

Learning brokerage through partnerships: Local Area Agreement meets Action for Communities in Portsmouth

This case study concerns a range of initiatives to develop a hierarchy of partnerships from strategic to grass-roots. Some of these have been completed, some are current; some grass-roots and some strategic; some regional and sub-regional, others local.

The impetus for these projects is two-fold – firstly the AFL team is committed to encouraging the added value of partnership; secondly external project requirements and strategic developments such as the Local Area Agreement and PCDL partnerships.

This work has led to increased participation in imaginative learning opportunities which are only able to be provided effectively in partnership. Results have included increased interest in learning within families; raised parents and children's aspirations. Examples include Paulsgrove RaW Family Learning activities in July 2007 and LSDA / Portsmouth FLLN research during 2004.

The work has also resulted in more engagement with 'grass-roots' organisations/workers and learners/residents who understand what learners needs/wants are and therefore has led to a more locally led curriculum. More learning opportunities have been offered and taken up, for instance the LAA – Charles Dickens ward work.

Partnership projects such as learning champions / community researchers have:

- Ensured provision better meets local needs
- Built capacity in communities
- Encouraged community involvement / volunteering.

Here are some examples of comments from a postcard tracking audit of learners during 2006-07. All these courses were made possible and/or enhanced by partnership working:

- Increased self confidence / wellbeing
- Increased flexibility
- Better relationship with children
- Integration of new arrivals into the area
- Computer confidence
- Inclusion of older people
- Introduction to voluntary work
- Increased awareness of activities in the local community
- Employability and job search skills
- Preparation for and / or progressed onto qualification bearing courses
- Computer confidence / skills
- Gained qualifications
- Progression to HE.

Partner organisations involved

Partnership initiatives referred to within the case study include:

- Sub-regional local authority partnerships
- Sub-regional and citywide LA / VCO partnerships: 'Horses for Courses'; WAPAF; Action for Communities; learning brokerage / champions / community researchers
- Thematic partnerships e.g. promotion
- Strategic partnerships to deliver Local Area Agreements; PCDL.

Partner organisations have included City Council teams and other Public sector organisations; Adult and Family Learning contracted providers - FE colleges, private sector and voluntary sector providers, and other private and voluntary sector organisations.

Most current partners have been supported over a period of time and were already good contacts/ partners, brought together with a new focus afforded by the joint commitment of the team.

The Public Value of Adult Education Learning Brokerage Through Partnerships

The following factors were important in the success of this work:

1. Local Authority Adult and Family Learning teams' commitment to:
 - Ensuring that learners needs were better met
 - Genuine partnership working
 - Achieving consensus for new mechanisms for working together
 - Building trust through delivering promises and managing expectations
 - Anticipating, considering and respecting the views of partners
2. Strong strategic and operational frameworks to build on.
3. The commitment and influencing skills of senior/middle managers.
4. Recognising and adjusting to the different methods of working and pressures in different sectors.
5. Innovative learner involvement and consultation methods including voting buttons, community researchers and events.
6. Continual efforts to demonstrate the value and impact of adult and family learning using a range of methods including action research, tracking learners via postcards, producing DVDs, and internal and external evaluation.

Implications of partnership working

- This way of working is time consuming
- Decision-making is more open and devolved – leaders and teams need to be prepared to embrace this – change management
- Building trust takes time and commitment. Make sure partners feel valued and rewarded for their commitment
- Tutor staffing needs to be flexible to meet needs. This is harder to manage – but more rewarding!
- All partners need to be clear as to what the purpose of the partnership is and each partners' role within it - no talking shops or 'sleeping partners'!
- Each partner must be prepared to think wider than just their own organisation's interests, and be learner centred – may mean giving something up / sharing – resources, power etc
- The curriculum need to be responsive – not planned in advance with no room to adapt to learner and partner needs / opportunities. This has implications for how the offer is promoted. In this work, learners are involved in working with providers to shape courses and learning champions are trained and provide feedback from residents and learners. Learner focus groups and consultation events are also held regularly.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

Email romy.warren@portsmouthcc.gov.uk in the first instance identifying your area of interest.