
Final Report

Careerforce Learning Representatives: Encouraging learning at work

Prepared for

Careerforce and Ako Aotearoa

Anne Alkema and Heather McDonald

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Learning Reps and their managers who took part in this evaluation, along with the national organisation who made it all possible.

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Key Point Summary

Careerforce, working alongside the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU), wished to develop new and sustainable models of professional development and support for Learning Representatives (Learning Reps) in the health and community sector. One of the models was evaluated in eight aged-care facilities and is reported on here. This was a half-day training programme, with follow-up support for Learning Reps, developed and delivered by Careerforce.

The expectations of the Learning Reps for their training programme were met. They enjoyed the opportunity for the additional training, meeting the other reps, sharing and listening to others stories and the hands on practical activities that were included in the sessions. Above all they felt “refreshed”, with Learning Reps noting the following knowledge was refreshed for them:

- Approaches to learning
- Different ways to talk to people and encourage them to get into training
- How to identify someone who might have learning issues
- How to go on the internet and find Careerforce qualifications.

Six of the eight Learning Reps were able to give examples of what they were doing differently after the training, most commonly this was being more active in encouraging people to start industry training. Overall Learning Reps were also doing more after the training, that is they had more interactions with co-workers, and they tended to rate their performance in their role higher. Managers didn't notice any changes in the way the Learning Reps were working although this may reflect their lack of knowledge about the training happening and the lack of time to catch up about it with Reps.

Responsibility for how Learning Reps operate at each facility is up to the managers. There were a number of factors the Learning Reps thought helped them to perform their role. These included:

- a. Support from management and the need for Learning Reps to be actively promoted in the workplace by managers, training co-ordinators or assessors.
- b. The need for managers to actively promote industry qualifications so Learning Reps can then support this.
- c. Knowing about workplace policies and procedures and being enabled through their workplace role.
- d. Time and affordance - this means the Learning Reps being provided with time to support co-workers and having the opportunity within work time to work alongside them or sit with them and support them with their training books.
- e. Good relationships and communication with the assessor so they can stay in touch with where people are at with qualification completion.

- f. Learning Reps thought it helped when their co-workers were interested in industry training.
- g. Learning Reps also appreciated the opportunity to work with each other. Having two Learning Reps in a facility seems to be beneficial as shift work means co-workers who do not share the same shift as the Learning Reps are likely to have less opportunity to access a Learning Rep.

The work of the Learning Rep sits comfortably within the other supports Careerforce provides to improve outcomes for their trainees. This support is a beneficial element in an integrated approach, particularly for learners at lower levels on the qualifications framework who may be reluctant and/or struggle. The main role seen for the union in supporting Learning Reps was in supporting the Learning Reps and encouraging workers to undertake training.

The evidence gathered before and after the training programme indicates the work of the Learning Reps does make a difference to their co-workers and subsequently the organisation: they encourage trainees to start qualifications, help to keep them on track while they are undergoing training and support them to complete workbooks. As workers progress in their training, they increase their knowledge and competence and clients benefit.

Having the opportunity to use new skills and to access further career development and promotion are also important to ensuring organisations gain the full impact from Learning Reps who encourage learning amongst their staff.

Introduction

Background

Careerforce, working alongside the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU), wished to develop new and sustainable models of professional development and support for Learning Representatives (Learning Reps) in the health and community sector. One of the models was a half-day training programme with follow-up support for Learning Reps developed and delivered by Careerforce. This training aimed to renew and refresh Learning Reps' knowledge and skills so they would be better placed to support co-workers, particularly in relation to identifying the co-workers' learning needs and assisting them to complete programmes of learning. The programme also aimed to develop a community of practice so sustainable processes and systems would be in place to support the work of Learning Reps in the future.

Careerforce delivered this new model to Learning Reps in eight aged-care facilities overseen through one national organisation where Learning Reps operate. At the same time Careerforce surveyed Learning Reps in another national organisation and provided supporting resources for them.

Understanding how the programme works and what happens as a result of it is important for informing the future work and development of the Learning Reps programme within Careerforce and other industry training sectors. Therefore

Ako Aotearoa supported this evaluation because of their interest in workplace learning and in how the findings could be applied in other organisations and industries that might benefit from establishing Learning Reps or similar models of peer support for trainees.

Careerforce, with funding from Ako Aotearoa, commissioned Heathrose Research to carry out a process evaluation of the intervention. This evaluation took place between September 2013 and February 2014.

Careerforce

Careerforce is New Zealand's health and community support services Industry Training Organisation. Careerforce works with employers nationwide to create and implement customised New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) recognised training programmes.

These qualifications are offered in health, mental health, aged support, disability, social services, youth work, cleaning and pest management industries. They are designed specifically for trainees who are working or volunteering in health, aged support, mental health, disability, social services, youth work, cleaning and urban pest management¹.

Learning Reps

Learning Reps were established in New Zealand by the NZCTU in 2004 with training starting in 2005. Up until 2012 the Tertiary Education Commission funded the NZCTU to deliver training programmes for the Learning Reps. The training was, "based around the role of Learning Reps as employees who act as advocates and guides in industry training and workplace-based literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) programmes", (Heathrose Research, 2011, p. 4). The NZCTU trained around 670 workers over the eight years they ran the training programme (2008-2013).

The NZCTU Learning Reps' training consisted of a two-day workshop, with a half or full day follow-up workshop. The training covered, "perceptions of learning, the role of the Learning Rep, overcoming barriers to learning, identifying learning opportunities, principles of adult learning, literacy and numeracy, and workplace relationships" (ibid, p. 15). Learning Reps had the opportunity to complete three level 3 unit standards in the Employment Relations domain².

Learning Reps support the upskilling of workers by³:

- helping workers identify their learning goals and potential
- ensuring workers have access to quality training programmes

¹ Taken from: <http://www.careerforce.org.nz>

² 23023: Strategies required for the role of a Learning Representative; 23024: How workplace learning operates in New Zealand and the role of unions in the process; 23025: Demonstrate knowledge of the purpose and role of a Learning Representative. Up to 250 Learning Reps completed at least two of the unit standards

³ NZCTU. (n.d.). *Learning reps: Workers helping workers learn*
<http://learningreps.org.nz/files/Final.LRep%20Pamphlet.14%20Oct%2009.pdf>

- raising workplace awareness of literacy and numeracy issues
- helping overcome barriers to learning
- encouraging workers into training to improve their skills
- supporting workers to complete qualifications
- being advocates who help build lifelong learning cultures in their workplaces.

