



Effective Communication and Language for Working in Care for ESOL Learners: Evaluation Brief

Aims, Objectives, and Rationale

“To Respond To Employers’ Requests To Produce A Training Package That Will Help Their Staff Improve Their Communication Skills”

The overall aims of the course, *Effective Communication and Language for Working in Care*, were to develop core written and oral communication proficiencies amongst foreign staff to meet modernised care sector demands, to achieve higher quality services, and to better integrate these staff into the care workforce. The objectives were to instill in carers greater competence to handle written and oral/aural forms of communication including paperwork, emergency calls, and to better know the needs of the service-users. The Certificate in Adult Literacy was a ‘value-added’ incentive for the students in meeting the aforesaid objectives.

The pilot course was envisioned in September 2006 and was a continuation of the *Move On Carefully* pilot course, with a focus on British-born carers acquiring basic literacy skills¹. After this course, there was a recognition that foreign staff should also have opportunities to partake in basic skills courses, focusing on language and communication. Few chances have existed for foreign staff to take these courses and in a climate where ESOL is being threatened across the board, it is vital to give them these opportunities and demonstrate that they *can* lead to successful experiences. Furthermore, the course responds to the Leitch report (2006) which now charges employers to take on workplace learning initiatives.

The Move On organization is committed to offering courses that are contextualised (to workplace demands) and so the purpose of the course integrates all of these aspects. There is a limited amount of research in the area of sector-specific English communication, and few courses are offered such as this, to care workers. The international recruitment of care workers is likely to increase to meet the growing demands of England’s ageing population, in conjunction with staff shortages. Therefore, it is probable that this type of course will be in high demand in the future.

What Happened

Care Sector Alliance Cumbria proposed the course and a partnership was developed between three employers (2 care homes and 1 domiciliary care agency), Move On Up Project’s Get On at Work, and the Cumbria Adult Education Service. Care Sector Alliance Cumbria used Department Of Health, HRD Grant money provided by the County Council to finance the project. This included a contribution towards the materials development costs and staff relief costs for the 10 participants. Through this partnership, the purpose was envisioned - to give educational opportunities for care workers to successfully acquire core communication proficiencies - as well as the structure of the course (10 weeks), curriculum (via modules), size (10 students), types of participants (ethnic diversity represented from different care homes) and facilities (in workplace sites) were established through monthly meetings. A number of potential learners were pre-

¹ The Move On course evaluation report, authored by Brenda Weston, is, entitled, *Essential Skills for Health and Social Care Move on CAREfully in Cumbria Skills for Life Pilot Report*, 2007

selected by employers as needing the course, and they were assessed. It was determined, that for the participants to have a chance to be successful in this time-limited course, mixed levels would not work. Therefore, following assessment, 10 beginning-intermediate students were selected and invited to join the course. Despite this general skill level classification, most of these participants were considered to have 'uneven profiles' with regard to reading, writing, speaking and understanding English. The other candidates were given educational information within their communities.

The course lasted from January 18th to March 29th. The weekly modules lasted between 10 am – 4pm during which time students learned a host of communication tasks and skills related to care work, including, care terminology, handling care procedures, and interacting about everyday problems that they confront, as well as British culture and regional idiomatic expressions. Students were also taught English vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, and sentence structure in written forms, aligned to elements of the Key Skills. Finally, students concentrated on cultural issues with service-users, including assertiveness, determining needs, and establishing roles and relationships between themselves, and the clients, but also with colleagues, and within the larger care environment. The course integrated many other issues as they arose, in conversations, presentations, during assessments, and teacher-student conferences.

Nine course participants completed the course, eight whom passed the level 1 literacy test and one who passed the level 2 test.² Aside from a couple of travel plans that were made prior to the course, and, a couple of absences due to illnesses, their retention rate was high with all nine completing the course, and receiving a certificate.

Students: Nine out of ten students were women who ranged in ages. Their countries of origin were: India (1), Zambia (1), Philippines (3), Romania (2), and Poland (3), many of whom were recent arrivals to the UK. Many of the students were health care professionals in their countries of origin (nurses, nurse attendants), without UK credentials, and were interested in furthering their careers and knowledge of care. Others were recent graduates in other fields and from other disciplines. Their motivations to migrate to the UK were largely economic, but they all had a desire to increase their education, credentials, and English language proficiencies, even if they had learnt English prior to their arrival.

