

Project name	Skills for Life through Family History
Location	Hull, Humberside
Partner organisations	Hull History Service Preston Road Neighbourhood Development Company
Contact details	Gareth Watkins, Martin Taylor – Hull History Service
Funded by	YMLAC

Introduction

The initiative developed following the *Family History for Families* course run by Hull History Services over the 2004 summer holidays. Intended as a means of engaging generations of families in learning about their roots, it became evident that the 2004 course had more value as a Skills for Life/basic skills project than a family learning project.

Informed by this city-wide pilot project, Hull History Services developed *Skills for Life through Family History*, geographically focussed on the Preston Road estate, in association with Preston Road Neighbourhood Development Company (NDC) a regeneration initiative covering that estate in East Hull. The 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation shows Southcoates East ward, which includes the estate, to be the 4th most deprived ward locally and the 64th nationally, with all the associated social and educational problems. This course was intended to contribute to the City's Council's meeting its PSA Target to tackle social exclusion and deliver neighbourhood renewal, in particular narrowing the gap in health, education, crime, worklessness, housing and liveability outcomes between the most deprived areas and the rest of England.

Once again learning from the experience of *Family History for Families* we tried to focus on people with school age/pre-school children – probably mothers – by timetabling the courses to run during school hours and providing crèche facilities. We provided participants with information from the internet genealogy pay sites eg 1837online, and copy certificates from the General Register Office. Genealogy is not something that can be done for free. By paying for participants to get started with information and certificates, we wanted to invest with them for the development of their skills for life through family history. We also laid on a buffet lunch on each day. An Open Doors grant from Yorkshire MLA enabled us to undertake all this.

Aims and objectives

Hull History Services is part of Hull City Council's Lifelong Learning Service.

Two of the high level goals of Lifelong Learning expressed in our annual service plan 2005/6 are:

- Supporting families and individuals
- Participation in lifelong learning and culture

These goals are underpinned by the following aims:

- Provide opportunities for everyone to develop skills, so they can participate in local community life
- Access for all to a wider range of learning and cultural services

The *Skills for Life through Family History* project (SLFH) had the following aims and objectives:

Through attendance at a family history day school, the participants will:

- acquire an understanding of the basic research methods, a great deal of new information about their own ancestors and family, and thus a new sense of themselves as members of the wider community.
- use reading, writing and communication skills to collect new information.
- acquire a knowledge of the use of the internet for family history research, and so a greater confidence in using the world wide web and buying things (in this case genealogical information) on line.
- gain a familiarity with libraries and archives as sources for family history information, and the means of undertaking research.
- enjoy their learning experience.

The project aims – encouraging people to develop new skills, gain confidence in using libraries and “official” bodies (eg General Register Office), and enjoy a new learning experience support the wider aims and goals of the Lifelong Learning Service.

Programme of Work

Four “day schools” were held on the Preston Road estate and contiguous area:

Thurs 17 February at Maybury Primary School, Maybury Grove

Tues 22 February at the East Hull Centre for Horticulture, Nursery Grove, Portobello Street

Tues 1 March 2005 at the Regeneration Centre, Flinton Grove

Thurs 10 March at Maybury Primary School, Maybury Grove

All sessions to run 9.30am to 2.30pm, so within school hours.

Outcomes

The following personnel were involved in the project:

Gareth Watkins, genealogist, Hull History Services, project leader

Jane Bottomley, archive assistant, Hull History Services
 Jeff Mennell, senior library assistant, Hull Library Service
 Support was provided by members of the Dot Hepton Family History Group – a family history self-help group set up following a course Gareth Watkins ran on the Preston Road Estate in 2003; they continue to meet every Monday and Wednesday afternoon and are a very active community family history group.

Although there was no attempt to evaluate staff participation using Generic Learning Outcomes conversations with staff suggested that they had found it enjoyable and useful. The Dot Hepton Family History Group gained 8 new members from the day schools.

