Project Report

2006 Victorian Equity Projects – An Office of Training and Tertiary Education initiative

Project title: The choice is yours – comprehensive training for the HACC and Disability Support Sector.

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Project summary

“The choice is yours” is a comprehensive training program that provides participants with 10 Units of Certificate IV Disability along with Certificate III Aged Care. This combination of training ensures that participants can seek work in a broad range of community services roles and be well prepared for each of the areas.

The learners

The project is targeted at single parents, and mature aged participants however it is relevant for anyone considering entry into the Community Services sector.

The course commenced with 21 participants from the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Participants ranged in age from Mid 20’s to early 60’s. 20 participants have successfully completed their training.

The challenge

The Disability Support Work sector has an identified problem attracting staff. When people do consider working in the industry they are encouraged to obtain their qualifications as soon as possible.

The aim of our project was to provide people with the basic skills and knowledge needed to enter the industry, however it became apparent when the course commenced that participants would benefit from a more intensive program of training than was originally planned. With the input of the Training and Development Unit of the DHS Disability Accommodation Service (Eastern Region) we increased the number of units to be delivered and broadened the scope of the training. We also placed great emphasis on the personal development of participants. Personal Effectiveness training was included to develop the confidence of participants and support them to take on any role within the community services sector.
As a result participants have achieved a significant proportion (10 units) of Cert IV Disability and will achieve a Certificate III Aged Care as well. This level of qualification will broaden employment opportunities to include the Disability, Aged Care and HACC sectors.

**Your approach**

The inclusion of Personal effectiveness training at various stages throughout the training contributed to our high retention rate. We also had the flexibility within the program to add in additional personal effectiveness days when students showed signs of losing interest or confidence in their ability to succeed. Encouraging participants to take responsibility for their own learning and accept that they were in control of how much or how little they took away from the program had a profound effect on students.

Many training providers will have experienced stages within their courses when students become a bit “wobbly”. This course was unusual in that we didn’t experience many such episodes and when we did they came much later than we’ve experienced in the past. However because participants had experienced these “get back on track” kind of sessions before they responded really well and settled right back to work.

The program also included a practical placement component.

**The results**

The introduction of Personal Effectiveness training also contributed greatly to the increased confidence of participants. They have been ready to comment on all aspects of the training program and participated fully in class. It has also contributed to the high 95% retention rate. Where in the past we have struggled to get students to take evaluations seriously – usually only getting a point score and very little comment – this time students were very keen to express themselves in an appropriate and considered way and offer suggestions for improvement.

Some of the comments from student evaluation forms include:

- *Chris made this dull uninteresting unit quite nice, congratulations are in order only Chris could pull this one off.*
- *Would have preferred a 3 day session instead of 2 days.*
- *Great teacher – plenty of laughs. Overall learnt lots.*
- *Really interesting and clear.*
- *Training room sometimes cold. Trainer fluent, introduced humor and had a good rapport with students. I enjoyed her lectures.*
- *This evaluation is probably more relevant once the whole course is complete.*
- *Great – want to learn more!*

As a result of their participation in the program we expect that more than 80% of participants who wish to work will achieve employment in the Community Services Industry within the next 3 months. More than 40% of participants have been asked to apply for positions at the organisation that provided their practical placement.
Lessons learned

Good planning and preparation are key issues with any training however with this particular target group trainers and support staff must know their subject thoroughly. Because participants arrive so unsure of their decision and so unsure of their capacity to successfully complete the training they ask lots and lots of questions. Many of our mature aged participants expect “teachers” to be the font of all knowledge. They expect answers to their questions whether they are relevant to a particular study area or not and trainers who cannot effectively manage all these questions risk their credibility with the group.

By including the notions of self-advocacy and being responsible for one’s own learning experience into the program, participants were more able to research questions themselves and take responsibility for finding their own answers where it was appropriate. They were also able to persist with a question if they felt they weren’t getting the response they needed. As a result participants have come away from the course better equipped to deal with issues around work but also to take those lessons learned into their personal circumstances as well.

As part of our response to the success of this program we have determined that we will incorporate extended personal effectiveness training into all our future courses. This includes pre-vocational and full certificate courses. We have also developed a new pre-vocational course based on what we have learned from the delivery of this program.

Contact details for queries regarding the project

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