Elfrida Society Project
Basic Skills for Adults with Learning Difficulties

1) Background

This project combines basic skills tuition and support with opportunities for application and use, encouraging the development of strategies that enable people to transfer and apply learning approaches across tasks and different elements of their lives. A principal feature has been the work with Homelink support workers to be more effective in their approaches to developing and facilitating the literacy and numeracy learning that occurs in independent living situations. The workers have been supported in managing and developing these tasks within everyday living contexts thus facilitating the embedding of the skills required within those contexts and ensuring that they emerge from them.

Homelink provides individually designed programmes of teaching and support for people with moderate learning difficulties to enable them to learn how to manage their own lives. The individual Homelink support plan is based on the Community Living Assessment, which results in a statement of service users' needs. Service users are allocated a one-to-one worker to support them wherever they live and at the times they need support. Homelink workers teach daily living skills and support service users in their efforts to take advantage of community resources, attend college, get a job or look after their children. This is a holistic approach, supporting the whole person by taking account of changing needs and responding to events in service users' lives.

This project purposefully aims to cross the divide between independent living and education in the process of establishing the relevance of learning and identifying ways of embedding it in everyday life. It is an opportunity to develop a co-ordinate and purposive approach across support programmes with better learning outcomes through a more holistic approach to learning in context.

Situated learning

The 'scaffolding' approach used in this project derives from situated learning theories, which argue that people learn most effectively in situations that are most meaningful to them. Most of our understanding about education and learning stems from an explicit assumption that skills and knowledge exist independently of the contexts in which they were acquired. However, situated learning theories are based on the idea that the context of learning is an integral part of what is learned; context and activity *'co-produce'* knowledge while most thinking and learning is communal or collaborative.

Sylvia Scribner's research demonstrates how learning is a purposeful and embedded activity; learners make use of resources in their environment to

both solve and pose questions. People learn skills in the context of their application to realistic problems and in order to accomplish purposes that are important to them in their everyday lives:

> *"…people strive to satisfy purposes that have meaning within their community, and in their activities they use tools, symbols and models that are culturally developed and transmitted" (Scribner, 1988:1)* 1

However, the acquisition of skills and competencies is only a secondary aspect of learning. Learning is about participation and becoming engaged in socially situated activities, about membership and the construction of a social identity as a person with the potential to do and to learn. Learning is therefore an ongoing activity coming out of people's participation in *'communities of practice'* and involvement in practical action in the *'culturally designed settings of everyday life'*. Equally, learning

> *"cannot be pinned down to the head of the individual or to assigned tasks or to external tools or the environment but lies instead in the relations among them".* (Lave, 1988) 2

2) Aims and Objectives

The aim of the project has been to embed basic skills learning within the development of independent living skills. The project sought to identify how staff that work with adults with learning difficulties in independent living support could incorporate basic skills in what they do. The increasing independence in day-to-day living of people with learning difficulties is evidence of their ability to learn. Equally many independent living activities such as shopping, paying bills or catching a bus, require literacy and numeracy skills. The project sought to amplify these everyday literacy and numeracy practices through the use of a scaffolding approach to learning rather than a teaching approach.

It is clear that support workers tend to use a 'trial and error' approach in their independent living work. The project sought to identify ways of supporting them to be more effective through developing a greater understanding of how to encourage and facilitate the learning that occurs in everyday living activities.

3) Operation
i) Initial development and recruitment
As project consultant, I met with key Elfrida Society staff before Christmas to talk through the project outline and share information about the projects managed by the Elfrida Society. It was also an opportunity to introduce myself and offer my thoughts about how the project might be facilitated. This initial sharing of information led to a detailed discussion about the relationship between literacy and numeracy development and independent living activities, relating service users' actual needs to the project brief in general.

