

## Skillbuilders Artisan Training Support

**Town:** Ludlow  
**County:** Shropshire  
**Population:** 10,000



Skills Taster Carousel for school children at the Sept 2005 food festival with young chefs demonstrating

### **Objectives**

#### Summary

Skillbuilders is an innovative artisan skill promotion programme. It is led by a group of volunteers from Ludlow who registered it as a Community Interest Company in 2007 and it is now expanding to other towns in the UK. In Ludlow, Skillbuilders is mainly focused on the artisans in the food businesses, although it started with furniture making and there is now a range of other artisan craft areas involved.

Central to the concept is the link with festivals and the encouragement of experienced artisans and their apprentices to promote their skills with younger people, the potential artisans of the future. However, the delivery of after school practical learning activities for 14-16 year olds has also become a key element. Activities promote awareness of the artisan business sector and the associated employment opportunities and also support the learning of young apprentices.

### **What is it about?**

#### Background

Ludlow is an attractive medieval market town in Shropshire with a reputation for good food, including several restaurants with Michelin star chefs. In recent years Ludlow has developed and promoted its food economy. It now has an established food festival in September.

Skillbuilders was created in 2001 out of desire to offer young people in and around Ludlow, an opportunity to understand and experience practical craft and artisan skills. Individual artisans demonstrated a desire to work with young people, through the education system, giving up their time to encourage them to consider skilled trade.

As in many market towns and rural areas, many young people move away after finishing school. Skillbuilders started as an attempt to encourage young people to consider joining artisan professions locally.

### Concept

- 1 **Peer teaching.** Linking artisan (trade or practical skill) based businesses to 14-16 year olds still in education. Businesses offering after school club sessions which provide insight into their trade. Using young artisans who relate well to the 14-16 year old group to deliver these activities. The artisan time is provided on a voluntary basis, but effort is made to raise funds to pay for materials required for the activities. In the case of food sector activities, these costs might be cooking ingredients for a baker to lead a baking class or a quantity of fish for a chef to work with the pupils on preparation of fish.
- 2 **Offering apprentice artisans external exposure to enrich their learning experience.** Supporting apprentices in their work place with education visits, encouraging them to gain new skills though themselves delivering training sessions to those still at school and setting up exchanges with other apprentices in other towns (where their businesses are not in direct competition). This process enriches their work based learning experience and is personally rewarding. It is also expected to encourage their own involvement in community led initiatives as they rise up their professions.
- 3 **Using festivals and competitions** to provide a focus for the artisan training promotion activities
- 4 **Supporting Business Cluster Development.** Focusing on sectors that have active players and relate to the local economy and town branding and using the approach to promote cross community links, including between and amongst businesses and schools.
- 5 **Rewarding the involvement of participants in practical ways.** Apprentice chefs have not only been able to take part in competitions, but have been taken on study visits to Buckingham Palace, Clarence House and the Houses of Parliament. Demonstrating their skills in the after school clubs has also proved an empowering experience for the young people involved.
- 6 **Encouraging artisans to give up their time to do what they do best** and demonstrate their practical skills and making it enjoyable. They are not asked to attend committee meetings and undertake administration.

### **What are the results?**

On-going activities for food sector support in Ludlow:

- It provides "After School Clubs" for 14-16 year olds. Currently Skillbuilders organises a 13 week programme where local 'experts' introduce young people to a variety of cooking techniques; a Food Hygiene Certificate is also offered.
- It takes a lead on the Education Day at the annual Ludlow Food Festival where local colleges offer demonstrations and invite young people to participate.
- It organises the Young Chefs Competition which attracts entrants from across Shropshire.

- And much more..

### The impact

- Recruitment of more food artisans apprentices, helping to promote it as a career option
- Increase in morale among young apprentices involved and also developed their skills as ambassadors for their profession and Ludlow.
- Reinforcement of the Ludlow food brand locally, increasing the awareness at community level. It has done this by raising the food profile locally, through links into local schools and the wider community. The food festival demonstrations and competitions are a key part of this process, since they not only directly involve a large number of people, but also provide an opportunity for press coverage.  
The capturing of experienced artisan skills for training purposes
- Increased networking between experienced artisans involved in the food sector, facilitating improved linkages between these businesses, so adding value to an already strong food business cluster.
- Export of the Skillbuilders concept to other market towns.

### **What are the challenges?**

Skillbuilders is a voluntarily run organisation and as such depends on the goodwill and commitment of the key individuals involved. Given the way it operates, by drawing in the experienced artisans and food sector leaders to offer their services on a voluntary basis, their ability to make personal connections is very important.

### Transferability

Ludlow is a market town with a strong food based economy. In other towns this principle could be developed around apprentice artisan support linked to other business sectors which are locally important.

### **Funding Profile**

For its core activities, Skillbuilders depends heavily on the voluntary donation of time by community members, particularly those with artisan skills. However, they have also benefited from some small grants and other awards which have helped to raise their profile and confidence over the years. Skillbuilders has recently registered as a community interest company or CIC, a not for profit company.

Going forward they believe that the cross region and cross EU approach is important, as is the emerging government 14-19 agenda. They hope to have the capability to go for Learning and Skills Council (LSC) contracts in the future.

For more information on the Ludlow Skillbuilders' story click here <http://www.skillbuilders.org.uk/> or contact Graeme Perks via [graeme@skillbuilders.org.uk](mailto:graeme@skillbuilders.org.uk)

Action for Market Towns case study by Camilla Govan, with contributions from Mark Firth of Yorkshire Forward and Graham Perks of Skillbuilders