

Community Learning News

A Newsletter for Community Learning Groups supported by Adult and Community Learning Service

"Transforming lives and communities through lifelong learning"

Welcome to the summer 2011 edition of the Community Learning Groups newsletter.

The big news for this newsletter is the change in the way we will be funding groups, details of which can be found on page 2 below.

The short films being produced about three of the groups are now in their final stages and are ready for distribution to the groups who took part, onto our own website and into libraries. Thank you to everyone who attended the pre-screening and gave some valuable feedback, which has been incorporated in the final films.

Thank you to the groups who have so far helped us to collect information about the impact on health and well-being of Community Learning Groups. If you would like to help too details can be found on page 2.

A thank you too, to everyone who has returned the yearly report form. We do appreciate the time it takes for you to give us this valuable information. I have written a short report on the results which can be found on page 3.

We had another good response for Adult Learners' Week this year, a short report can be found on page 4. If you took part and want to send some photos and a short report we would welcome the opportunity to put it in the next newsletter.

Finally, there is an update on the Big Society on page 5.

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Change of Funding

As you are all aware, I have recently asked you all for your thoughts on changing the way we fund the groups. The question was whether you would prefer to receive your funding as a grant rather than sending invoices to us. Since the majority of you agreed a grant system would be better we have decided to make the change. For the remainder of this financial year (August 2011 to March 2012) we will be giving you one grant to cover the two terms.

You should have received the information about the change together with some forms to complete. Once these have been returned to us we will send you one grant payment from August 1st. In future years the plan is, upon successful application, to award a grant to be paid for the whole of the financial year. We hope that this will give the groups more financial security and also reduce the amount of paperwork for you and for us.

Should you be anticipating any difficulties with this method of funding your venue hire costs please do not hesitate to discuss it with me as soon as possible.

Health and Well-Being – thank you

Thank you to the groups who have returned the Health and Well-Being activity sheets to us. The information is being collated at present, but it is not too late for more groups to take up this opportunity to actively inform our future work. You can help us to collect as much information as possible about the effects on health and well-being of belonging to a Community Learning Group.

To recap, the first activity asks individuals to decide among a set of definitions of “well-being” which they feel best captures their understanding of the term. The second activity asks individuals to rank the three most important aspects of the learning experience to them from a set of thirteen cards. Full instructions are given with the packs and both activities should take no longer than 10-15 minutes and can be delivered during a normal meeting, perhaps during a tea break. I hope more groups will take the opportunity to contribute to this research. Please contact me at the address in the “Have Your Say” section of this newsletter to receive your pack.

Spotlight on.....

your learner feedback

Thank you for returning your end of year report forms. 83% of you have completed and returned them so far. If you are one of the few that have not yet returned your report please do so as the more evidence we have of how your groups make a difference to the community, the more able we are to continue to make the case for funding informal adult learning.

According to your feedback 3,891 adults are involved in 114 Community Learning Groups across the county, which at an average of 34 members per group shows how vibrant and active a group of learners you are. It is interesting to see the variety of ways you have of collecting feedback.

Most members liked to give their feedback through informal comments either after each session or more formally as an end of year discussion. Some group leaders gave members the opportunity to complete questionnaires, write anonymous comments in comment books, write comments on sheets or email comments to them. Some groups used all or a combination of the above feedback opportunities. This gave the chance for everyone in the groups to find a way to add their voice and made the activity very inclusive.

The feedback has shown that members consider the importance of learning and personal development to have equal weight. Learners spoke about the importance of extending their skills, maintaining an enlivened mind and improving creative skills. They also considered the relaxed atmosphere of the groups to be important in helping them to learn and share that learning with friends and family. Personally learners spoke about their involvement giving them a purpose to their lives, helping them to gain confidence, giving them satisfaction and a sense of personal achievement.

When asked to comment about possible improvements to the group the constructive comments were about buying new equipment and expanding the learning programme. Only 10 groups felt that their present programmes were sufficient to warrant no changes. Every other group was eager to encourage and plan for growth, both of the learning experience and to involve group members in the delivery even more. It is great to see that you are all always planning to do more and do better.

Thank you for helping us to gather this useful information and don't forget that if you want to keep everyone updated about what your group is doing send some details and we will print them in the newsletter.

Who Did What in Adult Learners' Week

This year Adult Learners' Week was held from May 14th to May 20th and 17 groups had funding to plan extra sessions or special events to celebrate.