Heathrose Research evaluated the Learning Reps programme in 2011. The evaluation found a number of benefits for workers and workplaces where Learning Reps operated. These included:

- being able to raise the awareness of learning opportunities for fellow workers, where management was supportive of this
- having a positive impact on the attitudes of workers who'd had negative experiences of learning in the school system
- encouraging these workers back into learning resulted in improved literacy and numeracy skills and there was evidence of faster completion of study. While there are likely to be a number of factors that contributed to this, the managers thought Learning Reps were a key contributor.

This evaluation also found that it took time for the NZCTU to encourage workplaces to get Learning Reps underway and time for the Learning Reps to be able to undertake the role fully and effectively. Finally the report noted,

“We also note that there may be value in workplaces negotiating and developing a programme that is customised and responds to each local situation. It was common for programmes to have a big impact following their introduction, but they need to participate in ongoing development and renewal for momentum to be maintained”

(Heathrose Research, 2011, p. 5).

The Careerforce Training Programme

In October 2013 Careerforce ran a half-day training session in the lower North Island for 10 Learning Reps. They were working in eight residential aged-care facilities who come under the agency of a national organisation. Two Learning Reps interviewed before the programme did not attend, and two new Learning Reps (not previously trained) attended the training.

The Careerforce programme co-ordinator described the training as a refresher. It consisted of information and practical activities including:

- sharing learning journeys
 - Identifying enablers to learning success in Learning Reps' own stories
 - Identifying barriers to learning and ways to overcome them in Learning Reps' stories
- background on Learning Reps in the organisation

- Review (for existing reps) and information (for new reps) of the history of the Learning Rep Programme (LRP) in the parent organisation
 - Build understanding of the changes to the LRP, the reasons for the evaluation of the programme, and the new role that Careerforce hopes to have in the future.
- understanding the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) and where Careerforce's qualifications fit
 - the structure of the NZQF in terms of categories of learning and qualification levels.
 - Careerforce's suite of qualifications in Community Care only (not including Social Services or Cleaning)
 - the assessment process in workplace learning and how LRs can support the assessment process
 - understanding adult literacy issues along with an example of workplace provision in a care facility
 - overview of adult literacy and numeracy levels/issues in New Zealand, how literacy provision works in New Zealand, and the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool
 - resources to support the work of Learning Reps.

It also included an outline of the types of activities Learning Reps can do to support training for qualifications and the sorts of dispositions that help the learning process. This can be found in Appendix One.

By the time of the post-programme interviews the Learning Reps had also been sent two newsletters and activities they could use with co-workers to engage them more with reading and the content knowledge of their jobs.

The Evaluation Approach

As the Careerforce model was a new initiative a process evaluation was conducted. This means looking at *how* the programme happens in addition to examining the outputs and immediate / short term outcomes⁴.

The evaluation aimed to gather evidence about:

1. The new knowledge and skills that Learning Reps develop.
2. How Learning Reps transfer/use their new knowledge with their co-workers.

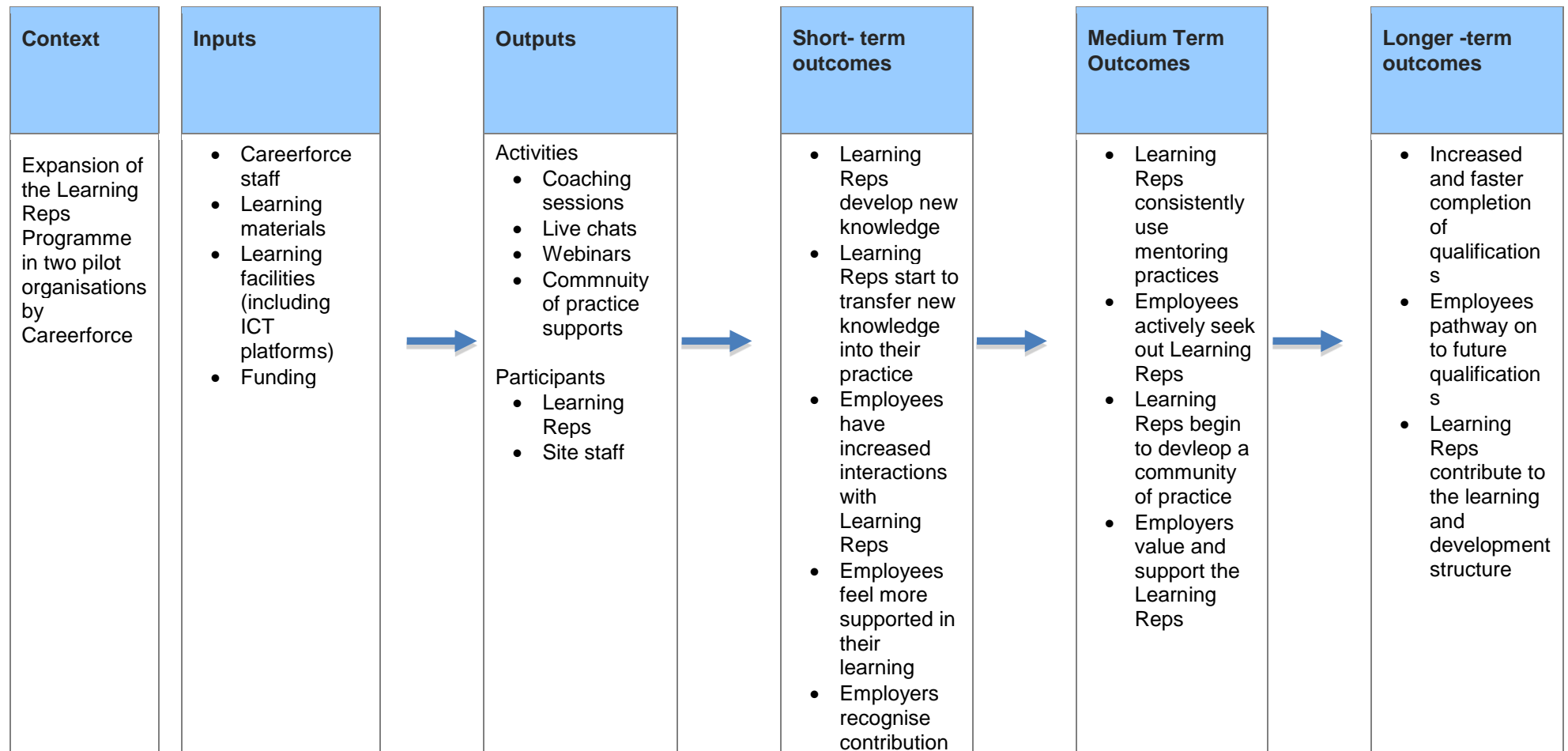
⁴ Quinn Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: 3rd edition*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oak. London.

