New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation

Research Reports

**Community Champions:
Building Networks of ICT users in
Newcastle NDC**

Research Report 50

Sheffield
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# Community Champions:
# Building Networks of ICT users in Newcastle NDC

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**Authors:**

Alison Kirton
Marie Lall

*Institute of Education,*
*University of London*

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## Executive Summary

The present government is committed to lifelong learning as an important part of education policy. Free learning for all adults in the labour market without level two qualifications has been proposed as part of a new national skills strategy linked to the *Success for All* reform.

Many residents in disadvantaged areas have not been successful in the educational system and fewer stay on post-16 than in the country as a whole. This is particularly the case in NDC areas. It has been recognised by NDCs that simply providing lifelong learning facilities will not guarantee take up in practice. It is crucial, therefore, that opportunities for lifelong learning are linked to the needs and interests of local residents. This report focuses on work in Newcastle NDC that is attempting to improve lifelong learning provision through a number of projects.

A range of projects are being developed, many of which have an element of ICT embedded. The 'laptops for all' project has had success in attracting numbers of residents to training provided in small groups to meet specific needs in venues throughout the NDC area. Residents are able to borrow laptops as they would a library book and a helpdesk service is being developed to support the use of such laptops as well as residents with their own computers. Ashfield Parents Centre is an important focus for parents whose children attend the local nursery. Courses are set up on demand, ranging from 'promoting good parenting,' to crafts as well as accredited courses for crèche workers and nursery nurses. There is provision of formal and informal learning opportunities for Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) women through 'First Step'. The women can chose from a variety of courses, including English as an Additional Language and a variety of GNVQ qualifications.

The projects have been especially **successful** in certain respects:

- There seems to have been some success in attracting 'hard to reach' groups through ICT training courses
- The 'Planet 13-15' project has provided effective support for young people who have missed out on acquiring basic skills
- The Ashfield Parents Centre has provided excellent training and qualifications opportunities in crèche, nursery and play worker courses as well as an informal support network for parents
- 'First Steps' has had some success at integrating Black and Minority Ethnic residents into the wider community
- Using community activists and 'Learning Champions' to attract residents to use the opportunities on offer has worked well

**Key factors** associated with successful initiatives are:

- ICT training has been linked to developing skills for community groups, specifically a Tenants Association so that the accounts, minutes and bids for funding can be done more effectively
- Local tutors have been used, wherever possible, as they understand the background of the residents
- Local venues and small groups for training provide non-threatening learning environments
- Crèches have been provided so that all those who wish to participate can. These have also offered training opportunities for parents
- Partnerships have been especially useful, e.g. between Newcastle NDC and other providers such as The New Opportunities Fund, European Social Fund (for funding) and Westgate Community College and Newcastle Literacy Trust (for tutors and facilities)

- Involving local people in the design and delivery of projects

Some **barriers and problems** remain:

- Recruiting insufficient people to run some courses
- Attracting young men into lifelong learning continues to be difficult
- Monitoring and measuring success in non-accredited learning where no formal qualification is achieved but significant skills are acquired
- Monitoring more effectively the take up of the laptop training would be helpful

# Introduction

Lifelong learning is a common educational goal across the entire New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative although partnerships are at very different stages in their attempts to set up lifelong learning projects. The concept of lifelong learning is important as it addresses the need to provide educational opportunities that are accessible to all age groups, regardless of their previous educational background. For this reason, our evaluation of the education theme in NDC includes a focus on lifelong learning in each of the evaluation years. Our selection of projects for evaluation has been guided by two principal goals: first, over time, to examine a range of projects across several NDC partnerships; and second, to use the evaluation to identify wider lessons, especially in relation to what works well under challenging circumstances. This report focuses on developments in Newcastle NDC. Many of the projects developed in this partnership have lifelong learning as an underlying theme. Their aim is to provide learning opportunities for adults outside of the formal system.

During our work in Newcastle we focused mainly on the following projects:

- 'Laptops for All' project
- The Ashfield Parents Centre
- Planet 13-25
- Steps/Breakthrough
- First Step
- Intermediate Labour Market (ILM)Classroom Assistants
- Learning Champions

This report covers the following areas:

- the context in which the lifelong learning projects have been established and the problems they are trying to address
- the nature of the interventions in terms of objectives and targeted beneficiaries
- the way in which the lifelong learning projects have been delivered, in particular focusing on the type of intervention offered and the assumptions behind them
- current outcomes and impact of the projects to date
- key lessons that have been learnt so far

# Socio-economic Context

According to the baseline information that was gathered to identify local need, Newcastle NDC has high levels of unemployment. In 2001 the proportion of workless adults was 23.7% (claiming Job Seekers Allowance, Income based JSA or SDA) compared to 15.1% in the region and 9.1% in England as a whole. The area also experiences low levels of household income with 37.8% receiving income support and housing benefit, compared to 18.2% in the region and 13.3% in England as a whole. Of the children aged under 16 living in Newcastle NDC 54.3% were living in these households. 66.6% of primary age children are in receipt of Free School Meals compared 35.8% in the region and 19.3% nationally.

