



Good Practice – BCC Budapest Breaking down barriers to learning for older people

Based on the training manual with the same title

The training programme was planned on the following basis:

Participants:

The training is aimed at those who create learning opportunities for older people – not at older learners themselves. This programme is for a transnational audience.

Aim:

The aim of the training is to alert participants to the range of barriers which stop older people from taking part in learning, and to find ways of overcoming these barriers.

Objectives:

these are to:

- help participants understand the barriers to learning faced by older people
- help them to find ways of overcoming these barriers that will work in their own circumstances
- use inclusive methods of training as examples that participants can draw on and use in their own setting
- help participants to relax and enjoy their learning.

The principles underpinning our work

In devising this training programme, we took account of the following:

- The speed and the retention of learning differ from person to person, and variations in literacy levels, which may be dependent on the quality of a person's previous access to formal education, can promote or hinder learning. Similarly, we acknowledge that variations in sensory and mobility levels can sometimes affect a person's ability to learn and the associated learning outcomes.
- People learn in different ways. Therefore there needs to be a mixture of types of activities to ensure that everyone has the chance to learn.
- Experiential learning is effective: we know that people learn particularly well from experience, providing there is an opportunity for them to reflect on their experience. Our activities are experiential, but in each case there is an opportunity – during feedback sessions, for example – to consolidate the learning.

- Equality: we believe that all learners bring their own knowledge, skills and experience into the learning situation. We have designed our programme so that learning builds upon participants' existing knowledge and skills.
- Provision needs to be suitable for local circumstances: there is no blueprint for learning provision.
- Training must offer an opportunity for learners and those working with them to shape opportunities according to local conditions.

Planning the training programme

We have found that it is essential to plan a training programme in great detail. You would need to develop your own plan, according to the learners you are working with, the time you have available, your aims and objectives and so on. We recommend that as a minimum you would need to include activities on the following topics:

- ice-breakers
- identifying barriers
- background research
- teaching methods
- planning your own strategy
- evaluation.

When people are working as a team to run a training course, it is useful to include trainers' names in the plan so that everyone knows who is responsible for which part of the programme. It is also vital to know the length of time each activity will take. It is extremely annoying if you have a session to run but the trainer before you has taken too long and your session has to be cut short! Even if you are training on your own, you still need to think about how long each activity will take.

Planning a training programme

It is also important to think in advance about the materials that you will need for each session. For any training programme you should have a flip chart or large sheets of paper, thick felt-tip pens, blutac or drawing pins, scissors, sellotape, and post-its or small blank cards. For some activities you may need specific materials, such as string, photographs or a worksheet. It is a good idea to note these on your plan.

In our original plan we also identified which method we would use for each activity. This was to ensure that we included a variety of training styles.

You will need to make sure that you leave time for feedback, so that participants have the chance to reflect on what they discussed during the activities.

Group work

Most of the activities suggest that participants work in small groups. There are many ways of constructing groups. You can, of course, ask participants to choose who to work with. If they are confident, they will use this opportunity to work with someone they do not know well. Usually, though, people sit with others they already know and feel comfortable with. So sometimes it is useful to help people to mix by constructing the groups.

Feedback groups

It's a good idea to take feedback from participants at the end of each day of training. The aim of this is to:

- give them the chance to reflect on the work they have done during the day
- comment on anything about the management of the course which they liked or disliked
- meet people other than those they have been working with during the day.

Allow about half an hour for feedback and make sure that participants work in different groups from those they have been in for the rest of the day.