



case study

equal opportunities



Objective One is part-financed by the European Union



The Objective One Partnership for Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly

EMPOWER

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the project

This project aims to raise awareness among young women of the benefits of higher level training and identify opportunities for career progression and self-employment.

Empower has been specifically designed to remove barriers to training, higher level employment and self-employment / new starts for women. To date the project has supported 228 women whilst 151 women have joined the project for mentoring, training or business advice, or a mixture of these.

The Programme has invested £255,178 from the European Social Fund (ESF) in the project which has a total cost of £593,328.

measures of equal opportunities adopted

Empower provides a structured mentoring regime which has been designed for and particularly welcomed by women who otherwise find themselves isolated in the business community.

Mentoring is provided by a business adviser with experience of advising women (from a career in banking) and a female adviser with specialist knowledge of ICT. Advisers were chosen on the basis of ability to meet beneficiary needs rather than gender and there is a mix of male and female. Advice is provided at a time and place convenient to the beneficiary. An individual action and mentoring plan is drawn up for each beneficiary to ensure that family-friendly times and non threatening venues are chosen.

Beneficiaries with a disability or learning difficulty are offered a one-to-one specialist assessment so that necessary support measures can be put in place.

Funding for childcare, dependant care and travel expenses for those in rural areas is offered to remove financial and geographical barriers.

Support is provided to people from ethnic minorities (including training delivered in their native language if necessary, eg Health & Safety at Work).



Empower adviser/mentor Suzanne Allin (left) with beneficiary Deborah Honey

Women joining the project who are already owners or managers are advised on the development of their own Equal Opportunities policies.

Some of the success stories from the project are:

- Beneficiary A gained employment developing training courses for a community scheme following training supported by the project.
- Beneficiary B gained promotion into her first management post after Empower supported training and mentoring.
- Beneficiary C opened her shop in Bodmin in December 2004 after receiving business advice, training, and mentoring through the project.
- Beneficiary D was provided with childcare support through the project which has enabled her to successfully complete her course.
- Beneficiary E received bank funding support following business advice and guidance.
- Beneficiary F - Following discussion about her business idea, which proved that self-employment proposal was not viable, she subsequently gained employment.



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The following are quotes from some of the beneficiaries.

"I was feeling very disempowered when I first heard of the project. Since receiving mentoring I have noticed a marked improvement in my confidence, motivation and assertiveness. I belong to an age group where women are still unsure of their role and am very grateful for the support and encouragement I have and continue to receive."

"The support has been invaluable in setting up my business as a charity and in my role as company secretary I have had a lot of help and advice. Steve Bennett provided excellent help."

"Just the first visit to me by my mentor has helped kick-start me into a constructive and positive process of building my business into a viable enterprise to be proud of, instead of a pin-money affair."

Other benefits have been expressed by participants:

"I think you cover everything – even down to confidence building."

"I consider that Empower provides a very useful service for women in Cornwall and I am pleased to see it is not ageist."

"So many businesses starting up need trusted advice – it's great. A much needed service – fills a gap in business needs."

"I am trying to develop a career (part-time at the moment) as a freelance writer. There is little that the project can do for me in practical terms but having a mentor in frequent contact is a great incentive to get things done. It is embarrassing to say you have achieved nothing since their last visit!"

"We are very grateful for the opportunity to train staff through Empower. Great team, very supportive and helpful without being overpowering."

benefits of equal opportunities

Economic Benefit

The project is currently helping 85 businesses of which 62 are new starts. The high percentage of new starts evidences the project's "return to work" bias. The project is also currently providing high level training for 84 women, some of whom have subsequently moved into self-employment. In addition the project has encouraged existing owner / managers to develop family friendly working practices, opening up the market place for the skills provided through the project. Hence the project is dealing with both the supply and demand issues for females in Cornwall.

lessons learnt

Sue Lovell, the Project Manager, and her team feel that whilst this is a 'women only' project, within this parameter the ethos of the project has been fully inclusive from the start. Women have been provided with individually tailored solutions, removing barriers to career development / self-employment.

Project applicants and managers need to understand the Objective One Equal Opportunities Objectives as well as the specific requirements of the project as detailed in the application.

For more information about how you can incorporate equal opportunities into your project please contact the Objective One Partnership Office on 01872 241379 or email objectiveone@cornwall.gov.uk.