

**Fourth Action  
for Northumberland County Council**

# **At the Crossroads 2**

## **Project 184**

# **Evaluation Report**

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## **Project Summary**

At the Crossroads 2 was a project coordinated and delivered by Fourth Action, along with a range of delivery partners. The accountable body for the project was initially Sure Start Berwick Borough, and then Northumberland County Council as a result of the transfer of Sure Start into public sector control.

The project built on the At the Crossroads (ATC) programme, which was led and delivered by Fourth Action, in the following ways:

1. To extend the existing ATC programme of mentoring, training and learner-led support to 100 further beneficiaries who are looking for new direction, including into new geographic areas.
2. To offer sustained learner-focussed enterprise support, with special focus on collective approaches, non-traditional areas and linked vocational training, for a further 30 women.
3. To facilitate four events and follow-up groups across the county, to help women and other interested parties to explore skills training in non-traditional areas appropriate to the Northumberland labour market around the themes of outdoor pursuits/ sports, construction and allied manual trades, rural diversification and ICT-based businesses.

## **Background**

The project recognised that women face internal and external blocks to learning and work progression.

### **Some facts about gender in Northumberland:**

#### **Workplace / employment issues**

In the North East as a whole,

- Twice as many men as women in full-time employment
- Five times as many women as men in part-time employment
- More women are entering the labour market but in low paid part time work
- Pay gap – women paid 77% of male average (in full-time work)

Average gross weekly earnings Northumberland April 2000

Average male earnings £376.1 per week

Average female earnings £294.6 per week

- Low numbers of women in senior jobs
- Gender stereotyping in career choices leading to lower status, and very low numbers of women in construction, engineering, sport and ICT (TUC North – 'Gender Inequality in the Workplace')

## **Women in Rural Enterprise**

In the report 'Rural Micro businesses in the NE of England: Survey results' Centre for Rural Economy, July 2000, 'rural micro - enterprise was described as mostly made up of Hospitality, Land-based activities and Recreation / Culture. These firms are notable for:

- 56% of female ownership (68% in hospitality)
- High levels of family involvement
- Most commonly sought source of support is from the private sector
- Substantial journeys are needed to access services
- Only half have access to the Internet.

Those businesses generating less than £20,000 are 87% female-owned, mainly B&B and self-catering, with 74% sourcing their inputs locally within 30 miles.

- 4.7% women are self-employed in the North East. Characteristics include:
  - More likely to use informal sources of capital and to be under-capitalised
  - Women-owned businesses are smaller and less growth orientated
  - Orientation towards local / regional markets
  - Chosen as a route to independence and flexibility in lifestyle

Women's role in North Northumberland's rural economy is not yet fully mapped or understood, but there is evidence that:

- women are playing a crucial role in farming diversification (e.g. of the 13 members of the 'Stay on a Farm' network, 12 are women) ('Sustaining Living Uplands' CRE 2000)
- Women's role is culturally limited to land-based activity in the areas of the declining fishing industry where diversification opportunities are less obvious.
- Women predominate in crafts enterprises where cluster support has been developed (e.g. through the Aurora project). This approach could be developed further.
- Women frequently develop 'portfolio' careers, supplementing low paid work with small-scale self-employment.

## **Social factors**

- Changes in household structures are resulting in more lone parents 95% of whom (in the Berwick Sure Start area) are women.
- Women's pension record is often inadequate, yet there are nearly twice as many women as men in the over 80 age group.
- Most carers of older people are women
- Women live longer but in older age are frailer
- Less access to own transport in rural areas
- Mixed Messages, with policy initiatives encouraging women into work while

cultural attitudes and pressures are continuing to result in women leaving training courses (Glendale Community Appraisal, 2001)

Taking the Alnwick District Council area as an example, gender differences are very apparent, for instance in the percentages of women and men in higher and more routine occupations in spite of the fact that girls are performing increasingly well while in mainstream education:

Females aged 16-74: Higher professional occupations (Persons)	2.21%
Males aged 16-74: Large employers and higher managerial occupations (Persons)	4.08%
Females aged 16-74: Semi-routine occupations (Persons)	16.02%
Males aged 16-74: Semi- routine occupations (Persons)	8.98%

## **Recruitment**

Learning from the experience of running At the Crossroads 1, Fourth Action decided to make a priority of reaching more women who were outside of the workplace, women interested in self employment, and also to target younger women, particularly young parents, who had been somewhat under-represented in the initial project. There had also been early discussions with the Women's Health Advice Centre (WHAC) who were interested in piloting the extension of the programme's services to its Ashington-based clients. This would create access to more women living in deprived areas and to women approaching WHAC with mental health issues.

