https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/importance-good-relations-adult-education>



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## **Unblocking Potential: Ulster University**

The Unblocking Potential programme seized an opportunity to avail of Widening Access funds, to address what the team believed to be a major dearth in adult education, i.e. a community-based accredited programme which recognizes and values participants informal learning and builds upon that experience, to develop self-confidence and self-esteem; to raise aspirations and to equip participants with the skills to study at a higher level.

Recognising that one of the most difficult barriers to learning is actually entering an educational establishment, we took the programme out to the communities. Working in partnership with local community organisations, who were able to host the programme and help recruit participants, enabled participants to take the first step back into education.

Over 12 weeks, we enabled participants to identify their barriers to learning, examine their preferred learning styles and build their capacity to undertake 3rd level study. Participants were encouraged to develop strong support networks, through collective learning and peer-study groups. Participants also attended a session at the university campus, to meet university tutors and begin to face personal blocks they may have regarding educational institutions.

A major challenge is recruiting and retaining participants. Building in support, ensuring centres with creche facilities and gaining funding from the University's widening participation grant, all helped address this. Without these supports the programme could not run.

Several iterations of the programme have run since 2013, in community venues in Belfast, Craigavon, Newtownards, Newry and Kilkeel. Of the 15 participants who completed parts 1 and 2 of this programme last year, 11 embarked upon a part-time degree at Ulster University in 2016. Anecdotally, several participants also reported that the programme gave them the confidence to apply for and obtain jobs.

An unanticipated outcome has been the contribution to building relations across segregated communities, thus positively impacting upon the OFMDFM policy - Together Building a United Community.

The overall impact of this programme is akin to skimming a pebble across a pond – initially, it might only come into contact with a small area, but as the ripples radiate outwards, its effects will be felt across the pond. A video sponsored by Ards and Banbridge Council, highlights the positive impact of bringing a university course into marginalised communities.

<https://youtu.be/pZB19G1iME>



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