

## E Brief Text August 2020

### 1 Introduction

This latest ebrief provides a further update and evidence of how WEA Scotland has responded to the challenges of COVID 19 and continued to provide services and support for learners. This is and has been a collective effort involving staff tutors volunteers partners and of course, the learners themselves. All have shown a willingness to be flexible and embrace change and have done so at a staggering pace. The efforts of staff, tutors volunteers and partners is clearly paying off as the success stories in this ebrief demonstrate. Everyone should be justifiably proud of our collective achievements and I would like to thank everyone for the part they have played in maintaining delivery of these vital services.

### 2 WEA Scotland E Briefs and Changes to Website

This month's ebrief coincides with a commitment to refresh the WEA Scotland website each month. For over a year now there has been a significant amount of development work on the WEA Scotland website, mainly on its architecture and functionality. With this work now complete, much greater focus will be on website content. In addition to the end of month ebrief, each month there will be a focus on one particular region of Scotland. While the brief gives an overview of the work across WEA Scotland, this monthly regional feature will focus in much more detail on one particular region. In this month's edition, the regional focus is on the West and South West of Scotland. We hope you enjoy finding out about the details of their education provision and the impacts on learners and communities

### 3 WEA Scotland Learner Success Stories

#### **3.1 Reach Out**

Every area across Scotland has had to devise new and different ways to engage with their learners during COVID. The Reach Out project have created a private Facebook page where learners can meet up engage and support one another in these challenging times. Some students have also formally volunteered to offer support to others. This peer support model has the potential to be scalable and potentially offer huge opportunities going forward.

The Reach Out Team have also created a You Tube Channel and used this outlet to produce and distribute a number of videos on a range of topics including art, the John Muir Award, gardening music appreciation, movie reviews and gaming. The team also worked in partnership with Aberdeen Healthy Minds Project to successfully bid for a grant that would enable some learners to access digital devices where previously they had no access to any learning resources that would enable them to engage with the activities on offer.

The impact on learners has been significant. In most cases, we typically include a single quote to illustrate the impact. In this case, however that would not do the feedback justice. Below is some [by no means all] of the feedback from some learners:-

- *'The art has been fun, seeing everyone else's work and sharing my own'*
- *'The videos have been easy to follow'*
- *'I enjoyed watching the outdoor videos; it was nice to see some countryside'*
- *'I wouldn't normally be able to come to every class because of health problems but the Face Book page has let me join when I can, no matter what time or day'*
- *'I love the outdoors but because of health reasons I can't get out like I used to. Doing the John Muir Award online was fun because I could see everything and even did the award when I could get out and about to green areas while doing my exercise.'*
- *'Great to see outdoor videos because I haven't been able to get out because I'm isolating'*
- *"I have enjoyed all the videos & content that the Reach Out staff made and feel I have been learning at my own slow pace. My mental health hasn't been great so I have struggled a bit with taking in all the information. I would personally like to thank you for all you have done as I'm not sure how I would have coped being on my own with no one to interact with during these very difficult times."*
- *'I really like how it is set up. You can choose the times that you engage which is a good thing'.*
- *'I have enjoyed taking part in all the classes online and I want to keep on learning more'.*
- *'Yes, it is good to meet new people and I was learning new things all the time'.*
- *'I have been learning a lot on the gardening side of things and enjoy planting vegetables & flowers at home'.*
- *'I learnt a lot from the John Muir class – I enjoyed watching Ross outdoors'.*
- *'I really loved the art class and did loads of drawings & paintings'.*
- *'I have learnt how to prune & cut my roses. Really enjoyed the John Muir classes & all the different music & art'.*
- *'I've learnt a lot actually with all the videos and information that's been posted over the last few months'.*
- *"It is a lot more flexible this way, you can do things in your own time.*
- *'Yes, really enjoyed the John Muir classes as I learnt a lot about trees, plants and animals etc.'*
- *'Really enjoyed the art class and would like to see more crafts the next time'.*
- *'I've learnt a lot in a short few months and it's kept me occupied during quiet times. Loved all the videos you made & I've found it really interesting'.*
- *'That keeping in contact with other students would have been impossible without the Reach Out Facebook page. I have also enjoyed all the content you have provided'.*
- *'How important social media is for us students to communicate during these times. Enjoyed all the content on Facebook'.*
- *'Have really enjoyed watching Ross's outdoor videos as I haven't been able to get out much since this lockdown'.*

### **3.2 ESOL in North East Scotland**

The challenges of COVID and moving from face to face to virtual learning had and has the potential to be particularly acute for many ESOL learners. In many cases across Scotland WEA Scotland, staff, tutors and learners have met this challenge resulting in a very positive experience for learners, as illustrated by these examples from North East Scotland.

Working in partnership with North East Scotland College and Community Learning Development, WEA Scotland provide Beginner Literacy ESOL classes to 35 resettled New Scots adults. These classes have successfully transferred to online learning using Zoom. A positive outcome of online learning has meant that three learners with pre-school children have been able to join the Zoom classes and experience learning in a group setting.

WEA Scotland also works alongside Sunnybank Community Centre to deliver three ESOL classes to diverse multi-cultural groups who have settled in Aberdeen City. All three classes have successfully transferred to online delivery using Zoom or Zoom and Canvas. There is a similar success story in Peterhead, where face-to-face ESOL provision to fish factory workers is now delivered by ZOOM.

Learner feedback has been very positive with a range of individual benefits:-

- *“I like online English because I am at home relaxed, I think online ESOL is exciting”.*
- *“I like online English because I feel not safe walking to community centre in the dark’.*

### **3.3 Accreditation of Learning in the North East**

In addition to the continuation of learning and support for learners, some learners have also been able to achieve qualifications and awards during lockdown. While two groups of literacy learners did have their assessments disrupted, others completed successfully. 13 ESOL learners passed SQA National 2 Literacy Assessments, 2 learners achieved units of the PDA in Supporting Adult Literacies Learning and 21 Reach Out Learners achieved their John Muir Awards, 7 of whom were awarded the certificate for their on line work during lockdown.

