

Contextualised Literacy, Language and Numeracy Awareness brings Success

A healthcare workforce that reaches its full potential, so that it can support better patient care and healthcare services, is critical for healthcare organisations.

In a bid to raise the skills of the healthcare workforce, and in response to recommendations made by the Leitch Review (2006), Skills for Health has been working with employers across the UK to raise awareness and integrate Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) and ICT within the health sector.

One solution was the development and delivery of the City & Guilds Level 2 Award in Literacy, Language, Numeracy and ICT Awareness, contextualised for the healthcare sector.

A series of successful pilots were held across England, during which the Level 2 Award – a qualification designed to provide an awareness of Skills for Life – was delivered for those who promote access to learning.

Derbyshire Health Trainers

One organisation that has built on the success of the initial pilot is Derbyshire County PCT. Eight Health Trainers/Health Champions from the PCT participated in the City & Guilds contextualised training which was delivered over three days. The Health Trainers work with people from marginalised groups, who often have the poorest health status, and likely to have poor educational status. The Health Trainers are representative of the communities they work with – in a ‘support from next door’ rather than ‘advice from on high’ model. This means Health Trainers themselves may have LLN needs, as well as having to consider how LLN needs can impact on the service they provide.

Following the awareness course, and a subsequent one day cascade session, three of the attendees went on to develop their own two hour awareness session for Health Trainers. This acted as a condensed introduction to the issues surrounding LLN awareness and signposting. Feedback following the first session delivered in early 2009 was extremely positive. Four people have benefited from the short sessions so far and there are plans for it to roll out across the county during 2009. There are around 100 Health Trainers and Health Champions in Derbyshire, with plans to recruit more in future, so the training has come at a key time to help support workforce development.

Responding to local need

Ann Stuart, Health Trainer Learning Co-ordinator at Derbyshire County PCT, explained how the contextualised award and subsequent cascade training has helped their Health Trainers respond to the frequent instances of LLN and ICT issues in their local communities.

“ The training programmes have helped us develop a successful methodology so that we can raise awareness of the signs, barriers, and strategies that could be employed to tackle basic skills needs.

The sessions have worked really well. First, they got the health trainers thinking about helping people to access services and resources in a more appropriate way, and second they gave them the ideas and techniques to make this happen. One of the Health Trainers went back to his organisation and immediately reviewed all of the health trainer leaflets and materials, then started to make recommendations for improving them – so that was an early win. ”

The work has led to improved knowledge of local education provision and services and interest in engaging with and developing relationships with local education providers. It has also helped to develop a local resource for information on accessing education and assessment processes, and encouraged Health Trainers to consider their own LLN needs.

As part of the course, delegates learned about the importance of using a whole organisation approach to LLN and the PCT is now looking at customising the LLN Awareness session for other parts of the service in Derbyshire County.

The Benefits

- Greater awareness of how to support people with LLN and ICT needs
- Improved skills of trainers so they are more confident in identifying LLN and ICT needs
- Training package and material developed with input of Health Trainers so it meets their requirements
- Resources will be shared across East Midlands and potentially further afield
- Potential for others to express interest in accessing the City & Guilds Award.

How the C&G Award helped other organisations

The contextualised City & Guilds Award was delivered during 12 pilot training programmes throughout England. Evaluation of the training showed that the course helped to raise people's understanding of how LLN can help organisations make the most of their entire

workforce, and gave them the tools to make an impact within their own workforce:

- 94% felt more confident about promoting the benefits of taking action on LLN to others in their organisation
- 88% reported an increased understanding of national LLN strategies associated with the health sector
- 74% rated their understanding of the relevance of LLN issues to their organisation as high or very high – up from 9% before the training.

“ I had been rather naive about the need for an LLN approach within the PCT. After attending the course I understand the need and have started to do something to address this need. ”

A Primary Care Trust Assistant Director

Skills for Health is delighted to see that the contextualised training has been of great value to those with roles supporting learning and development. We look forward to seeing the results of changes made so that all employees reach their potential and help to deliver improved healthcare for patients.