

## **E Brief - February 2019**

### **Introduction**

This month's e-brief once again highlights the breadth of work being done by the WEA across Scotland and the positive impact it has on individuals and communities. While the focus of the news is dominated by Brexit, the challenges for those economically, socially or educationally disadvantaged remain constant.

Organisations such as the WEA are vital in providing individuals with the skills, knowledge and coping strategies to meet these challenges and in turn building resilience within local communities.

Adult Learning is an essential part of the education landscape and there is a short update within this e-brief about how the WEA (along with other organisations and partners) is working with Scottish Government to develop a new Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland. This strategy is crucial for the future of Adult Learning. I would encourage all staff and Local Association members / volunteers to share both this e-brief and the development of this new Strategy for Adult Learning in Scotland. Adult Learning in Scotland needs a stronger voice and more supporters that can be mobilised to protect this vital service. The more people who know about Adult Learning and the WEA, the better!!

### **WEA Scotland Education Updates**

#### Falkirk Job Club

Everyone will be aware of the challenges currently being experienced by those who are making claims for benefit via Universal Credit. In Falkirk: through the excellent work of Ross Murray the Area Education Coordinator, the WEA is working alongside Falkirk Council to support those with little or no computer skills to complete their Universal Credit application. In addition to that vital service, the "Job Clubs" also help their participants with literacy and numeracy skills, build a CV, and write job applications.

Over the years the project has been running, the Job Clubs have supported a number of people back into work or further training. This project has rightly attracted the attention of the local media because of its impact on local communities in Falkirk, Grangemouth and Bonnybridge as evidenced by a recent article in the Falkirk Herald attached.

At the heart of all projects like this are the impacts on individual people and the sometimes transformational difference the intervention by the WEA can make to people lives. Outlined below is a personal account from "Chris" who is one of the Job Club service users:-

“Chris came to a WEA Job Club in the Falkirk area for employability support – computer skills, job applications, CV, universal credit application etc. He attended regularly and it was clear he was determined to move on. He completed a CV, covering letters, applied for a number of jobs and fulfilled his obligations to Job Centre Plus.

He began to talk about his life and lack of education. He is a recovered heroin user and has spent time in prison. He said his dream was to get a job that allowed him to work with young people to discourage them doing what he did.

The tutor signposted him to the Re-union Canal Project, where he secured a position as a volunteer mentor. The mentors use their own skills and experiences to guide young people, learning some new skills themselves along the way. The feedback from the project co-ordinator was glowing.

Chris continued to attend the job club building his skills and inspiring others. He completed an accredited SQA level 4 communications skills course at the job club, achieving his first ever qualification. While doing this course he began writing short stories about his life and continues this in his own time.

He gave a talk at WEA Scotland’s AGM recounting some of his life experiences, how he came to adult learning and the impact that is having on his life.

He successfully applied to West Lothian College for an Introduction to Counselling course which he starts in March. He is currently volunteering with Cyrenians and is working towards a mentoring qualification.”

“Who would have thought that popping in here (job club) to get the Job Centre off my back would have led to this?”

#### Falkirk Job Club and the Digital Inclusion Fund

The success of the Job Clubs and their impact on people like Chris has led to the core funding for the project being continued. Moreover, the Council’s support of the Job Clubs has recently been increased through additional money from the Digital Inclusion Fund that will provide the Job Clubs with new tablets and ipads. The Digital Inclusion Fund, managed by Fairer Falkirk Partnership, is to provide support and assistance to help people get online and use digital services. The fund prioritises low income groups or individuals who are disadvantaged by digital exclusion.

The Job Clubs have a limited amount of laptops which impacts on staff and volunteers’ ability to train learners in the use of a variety of digital devices, including Android devices. The new equipment will enable tutors to support learners during the group sessions to learn new skills. As well as job searches and applications,

CVs and universal credit, learners will be better equipped to access council services, to pay bills, on-line banking and contribute on social media.

