

Tailormade training

for the **third sector**

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Learning and
Skills Council

Tailormade training

For two West Midlands-based charities, *Take a Break* and *Solihull Leisure Opportunities*, **Train to Gain** has opened the door to relevant, cost-effective development opportunities that are already having a positive impact on the organisations, their employees and their clients.

Friendly and informative

Take a Break, which offers short breaks for children and adults with disabilities or life-threatening illnesses, has always seen training for all its staff – including volunteers – as a top priority. Skills broker Jeff Dean and skills relationship manager Jeff Guest were able to help the charity identify and meet new learning needs, and to find ways of off-setting the cost of training that was already under way.

“The meeting I had with Jeff was friendly, informative and really useful,” says Take a Break’s director Kim Fathers. ‘It was good to have the opportunity to talk through our training needs. As a result, we were able to find funding for two of our managers, one of whom was studying for a Level 5 diploma in management and the other a Level 4 NVQ in health and social care.’”

The analysis also showed that the charity could benefit from strengthening its strategic planning skills. Now Kim is planning to attend a two-day planning course later in 2008, funded through the Director Development Programme.

“This is enabling us to develop our management team with very little cost to us as an organisation,” says Kim. ‘These skills are vital to us as an organisation. The training is also giving people a real confidence boost.’”

Valuing people

Like Kim, Janet Down, general manager at **Solihull Leisure Opportunities** (soon to become Solihull Life Opportunities), is a great believer in training. ‘Yes, it helps staff to do their jobs more effectively,’ she says. ‘But it also builds confidence and boosts morale by letting people know that they’re really valued at work.’

The charity adds value to the lives of children, young people and adults by providing social and leisure activities. Funds are limited and, while the organisation has tried to compensate for this by providing as much training as possible in-house, Janet admits that this is inevitably limited by the expertise and experience available.

Flexible solutions

Skills broker Linda Rodriguez was able to give Janet some useful insights into the kinds of management skills that could benefit her organisation. Janet was impressed by Linda’s flexible, pragmatic approach.

As a result of the visit, five of Janet’s managers have now completed a qualification in adult learning through Bournville College in Birmingham. A trainer from the college came in to deliver sessions first thing on Monday morning. ‘It was great,’ says Janet. ‘We were able to choose a time that minimised disruption to our work, and the trainer tailored the course materials to suit our needs. That’s really added value. The course has also been a great team-building exercise for the people involved.’

Going the **extra** mile

Skills relationship manager Jeff Guest is based at **Business Link West Midlands** and works with both Jeff Dean and Linda Rodriguez. His role involves looking at the initial skills analysis and then using his in-depth knowledge and experience of the local training landscape to come up with the most appropriate solution. As a former entrepreneur, systems analyst and skilled trainer, he's ideally placed to help organisations across sectors get the most out of the training and development opportunities available.

His commitment and willingness to go the extra mile for clients has helped create a working environment where brokers like Jeff and Linda feel confident in stepping outside their remit if that means achieving a better match with clients' needs. 'If we can meet their needs through **Train to Gain**, great,' says Jeff. 'But, just as with a business, my main aim with our third sector clients is to help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to deliver their remit as effectively as possible.'

Having researched and identified a 'best fit' learning and development programme, Jeff then maintains contact with client organisations for up to a year, monitoring their progress and evaluating the impact of the training. Like Kim and Janet, he believes that learning and development can deliver benefits far beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills, vital though these are. '**When people feel valued, it's a transforming thing,**' he says.

“I see giving people access to training as like giving them wings. Then they can really fly.”

To find out more **about how a Skills broker or Train to Gain can help you**, please go to **www.traintogain.gov.uk**

