

**A Comparison of two Women's
Enterprise Support Programmes run
within the West Midlands under the
Equal projects,
Agender and Adjust the Balance**

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Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to compare and contrast the findings from two Women's enterprise support programmes, which have run within the West Midlands based Agender and Adjust the Balance Equal projects, with a view to making recommendations from the findings, which can be used to enhance the provision of women's enterprise support in the future, within different sectors of the community.

Two women's enterprise support projects were delivered within the West Midlands through the Equal round two projects, Agender and Adjust the Balance.

- Agender is focused upon enabling men and women to enter into non-traditional employment sectors. Self-employment is considered to be a non-traditional mode of economic activity for women.
- Adjust the Balance is focused upon work-life balance in the West Midlands both in employment and self-employment.

The two programmes to encourage women into self-employment were called the Agender Programme and The Balancing Act.

- The Agender Programme was delivered in a deprived area of south Birmingham called Druids Heath.
- The Balancing Act was delivered in the relatively affluent area of North Worcestershire and South Warwickshire. It was also delivered in Kidderminster's deprived ward of Oldington and Foley Park.

The Agender Programme was devised to provide the women on the Druids Heath Estate with higher-level qualifications, which would enable them to enter into self-employment or employment in non-traditional areas of work. Delivery was in a group setting and a qualification would be awarded upon satisfactory completion of the programme.

The Balancing Act was devised to help women with time constraints into self-employment. In addition women who were already self-employed and needed to re-focus their business activities to align it with their work life balance, were also welcomed.

The report analyses the outreach methodology employed to attract women into the programmes. Assesses the delivery methods and the suitability of the methods to achieve the end objectives and makes recommendations on future work in this area with reference to on going work in the field.

The key recommendations from the report to maximise the number of women entering self employment or employment are:

- Face to face outreach maximises beneficiary enrolment
- Provision of an individually tailored programme delivered by people who have experience of self employment or employment
- A support network of self employed women
- On going feedback to ensure the programmes meets the beneficiaries needs within the framework of the programme
- Programme must reflect the geographical and socio-economic nature of the area.

Context - The State of Women's Enterprise

Women's Enterprise in the UK

The UK government has set targets to significantly increase the number of women starting and growing their businesses in this country. The rate of women's business start up in the UK is significantly lower than that in the US. (Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise 2003).

Women's Enterprise in the West Midlands

The West Midlands has been shown to have one of the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship in the country (The Regional State of Women's Enterprise in England 2005). The Regional Government, Advantage West Midlands, has since responded to the figures by setting up the first Regional Women's Enterprise Unit, which will run from 2005 – 2008 with the objective of raising the profile of self employment for women in the region. The Business Link provision for the West Midlands region has introduced a specialism for women to bolster their mainstream provision in September 2007 and in 2008 it is anticipated that a Centre for Expertise focussing upon women will help to build the capacity for women's enterprise support in the region as well as working as a repository for best practice in the field and a critical friend to the Business Link provision. This Centre will enable future programme developers to devise better programmes based upon activities in the region and in the general field of women's enterprise support providers, to date.

The DTI's Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise (2003) summarises the main barriers experienced by many women when starting their own businesses to be:

- Lack of appropriate business support
- Access to finance
- The impact of caring and domestic responsibilities
- Difficulties experienced in the transition from benefits to self-employment

- Lack of appropriate role models
- Low levels of confidence and self-esteem.

Prowess have produced a response to the barriers entitled 'Business Support with the 'F' Factor' which discusses the requirement for specialist business support to increase the level of female entrepreneurship within the UK.

Kingston University has just published a report entitled 'Mainstreaming Business Support Targeted at Disadvantaged Communities' (June 2007) which analyses five providers of enterprise support to people in disadvantaged communities. These providers are spread throughout the country and it is notable that the main focus of all five's provision is individual support, coaching, mentoring and on line support.

Equal Round 2 Women's Enterprise Support Programmes in the West Midlands

This report will focus upon two women's enterprise support programmes namely the Agender Programme which is part of the Equal Agender project and The Balancing Act, which is part of the Equal Adjust the Balance project. Both programmes have been running in the West Midlands as part of Equal round 2.

