



NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Good employment practice case study

Growing an organisation's learning and development

Gloria Ssali, Learning and Development Manager for YMCA London South West spoke to us about the initiatives she has driven to put learning at the heart of her organisation.

How did this come about – what brought the issue to light?

When Gloria first joined the YMCA London South West, learning and development was coordinated by department managers at their individual sites. Each site had its own training budget and training was not evaluated across the organisation.

“We didn't have all the data to know what courses people were doing and what records were being kept. It was difficult to monitor the training budget and to know the impact training had on individuals”.

Who was involved in improving the learning and development function?

Gloria led the process, supported by the HR Director.

What did that process involve?

- **Centralising the training budget.** When Gloria joined, YMCA London South West decided to bring the training budget for all sites into the Human Resources department. This is now managed by the HR Director.
- **Reviewing the training policy and procedure.** Gloria has updated and improved the existing training policy at YMCA London South West in conjunction with the HR Director. *“The training policy and procedures were comprehensive but not as robust as we would have liked. It is much better than it was five years ago.”*
- **Ensuring existing processes are followed.** Staff are required to submit training application forms to provide course details - and explain what the training will achieve specifically. The forms must be supported by their line manager before they are forwarded to HR. The information provides Gloria with valuable data in terms of training needs within particular departments and is useful for the organisation's monthly Key Performance Indicator statistics, which show how the organisation is progressing in achieving its objectives.
- **Updating the training application form.** *“I've updated the application form to reflect the training policy, on areas such as the refund of fees when staff*

who have been sponsored to study, leave the organisation within 12 months of completing their studies.”

- **Establishing a training evaluation process.** Gloria’s improvements to the training application form have helped her to evaluate training undertaken by staff. *“I use the application forms to find out why staff want to go on courses and their training objectives are referred to in the evaluation forms after they complete their course.”* Gloria looked at the Kirkpatrick model of effective training evaluation when designing the evaluation forms. This model uses four levels. Soon after completing a course/event, staff reactions to the trainer and course are measured-level 1 of the model. Staff also complete post training evaluation forms 3 to 6 months after the training is completed- levels 2 and 3 of the model. The annual appraisal also assesses the impact training has had on the individual and the organisation which is level 4 of the model. In this way, Gloria can assess the potential value added to the individual, the department and the whole organisation.
- **Reviewing the training budget.** *“Once we had our recording sorted, we looked at our budget so that we had an idea of how to plan better for the future.”* For example, Gloria identified that the organisation used a lot of First Aid training and as a result she decided to provide this training in-house, as a more efficient means of delivering the same solution.
- **Making training a part of strategic planning.** *“From our organisation’s point of view, it’s important that learning & development is part of the strategic plan”.* Every year, Gloria meets with each department manager to discuss their department’s plan and to see what training is likely to be required to deliver their departmental objectives. The training needs identified are fed into the training plan that is used to organise YMCA London South West’s training for the year. In addition, Gloria reads all staff performance reviews to identify and extract any information relating to training. This information is also fed into the training plan.
- **Introducing a learning at work week.** In November 2009, Gloria organised a learning at work week for her organisation, which is now budgeted for annually. *“Staff attended short events throughout the week and were very excited.”* The week enabled staff to identify their personal learning goals. For example, a number of staff wanted to improve their written and spoken English:

“We put staff on English courses after the learning week in 2009 and I have received some great informal feedback from tutors and students. For instance staff were saying, ‘I can interview clients and write reports better as a result of attending reading and writing classes’. I noticed their writing has improved and some of them are a lot more confident and undertaking NVQs. As a learning and development manager, it is imperative that staff achieve a positive outcome from training and the organisation as a whole.

What has been the big impact of these changes?

YMCA London South West uses training strategically to better meet the needs of its organisation and to assist in the delivery of the strategic plan. Training costs are monitored and savings are identified. By encouraging staff to learn, YMCA London South West is able to continually develop its workforce. In 2009, the organisation was proud to be nominated as finalists for the Kingston Business Award, showing how much has been achieved over the past 5 years. Since 2008, approximately 20% of staff have also achieved professional qualifications such NVQs as a result of the improved training and development function.

What was the key to the success of these initiatives?

- **Gloria's enthusiasm for employee learning.** *"Because I'm an HR person and I am passionate about learning & development, I know the benefit of learning. I am also encouraged to help managers develop; I try to select great courses and trainers whenever I can.*
- **Good leadership.** *"I have a great manager in my HR director. He's helped me a lot. I work in an organisation that wants people to grow. We have a very good relationship. We can share ideas and he's allowed me to be innovative and try new things."*

What have been the main challenges?

- **Encouraging good quality discussion between staff and managers.** Gloria emphasised the importance of managers making time and space with staff to discuss training as a recommendation in her Masters degree case study about the transfer of learning at YMCA London South West. She's facilitated this by revising her organisation's annual performance review.

"Making sure that staff implement the training and development policy and procedures has been quite challenging but persistence in reminding staff to do so has achieved a good outcome".

Are there any future developments in the pipeline?

- **Design and deliver more training in-house.** Gloria would like to develop refresher courses to continue to embed learning in her organisation.
- **Introduce a training & development survey.** Gloria wants to evaluate the transfer of learning annually to address any barriers to learning and to improve organisation development.
- **Strengthen relationships with managers.** *"I would like managers to continue to develop staff and to be aware of how the knowledge, skills and behaviours they learn are transferred back into the workplace. It is important that we continually look at how departments can be improved. I'm pleased we've achieved what we've achieved; I'm always looking to push boundaries."*

About YMCA London South West's HR and workforce:

How many paid staff do you have? Around 380 though this varies from month to month with sessional workers.

How many trustees sit on your board? 15

How many volunteers do you have? approximately 100