



## **Using the Provider Toolkit website - a case study based on an interview with Julie Riley, Training and Development Manager of Meadowhall Centre Ltd.**

As the Training and Development Manager of a large shopping centre in Sheffield, Julie Riley has responsibility for around 360 staff, most of whom work in cleaning, security, customer services, buildings and technical maintenance, or marketing jobs.

New employees at Meadowhall go through quite a comprehensive induction process. They are then offered a range of suitable follow-up training. Julie and her team noticed that a number of employees were struggling with some of the training being offered, so she decided to invite Sheffield City Council to carry out a survey of literacy needs. The survey showed that around 21% of employees would benefit from improving their literacy skills. As a result Meadowhall applied for and received a grant from the local council to run a series of short courses. About 7% of the workforce showed interest in the courses and a total of 156.5 learning hours were delivered.

These courses made some impact on literacy skills, but after they ended Meadowhall was not able to access further funding without sending people off site into the local college. The problem with this was that too many employees were doing shift work and so were not available at the times when the college could provide classes. Also the location of the college made it difficult for employees to get there easily. The end result was that some of the impetus in developing literacy skills was lost.

In 2003 Meadowhall opened its own purpose-built training centre. It has a small work-based learning team delivering NVQs in Retail and Customer Service to both internal and external groups. Sheffield College also offers ICT-based learning there.

The opening of the centre presented an opportunity for Julie and her team to think about how they might be able to offer in-house literacy training. As part of their research into this, Julie typed “workplace basic skills” into the Google internet search engine. Before long she came across the Provider Toolkit website. She explained her impressions of the site as follows:

“I found it extremely useful. It was very detailed, showing you exactly the steps you need to take to set up, deliver and evaluate programmes. Importantly for us it also had a range of resources that we could download and use straight away. It was just fantastic to find everything in one place and in a logical order.”



She liked the presentation of the site, too:

“It was clear and accessible, and it was relatively easy to find your way around the site. It had very useful diagrams to show the overall structure of the process, and it didn’t use a lot of jargon. On some other sites I had visited I had the sense that trying to understand the world of basic skills was like trying to understand a foreign language.”

Above all, it had a profound impact on her approach to workplace literacy:

“The Toolkit made me realise that it was not just about dealing with a number of individuals, we needed to look at the issue in terms of the impact on *organisational* performance.”

As a direct result of visiting the Provider Toolkit, Julie attended a one-day course in Organisational Needs Analysis run by The Network. She found that the course augmented the knowledge she had gathered from the Toolkit very well. Since then she has gone on to complete a Level 4 NVQ in planning and co-ordinating basic skills in the workplace. In addition to this, a member of her team attended a Level 2 Certificate in Adult Learner Support, and they have recently started a Level 3 Certificate in Adult Literacy Support. Meadowhall also now has a full-time workplace LLN tutor from Sheffield College at their training centre. The tutor supports learners with online basic skills learning and will be delivering a range of workshops related to workplace needs in the near future.

Meadowhall’s other plans for LLN development in the near future include: revamping their entire induction procedure so that it identifies LLN learning needs; introducing LLN screening for new members of staff; and rewriting their Health and Safety training so that it incorporates embedded LLN development.

One year ago Julie admitted to knowing very little about workplace LLN. Now she believes she and her team have a good understanding of what is needed, and that her organisation is well on the way to doing something about it. She says that “the Provider Toolkit has played a very important part in that process.” When asked whether she plans to continue to use the site in the future she said simply, “I certainly will!”

Asked whether there was anything she would change or improve about the website she said: “The only things I would like to see added would be perhaps a little more information on funding and on dyslexia. But overall the site is excellent!”