Staying on rates beyond the age of 16 in the Newcastle NDC are 46.9% compared to 45% in the region and 51% nationally. Only 14.4% of young people aged 17-19 made successful

applications to higher education in the area compared to 27% in the region and 29.5% nationally.[1]

40% of the residents of working age have no qualifications compared to 43% in the NDC aggregate. 26% of pupils in the area attain five A-C grade GCSE passes compared to 19% NDC aggregate.

The figures above indicate low income, worklessness and social disadvantage. However, there are some positives in relation to lifelong learning as staying on rates are higher than in the region and across NDC partnerships, as are GCSE higher grade (A-C) passes.

The Newcastle NDC (formally WestGate NDC) covers four areas: Arthur's Hill, Cruddas Park, Elswick and Rye Hill in the west end of Newcastle. These areas are amongst the most disadvantaged wards in England. In this they compare very unfavourably with the thriving, prosperous central shopping and commercial areas of Newcastle, currently undergoing something of a cultural and economic renaissance. Negative and stigmatising perceptions of the area are held by employers and residents outside the NDC area. However, the evaluation by Coaffee & Dargan points to the considerable community assets:

> *'The area has a plethora of enthusiastic community and voluntary groups as well as a rich, diverse and multi-ethnic cultural community.'* (Coaffee & Dargan 2003, pp. 4)

## The Policy Context

The government is committed to lifelong learning as an important part of its educational policies. A report entitled *Community Leadership Training Pilots* (DfES, 2004a) was a response to the report of the Policy Action Team on Skills (PAT 2), *Skills for Neighbourhood Renewal: Local solutions* (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) which called for the development of strategies to enable local people to play a determining role in the regeneration of their own areas. The aim was that a pilot scheme in areas of multiple disadvantages would provide lessons and models that could be used in other disadvantaged areas. This is particularly relevant to the lifelong learning initiatives in Newcastle NDC, described below, aimed at involving local residents in bottom-up projects involving community leadership.

The report, *Community Leadership Training Pilots* (DfES, 2004a), describes how the three partner colleges came together to develop the pilot. They were Fircroft Adult Education College in Birmingham, Northern College for Adult Residential Education in Barnsley, and Ruskin College in Oxford with the National Organisation for Adult Learning which had a coordinating and evaluating role. It was funded by the Department for Education. More organisations joined later, the Bernie Grant Trust in Tottenham (London) and Moss Side (Manchester) and Community Initiatives for Citizenship Education Regionally Organised (CiCERO) in Lambeth and Tower Hamlets. The aim was to establish educational programmes over two years to provide training for community leaders. The underlying principles that were to underpin the pilots were agreed nationally so that the curriculum would be flexible and imaginative, encourage participants to be active citizens and make use of local residential experiences. Some courses were accredited others not, though the educational materials developed were equally useful in either route. Potential leaders were drawn from different groups, Pakistani women in Birmingham, African and African Caribbean activists in black communities, older people from sheltered housing, people with disabilities, the homeless and refugees.

Interesting issues arose from this study. Firstly the participants viewed the concept of 'community leadership' as contested, one preferred the concept of collective rather than

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[1] All data 2001

individual empowerment, two preferred the idea of 'community animateurs,' another the idea of 'area champions.' Some were unhappy with the language used to describe their communities as 'worst neighbourhoods' or 'disadvantaged communities.'

The pilot uncovered a strong demand for this kind of training not only in areas with multiple disadvantage but other areas with pockets of disadvantage. Whilst some staff had a good grasp of the realities faced by the activists and their communities, it was found that differences arising from social class, 'race' and gender were more complicated than had been initially recognised and were sometimes difficult to negotiate. The time scale was seen as too short to:

> *'Recruit workers, set up a project from scratch, gain trust, get people on board , encourage people to participate in learning opportunities and then use this knowledge to lead local initiatives.'* (Oxfordshire Community Education and Development at Ruskin College OCEDAR: 30)

However, considerable gains and successes were reported. Some participants described their improved confidence levels and the enhanced employment opportunities open to them after their courses. There was success in developing community leadership with groups who had a great deal to contribute to a variety of local organisations. Negative outcomes were that a collaborative national network failed to materialise but strong networks *within* the areas were reported. All partners found it difficult to secure funding to continue the pilots beyond the two years especially the smaller organisations. The pilots developed their training programmes in very different ways, partly to respond to diverse needs which made the development of a single *national* model of community leadership difficult to achieve. This was regarded as an innovative and valuable project from which other disadvantaged, indeed all communities, could learn.