Agender Programme

The Agender Programme was based around the employment needs of women on Birmingham's Druids Heath Estate and aimed to provide higher level qualifications which would enable them to go into self employment or employment in non traditional areas of work. The contract was between the Agender Equal project and South Birmingham College, who devised and delivered the programme.

The Balancing Act

The Balancing Act's objective was to run pilot projects to create a programme whereby women with time constraints, usually due to caring responsibilities, can learn about and become self employed, probably on a part time basis, with the potential to expand their economic activities as their caring responsibilities evolve. Thereby maintaining a viable work-life balance while contributing to the UK's economy. Emphasis will be made upon the need to set realistic and achievable business objectives enabling the work-life balance to be maintained.

A secondary target market was women entrepreneurs who are finding difficulties maintaining their work-life balance.

The contract was between the Adjust the Balance Equal project and Balancing Business Limited who devised and delivered The Balancing Act programme.

Target market and target areas for delivery

The two programmes targeted different areas of the West Midlands, each with their own unique characteristics.

Agender Programme

The target market is the women of the Druids Heath Estate. The Druids Heath Estate is situated on the southern boundary of the City immediately against the Worcestershire Green Belt. Built between the late 1960's and the mid 1970's the housing stock is predominantly system built and is dominated by fourteen large tower blocks. It is linked to the City Centre some 14kms distant by a single, but very regular bus route, that terminates on the edge of the estate.

It is one of a number of isolated estates built on the edge of the City in this period, which have become increasingly characterised by high indices of both social and economic deprivation. The council has sold much of the traditionally built housing stock to residents under the right to buy scheme.

Demographically its population is predominantly of white European extraction. There are large numbers of lone parents and single teenagers living in the system built and high-rise property, which is hard to let.

The Balancing Act

The target market is women in North Worcestershire, primarily Redditch and Bromsgrove and South Warwickshire which centres on Studley and Alcester. The towns / villages all border each other with Bromsgrove at the westerly edge and travelling southeast to Redditch, then Studley and finally to Alcester. Redditch has a total population of around 70,000 while Bromsgrove is close to 90,000, Studley has a population around 7,000 and Alcester has 9,000.

The towns are generally relatively affluent with wards of deprivation. The programme is also available to all women across the West Midlands providing that they will travel to North Worcestershire and South Warwickshire for delivery.

In addition, the research was carried out in the Oldington and Foley Park area of Kidderminster, Worcestershire. This was at the request of Worcestershire County Council who asked the Equal Adjust the Balance project leaders if The Balancing Act could be run alongside the Pathfinder project which is working to regenerate this severely deprived ward. The Pathfinder project is run out of Birchen Coppice Middle School, which is located in the community and is the

centre for many community ventures including a Children's Centre and a Police Sub Station. The population of this ward is around 5250.

Outreach

The initial requirement for the two programmes was to raise awareness of their services to the target markets. A wide range of methods was employed. Details and results are shown in appendix 1.

Key findings:

Active outreach for the Agender Programme and The Balancing Act spanned a 2-month period.

The Agender Programme used pre-tested promotional channels, which relied upon written communication.

In addition the Centre Manager phoned around existing students who she thought may be interested in the courses and this generated all of the leads. Staffing capacity and the resultant time restrictions prevented the Centre Manager from carrying out further outreach.

The outreach resulted in 12 women expressing interested in the Introduction to Personal Finance course, 4 women expressing interest in the Enterprise awareness course (which was promoted as Introduction to Self Employment) and no interest in the Introduction to Team Leading.

The Balancing Act decided that it was necessary to remove as many barriers as possible for the women to join the launch event. Therefore the project deliverers visited as many relevant community venues as possible, to talk to the women who fall within the target group. The catchment area was significantly wider for The Balancing Act and therefore a press release was used to promote the launch events. This was hugely successful generating 22 beneficiaries.

Outreach in the Oldington and Foley Park area of Kidderminster was on going throughout the life of the project. This is a 'harder to reach' group, similar to the Agender Programme's target group and the most effective outreach was through the neighbourhood office's staff and the Pathfinder project's team. The project deliverer had met with both groups at length to explain The Balancing Act.

Outreach was not continued once the Agender Programmes start date had passed.

