

E Brief Text March 2021

1 Introduction and Funding for WEA Scotland

While we are still a number of months away from a return to normal, we are finally beginning to plan for a return to normal. Across the WEA, teams are beginning to discuss how and when we might return to the classroom. Managers are making preparations and plans for some kind of return to working in the office.

While all this planning suggests better times are ahead, we all need to recognise that there are difficult times emerging too. The return to offices and classrooms will be a challenge for some who have become accustomed to on line learning and working at home. Regional variations will also mean that the picture might appear mixed and confusing for a while. The elephant in the room however is the state of the public finances and what implications these might have for the services we can offer to learners.

Against this potentially challenging context, it is pleasing to report that WEA Scotland is benefitting from a number of recent funding renewals. This will provide a level of financial security across 2021-22 and for some projects, for subsequent business years too. WEA Scotland has recently secured renewal funding from the Scottish Government for the Personal Assistants Project. A three-year grant has been received from Fife Council and a one-year grant renewal awarded by Aberdeen City Council. There are extensions to project funding from Falkirk Council, SDS, High Life Highland, Highland Council ESOL for Employability and further funding in Highland for one to one employability support.

The funding is of course welcome. However it is also a vote of confidence in the WEA, built on service continuity throughout the pandemic, when so many other providers were unable to offer little or no provision. Trade union provision during lockdown characterises this success story where the team achieved 188% of their target income.

While the funding climate will inevitably become more challenging, there are opportunities too. WEA Scotland is preparing to submit two large bids to AMIF and to Inspiring Scotland. While there are of course no guarantees, our record of accomplishment in lockdown means we should make these bids with a level of confidence in a positive outcome. We must also carry this level of confidence into other bid submissions and partner negotiations. The services we provide make a real difference to the learners and as our response to the pandemic demonstrates, partners can rely on the WEA to deliver excellent value for money

2 WEA Scotland Learners/Project Updates

2.1 Reach Out Project

The Reach Out Project has just completed their 8 week winter term. The term saw the team facilitate eight online courses; all delivered via Zoom, the Face Book private page or through the Reach Out You Tube channel.

The courses reflect the breadth of activity on the Reach Out Programme and included: the students forum the walking group, Cooking on a Budget, Arts and Crafts, Lockdown Experiences, GTKYD (Get to Know Your Device), Gardening and Information Advice and Guidance

All courses have been successful with students enrolling for more than one activity in many cases. We have worked with 32 students in total this term, 13 females, 19 males, aging from early 20's to 82, with approximately 30% coming from what are classed as areas of deprivation.

We have also delivered the Adult Achievement Award [AAA] via Newbattle Abbey College, to two of our students, as a pilot. This has also been a success with those taking part passing the AAA at level 3. This has been a fantastic experience for the students and staff members. For the students it has given them the chance to reflect on all the good work they have done over lockdown and to recognise the increases in their confidence levels and improvements to their self-esteem. For staff, this has been a learning experience too and [with the help of Gayle Kaufman and Craig Brown] the team are now better able to support future learner groups to gain this AAA qualification.

Next term will see the addition of a financial first aid course and a new employability offer to the programmes portfolio. This new term will start in the first week of May and we will be facilitating 10 courses during this period.

Some student quotes from this term:

"I have been following the cooking videos which are great for me who hasn't cooked in a long time"

"The videos were really helpful and I learned a lot from them"

"I joined the walking group which has helped me maintain my fitness"

"Yes I've been getting out more but because of my age I sometimes struggle when the weather is not so nice"

"You meet a great bunch of people, the class is relaxing and a great way to socialise"

2.2 Highland ESOL

The Highland ESOL Team continue to deliver outstanding work and make a real difference to learners in their communities. This in no small part explains the reasons for their funding extension and renewal mentioned at the beginning of this ebrief.

In recent weeks, the team have now secured enough Chromebooks to supply a device to every ESOL learner currently studying with the WEA in Highland. At a time when digital poverty and lack of digital access is such an issue, this has made a big difference to our learner's engagement levels, particularly on Canvas. In the past month, we have seen increased engagement on Canvas across the board indicating an increase in self-directed learning.