We discussed issues of recruitment of Homelink workers and their service users to the project and the practicalities of arranging meeting times for workshop and supervision sessions. It was agreed that Jon Lynn (the Society's Professional Development and action research co-ordinator) and Debbie Arthur, (acting manager of the Homelink scheme), would work on the recruitment of independent living workers on the principle of who was interested and available given that staffing rotas and shortages would be a key factor in the process. These were determining factors in defining the structure and frequency of workshops and support and supervision sessions during the period of the Project.

Recruitment took place during the 1st 2 weeks of January; in discussion with Jon and Debbie it was decided to take more time over the recruitment of the 10 workers stated in the project brief in order that they could all meet together at the initial workshop. This was scheduled for the end of January to allow workers time to consider volunteering and work rotas could be re-organised. Of the 10 workers initially recruited one dropped out at the beginning due to illness and another worker withdrew during February for personal reasons. The project proceeded with 8 workers and 11 service users participating over 3 months.

A project schedule was agreed in early January in consultation with Jon Lynn: 3 Workshops on Fridays from 11-3pm 26th January, 2nd March and 23rd March; support and supervision sessions on Fridays 11-3pm 9th Feb and 16th March with a peer support group offered during the week of 19th Feb.
I facilitated the workshops with input from Jon Lynn and Lorraine Brook (Basic Education coordinator); the supervision sessions were taken by both Jon and myself ensuring we both met all the workers over the 2 sessions. These were arranged for pairs, 3s or individually as decided by the workers or dictated by rotas. The initial suggestion for 2 groups of 5 was not feasible when work rotas were taken into account.

ii) NIACE Consultancy
At the end of January Christina Schwabenland (Chief Executive of the Elfrida Society) and I met with Angela Wertheimer, the consultant assigned to this project by NIACE to advise support and report on progress. We had a very useful discussion about the aims of the project and the practicalities we had to work with in order to reach the outcomes stated in the project brief. Arrangements were made for 2 small groups of workers and service users to meet with the consultant to talk about the work they have been doing. The steering group met with the NIACE consultant again at the end of the project to review the Project outcomes.

iii) Steering group
A steering group was drawn up consisting of Teresa Cairns (LET research officer), Juliet Merrifield (Director of LET at the inception of the project), Christina Schwabenland, (Chief Executive of the Elfrida Society,) Lorraine Brook (Basic Education Coordinator) Richard Parkin (Manager of Homelink

scheme), Simon Lynn (Professional Development and action research co-ordinator), Carola Perales (Homelink worker and Basic Skills tutor) This group met 3 times during the project to review progress and discuss the final report.

iv) Workshop programme.

The workshop programme was designed to explore and promote the aims of the Project through a dynamic but flexible process of interaction. It was a facilitation exercise rather then a teaching or training process.

Initial Workshop outline:
- Discussion and clarification of Project Brief
- What will the support workers be doing?
- How can we encourage learning? – produce action plans
- Project Logs - Guidelines about their use on the Project

This workshop dealt with the aims of the project, the role of the Homelink workers and the importance of negotiating service users' participation. Discussions took place in small groups. Suggestions were reviewed collectively which helped people focus on what was possible and what would fit into their independent living work. Everyone developed specific action plans for work with each service user involved.

2nd workshop outline:
- Review of progress -
  what work have you done to date with your service user?
  have you had to re-think any aspect of your original action plan?
- overview of 'Scaffolding'
- Where to now? - concrete action plans/revisions
- review Project Logs
- Monitoring and recording progress
- action for next Workshop

The 2nd workshop was an opportunity for workers to review progress with the literacy and numeracy tasks in their original action. It was clear from the outset that everyone was keen to use the opportunity to share their experiences and receive feedback on progress. This was a valuable opportunity for shared reflection on progress and setbacks. The issue of monitoring and recording progress was also explored and set in the context of existing procedures within the Homelink scheme.

Final workshop outline:
- Review of work
- Evaluation
- Support issues
- Basic Skills and independent living – how do they interact?