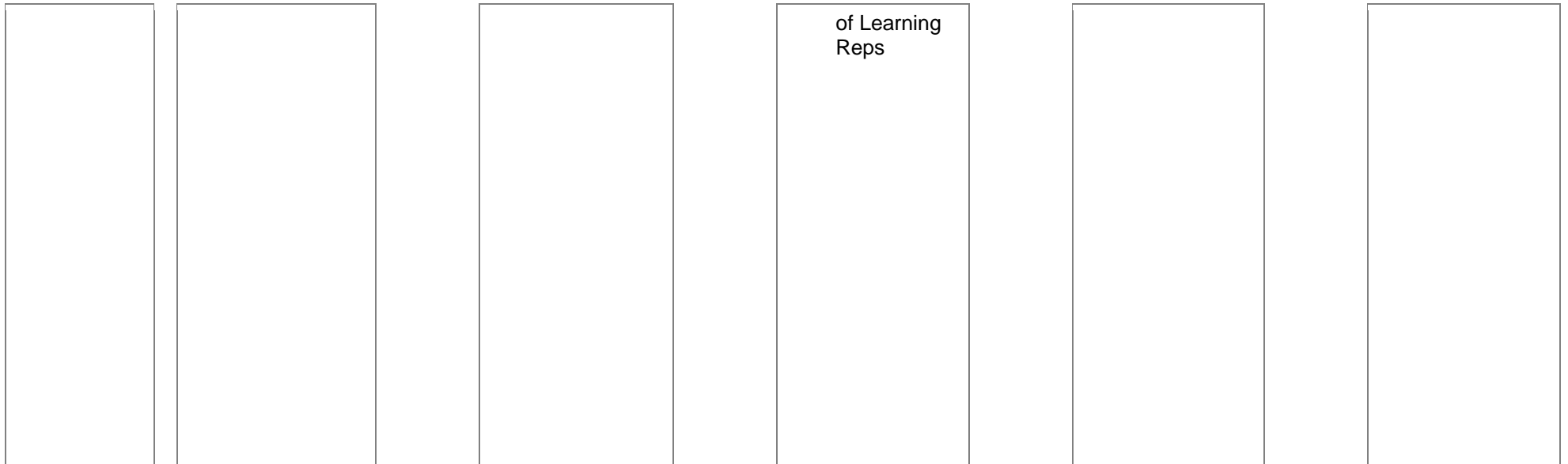
3. How workplace (processes and systems) supported Learning Reps in their learning and work.
4. How Careerforce connects with / supports the Learning Reps.
5. The impact (benefits) the Learning Reps' peer support/mentoring has on outcomes for employees and their organisation.
6. What helps and hinders the Learning Reps in their peer support/mentoring role.

The evaluation process started with the development of a programme logic outlining the context; inputs; outputs; and short, medium and longer-term outcomes. This provided a clear articulation of the model at the outset.

Figure One: Programme Logic

Purpose: To develop a model of professional development and support for Learning Reps in the health and community sector





Influences: Employers value learning and have a learning and development pathway; Learning Reps have time and opportunity to learn and practise their new skills; Employees have time and opportunity to learn and practise new skills

This was followed by a literature scan⁵ to update the literature review undertaken by Heathrose Research for the 2011 evaluation of the Learning Reps programme for the NZCTU. The scan focused on: the UK union learning representatives and the Union Learning Fund; peer mentoring for apprentices in the workplace; and literacy and numeracy support in the workplace.

In order to find out the extent to which the training programme made a difference to the ways Learning Reps worked, qualitative data were collected pre- and post-programme in structured interviews:

1. In September 2013 pre-programme interviews with:
 - a. 10 Learning Reps
 - b. seven aged-care facilities' managers or training co-ordinators
 - c. the Careerforce programme co-ordinator

2. In February 2014 post-programme interviews with:
 - a. eight Learning Reps
 - b. five aged-care facilities managers or training co-ordinators
 - c. the Careerforce programme co-ordinator
 - d. a manager of the national aged care organisation
 - e. a Careerforce manager

3. Data were also collected from:
 - a. Learning Reps training materials and resources
 - b. Careerforce documentation
 - c. Two Learning Rep logs
 - d. A survey of Learning Reps in another national organisation conducted by Careerforce (N=24)

While the numbers of people involved with the evaluation were small, collecting data in two different time periods, in a number of facilities and from a number of people, in conjunction with reference to the literature gives credibility to the evaluation results.

Evaluation Findings

What Learning Reps do

The literature shows Learning Reps primarily work as encouragers and advocates for fellow-workers. Cassell and Lee (2012) describe Learning Reps as change agents for individual learners, whereby they encourage co-workers to learn and support them through the process. Heathrose (2011) found Learning Reps acted as advocates and guides for co-workers.

The surveyed Learning Reps (n=23) reported being asked by co-workers about a number of topics, with the most common being:

⁵ Alkema, A. (2013). *The role of Learning Reps and mentoring in engaging employees in workplace training*. Wellington: Ako Aotearoa.
<http://ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-9492/literature-scan-learning-representatives.pdf>

- a. Training events and timetables (15)
- b. Induction training (9)
- c. Technology training in the workplace (6)
- d. Issues with training and assessment (6)

Ten Learning Reps were interviewed before they undertook the Careerforce training programme. They worked in eight different care facilities in the lower North Island as care assistants (7) and enrolled nurses (3). All but one of them actively worked as Learning Reps and had done this since their initial training around two years before. Eight Learning Reps⁶ were interviewed after the training programme, six care assistants (one of whom had not been interviewed before the programme) and two enrolled nurses.

