

Women's Technology Development Project and Women's Electronic Business Support (WEBS)

Funding: ERDF Priority 2 (People & Communities) providing Capital and Revenue for the Women's Technology Development Project; ERDF Priority 1 (Business and Ideas) for the Women's Electronic Business Support Project. Together with funding from ESF, Equal, UK ON-line, Learn Direct, Manchester City Council amongst many others.

Good Practice themes demonstrated: ICT

The Women's Electronic Village Hall (WEVH) is a city centre-based ICT and multimedia training organisation for women in the Greater Manchester area.

WEVH is unique, not only because it provides flexible, tailored services, but because it specifically looks at how ICT can inform and improve women's options in work, in business and in life. Since its creation in 1992 the WEVH has enabled hundreds of women to return to the job market by providing vocational training in advanced technologies, particularly in ICTs and Multimedia.

The Women's Electronic Village Hall mission is to:

- Help women to find satisfying and gainful employment by providing education, training, counseling and advice.
- Provide access for women to use new technologies and act as a focal point for women to influence technology policy to take account of women's needs.
- Offer women access to the skills and support required to develop their own businesses and co-operatives, increasing the self-employment opportunities for women.



WEVH provides a constantly evolving training programme to women in Greater Manchester. Training ranges from entry level courses up to NVQ level 4. Instead of focusing on the traditional office based or technical training, WEVH focuses on non-traditional skills that women need to work in the new economy. Women can gain a range of skills from taster digital camera courses right up to video training or how to develop an e-commerce site.



WEVH also aims to identify specific barriers that prevent groups of women benefiting from new technologies, and designs projects to overcome these. For example, the project recently delivered a number of initiatives using creative approaches for refugee and asylum seeking women.

WEVH also offers a comprehensive range of support and training for women entrepreneurs. The Women's Electronic Business Support Project (WEBS) is a business support package course with a difference.

Whilst offering all the normal services available in a business support programme WEVH works with women business owners to embed the ICT skills new businesses need in the 21st century. Businesses are helped to

exploit the internet by exploring the potential of electronic marketing, web design and e-commerce solutions.

During the WEBS project it became apparent that lots of people go it alone to get out of the pressured environment of employment. The team realised that the traditional measures of growth, turnover and employment do not match the aspirations of many business women. This realisation has led on to a new project called Measures For Success. This 18 month European Social Fund supported research programme will look at alternative outcomes that fit with the real aspirations of many women - work life balance and sustainability. Most importantly this research will be used to look at how ICT can be used by women to achieve their goals.

What singles the project out as being an example of ICT best practice?

- Above all sustainability. This is now one of the longest running ICT projects in the North West and although undergoing many changes during its life the key theme of making a unique contribution by providing a holistic women-centred approach continues.
- The purchase and development of new premises at Ada House, which has allowed WEVH to expand its facilities and the range of services it offers. These new offerings include facilities for women entrepreneurs, a crèche and extended training provision.
- The new building and enhanced services has led to a 40% increase in the number of women supported.
- The fully accessible facilities have meant that WEVH can now support a diverse range of women; attracting 124 women from black and minority ethnic communities, 48 disabled women and women aged from 18 to 79 in 2004.
- Ada House has five business units available for flexible rental to women owned businesses. The units are designed for start-up businesses or those in their first few years of trading. Rent is extremely competitive and includes free broadband internet access, business rates, as well as ongoing ICT and business support.

What singles the project out as being an example of ICT best practise?

The project has benefited women from all walks of life across Greater Manchester but by design has been of particular benefit for those disadvantaged.

'Just being at WEVH always boosts my confidence. Discovering I can do it is great'

Trainee on OS Commerce course.

'I can use the course to get a job, but maybe I'll join the university. I haven't decided yet.'

Trainee on refugee project

'There is so much to choose from, this has been a real eye-opener for me.'

Business network attendee

'It was so helpful to troubleshoot code in a supportive environment, where help was available.'

Trainee on OS Commerce course.

'The course greatly increased my scope of knowledge, consolidated my skills and showed me I can move on to more advanced skills with confidence.'

Trainee on advanced Dreamweaver course.

'We always had a computer because of the kids. It stood on the landing and I dusted it and that was all I ever did.'

Trainee on digital camera course.

'I want to thank WEVH for all they have done. I want to do more courses, advance and go further in life.'

Trainee on digital camera course.

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Project Part-Financed
by the European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

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