In October 2004 the final so called Tomlinson report was published, '*Curriculum and Qualifications Reform. Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform.*' The report recommended wide ranging changes which could be especially important for schools and colleges in NDC areas, in helping them improve educational attainment prior to 16 and staying on rates post-16 (therefore providing a much firmer base to develop lifelong learning). The report states:

> *'Participation at 17, 2002 data rank the UK 24th out of 28 OECD countries with a participation rate of 76%. More than 5% of young people reach the end of compulsory schooling with no qualifications.'* (Tomlinson Report 2004, p. 19)

Many of these young people are to be found in NDC areas where encouraging them back into education and training after such negative and de-motivating experiences can be a mammoth task. There was widespread support amongst teachers, headteachers, and the teaching unions, for the Tomlinson proposals. However, in February 2005 the Secretary of State for Education, Ruth Kelly, announced that the existing systems of GCSEs and 'A' levels would be retained alongside a strengthened vocational offer. It remains to be seen what happens following the subsequent consultation during 2005. Fortunately, for the lifelong learning agenda, there is wide support for a move to streamline the system so that the present muddle of 5,000 vocational courses can be condensed to a more manageable number of around 15 or 20 broad pathways. These should be capable of providing progression within a new diploma framework to advanced level and beyond, and linked, where appropriate, to National Occupational Standards in order to provide avenues to employment. Such vocational options can be combined with general and academic subjects in mixed programmes. However, Tomlinson has stressed that no single institution, neither school nor college, could cover such a wide range of options in the four level diploma framework. This raises an important question about how to develop a fair and comprehensive system of 14-19 education across different institutions.

# Barriers to Participation

As we noted baseline information indicates that many of the local residents have not been successful in the educational system though more 'stay on' after age 16 than in the region generally. Many residents are said to hold a negative attitude to the education system and have little confidence in their own abilities. In such circumstances it is rational to be wary of further investment in a system that has already failed you. According to those interviewed there are several interconnected factors, not least, a vicious circle arising out of generations suffering from unemployment. Such negative attitudes help explain why educational certification may be low on the list of priorities for some local residents and that merely having such facilities on offer will not ensure their take up. It was therefore recognised by NDC staff that engaging local residents in taking ownership of projects was crucial.

Those interviewed described how many residents had poor experiences of secondary education, which explained their reluctance to return to the classroom:

> "I didn't do well at school," "Oh, it's bound to be boring," you know, "The teacher's bound to be snooty with you." You know, all those sorts of things that people feel when they haven't succeeded at school. It's, you know, and it is very hard to overcome those perceptual barriers, because people are just so lacking in confidence that they don't dare do it in case they have another bad experience and get battered down again.' (ICT manager)

Such attitudes need to be taken into account in any educational opportunities provided to address former low attainment.

Another barrier mentioned by those interviewed was the suspicion of the formal system and authority:

> 'We try to keep things on an informal basis anyway. I don't like formality, well, not too much formality, because I think it frightens people. Especially in this type of area. They don't like authority very much, you know.' (Childcare Co-ordinator Ashfield Parents Centre)

This suspicion, it was felt, was not just for education and often related to bad experiences in the past:

> 'Well, suspicions around authority, so- and that can be authority of any kind, it doesn't have to be education authority, it can be the police service, it can be the fire service, it can be whatever, they have historically had difficulties in this area.' (Development Support Worker)

She went on to explain that this was partly the result of people feeling let down by the succession of initiatives in the area that had not solved the problems they were set up to address. It was also felt that a lack of consultation and access to services were key issues.

There are, therefore, numerous and complex barriers in Newcastle NDC. Factors like low aspiration and motivation, poor prior educational attainment and material disadvantage in adults with suspicion of authority play a strong part. Despite the presence of many thriving community groups and residents' associations there is little or no tradition of successful learning in the formal sector of education.

Such barriers present a considerable challenge to the effective provision and take up of lifelong learning.

## Nature of the Intervention

There are seven projects in Newcastle NDC that relate to the provision of lifelong learning. Primary data for this evaluation was gathered by observing the projects at work and through individual and group interviews with key players and participants. The seven projects are:

- 'Laptops for all' project
- The Ashfield Parents Centre
- Planet 13-25
- Steps/Breakthrough
- First Step
- Learning Champions
- ILM Classroom Assistants

### 'Laptops for all' project

This project was approved in February 2002. Part of the initiative is to provide laptop computers and tutors, for community houses and community venues in the NDC area, to be used with small groups on a drop-in basis. These are to provide support for local community groups (building social capital and/or reducing the risk of exclusion), e.g. tenants associations, young mothers and Asian women.

