



We can, you can

Lessons from the
RENEW Northwest
Exemplar Learning
Programme 2007

Julian Dobson
editorial director
New Start



The context

When asked about the historical impact of the French Revolution, former Chinese premier Zhou Enlai is reported to have replied: 'It's too soon to tell.' The contemporary approach to evaluation is often the opposite: to want to know the lessons before the event has been completed.

RENEW Northwest's Exemplar Learning Programme aims to avoid both pitfalls by taking a considered approach, recognising the complexities and nuances of creating sustainable communities while seeking to distil learning that can be shared and applied now.

The programme, now in its third year, does this by encouraging peers to present to each other what they have learned in a wide variety of projects, from massive housing reconstruction schemes to small community-based basic skills programmes. By focusing on difficulties overcome and knowledge gained, it has been possible to draw out themes applicable in a variety of arenas.

In the 2007 programme, 14 schemes from across Northwest England were shortlisted as potential exemplars and presented their achievements at a series of three events in November and December 2006. Of these, five have been chosen for more detailed follow-up over the course of 2007.

The Exemplar Learning Programme

ties in closely with the work of the Academy for Sustainable Communities, which seeks to promote the skills needed to build and nurture places that are physically, economically and socially sustainable.

Eight elements have been identified as vital in building sustainable communities. They are:

- Governance: a sustainable community is well run.
- Transport and connectivity: it is well connected.
- Services: it is well served by public, voluntary and community services.
- Environment: it is environmentally sensitive.
- Equity: it is fair for everyone.
- Economy: it is thriving.
- Housing and the built environment: it is well designed and built.
- Social and cultural activity: it is active, inclusive and safe.

These elements are commonly known as the 'Egan principles', as they were identified in the Egan review of skills¹, published by the UK government in 2004, and subsequent policy documents. They were given an international dimension in December 2005 through the Bristol Accord of EU ministers, which agreed the benefits of creating sustainable communities and fostering place-making skills across Europe.

This report seeks to identify key themes that have emerged from all 14 shortlisted projects that will help practitioners and policymakers to apply the Egan principles in real-life situations.

The exemplars

The following five exemplars were chosen in the 2007 programme:

■ **Castlefields Regeneration Project, Runcorn**

A comprehensive programme to revitalise an unpopular 1970s housing

Acknowledgement

In compiling this report on RENEW Northwest's 2007 Exemplar Learning Programme, I am grateful for the help and observations of all the participants in the programme, and especially the staff of RENEW Northwest and the members of the programme's judging panel: Pauline Davis, Stephen Gleave, Charles Green, Neil McInroy and Barbara McLoughlin.

*Julian Dobson
Editorial director, New Start*

Cover picture: Kensington Community Choir performing at Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool.

Photographer: Leila Romaya



estate is beginning to nurture a new sense of confidence in the area, as more than 1,400 deck access flats are replaced or improved, a new park is created and the local centre is redeveloped.

■ **CommIT – Community ICT Solutions, Lancaster University**
Volunteer students have helped a wide range of voluntary organisations and individuals, including young offenders and people with mental health problems, improve their information and communications technology skills. This has enabled voluntary groups to become more efficient and individuals to become more employable.

■ **Music for Life, Liverpool**
One of Britain’s top orchestras has joined forces with local schools and a regeneration agency to provide

musical opportunities in one of the most disadvantaged parts of Liverpool. The project is enriching the school curriculum and proving that music can play a genuine role in regenerating a community.

■ **Stats and Maps, Rochdale**
A groundbreaking internet-based information system allows statutory agencies, community groups and the public to get detailed data about the borough of Rochdale. Information that would previously have taken professional researchers hours to produce can be accessed by anyone in minutes.

■ **Stockport BME Children’s Project**
Seven different minority ethnic communities have come together, with help from Stockport’s Children’s Fund,



Key points from the Exemplar Learning Programme 2007

■ **Build on evidence but be ready to reinvent:** the most successful projects learn from what has gone before, but are sensitive to context. Knowledge and expertise must be adapted to meet the unique challenges of places and people.

■ **We learn by listening:** the programme highlighted the importance of thorough preparation, listening to those who have been involved in similar projects and to the concerns and aspirations of local people.

■ **We learn by doing:** meeting and overcoming expected and unexpected challenges enables practitioners to learn what works and what doesn’t. Flexibility and pragmatism are vital to success.

■ **We learn by daring:** the most effective projects don’t stick to the obvious. They venture into the unknown and set themselves challenges that are beyond the call of duty.

■ **We learn by valuing:** overcoming conflicts

and building relationships of trust and respect enables partnerships to work effectively.

■ **We learn by reflecting:** evaluation is an essential learning process, especially when used to adjust priorities and practice during a project.

■ **We learn by owning:** when participants feel a personal responsibility for a project, it generates an energy and will to succeed that turns obstacles into opportunities.