This past month, the team have worked with partners to ensure refugee families remain engaged and informed on current events and their rights in Scotland. We recently facilitated learners attending an information session led by the Scottish Refugee Council on their voting rights in the U.K. WEA tutors supported learners to register for the session and attend, further improving their understanding of UK political systems and wider integration and participation in society.

Later this month, a local partner organisation will attend one of our ESOL classes to inform the women about an information session with a local female GP where they can ask questions about physical and mental health, coronavirus and the vaccine. An Arabic interpreter will attend the session to support the learners and ensure they get the greatest possible benefit from this opportunity.

2.3 Employability and Digital Access in Highland

The Employability Team in Highland have also been successful in securing digital devices for their learners. It is making a similar life changing impact as shown by the story of one learner below.

Graham joined a recent WEA employability programme. At the time, he was homeless and sleeping on his mother's couch. He was waiting to be rehomed and did not know where in the Highlands he was going to be living in the future. Graham had lost his job as an apprentice baker due to Covid and had no access to the internet to look for work or to go through his housing applications.

He was looking for work up in Wick as he had friends and family up there and was able to find somewhere to live. However, he still faced the challenge of having no internet access during lockdown and was finding life very challenging. The WEA was able to secure him a laptop and things started to change. The laptop enabled him to start searching through local vacancies as well as allowing him to keep in contact with family and stay abreast of the situation with Covid.

He said in an email, "Yes the laptop has helped a great deal. Job searches are far easier, and I can look at many different job sites and see what is about in the local area. So, I think this is a good thing for jobseekers especially if they never had

access to internet or computer in the past". He was very appreciative and expressed his thanks to everyone for the help.

2.4 Future Pathways

Future Pathways supports in care abuse survivors. They help adults who were victims of historical abuse in a care setting in Scotland as children. Their aim is to help them lead a happier and more fulfilled life. WEA provides educational support, building confidence and skills. Two learners have recently achieved their first ever qualification – SQA Writing Skills and SQA Speaking. Both have spoken about the cathartic experience of writing, people listening to them and the confidence they have gained to go onto further learning.

“The computer skills I have learned has helped me a lot. Being dyslexic the Dragon software has helped me dictate my story. My diary journal, reflecting on the past and telling my story has been hard but worth it. Flashbacks can be difficult, so to cope I try to concentrate on the future and my grand-kids.

The speaking exercises have helped give me a voice. My main issue is that I was never listened to as a child by people in authority. Having no faith in the system has been life-long.

Without this support I would be stuck in limbo, without a voice, no one listening, no one to read my story. If it wasn't for this I honestly don't know if I would have survived.”

G.

“For someone like myself who had never turned on a laptop to where I am today with writing about my experiences in Northern Ireland has helped me so much. I never thought writing it down would be so therapeutic

I have found it great to express my feelings, good and bad ,and also take away painful memories and feelings of guilt and shame .

I feel really humble when you mentioned cathartic writing today. Writing my way through traumatic events and getting a sense of relief from it. I did not know that writing would have that effect.

You have helped my confidence so much recently that I sometimes wish I had done it sooner. I just was not ready

Thank you so much.”

Soldier C

The challenge for the WEA and many other adult learning organisations is to translate these powerful individual stories into societal benefits that merit greater

support and funding. What impact for other services might there have been but for the WEA's intervention and support of both these learners?

2.5 Trade Union Learning : USDAW, SUL and WEA

During March WEA delivered two successful online courses supporting USDAW members. We ran a Covid Recovery Fund (CRF) supported **Employability Skills** course and a **CV Writing Skills** course funded by Scottish Union Learning (SUL). This is a particularly challenging time for the retail sector and shop and distribution workers and WEA and our partners and funders are working hard to engage and support USDAW members across Scotland during this period. Both courses demonstrated once again the ways in which WEA our partners and learners are willing to be as flexible as possible and to try new approaches that fit the circumstances and situation we find ourselves in at this time.