The final workshop enabled everyone to reflect back to their original action plans and to think forward, looking at how to embed this work and to consider what aspects required change. It was also an opportunity to review support

structures and consider ideas for possible future work. The project logs were reviewed as a way to monitor progress and document learning; there was discussion about what other means could or should be used.

v) Monitoring progress

As research coordinator, I monitored progress through a number of intersecting processes; Workshop discussions, supervision and support sessions and review of the project logs.

- It was important to have 3 workshops at the beginning of the project, at the mid-point and at the conclusion. The support workers developed their action plans at the 1st workshop, we reviewed their appropriateness during the 1st supervision session and again through a collective review of goals at the 2nd workshop. The final workshop was an opportunity to explore the relationship between initial gaol-setting and eventual results, and to set the development of Literacy and Numeracy skills within the context of service users' and workers' independent living aims.

- Informal meetings and discussions with the Basic Education coordinator and the Elfrida Society's Professional Development coordinator were an additional tool for monitoring the impact of the project and for judging the significance of emerging issues. The Steering group meetings provided an overview of the project processes in the context of the Elfrida Society's structure and approach.

- The Project used reflective work logs to document and record activities; each worker was asked to keep a log and they formed the basis of discussions between workshops as well as to inform discussion during workshop sessions. Every Homelink worker involved in the project received a sheet of guidelines with questions that they could use to structure their log entries. The final section of the introductory workshop was spent in outlining the use of reflective logs and their purpose in this particular project. Workers were asked to record their action plans and to document any changes they found necessary. They were also asked to focus on the evaluation of Literacy and Numeracy tasks during the final 3 weeks of the project and to ensure that issues raised in workshops and support and supervision sessions were documented and reflected upon in their project logs. It was made clear that myself would only read these logs but they would also be returned to everyone. These were collected in at the final workshop in order to inform the final report – they have been returned to project workers.

4) Outcomes

The 4 planned outcomes of the Project were:

   i.   Independent living as the ultimate outcome for service users
   ii.   Greater understanding of how to support staff in identifying learning and to measure achievement
   iii.   Improve the coordination between the Basic Skills classes and the independent living schemes to enable learners to benefit from a more consistent approach
   iv.   To produce a report that will improve practice more widely

i) Independent living as the ultimate outcome for service users

Of the 11 service users who were involved most moved closer towards independence as an incidental outcome of focused work on Literacy and Numeracy tasks:

- Sue had decided to work with Matt on how to use the cash machine at his bank. He tended to panic and push any button, loses his card and had to go into the bank to ask for it back. He needed strategies for what to do, how to read simple numbers, some basic steps to use, simple procedures to get money out for shopping. At the end of the project Matt knew his pin number and no longer had to carry it around on a bit of paper (a security problem). He was also able to insert his cash card into the cash machine the correct way around and to enter his number and could read the numbers on the screen. He was also able to cancel the transaction and get his card back using the red button if he got anything wrong, no longer panicking if he miskeyed his number.

- Jim loves animals and works on a city farm one day each week, which is where he got the idea of keeping a snake. He was very keen to demonstrate that he could look after his snake in the face of some scepticism from family, neighbours and some of the city farm staff. Alex discussed with Jim using a simple calendar to help him look after Sid his snake properly. The first non-snake use of the calendar occurred at the end of the project. Jim had a doctor's appointment the following week and marking it on the calendar served to illustrate the difference between this week and next week – it was also the first time such an appointment had <u>not</u> been in Alex's diary but on Jim's calendar, put there by Jim.

- Sam has been working with Jake in putting money in his pre-payment meter and understanding what the numbers on the meter display represented. At one stage during the winter Sam did not visit Jake for a couple of weeks and Jake didn't put money in the meter, as he was uncertain about what to do and what the changed display meant. As a consequence he nearly ran out of electricity. Sam feels Jake has built

up his confidence. He can programme his washing machine on his own, and can read his pre-payment meter as long as it is single whole digits. Jake also volunteers to show Sam how he has worked out how to read the meter.