Outreach for the second phase of the Agender Programme, which provided Employment Workshops was again based upon leaflets, phone calls and e-mails. Initially although 10 women expressed an interest via the family

support unit, none attended on the day. The wording of the promotion was changed to make it more understandable and as a result of this and the phone calls, 5 women expressed an interest and completed the sessions. One of these women came through the job centre and the other 4 were existing students at the Dell Meadow Centre. (Language is very important when creating a women friendly enterprise culture. Prowess is the UK association of women enterprise providers who support women to start and grow their businesses (www.prowess.org.uk). They commission research and produced a members briefing which discussed terminology which attracted women to enterprise support entitled 'Marketing Business Support to Women'. The information contained within this report is very useful when compiling promotion materials.)

Outreach for The Balancing Act was purely passive from the Launch Event due to the initial high demand for the programme. This passive outreach took the form of word of mouth, which generated 54 beneficiaries, Redditch Job Centre, which generated 20 beneficiaries, and Business Link's Gateway team (a telephone call centre which advises on Enterprise programmes in the West Midlands), which generated 15 beneficiaries all of whom originated from the Birmingham and Solihull area. The project deliverers had attended a training course for the Job Centre Staff where The Balancing Act was explained in detail. The Gateway Team were spoken to in person over the phone and the project details were confirmed by e-mail.

Conclusion

Women who may want to enter into self-employment often lack confidence and therefore it is important that any barriers to attending the programme are removed. Face to face and well-explained promotion appears to have been essential to this process.

Innovative ideas for Outreach

There was no response to the written promotion for Dell Meadow and it would have been useful to invite groups of women (focus groups) from the estate, maybe through a cup of coffee as soon as they have dropped the children at school or through an existing mother and toddler group or playgroup, church groups or other community groups to get their thoughts on session they would like to see at the Dell Meadow Centre around self employment and employment. By going out to the groups you are removing the need to make the effort to come to pre-arranged sessions.

Design and Implementation

The Design of the Agender Programme

The Agender application was based around the employment needs of women on the estate and aimed to provide them with higher level qualifications which

would enable them to go into self employment or employment in non traditional areas of work. The aim of the project was to test the applicability of the model to the Druids Heath estate and where necessary to make adaptations and amendments from the lessons learned during the life of the project. A range of courses, at introductory level were proposed that would enable local women to gain skills that would lead them to self employment or employment.

A range of employment opportunities were identified where women were under-represented and where training to address the imbalance could practically be delivered at Dell Meadow. The courses developed were at introductory level:

- Introduction to Personal Finance;
- Introduction to Team Leading;
- Enterprise Awareness
-

It was decided to run these for ten weeks through the South Birmingham College's LSC Core programme and then provide progression into Level 2 courses delivered at the Centre in the same areas.

All these courses were to be financed through LSC Core funding for learning and require a minimum number of 14 students to enrol before they can commence.

The Introduction to Personal Finance started with eight students, with a promise from four others to attend. The other courses did not meet the minimum required numbers. The four additional students failed to enrol on the Finance course and after a month, four of the eight students ceased to attend and the course had to be terminated.

All of the women who had registered interest but did not attend the course and those who stopped coming to the course were phoned by the Centre Manager and they all said that they had 'changed their minds' about attending the course.

After meeting with the LSC Link Officer, it was decided to try a new approach to recruitment for the courses and provide Employment Workshops based around non-traditional jobs, CV's, application forms, interview techniques and job search. The delivery was on a more individual level and was delivered by the Dell Meadow Centre Manager, an experienced trainer in this area, who was taken off her existing duties to undertake this task. As she was not part of the teaching staff the issue of minimum numbers could in this instance be avoided. Five women attended the first and subsequent two sessions, thereby completing the programme.

The Balancing Act

Two launch events were planned for January 2006. The target was to attract 5 women to two different venues. The day and time of the events were scheduled from discussions with the women who expressed an interest during the outreach visits. The events were planned to coincide with the time that the women had childcare. The first event attracted 24 women and the second was limited to 11, which was the room's capacity. An overflow event was required which attracted a further 9 women. At the launch the women were told about the programme and a questionnaire was distributed asking the women what assistance they required to help them start their business. The guest speaker at each event was the editor of The Standard newspaper, which is distributed across the target area, who spoke about promoting your business for free in the local papers. 41 women registered as beneficiaries from the launch events and by the end of month 2 (Feb 2006) 52 women had joined the programme.