The Learning Reps' role varied and there was a continuum of practice ranging from those who had limited opportunity to support co-workers, through to those who were actively involved in induction and in-house training. For the most part, the activities of the Learning Reps takes place in work time with most of this happening during shift time. Only one was given time off the floor to conduct their Learning Rep work. This was also the case in the Careerforce survey where 18 out of the 24 respondents said they connected with co-workers while they were on the job. Their activities were seen as both formal and informal and included:

- a. Approaching people new to staff to see if they are interested in qualifications
- b. Supporting co-workers as they work through Careerforce qualifications at foundation and competency levels
- c. Following people up to make sure they are staying on track with their qualifications
- d. Delivering induction/orientation and in-house training
- e. Supporting trainees through literacy and numeracy training (pre-qualification)
- f. Liaising with assessors to enable them to keep track of qualification progress
- g. Practical support when working alongside co-workers

The Learning Reps observe the candidates [trainees] and are also able to talk with them and give them guidance. This happens on the floor in work time. One of the Learning Reps also invites people to her home for fish and chips and they work through books. They see this as being social rather than work.

[X] supports people through the learning and development process. For example, if talking to a healthcare assistant [X] encourages them to enrol. She also goes to the monthly training sessions with a third party provider who comes in and runs a class.

⁶ One Learning Rep had left her workplace and another was not able to attend the training day.

I gather staff together and do one Careerforce book at a time. If we get stuck we ask the RNs. They are very helpful. ... The keen ones come and ask me and I will help them, but it's hard to find time. We have to do it out of work time. I tell the new ones, including volunteers that Careerforce is good learning. Keeps us changing. ... I keep talking about it as they need to know that they will need Level Two now as work wants everyone to train.

The girls ask me to help with the books. The information is hard for them to understand. I sit down with them, read through it with them so they understand. English is difficult for many.

The point of difference between the research findings and the findings in this evaluation is that the Learning Reps in this evaluation took a more 'hands-on' role in mentoring and supporting trainees with their learning. That is, they went further than working as encouragers and advocates for co-workers.

Developing new knowledge and skills

At the time of the pre-programme interviews the Learning Reps did not know what the content of the learning programme was going to be, so were not able to be precise about the new knowledge and skills they hoped to develop. However their varied aspirations for the programme included that it would:

- act as a refresher or build on their previous Learning Rep training
- provide them with more knowledge and skills about how to support co-workers who might want to give up on qualifications or on how to get people to listen to them about qualifications
- provide them with more information about the Careerforce qualifications and the expectations
- provide them with information about where to refer co-workers who needed additional support with literacy or language
- act as a way of connecting them to other Learning Reps so that they can develop a support network.

The Learning Reps thought the new knowledge and skills would help them perform their Learning Rep role better as well as keep them motivated. In addition to the programme there were a number of things they thought would help them to achieve this, including, continued support from management, in-work time to support / talk to people, and having people in other roles at their workplace know about the Learning Rep training. The formation of a network of support between the Learning Reps was also seen as being important.

Their managers had similar aspirations in that they hoped the course would be a refresher to both acknowledge the Learning Reps were on the right track and to give them some new or alternative ways of working – for example how to approach people, how to give people with literacy needs more support. One manager also

thought it would provide an opportunity for them to network and see what others are doing. As with the Learning Reps themselves the managers thought time and networking would help them use their new knowledge and skills.

Data from the post-programme interviews show the expectations of the Learning Reps had been met. They enjoyed the opportunity for this training, meeting the other reps, sharing and listening to others' stories, and the hands-on, practical activities that were included in the sessions. Above all they felt "refreshed".

Meeting others, not feeling so by yourself - listening to their stories. It inspired you - you lose it otherwise.

Getting feedback from other Learning Reps on what's worked for them. Ideas from [programme co-ordinator] for how to motivate people to learn.

As might have been expected four of the previously trained Learning Reps felt they had not learnt anything new. The new things learnt by the other four were information about funding, how to approach people and the practical reading activities made one of the Reps think about her own approach to reading and the need to read things properly rather than just skimming through them.

How to approach people. What style works for them is important. I will try my way and then get them to show me there's and we figure it out together.

In terms of what was specifically refreshed the Learning Reps said:

- a. Different ways of learning
- b. Different ways to talk to people and encourage them to get into training
- c. How to identify someone who might have learning issues
- d. How to go on the internet and find Careerforce qualifications

Learning styles - now I understand why it might be harder for some. It made me think about my own style. Education is not important or first in my life.

The Learning Rep who had not had previous training commented while the training was good, on its own it was not enough to allow her to operate fully as a Learning Rep. She felt she needed to know more at a practical level about how to encourage others with their learning.

In terms of further training for Learning Reps all but one thought there was a need for more. Two suggestions for what could be included are:

- More time to share with others practical ways to motivate and encourage others to take up industry qualifications
- How to help others with time pressures and how to fit training in around work and families

Using new knowledge with their co-workers

Putting new / refreshed learning into practice is a key indicator of the extent to which a training programme has worked. When asked about what they were doing differently six Learning Reps were able to give examples of what they were doing, with the most common response being that they were more active in encouraging people to start training and were using the practical activities that were provided. There was a definite appreciation of the latter as these are the types of things the Learning Reps were not able to develop on their own.

One Learning Rep, who before the training was only working with one trainee, said she was trying to encourage more people into training as the course had motivated her. She has put her picture back up on the notice board as the Learning Rep and as a result has been approached by a potential trainee.

I have someone starting Level 3. I had a meeting with her as she can't motivate herself ... I'm hoping to be able to do more of this and get more onto training. I'm also continuing to work with the other lass who is struggling.

Others said:

I used the quiz and puzzles from [programme co-ordinator]. Put them out on the table. A couple did them. Had some chocolate for a prize and two days later gave them the answers. Got feedback they enjoyed it. Put it out when they were writing up their notes in the staff room. I felt I was doing something useful and explained answers as part of the caregiving role. Will try again if I get more puzzles etc. It made it fun.

