

Case Study

London Borough of Croydon

September 2012

LOVE LIBRARIES

LOVE VOLUNTEERING



Work Club at Thornton Heath Library¹

Abstract

This case study focuses on the Work Club at Thornton Heath Library which is run by volunteers once a week for two hours. The London borough of Croydon is involved in the Team London Love Libraries Love Volunteering Project which aims to strengthen communities and engagement with London's public library services by supporting and creating volunteering opportunities. Following recruitment of volunteers the club began in February 2012 and has attracted 348 attendees to date, on average 10 people a week. The libraries have worked in partnership with Job Centre Plus who refer customers to the club for support on typing CVs, applying for jobs and interview tips. Croydon Libraries also host a National Careers Service which complements the Work Club as customers attending the club are informed that careers advisers are available to talk to in the libraries on particular days.

The issue / Background:

The Work Club was established as a result of library staff attending a conference promoting the value of work clubs to the communities in which they are situated and linking this with the Love Libraries Love Volunteering programme. Thornton Heath was selected as the venue for the first Work Club in Croydon's libraries because of the higher proportion of long term unemployed around the Thornton Heath compared to other Croydon wards. According to JCP statistics, in April 2010, the average percentage of long term unemployed claiming for 12 months or more in Croydon as a whole was 13.1% in Croydon, whereas in Thornton Heath this figure was 17.2%.

The project works in the following ways:

- ❖ The sessions are run once a week by volunteers. The sessions are two hours long.
- ❖ The sessions are run on a drop-in basis. Computers are available for use by those attending.
- ❖ People can return as often as they like and the aim is that attendees offer each other support in the search for work.
- ❖ Support given includes IT support to type CVs and completing online applications; tips for interviews; awareness raising of useful websites

Partners and funding

¹ Generic photographs courtesy of London Councils

The partners include Job Centre Plus. Work Club volunteers attended a Job Centre staff meeting to promote the club and the Centre staff now refer customers to the Club. The advisers who deliver the National Careers Service have run some workshops for the Work Club attendees including one on appraising a person's skills and another on interview techniques. The volunteers are recruited and supported according to the Love Libraries Love Volunteering Best practice guidance

What we did:

The work club contributes to the libraries responsibility for contributing to the Council objective 'an enterprising city – reduce worklessness'. The target, set in the annual service plan was originally set at 60 people to attend the work club over the year. This has been greatly surpassed with the current total reaching 348 attendees since February 2012. It would not have been possible to have supported so many people without the help of volunteers

The libraries recruited one volunteer initially who started the club. The Club was promoted in all the libraries and through the National Careers Service. A second and third volunteer were quickly recruited and the volunteers visited the job centre to promote the existence of the club

A member of library staff meets with the volunteers to discuss issues that have arisen, the volunteers send a weekly update to the member of library staff including statistics. An email address has been created so that on publicity this can be quoted as a point of contact.

Evidence:

The Work Club has evidenced that poor IT skills are a barrier to people finding work. Many attendees are unable to navigate the online application forms or type up CVs which is an increasing requirement.

There is an obvious demand for support in the Thornton Heath area which has been demonstrated by the attendance at the Club. People who have attended have been very appreciative of the support they have received.

The impact:

- ❖ The drop-in nature of the club means that people do not have to wait to access support
- ❖ 348 people have attended the sessions in seven months so the need for this type of service is very apparent.
- ❖ People appreciate one to one IT support which is one of the main barriers to finding employment.

Key Learning Points

- ❖ Recruiting volunteers with the IT skills and skill to impart this knowledge is invaluable
- ❖ Keeping links with the job centre are crucial as they help promote the club to those who need it.
- ❖ Access to computers is essential It is important to be able to signpost attendees to other provision and have the local knowledge to do this.
- ❖ Libraries are a great venue for this activity as they are neutral can offer the IT facilities and book resources.
- ❖ The work club offers much needed support to people that many of the funded providers and organisations are unable to support due to restrictions in their funding.
- ❖ If links with a National Careers Service (NCS) provider are made it is beneficial for work club attendees if the NCS advisers can offer group work sessions, for example on interview tips, skills analysis.
- ❖ Refreshments should be provided to add a social element. We intend to introduce this.

Future Plans

There are plans to develop Work Clubs in other libraries in Croydon

Further information:

Fiona.tarn@croydon.gov.uk

<http://www.croydon.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/croydonlibs/theathlib>

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser/updates/work-clubs/>

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Jobseekers/programmesandservices/DG_198818

<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/culturetourismand2012/lovelibraries/>