



wise group



Lesmahagow Paths to Progress Final Report

Lesmahagow Paths to Progress...

- **Project ran from October 2011 until April 2012**
- **Provided 26 week work experience and training placements**
- **20 unemployed people were recruited from nearby communities**
- **£79,000 earned in wages by participants**
- **18 (90%) completed their training or left early for positive destinations**
- **20 (100%) achieved at least 1 new qualification**
- **4 (20%) have progressed into employment to date**
- **440m of footpath constructed**
- **300 fruit trees planted**
- **2.6 hectares of woodland thinned**

1.0 Introduction

The Lesmahagow Paths to Progress (LPP) project was developed as a partnership between Lesmahagow Development Trust, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Wise Group.

The project has delivered new footpaths linking the community of Lesmahagow to the countryside around the village. It also provided a range of woodland habitat enhancement and environmental improvement activities including brashing, high pruning, line of sight clearance and tree planting.

The environmental works were delivered as an employability project, providing work experience and training opportunities for unemployed local people. Project participants receive support to progress from the project into sustainable employment, utilising their newly acquired skills.

The project has provided the people of Lesmahagow and beyond with a physical link to the opportunities for recreation, training and employment offered by the countryside and access to the health, wellbeing and economic benefits they provide.

'Lesmahagow is a historic village and we're set within stunning countryside. Unfortunately, like a lot of areas, we also suffer from some social issues too. The Paths to Progress project has been excellent because it has enhanced the countryside around the village but at the same time it has provided waged work experience and training for local people.' Jeff Frew, Lesmahagow Community Council

2.0 Employment Benefits

- 20 unemployed people from communities around Lesmahagow were recruited onto 26 week contracts of employment
- 18 completed their training contracts or left early to take up employment
- 20 participants have been provided with job search and personal development support
- 100% of participants achieved at least 1 vocational qualification
- 20 participants will be able to access on-going support through the Wise Group, for a period of 26 weeks, on completion of the project

2.1 Trainees

The recruitment of LPP temporary employees was concentrated on areas of Lesmahagow and neighbouring settlements experiencing high levels of deprivation.

- 13 (65%) of participants are resident in Data Zones within the most deprived 15% in Scotland.

Participants were drawn from a range of age groups and displayed multiple barriers to employment including:

- 6 were from a Workless Household
- 5 were Ex-Offenders
- 2 had Literacy & Numeracy issues
- 2 had No Work Experience
- 2 had No Qualifications
- 1 was Homeless

2.2 Support & Aftercare

Participants benefited from practical work experience, vocational training and acquired valuable life skills through personal development support.

All participants spent their first week on a Wise Group induction course followed by training in Health & Safety and basic skills.

Thereafter, participants moved out onto site to begin delivery of the environmental improvements. Participants worked in squads of 5, with each squad under the supervision of an experienced Wise Group Site Foreman.

The Site Foremen oversee the quality of works delivered and provide on the job training. They also play a key role in the personal growth and development of the trainees building their self-confidence, team working, problem solving and communication skills.

The Foremen conduct Monthly Reviews with each of the participants in their squad. Reviews are signed-off jointly by Foreman and trainee.

Examples of Monthly Review comments are provided below:

'William has had some testing times with us at the start of the programme but he steadily got better as time went on. He has to face up to his demons and get into a good place.'

'Michael has stuck to his word and pulled his socks up although he is still finding it hard in his domestic life. He said he is enjoying the work with us and likes the squad he is currently with.'

'Aaron has really come out of his shell this month and started to ask questions at discussions on jobs he is involved in. He is happy at his work and enjoys coming into work in the morning. Attendance and time keeping are excellent.'

A Wise Group Employment Consultant was assigned to the project and met regularly with participants to address barriers and identify their employment aspirations. The consultant provided on-going coaching and job search support.

The Wise Group continues to offer support to participants for up to 26 weeks after completion of their training.

The Wise Group will contact participants fortnightly by telephone or e-mail to track their progress and offer assistance with on-going support needs. Participants can access additional support via the Wise Group's Advice Helpline.

2.3 Training

Vocational training was provided by the Wise Group's Training Dept. Participants worked towards a range of qualifications including in the use of brushwood chipper, pesticides and the CSCS card.

3.0 Environmental Benefits

The Integrated Habitat Network modelling exercise undertaken for the CSGN identified the area east of Blackwood, running down through Lesmahagow, Auchlochan and Stockbriggs as a Woodland Priority Enhancement Area (PEA). The works delivered under the LPP project are located within this PEA.

- Manual thinning Rougham Birch wood using hand saws - 2.6 hectares thinned to date
- Firewood for use by local people via FCS issued firewood collection licences - 150 cubic metres stacked throughout the wood
- Dismantling and replacement of boundary fencing - 100 metres.
- Tree planting - 300 fruit trees planted
- Access clearance - 300 metres of path brought back into use through removal of windblown trees
- Clearing unwanted trees (natural regeneration) from Coalburn Moss - 70m x 150m area cut to waste
- Willow removal from Aspen areas - 60 linear metres cleared & stacked
- Footpath construction at Brocketsbrae - 440 metres
- Debris / rubbish removal from roadside hedge - 600 metres x 2 visits
- Removed 1 overhanging tree which was windblown & threatening the roadside telephone cable

4.0 Community Cohesion Benefits

'It's massively important that woodlands and greenspace are made accessible to the community. The CSGN funding has enabled the Paths to Progress project to happen and we hope it is just the first step to creating a range of new, sustainable green assets for the people of Lesmahagow and beyond.' Liz Montgomery, Trustee, Lesmahagow Development Trust.

The volunteer membership of the Lesmahagow Development Trust has been involved in every aspect of the LPP project, from its development and marketing to the management of delivery.

The Development Trust, through consultation with the wider community, was able to inform the programme of works to ensure it addresses the needs of local residents.

The environmental improvements have been delivered by 20 individuals drawn from a number of settlements around Lesmahagow, thus serving to strengthen links between those local communities. Feedback from participants includes:

- 'It's been good for me, moving to a new country. It's good to meet new people.'
- 'A few of the people I've met on the job have become good pals.'

The project will leave a lasting legacy of environmental improvements which can be enjoyed by the community and visitors for years to come. It provides opportunities for a healthier, more active lifestyle making Lesmahagow a more attractive place to live.

The economic, health and capacity building opportunities presented by the project will foster both social inclusion for the individual beneficiaries and social cohesion of the community as a whole.

The delivery of a project like this serves to demonstrate to the community that success is achievable and reinvigorate the members to press on with further proposals to improve the village.

The LPP partners are now working to develop a community allotment and orchard.

5.0 Health & Learning Benefits

The LPP project has delivered a range of environmental improvement works to make the countryside more accessible, safer and more attractive for the people of Lesmahagow.

The new paths will provide access to the site of a community orchard and a proposed community allotment which will provide further long term opportunities for outdoor activity and healthy eating.

Six participants from the Paths to Progress project took part in a recent focus group session to gather feedback on their experience. They were asked about how the project had affected their health and attitudes towards the countryside. Comments were overwhelmingly positive including:

- 'I've grown in confidence. It's really helped me come out of my shell.'
- 'Once you're into the routine it's great.'
- 'We all get on brilliant. You do get a cracking laugh.'
- 'I went to the doctor who said I was a lot fitter than I used to be. It's had a positive impact.'
- 'I'll come down here to walk the dog.'
- 'I'll definitely bring my friends down here in the summer.'