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**Adult Learning and Literacies Service Report**

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**1. Purpose**

**1.1** The purpose of this report is to inform Area Community Planning Group members about how the Council's Adult Learning and Literacies service is helping to mitigate any negative impacts of Welfare Reform in the area.

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This is intended to form a part of members' focus on the local dimension to Single Outcome Agreement Outcome 5 'People live active, healthier and independent lives', under the short-term outcome 5.6 'Our partners work together to ensure that we mitigate against the effects of poverty across Argyll and Bute'; and in particular action 5.6.7 'Adverse impacts of welfare reform are minimised'.

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1** Area Community Planning Group members are invited to note the contents of this report.

**3. Background**

**3.1** Since September 2013, new requirements pertaining to a range of benefits under Welfare Reform have posed significant problems for a percentage of claimants, particularly those with literacies difficulties, mental and/or physical health issues, and learning difficulties of any kind.

**3.2** The Council's Adult Learning Service has responded by hosting job clubs, group work, courses and one-to-one support services in familiar community venues.

**3.3** We have a person-centred, needs-led, holistic and informal approach to learning, to which adults respond well. We aim, not to do things for people, but to help them reach a point where they can do things for themselves. As a result, we come to understand individuals' circumstances and skills levels, and their ability to

communicate these to other agencies. We have developed very good working relationships with the Job Centre, and can therefore help people who have more significant needs - not only to better understand and meet their benefits requirements, but also to communicate more effectively, thereby further reducing the potential for stress, hardship and sanctions.

- 3.4** Significant proportions of people are not only getting help with their IT skills, but progressing to IT classes, getting help with literacies, gaining accreditation or job-specific certificates like CSCS cards, and moving into volunteering or work, all of which contribute to the longer-term and sustainable mitigation of hardship.

#### **4. Detail**

- 4.1** The practical assistance with the requirements of Welfare Reform that Adult Learning staff offer comprises:

- Group support and 1:1 help as needed with Welfare Reform requirements
- Employability support and learning for jobseekers and people with long-term health issues
- Confidence-building with vulnerable adults
- Support in communications with the Job Centre for people who are unable to fulfil requirements for any reason – for example, literacy issues, mental health issues, learning difficulties, lack of confidence, or an inability to articulate what their skills levels actually are
- Progression onto courses or other learning opportunities
- Liaising with partners to offer tailored support / training / courses for specific groups
- Signposting to other partners

- 4.2** Current and recent Adult Learning provision that helps to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform in the Helensburgh Lomond area includes:

- Job Clubs (obtaining an email account, conducting internet job searches, uploading CVs, and filling in job applications, housing applications online, interview skills, writing cover letters, understanding claimant commitments etc )
- CV Workshops
- Adult Literacy help (1:1 or small groups)
- Job search skills – intensive short courses for those needing additional support
- Joint information sessions with Job Centres, giving information about help and support we offer to new claimants
- Basic computer skills outreach sessions in rural areas (Rosneath, Garelochhead)
- SQA-accredited computer courses, Employability Award

- courses, and Wellbeing courses
- Job-specific training: Food Hygiene, First Aid, Health and Safety, CSCS
- Upcycling (money-saving craft techniques)
- Universal Support Delivered Locally trial – a DWP-led partnership project, working to ensure that more vulnerable people can receive help with digital skills and/or personal budgeting prior to the implementation of Universal Credit

**4.3** The Adult Learning service works with partners, and particularly with the Job Centre, to reach those who are most in need of help to become more independent, such as people who:

- Are on benefits / low income
- Have low self-esteem, stress and/or anxiety conditions
- Are unemployed or under-employed
- Have health issues (physical and or mental)
- Have addictions issues (HART)
- Have learning difficulties
- Are homeless
- Have mobility and/or geographical isolation issues regarding access to help
- Do not have access to, or cannot afford, a computer and/or broadband

**4.4** As a result of our work, the most significant impacts are that people:

- Have a better understanding of their benefits requirements and are less likely to incur sanctions
- Feel they have someone to turn to, feel listened to, and better about themselves
- Are more ready to take part in ongoing learning
- Have more confidence to try new or different activities and explore new avenues
- Progress into employment, further learning or volunteering

Real-life case studies of impact include:

- 'P. was a long-term unemployed literacies learner with dyslexia, who also attended the Work Club and IT classes. In the past, he had applied unsuccessfully for labouring jobs, but knew that if he could get a digger-driver licence, he would have a much better chance of employment. Adult Learning staff highlighted his need with the Job Centre, who then assisted him to train for the licence. He passed the practical test, but, due to his dyslexia, failed the paper test. However, with further literacies help focussing specifically on the paper test, he passed. **As a result, he secured a short-term contract at Faslane - and has now progressed to start his own successful business.**'

- ‘T is an older man without transport and with very little money. He consistently tries incredibly hard to secure employment - he travels very long distances to try and find work, and once cycled to Kent, where he had been told there was a job. He had had a number of sanctions that have placed him in extreme poverty. In last 6 months with Adult Learning, he has successfully completed several courses to boost his CV – Health and Safety, First Aid and CSCS – and has learned basic computing skills. He has since obtained four short-term jobs, cycling to Aberdeen and camping to hold down one of these. **He now independently sources jobs online in the Work Club, and no longer signs on.**’
- ‘Initially reluctant even to touch the keyboard, E now has good basic computer skills and has the confidence to try things on her own. She attended Work Club and a CV workshop, and now has a good CV which she typed herself before progressing on to SQA-accredited IT at level 3. “I learned filing, keyboard skills and spreadsheets. I think this course is very important for anyone like me. When you get to a certain age your confidence goes. I didn't want to come on the course but I'm so glad I did. I've met new people and learned new skills.” **E now has a job and is no longer on jobseekers allowance.**’
- R is 17 and has Asperger’s Syndrome. Unable to cope with mainstream education, she withdrew from school aged 14. She initially attended an Adult Learning confidence-building course and went on to complete the Employability Award (SQA level 3). “It has raised my confidence and I feel able to now speak out in a group. The course was amazing and I learned interview skills.” **R has overcome severe anxiety and now has a part-time job. She is moving on to a full time college course in August.**’

4.5 Some headline statistics for Helensburgh Lomond in the past seven months (since Jan 2014) are:

- In excess of **450** people have engaged with the Adult Learning and Literacies service across the area for advice and/or support.
- Of these, **309** progressed to attend one or more courses, and **185** achieved accredited learning outcomes. 95% achieved individual learning goals, and 78% reported an increase in confidence.
- A total of **68** courses were delivered, **49** of which were specifically tailored to support jobseekers, especially with IT skills and improved employability.

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1** The Council's Adult Learning and Literacies service, together with our partners, is making good headway in the task of mitigating the negative impact of Welfare Reform.
- 5.2** The main focus is on digital literacy and IT skills, but these need to be delivered in conjunction with many other types of learning and support in order to achieve lasting independence.
- 5.3** Demand remains very high, and is likely to increase again when Universal Credit is implemented, for which greater numbers of claimants will be required to acquire a wider range of abilities.

### **Name of Lead Officer**

**Cleland Sneddon, Executive Director, Community Services**

**For further information please contact:**

**Jeannie Holles**

**Community Learning Manager**

**CLD Area Office, Lochgilphead Community Centre, Manse Brae**

**Lochgilphead**

**Argyll PA31 8QX**

**Tel: 01546 604753**

**Email: [Jeannie.holles@argyll-bute.gov.uk](mailto:Jeannie.holles@argyll-bute.gov.uk)**