A weekly workshop programme was then initiated as a result of an analysis of the questionnaires from the launch event. Subsidised childcare was available for the workshop sessions. The beneficiaries completed a feedback form after each workshop, which also provided them with the opportunity to suggest workshop topics. The workshops provided networking opportunities and very soon the women were 'buying' each other's services for cash or on a bartering system. In addition to the programme deliverers, beneficiaries with specific experience and skills, such as sales techniques delivered workshops as did other delivery partners from Adjust the Balance.

Each beneficiary was offered individual sessions to enable her to progress her business idea. The individual session ran for 1 to 2 hours and was delivered in the community, either within the beneficiaries' home if she requested this or at a suitable community venue. The workshop and all of the individual sessions took place within the school day and school term.

In addition, other events such as group trial trading and actual trading events, Inland Revenue workshops; visits from our Italian partners and trips to Enterprise events took place.

With time the numbers attending the workshop started to fall as the women were working on their businesses, so the workshops were replaced with monthly evening networking events. Interestingly these attracted a different group of beneficiaries and were only reasonably successful.

All communication with the women was through e-mails and the website also promoted upcoming workshops and other events. A forum was introduced to the website and the women were offered a password so that they could participate in the forum. Around 95% of the women had access to e-mail and this proved to be an effective and inexpensive mode of communication. Importantly it also prepared the women for the technologies, which are used in business. The forum on the website was not very popular as the women

were not keen to use it. Further research is required to find out why this was not popular.

Oldington and Foley Park Programme

The same programme was run in this area. The beneficiaries from this venue, which is about 15 miles from our workshop venue, were invited to all of the workshops and some did attend. The individual sessions were delivered in the Pathfinder project venue, which is Birchen Coppice Middle School, which is located in the Oldington and Foley Park Estate. A limited number of workshops were also delivered at Birchen Coppice Middle School.

Conclusions on design, implementation and performance of the programmes

Outreach

The Balancing Act and The Agender Programme undertook 2 months of active research.

- The Agender Programme generated inadequate interest to complete any programmes. Initial interest was 12 women.
- The Balancing Act generated so much interest that further active promotion was halted for the life of the project. Initial interest was 44 women.
- Promotion for Oldington and Foley Park was on going throughout the life of the project as this was a significantly harder to reach group.

Programme Delivery

- The Agender Programme required 14 women to enrol, for each course to run. Only the 'Introduction to Personal Finance' course started and this completed only 4 out of 10 sessions due to low attendance levels. The subsequent 'employment' sessions had 5 beneficiaries who completed the 3-session programme.
- The Balancing Act Programme had to timetable an additional launch event, bringing the total to 3, to cope with demand. The launches generated 41 beneficiaries. Final beneficiary total was 162, which had been limited due to staffing capacity.
- Oldington and Foley Park had steady enrolment, which was significantly slower as the target area was much smaller and the area has high deprivation indices. The final total enrolled is 15.

Programme Outputs

- The Agender Programme's courses to stimulate self-employment generated no qualifications for the beneficiaries as no courses were completed.
- The Agender Programme's employment sessions generated 5 beneficiaries who completed the programme. Of which, 4 have returned to Dell Meadow for further education and 1 is awaiting an interview following her application to a housing association for an apprenticeship in building maintenance.
- 40 beneficiaries from The Balancing Act were self-employed when they enrolled.
- The Balancing Act to date has generated 39 women into self-employment. This is around 1 in 3 beneficiaries who attended the course into self-employment, which is high for the enterprise sector. The majority of these women were not on benefits and so although they were not a 'drain' on the UK's economy, they are now actively contributing to it
- Oldington and Foley Park's project has generated 5 women into self-employment, which is 1 in 3 of the beneficiaries from the ward, again, a high figure for a deprived area.

Summary of Research Findings Agender Enterprise Programme

No women entered into self-employment as a result of the Agender Programmes. Five women are now better equipped to enter into employment as a result of the employment workshops, four have chosen to continue their education at the Dell Meadow Centre and one is awaiting the outcome of her application for a building maintenance apprenticeship with a housing association, which is in a non-traditional career area.

