

Final Project Evaluation Report

Ref: NLC/P/10

Huddersfield Pakistani Community Alliance -
Thornton Lodge Neighbourhood Learning Centre (NLC/P/10)

12a Thornton Lodge Road
Thornton Lodge
Huddersfield
HD1 3JQ
Tel: 01484 544877

Produced by:
Ishtiaq Ahmed
Syed Rashad Bokhari

Acknowledgements

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Shahida Awan (Chairperson)	Huddersfield Pakistani Community Alliance
Aleem Ahmed (Chairperson)	NLC Management Committee
Dr. Nasim Hasnie OBE	Senior Lecturer – Huddersfield Technical College
Dennis Carrington	Department for Education and Skills
Sheena Whittingham Peter Crosbie Kate Fleming	KMC Community Education and Regeneration
Roger O'Doherty	Voluntary Action Kirklees
Mumtaz Ali	ICT Manager Thornton Lodge ICT Centre

Executive Summary:

Thornton Lodge is an inner area of Huddersfield in the metropolitan Council of Kirklees. This is a multiracial area with high concentration of the South Asian community particularly people of Pakistani origin. The local community displays all the symptoms of poverty and social exclusion, for example,

- High incident of unemployment,
- Educational underachievement,
- Drug abuse amongst the young people,
- Lack of advice provision,
- Poor health in terms of diabetes and coronary related illnesses.

The community feels abandoned, apathetic and least motivated and involved in terms of accessing opportunities and resources. This situation is further compounded by the absence of community development and community-based infrastructures. It is in this context that the work of the Neighbourhood Learning centre was located and subsequently developed over the last 12 months.

PCA, with support from Community Education and Regeneration (KMC Education Service) submitted a pilot project for the Neighbourhood Learning Centre in the Thornton Lodge area of Huddersfield. The proposal was successful and PCA was given funding for 12 months to test out the viability of neighbourhood learning approach and to establish a broadly based and flexible provision of learning and advice for the local residents. In the early stages of our development we were very much guided by the findings and recommendations of a research-study commissioned by PCA titled, 'The Educational Needs of the Adult Pakistani Community in South Kirklees with special reference to the Lockwood and Thornton Lodge areas'.

The report highlighted a number of key areas of concerns and points for action, for example,

- Lack of information and guidance about learning opportunities. (This point is more important considering that for a significant percentage of the community English is not their first language)
- The education provision is to be locally based, flexible and culturally sensitive. The report highlighted transport, timetabling of courses, learning bureaucracy, family commitments, and formality of learning as being key barriers to access.

- In a multicultural environment, multilingual approaches should be adopted for education; for example, it should be possible for first and second-generation settlers to access learning in the languages they feel most comfortable.
- The learning needs to build on and take account of the life experiences of learners.
- The learning provision needs to be more family focused, enabling different generations and age groups to take part in a flexible and inclusive learning environment.

The NLC approach was based on the above framework and much of the activities were family orientated, flexible, and bilingual with an emphasis on engaging learners in a variety of different ways. In our approach we were very much guided by the three templates developed by the NIACE: Social Inclusion, Community Learning Profile, and Development Plan. For the learning profile we relied on the research-study and the social inclusion template was very much integrated into the planning and the development of the NLC.

What factors that helped to make the project successful:

- ❖ A local base, at the heart of the local community shopping area, and within a walking distance from a number of local mosques and other key community facilities.
- ❖ Timely support and advice from the KMC Community Education and Regeneration section, from the staff of the Kirklees Voluntary Action, and staff and members of the Kirklees Uk-online project. We have also benefited from the support of other statutory and voluntary agencies. This shows the value of the partnership work and willingness to tap into the existing resources and networks.
- ❖ The capacity to employ fulltime project development worker and with adequate admin support meant that we were able to build and sustain links with our partner organisations and the local community. Under the guidance and support from the members of the steering, our project development worker was able to initiate, nurture and sustained links with the local community organisations and residents, and over the coming months secure their involvement in the development of the learning programme.
- ❖ The informality of our approach also helped. People felt at ease to come into the centre without feeling that they were entering into any kind of binding agreements.