- Jon works with Paul who is very able but needs to learn to tell the time so that he can get himself ready and to his day centre when he doesn't have a support worker there to remind him. He also wanted to keep in touch with his brother but wouldn't use the telephone in his flat. Jon worked with Paul on basic recognition of numbers. Paul has made progress over the 10 weeks of the project in that he now has a large telephone with his brother's number programmed in so he is able to contact him more easily. He also has a large clock, which he is beginning to use in a limited, but focused way.

- Diane will be starting a course called 'Outside London' at the City Literary Institute in Holborn (City Lit), central London in the autumn, which will involve lots of travelling around London. Her Homelink worker, Isabel, decided to work with Diane on reading and understanding the London Underground map and using it for travel. Diane is now able to take the tube to a specific place and to read the tube map and exit signs. Because Holborn Tube station is very complex to navigate it is easier for Diane to catch the tube to Holborn to attend her class and then to catch the bus home. She can now travel from Holborn tube to her house by bus, change twice and read the bus signs and numbers; she is on the verge of independence and should be able to continue developing her new-found skills through her new course.

- When Sara went to the pictures with Fiona (Homelink worker) she handed over exactly the right amount of money for her ticket but stood waiting for change because that was what she had seen other people do. Fiona worked on the idea of getting change/not getting change and on basic coin values with Sara who is striving for independence and very keen to do this work. Fiona feels very positive about Sara's progress – she can now distinguish between different value money and they are working with concrete examples such as the cost of a coke and a packet of crisps. She also knows that different coin combinations can add up to the same amount and buy the same things. Having learnt basic coin values she is now more confident about paying for things herself instead of handing over her purse to her support worker and also doesn't expect change unless she has given more than is required.

ii) Greater understanding of how to support staff in identifying learning and to measure achievement.

The focused discussion of the embedded nature of Literacy and numeracy skills has served to raise Homelink workers' awareness of their existence within everyday household tasks. The need for guidance on ways of reinforcing the use of basic literacy and numeracy skills became evident in the course of workshop discussions. Opportunities for sharing experiences, understanding the value of limited but focused and achievable goals, and advice about materials and approaches to literacy and numeracy tasks were some of the ways of supporting workers that have emerged and which could be developed.

- Paul has difficulties recognising numbers, particularly in combination. The Basic Education coordinator suggested some materials such as bingo that Jon could use to develop Paul's number recognition skills. He is now integrating numbers into doing the shopping so Paul gets a chance to embed and rehearse his numbers in concrete situations. Jon also now asks Paul to identify the number of the bus they have to catch to do the shopping instead of just saying 'here's our bus'. Jon has become more aware of the embedded nature of Literacy and Numeracy tasks and is able to reinforce skills which were originally unassociated with Paul's everyday living needs.

- As a result of working with Will on developing his communicating skills in preparation for moving out of his parents' home Alex has discovered how important numeracy skills are for Will's plans. Will wants to work in a record shop and would need to know how to calculate and handle money. The project has enabled Alex to explore the possibility of working on Will's numeracy skills through role-play

- Fiona identified that her own approach to basic skills working with an adult led to problems (she is a trained primary teacher). She had to re-think and scrap things before starting again. Fiona has found working with Sara has made her think much more about what makes sense to Sara rather than what the abstract concept is to be learnt. She is much more aware of the need to focus on the context for learning and identify their skills and approach from there.

iii) Improve the coordination between the Basic Skills classes and the independent living schemes to enable learners to benefit from a more consistent approach.

The workers that have used the basic education resources at the Elfrida Society have tended to be individuals who either knew about the resources informally, have worked for Homelink for some time, or work with service users who are or have been students on the Basic Education programme. This project both raised the awareness of the Basic Education programme and enabled Homelink workers to seek advice and develop resources that

linked specific literacy and numeracy skills to life situations:

- Jake can turn on his oven but doesn't know which knob corresponds to which ring on the top. He goes to cookery classes run by the Basic Education programme but only attends infrequently. A concrete way for Jake to develop both his cooking skills and his literacy and numeracy abilities is for Sam, his Homelink worker to liase with the Basic Education tutor to enable Jake to practice his recipes at home during their shift together.

