

## **The Learning City of Norwich – A case Study**

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Norwich has a population of 120 000. Widely regarded as a 'liveable' city, nevertheless 20 000 dwellings are on Council estates and this means that a significant proportion of the community lives in deprived circumstances. A deeper analysis of the economic indicators such as unemployment rates (at 4%) shows that there is deprivation despite superficial improvement. 50 000 people who work in Norwich live outside the city, so the wealth goes outside the city as it does in Glasgow.

### **Why Norwich is a Learning City**

Norwich was one of the first cities to declare itself a Learning City in the UK and has always been strongly linked with the economic development unit of the City Council. Norwich has been conducting regeneration projects for seven years and while there has been substantial progress, the issues of poverty and deprivation remain significant.

The key driver for the Norwich Learning City Initiative is the low level of the educational and skills base of Norwich residents and the impact this has on their earning potential and the competitiveness of Norwich businesses. Many Norwich people are not currently benefiting from the City's economic successes and a significant proportion are economically excluded, while the competitiveness of the Norwich business base is restricted by the skills and aspirations of the work force and potential work force (Poplewell, 2002).

However, in collaboration with other initiatives, the Learning City partnerships have led to tangible outcomes including reduced unemployment and considerable new community infrastructure such as a new shopping mall, a state of the art library and learning shop precinct (The Forum), regeneration of the Riverside precinct and refurbishment of Norwich Castle.

Current issues for the Learning City are around setting new targets in the wake of such impressive achievements and one of the new areas of focus is to enter into a European competition to be a City of Culture in 2008. New government funding is also creating 'initiative overload' and Norwich, like the other Learning Cities visited, is putting resources into developing effective networks and avoiding overlap so that the focus on the participant is not lost in the effort to manage the projects.

Norwich Learning City is surrounded by several smaller towns and cities that have also declared themselves Learning Communities. One of the largest, Great Yarmouth, finds that in common with the other UK Learning Cities in this visit, one of its greatest challenges is the lack of aspiration on behalf of many adults to improve their situation. The low skills base of many jobs and the high employment rate means that many people can survive in deprived circumstances and get used to those circumstances. A 'two speed' economy is the result with prominent, cutting edge employment opportunities masking too many people trapped in low paid work. Consequently, the deprivation level is still too high and lifelong learning is recognised as a key strategy for changing that situation.

### **Current Focus of the Learning City**

Norwich Learning City has determined that the early years target groups (16 – 19 year olds) are being catered for by the new Learning Skills Commission (LSC). Norfolk County is allocated \$150m annually for the delivery of all local 16 plus education. There is particular effort in increasing participation in structured learning and the target is to have 70 000 learners out of the County population of 750 000 by 2004.

The LSC also aims to have 50% of adults with a Level 3 accreditation by 2004 – an increase of 23 000 learners – and 11 000 adults with Level 1 through the new Basic Skills initiatives. The current gap in provision is identified as the 45%

of local people who do not engage in learning and the Learning City is working with groups of these people to get them to develop their own programs (Interview with Norfolk LSC Director, January 2002).

## **SNAPSHOTS of Effective Practice**

### **Strategies for engaging non learners**

#### *Community Action Plans*

Learning Champions who represent non learners are now being recruited to the Norwich Learning City Advisory Group. A project group is developing Community Action Plans along the lines of Blackburn with Darwen's Neighbourhood Learning Plans and is currently in its initial research phase. This includes mapping the current skill levels and current provision. Interviews are also being conducted to determine learning needs and barriers to learning.

This information will be used to develop Learning Interventions that will be locally owned and developed. The community will identify funding sources and apply for it while being supported by organisations that have expertise in this area. Current funding sources have to be provider led because of the complexity of managing the funding process. To assist with this skill development, the Learning City also makes small grants available to community groups so that they have minimal paperwork and simple accountability requirements.

As community capacity is developed, Community Action Plans will build in progression routes for participants and is using the Learning Champions to activate the plans.

#### *Norwich Learning Festival*

Probably the benchmark for Learning Festivals, Norwich has well developed promotional material and multiple partners in this annual event. With a major information display and demonstrations from a wide range of learning providers held in the shopping mall, the Festival also has a mobile exhibition that is set up in supermarkets including those in the more deprived areas.

The size of the Festival now means it takes nine months to organise and follow up and the organisers are experimenting with changing its format to spread its effect throughout the year. It will do this by focusing on national events and holding local events to coincide with Adult Learners' Week, the Sign Up Now Campaign and Family Learning Week. In 2002, a Learning Festival event will also be held in conjunction with the official opening of The Forum by the Queen.

Evaluations of the Learning Festival indicate that new people participate in formal and informal learning as a result of information they gathered during the Festival.

#### **The Forum**

[www.theforumfolk.co.uk](http://www.theforumfolk.co.uk)

The Forum is a Millenium project that has just been completed. An attractive, modern, accessible facility, it includes a library, a tourist information centre, the Learning Shop, a computer training room for adult education programs and a coffee shop. The new Norwich BBC broadcast station will also be located in the vicinity.

#### *The Library*

The library has a number of interesting strategies that represent a paradigm shift in the way libraries operate. Rebuilt after the former library was burnt down, the library in The Forum has become a learning centre that is attractive and accessible for a wide range of users beyond its traditional client group.

With 100 computers that are linked to printers and the internet located throughout the library, the public has free and unlimited access to ICT. Currently, there are no time limits on use of the internet although the heavy use of this facility may see these introduced. There is no censure on young people playing computer games and there is a demonstrated an increased number of young people using other library facilities as well as the computers.

