

*Challenging gender
stereotypes at work*

EQUAL 2 AGENDER

Information Advice & Guidance

Final Report

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EQUAL 2 AGENDER

Women's Programme.

Final Report.

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1: About the Project

The **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)** package has been developed for use in local communities through the Children's Centres within Birmingham. This development will help to establish Children's Centres as providers of good quality IAG, providing an enduring legacy in the form of a package which can be used by individuals and / or groups of women. It provides an opportunity to develop Champions who can support the first rung IAG process enabling participants to really look at where they have been, what they have gathered on the way and how they are going to use it in the most productive / beneficial way.

The focus of the development is on non-traditional areas of employment because many occupations in this category provide better rates of pay within a good pay range. There are skills shortages within the West Midlands in many of the non-traditional areas of employment e.g. construction, and within these sectors few women are employed. Part of the reason why women are not employed as mechanics and plumbers and Web Designers is that there is a good chance that they have never been guided into work in these sectors either at school or later in adulthood.

Embedding this pack in Children's Centres will ensure that IAG is given impartially. This pack will support the development of IAG Champions in Children's Centres and will help to alleviate funding issues as the materials are free at source. The pack can be used in a number of different ways, with an advisor or 'trusted friend', independently or with a group of women. Whichever route is taken, the outcome of working through this pack will be a meaningful self-assessed IAG which has come through a structured decision making process in order to help the individual make informed choices about the future.

This project started in January 2007 and completed in March 2007. The development included:

- Research and develop an IAG package for use within Children's Centres
- Focus on non-traditional employment
- Pilot on 30 women from 4 Children's Centres
- Provide a written evaluation

The IAG package is ultimately about guiding women into training and employment, but when working with disadvantaged or disaffected individuals this needs to be a staged process. This package is a 'first rung' resource which enables individuals to gather information about themselves, gather evidence, gather ideas and gather the confidence to move forward.

2: The IAG Pack Development

The materials for the development were drawn from a range of other sources, but primarily from a prevocational programme developed by an **Equal Partner, Igualem / Igualada Town Council**. In particular the **Reclaiming Resources** tasks were found to be useful.

Why were these selected? Many of the tools available provide 'easy choices' for users. For example, many tools that help you to look at your strengths require the 'ticking of a box' without the need to fully explore why the choice was selected. By asking people to do a task analysis on an activity in which they engage, they can capture the skills and qualities that can be seen as transferable to other work. In this way, by breaking down 'activities of daily living', individuals can identify the skills and competencies they own.

The Reclaiming Resources tasks can be used in a number of ways such as:

- ✓ By individuals given the opportunity to reflect over time,
- ✓ A paired activity with a 'trusted friend' who can be used as a 'sounding board' or who can identify characteristics and skills perceived only by others. This is also a route for those who don't have English as a first language or who have poor levels of literacy.
- ✓ A guidance worker, trying to track skills and abilities of clients. Again, this is also a route for those who don't have English as a first language or who have poor levels of literacy.
- ✓ A group of women, facilitated by a Champion or Advisor, who are willing to share ideas and help each other by discussing the skills and competencies in identified activities. There are a lot of potential gains to be had through sharing.

In addition, **These Are My Qualities** work sheet was also used and adapted for the pack. Although there are similar tools available, this worksheet captured a good range of qualities that relate to work so that the individual can gather a profile of the type of conditions in which they can work e.g. leaders, team workers, physical work, outside etc. This offers a range of 'tick boxes' contrasting with the previous activities and visually allows the reader to see, at a glance, a profile of the participant.

In order to make the pack 'flow' it starts with advice about using the pack followed by a Personal Record Form which starts the process but also finishes the process as the participant needs to come back to this point when the activities have been completed in order to fill out the action plan.

The activities start with an introduction to reclaiming your resources, relating this to facts about housewives and their calculated commercial rates of pay, and a job advert for the position of housewife. This identifies a range of skills required to fill this post! At intervals through the pack the participant is asked to reflect on the previous activities and summarise the information. Snippets of information are given throughout the process focusing participants minds on non-traditional employment

and some of this information is taken from the **Agender Information Fliers** produced in 2007 (**Construction, Transport and Communications, Information Technology**). In addition, we referred to the **Focus on the Labour Market** information, produced by **Nextsteps, Birmingham and Solihull** to assist the development process.

Finally, participants are provided with an opportunity to self-assess their competencies against a range of non-traditional work e.g. electrical installations, horticulture and fork lift truck driving (the latter provided by ENTA who are delivering the **Agender Fork Lift Driving Programme**).

To work through the pack with an individual takes approximately 60 to 90 minutes but if an individual chooses to work through on her own this may take longer as it can be done at leisure, returning to a guidance worker to complete the process.. As a group this pack could take 2 hours to work through because of the discussion generated.

It is recommended that Children's Centres look at developing IAG Champions who can use this pack with individual clients or as part of women's programmes run within the centres.

Figure 1: The IAG Pack.

The Information, Advice and Guidance Pack contains.