The CV Writing Skills course was delivered remotely online (Zoom) to learners at Co-operative Food Primary Logistics Services in Motherwell. The learners were all on site for the sessions and following negotiated release fitted the learning in around their work schedules. All participating were safely socially-distanced in the Co-op training room but able to discuss in small groups and support each other. The course was not straightforward to organise or deliver but Co-op, USDAW and WEA worked closely to find the best solution to meet the needs of the members and learners at Food Primary Logistics Services.

Employability Skills delivered online through Zoom and Canvas benefitted from having learners attending from four separate employers (Tesco, Morrison's, Co-op and AAH Pharmaceuticals) who accessed the course from several different sites and venues (including from home). This cooperation between trade unions and different employers learning together is one of the unintended consequences of moving to online/remote learning. It has and clearly is working well and it is likely that many unions will choose to continue with this mode of training into the future even when we can return to normal

2.6 WEA in Glasgow and West of Scotland

In addition to the renewal of substantive strategic funding described at the beginning of this ebrief, the WEA in the West of Scotland has successfully secured extra funding to provide additional support for a number of its current projects

2.6.1 Glasgow ESOL register

We have secured a small amount of additional funds to undertake a mapping of provision in Glasgow. This is an important piece of work at present as we try to find ESOL learning opportunities for the 4000 people on the register who have had an initial language assessment and are waiting to access learning.

2.6.2 Funding from the Foundation Scotland's Response, Recovery & Resilience fund will support the development and delivery of four online Visual Journaling for Wellbeing courses for unpaid carers, care professionals & NHS staff, and shielding households throughout Scotland. One course will also be delivered to people with loved ones in prison, in partnership with Families Outside. All participants will be provided with an octopus journal and visual journaling craft kit, containing everything they need to get started (pictured below).



Care Professional or work in the NHS in Scotland?

Want to explore your creativity? Try Visual Journaling for Wellbeing with the WEA:

Every Tue, 27th Apr - 18th May, 8-9:30pm
 Contact Bex to enrol:
B.walker@wea.org.uk

WEA Adult Learning Within Reach
Foundation Scotland

Are you an unpaid carer living in Scotland?

Explore your creativity with #Visual Journaling for Wellbeing for unpaid carers with the WEA

Every Mon, 8-9:30pm
 10th - 31st May

Contact Bex to enrol or for more info:
B.walker@wea.org.uk

WEA Adult Learning Within Reach
Foundation Scotland

WEA tutor Keira McLean started developing and running Journaling for Wellbeing courses for the WEA during lockdown.



As a glass artist, she wanted to find ways to approach journaling that were more hands-on, drawing on the therapeutic benefits of creativity and visual journaling. Both the Shielding and Families Outside courses are now fully subscribed, but there are still a few places left on the Care Professionals & NHS Staff and Unpaid Carers courses. Get in touch with Bex for more info or to enrol: B.walker@wea.org.uk 07901100298.

2.6.3 The Lipman-Miliband Trust



The Lipman-Miliband Trust has provided funding for the creation of a digital archive for political literacies resources for tenants in Glasgow. WEA tutor and researcher Joey Simons and web developer and artist Kate Frances-Lingard will collaborate with tenants throughout Glasgow to develop a digital archive to store materials around housing struggles in Glasgow from 1910-present. Joey will also run a series of online archiving workshops, with contributions from archivists throughout the UK, making sure the new resource can be maintained and added to by tenants on an ongoing basis.

The idea for a digital archive came from learners taking part in Joey's popular online political literacies courses for tenants last year and we're delighted that the Lipman-Miliband trust have helped the WEA to make this happen. Look out for announcements of the archiving workshops soon, and the launch in January 2022!

2.6.4 Digital Devices via GCVS

Emma Williamson made a successful bid to GCVS and secured seven desktop computers and three Chromebooks on behalf of her learners. This is yet another example of WEA staff going the extra mile beyond their formal teaching and management remits to make a real difference to our service users