### The Ashfield Parents Centre

This project is funded for three years from August 2003 to July 2006. The funding pays for a centre development worker, a full time admin worker and a crèche worker for 16.5 hours a week. The Centre is located in shared premises with Ashfield Nursery school. It is an independent charitable organisation. It currently provides support for parents through advice on childcare and parenting. A variety of courses like positive parenting, healthy eating and first aid are provided. Training in childcare, crèche work, play work and related areas (as well as employment opportunities) are on offer. The Centre provides an informal meeting place for parents dropping off and picking up their children from the nursery school.

### Planet 13-25

This project is funded for 3 years (2001-2004) by the NDC and runs through the Newcastle Literacy Trust, a citywide project, with three members of staff, of whom two are full time. It aims to help young people 13-25 in the NDC area to improve their skills and to get back into training, work or school. Support is provided on a one-to-one basis and focuses on raising levels of achievement in reading, writing, numeracy and communication. Young people are referred through local schools, Connexions, Jobcentre Plus and Social Services as well as by self- referral.

### Steps/Breakthrough

Steps/Breakthrough consists of a scheme to train trainers to deliver a set of courses for the wider community. Through this project young people and adults are provided with help (in separate sessions) to improve their self-esteem as well as developing in them a positive attitude to educational opportunities. Such courses are known as *Investors in Excellence*. The training of local community members to deliver the programme means that the programme will run without having to resort to external delivery.

**First Step**

First Step is a registered charity that has been running for fourteen years. It is a multi-ethnic project addressing, in particular, the needs of minority ethnic women. The centre offers the development of key skills amongst others: English as an Additional Language (EAL), basic IT skills, English as a Second Language (ESOL) with ICT, and numeracy. Vocational Qualifications (including NCFE national awarding body for Classroom Assistants) are also on offer. There is home-based learning through trained volunteers for those who cannot access the centre. First step has received both capital and programme funding from the NDC.

**Learning Champions**

This project is run by the Wisegroup and recruits and trains young people to work as NDC champions. Currently there are eight Learning Champions, who are placed within host organisations within the NDC area. The project is to help employ and to provide training for NDC residents, and give them an vocational qualification. The Learning Champions go out into the community and engage with local residents. This involves providing a bridge between local people and education and training opportunities in the area. Some champions will have specific responsibility for ICT training. The idea is to link education and employment, training young people whilst simultaneously meeting community needs in education and training.

**ILM Classroom Assistants**

The project is again run by the Wisegroup. Members of the Local Community are given the opportunity to train as Teaching Assistants. They are placed in a local school for work experience. Further funding to the schools allows them to be employed at the next stage of the project. This again links education and training with the needs of the local community and local schools.

# Aims and Objectives

Newcastle NDC seems to have constructed a large part of its education theme around the concept of lifelong learning. Most of its education projects, and some projects linking training and employment, have an aspect of adult or further education attached. This is unlike some other NDC partnerships, which tend to focus their education funding on schools and school based programmes. The overall aim is to increase participation and attainment in lifelong learning with targets for increasing the percentage of people in sixth form, further and adult education (NDC Action Plan, pp. 18). This raises issues about measuring attainment outside the formal system: methods of assessing the impact and success of non-accredited learning are being considered at the moment by the Programme Officer.

In addition to this overall aim, each of the projects have their own specific aims and objectives. The ICT strategy has three main aims outlined by the ICT manager. The first is to get computer equipment, especially laptops, out into the community into local places that are no more than a few minutes away from where people live. Second, to get people using the equipment for supporting the work of community groups, improving basic skills, gaining qualifications and for leisure activities. Third, to support the other various NDC themes. Priority was given to the provision of ICT because the skills audit conducted in 2001 found that two thirds of the residents in the NDC area either knew nothing or very little about ICT. This has led to the development of the 'Laptops for all' project where laptops are available at seven local venues catering for different needs and aimed at developing computer literacy for a variety of purposes.

The barriers to participation in education and training outlined above indicate a negative attitude to formal education. The aim of many projects is to locate educational facilities in non-

threatening local venues in order to reach those residents who have had poor experiences at school. The courses provided at Ashfield Parents Centre are aimed at getting parents who are using the nursery interested in attending courses. These are aimed at addressing their interests and needs, for example, ten-week courses in crafts like candle making and silk painting. Success in these then leads on to more formal courses aimed at training and employment for crèche workers and nursery nurses. The same philosophy goes for First Step where BME women can feel safe in their learning environment. Providing crèches in both projects was a way of making it possible for parents to attend courses and maximising attendance. At Ashfield Parents Centre this also became the source of training opportunities which lead on to paid work The Centre Development worker describes her aims for the venue:

> *'My philosophy is that you can only work with parents to get them where they want to be. You know, my idea would be to have everybody going through here to have an accredited certificate at the end, you know, whether it be in crèche, play work or whatever.'* (Centre Development Worker)

A number of projects also link education, training and employment. Both projects run by the Wisegroup allow participants to achieve vocational qualifications and gain work experience while delivering a service to the community or to the local schools (which in turn enhances education more broadly).