- The Agender Programme has shown that more outreach was required to better understand the needs of the area prior to designing the programme.
- Teaching 'enterprise' even at an introductory level is not attractive in a large group setting.
- Small group and individual tutoring was very effective for the employment workshops.

The Balancing Act

Thirty-nine women have now entered into self-employment and this number will continue to rise, as the programme will run until the end of December 2007

- Demand for a programme which can help women with time constraints into self-employment, far exceeded expectation.

- The number of women who have entered into self-employment has far exceeded the target for the programme (beneficiaries into self employment target was 20).

Oldington and Foley Park Programme

Five women have now entered into self-employment from this group. An additional woman has entered into voluntary work as a step to future employment or self-employment.

- The programme needed to be modified for delivery in a deprived area due to health and safety issues. The programme was delivered in the Middle School within the community and 5 women entered into self-employment

Factors for consideration

Women's characteristics	Druids Heath	Oldington and Foley Park	The Balancing Act
Education levels	Low	Low	High
Employment	Low	Low	Low
Benefits	Yes	Yes	No
Tax credits	Yes	Yes	Yes

Both Druids Heath and Oldington and Foley Park are areas with high levels of deprivation. The Balancing Act programme however was delivered in the 'leafy suburbs'. The women in Druids Heath and Oldington and Foley Park share many socio-economic characteristics, while the women on The Balancing Act programme are better educated and more financially secure.

The risks of entering into self employment may therefore be greater in the areas of deprivation as these women may perceive that they have 'more to loose', in terms of their benefits which translate into a regular income. Self employed people should never be worse off financially that those in receipt of benefits however the services which supply the benefits and tax credits are very disjointed and consequently there are often very stressful periods while the change of 'status' from benefit recipient to self employed becomes embedded in the system. As a lone parents this is increasingly stressful.

Consequently the decision to become self-employed may be more difficult for some people than others. (Bridging the Enterprise Gap 2004 highlights the potential problems associated with the transition form benefits to self-employment)

There is an issue of confidence and education, which is required to enable the person to move forward towards their self-employment goal. Feedback from

the Dell Meadow Centre was that many of their clients were too risk adverse to take the step into self-employment.

Performance

The courses designed for the Agender Programme were aimed to build up the 'soft skills' namely confidence building, presentation skills, decision making and so on, so that the women were in a stronger position to move forward into self employment or employment. The courses would re-enforce that the women actually were well equipped to deal with the situations in the programme.

Hurdles

The funding for the Equal projects comprises of two sources, the European Social Fund, which provides 40% of the total funding, and the match funding, which supplies the remaining 60%. The delivery partner, who in this case is South Birmingham College, usually supplies the match funding.

When designing the courses to be offered for their Agender Programme contract, South Birmingham College built their delivery around their LSC Core Funding for Learning, as this was their match funding.

This funding stipulated that the courses had to attract 14 women per course in order for the course to be run. This is an immediate challenge.

The level of education and employment is low in the Druids Heath area and therefore any course, which was to be offered, had to be at the Introductory Level.

Research of the enterprise courses available for delivery revealed that they were all at level 2 or above, which was too high for the target market to start on.

Consequently three introductory level courses 'Introduction to Personal Finance', 'Introduction to Team Leading' and 'Enterprise Awareness' were proposed. These courses were then offered to the community. The take up was inadequate for the funding requirements and two courses never started while the Introduction to Personal Finance ran for four weeks and was closed. The main challenge, which the Agender Programme had, was the need to have 14 women on each course and maintain this attendance throughout the course.

This generated two key problems:

Two of the courses did not run due to lack of initial interest. Therefore it was not known whether this course would have moved the women on towards self employment or employment.

The one course that did run stopped after 4 weeks. This must have been rather frustrating for the 4 women who did continue to come and had the opportunity to progress removed from them.

A course was then run which delivered help with employment including CV writing, application forms, interview techniques and job search. % women started this programme which ran for 3 sessions and 5 women finished and are now looking for work. These sessions were delivered by the Centre Manager who had previously worked within the Job Centre setting and had experience in this area.