- The Basic Education coordinator met Sue and Matt who borrowed the digital camera to develop materials to promote Matt's ability to use a cashpoint. They worked together to produce laminated cards of the main screen displays for Matt to learn to recognise and read.

- Alex sought advice from the Basic Education coordinator to create an appropriate resource for Jim to learn when to feed Sid his snake (simple clear Days Of The Week calendar format).

- During the Project several of the Homelink workers arranged to meet as a group with the Basic Education coordinator for an informal advice session to further the basic literacy and numeracy goals they were working on with their service users.

- Isabel is a Basic Education Scheme tutor and Homelink worker. She discussed and used resources developed at the scheme with the 3 Homelink service users she worked with.

iv) To produce a report that will improve practice more widely.

This report is a product of the discussions during the workshops and meetings, with the steering group and key workers within the Elfrida Society. It will form the basis for discussions on a range of developments across the Elfrida Society's projects.

- An article has been written to appear in 'Community Living', May 2001, outlining situated learning theory and its appropriateness as an approach to embedding Literacy and Numeracy learning within independent living support work.

- All the Homelink workers who participated will receive a copy of the report.

- The report will be circulated within the Elfrida Society and form the basis of discussions about future training needs, the relationship between projects and the direction for development of the Basic Education programme.

5) Evaluation

This project has been extremely valuable in identifying and piloting approaches to embedding basic literacy and numeracy work within independent living situations. It has enabled us to work intensively with everyday needs as well as crises and to explore how to negotiate between sometimes competing demands. It has been a short, intense experience for everyone involved; workers, service users, professionals and researchers. Yet the brevity of the project belies the richness of progress and experience that has emerged from it. The discussions during the workshops and supervision sessions have demonstrated the breadth of progress made by both service users and workers. It is evident that this process of focusing on Literacy and Numeracy tasks within everyday living/work practices has raised awareness of their existence and the potential for introducing and reinforcing literacy and numeracy practices across a range of activities The ways they are inter-related with other issues of everyday life is becoming clearer. Using a money machine is not just about reading numbers or words on a screen or about developing the confidence to do that. It is also about access to money, attitudes to it, managing and saving, and about sometimes being exploited and manipulated by friends and family.

i) Monitoring

a) Process of the Project:

- The flexible and adaptive structure to the project has been important; the workshop programme was open to change in response to the expressed needs of support workers as they grappled with the tensions experienced through their developing awareness of literacy and numeracy skills. The workshops allowed a collective intermeshing of individual goals within the broader framework of independent living, as support workers explored ways of working on basic literacy and numeracy tasks whilst carrying out routine support tasks such as cooking or cleaning. The supervision sessions were an opportunity to express concerns, seek advice and check on goal – setting.

- Action plans have provided an underlying structure with which to identify, plan and track progress in skill development. The initial goals had to be broken down into small and realisable tasks through a process of trial and error. The action plans formed a baseline of reference while the project logs were a means of tracking and reflecting on this baseline, and identifying potential difficulties and ways of moving beyond it.

- A key aspect has been the way in which the action plans, although generally focused on literacy and numeracy practices actually led to bigger achievements. Isabel's story of Diane's progress illustrates this. Diane now is able to use the tube to get from Holloway Road to Holborn and to catch 2 buses back to her house. Her increased independence is demonstrated in her confidence in meeting her

worker, Isabel, at Holloway Tube station rather than being collected and taken to the tube station. Isabel's account of these developments unfolded interactively across the workshops and supervision sessions and within her project log.

b) Demonstrating progress:

