Professional Learning Survey and Conference

Tayside and Fife
CLD Professional Learning Alliance

Tayside and Fife CLD Professional Learning Alliance is a professional learning forum for community learning and development workers and volunteers working across Angus, Dundee, Perth and Kinross and Fife.

Our professional learning framework seeks to provide a route map for CLD practitioners across the Tayside and Fife areas that will support them to achieve consistently high standards of professional practice and performance, enabling them to make significant change contribution to the lives of families, individuals and communities.

To inform the refresh of this framework a practitioner survey was conducted in early 2024, which was followed by a professional learning conference. On the 26th June 2024, 48 people from thirteen organisations across Tayside and Fife came together at the Steeple Church in Dundee to network, find out about developments in the CLD sector and to inform the refresh of the Tayside and Fife CLD professional learning framework. This report provides an overview of responses received through both the survey and at the conference.

At the conference we asked people "What is the best professional learning experience you have had?" Leadership training and on the job, peer learning/job shadowing seen as most valuable.

- *Working alongside community activists and learning from them. Learnt more from them than any other colleagues.*
- *It is the same in CLD once you qualify that's when you learn CLD as you come across situations*
- *So much professional learning happens informally. Need to be intentional about PL post COVID.*
- *Going back to study again after 15+ years allowed me to re-evaluate my professional work and ask the questions…. What am I doing this for? Why is this piece of work impactful? Is it addressing need?*
- *A touchstone to the core principles and values, delivered in a way that refreshes their importance to my work*
- *Peer Learning and Shadowing at a local level supported me in becoming more aware of different practices and methods within the team, is and invaluable in delivering to our local communities*
- *I find conversational and experiential learning experiences are ones which challenge my thinking most. And allows me to see things from another perspective. Why I find collaborative practices most valuable*

Pulling together the themes from the survey (across all questions) there is a clear ask for IT training – specifically around office 365. This should sit under the responsibility of organisations rather than with TFPLA for CLD.

SURVEY RESPONSES
What are your current priority learning needs as a CLD practitioner or volunteer?

- M365/IT 19
- Mental Health 19
- Evaluation/data/impact 16
- Community Development/Capacity building 10
- Digital CLD 10
- Professional CLD Training 9
- Practical tools/skills for group work 8
- Governance 7
- Literacy and numeracy 6
- Leadership 5
- Poverty and Inequalities 5
- Operating in political context 4
- CLD values 4
- Reflective/reflexive practice 3
- Community engagement 3
- SQA 2
- ESOL 2
- Family Learning 2
- Substance use 2
- LGBTQi 2
- Working with volunteers 2
- Place-based CLD 1
- Employability 2
- Environment 2

Many staff are asking for learning around supporting people with mental health issues.

Another clear ask was about finding and using data to understand need and demonstrate impact – linked to evaluation. Different ways to evaluate practice and evidence outcomes.

When seen together asks around community development, empowerment, engagement, capacity building seem to be linked.

At the conference there were a few requests for YW/AL/CD specialist training but a stronger request for training relevant to current practice (non-siloed):

- UNHRC
- Building resilience within communities
- Digital CLD
- Community Engagement skills
- Community Led Approaches
- Data
- Youth Work
- Community Development
- Literacy

Also, a request to reflect on our values/competences and go back to CLD basics.

Comments from the survey and in-person event:

- *Change happening so quickly. Things are different. Political context, social context is different. Helping people to respond to communities*
- *Community engagement skills, staff scared to get out and engage. People too comfortable online*
- *PDA Youth Work was going to be rolled out?*
- *Cost of living, affordable holiday provision for families, health and wellbeing support , access to outdoor green spaces within local communities*
- *Capacity building - I do not feel confident in this however I learn and retain information more during practical experience so I imagine I will learn best whilst actually involved in supporting groups/organisations with this. I also feel like I could be more creative around evaluating and evidencing practice. I do not feel as confident as I would like to be around presenting, creating presentations etc although this is not only digital skills but also confidence in doing this - again I think this just needs some practice.*

- *Also- how to truly empower people in a cost-of-living crisis and in the face of growing inequalities- how to keep hope and value end celebrate even our small wins better*
- *Understanding data, sites aren't self-explanatory and stats not my strong point.*
- *Digital skills as we have an aging population who have not been exposed to information technology and this need is in high demand.*
- *Learning which is not for career competency but where the values are inherent in how we act as people who are community workers during our working lives and beyond*
- *Themed on the competences*
- *Meaningful courses for us to advance and be more professional/knowledgeable in our position*
- *Some learning on partnership and collaborative working. There does not seem to be much on the CLD Standards Council website on this.*
- *CLD support for staff moving roles within organisations*

At our conference there was a clear request for thought to be given to the accredited pathway (SVQ, PDA, professional qualification). Specifically
- Routes for community activists and volunteers
- Opportunities for staff to progress and develop

But also, to provide in-person networking and learning events and opportunities for practice sharing across the 4 areas. Most people were requesting in person events, although some still asked for online sessions. Request for thematic discussions and events, but not siloed to AL, YW or CD staff.

Comments from the survey and in-person event:

- *I don't learn from a classroom or being talked at. The real learning is in the doing*
- *Opportunities that are relevant and well-focused. That meet needs identified through a process of consultation with CLD workers and not foisted upon us.*
- *Bringing practitioner together around themes and issues. Not necessarily siloed to YW, AL, com dev etc.*
- *As I work part-time, online flexible learning modules suit me better than face to face training (due to time constraints etc).*

Practitioners are very keen to be more involved through practice sharing and networking. Discussion about newsletters or having an online space to do this and make connections. Practitioners are keen to lead network groups and feeling that the voluntary sector should be more involved.

- *Practitioners have to put in as much to the network as they get from it.*
- *In order for it to be successful - people have to contribute with ideas/resources/good practice etc*
- *Managers need to give permission & encourage staff to attend events like today*
- *Practitioner Voices - case studies, podcasts, VLOGs, visits, workshops etc. all about sharing practice and building knowledge.*