I've already talked to three people about training. I've used the resources. I didn't use the first one [directly] as it was sent at Christmas time. I put it in the open for people to fill in - might be better to hand it to people doing papers personally or to new ones coming in.

I approached some afternoon staff and asked if they would like to do the course. Told them that [the employer] would support them, it is free. Education is a good help. It might help you to get ahead.

The Learning Rep who made the last comment above thinks that overall she is now talking about education more often. She has also approached the manager and asked to use the computer to look up Careerforce qualifications so she could provide information to a co-worker. Another Learning Rep commented she had been approached by more staff since the training, but did not put this down to the training.

Not really from the training but lots of new staff are coming to me to ask questions about orientation books. They are informed about the Learning Rep and we can sign some things off like hand washing. Have had quite a few orienting. ...I'm doing level 3 myself ... so I can help others better. Have asked trainees if they want a group.

Before the training programme the Learning Reps felt they knew what they were doing was working when:

- a. their co-workers felt supported
- b. they could see co-workers were enthusiastic about getting started and the sense of satisfaction they got from working through and completing booklets
- c. they get feedback that co-workers are moving on to the next booklet
- d. co-workers come back for more help and are willing to keep asking questions
- e. they have a continuing relationship with the co-workers
- f. they see change in people

Seeing them pass, finishing their books, satisfaction on their faces, seeing the results. They can see how it's helping them in their jobs.

After the programme the Learning Reps thought their co-workers probably wouldn't have noticed much, if any, difference with what they were doing as a result of the training. However, in saying that, one commented that one of the trainees was now less resistant to pre-qualification training, another commented she was now trying to listen more to a trainee who had been struggling with her industry training and another commented that her co-workers would notice she was talking more about her Learning Rep role.

The managers/training co-ordinators knew very little about the Learning Rep training and apart from one, had only talked about it in passing with the Learning Reps. This person had noticed:

The Learning Reps are more confident after training. They've got a spring in their step. This comes from talking with others doing similar work and the sense that we are doing things ok here.

As part of the evaluation the Learning Reps were asked to keep a log of the interactions with other staff, i.e. what they talked to a co-worker about and what happened as a result. The programme co-ordinator gave instructions for the use of the log as part of the training and was of the view the Learning Reps were hesitant to use the log because they thought they wouldn't have anything to write.

Three of the Learning Reps kept the log, with the others saying they either didn't know about it and two expressing concern about the need to keep actions at the informal level. However these two think in future there is merit in keeping an information log about issues brought to their attention so they can be addressed more systematically. One of the Learning Reps said keeping the log had made her more aware that she was talking to people about training. Examples written in the logs supported what the Learning Reps had said their tasks were before the programme started. For example:

a. Talked to another worker:

There are not study groups during working hours, everyone doing different shift

Resulted in:

The trainee needing to work in their own time at home and bring their workbook to [me] to clarify any questions they are having problems with.

b. Talked to another worker:

Went around the home to encourage staff to attend [X] training

Resulted in:

We had workers attend that had not read the notices for in-service [training].

Overall there was the sense Learning Reps were doing more. While none of them thought the training had made them feel more comfortable in the role or that they were doing things better there were some changes in the ratings (1-7 scale with 1 = low, 7 = high) they gave themselves as Learning Reps.

- Four rated themselves more highly as they thought they were now doing more and communicating more about qualifications
- One rated herself the same
- Two rated themselves lower than they did before the training programme: one said this was because she now knows the amount others are doing in comparison to her. However, she still rated herself the same in terms of how she was operating; the other because there had been a change in the workplace and she didn't feel as involved as she had previously.

The biggest change came from one Learning Rep who before the training programme had rated herself as a four-five as she thought she was "cruising a bit" and after the training rated herself at a seven.

None of the managers / training co-ordinators had noticed any change in the way the Learning Reps were working and rated them the same as they had before the programme, which was at the higher end of the one-to-seven scale. A contributor to this is likely to have been the fact the managers did not know about the training and in the busy operational environment of the facilities had not had time to catch up about it. They would, however, like to know about future training.

While the Learning Reps had enjoyed the opportunity to meet with others, the idea of a community of practice has not eventuated. The Facebook page has not been used and Learning Reps have not communicated electronically with the programme co-ordinator or with each other. This is in spite of a newsletter being sent out. However, one of the Learning Reps said she would like to keep in touch with Learning Reps at another facility and thought it was her responsibility to do this.

Workplace processes and systems to support the Learning Reps role

Responsibility for how Learning Reps operate at each facility is up to the individual facility managers. There were a number of factors the Learning Reps thought helped them to perform their role. These included the support of managers, knowledge about policies and procedures, time to perform the role, co-workers who were interested in learning and having more than one Learning Rep at a facility.

Management support of Learning Reps was the most cited factor.

Knowing I have management support to carry out the role –for example I'm able to be paid if I'm coming in out of work time.

Management is supportive - but we have to make appointments with them to get this support. No time available during shifts. Can stop and talk to people, but can't sit down with them. Would need to make time outside of work.

The parent body of the care facilities also commented on the importance of managers.

The manager is the key person. It is hard when you don't have the manager on board ... Some managers are passionate, then there are others who don't want to give it any attention and Learning Reps get nothing or they don't have one.

Learning Reps also need to be actively promoted in the workplace by either managers or assessors. In some cases the Learning Reps did this themselves, for example by introducing themselves during orientation or having their photo on the notice board. Another commented that it would be helpful if she had a badge. This is seen as a way of 'legitimising' the role of Learning Rep in the training process.

Managers also need to actively promote qualifications and then Learning Reps can support them in this.

Managers need to remind staff that they need the qualifications. Most would do their level 2 and 3 if this happened as they would know why they need it from managers as well. I need [the organisation] to support me to help the girls through their workbooks - time mostly.

If there was an expectation that people would undergo training the role would develop naturally.

As new people start management need to say you have to do study. It's got to come from the top. It's not happening at this stage. It would help the Learning Rep role if this happened.

