

REPORT: NDLC RESEARCH - Contract no WM41006360

INTRODUCTION

The aims of the project were to raise awareness of career options and progression opportunities and to promote non-stereotypical careers to women beneficiaries. Activities were offered through drop in information sessions and through one to one guidance interview sessions aiming to

- Support beneficiaries to make informed career decisions
- Support beneficiaries in planning action to progress into careers
- Support beneficiaries in considering non stereotypical career options

The delivery of Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) was offered through the Children's Centre network. The three Children's Centres selected for the delivery were:

- Surestart Centre 80 –Anthony Rd Saltley Birmingham
- Bordesley (Muath) Centre –Stratford Rd Sparkhill Birmingham
- Mirfield/Tame Valley Centre Ridpool Rd/Bromford Birmingham

City College Birmingham has close links with two of the centres - Saltley Centre and the Bordesley (Muath) Centre. City College and Saltley Surestart occupy a shared building, with Centre 80 occupying the ground floor and City College Saltley Academy occupying the other two floors and providing education and training. Although separate institutions, we share a common reception, car parking and other facilities. Staffs from both organisations have built good working relationships. The Bordesley (Muath) Centre is a City College community partner organisation, with the college providing most of the education and training provision there. Both of these two centres are located in areas of high economic and social deprivation and both have a large Black and

Minority Ethnic population, with the majority of Pakistani Muslim backgrounds. These tend to be socially conservative communities with traditional gender roles. I am familiar with both these centres as in my careers adviser role I provide careers input to City College students at both these sites. The college has no such direct contact or established relationship with Mirfield/Tame Valley Centre but Mirfield Centre is geographically close to City College's East Birmingham campus in Garretts Green.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Activities started mid January 2007. After making initial contact by telephone I arranged to meet relevant staff to discuss the project and potential IAG input. At the Bordesley (Muath) Centre I met with the centre manager, their employment adviser, the nursery manager and, at a later meeting, their marketing officer. They agreed the IAG input would be viable and beneficial to their users and agreed to provide facilities for drop in advice and guidance sessions. They agreed to make a private interview room available for booked one-to-one guidance interviews. To enable me to make my presence known and to access the women using the centre we agreed to start the activities with an information stand to offer informal IAG. Their marketing person agreed to advertise the sessions and the times I would be available on site.

Similarly, I met with the manager and the employment worker at Centre 80. Both have been involved in the Agender project which, as well as making access easier, gave me a valuable insight into their involvement with the project. Again, at Centre 80 we agreed to commence activities with informal drop in IAG sessions, and a private room for interviews was made available to me.

I made initial contact by phone at the Mirfield Centre and met with one of their development workers who worked across both sites. However, one site was in the process of moving to new premises, and at their request it was agreed to postpone activity until the move was completed and the staff were under less pressure. I made contact two weeks later as requested but the required management clearance had not been obtained and the relevant person was

now on leave. Because of this added delay I decided to approach another local Children’s Centre but met some difficulty with this contact. As a consequence the activities at Mirfield started later than the other two centres.

I was allocated two days to the project with some flexibility, and time for follow up work and general administration work.

At all three centres I initially set up an information stand to offer drop in advice and guidance. The Muath has a large attractive reception area and I set up by the entrance doors, close to the main lift doors to be as visible and as prominent as possible. At the other two centres I set up by the two nurseries, which again were in a prominent place. To engage with the women onsite I went wherever they were, for instance, into Stay and Play sessions, baby and toddler groups, and into the teaching classrooms. On the information stand I used a wide range of careers and guidance resources from a variety of sources, including information on non-traditional training and routes into non-traditional employment. These resources were complemented by Agender resources. I also purchased relevant resources on, for example, job search and non traditional occupations and I was able to access online guidance resources, labour market information, and specialised careers packages, for example Adult Directions, to assist with the guidance process. A schedule of drop in guidance sessions was drawn up and delivered. These were often adapted on the day depending on the circumstances and for the women using the centre-for instance on one occasion I went into the Stay and Play session and set the stand up there. The informal IAG sessions were followed up by appointments, and booked appointments were offered to women who were unable to stay to discuss their needs or who requested an in-depth interview. As stated, suitable private interview space was provided at all centres.

Profile of beneficiaries of IAG by age (booked appointments)

	16-18	19-24	25-40	41- 59	60+
Centre 80	1	3	3	1	0
Bordesley(Muath) Centre		2	1		0
Mirfield Centre			2		

Profile of beneficiaries of IAG by disability

Centre	Disabled	Not disabled	Not known
Centre 80	1	6	

Bordesley (Muath) Centre	0	4	
Mirfield Centre	0	2	
Total	1	12	

Profile of beneficiaries of IAG by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Centre 80	Bordesley (Muath) Centre	Mirfield Centre	Total	%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi					
Asian or Asian British - Indian					
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	7	4	1		
Asian or Asian British - Other					
Black or Black British - African					
Black or Black British - Caribbean			1		
Black or Black British - Other					
Mixed - White and Asian					
Mixed - White and Black African					
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean					
Mixed - Other					
White - British					
White - Irish					
White - Other					
Chinese					
Other					
Not known/not provided					
Total	7	4	2		

EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES

Having pre-established links to both Centre 80 in Saltley and the Muath undoubtedly made access to these centres easier, dispensing largely with the need for formal introductions and management clearance for the delivery of IAG.