> *'But the purpose of the Learning Champions again was kind of a double whammy for us, and that was to basically recruit local people, principally young people from the area, linking them with voluntary community organisations to help those community organisations improve their capacity as far as the services and the quality of the services they were delivering in the community. And, at the same time, train the young people themselves, so they would be much more job-ready, if you like, and much more skilled to be able to move into employment at the end of it.'* (Programme manager)

The above aims and objectives show the NDC's wider thinking in trying to meet existing needs whilst also providing the local community with skills for the future.


## Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries include a wide variety of local people of all ages and a wide variety of backgrounds.

All the projects included here have had some success in improving the skills and confidence of residents. The participants interviewed in 'Laptops for all,' for example, were all women between the ages of 50-61, actively involved in their local Tenants Association that has three hundred members. ICT training has enabled them to acquire skills to carry out their duties more effectively:

> *'What I am doing here is letters, agendas, posters and reports and when I go to a conference I write up my report on the laptop and that goes to the board.'* (Chairperson of the Tenants Association)

The tutor described how one of her students, the treasurer of the Tenants Association, had done her accounts before coming on the course and the progress she had made:

> *'She has done spreadsheets and she's going onto databases. Yeah, she's learnt all of that. And, I mean, from when she started she was doing her accounts by hand in a book. But for funding you need it all done properly and now it is.'* (Laptop Tutor)

These women described how they had acquired ICT skills and their confidence had improved as a result. However, they also explained that they did not wish to take exams or gain formal qualifications because of their age. They stressed that they were not interested in paid work, just the voluntary work in their Tenants Association. Their tutor felt it would improve their confidence to have the qualifications and therefore took every opportunity to encourage them to do so.

The laptop tutor described other client groups using the service. These included young mothers 16-plus who needed qualifications; older residents in their 70s and 80s who used the class to word process their autobiographies; and an Asian women-only group who want to improve their English and also to gain qualifications. Such courses and venues were also used for social reasons to meet other residents in similar situations.

At Ashfield Parents Centre those interviewed, all mothers, described the range of ways in which they had benefited from the Centre. First, it was a welcoming place to meet after dropping children at the nursery and also a place to get help and advice:

*'It's just so nice just to be able…You know, sometimes you've got problems and you don't want to talk to the schools or anything. You know, and you can just come in and you just get it all off your chest, and it's really, really nice and friendly, and it's so relaxed.'* (Parent, Ashfield Parents Centre)

Second, many felt that the Centre helped to cut down on the isolation mothers felt being at home all day with their children:

*'Without this service here I would be completely lost. I would be - I would be stuck at home with two kids, pulling my hair out. You know, this has- this place has given me a chance to get back on my feet to do things that I wouldn't normally be able to do.'* (Parent, Ashfield Parents Centre)

Third, from using the Centre to drop-in and get advice many parents described how they then got involved in the courses on offer:

*'It actually started when my daughter went to nursery, and I actually just got involved with the groups that were running. And eventually became very involved. The first course I did was a parenting course. It was fantastic - nice to know that other parents had the same problems with their children!'* (Parent, Ashfield Parents Centre)

This mother described how she had then taken additional courses in Healthy Eating and Shared Beginnings, moving on to a crèche workers course. She felt that providing crèches for children meant that parents could attend the courses knowing that their children were in a safe and secure environment. Importantly, the crèches had also been used as a training opportunity for parents who could then use the qualification for sessional employment:

*'Its just a great place to come, really. And I'm glad I came here to do my crèche course because it has moved me on to do other things. It gave me a lot of confidence because I didn't have a lot of confidence when I left school.'* (Parent, Ashfield Parents Centre)

Central to the lifelong learning initiatives in Newcastle NDC is the idea of using members of the local community in initiating and sustaining projects:

*'You know, I could sit here all day and say to you, "Well, I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do that, and I'm going to do the other." That doesn't work, and that has been proved over the years. But I think because people have taken ownership of the Parents Centre from the local community that is why it works.'* (Development Worker, Ashfield Parents Centre)

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For the BME women, who do not feel comfortable in the community centre, there is First Step, which allows for an all female environment whilst offering both formal and informal learning opportunities:

*'Not everyone is comfortable to go to Westgate College because it's mixed, and not everybody is happy to go to Newcastle College and do all these courses...'* (Education Development Worker)

