

Graduate of first youth leadership programme explains how taking part boosted her practice and skills

Training youth sector leaders

YOUTH WORK

By Derren Hayes

A group of youth work professionals have embarked on a programme to train the next generation of youth sector leaders.

A total of 28 youth sector professionals are taking part in the Emerging Youth Leader programme run by Clore Social Leadership and funded by the Big Lottery Fund and Bank of America Merrill Lynch. This is a 30 per cent increase on the number involved in a pilot of the programme that took place last year.

The programme has been developed in collaboration with a group of youth charities and involves participants working in teams to find solutions to leadership challenges. It requires 20 to 22 days of learning over six months, including two residential trips of 2.5 days each. Course fees are between £1,000 and £2,000 dependent on organisation income.

Key to the programme is for participants to bring what they have learned back to their own organisation – one of the teams last year devised a new management project that is now being piloted for use across the youth sector.

PROGRAMME CRITERIA

Participants should:

- Work within youth charities and social enterprises or in youth-focused organisations
- Have three to six years of leadership experience
- Be seeking to enhance their leadership capabilities
- Be preparing for an internal promotion or envisioning a change of role

Source: Clore Social Leadership



Here, Fiona Ellison, fund development manager at the Big Lottery Fund, a graduate from last year's programme, answers questions about her experience.

What did you hope to get out of participating in the course?

I really had no expectations – I always love to challenge myself and push myself out of my comfort zone. I was honoured that I was asked to be part of the programme by Charlotte Hill, chief executive of Step Up To Serve, one of the founding partners.

How did this compare with the experience of taking part?

I hadn't realised quite how hard it would be. It meant a lot of juggling of work commitments to really make the most of the opportunities and the different elements, as well as the reflection time. I remember finishing the first residential and was so mentally exhausted from the experience but in a hugely empowering way.

What skills and learning did you take away from it?

The learning I continue to take from the programme is the concept my coach coined for me – my "long tall shadow". Something that can linger in both positive and negative ways when I'm working. I'm someone that comes into any role or project with enthusiasm and

"I loved building a network of people from the youth sector who we could be really honest and open with"

Fiona Ellison, fund development manager at the Big Lottery Fund

drive. Considering how my actions can be interpreted in both a positive and negative way has really helped me take more time to consider others and how I can best support them to get the most out of an activity.

What was the most useful aspect of the course?

Two things stand out:

- I loved building a network of people from the youth sector who I could be really honest and open with. I'm still close to a number of people from the course, especially those who were part of my "action learning set" – something we've continued beyond the formal part of the programme.
- The coaching sessions gave me time and opportunity to reflect on key challenges that I probably wouldn't have addressed without that additional support. It's something that I didn't carry on after the programme but I've really noticed how much I missed the opportunity to talk things through with someone completely impartial.

What was your project about?

We started with a broad theme around people development. I had the pleasure of working with an amazing group of women to produce something that hasn't just died – Clore is now picking up the

detail of the programme to roll out some of the content we pulled together to support people who are new to management across the social sector. I'm incredibly proud of this piece of work.

What are the key takeaways from the programme?

1. Put the time and effort into developing relationships – they are so valuable.
2. Take time to reflect and recognise the things you're good at and focus on those.
3. Bring people along on the journey – seeing others succeed is an amazing feeling.

Why is a leadership programme so important for the youth sector?

The youth sector has had a tough time of it over the last few years. However, you can either sit back and moan about it or take a much more positive attitude. We had a great conversation in our very first residential about our role to really drive the youth sector forward in a positive way, being honest about properly working together and remembering that ultimately we all exist to make sure that young people have the best opportunities and chances in life. Organisational politics shouldn't get in the way of remembering who the beneficiaries are.

What advice would you give to new or future participants?

My old head teacher used to talk about "grasping opportunities" that come along – it is something that has stuck with me. You never know where something might lead. It's scary to be honest and to talk about what you're great at. The programme created an incredible environment to really examine so much about me that I'm still reaping the benefits of investing in myself and I'm sure I'll continue to do so for a long time to come.

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