

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- BETWEEN THE WEA AND CRAFTS FOR EVERYONE

For a number of years the WEA has been actively supporting Crafts For Everyone in what has been a highly successful community partnership. Crafts For Everyone is a registered charity based in Crumlin providing work-based training for people with learning difficulties and mental health problems. Approximately three years ago the project received funding from the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action to set up a craft workshop producing ceramic models, some decorative and some functional. The products, which include items such as lamp bases, vases and novelty items, are sold to the public in the small gift shop situated in front of the premises. By paying for the time of two craft tutors the WEA has ensured the project is able to continue providing hands on learning. In addition to these activities there are workshops for children as well as regular craft fairs to promote both products and raise awareness of the project within the community.

Project Manager Margaret Betty acknowledges the importance of WEA support: ‘We haven’t got enough money coming in to pay for additional tutors. I am the only full time paid member, I do the managers job and the development side so I could not take the classes... so you can see what the WEA means to us’.

WEA tutor Keri is herself a product of the way in which the partnership between WEA and Crafts for Everyone is able to support individuals back into employment. Following a period of illness Keri was keen to get back into work so joined Crafts for Everyone as a volunteer. While it is widely acknowledged that long periods of unemployment can result in a loss of confidence in ability, it quickly became apparent that Keri had a natural aptitude for the work involved. Recognising this potential, Margaret Betty was keen to keep her on a more permanent basis and found the WEA equally keen to help. With the support and encouragement of everyone involved, Keri subsequently undertook training to become a qualified WEA tutor and now works 12 hours on the project. Margaret sees this example as an important aspect of the partnership’s work “that’s what we’re all about, offering employment to people, developing them and training them”

Similarly, the WEA is keen to use the resources at its disposal to enable learners to become empowered, to have a voice, and develop confidence and knowledge. One example of many such success stories is Susan, a thirty year old with learning difficulties who joined the project 6 months ago. Having previously felt overwhelmed at any attempt to learn in a large group setting, the contrasting relaxed atmosphere and friendly approach adopted by the project team provided Susan with an environment in which she felt safe and happy to learn. Initially, in order to help her settle, a member of staff at the centre offered to provide her with transport. While this arrangement still continues, Susan now feels confident enough to make her own way on one day each week, significant progress for someone initially daunted by the prospect of travelling on her own. It is this kind of support that enables learners like Susan to acquire the

confidence that is so crucial to further development. As confidence grows the level of support is gradually withdrawn, allowing the individual to become as independent as possible. In this environment, Susan quickly settled down and began to show a marked improvement in her development, ultimately recognising her capabilities by proudly exclaiming, “Haven’t I come on!” Margaret feels that Susan is now ready to progress, and will encourage further development by presenting her with new experiences and situations in which she can transfer her knowledge and skills.

Throughout the production process many learning opportunities occur, ranging from the practical skills involved in making and decorating the moulds to the underpinning health and safety aspects involved. All learners will eventually be encouraged to undertake an OCN Entry Level Award in Health and Safety as well as the opportunity to select relevant OCN units. Giving learners’ choice in this way is clearly in line with the WEA’s philosophy for democratic learning. In order to heighten the learners’ abilities and creative awareness, WEA tutor Linda Lloyd took the group on a work experience visit to a ceramic café in Cardiff. As the group produce and sell their own ceramic wear Linda knew the trip would be a valuable addition to the learning process” I found the groups to be most receptive to new ideas and eager to try new techniques”

Important as the opportunity for hands on learning undoubtedly is, it is often the development of ‘soft’ skills, such as confidence and motivation, which provide the springboard to further learning and development. Participating in the project has, for example, seen learners like Susan develop into valued team players, keen to help in the variety of tasks involved in the day to day running of the project. Similarly, organised activities such as horse riding, shopping expeditions and pool tournaments, provide the opportunity for social interaction and team development.

The outstanding success of the project has prompted the decision to set up a limited company. While charitable status is retained, any profits will be reinvested for the benefit of the learners. The short-term goal is to employ people with learning difficulties with the long-term objective to establish and run a ceramic café where the public can buy merchandise off the shelf and enjoy tea and coffee in a creative environment.

Both partners recognise the benefits of working together to achieve a common goal. In Margaret’s opinion “without the support of the WEA in practical ways we couldn’t function” The WEA on the other hand consider it a privilege to help, or as Linda puts it “I feel we are fortunate to have the opportunity to provide classes in a much needed area while helping their progression into a new and exciting venture”.

The logo for WEA (Welsh Education Association) is displayed in a large, light grey, lowercase, rounded font. The letters are stylized and connected, with a soft, hand-drawn appearance. The logo is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page, above a thin green horizontal line.