Thirty-five learners attend Planet 13-25 every week. The majority are of school age and are non-attenders for various, often complex, reasons. Two young people using the service were interviewed, one a 15 year-old young woman, the other 16 and male. They described how much they had benefited from the one-to-one support. Both young people hated school, lacked basic skills and had difficult home backgrounds. They had flourished with support and encouragement form skilled and supportive tutors on a one-to-one basis:

*'Nice people here but they weren't nice at school. I was miserable, unhappy and sick a year ago - but its brilliant here.'* (Male student, Planet 13-25)

The tutors described other young people who had benefited from the service, in particular a group of young mothers:

*'I worked with a girls' group and they produced a magazine of which they're just so proud. Only one of the group had any qualifications, all of the others had had babies from age 14 up to about 17. And they basically produced a magazine to tell young people the nitty gritty of teenage pregnancy…And what they have done - two of the girls have gone on to do basic counselling courses.'* (Literacy Development Worker, Planet 13-25)

Schools have also benefited from the Teaching Assistants programme, as have the local community at large from the Learning Champions who have been able to provide advice and informal help on education and training opportunities:

*'I think they are addressing people not going back to education. People dropping out of the education system early, unemployment, people who don't know how to receive training, don't know where to go to get training. Lack of information- I think that's one of the key drivers.'* (Project Manager)

## Delivery

There are several themes that emerge from how these projects have been delivered that resonate with the delivery of opportunities for lifelong learning in other NDCs. The first aspect was that an ICT strategy was put in place that recognised the call for local venues addressing a variety of needs. In several of the projects the use of crèches has been central to the success of getting participants to join in and these have also been used creatively as a training and employment opportunity. Careful selection of tutors and use of Learning Champions who are acceptable to the participants has taken place. Finally many of the courses were presented in non-threatening ways that engaged the interests of the residents but which lead on to training and employment opportunities.

### Local ICT facilities as a key strategy

An essential feature of this strategy has been to make computer use as accessible as possible: this has involved using local venues and laptops for their versatility and mobility. The 'Laptops for All', project has used a variety of different venues catering for a various needs. The

participants that we interviewed were all involved in their Tenants Association and attended courses held in a flat on the estate. One woman explained why this was so important:

*'We have had enough of institutions, colleges are good but people don't want to go back to school. People need to be learning where they live because they have had their confidence knocked out of them and feel abandoned by the system.'* (Treasurer, Tenants Association)

Using a flat on the estate made it non-threatening and residents could use the sessions on a drop-in basis. A second flat was being acquired for the crèche and internet access was being installed. The groups were small:

*'We can afford the luxury of doing it quite informally to start with, and having it in small groups of about, you know, anywhere between four and six. Because you find in colleges it's a minimum of ten and often a lot more, and people tend to get lost in that.'* (ICT Manager)

Poviding individual attention and the informal nature of the training (almost like 'being in someones sitting room'), contributed to the project's success. Neither was it 'qualifications driven' with students using the laptops for their own purposes until they gained confidence. Laptops were also excellent for such venues as they could easily be carried up to the flats. They were delivered for the sessions and participants were given help in setting them up. The courses were advertised widely but people were often attracted by word of mouth:

*'There's a lot of advertising goes on, a lot of word of mouth. I mean, it seems to snowball. Like with the Asian ladies, I've never advertised but some of them come and then they tell their friends, who tell their friends, then eventually you end up with waiting lists for people that want to join us.'* (Laptop tutor)

Informal networks, therefore, have become a valued and effective means of recruiting learners.

## Reaching out to the community

The Learning Champions have been part of the informal, reaching out strategy of Newcastle NDC. They are seen as role models who can not only help local residents with their training and employment problems, but who also can give them hope and show what opportunities there are:

*'And they see one person and think, "Well, they've done it and there's a possibility of me doing it as well." And that happens with jobs as well. Not just the training part of it, I think. If you see people from your area, your community, moving into positions, jobs, and getting full time, part time, whatever jobs, I think it's quite motivating.'* (Community development regeneration worker)

## The use of crèches

In previous evaluation reports for the education theme of the NDC we have already commented on the importance of providing facilities and support for community members with young children (Kirton et al, 2003; 2004). In Newcastle those interviewed reported that providing crèches was vitally important:

*'Over the last few years we've really developed crèches because when I'm talking to people, about doing courses, who are saying, "Well, I'd love to do it, but I've got little Johnny here, and what am I going to do with him?" So we took the stance of, you know, if that's a problem for them it shouldn't be. So, you know, we need to look around how that*

*can be developed. So anything that happens with Ashfield Parents Centre now there is crèche provision put against it. Which has worked.'* (Centre Development Worker).

The parents described how important the crèches were so that they knew their children were being looked after in a secure and safe environment. As many parents from the local area were also undergoing training to be crèche workers it was likely that local parents were involved in running the crèche. Crèches were also used to enable parents to participate in 'Laptops for All'.