The Evaluation

The course underwent a participatory evaluation process, with all of the partners involved in its development. The data sources consisted of: pre and post focus groups on expectations and outcomes (employers, students, and the teacher, as well as the team), classroom-based observations, interviews with 10 students plus one initial candidate, the teacher, and, clients. Assessments were also included, which consisted of: literacy tests and tutor-designed assessments, evaluations, and a video of learners talking about their experiences and lessons.

² One participant was hospitalised for a pneumonia midway through the course, and eventually died in April 2007, after the course was over. His name was Evans Mwale, and all of the participants in this course were affected by this tragedy.

Initial Impacts³

Employers and workplace: Employers stated that their employees gained confidence to take on tasks that they formally refrained from due to fear; they acknowledged the importance of further training for their staff and observed general communication and relationship improvements. They also noted that other staff members wanted to enrol in the course signaling its word-of-mouth success in their organisation.

Students: Most of the students reported that they gained greater self efficacy in dealing with difficult situations at work, especially phone calls and other situations, and confidence to engage in informal discourse with clients which helped them to better know their needs. In addition, they also learnt how to chat and use humour, which was important for de-escalating difficult situations, trouble-shooting, or, starting a new relationship. Most of the students had not previously taken English language courses in England, and in valuing this opportunity, they reported they wanted to continue with their education and learning.

Service-Users: Clients⁴ noted a greater sense of confidence and felt involved in the carers' learning experiences, sometimes helping them with their homework or practicing their newfound skills, or even, commenting on their learning.

Initial Achievements (Themes)

The Development of Learning Organisations - As workers gain new skills and credentials they are rewarded with new job roles (one student was promoted) and additional opportunities to gain knowledge and skills and pass it on. Employers and workers who are learning together to integrate literacy, language, and communication practices into the workplace can create a positive learning climate for all participants, reflecting a whole organisation approach.

Creation of a Progression Route for Care Workers - The carers on the course received the Certificate in Adult Literacy, and course participants gained the confidence to take on more learning opportunities including seeking out information, and studying for the NVQs and other exams, and inquiring about the availability of higher and further education.

Confidence in Communicating - Course participants gained the abilities and desire to engage more with clients and colleagues, and this had the potential to lead not only to their integration into the care workforce but into the community as a whole. Greater workforce integration may have potential for greater social integration.

Gaining Skills and Practices – Embedding literacy, numeracy, and language skills into learning and in the context of the workplace makes for an integrative experience. Course participants were allowed to gain skills but also to practise them through giving presentations, talking about their learning with clients and establishing more opportunities to experiment in many places. They also helped one another and formed a learning community.

References

Leitch, S. (2006) *Prosperity for all in a global economy: World class skills*, London: HM Treasury.

³ An in-depth evaluation report will be completed in December 2007.

⁴ Two clients were interviewed

Partners:

Name	Organisation	Tel. No	Email address
<i>Lesley Gill</i>	<i>Workforce Development Officer, Care Sector Alliance Cumbria C/o Adult Social Care, County Offices, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 4RQ</i>	<i>01539 773327</i>	<i>lesley.gill@cumbriacc.gov.uk</i>
<i>Julie Mooney</i>	<i>Move On Regional Adviser, CTAD North West, 1 Tower Lane, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4AR</i>	<i>07748 985510</i>	<i>Julie.mooney@tribalgroup.co.uk</i>
<i>Chris Whinnett</i>	<i>ESOL Lead, Adult Education Service, Cumbria County Council</i>		
<i>Sondra Cuban</i>	<i>Lancaster Universtiy, Educational Research, County South, LA1 4YD</i>	<i>01524 35020</i>	<i>s.cuban@lancaster.ac.uk</i>
<i>Diane Smillie</i>	<i>Cumbria View Care Services 16c Market Place, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 4TN</i>	<i>01539 735694</i>	<i>dianesmillie@btconnect.com</i>
<i>Brian McCubbin</i>	<i>Hometruster Care Ltd (Silver Howe), Parkfield, 256 London Road, Carlisle, CA1 2QQ</i>	<i>01228 818933</i>	<i>maria.brown1@tesco.net</i>
<i>Lisa Wiles</i>	<i>Heron Hill Care Home, Estwaite Avenue, Kendal, LA9 7SE</i>	<i>01539 738800</i>	<i>janetb@abbeyhealthcare.org.uk</i>

For citing purposes: Cuban, S. (2007). **Effective Communication and Language for Working in Care for ESOL Learners: Evaluation Brief** (with Lesley Gill). Lancaster: Lancaster University.

Timeline

