ESF Convergence

Media release

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Theatre of Opportunity for Jobs

Longstanding Cornwall-based theatre company Cascade has been using ESF (European Social Fund) Convergence for courses aimed at supporting adults who are aged 50+, have health problems or are disabled in their journey to work.

Theatre of Opportunity offered the chance to learn self-awareness and self-management through drama workshops and psychological techniques. The skills learned can then be transferred to the workplace. The activities are tailored to each participant. Four, six week courses were held in Liskeard, Camborne, Newquay and St Ives with 37 people supported.

Cascade team members have a social science and psychology background and artistic director Kit Maher is one of the few practitioners of an American emotional mastery technique to be based in the UK. This puts the team in a great position to give the best possible support for the individual participants.

Carol Brooking, Executive Director of Truro-based Cascade, a registered charity since 1996, explained, “We use games and exercises drawn from the world of theatre and have a lot of fun. All our work is based on sound psychological principles. We give people techniques which help build their confidence and self-esteem and enable them to manage some of their worries and let go of others. I am confident we have a unique package combining emotional intelligence and awareness with theatre. We have been doing this for so long now that we just know that it works.”

Mark Yeoman, Head of ESF Convergence Communication, said, “These workshops are all part of a big picture of flexible ESF Convergence support that complements mainstream provision from DWP and Jobcentre Plus, and is being offered to people in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to open up routes to employment.”

Theatre of Opportunity receives ESF Convergence investment through the Community Grants Fund co financed by the Skills Funding Agency and managed by CDC (Cornwall Development Company).

Bernice Pearson, from St Austell, is one person to have benefitted from a Cascade course. Having become unemployed from her work as an occupational therapist she went to Cascade hoping to rebuild her confidence. Since completing the course Bernice has gone on to further training in upholstery and how to run her own business.

She said, “At 58 I found myself made redundant from work- I had a very real fear of poverty and being on benefits and had no real belief in my ability to obtain work to sustain me in the future. Having worked and trained hard previously I felt I had no way forward and no support.

“I read about Cascade at the Jobcentre and liked the look of what they were offering to people over
50 and out of work. Although I had doubts that I would fit in I signed up.

“Carol and Kit were warm and welcoming from the start and put the group members at ease with their sensitive and humorous approach. Between us the group had a wide variety of life experience and individual need, including physical and mental health issues.

“Cascade created a close and trusting space, with a very light touch and always a realistic and positive way forward. The group was small and became mutually supportive over the sessions. We all enjoyed the variety of techniques Kit and Carol employed to help us review and reshape our long held ways of dealing with life!

“When I first began with Cascade I had little self belief but having participated in the exercises, shared lots of laughter and taken on board the anxiety reducing strategies among other aspects, has left me with a much better sense of myself and my future. My confidence has greatly improved since attending the Cascade sessions to the point that I am currently training in Upholstery and how to run a small business.

“Throughout the process I picked up many simple, effective strategies to help me to use alternative ways of responding to life stresses and the stages we pass through.

“Cascade sessions gave me many opportunities to review how I want to go forward in this next stage of my life. I plan to continue to enjoy what I do, to dare to follow my instincts and to laugh as much as possible- at myself as much as anything- many thanks to Carol and Kit!”

Kit and Carol also regularly deliver communication skills training throughout the UK to doctors and dentists to support their interactions with patients in general and disadvantaged people in particular. Using previous ESF investment, Cascade has also worked with carers to help them to deal with their difficult lives.

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Editors’ notes.

ESF Convergence: The ESF (European Social Fund) Convergence Programme in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is worth more than £150 million. It is targeted at tackling barriers to work, improving workforce skills and research and graduate activity. It is being delivered primarily through co-financing via the Skills Funding Agency, Jobcentre Plus/DWP and the National Offender Management Service. There is also direct investment in higher education via Combined Universities in Cornwall partners.