

What are Community Learning Champions?

Community Learning Champions – or CLCs - are volunteers who become active in their community promoting the value of learning to others – friends, relatives, neighbours, workmates or pure strangers they buttonhole in the street.

A government funded programme in 2009-11 enabled 50 local projects to recruit and train 2000 CLCs who worked with 100,000 people, 70% of them out of work, engaging them in various forms of learning. Films and reports can be viewed at www.communitylearningchampions.org.uk

Who they are

Their effectiveness owes a lot to two commonly shared personal qualities

- they speak from personal experience about the difference learning can make to quality of life or job prospects
- CLCs are recognisably like the people they try to involve in learning, often living in the same community or working in the same place.

This doesn't rule out professionals from playing the CLC role; it's just that, as outsiders, they often lack the credibility and local know-how of most CLCs.

What do they do?

CLCs – who can also be called learning ambassadors, mentors or advocates – play a variety of roles: they can

- signpost people to the learning opportunities that suit their needs
- introduce them to learning providers, sometimes accompanying them to a college
- support and mentor people through a course
- help to set up new learning opportunities, filling gaps in provision
- feedback to learning providers suggestions for improvements made by learners.

To do the job well, CLCs need to be well informed about local learning opportunities and clearly impartial. However, being able to recommend what is good for the 'customer' can be difficult if CLCs work with a body that expects them to recruit to their courses exclusively.

How are they organised?

CLCs are usually volunteers, one of a number working in a local project. This might be run by a community organisation, a local authority, a college or another body. In some cases they are paid expenses, in some they are paid a salary, although usually on a part-time basis. Confusingly, some organisations use the term CLC to refer both to learning champions recruited from the locality and the professionals who are paid to manage them.

What happens to them?

The experience of being a CLC is good for personal confidence, building skills and knowledge valued by a range of employers. Many CLCs go on to salaried jobs in education and other sectors, working as learning mentors, classroom assistants and in community engagement, taking degrees and other qualifications.