

Improving health, developing skills for life

Skilled for Health

'I changed my diet because I now understand what is healthy and unhealthy.'
(Skilled for Health participant)

Skilled for Health (SfH) is the national learning programme that embeds skills for life learning into health improvement topics. SfH courses and workshops address both the low skills and health inequalities prevalent within traditionally disadvantaged communities.

The programme aims to:

- ▶ contribute to reducing health inequalities by improving health among those communities that demonstrate the worst health outcomes
- ▶ enhance the ability of individuals within those communities to make informed decisions about health and well-being in a variety of different settings
- ▶ use health improvement topics that embed skills for life learning as an incentive to engage and recruit individuals who do not traditionally participate in public health or adult learning initiatives.



To find out more:

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Changing lives through learning

Background

Inequalities have been increasing in the UK over recent years, in terms of health, wealth, education and social inequality. Where a person is born in the UK still has a significant impact on their health outcomes. Babies born in Preston, for example, have a life expectancy of between three and six years lower than those born in North Norfolk.

SfH is a health literacy programme that aims to address health and learning inequalities. Health literacy represents 'the cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health' (World Health Organisation).

Research on 33 year old adults in England (Centre for the Study of the Wider Benefits of Learning, 2006) has shown a strong correlation between indicators of poor health/unhealthy lifestyles and a poor experience of secondary education. When comparing people who were disengaged at school and had no GCSEs and those who did, it was found that the odds of:

- ▶ smoking are 4.7 times higher for women and 3.5 times higher for men
- ▶ drinking heavily are 1.5 times higher

- ▶ taking exercise less than once a week are 1.5 times higher
- ▶ having depression are 2.4 times higher for women and two times higher for men
- ▶ having back pain are 1.3 times higher for men
- ▶ having migraines are 1.3 times higher for women.

The costs of limited health literacy (Eichler, Wieser and Brügger, 2009) summarises recent research into health literacy in the US and in Switzerland, which suggests that 3 to 5 per cent of the countries' total health care spending is due to limited health literacy.

If this same percentage were applied to England, the cost would amount to around £3 to 5 billion; this is equivalent to the cost of all maternity and reproductive services, the cost of treating all cancers and tumours, or annual real rates of growth in NHS spending in recent years.

Skilled for Health embeds skills for life learning into health improvement topics to maximise the impact of both.

Expected project outcomes

The outcomes will depend on the specific focus of each Skilled for Health project. The national evaluation of SfH (Tavistock Institute and Shared Intelligence, 2009) identified the following outcomes for previous SfH programmes:

- ▶ Changes to health behaviour, such as taking up healthier food options and doing more frequent exercise
- ▶ Increase in health knowledge in the areas of healthy eating, exercising, smoking, drinking and looking after mental health
- ▶ Participants improving their family's health and cascading their new knowledge back into their communities
- ▶ Improvements in skills levels and a high motivation to continue learning
- ▶ Participants progressing along language, literacy and numeracy levels



Developing skills for life

How is the project delivered?

- 1 Skilled for Health targets areas of multiple deprivation and recruits individuals who do not traditionally participate in public health or adult learning programmes.
- 2 Skilled for Health materials can be used to deliver stand-alone Skilled for Health courses or they can be embedded into other courses focusing on health, sport, catering, health and beauty, or skills for life, for example.

The content of the resources can be adapted easily to meet learners' needs, interests, level and skills focus. The Skilled for Health materials can also be complemented by practical tasks, for example, cooking or physical activities.

- 3 There is no one 'best' way to deliver Skilled for Health programmes. While each Skilled for Health course is 45 hours long, sessions can be delivered flexibly to meet the needs of the learners and to reflect the setting's objectives.

It is this flexibility which makes Skilled for Health suitable for a wide variety of settings, such as in the community, in the workplace, and in prisons.



Improving health

FAQs

How much will it cost?

The cost of delivering a course will depend on a variety of factors, for example, the delivery requirements, who the partners are, who is delivering the programme and where, and the number of trainers or participants. Example costs are available on request.

Where is the programme available?

Skilled for Health is designed to be delivered in a wide range of community and workplace settings, and is targeted towards people living in areas of multiple deprivation.

How is the project staffed?

The programme requires a champion to market, recruit and co-ordinate the courses. Delivery staff can be used on a sessional or part-time basis to run the SfH courses.

The skills and knowledge required to deliver Skilled for Health will vary according to the programme outcomes, but delivery staff normally have an educational and/or a health background. Specialist facilitators can also be used for specific topics, such as 'stop smoking', 'oral hygiene' and 'safety in the home'.

ContinYou staff can:

- ▶ project manage large or small Skilled for Health projects
- ▶ deliver Skilled for Health courses directly to communities and client groups
- ▶ deliver staff training programmes.

Is the project sustainable?

Working in partnership with key stakeholders and partners, SfH can be embedded into existing educational programmes or delivered by health practitioners and trainers as part of their normal practice.

About the partners

Skilled for Health is run in England by an innovative national partnership, consisting of the Department of Health (DH), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) – formerly the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) – and the learning and health charity ContinYou, which has overseen SfH since its inception.

www.continyou.org.uk