Publicity was produced in poster and leaflet form and all of the women who had taken part in North Northumberland Women's Network activities were mailed and in many cases contacted directly. Fourth Action also liaised with Sure Start staff in Berwick and Alnwick throughout the programme. There was also a special meeting for a wider range of other organisations with an interest in supporting women and useful discussions took place about improving referral and the range of services available.

As seems often to be the case at the outset of ESF funded projects there was a relatively slow start to recruitment, but this accelerated as the project progressed.

## **Profile of the Beneficiaries**

The target group for the project was identified as 'any women who lives or works in North Northumberland who may be considering getting a job after a break, or changing direction, exploring independent living, going into business, getting involved in a community project or just wondering where to go next.'

At its full complement the project had recruited 113 beneficiaries, although some of these in the event did not go forward or were found to be ineligible. Of 108 women in the project in August 2006, the age range was as follows:

**Age**

Age Group	Numbers
18-24	16
25-34	15
35-44	29
45-54	36
55-64	10
65+	2

This represents a real improvement on the ATC1 position, but there is still an interest in extending support to younger women in future.

**Ethnicity**

Eight beneficiaries identified as other than white British. These were:

- 13 – 1 – Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
- 14 – 1 – Asian or Asian British – Other
- 15 – 1 – Black or Black British -
- 24 – 2 – White Irish
- 25 – 3 – White – any other white

The project steering group was pleased with this range, which represents a higher proportion of the ethnic minority population than would reflect the local population.

**Disability**

Seven beneficiaries declared a disability, which included mobility issues, learning difficulties and long-term mental health issues. Various special arrangements were incorporated to ensure these women were able to be fully included, including booking accessible premises, special diets, regular short breaks in learning sessions, transport and adaptations.

**Prior Attainment Level**

Level 1	3
Level 2	41
Level 3	21
Level 4	36
Not known or shared	5

This mix of attainments reflects the levels of attainment in rural Northumberland generally. The emphasis on enterprise support in the project meant that we needed to work with women from a wider range of attainment levels than would have been desirable if, for instance, the project had been

aimed at unemployed women generally. The project also demonstrated the surprising levels of low confidence in highly educated women in the area, who typically have not met their full potential through work or have been outside of the workplace as carers. We feel this is an important point to reinforce in a climate where increasing resources are being diverted to encourage boys to achieve higher qualifications, because it shows that the blocks faced by women often become apparent at a later stage.

Fourth Action reviewed recruitment practice in the light of this mix, and while we felt it was appropriate to this project, we agreed to seek further funding to target greater numbers of women with qualifications below Level 2 in any future project.

### **Employment Status**

The project was aimed at all women, and the mix was as follows:

- 50 were employed. Of these
  - 21 were in the public sector
  - 25 were in SME's
  - 4 were in large organisations
  - 31 were in temporary posts or threatened with redundancy, 10 of these in the public sector, 19 in SME's and 2 in large organisations
  
- 44 were unemployed. Of these
  - 12 were unemployed for 6-11 months
  - 11 were unemployed for 12 -23 months
  - 8 were unemployed for 24-35 months
  - 13 were unemployed for over 36 months
  
- 18 were self-employed.

As the figures show, many women had been out of work for some time, a situation which leads to loss of confidence and direction; as does employment that is not a real career choice, which was the situation for almost all of the women recruited.

## **Programme**

### **Individual Support**

The individual programme within At the Crossroads2 was designed to be tailored to the needs and aspirations of the individuals who took part. Each beneficiary was offered:

- Regular support from a mentor who will help you assess your learning needs and interests and help you set goals to achieve them.
- Opportunities to try out new experiences through volunteering or work experience
- Practical and in some cases financial support to help you get into new learning of your choice, or to help you into work or enterprise.
- Learning opportunities, tasters and support for achieving numeracy and literacy qualifications.
- Support and training for anyone also interested in joining the mentoring team

### **Group experiences**

The project also offered group courses and activities to help women develop. These included a special programme called 'Encouraging Self Belief,' DIY and manual trades skills tasters, and a support programme for women looking at enterprise as an option.

