

ADULT LEARNER PUBLICATIONS 2011

AN APPLE A DAY

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As a community learning and development worker I am always looking out for opportunities for learners to try new ideas and use their skills and abilities in fun and interesting ways to help boost their confidence and self-esteem and highlight their achievements. As some of the learners that I worked with had expressed a desire to have their writing published I planned to take information about the Scottish Book Trust application for funding to them to discuss the idea of them working towards getting their writing published. In order for them to get the most out of the experience the decision to apply for the funding had to be theirs.

I expected the literacy outcomes to be that the participants expressed their ideas in jokes, stories (fact or fiction), cartoon or even tweets and that they expressed these in their own words and dialect without worrying about perfect spelling and grammar. This was to show that they can communicate effectively with others regardless of their literacies abilities. Some learners tell me that they can't read or write and they can, they just are embarrassed to put pen to paper because of their spelling or grammar. Contributing to the book enabled people to overcome their internal feelings and through peer support and mentoring were able to see that their writing or illustrations could help others who were feeling anxious or embarrassed about their own reading abilities. I also hoped that the book itself would help raise the profile of literacies learning and encourage new people to come and ask for support with learning.

One objective was to involve all of the literacies groups that operate within West Dunbartonshire in a joint venture. I thought this would give people, who would normally not meet, the chance to come together over a common cause.

I approached an existing group of learners in Dumbarton to take on the responsibility for the project as some of the learners within the group had expressed an interest in creative writing with one person keen to have some of their work published.

Participants were offered the opportunity to opt in or out of the project. All of the learners opted in and we agreed that the group should take editorial responsibility for the project and send out an open invitation to all literacies learners in the West Dunbartonshire area to contribute stories, jokes or images to the book.

Tim Turnbull from the Scottish Book Trust visited the group before the funding application went in to offer advice and answer any queries the group had. From that meeting I put in the funding bid which was successful. I was given written guidance to follow with dates for deadlines to meet. The Tutor who manages the group produced a structured plan to ensure that guidance was followed and deadlines were met. The group self selected roles and responsibilities based on their strengths and skills and matched this to the jobs

that needed done. The editorial group started by inviting entries from other literacies learners and producing material of their own. I produced a brief and circulated it to all literacies groups in the area to encourage learners to enter.

The tutor worked with the group to design a selection criteria checklist to follow to ensure that all entries met the funding criteria and that the process of selecting entries to appear in the book was fair and transparent. At this starting point we had no way of knowing how many entries we would receive and whether they would meet any of the criteria. Once the final entries were decided the group agreed on the content order, the design of the front and back page as well as the title. This was passed to the printers who sent back a mock up of how the book would look. The editors reviewed this and requested a few adjustments which were sent back to the printers. Overall the group was able to have the majority of their requests for the book design to be met.

People surprised themselves and others in the group by showing how creative they were. Hidden talents were brought to light and one of the learners offered to draw illustrations to complement the stories. Someone else used their knowledge of design to focus on the technicalities of the layout and final look of the book. Ideas were discussed and everyone was able to contribute to this process and be included. The creativity of the editorial process flourished week after week which enhanced the motivation and increased the confidence of those involved. The group members were sensitive to each others feelings when it came to being constructive with any criticism and this approach enabled ideas to be adapted to keep the focus on the agreed theme of the funny side of health.

Initially it was difficult to imagine what the final product would look like. Everyone probably had their own picture in their mind as to what the book would look like. The challenge was to take those pictures and put them together in a way that everyone was happy about. People contributed what they could and the ideas and pictures grew through the process of discussion, sharing thoughts and were finally captured on paper. I don't think people could see what progress they were making and what they were achieving until their ideas started to come together on paper. The tutor witnessed the

group go from uncertainty and worry about what they'd taken on at the initial stages to being enthusiastic, confident and proud of their work. Seeing the book progress and start to look like a book increased their motivation to make it the best it could possibly be. There was great anticipation waiting for the final product to arrive from the printers. No-one was disappointed by the end result. It was pretty perfect!

The difficult part was selecting entries for the book as some of the entries did not meet the agreed funding criteria. Drawing up a table of selection criteria and having everyone reading all entries and commenting against the criteria made the process easier and fairer for the group. Having discussed potential difficult areas right from the beginning and who would take responsibility for them meant that when they occurred it was already planned for. It was also difficult encouraging people from other areas who were not part of the editorial group to contribute as they were not fully involved in the process. I had to remind tutors and staff to encourage learners to contribute to the book. Apart from the initial brief that was sent to all tutors I raised it at team meetings and every other opportunity that I had. In reflection I might have been more successful if I had visited different groups to talk to learners directly about it and answer any questions or worries people may have had.

It was agreed up front what the boundaries and roles and responsibilities would be. As the group was organised and run by West Dunbartonshire Councils Community Learning and Development Section Adult Learning and Community Literacies staff, the overall vetting of entries would be done by the Section Head to ensure the Council's standards and legal requirements were met. Apart from this the rest of the decision making was down to the editorial group with the tutor keeping the Scottish Book Trust guidance in mind. All publicity included photographs of participants and quotes written by learners about their experiences. Learners who contributed were asked if they wanted their names in the book or not and individuals chose how they wanted to be mentioned in the book. The stories were written in a way that reflected the writers own voice and how they would express themselves. Some support was given to correct grammar and spelling but the essence of the authors' voice was retained.

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

- “Trust yourself as much as other people trust you”
- “Suddenly we could see it was going to happen”
- “A great team effort”
- “Everybody did their bit”
- “The group got quite excited and couldn’t wait to see the end product”