Knowing about workplace policies and procedures and being enabled through their workplace roles meant Learning Reps had the opportunity to engage with more of their co-workers than they would have if they just worked 'on the floor'. For example one of the Learning Reps was an enrolled nurse and the Health and Safety officer and this gave her more contact with more staff. There were also examples of

Learning Reps being involved with orientation, which means they have the opportunity to engage with all new staff.

Time and affordance were also seen as important. This means the Learning Reps being provided with time to support co-workers and having the opportunity within work time to work alongside them or to sit with them and support them through their books.

People see us on the shift and then try and arrange a time, usually when we're both off or whatever works. It is nicer to find a time to sit down where we have privacy. It isn't a bind (finding time) - just annoying.

Can approach management if someone is struggling and they will arrange time in shift time to work with them. It is a short time but it helps a lot. It is usually around policies and procedures. They are intimidating - in two big folders - could be made simpler.

Good relationships and communication with the assessors were also seen as important. This helped Learning Reps stay in touch with where people are at with qualification completion. One of the Learning Reps cited an example of working with an assessor who kept an updated list of where trainees were up to with their qualifications, and then the Learning Rep would check in with these trainees. Learning Reps also thought it helped when their co-workers were interested in training.

... Sometimes the trainee is at fault, leave it to the last two-three days before they need to have a book done. They need to organise themselves a bit better.

Finally Learning Reps thought it was useful to be able to work closely together to support co-workers. Having two Learning Reps in a facility seemed to be beneficial as it allowed them to collectively access workers across different shifts.

Between Learning Reps we are quite tight ... catch up on how each other is going.

Before the training programme there were mixed responses to rating how well organisations allowed Learning Reps to work. On a one-seven scale (1= low, 7 = high), three of the Learning Reps rated their organisations at a seven, four rated them between five-six, and one gave a lower rating to their organisation than they gave themselves. The managers gave lower ratings to their organisations than the Learning Reps did.

Seven - allow me to do what I want to do. Want the best for staff and staff to be educated.

Two-three. [They] allocate an hour but I can't use it - too busy with residents. It would help if there was a fixed time.

After the training programme two Learning Reps rated the facility more highly.

Six - they are backing us more, understand it is beneficial to them and their staff. We do more of the orientation now. I hate people watching us but it is a compliment.

Four of the Learning Reps rated their facility around the same as they had before the programme. Their rationale for this was because their managers / co-ordinators were supportive of the work and provided opportunities for them to operate as Learning Reps.

I certainly get opportunities. We have training coming up and [manager] makes sure I'm rostered off so I can make the most of it. I document who comes, what questions staff are asking and then follow up with people.

One Learning Rep rated the facility lower because of the lack of encouragement given to workers to get qualifications.

Three - they are not encouraging people even to level two [qualifications] let alone beyond that. They need to be encouraging ladies to get better qualifications.

There was no change to how the managers / training co-ordinators saw their supporting role.

The role of the Learning Reps within Careerforce

The work of the Learning Reps previously sat with the NZCTU, but with the loss of funding support the work has been in abeyance. Careerforce sees a place for peer mentors to support co-workers through qualifications. As a Careerforce manager commented,

Peer support is the glue ... our assessors are often RNs or unit managers and the trainees can feel intimidated. Learning Reps are at their own level, they have been through it themselves so it is not a giant leap. This support is huge.

The work of the Learning Reps sits alongside the other supports that Careerforce provides to improve outcomes for their trainees, particularly around literacy⁷. In 2014 Careerforce has developed workshops for educators and assessors on the use of the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool and provided additional resources to inform and support those responsible for trainees with literacy issues.

The Learning Reps also discussed literacy issues for co-workers with one of them taking an active role in supporting trainees as they went through a literacy programme before starting their level 2 qualification. Another Learning Rep discussed needing to know more about how to seek help for a trainee she suspected had literacy issues that were holding her back from working on her qualification. The Learning Reps also talked about literacy support at the training day.

⁷ <http://www.careerforce.org.nz/employers/literacy-learning-support/>

The role of Learning Reps to support co-workers with literacy is not surprising given the original Learning Rep training through the NZCTU training had a focus on this. Heathrose Research (2011) found that while the initial focus of the Learning Reps work had been on industry training it adapted to include literacy and numeracy. They noted that in one workplace, literacy had become the major focus for the Learning Rep work.

Before the training programmes the Learning Reps and their managers / training co-ordinators thought Careerforce had a role to play in supporting Learning Reps in their roles. While two of the Learning Reps were unsure about what might be done, the others thought they could be supported by having:

- a. An overview of Careerforce and the qualifications
- b. Information about the workbooks and the requirements for assessment
- c. Resources and ideas they could use to support trainees
- d. Contact with other Learning Reps

An overview of Careerforce and what's in it. What is required from training, what depth is needed in the answers.

Ideas on things to do to encourage and meet challenges with training – resources, contact with others doing same, get their ideas.

Before the training two of the managers held similar views to the Learning Reps. They thought there needed to be regular Learning Reps' meetings to update them on Careerforce qualifications. One of the managers thought it would be good if Careerforce could go to individual workplaces to talk with Learning Reps and also that it was important for assessors to understand the work of the Learning Reps. As this work had not previously been connected to Careerforce the four other managers did not have a view on how Careerforce might support Learning Reps. After the training the five managers / training co-ordinators thought there was a role for Careerforce to support Learning Reps and this could happen through contact, emails, training and working alongside the educators.

The Learning Reps held similar views after the training as before, with information about qualifications, resources and contact with other Learning Reps coming through. There was a sense the training had given them information that would be useful in this regard. There was also a feeling there was a 'fit' with the work of Careerforce.

It's good to be with Careerforce as they are leaders in the education. The union should have input and support it... Careerforce provide learning tools and one-off training.

Better that the training comes from Careerforce ... training is more neutral if it comes from Careerforce as it is about helping people. Careerforce makes sense as we do all the learning through them.

Before and after the programme there were mixed views about the role of the union in supporting Learning Reps. Five Learning Reps thought there was a support role for the union in relation to supporting the Learning Reps themselves and / or encouraging people to undertake qualifications and in getting connected to Careerforce refresher training programme. One also commented there was a role for the union to negotiate some payment for Learning Reps.