### **Mentor development**

The programme wanted to offer some of the women who had requested support themselves to have the opportunity to become mentors and also to explore progression in careers working with people. During the project Fourth Action developed its mentoring training and explored various accredited courses, including a distance learning Level 2 certificate in IAG, and non-accredited courses. By the end of the project we were ready to deliver our own nationally accredited programme and a number of women who had expressed an interest in initial mentor training agreed to go forward into the follow-up 'Moving on Up' programme where this training was run three times.

Part of the lead-in to Moving On Up also involved trialing the use of the Award for progression as an umbrella qualification. A group of eight women took part in a Level 2 programme as part of their own career progression, and allowed us to learn from their experience to improve the programme for future use.

### **Enterprise Support**

In the mentoring context several women expressed an interest in set up skills support for self employment, such as understanding tax implications, book-keeping and marketing. A number of women took part in business Link courses, but wanted to supplement these by input that was designed around their own situation.

In response the project set up a programme including time management, marketing, using IT in your business, book-keeping and tax, as well as chances to discuss issues in a group setting.



**North Northumberland Women's Network**

**would like to offer YOU the opportunity to discuss YOUR ideas with groups of WOMEN in similar situations to YOURSELF**

WOULD YOU LIKE SUPPORT IN STARTING UP OR DEVELOPING YOUR EXISTING BUSINESS LEARNING NEW OR ENHANCE YOUR SKILLS?

DO YOU HAVE A BUSINESS IDEA OR HAVE YOU STARTED YOUR BUSINESS?

**NNWN is offering:**

**A series of workshops (first one on finances) on business planning, marketing, finances and anything else you want to explore....**

**A survey to find out what your support needs are**

**One to one support to explore how your business fits with the rest of your life...**

**More info at**

**[www.nnwn.org/page/enterprise-support.php](http://www.nnwn.org/page/enterprise-support.php)**

**FINANCES FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED**

**SANDRA WILSON OF ABACUS-BOOK-KEEPING**

Cash flow—finance plan  
Tax Returns & NI contributions  
Self Assessment

**6-9 pm**

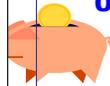
**Tuesday 4th December**

**Berwick Voluntary Forum**

**Tweed St, Berwick-upon-Tweed**

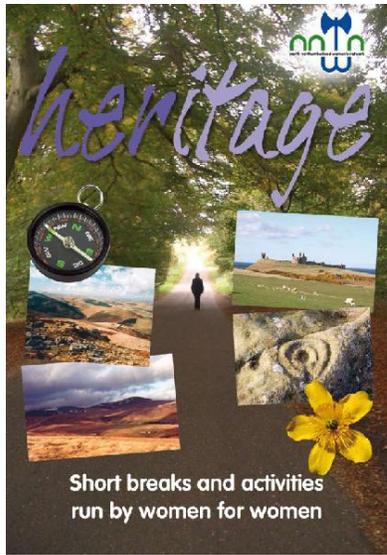
**For more info contact Andrea on**

**07843 602889 or use the attached booking form...**



## **Tourism enterprise**

A significant number of local women are interested in setting up businesses on aspects of hospitality, tourism and well-being. The project brought a number of these women together to explore how they could work more effectively together, and this resulted in the establishment of a project called HER-itage, a tourism community collective offering holidays 'run by women for women.' This project is continuing and we hope to receive support from the Tourism Partnership to raise its profile later in 2008.



SPRING/SUMMER/AUTUMN 2007

# heritage

Short breaks and activities run by women for women

### Holistic Retreat

Nurture yourself with a week of treats for the mind, body and soul. Take time out to relax and unwind in a beautiful setting with a group of like-minded women. Nestled in the beautiful village of Colly in 4\* B&B accommodation, your stay will include workshops in Yoga, Aromatherapy, Thai massage, or Shiatsu and fascinating guided walks in beautiful surroundings. Delicious home-made vegetarian food completes the whole experience.

(The B&B can accommodate up to six people sharing, other accommodation is available according to demand.)

### Day and Mini Break activities

Visit ancient archaeological sites and discover the hidden history of women in the area. Explore the hedgerows, woodland, coast and meadows of Northumberland and discover the seasonal plants that grow here and their fascinating stories.

Go wild and take part in an expedition to remote areas and extend your skills with maps and compasses.

All workshops and walks are led by experienced, qualified female leaders who have lived in the area for many years.