In Oldington and Foley Park there were a total of 15 women who registered on the programme. Each woman was seen regularly on a 1:1 basis to develop her business plan. She was also invited to the group session which took place in Studley (although this was too far for some of the ladies to travel) and some also attended small group sessions, which took place in their estate. Of the 15 women registered 5 of them have gone into self-employment.

In a previous Equal project the neighbouring area of Kings Norton Three Estates was targeted as part of a larger project again to help women to enter into self-employment. This area has very similar challenges to Druids Heath and the residents have a similar socio economic composition. The women from this area had many challenges to becoming self-employed. However in the end three women from the estate became self employed, all were lone parents and two set their businesses up on the estate. One of the women set up a café and employed three other women who had come to the programme but were not ready for self-employment. This had a very positive effect on the community. These women were seen on a 1:1 basis but had to travel to Sparkbrook for their appointments. The three who became employed in the café could not cope with this requirement, however through a community programme they stayed in touch with the woman who was setting up the café and 4 women (business owner and 3 employees) found work as a result.

Conclusion

The Equal round 2 projects namely the Employment Course run by the Dell Meadow Centre Manager as part of the Gender Programme and the Oldington and Foley Park Balancing Act project, along with the Equal round 1 project to enable women from disadvantaged areas to enter into self employment, (which included Kings Norton 3 Estates), have shown that it is possible for women from deprived areas to participate in and become economically active from individually tailored employment and self employment programmes. However there are many hurdles to cross and working on an individual basis is key to success.

Supplementary group sessions are very important as they enable the women to realise that there are other women like themselves who can become self employed and employed and if they can, so can I!! This also fosters a support

network and the women in Kings Norton 3 Estates were very supportive of each other on a personal and business basis.

Recommendations

When designing a programme it is essential to make sure that the programme does actually deliver what the participants want. The Balancing Act was built around the objective of meeting the beneficiaries' needs within the framework of enabling them to set up in business. The introductory session had an audit of the potential beneficiary's needs whereby the beneficiaries answered focussed questions. At the end of every workshop a feedback sheet was completed by all participants, asking for feedback on the session and asking what other workshops the beneficiaries would like to see offered. The workshop programme was then built around the women's requirements.

At the end of the 1:1 sessions the women were asked if the session had met their need for moving forward. The delivery partner always tried to accommodate the need and where they couldn't they sign-posted the women to someone who could meet the need.

The programme at Druids Heath was devised around the funding requirements and the accredited courses available. There was no consultation with the community. This would be a useful activity in future programme development. By involving the community in the decision making – particularly community leaders, both formal and informal, the course may stand a better chance of success. This is a model used by Bizz Fizz who help start up and existing micro businesses in disadvantaged areas through a 'Local Panel' comprised of members with diverse backgrounds from teaching, local authorities, businesses, faith groups, Business Link to Inland Revenue to assist their business advisers to help the community members with their enterprises. (Mainstreaming Business support targeted at Disadvantaged Communities 2007)

Approaching enterprise education in formal teaching sessions without the 1:1 support is very difficult and, as the outcome has shown, not very appealing to the women. The outcome suggest that if it were possible it would have been better to use the ESF funding to support the programme deliverer which would have removed the requirement for 14 women in a group setting and would have enabled delivery like the employment sessions. The overheads would then have funded the match-funding element.

Stopping courses when they have already begun is potentially very discouraging for those who do want to move forward and will foster apathy when further courses are offered. Word of mouth is the most powerful form of promotion. The women who were attending the course, were asked to invite people onto the programme

The Employment Workshops were delivered by the Centre Manager, who had experience in the field. The women delivering The Balancing Act programme and the programme in Oldington and Foley Park are both self-employed women and as such have experience in the field. When discussing enterprise support with providers across the country, it is recognised that the best support providers are those who have had experience of self-employment.