- Burntwood Family History Group ran an open day to promote family history and research.
- The B.I.R.T.H group held an open day, with workshops in a variety of activities.
- Heath Hayes Art Society held a portraiture workshop for their members.
- Whitmore Art Group tried a new medium using acrylics.
- Burton Flower Club held a flower arranging display and demonstration.
- Plain and Fancy Knitting ran a hand and machine knitting workshop.
- Jazz Improvisation held a workshop and performance.
- An IT group held extra sessions especially to work on Internet and Emailing.
- Chase Scrappers held an Image Transfer Techniques workshop.
- Offley Hay Art group held an extra workshop.
- Cheddleton Art Group held an exhibition.
- Zig Zaggable held a workshop on Inspirational visual learning media.
- Wandering Threads held a Coptic bookbinding workshop.
- Rugeley District Phoenix Activities Club Art Class held an art workshop.

Second Time Around Choir and Whittington Craft Club have had to postpone their workshops until a later date but hope to hold them in June.

Burton Monday Writers held a storytelling workshop and sent the following report and pictures.

Developing Storytelling Skills

In support of Adult Learning Week (May 2011) Burton Monday Writers hosted an open workshop "Storytelling for your Children/Grandchildren" led by nationally acclaimed storyteller Maria Whatton.

Fourteen people attended including three non-members. Maria took participants through two stories. The first she told with enthusiasm, subtlety and interest, as she built a rapport with her audience. Analysis of her techniques followed with tips on how to deliver, hold and retain listeners' attention were covered.



Maria Whatton delivering her workshop, "Storytelling for Your Children/Grandchildren" and members of the group.



Maria Whatton (left) and Lynda Turner, Chairman of Burton Monday Writers

In the second part of the workshop, Maria used the theme from Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale and set the group to work to tell a different version, perhaps with a modern theme and using the skills previously explored. The short summaries at the end proved entertaining listening. Congratulations to all who participated and especially to Maria Whatton for delivering her stories and sharing some of her skills with the group.

Big Society Update

The Government have recently issued a Giving White Paper that has the following commitments included, which may be of interest to some of you:

- A £10million Social Action Fund to support the most promising ideas for growing giving in priority areas in England and boosting levels of engagement over the next two years – including new schemes for people to volunteer a little when it suits them or match funding school philanthropy projects
- Challenge Prizes, of up to £100,000 for the best solutions to volunteer challenges
- A £30 million fund to improve the effectiveness of infrastructure organisations that support front line organisations
- £1 million to support Youthnet which runs the volunteering website www.do-it.org.uk and which will share its data more freely with organisations. Facebook have said that they will make this data accessible through them
- £700,000 to support Philanthropy UK connecting wealthy people with charities that need their support
- £400,000 support from Government and NESTA to trial 'Spice' in England which gives volunteers 'thank yous' like vouchers or discounts with local businesses when they do good things for the community
- Establishing a new honours committee to ensure people are recognised and celebrated for exceptional and sustained philanthropy
- Trial charity promotions on the public service website Directgov that gets around 4.5 million visits per week
- Open up government buildings to charities and voluntary groups
- Hold a Giving Summit in the Autumn to bring together charities, philanthropists, businesses, technologists and financiers to set the course for the future of giving
- All Ministers have agreed to a one day volunteering challenge

Have Your Say

Burton Monday Writers have told us about their recent 10th anniversary celebrations.....

This year is our 10th Anniversary and we celebrated with a dinner and various other functions including an exhibition of members' work in the Library. Lynda Turner, our Chair, is proud of the group's successful year with members (including herself) being well-placed in competitions and published in magazines and newspapers.

This year we have been supported by Adult Community Learning which has helped us financially and allowed us to organise extra professional workshops; this has encouraged our members to develop their creative writing skills.

We celebrated the October Learning Festival with an Open Meeting workshop led by Dr. Lynn Ashburner called 'Writing Your Memoirs'. This was a very successful event and 19 people attended several of these being non-members, subsequently three of those joined the group.

The group was formed in September 2000 by Maggs Payne, our honorary president, supported by Josie Elson (treasurer) and Carol Hickebothom. Over the years the group has strengthened with a number of anthologies being produced and broadcasts on Radio Derby's 'Pause for Thought'. Recently our vice-chair Shelagh Wain broadcast on Radio Derby talking about the group and reading a Remembrance Day poem written by Maggs Payne.

Our senior member Bunty Marshall has been published regularly in The Oldie Magazine.

Micro piece by Josie Elson:

Knitting

He wanted to learn to knit. I cast on eight stitches, one for each year of his life. I spoke out loud, "right needle under left, wool round needle, pull loop through." He began the next row. The knitting grew long.

Like life, the rows had loops, dropped stitches and a hole like the one where his Daddy should be.

Apologies to **Stafford Folk Dance group** for missing them off the last newsletter. Janet Palmer would like everyone to know that the group meets at Walton Village Hall every Thursday evening from 8pm to 10.15 pm and all are welcome. This lively friendly club will be celebrating its diamond anniversary in 2012 (the same year as the Queen!) and is anxious to promote folk dancing as a living tradition that is healthy, friendly and fun! Contact Janet on 01785 661076 for further details.

If you want to let me know how your group is fairing please write or email to:

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