



UNIVERSITY
of DERBY

University of Derby
Learning & Information Services



UCISA Staff Development Group

Best Practice Award 2009

LIS “RedWelly” Staff Development Project

**University of Derby
Learning & Information Services**

RedWelly Staff Development Project

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Abstract:

The University of Derby is outwardly facing and constantly seeks ways of being accessible to the wider community in which it operates. Learning & Information Services (LIS), in conjunction with our Human Resources Department and RedWelly Ltd. demonstrated commitment above and beyond supporting the University's community strategy by embracing new and innovative ways of using team development activities to impact on members of the Community who would not ordinarily have contact with a Higher Education Institution.

Submission Outline:

LIS provides resources, systems and technology to support academic and administrative processes of the University. We aim to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment, developing and applying new approaches, and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the management of the University through IT systems.

The Learning & Information Services (LIS) RedWelly project encompassed the "Ground Force" style renovation of four garden / outside spaces within the surrounding areas of our two main campus in Derby and Buxton, which would transform the lives of over 30 people directly and many more in the future. Many of those immediately benefitting from this venture were elderly residents, and adults in supported living, typically residing in underprivileged areas within our region.

Over 60 members of IT staff committed themselves to the aims and objectives of a team building activity by engaging in community projects. The overall project was crucial in developing behaviours and values allied to effective teams, as these colleagues would be required to rely on each other to deliver on high investment projects in the future. Their ability to work cohesively and collaboratively would ultimately impact on the achievement of the University's IT strategy and core operations that affect all University areas.

Main Section:

Scope of the activity described

Strong teamwork and communication is central to the successful operation of the IT Service within Learning & Information Services. In undertaking the RedWelly Projects, we wanted:

- to further develop collaboration across our Department, based around real project challenges and to reflect the University's commitment to the local community in doing so.
- to build longer term relationships
- to enable individual self-awareness in terms of preferred behaviour and communication style and to share this within discrete teams of 15
- to create an environment where each team member is dependant on each other to achieve a result with a specific outcome
- to facilitate networking, through developed networking skills

We approached our HR Department to offer a challenge to our ideas of "traditional" staff development and they subsequently proposed the RedWelly Project. RedWelly Ltd. is a Derby-based social enterprise that undertakes garden makeovers with the support of local organisations, which provide muscle power in a team-building event with a difference. RedWelly is part of Spirita Ltd., a member of the Metropolitan Housing Partnership

Working closely with our HR colleagues & RedWelly, LIS scoped, co-ordinated and actively supported a development project which took place over a period of 6 months. The development was based around 4 community gardening projects which carried real risks, consequence and potential rewards. It also incorporated a focus on personal, team and leadership values to a greater degree than many of the participants had engaged in previously.

The overall initiative was phased to include:

- Initial briefings, project outlines and completion of Type Dynamics Indicator (TDI) learning styles questionnaires
- Workshops to discuss the results questionnaire to enable individuals to gain a greater awareness of their preferences/approaches which sits outside their traditional team role. Through support and guidance this enabled them to understand other approaches and perspectives. The introductory session encouraged networking and activities which saw individuals link together according to dichotomy. This means that there is a likelihood that most individuals will find something in common in terms of approach with others in the room, setting a positive starting point. Alternatively where differences exist, they will be encouraged to understand those differences and see the value that may bring to this project.
- Group-led planning & project development meetings
- The production of project video diaries for each group to record their progress. This was then used at the end of the project at the LIS presentation event to demonstrate how their team has developed throughout the process.
- The four garden makeovers
- Video editing and presentation of the projects

Wider relevance

The approach was widely supported by all stakeholders. The LIS Senior Management team and our Pro Vice Chancellor for Learning, Teaching and Scholarship took great interest in the video diaries produced and supported the celebration of their achievements which will help shape how we develop teams using projects for the good of the community in the future. The outcomes of this learning was also shared with all colleagues in Human Resources to enable a broader range of colleagues to advise other Faculties and Departments on how they can further use community linked team building developments.

The University has established a set of core values which focus on 'how' we work together. Living the values and developing effective communication strategies across teams are at the centre of this project and are integral to wider University strategies. Whilst the University has undertaken many joint community initiatives, it has never combined such a large scale team building activity to affect so many residents within the University's footprint. This project is an important milestone in combining learning and development with achieving a real life project which has such a positive end. Already we are seeing the benefits of this on the communities and our own staff attitudes. Longer term the achievement of the IT strategy will also determine whether this development has been successful.

It is projects such as this that reinforce our University's longer term corporate strategy of being regionally rooted and employer engaged. 65% of our student body reside within a 50 mile radius of the University which makes the impact such work even more critical. It also helps us to realise how we wish to be perceived by our own community 'a University that is actively part of the community'.

Performance indicators

We measure Staff Engagement as a University KPI which includes perceptions on our Values being witnessed within teams. This is undertaken via a survey tool which measures perceptions twice a year. This allows us to 'take the pulse' of the Institution. The overall engagement score for LIS increased overall in 2008 by 1%, which is a notable increase in engagement terms.

In addition, following evaluation of this project, 87% of respondents stated that participating in this project enabled them to demonstrate the values, i.e. working effectively with others, challenge and innovation, meeting deadlines.

The views of those taking part included

- It was a great event, constructive, fun, hard work
- I was pleased to be able to contribute to the community wellbeing
- I liked the teamwork. Watching the managers get stuck in was good for building our relationship with them because in our day jobs they're understandably very detached from the detail of the work we do
- Helping people, improving the environment for people
- Sense of satisfaction at completing the event
- Getting out of the Office and away from the phones, this event was a different slant from the usual 'flip chart' types of team building events we have had in the past
- Being able to help the community with a project that they had been wanting for a long time."

Accrued benefits

LIS were considered to be taking a bold step in introducing a community project which required a significant amount of time and investment. At the heart of this project was the notion that each team would shape their respective renovation and select their own project lead (work-based managers were a resource to support (i.e. dig), but not lead on this initiative). This has led to individuals not currently in management positions developing project management skills and leadership qualities thereby enabling individuals to demonstrate talents that will be transferable to the workplace. Above all it has generated a greater sense of team identity and provided some positive recognition for functions which are often “behind the scenes”.

We feel the way this was achieved exceeded our expectations. The real sense of pride in the teams’ work, combined with real outcomes, the feedback from the residents and improvements we have seen in working together since that time made the initiative thoroughly worthwhile. Some months have now passed and we have witnessed a little more understanding of the challenges faced by others, that we’re all here working towards the same goals.

This activity has also resulted in other teams thinking more laterally about the types of development they engage in. The LIS initiative was a first of its kind for the University and our HR Department have received further RedWelly requests as a direct result.

Teams now appreciate more fully the community in which we operate and have a sense of pride in seeking practical ways to make a positive impression and impact. Internally we recognise that increase in cross team project working will help move forward our agenda to improve our abilities and skills in managing projects as a business.

Our Community Relations Officer Peter Walker reflected on comments he received following the developments. One resident commented that “he felt exhausted watching them work so hard that he had to go to bed.” Peter added that working with RedWelly enabled the University to get closer to the heart of the community, allowing them to see the supportive and friendly nature that is at the centre of our values as an organisation.

Trudy Newton
25 August 2009

Appendices

1) Group 1 Video Diary