- The use of project logs caused some anxiety at recording and writing about service users. The resistance to putting things down in writing is partly related to existing good practice in <u>not</u> writing about service users other than to hand over practical information from shift to shift. However, it is also about the difficulties experienced in writing reflectively and identifying those things you have grappled with and perhaps been unsuccessful. The point of transference is most acute when written down –if it isn't in writing then you can concentrate on the positive things and ignore those issues, which are most difficult to acknowledge or deal with. The process of reflecting on action is difficult but it is vital to both the research process and to effective professional development. It is not predicated on workers' perceived or actual levels of literacy. Alex commented on how the Project had offered him both the opportunity to share ideas with other workers and allowed him to set aside time for thinking and reflection. It had also demonstrated the value of using a reflective log to work out where he had left off with the service users he worked with given that he can forget exactly what they did and what the outcomes had been.

- In working with individuals with Learning Difficulties time is an important factor. There is no quantitative way of measuring progress within the development of independent living skills that makes sense. Testing loses the holistic nature of progress and the embedded nature of the skills developed. Life story narrative as part of an evaluative process is particularly appropriate in situations where skills development is embedded in the broader life context. Narrative demonstrates the complexity of the process of becoming independent. It involves the interaction of the service user, their Homelink worker/s, the web of agency services and their broader life experiences. The stories narrated are stories of workers' insights and the processes of the service users' developing understanding. Their perceptions of the service users' progress are reflective of their interaction with them and their role in the process of developing independent life skills. The service users' narratives are entwined with that of the support workers' at the point of interaction through Homelink.

- In his project log, Alex commented that the way he had been able to assess progress with the service users he works with is essentially narrative. He illustrated this by recounting the story of Jim doing the cleaning. When he first started working with Jim he was very reluctant to do the cleaning, they would do ½ each, progress was slow and Jim hadn't developed the skills to do it independently. Alex spent several months teaching Jim how to clean the toilet –Jim is still learning and

still needs prompting. Sometimes he forgets to pour the water away and flush the toilet before putting the bleach in; sometimes he forgets to use the toilet brush to clean the sides of the toilet pan. For a long time working alongside each other was essential – if they didn't work this way Jim would stop altogether, Jim was very bored and there was a lot of tension between them. Now Jim Hoovers downstairs and mops the kitchen floor before Alex arrives for his shift; he washes down the kitchen surfaces himself, and defrosts the fridge himself. He cleans the toilet himself, with prompting, he Hoovers upstairs himself, with prompting. Jim still has difficulty putting things away and finding places for things but this doesn't seem to bother him. He has also begun to throw things away like old receipts – which he was very reluctant to do – although this aspect of Jim's life is still relatively unchanged.

Alex, in telling Jim's story and his part in it demonstrates what has changed and what has remained the same – it is a narrative of change. The progress is embedded firmly in Jim's everyday life and where some aspects may not have changed very much the overall context has perhaps shown movement. It demonstrates the situated nature of learning and the difficulties in isolating the acquisition of skills from their context of use.

c) Existing structures:

- Workshop discussions identified that structures for monitoring and evaluation already existed. There was a clear sense that there should <u>not</u> be any additional monitoring as that was considered unnecessary and would be intrusive. It could also add another layer of record-keeping and take valuable time away from the essential tasks workers need to address during their shifts. However, these existing structures needed to be more consistent in the way they operated.

- The issue of who is recording, what is being recorded and why was a recurring theme. The existing monitoring systems within Homelink require a sharper focus if literacy and numeracy skills are to become significantly embedded within independent living work. This should be addressed further in other work.

- Homelink workers often work with a deficit skills model because that is the basis on which care plans are worked out. Part of the service users' initial assessment needs to indicate how people developed the skills they currently possess as well as what skills they require for independent living. Literacy and numeracy abilities should be integrated within other social and life skills development.

ii) Support structures for staff.