Attendee profiles

- Total places 37; total attendees 34
- Age range:

20/30s	9	(26%)
40/50s	6	(18%)
60+	19	(56%)
- Higher/Further education:

Yes	6	(18%)
No	28	(82%)
- Previous experience with computers

Yes	21	(62%)
No	13	(38%)
- Previous experience with family history

Yes	12	(35%)
No	22	(65%)

Evaluation

The project was evaluated using a simple questionnaire which expressed the Generic Learning Outcomes in the form of easy questions. 31 questionnaires were returned. Results summarised below:

- Did you enjoy the Family History day school today? Yes 31 No 0
100%
 - What did you enjoy?
 - Welcoming tutor & group – friendly & knowledgeable & not intimidating*
 - Being able to find a few ancestors*
 - Friendliness – help*
 - Exploring & finding things out*
 - What did you not enjoy?

Nothing
 Nothing
 Not being able to trace some of the family
 Frustrated:- not enough time

- What have you learned about yourself and your family today?

First ever computer finds
It is very interesting
Grandparents and other family members
How awkward they were
Surnames I didn't know
When my father was born
Close knit families
Such large families

- What new skills have you found out about today? Please tick.

Fill in a family tree chart 21

Use the Internet to find births marriages or deaths 29

Apply for birth, marriage or death certificates 29

Use censuses on the Internet 29

Use the Internet to find church baptisms, marriages and burials 24

Is there anything else you have found out how to do?

Used computer for the first time
Be patient

- Has today made you think differently about yourself and your family?

Yes
Yes a great deal, you need to know where you come from it is important
Should have started much earlier
It has opened my eyes
Not really, have already done a lot of geneal[ogy] & well hooked

- Will you be doing your family history after today? Yes 31 No 0

- Would you be interested in coming to more day schools in the future?
 Yes 31 No 0

Conclusion

In terms of innovation this was the first time Hull History Services had done a project on this scale in association with a regeneration initiative like Preston Road NDC, which supplied advertising, venues and administrative assistance with bookings. The involvement of a community family history group, the Dot Hepton Group, which itself had developed from a previous family history course run by Gareth Watkins on the Preston Road Estate, was a new departure and a very successful one.

Although we had aimed the course at people with childcare commitments, in timing and provision of crèche facilities, the majority of attendees were older retired people, who are generally the biggest group active in family history. We had not made any attempt to exclude such people, and it would have been difficult and perhaps counterproductive to have tried. We did however attract 9 people in the age group we were aiming at, and in future we would not worry too much about providing crèches; it may be in close knit communities like Preston Road, other family members (usually grandmothers) are available to care for pre-school children.

The quantitative and qualitative data detailed above indicates that the project was a success. All the attendees enjoyed the day schools, and would attend similar events. All learned some new skills, and many learned new things about their families. Some people were led by the day to think differently about themselves and their families, but it was a shame that most of those who replied “yes” to that question did not go into further detail – perhaps we should have phrased that question differently.

In terms of our aims and objectives in 1.2 above, we can conclude that the project was a success.

We did find it beneficial to work in the community on one of the more deprived estates in the City. There is clearly a great deal of interest in family history irrespective of social background. Learning from this project, we have decided that a major part of Gareth’s activities should be teaching family history courses, in association with or at least on the premises of local regeneration organisations on the City’s peripheral estates. September to December has seen a course run on Longhill estate. We are arranging courses for the January-March term on North Bransholme and in the Gipsyville area.

The success of the Dot Hepton group has suggested that there is merit in helping form and supporting similar community family history groups which provide a focus in their communities for family history and social activity. A beginners’ family history course at Greenwood Library, North Hull Estate which ran in August has led to the formation of a North Hull family history group and we hope that Gareth’s course at Longhill will lead to the formation of such a group in the far east of the City. Hull History Services has recently obtained funding from Yorkshire MLA, and is working with another regeneration initiative, Hull Developing Our Communities (Hull DOC), to develop the Hull Family History Forum. This will provide both physical and virtual forums for community family history groups such as these, and others which have developed from courses run by Hull DoC, to meet and learn from each others experiences. We are thus able to facilitate a degree of sustainability for the courses we run.

We are looking at sources of funding to provide access to pay genealogy websites and buy certificates for participants. Family history can be expensive; we see such provision as important in getting them started.

The project was particularly valuable to Hull History Services in proving the value to the participants of taking family history teaching into the community with a skills for life angle to it. It has confirmed our belief that there is an interest, even a market, in our more deprived wards, and that these courses can and do help people learn, and inspire them to continue research themselves.