

## NOW PROJECT WINS NATIONAL TRAINING AWARDS ACOLADE

80 Belfast people with learning difficulties have acquired catering and hospitality skills thanks to an innovative training project.

The programme of catering skills run by NOW received a National Training Award. The award which recognized outstanding achievement and success through training and development was presented at a gala ceremony in Belfast City Hall on Tuesday evening.

NOW is a limited company with charitable status that provides training and employment services for people with learning disabilities in North and West Belfast. This is an area where 16.5 per cent of the working population is disabled – more than double that of other parts of the city.

Maeve Mc Rory, NØW's Director explains the problems encountered in her area: "The learning disabled community is doubly disadvantaged by the nature of their disability and the area in which they live. NOW can break the cycle for people living in some of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland who are furthest removed from the labour market". The funding support from Belfast Local Strategy Partnership has been instrumental in the development of this successful programme and we are absolutely delighted to have the excellent work of our staff and trainees recognised by the National Training Awards tonight"

"NOW launched a Hospitality and Catering NVQ level one course in 2004 and working with one-to-one support, the trainees spent a day in the classroom and one day a week in a coffee shop. They worked through videos and role plays, with visual aids like colour-coded chopping boards, and were coached and mentored for three to six months before starting the NVQ", says Anne Cheevers, Training coordinator with NØW.

The project ran from March 2004 to March 2006 and 80 people were trained – 71 of them gaining accredited qualifications, and others achieved individual units. Apart from the NVQ, which gave them the experience of serving customers and preparing food, they learned essential food hygiene and how to make gourmet coffees.



The NOW Project was funded to the tune of £95,619, by the European Social Fund supported by Belfast Local Strategy Partnership. With additional funding received from £20,000 per annum from N&WBHSST for the operation of the Training Kitchen. Nine trainees are now in paid work – five in catering and four in retail.

“Each trainee has ownership of their NVQ file of which they are extremely proud,” said Anne. “This is often the first time that they have had a personal record they can show off and be proud of.

The project has been exceptionally successful and has meant that 71 people who are identified as being furthest removed from the labour markets and least likely to have any formal qualifications, have gained accredited qualifications recognised by all employees in the hospitality sector. The good work will continue in 2006 -2008 with continued funding support from ESF through the Building Sustainable Prosperity, Measure 2.8 with match funding from N&WBHSST and the Department for Employment and Learning (Disablement Advisory Service).