■ **Sharing the learning is important:** while some projects put systems in place at an early stage to share what has been learned, others appear to approach this as an afterthought. Learning may be lost unless specific provision is made.

■ **The Egan principles need an underpinning ethos:** the most effective and convincing projects don’t just supply the elements of a sustainable community. They reveal an ethos that marries energy and values to vital professional skills. A successful project is more than just a job.



to provide classes and resources to help their children learn about their heritage and culture.

Full details of these, and all shortlisted projects, are on the RENEW Northwest website at www.RENEW.co.uk – go to Resource Library and click on ‘Good practice case studies’.

Building on evidence and reinventing wheels

Professions gather clichés and truisms as they mature and develop. For the most part, they are based on good sense. But genuine learning involves examining our assumptions.

One such assumption is the necessity of evidence-based practice. Its opposite could be described as reinventing the wheel: repeating work that has already been done hundreds of times.

It would be hard to argue against learning from the evidence. An important theme to emerge from

the Exemplar Learning Programme, however, is that learning from the evidence is part of the picture, not its entirety: in itself, it does not create the drive and passion to succeed, the infectious enthusiasm that wins over sceptics, or the sense of value that persuades practitioners that a job is worth doing against the odds.

It would be hard, too, to argue that wheels should be reinvented. Yet the Exemplar Learning Programme provided some examples of exactly that: instances where it was felt necessary to start with a blank sheet in order to provide genuine local ownership of a project. More often, it was a case of adapting the wheel: existing good practice was used and valued, but it was considered equally important to fit it to local circumstances. Even those with many years’ experience of multi-million pound regeneration schemes recognised that whenever learning is applied, it is within a unique context of place and people. The wheel has to suit the terrain.

Grove Village, on the edge of Manchester city centre, is a case in point. This is a £100m programme to regenerate what used to be an unpopular and troubled housing estate in Ardwick, plagued by a reputation for gun crime and empty properties. There have been many such housing programmes in the past, and the lessons learned have been well documented. Structurally, Grove Village was different because it was one of the first private finance initiatives in housing, but the difficulties faced and solutions applied were familiar.

Grove Village demonstrates how successful regeneration combines both learning from evidence and an element of reinventing the wheel. The team leading the project, which included Harvest Housing

“ *It’s about us being the now and not just the future.* ”
LKC awards



Group, Manchester City Council and developers Gleeson, had vast experience of housing redevelopment; yet they said one of the key lessons was to listen to the community, support local residents and adapt the scheme to suit residents' needs.

Ian Perry, chief executive of Harvest Housing Group, explained what this meant in practice: 'We set out the big idea and we had the vision of what it needed to be, but how to do that we didn't really know. The detail of what we have done actually came from the people who live there.

'We turned ideas into reality with the residents. We can provide the building blocks but they have to be put together differently in every community. Every community will want the shape to be different. You can't take Grove Village as a solution and plonk it somewhere else.'

One project did appear to have set out consciously to reinvent the wheel. This was the LKC Awards, a scheme to celebrate the achievements of young people in the Lower Kersal and Charlestown area of Salford, which is home to a new deal for communities initiative.

Here the award scheme was facilitated by a youth worker, but effectively started with a blank sheet in order to give local young people a full sense of ownership. While it proved highly successful in this respect, it was clear that after the event the young people involved had second thoughts about some of their decisions.

Hannah Peake, the youth worker, said: 'The group made a decision not to involve children under the age of 11 and in some ways I feel that this was a missed opportunity to recognise that children also get involved in the community. They also chose not to invite parents or any



“ It's nearly four years since we started bidding for money. Without the dedication from us as individuals and resources from our organisations the project could easily have stalled. ”

East Manchester Home Front

officials, and I think this meant they did not receive the recognition that they deserved.'

Taking time to look at the successes and lessons of other youth award schemes might have encouraged a different approach. On the other hand, it might also have diluted local youngsters' belief that they were genuinely in control.

What emerges from the assembled experiences of the shortlisted projects is the magnitude of context. Our exemplars cannot be cloned; but their experience can be applied and adapted in new situations.

The rest of this report examines in more detail the types of learning that have emerged from the programme, and may be applied in other contexts in the task of creating sustainable communities.



Learning by listening: preparing the ground

A common characteristic of the shortlisted projects was a willingness to learn right from the start. Many stressed the value of effective preparation, and some pointed to the pitfalls of acting without sufficient groundwork.

This learning took two principal forms: learning from outside, through visits to similar schemes or knowledge of relevant work done elsewhere; and learning from inside, through conversation and negotiation with project partners and stakeholders.

By garnering this knowledge, projects built the ability and confidence to set clear and realistic objectives and gained a clarity about the strategies and skills needed to achieve them.

Stats and Maps is a striking example of thorough preparation. Stats and Maps is an internet-based information system that allows statutory agencies,

community groups and the public to get detailed data about the borough of Rochdale – crime statistics, educational information, or details of local services. Users can tailor the information to their own neighbourhood or area of interest, and staff from Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council train community groups to use the system.