Innovation for Women Enterprise Support

The Balancing Act researched innovative ideas throughout its programme and has been able to draw conclusions from this research:

- **Programme** for helping women with time constraints into self-employment. The Balancing Act originated from the observations and research of Balancing Business, which had shown that women would like to set up in business, but on a small scale to fit into their available time. The business will grow or evolve as the women's circumstances change. There are key times when women change their economic activity, namely children being born, children starting nursery, primary school, secondary school, leaving home, a disability arising, cessation of caring for elderly relatives and so on. Of the women who came to our programme who were already self employed, a number were childminders, but because of a change in their home responsibilities they wanted to diversify into a wrap around care club based at a local middle school, a curtain and blind designing and making company and a gift retailer. The wrap around care club provides employment for one of the women in The Balancing Act, as well as more people in the community. Self-employment is an ideal option for women, because for example, they can then be there for their children during school holidays and scale their business accordingly.
- **Outreach.** It was essential that we removed as many barriers as possible for the women to join The Balancing Act. To achieve this objective the promotion carried out in the community, was done by the delivery team, so that the person the women met at the community venue, was the person they met when they came to The Balancing Act. The only cost for the promotion was staff time. There were no paid for adverts and the initial leaflets which had been printed were not re-printed. This resulted in cost effective promotion, which focused directly on the target market and generated a high number of beneficiaries.
- **Communication through e-mail.** All communication with the women was through circular e-mails and the Balancing Business website. The objective was to encourage the women to communicate in a business mode. Communication through e-mail was very successful, less than 6% of the women did not have access to e-mail and many became significantly more proficient in this mode of

communication throughout the course. All 1:1 advice notes were e-mailed to the ladies who then had to learn how to retrieve attachments.

- **Website and the website forum.** All events were advertised on the website events section (www.balancingbusiness.co.uk). In time, a forum was introduced for the women to communicate with each other and passwords were issued for access to the site. This facility was not popular and was very sparsely used. Further research is required to investigate whether this is a gender issue or is the result of the close proximity and easy access to the other women on the programme.
- **Export trade.** Two of The Balancing Act beneficiaries visited Benevento in Italy where Adjust the Balance's transnational partners were based to learn more about women owned businesses in the region and to explore the opportunities for exporting. This will be followed up with the creation of a women's enterprise website which will enable women's enterprise support providers to share best practice and women entrepreneurs to learn more about exporting to other European countries.
- **Mentoring.** The business advisors on the programme have run their own businesses and so there is an element of mentoring as well as advising which has taken place throughout the programme. This was very valuable also when the Agender Programme ran the employment workshops as the deliverer had extensive experience of goal setting, CV writing and job applications.

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**Outreach Activity for the Agender Programme,
The Balance Act and Oldington and Foley Park**

Activity	Agender Programme	Adjust the Balance Enterprise Project North Worcs & South Warks	Adjust the Balance Oldington & Foley Park
Date of outreach	August & September 2006	November & December 2005	
Target market	Women in Druids Heath Estate	Women in North Worcestershire & South Warwickshire	Women in Oldington & Foley Park
Mode of outreach	Local school network	Community groups e.g. Escape (6), Mother & Toddler Groups (1), National Childbirth Trust (4), First Schools (1),	Job Centre (0)
	Newsletters	Banks (0)	Pathfinder newsletter (twice) (2)
	Leaflets and posters in local shops & Doctors surgeries	Job Centres (20)	Children's Centre (0)
	Local Community Organisations	Gateway Team @ Business Link (15)	Neighbourhood Centre (7)
	Dell Meadow providers	Press releases in local newspapers (22) & Sure Start newsletter (1)	Family weekend event (0)
	Dell Meadow Centre Manager by phone (12)	Leaflets (1)	Word of Mouth (2)
		Health Visitors (1)	Local College (0)
		Other enterprise support providers (0)	Borough Council (0)
		Borough and County Councils (6)	Pathfinder project (4)
		Balancing Business & Prowess website (2)	

		Inkberrow Design Centre (9), Reddi Centre (1), SandicroftCentre (2)	
		Business Club (2)	
		Word of Mouth (54)	
Women registering on programme	12	162 **	15
Active on going promotion	No	No	Yes
Women already self employed when registering	0	40	1
Women now self employed as result of programme	0	39*	5*

() Represent the number of women enrolled on the programme from this route of outreach

* Adjust the Balance's Balancing Act is running until 31st December 2007 and there will be more women who enter into self-employment as a result of the programme.

** If the numbers on brackets are added up for North Worcestershire and South Warwickshire they do not total 162, this is due to the community groups being given as examples and therefore they are not all included.