As well as adding value to the equipment at the job clubs, confident use of digital devices enables learners to participate fully in an increasing digital world.

### ESOL in North Ayrshire

The provision of ESOL in North Ayrshire continues to flourish and grow both in terms of number of learners, volume of provision and in learning innovation. As well as delivering core ESOL provision to learners who have newly arrived in the UK, the education offer is constantly being refreshed and updated to meet emerging demand.

Last month, we reported on the recent award from the Bank of Scotland Foundation to deliver ESOL to improve financial literacies. This month sees Stewart Fraser and Aileen Pollacchi reporting that they are working with Ayrshire College and North Ayrshire Council to develop and deliver an ESOL for College course. The aim of this course is to enable learners to progress into full time mainstream college provision or shorter part-time courses

### WEA Highland ESOL

This success and innovation in ESOL is also prevalent in the Highlands. In an Employability for ESOL course which was recently delivered by Mark Thomson, four out of seven learners successfully completed and achieved the award. While on the course, five of the learners identified jobs they wanted to apply for. Supported by Mark, three of these learners successfully obtained an interview and two of them obtained employment. On another ESOL course also delivered by Mark, a learner from Turkey has just got a volunteer technician post at the local radio station, North Highland Radio.

This is the heart of what the WEA does. Our provision builds confidence and capabilities in people enabling them to achieve what they previously regarded as out of reach and in so doing, transforming life circumstance and opportunity.

### WEA Highland Innovation: Mindfulness in Local Schools

WEA Highland have recently begun working with local schools in Highland to offer staff the opportunity to understand the basics of mindfulness, and how practicing it both at home and at work might improve their wellbeing. Through practicing these new techniques, the aspiration is that the teachers will in turn cascade some of these techniques to the pupils and ultimately to parents raising awareness of both the programme, its potential health benefits and also increasing the profile of the WEA across the region.

### WEA Highland Innovation: Window on the World

Also being piloted in Highland is a blended learning course to improve digital skills and promote on line learning. This course aims to highlight all the free learning on the internet from You Tube, to the Open University, Ted Talks and Future Learn. The classes will be a blend of self-directed and directed study on-line and face to face discussion groups to share the learners experience and newly discovered knowledge.

### Women in the Highlands

Women in the Highlands have a number of events workshops over the next few months and of course, their annual conference on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May. Lara McDonald will be happy to provide anyone interested with more details and information.

### Local Association Day Out to Dundee

Prior to the dissolution of the Scottish Committee, one of the items being discussed was for all Local Associations to try and meet for an educational visit. WEA Highland have now set a date for members of WEA Highland to visit the V & A Museum in Dundee on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019. Norman Newton has been in contact with Local Association colleagues in other parts of Scotland already about this. However, it was agreed that we should include a further reference to this opportunity for members and volunteers in Local Associations within this e-brief. Anyone interested in joining this visit should contact Norman Newton.

### **A New Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland**

The Scottish Government is helping lead and facilitate the delivery of a new Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland. For a number of months, there has been a series of consultation events across the sector to get views on how best this should be developed and what it should include. These views are now being collated and a group of key stakeholders from across the sector (of which the WEA is one) is being convened to decide how best to move this forward.

It's still very early days. The first meeting of the group was on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019 with a second meeting taking place on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2019. This strategy is vital for both the sector and the WEA. It is clear from Scottish Government that changes will be required and that we need to move from the current Statement of Ambition to a new strategy that has clear deliverables and where the sector can measure the difference and impact it is making.

I would welcome a discussion or views from anyone across the WEA on what they think this strategy could look like and what it should aspire to deliver. At present, the target is to have the strategy completed by the spring of 2020. We will continue to keep you posted of how this strategy is being developed in the coming months.

## **WEA Inspiring Stories**

Another WEA Learner story at <https://www.wea.org.uk/inspiring-stories/education-its-own-sake>