A range of different support needs for staff emerged clearly from this project. The key seems to be availability of opportunities to give and receive feedback on their work, develop and review their action plans, and receive structured advice related to specific skill development. Time to think things through and

receive feedback on a regular basis was acknowledged as necessary but not generally always possible. Where workers and service users were strongly motivated and there was optimism progress was clear. It is significant that, in general, the least 'successful' action plans were those dealing with issues such as developing socialising skills or where the basic literacy and numeric skills were buried beneath a complex blanket of agency involvement and where boundaries between agencies where quite clearly being threatened. The difficulties encountered by workers in their sessions with service users have implications for the support structures available to them and to the way workers themselves choose to use their shift time. However, it would be detrimental to separate Life Skills and Literacy and Numeracy skills from each other – this project has demonstrated their strongly interwoven nature. Support structures should address the need for workers to be clear about goals and to address the power relationships that can emerge in the support relationship

a) **Goals and motivation**
The different approaches support workers use & the effect of their motivation & that of their service user is acknowledged in the Homelink project. However, with the inclusion of literacy & Numeracy tasks in independent living work these differing situations & approaches need to be explored more thoroughly.

- Inter-agency involvement in service users' lives often indicated complex problems with consequent loss of control and independence for the service user and loss of focus for the Homelink worker.

- With more abstract skills such as socialising, service users' lack of interest in developing networks can rebound on workers. One worker identified how his service user's inability to develop a social network independent of Homelink was affecting him and blocking his ability to see what to do and to learn himself. Ian is clearly frustrated by the scale of the task he appears to face working with Victor – although he has succeeded in getting Victor to use a clock in the bathroom to be more punctual for appointments he doesn't feel his larger aim of encouraging the development of a social network has succeeded.

- Some workers prefer to keep things in their head or use a 'trial and error' approach, as they feel more comfortable with getting straight into a task rather then planning for it.

- Alex has been working with Jim for a long time and they have a history of structured work already so this was the background to the work with using a calendar. The relationship was well established with high motivation to encourage learning.

b) Power relationship and Attitudes
Concerns emerged around complex issues of power and control, both with workers and service users:

- How to handle the movement towards independence was one area of concern. Isabel experienced reluctance and fear with one of her service users about learning new skills. However, despite her increasing independence that has resulted from learning to read a tube map and simple signs, Diane is very frightened at the prospect of becoming independent. There is a constant tension as she moves forward towards independence and holds back for fear of what she might lose by demonstrating ability.

- Fiona's narrative makes clear that a temporary change of worker for Sara had opened up the possibility for development. She has now finished working with Sara and has tried to make clear the extent of the progress made during the Project. However, her permanent worker was only interested in whether Sara's personal hygiene plan had been adhered to, and was dismissive of Sara's ability to progress with any numeracy or literacy skills. There is an issue here about a worker being with a service user for too long and demonstrating a sense of ownership. The progress made in the period of the project could now be undermined by the worker's need to regain her control in the relationship   Yet It is clear that a change of worker for Sara has opened up the possibility for development. There is a need to monitor and acknowledge when workers need a change to remove them from a 'stuck' situation or where they are acting as a brake on potential learning.

iii) Cross-agency involvement.

In situations where there is multi-agency involvement with a service user, it is often very difficult to co-ordinate work, with workers left feeling both powerless and frustrated at the way resource centres sometimes seem to be working in opposition to each other. Literacy and numeracy skills are clearly not just about reading, writing and counting change but also about understanding forms and knowing how to budget. The tensions come about where agencies control access to resources and make decisions without consulting service users. . As support workers encouraging service users towards independence, their work can sometimes place them in opposition to statutory agencies. This is a complex area and one we could not address in this project; we can only identify these tensions and draw attention to them:

- Shireen and Shelley had hoped to help Joan develop an understanding and feeling of control over her money and what it was spent on. Her money is held by the Community Support Team because she tends to spend any money she gets on alcohol and cigarettes rather than pay her bills. This is a very disempowering situation as all control over her money has been removed. The response of Joan's Community Support worker to the idea of Joan learning how to budget was 'we deal with your budgeting'. The problems became really complex and Joan's support workers were unable

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iv) Role of education within Elfrida Society provision.

