

WEA update for partners

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WEA Update

This newsletter provides WEA partners an update on our response to the current pandemic both nationally and locally. Over the last few weeks we have all experienced that partnership and collaboration is more important than ever and we are grateful to you for your ongoing support.

Thank You to WEA Scotland Partners

The past few months have been quite a challenge for the WEA and I am sure for many of our valued stakeholders and partners across Scotland. Together we have responded to this challenge and continued to maintain services and provide support for our learners which: as you will read about below, many have found invaluable. This has only been possible because of the valued support engagement and commitment of the WEA's partners and funders. Throughout this pandemic, they have worked alongside WEA Scotland to innovate services and deliver

transformational change to service users in a time period none of us would previously have contemplated was possible.

Our partners have also provided financial security to WEA Scotland and to their learners by maintaining current levels of funding this year and in many cases, renewing funding for future years. The collective response by all WEA Scotland partners to this pandemic has been extraordinary and on behalf of all WEA Scotland learners, we would like to thank everyone for their commitment and contribution.

ONLINE LEARNING

We are acutely aware of the fact not everyone has access to, can afford, or wishes to use modern technology and communications in the form of smartphones, tablets, teleconferencing etc. We continue to be as inclusive, accessible and flexible as we can be in order to provide opportunities for as many learners as possible to connect and engage with us. In some cases, tutors have simply kept in touch with, supported learners, and continued learning activity via the telephone. Ultimately, the aim is to support as many learners as possible by whatever means possible.

The growth in on line learning since lockdown has however been transformational for learner's partners and the WEA. Since the first WEA update in May, the WEA have continued to deliver learning using Zoom [a virtual classroom] our Virtual Learning Environment Canvas, YouTube and a number of social media channels. Across every area of Scotland, the WEA: along with its partners, have provided a lifeline to hundreds of learners during this crisis. The examples and quotes below from learners demonstrates the impacts and differences that the WEA has made to both individuals and communities across Scotland.

The Women in the Highlands Project provides an excellent example of extending its community and geographical reach since lockdown. Prior to lockdown classes took place face to face in community settings almost exclusively from the inner Moray Firth area. Since moving to virtual learning by Canvas and Zoom, a large number of learners have been recruited from across the Highlands including Jura, Orkney, Skye, Wick, Aviemore and Elgin to name but a few.

On line learning has created new sustainable opportunities for both the WEA and its partners to reach more people across Scotland who can benefit from our services

For some individuals maintaining services to them is a metaphorical "game changer" as illustrated by this quote from a Reach Out learner:-



I have and still am enjoying the Online Reach Out Page. The good thing about it all is that with all our disabilities we can still take part even on our worst days where we cannot manage out of the house but can still take part in Reach Out classes. For example, JMA is great to see other places that me and a few others that can't get to due to either health or transport conditions. The JMA has helped me to learn and see more of what is out there to explore. The Art and Forum have been great too..... All an all I really hope this keeps going online and it has been a great help to me and Nicola to keep our minds focused on something through these tuff times.

Very often, the services provided by the WEA and its partners extends beyond the mere delivery of learning. It is the personal support to the learner that makes the difference. In one case, an employability tutor enabled several learners to engage with on line learning by going the extra mile. She sourced tablets through a local ICT partner picked the tablets up and hand delivered them (at a distance) to all 5 learners.

RETURNING TO FACE TO FACE PROVISION

Despite the success of virtual learning, we know that community partners are keen to get back to face-to-face courses where it is safe to do so. We are currently finalising our risk assessment framework in line with guidance and advice from the Scottish Government. As and when the Scottish Government indicate that it is safe to deliver face-to-face community based adult learning, WEA Scotland will engage with all its community partners to agree the best means by which this can be achieved. This will be done on a partner-by-partner basis in the way most appropriate for the needs of the partner, their learners and in line with both national and regional guidelines. For further information on this, please contact your WEA Area Education Co-ordinator or Area Education Manager.

Research update - we need your help

The WEA works with over 450 partners and these partnerships are a fundamentally important part of WEA education. We know from our previous surveys that your primary focus is support for the most disadvantaged in society, economic and social prosperity of communities, digital skills and reducing social isolation.

Planning is underway for our annual Partner Survey, which will be sent out to WEA Scotland partners in the next few weeks. We are hoping to get some insight into what our partners think of the services that the WEA provides, as well as your feelings on your partnership with us. We also want to gain a clearer picture of the support provided to us by our partners in order to help improve our work and strengthen partnerships moving forward. We would be grateful for any feedback that would help us improve the experience for learners and enhance the delivery of services to partners.

Funding and Digital Poverty

We are grateful to all our partners for their funding and support of WEA Scotland and aim to do everything we can to deliver the best possible value for money and the best possible experience for learners. We also appreciate that the current crisis will most likely put pressure on all budgets in future years and we want to assure all our partners that we will continue to maximise the value and impact of every pound you invest with us.

In addition to delivering value to our current partners, the WEA will continue to look for new partners and new sources of funding. Evidence shows that the most disadvantaged have been disproportionately affected by the current crisis notably in relation to digital poverty. Many prospective learners are unable to learn because they cannot afford the technology or they cannot afford the data costs associated with on line learning. Other prospective learners may have the technology but do not have the skills and knowledge to use their devices as a tool for learning.

This digital poverty gap has always been there but the adverse impacts of it have been exacerbated by the current crisis. WEA Scotland is committed to addressing this national emergency. We are actively looking for funds from across Scotland and lobbying Scottish Government to enable prospective learners to get the digital resources they need.