Relaxed regulations around noise and returning books are seeing more people using the library and borrowing books including people with disabilities and older people. The library is also involved in the provision of training in Reminiscence techniques for personal carers in the aged care industry.

Refugees are an increasing client group that finds the library approachable and safe. Through the internet, they are able to access information from their homelands. Translation services and local information are available for them and they are now being referred to the library by social welfare workers.

The Forum library has an 'Express' section at the entrance of the library that is changed frequently – books for quick browsing and borrowing for people in a hurry or those who do not want to go further into the library. Many new users are registered through use of this section.

A separate section has been set aside specifically for local family history research and the amount of learning that occurs in this busy precinct is formidable. Local resources are discovered and new material is developed by local people who can work individually or in groups in a warm and friendly environment.

The library also has a War Memorial room that has material that is of particular interest to older men who may not use the library otherwise. Draped with flags and military memorabilia, this room is also a repository for private collections of books and material that may not be well used in other environments.

#### *The Learning Shop*

[www.learningshop@norwichlearn.u-net.com](mailto:www.learningshop@norwichlearn.u-net.com)

Also located in The Forum, the busy Learning Shop provides advice and assistance for people in accessing all the learning opportunities that are available locally. The operation of the shop is funded by major educational providers. The manager of the shop is seconded part time from the City College and many other providers also provide staff for sessional attendance. University students volunteer to work in the shop as well.

An evaluation of the Learning Shop in May 2000 indicates the positive impact on extending participation in learning:

'It can give people ideas they may not have thought of.

Opens your eyes to the amount of different courses available.

I didn't realise there was so much on offer.

Was made aware of many opportunities of learning that the city has to offer.'

Survey conducted by Pam Breckenridge, 'Shopping for Learning', 2000

## **GREAT YARMOUTH**

One of the five most deprived cities in the UK, Great Yarmouth experienced a sudden downturn in its economy when its principal industry as a tourist resort was demolished by the rise in cheap holidays to the Mediterranean. While it is still struggling to find a significant industry replacement to regenerate its economy, Great Yarmouth has many innovative projects that are effective in reaching non learners.

The Learning City has engaged a range of partners and while business and the local Economic Forum are active in the partnership, the business takeup of learning is low and this is a next phase of effort for the Learning City. There is a high proportion of small businesses here as elsewhere. Barriers to participation in learning by small business are widely identified as perceiving learning as a cost rather than an investment, access to learning at times and places that suit and people moving on once training has been completed.

### **SNAPSHOTS of Effective Practice**

#### **Strategies for Engaging Non Learners**

##### *Sure Start*

[mail@surestartgyarmouth.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:mail@surestartgyarmouth.fsnet.co.uk)

Funded with a 10 year outlook, this project for young parents has high initial funding that will taper off as resources are developed. The funding includes the provision of capital works programs as well as training and aims to improve the learning capacity of the next generation by training young parents to mentor others in developing a positive attitude to learning in the home.

Young parents who have undertaken the training in the 'Certificate in Community Parenting' in Great Yarmouth have had their program accredited. The first young fathers are about to join the group of trained parents and several of the trained parents are now employed by the project to train others. Community Parents work with young parents before and after they have their baby and support them in reading to their children and in preparing for further study.

The trained Community Parents in Great Yarmouth's Sure Start had to overcome multiple barriers to learning as well – several had their first child by the age of 15, some were single parents, all are living in disadvantaged circumstances. However, in addition to supporting the development of positive attitudes to learning in others, the learning outcomes for the Community Parents themselves are stunning. All of the seven young mothers in the group visited were now engaged in formal learning programs from school certificates to University degrees. They were able to overcome their barriers to learning by the provision of unlimited, free childcare while they are engaged in study, mentoring by the midwives who visited them when they were at home with their young children and the peer support they give each other.

In the two years that this project has been going, a new building for this program and others is just being opened (Peggotty Road Community Centre and Nursery) and another is planned. The group has formed itself into a Trust so that it can plan for the sustainability of the initiative. A complementary initiative, Book Start has started whereby Safeway sponsors the provision of a book to each new baby born in Great Yarmouth.

##### *Women's Resource Centre*

This centre also works with young women at risk and provides prenatal and post natal support in social services, health and education. Adult education programs are run in the same building that the Resource Centre operates from so that participants are in a safe and familiar environment. Again, there is unlimited access to childcare on the premises while the participants are in learning programs and the outcomes with a particularly difficult target group are considerable. Some clients do revert to old behaviours but many return and are more successful in subsequent programs.

## *Community Building*

This project refurbishing derelict housing is attractive to young men in particular who are recruited through support agencies and employment services. In partnership with the City College, the participants refurbish houses with materials that are supplied by the Council. In some cases, participants have actually then moved in as tenants of the houses they have renovated. Others are sold by the Council for public or private housing.

The building industry is a growth industry and has a lack of young, qualified people entering it. There is particular opportunity for skill development in the Heritage Trades and Great Yarmouth has expert training available in this area that will potentially develop into a specialty industry for this community.

## **CONCLUSION**

Norwich and Great Yarmouth are the facilitators of many proposals for innovative approaches to neighbourhood regeneration. The strong support of the Economic Development forums in each city ensure that there is a strong link between learning and improved economic indicators but again, the striking success to date is in improved social inclusion.

Both cities recognise that building a culture of lifelong learning takes many years and that the journey needs to be constantly reshaped to meet changing circumstances. As Learning Cities they have both been in a position to readily capitalise on initiatives. While they experience frustration with the shifts in emphasis that occur with new proposals they seem to be enthusiastic adaptors and are highly focussed on ensuring that resources are well used for those who are most isolated socially and economically.