- ✓ Capturing 'transferable skills' gained from:
 - life experiences,
 - education and training
 - work life (paid or voluntary)
- ✓ Capturing 'other' qualities which are valued in the workplace
- ✓ Providing the opportunity to consider non-traditional employment
- ✓ Checking non-traditional occupations against 'own' transferable skills
 - Electrical Installations
 - Horticulture
 - Plumbing
 - Mechanical Engineering
 - Carpentry & Joinery
 - Motor Vehicle
 - Painting & Decorating
 - Bricklaying
 - Web Designing
 - Fork Lift Truck Driving
- ✓ Basic action planning

Contains 24 pages and 10 activities.

3: The Pilot

The IAG pack was piloted via four Children's Centres and with 30 women. The pilot was looking to trial the IAG pack on lone parents, disadvantaged / disaffected women, those who were ready to return to work, those who were ready for life enhancing experiences. The target cohort were interviewed around Allens Croft Children's Centre, Doddington Grove Children's Centre, Four Dwellings Children's Centre and Frankley Children's Centre in the South of Birmingham.

3 methods have been used depending on the individuals and the context.

- 1: One-to-one interview:** The interviews consisted of IAG developers and project workers, but could equally have been 'trusted friends' or IAG Champions or Mentors. The interviews lasted, generally, between 60 – 90 minutes. During this process it was felt that the interviewer was helpful in encouraging the participant to think laterally and in taking them back to basics to think about activities of daily living that they participate in. Most participants would have missed out valuable information had they completed this task on their own as they needed prompting to think about such things as writing letters to school, organising maintenance visits, caring responsibilities with elderly parents etc.

Those who experience difficulties in reading and writing, and those with English as a second or subsequent language, needed to be guided through the process in this way. However, with English as a second or subsequent language communication difficulties did impact, to some extent, on getting facts in chronological order and / or in the right time frame.

- 2: Independent study:** Some individuals expressed a preference to work on this pack independently thus having more opportunity for reflection on past experiences and what this may lead to. Following a period of independent study, participants met again with the advisor for the process of action planning. Time has to be taken to carefully explain/demonstrate the activities to the participant before the pack is taken away. Some of the returnees felt that this has been very productive and they had been able to use prompts at home such as certificates they held, course file and daily activities.

Participants have to be self-motivated, and be able to manage their time, in order to complete this task unaided.

- 3: Small groups:** Although this is a very personal process it is about gathering strengths. This can be aided by having discussions evolving around the home, the children, hobbies and interests etc. etc. Ideas that flow can help people to think about things they can do and have experienced. In small established groups people's knowledge of each other can be significant and they can help individuals by drawing attention to things they may have forgotten.

There does have to be though, a time for a one-to-one action planning session with the advisor/group facilitator and this is private so that others

cannot influence the decision making process. This is a time to make sure that everything has been captured and a time when concerns may be discussed e.g. I am not ready, I need help with, I have a problem with dyslexia etc.

The verbal feedback from sessions, and from those delivering the IAG, has been collated and key messages have been drawn from these. You will find the key messages as you read on.

4: The Findings

What did we find?

- ✓ This is not a pack that can be run through quickly – participants need to be given time to think, explore, reflect, consider. This may have to be delivered, in some instances, over 2 or three sessions. The advantages of splitting the process into sessions is that you can ask participants to think about their previous experiences and skills, and what they feel they are good at or need more work on.
- ✓ The choice of delivery has to do with the individual and the context. This cannot be totally prescribed but the factors which seem to influence the selection are:
 - If English is a first or second language and how well it has been mastered if a second or subsequent language.
 - Level of literacy and/or confidence in reading and writing.
 - Confidence levels. Some people will need more encouragement than others. Sensitivity in handling this situation may be where a local IAG Champion may be very useful.
 - Established small group of women working on personal development activities may find this a good group activity, particularly if starting to look at pre-vocational skills.
- ✓ After the process, everyone felt that they had more skills than they gave themselves credit for and many felt they had the skills required to consider moving into non-traditional employment.
- ✓ Most women had difficulty saying 'I am....' In relation to having skills and experiences.
- ✓ All of the women enjoyed identifying their current skills and competencies and stated that they felt more positive about themselves after completing the IAG process

- ✓ Many of the women recognised that they enjoyed the ‘hands on’ skills that they possessed and used in their own homes, e.g. painting, decorating, plumbing.

5: Recommendations

No recommendations are made in relation to amending the pack although however, we do strongly recommend that the role of appointing an IAG Champion within each Children’s Centre is given consideration.

In general, we have found that few, if any, women participating in this pilot study have ever received careers advice and guidance and all have welcomed the opportunity to consider and discuss their future career pathways. Many women are aware that they want to change direction and identify new career routes and employment opportunities but do not know how to start the process. Any offer of support and encouragement to fulfil goals and aspirations are met with relief and total commitment. The women participants were all aware that they had ‘lots to offer’ and enjoyed a wealth of ‘lived’ experiences that should be shared and put to good use even though they might not have actual accredited qualifications.

Many women undertake a huge and diverse variety of roles within their personal and domestic lives. Identifying the skills and competencies used within these roles is a positive and empowering experience which could lead to the women achieving a financially higher level of employment.

6: Acknowledgement

Our thanks go to the **Equal Development Partnership, Igualem**, for allowing us to use parts of their newly developed Advice & Guidance materials for insertion in the IAG package.