The union is a support. When training they were very supportive ... It would be great to know the union was encouraging every new person starting [the job] to do training - that it is an accepted thing ... It would be nice to have the Learning Rep role recognised through pay. The union could negotiate this as part of the collective.

Yes there is a role. The union understands the importance of the skills in the staff and education is important with this company.

It is unclear where the union fits. It is important that they are alongside what we're doing - encouraging. Careerforce has recognition for qualifications - so Learning Reps should be there.

Benefits of the Learning Reps' peer support on trainees and the organisation

The evidence gathered before and after the training programme indicates the work of the Learning Reps does make a difference to their co-workers and subsequently the organisation. As discussed earlier in this report they encourage trainees to start qualifications, help to keep them on track while they are undergoing training and support them to complete workbooks. As the training intervention was small and the evidence for the evaluation was gathered a few months afterwards, substantial change to their practice was not expected as a result of the programme. As the Learning Reps and their managers have commented it refreshed and revitalised their approach to their roles. As one training co-ordinator commented,

The Learning Reps are more confident after training – got a spring in their step. Comes from talking with others doing similar work and [have a] sense we are doing things ok here ... [they] are more forward with staff saying they are here to help. Such a beneficial role ... Learning Reps can keep on with people to get their books done.

When the short-term outcomes of the programme logic are looked at the data collected for the evaluation shows while Learning Reps said they did not develop new knowledge there were examples of them using the “refreshed” knowledge with co-workers. Some Learning Reps have also increased their interactions with their co-workers.

While this evaluation collected data from a small number of Learning Reps over a short time period, the findings on the benefits to co-workers is in keeping with the literature, particularly in relation to how, when enabled to operate fully, Learning Reps can influence the uptake of training and qualification completion (Stuart et al., (2012), (2010); Cassell and Lee, (2012); Clough, (2012); Ross et al., (2011); Heathrose Research (2011)). However, Bacon and Hoque (2011) were more circumspect in their view of the impact of Learning Reps. Citing evidence from the national survey of Union Learning Reps in the UK in 2007-2008 the researchers noted 26% of Learning Reps said they had not had any influence on training levels and a further 13% said they only had minimal impact.

It is clear Learning Reps influence co-worker trainees and there are downstream benefits, for example, one interviewee commented that Learning Reps added real value as they support workers through qualifications, therefore workers become more knowledgeable and more competent and as a result clients benefit. However, the impact of Learning Reps on their organisations requires further investigation. Clough (2012) and Stuart et al., (2012) found some employers reported on improved organisational performance as a result of Learning Reps work. However what was clear from the research was the need for organisations to provide workers with the opportunity to use their new skills and with further opportunities for career development and promotion.

What helps and hinders the Learning Reps

There is a range of factors that help or hinder the work of the Learning Reps. Those that help include:

- a. personal attributes of the Learning Reps and the relationships they have or are able to build with co-workers
- b. their own knowledge about the job, qualifications and Careerforce workbooks / assessments
- c. a connectedness and team approach where support comes from the organisation and Careerforce
- d. job roles and shifts they have which enable them to access co-workers
- e. workplace affordances
- f. support from management
- g. resources / activities to support their work
- h. time

Evidence from the Learning Reps and their managers pre- and post-programme showed how important this combination of factors was. Some of the Learning Reps talked about how they had worked hard to get their own qualifications and how they wanted to encourage and support others who might be in the same position.

Getting more familiar – I had a complex that I was stupid. If someone says that to me I tell them you are just lacking in education. I was, I didn't have to go to school ...

The Learning Rep training has taken me away. I want to move forward with my own education. Want to stand beside others and get them through it. They are worthy of it. I'm looking to work in a one off with groups then individual sessions. Could set up a workshop to see who needs help. I don't want to be the know-it-all ... I want them to know it all too.

I appreciate the tightness that [the other Learning Rep and training co-ordinator] and I have, plus manager's support and [X from] Careerforce's support. Others are talking to us now, shows we are trying to get things right and we're out there working with staff. Staff want to know things from us. Having contact with other Learning Reps and their experiences ...

Relationships with staff were seen as pivotal to the success of the role of the Learning Reps. Managers and training co-ordinators thought the women in the Learning Reps roles were those who were confident, trusted and experienced in their roles.

They are pretty up front women [who] don't get wound up. Good go-betweens. They have taken while to be known [but] are now seen as helpful to the staff. They are relaxed about the role, so people approach them readily.

While the Learning Reps and their managers did not describe the work of the Learning Reps as peer mentoring it can be seen in this light. The literature on workplace mentoring, (Sanders et al., (2012); City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development, (2010); Holland, 2009)) notes the importance of relationships between mentors and those they are supporting. This literature also comments on the need for training of mentors and time being available in workplaces for the mentoring to happen.

Workplace affordances have been discussed earlier in this report and are essential if the work of Learning Reps is to benefit co-workers (Jameson, 2012). As this evaluation found, the affordances include the time made available for Learning Reps and how their work roles enable them to work. As one Learning Rep who is an enrolled nurse, the health and safety officer and involved with induction training commented,

It would change if the role changed, but I'm still a person who would do this, "it is just me ... it is just a matter of a conversation ... encouraging people ... If people think I'm approachable they will come and see me".

Another factor that enabled Learning Reps to help their co-workers through qualifications was that the Careerforce workbooks were now easier to work through. As a Learning Rep commented,

The books are now much simpler and that really helps. Also good material on the website as well.

What hinders Learning Reps is the flip side of what helps. While only two of the Learning Reps commented that having one hour a week paid time was what helped them in the role, seven of the Learning Reps commented that time, work schedules, including being short staffed, and general busyness were factors that got in the way of their work as Learning Reps. In addition what became clear during the evaluation was the busy lives women lead outside of work and the competing priorities of work, study and families.

Work - fitting everything in. If I'm not on the floor someone has to take over. It's easier now as there are two other ENs

Probably just time. Doing it voluntarily. I come in on days off to help others. Need to sit down and talk with them and hard to do that cos [we] can't come off floor. Happy to do it – sometimes just a bit of a bind.

Some keen [to take on study], but mostly not because of commitments - work and families ... Also they are not fully familiar with the Careerforce certificates.

