



Doncaster West Development Trust

“Working alongside local people to deliver a more sustainable future within communities”

Annual Report 2017

Introduction

The early part of 2017 saw DWDT complete the move from its long-term home at The Terrace in Conisbrough and set up an administrative base at Mexborough Business Centre. The new premises also became home to the Money Matters debt advice team while our Talent Match coaches, who work with young unemployed people, moved next door to The Hot Chocolate Lounge training café in Denaby to maximise the links between the two projects.

Business continued uninterrupted during the move and our projects delivered much-needed support to residents across Doncaster ranging from employment, volunteering and training opportunities to debt advice and money mentoring. We welcomed some new members of staff and said goodbye to others as projects came to an end or colleagues moved on to fresh challenges. Money advisor Andy Butler-Walker, Café Supervisor Libby Carl and Volunteer Co-ordinators Sue Oxley and Angela Cooper left with our thanks and good wishes. We also welcomed trainee barista Megan Ackerman to The Hot Chocolate Lounge while Joanne Patton stepped up to the role of Café Supervisor towards the end of 2017.

We continued to evaluate our existing services to shape future provision, worked hard to strengthen local partnership links and explored new funding opportunities in what remains a challenging sector.

Projects

Money Matters

Referrals to our Lottery-funded debt advice/money mentoring project were typically high at the start of the year and remained steady in the coming months. We saw a trend of more complex debt problems and supported clients to address a raft of financial issues from rent and utility arrears to loans, fines and impending enforcement action. We achieved some excellent results by challenging creditors including HMRC and payday loan companies which in some cases wrote off debts amounting to thousands of pounds after our intervention. Client debts totalling £20,627 were written off between June 2016 and 2017. From June 2017 to May 2018 that figure rose to a massive £41,532.



To equip clients with practical money management skills for the future, we gave individuals general budgeting advice, a copy of our Money-Saving booklet and set up a dedicated Money Matters website with useful documents to download including a Spending Diary and Budget Sheet. We also shared our knowledge and learning materials with other local agencies so they could assist their own customers with basic budgeting and we attended Benefit Cap events

to keep up to date with welfare reform.

Some project outcomes were more difficult to evidence than others but by the end of the year - which marked the halfway point of this three-year project - Money Matters was slightly ahead of its overall target to support 400 individuals and hold ten training sessions annually. Given the unsettled nature of this client group and the unavoidable issue of missed appointments (despite frequent reminders to clients) we were very satisfied with this achievement which is testament to our engagement and delivery methods.

Creating Change

This three-year project, funded by The Henry Smith Charity, supported people experiencing mental health problems linked to debt and money worries. It ended in June after slightly exceeding its overall target of supporting 480 clients. As part of our exit strategy to provide ongoing financial guidance to Doncaster residents we strengthened the links between Money Matters and Creating Change well in advance. For example, prison inmates who initially engaged with Creating Change were supported by both projects, many of our partnership working arrangements overlapped and we promoted Money Matters more widely among other agencies to encourage future referrals which proved effective.

This project served to reinforce the well-documented view that money worries are intrinsically linked to mental health conditions ranging from stress and anxiety to severe depression. It also demonstrated that easing people's financial pressures led to an improvement in their wellbeing and general outlook.

Talent Match

Our Lottery-funded Talent Match project, which supports young people to find work or training, started the year by hosting an open day at Dearne Valley Leisure Centre where people could meet local employers and tap into expert careers advice. The event resulted in several new client referrals for the team and further expanded their links with local businesses and training providers. These positive relationships have been integral to achieving successful outcomes for this challenging client group of 18 to 24-year-olds who have been outside employment, education or training for at least 12 months.

The project continued to meet some difficult goals throughout the year and comfortably surpassed its targets for clients completing basic skills training, work placements and formal education. Many of these personal milestones marked a real turning point for individuals who had previously lacked the confidence, motivation or skills to make progress, thereby demonstrating how much can be achieved through one-to-one support and commitment.



Volunteer Conisbrough and Denaby



This council-funded project ran for 12 months and ended in July after engaging with residents and organisations in Conisbrough and Denaby and securing volunteer a variety of placements.

Lessons were learned along the way as we found that matching and introducing potential volunteers to organisations that had registered an interest with us did not necessarily progress to an actual placement. We therefore followed up these initial introductions to ensure, as far as possible, that they developed as planned. Direct community engagement including hosting local events and attending others was crucial to achieving the required outcomes which largely depended on partnership working and forging strong links with local people. By the end of the project, we had engaged with dozens of local volunteers and organisations for the mutual benefit of all parties.

The Hot Chocolate Lounge

Our community training café in Denaby continued to attract an increasing number of customers in its first full year of operation. It expanded its offer by introducing regular themed bistro evenings, adding cooked breakfasts and afternoon teas to the menu, catering for community events and offering venue hire outside opening hours.



In what is believed to be a first in Doncaster for an independent café, The Hot Chocolate Lounge also joined the Suspended Coffees movement which is an international initiative enabling customers to pay for food or drinks in advance for chosen recipients. Initial beneficiaries of the fund included a local group of young parents who sampled cakes and coffees but also enjoyed the chance to mix with other people in line with one of the project's key aims to tackle social isolation.



Staff throughout DWDT continued to promote The Hot Chocolate Lounge to the wider community and encouraged their contacts to visit or hold meetings there. As awareness increased, customers numbers grew and

the café easily met its end of year targets to support community events including hosting a Macmillan Coffee morning and joining in a Family Fun Day and Denaby Christmas Fair.



Micro-grants

DWDT continued to administer a contract to distribute micro-grants to community groups in Conisbrough and Denaby as part of a project funded by Doncaster Council and Public Health England for the Well Doncaster programme. Initiatives eligible for funding included those that aimed to raise aspirations, promote physical activity and healthy eating, reduce social isolation or support volunteers. Later in the year, the micro-grant scheme was expanded to include start-up grants to help people get business ideas off the ground with the same basic aim of improving health and wellbeing in the target areas of Denaby and Conisbrough. We promoted the start-up grants online and via local outlets and soon received the first batch of applications which, after consideration by a decision-making panel, resulted in grants being awarded to a tiler, wedding co-ordinator and soft toy-maker.

Job Club/CVs

Early in 2017 we teamed up with POA Learning to run a Job Club at Your Place in Denaby. Instead of our previous drop-in model, we adopted an appointment only approach which enabled us to expand our offer to individuals and provide more targeted support based on their needs and aspirations. The weekly sessions gave job-seekers access to computers and the internet plus one-to-one employment support including job-searching, preparing for work, interview skills and access to distance learning courses. The Job Club was complemented by weekly CV sessions with a National Careers Service advisor. The appointments catered for people aged over 19 and were in demand throughout the year.

Contact us

To find out more about our work and the services we offer please browse our website and Facebook page for news and information or get in touch with us by phone or email:

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<https://www.facebook.com/Doncaster-West-Development-Trust-715772058511086/>

You can also keep up to date with events and activities at The Hot Chocolate Lounge via its website and Facebook page:

www.thehotchocolatelounge.co.uk/

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/HotChocLounge1/>