

City Bridge Trust – Monitoring Visit Report

Organisation: U Can Do I.T.	Grant ref: 10485 (JF)	Programme area: Positive Transitions to Independent Living\ a) Newly acquired disability
Amount, date and purpose of grant: 17/03/2011: £75,000 over three years (3 x £25,000) towards IT training for disabled people in their own homes designed to increase their independence, choice and control over their lives.		
Visiting Grants Officer: Martin Hall, accompanied by Mr Ian Seaton (Committee Member)	Date of meeting: 27 th February 2013	
Met with: Patricia Webb (Development Manager), Mary Payne (CEO)		
1. Introduction to the organisation: U Can Do IT is a nationally recognised organisation providing IT training and advice to people with a range of disabilities. In particular, the charity provides expert support on the use of adaptive technologies and software which can make IT accessible to people who may be blind/visually impaired or suffer from conditions which make mainstream technology difficult to use. The Chief Executive of the organisation, with whom we met, is herself visually impaired and was originally trained by the organisation (having had to retire from her career in the NHS due to her condition), before becoming a trainer, manager and finally appointed as CEO last year. As such, she has a unique insight into all aspects of the organisation's work.		
2. The project funded: Your grant is towards the core aspect of the organisation's work, namely providing training for disabled people to help them live their lives more independently. Users begin by getting in touch with the organisation, at which point an initial conversation will take place to judge their needs, as this will determine which trainer they are assigned. The Development Manager and the potential trainer will then go to meet the client in their own homes, to fully assess the users' needs, provide advice on adaptive technology, and agree which areas the training should cover. Support then takes place over 10 lessons. All training takes place in the client's home due to the difficulties many have in travelling to a training centre.		
3. Work delivered to date: To date 50 users within the Greater London area have accessed the training supported by your grant, well on course to meet the target of 75 over the lifetime of the project. The organisation has a total of 80 tutors nationwide, who are all experienced IT professionals. Trainers are paid on a freelance basis, but their fees reflect the charitable nature of this initiative.		

Clients are recruited through a number of different avenues, including word-of-mouth, via internet searches, presentations made by the CEO and other advertising. They also receive a large number of referrals from occupational therapists, health professionals, including Moorfields Eye Hospital, and from major disability charities such as the RNIB. Although many other disability organisations offer similar services, U Can Do IT is unique in dealing with all types of disabilities, which also includes increasing numbers of people with Learning Disabilities and Mental Health issues. The organisation is constantly looking to refine the service it offers, and has found that some users only require 5 sessions to achieve their goals. This will be taken into consideration for future projects. It is also looking to provide more support in the use of mobile IT devices such as smartphones, iPads and other "tablet" devices. These new technologies can provide great benefits to some disabled people due to their ease of use and more intuitive nature. They are also available much cheaper than a laptop or PC.

4. Difference made:

The training provided by this grant can have a significant impact on those taking part, greatly increasing their quality of life. For many, it provides a renewed level of independence through the ability to access online services such as shopping and banking, and through the use of specialist software, using technology unassisted. Users also benefit from increased confidence and self-esteem, along with a reduced sense of isolation through being able to keep in touch with friends and relatives via e-mail or Skype. At the highest end of the scale, some clients have been able to re-enter the employment market, start their own business, access further education or training, or explore interests such as music, writing or campaigning. This is vital in instilling an increased sense of purpose for people who may have felt "written off" by mainstream society.

5. Grants Administration:

This project has run largely to plan, with only minor changes taking place to delivery. The grant has just concluded its second year and the Monitoring Form for this will be due at the end of March. The first year's monitoring was rated as "good". The organisation is well-managed with experienced staff so no problems are anticipated.

6. Concluding comments:

This is a valuable project which makes a significant difference to the lives of those taking part. IT can provide a life-line to the outside world for people who have trouble leaving their homes, as well as providing the opportunity to access vital services, information and online "communities". The organisation is well-established and has good management and support structures in place.