Other aspects that got in the way included people not wanting to learn or undertake qualifications as they had experience; there no longer being anyone at the NZCTU to support Learning Reps; and the fact that they themselves have busy lives outside of work.

In keeping with the fact the support from management helped Learning Reps perform their role, three of the managers / training co-ordinators thought lack of support from them would prevent Learning Reps fulfilling their roles. Other factors included the timing of shifts and time and busyness generally.

Time - so busy in general with residents with higher needs. We also have to provide other training to maintain standards.

While not stated by the Learning Reps, the managers thought the shifts people worked could act as an inhibitor to them being able to access all staff. It seemed to work best where there were two Learning Reps who worked four days on and four days off meaning they could access most of the staff they needed to. Those who work regular evening shifts only had limited access to other staff.

[X] and I are on different shifts and so it makes it easier for staff to contact us. Good to have training so can make sure people passing, and getting more people trained in our workplace.

Another factor, again not overtly stated, was the low turnover of staff, the lack of the promotion of qualifications, and subsequently the few people who were undergoing qualifications. One of the Learning Reps felt the lack of promotion impacted on what she was able to do and two others reported that as there wasn't much training going on their role was quite limited. Data from Careerforce confirmed the small amount of qualification training happening in the facilities.

The key factor for all of them was the lack of time to undertake the work. Factors contributing to this were busy shifts or shifts that don't coincide with co-workers undertaking qualifications. While two Learning Reps had been provided with paid-for time to come in outside work time this did not necessarily work as their training co-workers did not always have this same time.

Lessons learnt

The evaluation of the training intervention allowed us to collect data about the training programme and about Learning Reps ways of working. While the literature has Learning Reps primarily working as influencers and advocates for training for qualifications, this evaluation shows Learning Reps in this sector working as encouragers, supporters and learning assistants. It is this latter role that is a particular point of difference and requires Learning Reps to have specific knowledge about the role and knowledge about how to guide co-workers through the Careerforce workbooks / assessments. It is also beyond the scope of what is shown in the training about the role of the Learning Rep (See Appendix One).

Overall the training intervention refreshed and re-invigorated the previously trained Learning Reps. The data from the post-programme interviews showed that while the Learning Reps were not working any differently in terms of how they approached and talked to workers or supported them with their training, most of them were doing more of this in their role and felt recognised for their work and more supported. They appreciated the follow-up activities from Careerforce, were able to use these with co-workers and would like more of these.

The community of practice envisaged before the intervention did not eventuate, in spite of the electronic communications from Careerforce and acknowledgement from the Learning Reps that they like hearing from others in the role and would like more opportunities to do this.

So what does this mean for the future of Learning Reps and their training within the context of Careerforce and industry training more widely?

The key messages from this evaluation and the research are:

1. Support for the work of Learning Reps needs to come from management.
This support includes:
 - a. A culture of learning and development that incorporates active promotion of qualifications
 - b. Active promotion of the Learning Rep as a 'go-to' person for support for co-workers i.e., legitimising the role of the Learning Rep within a training framework
 - c. Provision of time for Learning Reps to promote qualifications and encourage and support co-workers

2. Learning Reps were better able to perform their role when they:

- a. work alongside others in their facility involved with training, i.e. the training co-ordinator and the workplace assessors
 - b. have resources / activities to support their work
 - c. know about Careerforce qualifications
 - d. know where to access support for co-workers who may have learning needs that stop them from starting or completing qualifications
3. It is important to get the 'right' person as the Learning Rep. Personal attributes or ways of working that meant Learning Reps were approachable and trustworthy and had the ability to build relationships with co-workers were seen as crucial by the managers and Learning Reps themselves.
 4. There are benefits to Careerforce from having a Learning Reps programme to complement the formalised structures of ITO training and assessment.
 5. The training delivered in this programme was a follow-up for Learning Reps. While it was sufficient to "refresh" trained Learning Reps, on its own it is not enough to provide Learning Reps with the knowledge and skills required for them to perform the role fully. This was attested to by the reactions of the previously untrained Learning Reps to the training programme and the extent to which they did not feel able to undertake the role fully following the training.

In the future "refresher" training that provides both information on Careerforce qualifications and how to mentor and support co-workers through qualifications is required. The training needs to include follow-up resources and support with a view to developing a community of practice led and supported by Careerforce.

Information sessions for facility managers needs to be included as part of the package for Learning Rep training.

6. There is a need to clarify exactly what is required from the Learning Rep role and where they are best placed in the organisation. This evaluation found Learning Reps best placed working alongside the training co-ordinators.
7. Learning Reps benefited their organisations through role modelling, encouraging reluctant learners to attend training, to keep at their studies and through providing specific coaching support. While some of this is completed during work time, it is more often provided on the floor while Learning Reps are completing other tasks and in Learning Reps own time. This support relieves pressures on potentially higher qualified staff who might otherwise be required to provide learning support. Most Learning Reps are also very motivated to provide the assistance and have a clear understanding of their role, its limits and opportunities.

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Appendix One: The role of the Learning Rep

Ways Learning Reps can help the learning process

- be approachable - friendly courteous and respectful
- keep positive – don't "dis" the training, stay upbeat
- show empathy – it's a struggle for the trainees and the trainer (but anything worth having often is)
- be dependable – if you say you will do something, make sure it gets done
- promote life-long-learning (generally) and qualification-based training (particularly)
 - help eliminate barriers
 - find opportunities to celebrate co-workers' successes
- keep focused on completions:
 - flag up when units are finished, workbooks completed, verifier/assessor needed... etc.
- keep professional boundaries
 - support co-workers in their learning journey
 - but don't give them the answers
 - be an active listener and show empathy
 - but keep them on task
 - Learning Reps are not Councillors
- Plant a (thought) seed about the benefits of learning
 - then give it space and time to grow



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- coordinate LR activities with trainer's schedules
 - represent trainees when flagging up learning issues
 - seek answers to any questions coming out of study sessions to report back to trainees
 - Notify trainer when workbooks/ assessment modules are completed and ready for assessment
- cover some of the Verifier work (in some work places – where appropriate)
- form study groups
 - organise study buddies
 - touch base with trainee – care
 - help remove any barriers to learning if you can
 - highlight their successes and celebrate with them