I feel that the “immediacy” of the drop in guidance sessions worked well, giving the women the opportunity to talk to a guidance worker there and then. Approximately 100 women were seen during drop in sessions. Many of the women commented that they had not had access to a careers adviser for many years and even a brief, informal session was often of real value. Women were given the option of a follow up interview. Booked one-to-one guidance interviews provided the opportunity for the women to explore their ideas and their options in more depth in a private setting, allowing us to explore non traditional career options and to explore training and employment routes. These sessions allowed me to build relationships with several women as we explored their various options. 13 women were seen for booked one to one interviews, and 5 of these were seen for repeat sessions. This number was perhaps smaller than I would have expected. This might reflect the advantage of “drop in” guidance-advice can be given immediately and information can be given for the woman to take away or to follow up herself, also time restrictions did not allow for complete flexibility in arranging one to one interviews. Also, a disadvantage of pre-booked appointments is the failure to keep appointments and this did happen, but this is a common problem experienced by any guidance practitioner!

Stay and Play sessions at the centres proved valuable, enabling me to directly approach women in the nursery setting. Toddler playgroups also proved useful, although women using these sessions often chose not to stay on the premises, using the sessions as valuable “me time”.

A diverse range of women were seen from a range of differing starting points in terms of qualifications, work experience, career aims and aspirations. Many were not considering work as a realistic option, but wished to discuss future long term options but many, even though work was not an option were possibly considering re entering education or training in the near future and wanted to explore their options. In these discussions **the majority** expressed interest in “traditional” female dominated careers-for example teaching, nursing/health, childcare and administration, and were either looking for routes into these careers or in some instances, working towards them. As the majority of the women seen were of Muslim faith, this may be a reflection of some of the social and cultural barriers and expectations experienced by some Muslim women.

Several stated that that their career aspirations or choice of course met family “approval”. However, as a guidance worker I can never make such assumptions and in my role I have seen female Muslim students on a range of academic and vocational courses including non traditional areas of motor vehicle, engineering, computer programming, as well as women needing advice on routes into a range of non traditional occupations, including one student who wanted to train as a pilot. As part of the guidance process I broached non traditional options and many of the women were willing to explore ideas around such non traditional training and employment. However the very fact that women were users of a Children’s Centre often meant they were aware they faced additional barriers to work or training, such as childcare provision or financial barriers. Many of the women stated in informal chats that because of parenting responsibilities they were not considering work or training as a realistic option at this time— echoing one staff member who told me that “these women have young children, they`re not looking for work”.

Those wishing to enter more traditional occupations tended to be those with younger children, and having such parental responsibilities was sometimes seen as a barrier to entering less traditional employment, or reinforced their desire to enter more traditional occupations. One woman, wanting to go into primary teaching commented on the flexibility of part time working and longer school holidays “I have three kids of my own,I have to think of them.” Similarly, another woman with five children was currently undertaking a childcare qualification with another provider, loved working with children, was an active parent governor and knew that teaching children was the right career for her.

However as stated many of the women seen as part of this project were receptive to discussing ideas around non-traditional career routes and several were looking to enter management roles or self employment in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Women often face barriers to accessing appropriate IAG. Venues such as Children's Centres are an effective way of accessing services and enabling women to discuss their options with a guidance worker in an environment they are familiar with and feel secure in.

3 For women considering non traditional education, training and career routes such access gives women the opportunity to access appropriate advice and guidance on appropriate routes.

2. Women often face additional barriers such as financial constraints and parenting responsibilities and IAG services should be delivered alongside other appropriate and relevant agencies to enable women to make informed choices.

3. The project's timescale allowed the opportunity to deliver relatively short-term guidance. Some women would need a longer period of sustained support to gain the confidence to consider their next steps and to consider more non-traditional employment. For women to really explore non-traditional occupations, education and training courses and careers routes IAG services should be delivered over a longer time period and supported by provision of opportunities for practical experience (e.g. tasters) in non-traditional occupations.

To summarise, I feel the project achieved its aim of providing local, accessible Information Advice and Guidance services to the three centres selected in a relatively short timescale. As stated, the majority of women had had no access to careers advice for many years and the input gave them a real opportunity to access guidance and consider their options and next steps.

Contact:

Kathryn Boyd

Careers Officer, Student Services Team

City College, Birmingham

East Campus, Garretts Green Lane, Birmingham B33 OTS

Email: kboyd@citycol.ac.uk

Telephone no: 0121 204 0000 ext 5170