- ❖ The introduction of ICT facilities into the Learning centre helped to promote positive and practical image of the project. The ‘see and touch’ nature of ICT helped to generate confidence in the community suggesting that something useful was going to, eventually, happen. This helped to create a ‘feel good’ factor about the project.
- ❖ Various information surgeries and information sessions around careers advice, drug abuse, fire safety, social care benefits etc helped to entice people into the project.
- ❖ The taster sessions in ICT, DIY, Beauty Therapy, and Driving Theory, etc. helped to introduce a new type of learners to the centre.
- ❖ The Family Learning Summer School engaged about 14 families and the learning was designed to cater for children and parents.
- ❖ The women ‘only’ learning programmes helped to attract women learners and mobilised that section of women, which because of their religious and cultural beliefs found it difficult to take part in mixed gender learning activities.
- ❖ Bi-lingual approach enabled people to access learning who hitherto felt restricted by not having sufficient English language.
- ❖ The facility to access Urdu newspapers on the Internet is proving to be very popular with Urdu speaking elders. After overcoming the initial barriers about IT and Internet, some go on to other ICT based learning and projects. We are aiming to extend this facility in other south languages.
- ❖ The flexible and informal approach to timetabling of the learning programmes without complex enrolment procedures and systems also greatly helped to attract learners who otherwise may be put off.
- ❖ Delivery of learning programmes at different locations and easy to get to venues was very positively received.
- ❖ Facilities for local children to access ICT facilities for their school based projects and homework helped to demonstrate the positive value of the centre. This also helped to create good will amongst parents and elders of the community.
- ❖ The project has created a kind of ‘buzz’ in the community and people are being motivated to get involved in all kind of activities, For example, Ethnic Minority and Drugs project has been set up and operates from the centre in order to raise awareness and initiate preventative educational programmes around the issue of drugs abuse. Also, discussions are at an advanced stage to set up a local residents association for the area.

Factors that hindered progress:

- ❖ The timescale was very unrealistic for what was a difficult community setting with no real history of neighbourhood learning and a significant number of first/ second generation settlers with no real educational background and learning culture and habits.
- ❖ NLC started from 'scratch', with limited time allowing no provision for groundwork. In the 12-month period, NLC set up a base, recruited staff, gained the confidence of the community, established a steering group, made a provision for ICT and delivered learning needs. Although this was challenging there was not sufficient time or resources for proper and long term planning, all the time we were cutting corners, not a healthy way initiating and developing an education resource.
- ❖ In the past the community had been consulted on many occasions but nothing had materialised. Naturally, there was a great deal of initial suspicions about the project and our efforts.
- ❖ Some of the key providers were impatient, demanding perfection and not making allowances for what was a new project with limited timescale and resources in a challenging environment. At a time we felt that our good work went unacknowledged and our shortcomings and mistakes, inevitable in the circumstances, were dwelled upon hindering collaborative working and support.
- ❖ There was always a baggage of suspicion around our capabilities to manage and deliver the activities of the centre. We had to spend a great deal of time in justifying our actions and rationale. One of the steering group members best expressed this in a meeting by stating, "It seems we are guilty until proven innocent. The reality should be the other way around."
- ❖ At a time we felt that certain providers always communicated through our support agencies and when in their view things had gone wrong we were the last to hear. This may be partly due to the mistrust of the community's ability to manage learning projects, partly due to the culture of rigid white bureaucracy, and partly due to institutional racism.
- ❖ In the initial stages majority of our users were male, we were not attracting women. On further consultation with a number of local women's groups two issues were identified: 1. The centre projected a male dominated bias in its activities and general office atmosphere; 2. They wanted a separate women's only provision. Both of these issues were successfully addressed.
- ❖ We discovered that insensitivity to religious and cultural considerations in a multicultural setting could be a major barrier to people in their engagement with the project and services. This was very much highlighted to us when organising the Thornton Lodge Community Festival.

- ❖ We initially offered the Development Worker's post on a job-share basis that turned out to be a bad strategy. We believe a job-share works well in an established setting with other support services intact and not in a new project that is time and finance limited.
- ❖ The location of the building is our biggest strength but the size is our biggest weakness. With the timescale and limited finances this was the best option at the time. The size of the building restricted our delivery capacity on site.
- ❖ The fact we did not have money to deliver learning we had to rely on other providers. This also restricted our capacity to deliver creatively with flexibility.