### **3.4 Women in the Highlands**

The move from face to face learning to virtual learning has in some cases enabled WEA Scotland to increase its geographical reach. It has also enabled some people who had to stop attending face-to-face classes for whatever reason to re-engage with learning as virtual learning offers them greater flexibility.

When lockdown began, the Women in the Highlands Project ran a series of taster sessions followed by courses in Canvas and ZOOM on a range of different subject

areas including: women's writing, a book group, mindfulness, yoga, developing digital confidence and "our place our community. To date, there are 75 enrolments (so far - not all 7 courses have started yet) across the Highlands. Where in the past the learners would almost exclusively have come from the inner Moray Firth area, our online offer has recruited learners from Jura, Orkney, Skye, Wick, Aviemore and Elgin to name a few.

This new mode of engagement opens up new sustainable opportunities for the WEA once lockdown ends. While we will continue to deliver face to face, we must also look at what we can continue to offer to these new digital learners.

### **3.5 Employability in Highland**

Another successful and motivating lockdown story is highlighted through the work of tutor Lucy Campbell in Highland. Digital poverty is a significant challenge for many prospective learners. Many have no access to devices or if they have, cannot afford the data packages that will enable them to engage with the learning opportunities on offer.

Lucy was able to secure funding to support five learners get the devices they needed. In addition to securing the funding, she then went the extra mile by sourcing the tablets through a local ICT partner. She picked the tablets up and hand delivered them (at a distance) to all five learners. This is not the normal work of a tutor but is an excellent example the extended commitment that WEA Scotland tutors make to their learners and illustrates why WEA Scotland has succeeded in maintaining provision when so many other organisations have failed to do so.

### **3.6 Working with Trade Union Learners and Employees**

While the COVID crisis has presented many challenges, it has also created some new opportunities as many of our partners look for new and different ways to meet their learning objectives through on line learning.

We have recently for example delivered two successful Scottish Union Learning funded courses, [The New Normal: Planning for the Future], on behalf of the Unite Union. These courses were delivered on line to UNITE members and activists from a number of locations across Scotland. There was a wide range of topics delivered including human rights, inequality, class and the history and future of work

Organising courses such as these on a face-to-face basis would face huge logistical and budget challenges. In contrast it can be seamlessly delivered on line and provide new levels of flexibility and improved efficiency to all our trade union partners in Scotland. For the learners, they can actively engage with the learning without the stress, time and cost of travelling to venues.

In some cases, the continuity of provision has gone beyond the delivery of learning. Some work-based learners have also been able to achieve qualifications and awards

during the lockdown period. Tutor Gayle Kaufman enabled nine RMT learners from across the whole of Scotland to achieve their Adult Achievement Award at SCQF Level 6. Classes were delivered on ZOOM with ongoing support and continual assessment undertaken between classes via email and telephone. Classes were also staggered to accommodate variable shift patterns from different employers affording learners and their employers the greatest possible flexibility. Quotes from learners on their experience are below-

- *“As one of your learners on this course, I can’t praise you enough for how well you delivered. You made the experience so much easier using a platform very few of us were accustomed to learning from*
- *Gayle was an excellent tutor, great feedback and support throughout tailored to individual needs”*

On line, learning opportunities with the WEA has also helped people to cope with the crisis. Learners on furlough from the hospitality sector report that the social benefits of learning and the wider connectivity positively contributes to their health and wellbeing. Beyond formal learning, delivering knowledge and skills and helping people achieve awards, the contribution that WEA Scotland is making to health and wellbeing is significant. WEA are assisting their own staff and other employers by running a series of Mental Wellbeing Workshops including Working from Home at Your Best and Self Care During Lockdown. .

### **3.7 Learning in West and South West Scotland**

This area of Scotland is the subject of the first monthly Regional Feature on the WEA Scotland website. Please make sure to read this new feature, which will provide much more detail of all the excellent provision in this region.

For the purposes of this ebrief, there is some brief information so that readers get a full picture across the whole of Scotland. The Personal Assistants Network has continued to deliver support to their personal assistants through the addition of a new on line personal development training programme. Over 100 learners have taken up this opportunity and 80 of these have achieved awards in on line social care training.

Our work with migrants and refugees has also been maintained through lockdown and resulted in notable successes. The AMIF ESOL Project in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council is now delivering to pre-lockdown levels of learner numbers. In Ayrshire, WEA Scotland’s contract with North Ayrshire Council to support Syrian Refugees has just been extended for a further two years. In the current context, these are huge achievements and all the staff and tutors involved are instrumental in and should be proud of these outstanding results.

### **3.8 Last Word: Falkirk Job Club Learner**

At the Falkirk Job Clubs, learners continue to develop their literacy skills through writing their stories and reflections of lockdown. WEA Scotland is also working with Falkirk Council to identify the most vulnerable people who need access to digital devices or any other equipment they may need to maintain contact with the wider community or to access services. The challenges of many of our learners is illustrated perfectly in the poem below by Gordon from Grangemouth

#### **Financial Impairment - rant of an unconnected**

*Out of credit, couldn't phone  
Nothing left, mustn't moan  
I need an avenue  
Perhaps more revenue  
Would you credit it  
Don't cut my benefit  
(Apply for a job? How?)  
Here's the impact  
No form of contact  
Out of sorts  
Some dark thoughts  
Gigabyte, megabyte, memory and ram  
Without all them  
They don't give a damn*

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Ray McCowan

Director WEA Scotland