If I'd like further information about **heritage** women's short breaks and activities:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: 01667 511111 Fax: 01667 511111 Email: [heritage@nwmn.org](mailto:heritage@nwmn.org)



## Learning Choices

The women in the scheme were encouraged to identify their learning needs, and small grants from the programme were made available to finance these where appropriate. The range of choices women made included:

Level1	Level2	Level 3	Other
Interpersonal skills	IAG mentoring skills	A1 award in assessing	NLP master practitioner
Understanding HTML	Award for Progression	Training in the Community 7303	Counselling
Mail merge	Introduction to Construction	ECDL / CLAIT	Encouraging Self Belief
Desk top publishing	French	Counselling	Skills with tools
	Painting	Administration	Expedition
	Graphics	GCSE Psychology	Working with survivors of domestic abuse
	Digital Photography	Community Development	Working with clients with learning disabilities
	Community Development	Counselling supervision	Healing Foundation diploma
	Polish	Travel and tourism	Time management
			Fireworks for women
			Introduction to

			plumbing
			Hypnotherapy
			Yoga massage
			Project Management
			Garden design

Some women got involved in these courses early in the programme and continued to receive support from mentors as they progressed, and several women have described how important that ongoing support has been. Ironically, the terms of the contract with the LSC have meant that the natural progressions 'shape' for many women has not been recognised in funding terms, where the project has only been able to claim for some of these routes. At different times in the LSC monitoring process differing views have been expressed on this and we feel this must be addressed as an urgent issue before further contracts are issued.

• **Impact of the Learning and Mentoring Support**

The project sought feedback from beneficiaries on the impact both of the programme and the mentoring. Responses were as follows:

Could not have enrolled otherwise due to lack of finance		Keeps you motivated and focused.
Very useful self assessment skills. Highlighted areas of change needed.	Highlighted some changes I need to make and recognising what I don't want to do.	Good so far!
Desk Top Publishing enabled me to assemble promotion material. Diploma has provided and extended design skills	Enabled me to extend and develop business with view to becoming more financially secure with possibility of offering employment to others in future.	
Useful by motivating and giving confidence to make further choices		Extremely good. Ultimate aim to attain paid employment and have had 3 interviews with very good feedback.
Motivation and focus thro Life Coaching. Time Management especially useful		
Developed confidence thro Self Belief and Expedition. Writing fun!	More self belief and more expedition to develop confidence further.	
Developed skills as counsellor in relation to drug and alcohol use. Enhanced listening skills	Wanting a complete career change (hairdressing) and enrolling on range of courses.	Helped to clarify direction.

More awareness of disability issues	Enabled me to consider what a learning difficulty was.	Able to attend training with support from mentor and funding via WHAC
Been with WHAC for 1 Year and work has been both useful and interesting.	Being a mentor is a new career direction.	
Mentoring useful to set goals and support systems	Presentation Skills	Very supportive and useful to set goals.
		WHAC have provided counselling for bereavement.
CD course has given an understanding to background to ATC		
Building of knowledge & experience to hopefully lead to paid work.	Spiritual healing Training has allowed me to identify personal issue to address.	Valuable to have a mentor I have faith and trust in.
Learnt about how people's mind develops		Informally by Pam and happy with it.
Helpful in setting up own business. Moving from benefits into employment.	Marketing, First Aid, Music, voice coaching	It has really motivated me and helped to move my life on.
Acknowledging my state of mind & finding practical solutions. Nice to find a community of self improvers!	To keep an eye out for similar courses	
helped me gain more experience and confidence	made me realise I want to learn more about different learning styles.	useful to have someone impartial to act as a sounding board for ideas and obstacles
Life Coaching By Andrea Perrett	Developing my own ideas of running a business.	Andrea is great! I have completed my hypnotherapy qualification and taken action on several ideas as a result.
made me start to look more for what is available		It has shown me to look more at how to make things happen rather than just sitting at home.
Encouraged me to experiment & try a new path.	Self belief course made me want to look at these approaches to psychology more as in some way it informs my art. need to kick start my business ideas! Chris Algar & I have common ground here and a session is being set up.	Very helpful with focus, intention and vision for the future.  Fine
Helpful for getting me back into Comm Work after an extended period of illness and adding to CD skills.	Yes. Getting back into work and developing confidence	Informal mentoring with Julia - appreciate the opportunity to involved in work and learn new skills and ways of working. Great CPD.