The lasting impact of NLC work:

- ❖ The community has been given a resource at their doorstep that they can access at ease and make practical use of.
- ❖ In a least resourced and hugely deprived area a buzz atmosphere has been created where their needs are being catered for and they are cared about.
- ❖ The local community is actively involved in the day to day running of the centre through the steering group and volunteers. The community has been given a resource they control, and individuals have gained vital skills of leadership and advocacy. Three initiatives that have come about through NLC are: 1. Moves to set up a local residents group for the area that will take up issues of concern to the community; 2. EMAD (Ethnic Minorities And Drugs) has been established to raise awareness and organise preventative education programs around the issue of substance misuse; and, 3. Asian Healthy Community Network, that works with Asian elders around healthy eating, exercising, etc.
- ❖ NLC has encouraged collaborative work between local community based projects and organisations.
- ❖ NLC has become a focus for the local community in term of advice, guidance, a place to network and share ideas.
- ❖ Highlighted the needs of the local community to service providers and hopefully this will encourage other agencies to address these needs with the engagement of the local community.
- ❖ NLC is encouraging and becoming a focus for across communities' links and collaborative working, hence, furthering the community cohesion agenda. The Thornton Lodge Festival was a very good example of NLC's role in bringing communities together.
- ❖ DfES, NIACE, local MP's, Councillors, and Kirklees Officials have significantly raised the profile of the area through visits.
- ❖ People's horizons have been broadened in terms of learning and learning opportunities.

- ❖ People have benefited by being introduced to learning opportunities in terms of their personal development and employability and access to education routes.
- ❖ We have encouraged volunteering within the community.

Additional Comments on key areas

Templates

We have used the Development Plan and the Social Inclusion Strategy extensively to guide our planning, however the Community Profile was completed through the research into the learning needs of the local community.

With regards to the Social Inclusion Strategy we integrated the guidelines into the organisation, management and delivery of NLC, therefore our feedback on the template entitled 'Social Inclusion Strategy in action' gives details of our approach.

Participants and activities

Activities	Number of users/ learners (Figures based on 12-months)
ICT users	186
English classes	54
Driving Theory	24
Beauty Tips Taster Course	10
Urdu In-page Taster Course	16

Referrals to other agencies	60
Assistance with job search	400
Benefits advice	300 (Approx. for 8 months)
Family Learning Summer School	16 families
Family Learning in partnership with Mosque	12 families
Equal skills	20
Fire Service Seminar for females	15
Black Governors Seminar	30
Research Report Launch	60
Volunteers	30
People supported into employment	7
People who came into the centre for various reasons, including above.	1400 (Approx.)
Thornton Lodge Community Festival	2000+ (Approx.)

Project and Management

Initially questions were raised about the involvement of Huddersfield Pakistani Alliance and its relationship with the local community, and to what extent would the management and control of the project be devolved to the local community. In response, the local steering group was established, and in the initial stages five focus groups were set up to advise on the development of the centre. At the present, although the PCA is the accountable body for the project, the day-to-day control and direction of the project is very much with the Steering Group.

In reality we needed more time to consult and involve the community in the preparation stages of the project. The timescale leading up to the first grant application did not allow for this.

We had a close liaison with NIACE, ASW, and DfES through various visits and networking seminars. The advice and information rendered through these visits and seminars proved to be most useful and inspiring in our efforts to develop the project. The feedback from the visits was clear and encouraging.

We would like to record our special thanks to Dennis Carrington of DfES for his support and advice on funding matters, and Cheryl Turner of NIACE, and Mary Crowder of ASW for their advice and encouragement.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- ❖ We devised systems to monitor income and expenditures, and have submitted quarterly expenditure profile to NIACE.
- ❖ We have developed the following systems to collect evidence:
 - Interest Log Sheet
 - Signing in Book
 - Volunteer application forms
 - Enrolment forms
 - Course Evaluation Form
 - Telephone Log

- Petty cash
- ICT user log
- ❖ Record of Steering Group meetings.
- ❖ Written reports to Huddersfield Pakistani Community Alliance.
- ❖ Quarterly Progress Reports to NIACE.