There is a focus in Homelink supervision and support sessions on Life skills development with supervisors' training and expertise having a mainly social welfare focus. The Homelink Community Care assessment is generally concerned with doing the washing, shopping, cleaning or learning about personal hygiene. This Project has demonstrated how Literacy and Numeracy tasks are enmeshed with other aspects of people's everyday lives and it has raised Homelink workers' awareness of basic education issues. If this work is to develop there has to be parity of esteem between Basic Education provision and independent living work.

- The potential role of the Basic Skills programme and the Basic Skills coordinator has become much clearer during this work. It is evident that the coordinator has a key role as advisor and facilitator in the embedding of Literacy/Numeric skills in independent living work. Lorraine Brooks' support and advice to workers has been invaluable to the project.

- Structural issues around teaching within community/supported living work requires clarification of the role of support workers. In being asked to 'teach', workers expressed concern that they didn't have the skills, knowledge or resources to work on particular aspects of Literacy and Numeracy tasks. Separate supervisions for Literacy and Numeracy development would add to the burden of meetings and separate this work from general life skills development. There is a need for Literacy and Numeracy input to supervisions to inform independent living work.

6) Impact and Continuation

i) Development of basic skills provision:

- This Project has explored ways to embed literacy and numeracy skills in the everyday life practices of Homelink service users. Support workers have used the expertise and resources of the Basic Education Scheme and the Basic Education coordinator facilitated the final workshop session. The discussion focused on ideas for the development of provision, with Homelink workers suggesting a number of ideas from short courses for groups of service users on 'understanding letters and bills' to more opportunities for worker/user pair support and input to Homelink support meetings.

- It has been an important outcome of the Project that the Basic Education expertise within the Elfrida Society should be acknowledged; Lorraine Brook, the Basic Education coordinator facilitated the final Project workshop session to review the Elfrida Society's Basic Education provision.

- Curriculum development work could be considered by exploring cross-agency collaboration and sources of funding that do not solely require standard units of output (as in past FEFC funding methodology). The new Learning and Skills Councils are expected to have a more flexible remit. The Society should explore this further and consider ways to enable collaborative work across projects involving the Basic Skills programme and so respond to the embedded nature of Literacy and Numeracy in independent living tasks.

ii) Training and development work

- It has been important to work with the Elfrida Society's Professional Development coordinator (Simon Lynn) in structuring the workshop programmes and in co-facilitating the workshops and supervision sessions. He will be key in training and development work in the future, picking up issues uncovered by the research process.

- The probable expansion of the Basic Education provision in the near future has made it essential that Literacy and Numeracy development should be embedded within the support and supervision structure of the Society. This will require awareness training with both managers and support workers. Simon Lynn's involvement throughout this project has ensured that he is aware of the drawbacks and potential involved in this process.

7) Conclusion

People with Learning Difficulties exist within a web of professional intervention. The boundaries and different language and reference frameworks serve to divide activities that should be linked together organically. This reflects the tensions – Learning difficulties draw people into a web of 'care' about how to cope with independent living/housing/getting a job. All are linked to how people learn. It is important to rethink how to help people with learning difficulties to learn effectively. This project has demonstrated an approach to teaching and learning that has succeeding with this. We have discovered much about the potential for embedding ways of learning within independent living developments. People with Learning Difficulties have learnt basic literacy and numeracy skills within non-classroom settings successfully, and have demonstrated that people with LDs actually do learn and have learnt in their homes in their everyday life practices

In the context of basic skills development, it is critical to appreciate that learning is not an activity separate from other activities. Embedding basic skills learning in the development of independent living is a positive response to the right of people with learning difficulties to belong to a 'community of learners' alongside everyone else. However, it is not without its difficulties, principally that of working across agencies and fields of professional practice, a confusion of conflicting languages and outcomes. This approach demands open communication between learners, workers, and agencies, conversations of sharing and empowerment rather than exclusion and deficit.

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