

## **West Mendip Opportunities Project**

### **Project Summary**

Delivery of training and skills advice in relation to future job opportunities at Morlands site by Glastonbury Community Development Trust. 200 people access new service of which 80 people assisted to obtain work10 businesses assisted Service taken into 6 new venues.

The six-month extension will enable project staff to focus on the following additional objectives:

- solidifying working relationships with new Morlands employers and others;
- expansion of the services offered
- developing a much-needed local “labour exchange” for casual workers (e.g. secretaries, cleaners, gardeners, odd-jobbers, etc).

### **Project Background**

It may seem counter-intuitive, but industrial and commercial brownfield developments, such as at the Morlands Enterprise Park, do not normally have a significant favourable impact on levels of unemployment in adjacent disadvantaged wards. A DTI (2005) summary of research by Lancaster University demonstrated this across the UK over many years.

The reason is almost certainly that long-term unemployment discourages and undermines individuals and communities to the point where new opportunities are not seen as relevant or achievable (or possibly are just not seen) – while incomers and commuters take the new jobs created.

At its post-war peak, through to the early seventies, Morlands (sheepskin products) employed 1,000 people from Glastonbury, Street and surrounding villages and contracted with local service providers, including farmers, underpinning a vibrant local land-based economy. When Morlands closed, in the early eighties, it left Clark's as the only significant local manufacturer (all now moved abroad) and, apart from Avalon Plastics' recent modest revival; there has been no significant recovery of local manufacturing employment.

Morlands Enterprise Park is therefore rightly described as a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and the West Mendip Opportunities project is seen as an effective and timely way to contribute to the success of SWRDA's local and regional employment targets while benefiting local people and their communities. SWRDA have agreed to give us the maximum advance information on employers locating to the site and we are committed to using that intelligence to inform and stimulate local people to be motivated and qualified to have the best possible chance of securing as many of those jobs as possible.

The project fits well with, and has the support of statutory agencies at town, village and parish level as well as District, County and Region (GOSW and SWRDA) and some of these bodies have been able to contribute match funding.

The project aims to ensure that people from rural West Mendip, including Street, Glastonbury and Meare have a fair shot at new jobs at Morlands Enterprise Park and

other local employment by providing information, advice, guidance and support to local people in applying for employment, starting in self-employment and accessing work-related training opportunities.

In addition to the Glastonbury Opportunities Shop, delivery has so far been trialled at accessible venues such as Baltonsborough Village Hall, Meare Village Hall and North Wootton Village Hall and more recently Pilton Village Hall.

### **Case Study**

Lynne Marson became a volunteer in the Glastonbury Opportunity Shop in January 2007 and signed up for the OCN Level 3 Skilled Adviser course at the same time. Lynne describes herself as a White Traveller and has a degree in science. Prior to this course, Lynne had spent thirteen years raising children and running a smallholding in Wales and is planning to travel again this summer (2007), investigating traveller culture in Romania.

Lynne stated that the volunteering and the course offered her an opportunity to rebuild her confidence and to re-engage with adults, in particular developing her listening skills, and dipping her toe back into the water of formal learning.

During the course Somerset Adult Learning and Leisure provided an introductory session to basic skills provision (numeracy and literacy). Lynne valued this very highly because, despite her prior academic achievement, she felt her spelling had never been up to scratch. She was introduced to the Basic Skills and the BBC Skillswise web sites and regularly spent time playing spelling 'space invaders'.

A later session in the course had the students (all women returners) practicing counselling each other in career/work development. Lynne's advisor established that Lynne had an aspiration to continue her higher education but that she had become discouraged about finding the course she needed and finding the information about funding that she would need to make the course possible. The practice session turned into a real live consultation and shifted from the training room to the opportunity shop where Lynne was encouraged to research possibilities online and to make further phone calls leading to her deciding to apply to do an MSc at the University of Bristol this September.

Lynne said of this process, "You mean someone is going to help me for a change!" This typifies the fluidity of work within the West Mendip Opportunities project where any individual might be a volunteer, a learners, a member of staff and a client or several of these at one an the same time. It means we are trusted by our customers as being like them but with something to offer that they need.

Lynne plans to return to volunteer with the oppshop in September when she returns from her travels. We look forward to her working with us again where her understanding of people who face barriers to inclusion will be a valued part of our volunteer resource.