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Review 2009

Report from the Chair



It gives me great pleasure to present this review of Skillnet Edinburgh's activities and achievements over the past year.

In May 2008 we said goodbye to Sam Horobin, our office administrator for over 2 years. She has been replaced by Laureen Campbell, who comes to us from one of our previous partnership organisations, NISUS Scotland.

Another new member of staff is our Guidance and Advice worker, who is a well-known face to many of us. Jerusalem Barnabas has worked as a freelance consultant with Skillnet over the past 5 years and now joins the staff team on a part-time basis.

We also formally welcomed Arthur Akugbo to the Board of Directors as our Treasurer. Arthur works as Management Accountant for the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh and brings with him a lot of experience in accountancy and finance.

Financially this has been a positive year for Skillnet and we have applied for and been successful in receiving funding that will secure the future of the organisation until 31st March 2012.

These funds will be used to develop and deliver the Black Community Skills project in partnership with BCDP and expand the Mind2Work project, to include working with women experiencing mental ill-health.

During the year, Skillnet was highlighted by the Scottish Government ESF team as an example of good practice and we were visited by Scottish Government Policy Officials and Polish delegate interested in how we integrated the "horizontal themes" of Equal Opportunities, Sustainability and Inclusion into our project bid and delivery.

We were also chosen by ESEP Ltd as a case study in partnership working and visited by external consultants who met with staff and participants to examine how we worked together and the systems and procedures we put in place to ensure partnership working.

I would like to thank the Board of Directors and Skillnet Edinburgh staff for their hard work over the past few years.

Skillnet has much to feel proud about, considering how far we have come, but we must not be complacent and much remains to be done. We have ambitious plans for the coming year, and look forward to working towards their achievement.

Marion Fletcher, March 2009



Review of the Year



‘Skillnet Edinburgh is singular in its background, set up, aims, objectives and programming’

Words from our first annual report, as true now as when first written in 1996.

As I prepare this report, we face times of great challenge. Economic uncertainty, rising unemployment, familiar companies closing their doors, banks being privatised. The one thing we can be certain of, however, is that the current recession will have a disproportionate impact upon Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

Many of our participants lack formal qualifications. Many have qualifications gained overseas, unrecognised or unaccepted here. Many have English as an Additional or Other Language; some are refugees, fleeing persecution; some have been born and lived all their lives in Scotland, but been failed by education and support systems in the past.

All our participants share two things – they are seeking help and support to enable them to enter employment, education or training; and they face discrimination in trying to do so based upon their colour, their creed, their religion or their culture.

As unemployment rises, as jobs become more difficult to find and sustain, it is those who are perceived as different, unqualified or over-qualified, those who lack experience or references, who suffer the consequences.

The work of Skillnet is, and continues to be, to pro-actively address the needs of BME communities, to provide training, group and one-to-one support, and to work with employers and other training providers to tackle the institutional and structural barriers that prevent access to employment, education and training.

Through this, we strive to create equality of opportunity for BME communities throughout Edinburgh and the Lothians.

In working towards this vision, we realise that we cannot succeed alone. Over the years, we have worked with many partners to achieve our goals, and you can read more about these in this report.

We have also asked some of our participants to tell their stories—stories of challenges faced, opportunities taken, and progress achieved. It is their determination to success that motivates and sustains us in our work, and demonstrates the true worth of all we do.

Eddy McGregor, April 2009

- secured **funding** until **2012**
- **highlighted** as an example of **good practice**



Black Community Skills Project

The Black Community Skills Project is a partnership between Skillnet and the Black Community Development Project (BCDP).

BCDP were established around the same time as Skillnet, back in 1995, and work with BME communities to tackle discrimination and racism throughout Edinburgh, through case work, advocacy and capacity building.

Skillnet and BCDP worked together in the past on joint one-off training courses, but both organisations recognised the value of working together and pooling our respective talents of community development and outreach with pre-vocational training and support.

The project mixes personal development (the soft skills), with language and IT support (the hard skills), followed by work placement (the experience). On going one-to-one and group support sessions help participants hone their skills, and develop better opportunities for people to access employment.

Key to the success of this joint project is the provision of training close to the participants, enabling people to learn with other learners from within their local communities, to promote peer-to-peer support groups and through work with locally based mainstream organisations, to promote social inclusion and community cohesion.



Through ESF funding, we were able to work with 70 participants during 2007/08, and at the end of March 2008, we welcomed Mrs Maureen Watt, Minister for Schools and Skills, to present certificates of achievement to most of the participants. Mrs Watt was delighted to hear that 21 of the participants were unable to attend – as they were now in employment.



During 2008/09, we worked with 100 participants, and at the Graduation event in March 2009, Shirley Anne Somerville, MSP, was equally delighted to hear that nearly 30 participants couldn't attend this time!



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BCDP

Black Community Skills Project

Mahboob's story

My involvement with Skillnet goes back many years.

When I joined Skillnet, I was quite shy and reserved. I was also very inexperienced in using computers. With John's encouragement, I enrolled on the Mind2Work computing skills course. This course gave me good basic skills and confidence in a vital area of learning. I then moved on to the FlexIT course with Skillnet's partner organisation, Nisus Scotland.

Through my long involvement with Skillnet, I have been invited to attend meetings, training sessions, outings - I particularly enjoyed the fishing trips - we went as a group where everyone was friendly and helpful and I felt very relaxed.

As a result of the support I have received from the staff at Skillnet, I have also had the confidence to become more involved with other projects; I now speak in group settings and at conferences. I was also very grateful for the successful employment opportunity as a sessional worker teaching English for the Skillnet Employability project. I have gained so many new skills and am much more confident and assured.

