



# Innovation Bridge case studies

Dyslexia Matters

## How specialist support and a grant helped a dyslexia training business go for growth

In 2010, the joint head teachers of a specialist school for children with dyslexia, Julia Hewerdine and Liz Blackburn, were on a mission. They could see that most mainstream schools lacked the specialist teachers needed to support pupils with dyslexia and they wanted to do something about it.

So, in their spare time they launched Dyslexia Matters - and since then the business has trained 375 specialist teachers.

### The barrier

Despite their success, Julia and Liz could see that although Dyslexia Matters courses are right for many teachers, for others there is a barrier. Some special needs teachers, having completed the obligatory SENCo Award, don't want to dive straight into another long and intense course.

The obvious way for Dyslexia Matters to grow was to add shorter courses to the range. However, as any small business owner will know, it's one thing having an idea, making it happen is another.

### Enter Innovation Bridge

Just as the two Dyslexia Matters partners were contemplating the prospect of writing a whole new range of specialist training courses,

they attended a networking session where Innovation Bridge were also present and Julia Hewerdine remembers "I'm nudging Liz, saying 'Look, perfect timing!'"

An introductory meeting with Innovation Bridge followed where Julia and Liz talked through their ideas and learned that help would come in two stages, firstly developing a detailed project plan and secondly, putting the plan into practice with the aid of a grant.

Like all Innovation Bridge projects, the project put Dyslexia Matters together with a University academic and business advisors. In a powerful demonstration of Innovation Bridge's ability to enable businesses to mine the expertise in the region's Universities, Julia and Liz were introduced to Professor Janice Wearmouth, Professor of Education at the University of Bedfordshire, one of the country's

“The Innovation Bridge process has taken us on a very constructive journey”

Julia Hewerdine  
Director,  
Dyslexia Matters



### How to find out more

To find out if your business is eligible contact the Innovation Bridge team:

**0300 300 8582**

Email [innovationbridge@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:innovationbridge@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Visit [centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/innovationbridge](http://centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/innovationbridge)

# innovation bridge



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leading authorities on special needs education. Julia says "We couldn't ask for more!"

Julia and Liz were quickly reassured that Innovation Bridge was a good fit with their business values and that they would remain in control of the project.

The team clearly hit it off straight away and set about creating an innovative range of training courses which maintain high standards but take less time to complete. Julia describes the process of working with Professor Wearmouth and the business advisor as "Very rigorous and very rewarding".

#### The grant

Julia Hewerdine says "The grant application form is very useful as it forces you to think the whole project through". Innovation Bridge grants cover 30% of a project's cost up to a maximum of £15,000 and Dyslexia Matters applied for and were awarded £5800.

“Very empowering, very positive”

Julia Hewerdine



Dyslexia Matters - meeting the rising demand for specialist dyslexia training with an innovative range of courses

The grant allowed the courses to be finalised and made ready for the launch at SENCo'17, the education special needs exhibition. Pre-event nerves proved to be unfounded, the new courses were well received and Dyslexia Matters came away from the show with a long list of new contacts. Julia says "It was really quite a moment for us"

#### The results

Specialist support and a grant from Innovation Bridge has given Dyslexia Matters the opportunity to grow their business. The new product launch gives the business a broader range of courses which will increase turnover, especially important at a time when investment in training is falling. Training can now reach many more teachers, fulfilling the companies mission of improving the support for learners with dyslexia. Dyslexia Matters is optimistic about taking on more staff and also developing some unexpected new opportunities.

Julia Hewerdine sums up the Innovation Bridge project: "I'm already out there telling other people to do it".

Julia Hewerdine: advice for businesses considering an innovative project

“Think of your very best dream for your business and what it could look like. And then take that to Innovation Bridge.”

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