The courses on offer have been located at various centres outside of mainstream schools and colleges. It shows that there is an understanding that not all people wanting to access education opportunities can be 'lumped together' as one group.

*'Lifelong Learning (…) is working with, obviously cradle to grave, but I mean, it's very much about being able to target people at certain stages in their own life cycles, and market then so that it makes sense to them, so far as if you've got young families then you obviously do it a certain way, you obviously target a certain way.'* (Programme manager)

## Using the right tutors

A successful characteristic of the delivery of *'*Ashfield Parents Centre' and 'Laptops for All' was that the staff employed were friendly and accessible. It was expressed strongly by those interviewed that they would not work with tutors who patronised them:

*'Our tutor is dead relaxed. She is perfect because she looks as if she has been dragged in from next door.'* (Participant, Laptops for All)

## Non - threatening delivery linked to peoples' interests.

There has been some success in the NDC area in linking courses and facilities to people's needs and interests. For example the 'Laptops for all' project has linked into supporting the Tenants Association, EAL speakers wishing to improve their English, as well as those seeking formal qualifications. Ashfield Parents Centre has used the nursery as a draw for parents and then provided courses and training for parents held on the premises.

## Outcomes and Impact

All these projects have had some success in achieving their aims of raising skill levels and self-confidence, and providing progression from 'leisure' courses onto more substantial ones involving formal qualifications. The laptop tutor describes the improvements in self-confidence and skill levels that she has observed:

*'When the women started they would say "Oh, I'll never learn it, I'll never learn it." But now they are flying. They are glowing examples of what can be learnt. At first they were really freaked out about using a computer and scared that every time they touched a button they would break it. If they decided to do the exams they would all pass with flying colours."* (Laptop tutor)

The ICT manager feels that the ICT strategy, particularly 'Laptops for all', is working nicely:

*'Because it is in places that they know and places that are close to where they live, it's actually working quite nicely; I think we've had something like two hundred and fifty people through to date.'* (ICT Manager)

Targeting different groups through different projects has also resulted in meeting diverse needs. At the same time a network of what is available in the area has developed so that many residents have been part of more than one initiative.

**What works**

In terms of providing lifelong learning opportunities for residents in the Newcastle NDC several features of these projects can be identified as successful practice. As mentioned above, providing different services for different groups has been a key factor. At Planet 13-25 it was felt that having a truly child-centred approach was what worked:

> *'The fact that we are not bound in the same way that either formal education or learning is bound. And therefore we have a unique opportunity not to make the same mistakes and not to recreate the problems that brought these young people to be in a position where they don't access anymore.'* (Tutor at Planet 13-25)

The approach to young people is not imposed; rather it is negotiated, discussed and agreed upon. This is seen as a successful blend of approaches, for example, listening to young people can help to cultivate a sense of ownership and control but, alongside this, it was also felt that young people appreciate clear parameters, and so there is a strict behaviour code in the Centre.

There has also been some success in providing 'Laptops for all' courses in community languages:

> *'Having tutors who can work in the native languages for people whose mother tongue isn't English. We run a class, for instance, down at The Hub, which has an English tutor but has an interpreter there, for those who need that boost. (…) But we also have another tutor for instance, who's a Bangladeshi, you know, who can teach in Syleti. And can provide that sort of support. And that really does work well.'* (ICT manager)

A joined-up approach is also very important between projects. The Learning Champions have all taken the Breakthrough course for self-development. They are aware what else is available for local residents through the NDC projects and they can subsequently advise people who come to them:

> *'I think there needs to be a joined-up approach between all the different agencies who are involved in actually dealing with these people. I think there's very much still a culture of, "He's or she's my client and I don't want to share them with you because they are mine".'* (Learning Champion)

As mentioned above, informality is a key strategy when engaging residents who have had a bad experience in the formal learning system. Only when a certain level of confidence has been established can learning opportunities be offered. The Learning Champions project is a very important part of that strategy:

> *'Yeah, most of my clients are repeat clients and most of them are quite nervous, and they don't actually come and ask us straight away to do jobs or training. It's usually something like, "You filled this form in for my friend, can you help me?" And I just tend to fill the form in and explain what I do do, and if they need anymore help...'* (Learning Champion)

Newcastle NDC has also worked hard to engage all communities in its programmes. Both First Step and the Learning Assistants programme work towards the greater integration of BME groups. As one of the teaching assistants explained:

*'Once a week I work with her for two hours to improve her Turkish and her English. And also it's good to be in different minorities. Because our school is...more than 60% is not English, so the children can know that. Not only the children, but the staff already is from different minorities. So it is good for children.'* (Teaching Assistant)

There will be a separate report on the engagement of BME communities focusing in particular on the work done by First Step as a part of this year's NDC education evaluation.

