

# The Black Community Skills Project

Funded by ESF and organised and delivered by Skillnet Edinburgh and Community Organisation for Racial Equality (CORE), the Black Community Skills Project (BCSP) was developed to enable black and minority ethnic (BME) individuals the opportunity to raise their aspirations, confidence and skill levels to increase their employability and further education opportunities.

The BCSP, which is open to individuals from a BME background between the ages of 18-50, consists of a wide range of short courses, such as information technology and literacy and introduction to childcare. They also work on their employability skills including: CV writing, presentation skills, job application forms, interview and teamwork skills, confidence building, with visits to, and presentations by, outside agencies. In addition to this, participants receive English language support to undertake employment-focused activities, including work placements. The BCSP also offered childcare support, an agreed learning plan, continuous progress assessment and the opportunity to speak to potential employers.

CORE and Skillnet work in partnership with a wide range of organisations to deliver these courses. Partners include Edinburgh's Telford College, North Edinburgh Childcare Centre and a number of local community learning and development centres.

Over the past four years 500 people have graduated through the BCSP (photographed right) 120 have moved to full time employment whilst 260 have decided to go on to further education or training. Delegates from the European Union have visited the project to look at their work, which was recently short listed for the Scottish Government Best Practice Awards.

Here are some views from some of those who have participated in the course:

BV (East European participant): "I have lived in Edinburgh for about 13 years.

During this time I experienced racial harassment, bullying and verbal abuse. Sometimes, I stayed locked in the house because of these problems. I found out about the Black Community Skills Project course through word of mouth. I joined the course and it was very beneficial to me because I met other people from different ethnic backgrounds. We shared information about our culture, language and traditions. The other participants were very nice and friendly. We worked together, most of the time, as a team. To start with I was so nervous and shy. However as the course progressed I started to become much more outgoing. The good things about this course were the opportunity to gain more confidence and to learn a lot of new things. I found this course very useful and I would definitely recommend it to anyone who has an interest in learning new skills."

SN (Asian participant): "I came to this course to improve my writing skills and spelling and also to get the confidence I needed to go on to employment. I have always wanted to do something in life, and this is the first step towards the job I have always wanted. After being a housewife for the last 20 years this course is exactly what I needed. It has helped me so much. One of the things I enjoyed most was a visit to Careers Scotland. This was a very good experience, and it allowed me to find out about the opportunities out there. I have met some very lovely people and made new friends. I wish I'd had the opportunity to do something like this a long time ago, but it is never too late to start."

BN (African participant): "I found this course very useful. It has helped me to build my confidence in order to speak to other people. It also motivated me and I strongly believe that you need to be motivated and determined if you are to get a good job. During the course, we learnt about interview skills and CV writing."

CS (Chinese participant): "I felt so happy during this 12-week Skills Project course.

I also felt very much at home and more cheerful. This course helped me to improve many of my skills, including my confidence, English language and team building skills. It also widened my vision to meet new people. I have learned a lot from my tutors and other participants. I have acquired knowledge, which will help me to improve my life. I sincerely thank all those who have been involved in organising this course."

At the 2010 graduation ceremony, CORE Chairman Fernando Diniz told graduates and their guests: "As a university professor I have attended so many graduation ceremonies but this one gives me particular pleasure because it takes place outside the normal structures of university life. Today is a great reason for celebration and congratulations to you all and to everyone who has contributed to make this project a success."

At the same event, Shirley-Ann Somerville MSP sent a message of congratulations to the participants: "I would like to send my best wishes and congratulations to all those who are graduating today. This is a special day to celebrate, with family and friends, your achievements as well as look back on the hard work carried out to achieve your qualification. I thoroughly enjoyed attending the last year's graduation event as it gave me the opportunity to meet those who have benefited from the project. The project gives people the chance to develop important skills, which can lead to further education and employment - not only that, it gives people the life skills and confidence to build on and improve their personal development. I welcome the work carried out by Skillnet and CORE to provide the training sessions on a wide variety of subjects, and I am sure all today would join me in thanking all staff and volunteers for their dedication.

Funding for the current Skills Project ends in March 2011 and additional funding is needed to continue this life changing work.