I am pleased to say, in 2008, I received an Award from Edinburgh's Lord Provost in recognition of my contribution to the Community.

I have been so happy with the service that I have received over the years. The staff at Skillnet are always welcoming and non judgemental. I always recommend the organisation to new friends and colleagues who have been equally delighted at the service they have received.

I am very grateful to John and Eddy for the support and guidance they have shown me and wish Skillnet Edinburgh every success for the future.



Mind2Work Project



The past three years have been extremely busy and challenging for the Mind2Work Project.

The Mind2Work project aims to provide a quality service to black minority ethnic men who are experiencing mental ill-health such as lack of confidence, lack of self-esteem, loneliness, stress and isolation. This in turn can cause huge barriers for the clients in accessing employment, education and training.

We set out to work with 25 clients per year, but ended up working with 110 over the period—more than expected, and an indication of the demand for our services.

All clients receiving support from the project completed a personal development plan. This outlined the client's baseline details, their career goals and steps on how to achieve these goals. These plans were very useful in concentrating efforts towards client development.

The participants have been men aged 18 and over from the black minority ethnic communities, refugees and asylum seekers. The project provision has given the individual greater self – confidence, as well as developing their personal skills and abilities through training courses, one to one work and casework and advocacy.

We work closely with a number of other agencies throughout Edinburgh, and through this provide the client with a better knowledge of accessing mainstream services, improved mental health, enhancing their opportunities for employment, education and training with a better quality of life.

In addition to the provision provided by the project, peer support has been a vital element and has been provided through group meetings for clients to share experiences and offer encouragement to each other.

Such has been the demand for services, and the success of our work so far, that in January 2009, the Big Lottery Fund for Scotland awarded us nearly £300,000 to continue and develop our work over the next 3 years, including establishing similar provision for BME women experiencing mental ill-health.

Harbhajan (John) Singh, March 2009

Marlene's story

The Mind2Work Project has opened up new horizons for me and I now have a more positive outlook in all that I do.

My life had been full of ups and downs and I had many problems over the years and suffered bouts of negativity and depression. Life was never straightforward and always seemed to get the better of me. I used to worry constantly, was very unhappy and could not settle down. All my life, I felt undermined and let down by people and found it difficult to trust.

I moved to Scotland from London and contacted Skillnet Edinburgh. In the beginning I could not talk about my problems with the staff but with great patience on their part and over a considerable time, I began to feel more comfortable and at ease and felt they understood the problems I had faced. They were there to help me.

The staff at Skillnet Edinburgh are very supportive and totally trustworthy. Through their compassion and understanding, they have given me the strength and courage to improve my prospects. I have now returned to education and feel focused and motivated to work harder and be stronger in all aspects of my life.

The Mind2work Project changed my life for the better and I now feel I can rise above the challenges life throws at me.

Thank you John and Eddy.



EMPOWER

2008 saw the end of the EMPOWER Project. Established in 2001, EMPOWER was a partnership project between community organisations, local authorities and colleges to develop a range of innovative approaches to tackling the discrimination and barriers facing members of the BME communities in Scotland.

EMPOWER enabled Skillnet to develop and share out work with other similar organisations, as well as learning and adopting new ways of working. It also allowed us to look at how we worked with others, and from EMPOWER, our partnership with BCDP on the Skills Project developed.

Part of the work of EMPOWER was to create a 'legacy' - something that would outlast the EMPOWER partnership and provide benefit in the future. The Black Community Skills Project is one of those legacies.



Skiltech

We also sadly saw the end of the Skilltech Project. Skilltech was a partnership between Skillnet and Nisus Scotland, providing IT, Language and Employability training, with the focus on the provision of accredited ECDL training.

Unfortunately, despite the demand, and the success of the project, funding problems saw Nisus close in June 2008. We are looking at ways, and other partners, to continue the Skilltech project, but would like to thank all the staff at Nisus for their dedication and work over the years.



Frank's story

A close friend recommended the Skillnet Mind2work programme at a time when my family and I were depressed and stressed about our situation.

With the assistance of John Singh, I was able to map out a plan to improve my circumstances. Not only a very friendly person, John was very professional and courteous and guided me towards seeking the advice and help of a solicitor. As a result, my circumstances are now dramatically changed and I am delighted to say that I now have the right to live and work in the UK.

During my involvement with Skillnet, I attended courses recommended or arranged by them which helped me improve my confidence and skills in many, many ways. I now have my ECDL certificate and have also been involved in Employability Skills programmes. Not only am I totally confident in meeting and socialising with people from different cultures and backgrounds, but through the support of Skillnet, I have now gained full time employment with the City of Edinburgh Council.

I have been very happy with the support, advice and training I have received from Skillnet and would recommend this organisation to anyone that needs it.

Skillnet has helped to greatly improve our quality of life which in turn has boosted my confidence. My family and I are now much happier. We can see a future.

About Skillnet



Skillnet Edinburgh Limited is a unique independent voluntary organisation set up in 1996 to enable people from minority ethnic communities to compete more fairly in the job market by pursuing further educational and training opportunities, careers advice, and support to enhance their employability.

Board of Directors

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Staff

Eddy McGregor Director
Laureen Campbell Administrator
Harbhajan (John) Singh Mind2Work
Jerusalem Barnabas Guidance and Advice

Funding

Skillnet would like to thank our funders over the past years.

Copies of our latest audited accounts are available from our office, or on our website.



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