

Construction Works!

LSC Pan London ESF PROGRAMME 2
Case Study May 2008



The 'Construction Works!' project led by Mace Sustain Ltd aims to help women benefit from the opportunities available in the Construction Sector, especially at higher levels. 'Construction Works!' enables women already employed in the sector to increase their skills to NVQ Level 3 and supports unemployed women to gain training needed to enter the sector, namely obtaining Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) training and certification.

Above: (l-r) Corrina Adams Collins, Eileen Williams, Natasha Greaves and Sue Leong carrying out practical work for an NVQ Level 3 in Domestic Gas Installation and Maintenance

The construction sector is experiencing considerable shortages – it has been estimated over 70,000 additional workers need to be recruited each year just to replace those retiring and there are significant skills gaps at managerial and supervisory levels. The sector is also currently highly gender-imbalanced. According to Construction Skills, women account for approximately 10% of the total employment in the sector but only 1% of manual employment.

Project Delivery

'Construction Works!' has set out to help women overcome the multiple barriers to entering and progressing in the construction industry as reported in 2004 by oneLondon in 'Building the Future: The barriers to women entering the construction industry and possible actions':

- The image of the industry, which is considered to be a male preserve that is unsuitable for females
- The culture of the industry, which reinforces the male-dominated image of the industry and can be seen to be exclusive
- The confidence needed to enter what is seen as a male preserve
- Career prospects within the industry
- The recruitment process
- Terms and conditions of employment and their impact on work-life balance
- Lack of support when moving into employment

The project also supports women already employed in the sector facing barriers to progression by increasing their skills to Level 3, providing them with the training they need to

progress into higher level positions. There has been little provision of skills at this level in recent years, as illustrated by Women and Manual Trades, who reported that in 2005 only 30 women across London achieved an NVQ Level 3 in a construction-related subject.

According to Construction Skills, the highly fragmented nature of the construction industry (with its strong emphasis on sub-contracting) makes it difficult to implement workforce development schemes. Indeed, 75% of construction companies have stated that they do not invest in training. Furthermore, the majority of construction workers (55%) are either self-employed or employed by small or medium-sized enterprises. In these environments, there are often barriers to accessing training such as limited financial resources and small workforces that make it difficult to dedicate staff time to complete training. 'Construction Works!' focuses on women employed in these circumstances as they are least likely to be able to access training.



Above: Katie Elizabeth Hewer and Sandra Jones carry out safety tests for NVQ Level 3 in Domestic Gas Installation and Maintenance

Project delivery focuses on beneficiaries' needs centred around a support coordinator. The support coordinators are dedicated to building relationships and helping beneficiaries not only to achieve goals but make sustained progress in their career. They work with beneficiaries at every stage of their learning journey. Consistency is achieved as the Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) session and Individual Action Plan (IAP) process is delivered by the support coordinator. Information from the IAG on previous training, goals and basic skills needs informs the IAP, ensuring appropriate milestones are set. The support coordinator also sets up work placements, ensuring they are adapted to beneficiaries' circumstances and particularly take benefit eligibility issues into account. The job search process is also delivered by the support coordinator one to one either at the project's offices in central London or at a location requested by the beneficiary.

In addition to the one to one support offered by the support coordinator, the project delivers specific interventions to enable women to undertake training such as childcare and dependent care and reimbursement of travel costs.

In order to meet the individual needs of women already employed in the construction sector, the project is designed with the flexibility of offering training at NVQ Level 3 in any construction-related subject according to beneficiaries' requirements. For example, Level 3 training in domestic gas installation and maintenance has been provided to a group of women in north London held outside working hours to fit around beneficiaries' work schedule.

Project Beneficiaries

Ambitious to work in construction, Samantha was signposted to the 'Construction Works!' project by Jobcentre Plus (JCP) in Clapham. Although Samantha held an NVQ Level 2 in painting and decorating she had not gained any paid work experience and had been unemployed for over six years. She says, "I've been in prison and did a painting course there. I've always been on benefits and never had a job so the help I've had from Gez, the support coordinator, has changed my life."

The 'Construction Works!' support coordinator first set up an informal meeting with Samantha in the familiar surroundings of the Clapham JCP offices. The meeting continued at a local coffee house to encourage an open, relaxed discussion of Samantha's plans, potential barriers and help that the support coordinator could offer her. This was followed up with a formal meeting at the Mace Sustain Sustain offices, where an IAG session was carried out

along with a literacy assessment that revealed Samantha had difficulty reading. The resulting IAP highlighted Samantha's need to improve her literacy skills in order to pass the health and safety course needed to obtain a CSCS card.



Above: Samantha gained employment with the project's support

After improving her literacy through a programme arranged by JCP and receiving further support from the 'Construction Works!' project, Samantha went on to pass the CSCS health and safety assessment. The fact that the CSCS assessment has no time limit reduced the pressure, helping Samantha to get to grips with the questions.

Having identified a suitable company to provide a work placement, the support coordinator informally introduced Samantha to the employer. Subsequently, she put the interview techniques gained during sessions with the support coordinator to good use in a formal interview and successfully gained a placement as a building site cleaner, the only opening available at the time. The support coordinator attended the interview to act as a mediator and brokered a 16-hour week on a one month trial to allay the employer's concerns around Samantha

returning to work after an extended absence from the labour market. He also discussed the placement with Samantha, explaining that it could lead to a chance to demonstrate her painting and decorating skills in the future. Working at the placement part-time gave Samantha a valuable chance to readjust to working and the host organisation an opportunity to assess her performance.

Samantha maintained regular contact with the support coordinator throughout her placement and was supplied with a travel pass by the project. Impressed with her attitude and performance, the host organisation went on to offer Samantha a full-time paid position. The support coordinator continued to help Samantha through the transition into full-time employment and arranged for her first pay check to be paid into a post office account at her request as she did not have a bank account. She says, "Gez has been brilliant. He is really helpful and made me realise I can get out and do something. It has made such a difference."

A month later, Samantha was given the opportunity to decorate one of the company's refurbished properties on a trial basis and this led to her being offered the chance to move into decorating permanently. During regular contact with the support coordinator, Samantha has described how her decorating skills are progressing – she is being given the opportunity to learn new finishes and is thinking about further vocational training. She says, "I absolutely love painting and decorating and I would like to be self-employed."

Objectives and Outputs

The project started in February 2007 and will finish in July 2008 and aims to deliver the following:

- 30 NVQ Level 3 qualifications
- 20 progressions to employment
- 40 CSCS Cards
- 18 work placements

Partners

Lead Partner: Mace Sustain Ltd	
Delivery Partners	Strategic Partners
Flower Skills and Training Ltd	CITB – Construction Skills
MPower	Building London – Creating Futures
	Nick Stephenson Ltd

Funding

The project has been awarded £249,834 of European Social Funding under Objective 3 (specification 5.1B). The funding has come through the LSC Pan London ESF Programme 2.

Further Information

For further information about the European Social Fund and the LSC Pan London ESF Programme, please visit:

www.esf.gov.uk

www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/London/ESF

www.LondonO3.ecotec.co.uk

Alternatively please contact the Pan London O3 Team at ECOTEC (0845 630 8699; LondonO3@ecotec.co.uk).

For more information on ‘the Construction Works!’ project contact Gez Carr:

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or visit <http://www.macesustain.com/achievements/project-library/construction-works>

Learning & Skills Council

The Learning and Skills Council exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. The LSC is responsible for planning and funding high quality education and training for everyone in England other than those in universities. For any media enquiries about the LSC, please contact Lynn McSweeney (lynn.mcsweeney@lsc.gov.uk T: 020 7904 0663).