## Events and activities

Part of the process of encouraging women to take an equal place in the learning and work environment is to provide them, and also relevant professionals, with the information, support and networks to become champions for gender equality. The project hosted a number of events that set out to do this, as well as providing women with more opportunities to take part in taster activities. These events included:

- **Women's Winter School**

A week of tasters, workshops and discussions at a coastal location. The idea is to encourage women to participate in group activities where they have been used to more individualised support. The first few days of the 2006 programme included:

### Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December

NETs Xmas Trading Event 10am – 4pm, Drop In for your Xmas shopping/trading and a chance to find out more about the NETs and how you can get involved.

**Including....NNWN What Next? 12-2pm** Come along and find out what's been happening in the Network and put forward your views and ideas on 'What Next'.

**Poetry Writing Workshop 1.30 - 4pm** with Lisa Mathews. Born in Newcastle upon Tyne, Lisa Mathews has lived in the north east of England all her life. 'Diamond Twig Press' published her first short collection, *Postcard from a Waterless Lake*, to great critical acclaim in 2001. A great opportunity, at a great setting, to develop your poetry and writing.

### Monday 11<sup>th</sup> December

**Confidence Building session 10-12pm** with Kate Vero. This is an opportunity to take some time for yourself and reflect - time to ask yourself questions about what you want in your life and how you might achieve it, time to consider what is holding you back. Reflect on the changes you may want to make.

**Katherine Vero** is an experienced coach and hypnotherapist, her desire is to support and encourage people to find the greatness within themselves. This session can be accredited for anyone involved or interested in the Progression Award (more info on the day).

**Coastal Mile Project: 10 - 4pm** We will be working on a stretch of unclassified road at Longhoughton to map the area. This is part of a year-long project aimed at managing our stretch of Coastal Mile and we will be organising other activities throughout the year. The morning will involve mapping the site and having a good look around at what's there!

Over 40 women and their supporters took part in the week.

- **Skills with Tools**

Fourth Action seeks to take a lead in promoting gender equality in construction and manual trades, and this programme provided an opportunity to showcase some skills through workshops and a seminar for interested partners and funders.



- **Fireworks for Women**

Fourth Action approached the Fire Service to put on a day of skills and fire safety learning tailored to local women. This was of particular interest to young women, a number of whom went on to explore the fire service as a career choice in more detail.

- **Women's Cultural Festival**



The Women's Network took over the Alnwick Playhouse for two days in October 2006, to celebrate a range of arts and cultural skills and offer workshops to women and their families. The programme included circus skills, writer's workshop, singing, dance, arts, VJ and DJ skills and banner-making as well as opportunities for women to offer stalls showing their products and skills.

- **Women Making A Difference**

In May 2006 the project took over the Cheviot Centre in Wooler to host a wide range of activities, with a theme of campaigning and speaking out skills, in honour of the centenary of the death of a local campaigner Josephine Butler. The event attracted over forty women and families.

- **NETS Networking events**

The programme offered a range of enterprise support and the NETS scheme was a particularly innovative project that gave women the opportunity to test trade their products and skills outside of the money market. Over 75 women have joined the scheme and have benefited from stalls and services from food, to massage, and from plant to ironing services. There were three such events during the project with over 50 women participating.

## Issues and Concerns

- This programme was highly individualised and concentrated support in ways that were requested specifically by the learners involved. As such it was hard to keep it on course to deliver on a very fixed output driven contract, although in fact the approach relates closely to that recommended in the Employability Framework. For example many of the outputs required were achieved, but not recognised where one beneficiary both entered further learning and work or self employment. On the other hand, some of the outputs were not achieved because many women were not keen on putting themselves through areas they had not identified for themselves. This applied to the numeracy and

literacy outputs where there are still taboos to be overcome. However where women did take the risk and achieved both, again LSC systems questioned their achievement. This is not an area that needs further disincentives!

- Many women choose vocational progression routes that require courses that are currently not recognised on the LSC's Learning Aims Database. This is a difficult situation to negotiate where the service is promoted as holistic and learner-centred.
- The way that mentoring has been organised around market town clusters has been recognised as a really useful approach to create a sustainable network of good quality mentoring.
- At the application stage Fourth Action expressed an interest in managing the project but realised that the LSC may feel that the size of the contract would be a risk with a relatively small voluntary organisation. However, Fourth Action has in fact borne all of the risk throughout – financial, contracting, quality assurance, inspection – and feels that the LSC needs to recognise the quality that VCS organisations can achieve when a project is community-based.
- Partnership building is a long-term process and so in a time-limited project there can be pressure to achieve that creates a more 'bumpy' relationship while understandings are developed. It would be ideal if programmes received a minimum of three-year funding.

JL