

# Back to school

While bespoke, in-house training programmes may only be the reserve of large charities, there are a variety of options, both in-house and external, for organisations whose pockets are not so deep. Sandra Haurant explores these options, looks at how different sized organisations are implementing training strategies and finds out why it is worth offering training in the first place

**G**ood staff training has long been recognised as an essential cog in the machinery of any organisation. It clearly improves a person's ability to do their job well, but more than that, it helps to motivate and, therefore, retain good staff members. And the promise of a stimulating programme, with the chances of progression that brings, can also help to recruit the right sort of people.

Drugs and alcohol treatment agency Addaction already had a strong scheme in place for staff at the front-line dealing with clients. It decided that the next step was to set up a comprehensive programme for its managers, and so brought in the services of the Open University which built a bespoke programme to fit the organisation's requirements.

More than 100 members of staff, one sixth of the workforce, will be trained in a variety of aspects of management and leadership. Guy Pink, Addaction's human resources director, says: "This is being rolled out to every manager from chief executive to team leader. Everyone will be going through the same training." Staff will be using a variety of learning methods, supported by a tutor and including classroom-based study and distance learning.

But what are Addaction's aims? Is it better retention and recruitment prospects or perhaps greater staff competence? All of the above, and more, says Judy Armitt, the OU consultant lecturer for voluntary sector development programmes who worked on the project.

The programme aims to "provide the glue that will keep the organisation together," she says. Apart from the skills

the training will give staff, it is also about creating a joint experience and "developing a management culture and style as we go through the process. The language our managers use will become more consistent," adds Pink.

Quantifying the success or otherwise of a training programme is potentially difficult. How can you tell whether a member of staff has really progressed in their abilities as a result of a course? How do you know whether a particular approach to learning is the right one for the organisation? "We are looking at a variety of indicators," says Pink. "We have in place clear developmental and target-based appraisals, and we will look at the scores [of staff] before and after training."

Furthermore, Addaction will be looking at data regarding employees that have completed the training to monitor their development and progression within the charity. "One would expect to see a higher percentage of staff moving up within the organisation," he says.

Staff development is equally important to Cancer Research UK. The charity offers a variety of different styles of training covering a range of issues, from so-called soft skills such as assertiveness through to vital competences such as fundraising, provided by both in-house and external trainers and developers. Employees are given a booklet containing details on all the different sorts of training on offer, and are encouraged to discuss their needs and wishes and work out their aims with their line managers.

Brenda Daisy, the organisation's head of learning and development, explains that the programme places a great deal of emphasis on ensuring that knowledge

is not just acquired, but that it is also applied. "It is designed to encourage and support dialogue between employees and their line managers," she says. When a person completes a course they discuss what they have learned with their manager and find a way to use their new skills within their job, perhaps through a new responsibility or a new project to manage. In other words, rather than training being an excuse for a staff jolly, it brings tangible results to the workplace.

Both Addaction and Cancer Research adopt a corporate style of training, and this suits the needs of these large charities. Meanwhile, ChildLine North West, with its very different requirements, has found another way of solving the training issue in the form of a partnership with Liverpool John Moores University.

The charity's volunteers can earn an academic qualification during their training in the form of a certificate of professional development in listening to children and young people. It is the equivalent of one module of degree at second year level, and allows volunteers to be full students at the university, with access to its library and online learning resources.

Charles Frost, chief supervisor at ChildLine North West, explains: "A lot of our volunteers want to change career and they come to us as a stepping stone into working with children." The certificate not only equips them with the skills they need to do the job, it also gives them a recognised qualification they can take with them.

And what's more, it's free. A reciprocal agreement between the two bodies means the university teaches trainees for free and in return the charity offers services to the university, such as sending specialist speakers. Volunteers, for their part, are asked to stay around for a year after their training and give 120 hours of their time, equivalent to 40 shifts, to the charity.

## A question of size

For smaller charities, training options can often feel limited. In house, bespoke training is costly and not always suitable. Smaller organisations might only need to train one member of staff in fundraising

techniques and another in project management, for example, meaning that buying in training for everyone on the same subject is unnecessary and costly. However, there are plenty of resources available to help even the smallest of groups find an affordable way to train staff and volunteers.

Members of the Women's Resource Centre, for example, can take advantage of a variety of training covering a huge and ever-changing list of subjects for free. Vivienne Hayes, director of the WRC, explains that the organisation's remit is to improve the sustainability of the sector. The group can offer one-to-one intensive training for members, but it can send trainers in-house so that all employees can learn about a particular subject that they all need to understand, such as employment law or disability discrimination.

Meanwhile, the DSC has a raft of courses available, covering everything from charity law through to effective direct mail marketing. Charities can send along individual delegates to courses run by the DSC, often in Manchester or at the Charity Centre in London. A one-day course in supervision skills or time management costs from as little as £110 per candidate, while a two-day course on voluntary organisations and the law, for example, costs from £190.

Members of a CVS (Council for Voluntary Services) can also group together to make training more affordable, accessible and closer to home. A CVS, or more than one CVS making up a training consortium, can act as a host for training courses run by the likes of the DSC or the Open University for local voluntary groups so that trainers come to them and delegates do not need to travel. And of course, training with other local charities brings plenty of networking opportunities.

How a charity or voluntary organisation goes about training staff depends on its size, its budget, and its specific learning needs. From one to one mentoring through to corporate-style programmes available to all staff, from academic classroom-

based courses through to workplace-based schemes, the different types of training available are as varied as the needs across the sector, and finding the most suitable form of training is vital in making it work for your organisation. Get it right, and the results will be long lasting. As the WRC's Hayes says: "It's about a commitment to the development of your employees. After all, an organisation is only as good as the staff who run it."