**Problems Encountered/Barriers to be Overcome**

There have been several problems encountered in the development of these projects. Attracting young men into lifelong learning opportunities, for example, is a challenge that has arisen in Newcastle but also in the other NDC areas studied. This is a national problem that may relate to wider patterns of male educational under-achievement. Some commentators have suggested that it may also relate to certain cultures of masculinity, which can view learning as feminine and admitting need as a weakness. The Laptop Tutor explained that in all her courses she only had two male students. This is surprising as computer use is often dominated by male students in schools. This problem is being addressed:

*'We have two multimedia projects to try and bring in the ones that are always missed, which are the teenage boys. We need something, you know, flashy that they can do, you know, I think it would be a big pull. We've got, well, games for starters, video projects for starters, you know, things like music technology and, you know, all of that stuff which isn't sitting in front of a computer doing another lot of bloody word processing.'* (ICT Manager)

At Planet 13-16 equal numbers of male and female students participated in the tutoring but post-16 it was mainly young women who accessed the service, with young men being hard to reach. It was felt that more effort should be put into the recruitment of post-16 students who were generally much harder to contact.

Worklessness rates are high and schemes which are being set up to get people back into education and employment need to be flexible so that local people do not loose their benefits in trying to retrain:

*'The unemployment rate here is hidden. And it's hidden principally because an awful lot of people are on incapacity benefit. There are probably about twice as many people on incapacity benefit as Job Seekers allowance.'* (NDC programme manager)

As in many NDCs certain projects have been set up as pilots to see if they would be successful and resonate with the needs of the local community. Plans to discontinue good and successful projects can be counterproductive as local people have come to depend on them. The Learning Champions are to have a new cohort focusing solely on ICT next year. However, the fact that the current link people are not being replaced means that many local residents who have benefited from the service will not know where to turn. Any new Champions with new roles will have to start from scratch in building up trust. It would seem preferable to retain at least a few Learning Champions in their original role.

*'Yeah, well, a lot of my clients come from asylum seekers, refugees, and it's a lot to get them to come to see you. And then it's like - well, you can't come and see us anymore. And I can't even give them a name of somebody else who can carry on. I can't say, "Well, I won't be here but this person's here and they will be taking over".'* (Learning Champion)

Racism is a problem across the country but the tensions are frequently most pronounced in areas of social disadvantage, where minority ethnic groups provide an easy target for abuse and scapegoating. This has been an issue for the NDC for some time and will require further considered action across the programme.

# Conclusion

Newcastle NDC have had success in structuring their lifelong learning provision to the wide range of needs and the various interests of the local community and engaging residents in lifelong learning opportunities. The reasons for non-engagement are complex and the challenge of raising basic levels of skills, and improving educational qualifications and self-confidence, is not an easy one. Hostility to authority, negativity to former educational experience, as well as high levels of material disadvantage are hard obstacles to overcome. Good use has been made of ICT as a core strategy of a new and exciting way of supporting learning in small groups at community venues. Excellent use has been made of community activists and Learning Champions to develop networks of people interested in learning opportunities and with positive attitudes to the NDC's efforts to promote lifelong learning. Safe learning environments have been provided for vulnerable young people and those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. There has been particular success in adopting a joined-up approach so that these projects, despite meeting different needs, overlap and reinforce each other. Many residents described how they had benefited from more than one project and that they had provided opportunities for employment. There was also robust evidence that the projects were truly 'bottom-up' initiatives with local residents involved in all levels of the NDC's activities. Many of those interviewed had a degree of community pride and refused to be seen as victims or pathologised by outside perceptions. Despite the challenges faced, positive and enthusiastic attitudes were displayed by the NDC staff and participants to the opportunities being provided for lifelong learning.

## Key Issues for Partnerships

### Barriers to progress

- a vicious circle of poor educational attainment and worklessnesss being transferred from one generation to the next
- stigmatisation from employers and residents outside the NDC area
- poor experiences in, and hostility to, formal education

### Characteristics of Emerging Good Practice

- providing a safety net for young people not accessing educational opportunities for complex reasons
- supporting community groups and organisations through ICT and other forms of training with the aid of Learning Champions
- providing good quality crèche facilities
- being sensitive to the needs of those from BME backgrounds
- providing courses that are non-threatening and flexible with approachable staff, in local venues, that are not qualifications driven

### Further Pressing Issues

- attracting male residents to lifelong learning opportunities can be especially difficult
- it is vital that the statutory sector of education recognises, and acts upon, its duty to ensure that fewer young people are absent from school and more people leave school with positive attitudes to continuing their learning
- there is a need to provide continuity for projects so that relationships built and networks established are not lost

- continuing to attract local residents through networks to take advantage of the courses on offer
- finding methods of assessing non-accredited, informal learning

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