Case Study 12
Paths to Progress: Improving Access and Employability

The Lesmahagow Paths to Progress (LPP) project has delivered a new network of woodland paths linking the community of Lesmahagow to the countryside around the village. It also provided a range of woodland habitat enhancement and environmental improvement activities. The works were delivered as an employability project, providing work experience and training opportunities for unemployed local people. Participants are supported to progress from the project into sustainable employment, utilising their newly acquired skills.

Context
Lesmahagow is a rural village of around 3,500 people in South Lanarkshire. Local residents face low employment rates, income levels and life expectancy. By making the countryside around Lesmahagow more accessible and providing employment and training opportunities, LPP is complementary to many local and national strategic priorities for mental and physical health, social inclusion, economic regeneration and sustainable development.

For example, along with the Scottish Government’s ‘Let’s Make Scotland More Active: a strategy for physical activity’ and ‘The Scottish Forestry Strategy: Implementation Plan’, it fits in with the South Lanarkshire Rural Strategy vision to create:
‘A sustainable rural South Lanarkshire which will improve the quality of life for local communities; address problems of rural disadvantage through regeneration; as well as safeguarding and enhancing the area’s rich cultural, historic and natural heritage.’

‘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.

Project Background
The Wise Group, one of the UK’s leading social enterprise organisations, worked with the Lesmahagow Development Trust and
contacts within Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to establish the project.
The Trust has a volunteer membership committed to improving the environment and providing opportunities for local residents, and was inspired by the work of the Wise Group which seeks to lift individuals and their families out of poverty through training and employment activities.

What it Does
The Wise Group worked closely with FCS and the Lesmahagow community throughout the project to identify appropriate environmental improvements and monitor progress of the works. Lesmahagow Development Trust’s leading role in the design and delivery of this project is a practical demonstration of its mission to enhance the assets and environment of Lesmahagow for the benefit of local residents and visitors.
The physical works undertaken were mainly woodland habitat enhancement and environmental improvements. These included brashing, high pruning, line of sight clearance and tree planting.
Project participants were paid a wage throughout their participation on the project. This amounted to over £79,000 in wages earned by the 20 participants plus attendant National Insurance contributions.

This income improves the economic circumstances of those involved and their families, and increases their spending power providing a potential boost to the local economy.
A Wise Group Employment Consultant met weekly with each participant to identify their employment aspirations outwith the LPP project. On completion of the works, participants were supported to progress from the project into sustainable employment, utilising their newly acquired skills.

Key Points
- 20 unemployed people from Lesmahagow and neighbouring communities recruited onto a 26 week long contract of paid employment.
- Participants were provided with vocational training, 20 achieved formal qualifications (including site safety, manual handling and brushwood chipper operation) and so far, one has found a full time job.
- Participants have also benefited from personal development, including enhancement of their inter-personal skills.
- Physical outputs have included 440 metres of footpath creation, 2.6ha of woodland thinned and removal of 100 metres of boundary fencing and 300 fruit trees planted. Also 150 cubic metres of stacked firewood is now available for the local residents to use.
- Local people can access new woodland routes and existing paths brought back into use through removal of windblown trees.
CSGN Support and Learning
LPP has successfully delivered multiple benefits across the economic, environmental and social landscape of Lesmahagow. It has provided profound life changing opportunities to several young people, enabling them to pursue employment. The Integrated Habitat Network modelling exercise undertaken for the CSGN identified the area where project activity took place as a Woodland Priority Enhancement Area (PEA). It also delivered a range of environmental improvement works to make the countryside more accessible, safer and more attractive for the people of Lesmahagow.

Future
The new footpaths built by Paths to Progress provide a physical link from the village to a FCS owned site earmarked for the creation of a community orchard and allotment. Planting for the orchard is underway. The partners are seeking funding to create the community allotment as an employability project entitled ‘Grow a lot Lesmahagow’ with the ambition to start works in the Summer of 2012.

Outcomes

**Improved Employability:** Through training, obtaining qualifications and a team of supportive transition workers, local young people have improved their chances of obtaining employment.

**Better Access:** Lesmahagow residents and visitors to the area can benefit from nearly 750 metres of new or improved woodland paths.

**Improved Physical and Mental Health:** Participants have noted better physical and mental well-being since being in the project. Several have made supportive friendships and increased self-confidence.

**Boost to the Local Economy:** Local retailers and other businesses have benefited from the increased spending power of the waged participants.

“The Paths for Progress project has been excellent because it has enhanced the countryside around the village and at the same time it has provided waged work experience and training for local people.”

Jeff Frew
Lesmahagow Community Council
Location
South Lanarkshire Local Authority and the Lesmahago area where the works were based are shown in the maps below.

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Project Partners
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The Wise Group

What is the CSGN?
The CSGN is a national development within the National Planning Framework which aims to make ‘a significant contribution to Scotland’s sustainable economic development’. It involves public agencies and stakeholders (those with an interest in our work) working together to align their policies, programmes and actions to achieve a common aim. That aim is to change the face of Central Scotland by restoring and improving the rural and urban landscape of the area.

Getting in Touch
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For further information on other case studies please visit: www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org