While the concept of Stats and Maps is simple, its execution was complex. Data had to be gathered from a wide range of agencies, which needed to be satisfied that the information would not be compromised. A technical solution had to be found to enable users to view information clearly in a format that suited their requirements. Data must be constantly reviewed to ensure it is up to date.

Information specialists working for statutory agencies took part in five months of exploratory discussions and fact-finding before the project became a formal entity. Recognising that a high level of technical expertise was required, tenders were invited to set up and test the Stats and Maps website. The site was established in 2004, but tested further with users and developed over the following two years.

Even with such extensive preparation, Stats and Maps has not been glitch-free. In fact it was a victim of its success: usage was so high that the system became overloaded, and further work has been necessary to improve the site's stability and speed.

While Stats and Maps shows the value of internal learning, the restoration of Castle Park House in Frodsham, Cheshire, shows how external learning plays its part too. A decaying former mansion house, given to the town of Frodsham in 1933, has been revived as a community hub, bringing together local services, business space and training facilities.

The scheme was led by Frodsham Forward, a market town regeneration



“ “ One of our huge hurdles was showing that while we are a very “ ”

large university, there was a genuine ethos of giving something back to the community.

CommIT



All we ask is a slightly different way of working. All we ask is a little bit of a change in mindset.

Families Learning and Employment Programme (FLEP)



project, in partnership with Vale Royal Borough Council. What looks at first glance like a traditional building restoration project proved remarkably intricate, involving detailed negotiations with service providers and the Charity Commission, and permission from the secretary of state to alter a listed structure.

The project's organisers did two things at the start: they held an extensive consultation to listen to local residents; and they visited similar schemes elsewhere to learn about what had worked and what hadn't.

'We learned lessons before setting out,' said Anne Boyd, market towns project manager at Vale Royal. 'It wasn't about meeting the demands of the community or anyone else, but looking for everybody round the table to gain. The community have had their asset restored. The council can deliver services that are appropriate to community needs, and partners are seeing increased participation in services.'

Learning by doing: practicalities and pragmatism

The ability to think and rethink on your feet without losing sight of your objective is a prerequisite for successful project management. In the complex field of sustainable communities, that must be done while satisfying partners, funding

agencies and the people the project is intended to benefit.

The shortlisted projects demonstrated this practical learning in abundance. Many of them learned the importance of creating effective teams, having personnel with the required skills and seniority in place at an early stage. Others learned how to juggle different funding streams, meeting different deadlines and requirements while spending the money as effectively as possible.

For others, the practical lessons were to do with ensuring the engagement of local people, meeting their aspirations without creating unrealistic expectations.

The Castlefields Regeneration Project in Runcorn is a good example of this learning by doing. The £63m project to revive a run-down 1970s housing estate involved more than 50 individual projects, replacing or improving more than 1,400 deck-access flats, and the creation of a new community park on the site of a former school.

The project began with a detailed masterplan setting out how the estate would look at the end of the process. But as the partner agencies listened to local people, examined how each element could be delivered and balanced resources, it became clear that the masterplan had to be adapted as the scheme progressed.

'Local knowledge and understanding



We make sure students are getting a genuine experience of a draughty church hall on a Tuesday night. People are not getting last year's lesson plans out – it's what's happened today in their life.



Compass Regeneration Academy

of the area proved very useful, often helping to foresee how some of the conceptual elements of the masterplan might be difficult to implement on the ground,' said Derek Sutton, operational director at Halton Borough Council, the lead organisation in the partnership. 'Through extensive consultation events with both internal and external partners, the partnership was able to harness this knowledge and use it to help adapt the masterplan.'

Similarly, budgets and timescales had to be constantly reviewed, as changes in one element of the scheme had knock-on effects on another. Throughout this process the partnership learned to keep local people informed, and learned to promise only what could be delivered.

Salford Sports Village, similarly, demonstrates the need for flexibility. The aim was not just to provide a new sports centre in the Lower Kersal and Charlestown area, but to use sport as

a catalyst to improve residents' skills, health and education. This demanded close liaison with a wide range of partner agencies, detailed financial management and a strong rapport with the local community. 'Applying to eight organisations each with different agendas, application processes, timescales and outputs was difficult to say the least,' the organisers admitted.

Working with police, sports, health and education specialists has demanded a high degree of adaptability. A year before building work was due to begin, plans had to be redrawn on the advice of the police architect so that the sports village could meet 'secured by design' principles.

Because the project was a flagship scheme for the Football Association, there was inevitably a strong emphasis on football as the main sport on offer. The sports village is now beginning to offer a wider range of sporting activities to cater for other interests.

Learning by daring: taking risks, reaping rewards

The most effective and impressive projects don't stop at the obvious. They have an energy and a desire to generate change that leads them to take risks. The prize of success counts for more than the fear of failure.

In setting themselves tough challenges, the shortlisted projects entered unknown territory, seeking to stretch beyond simply transferring best practice from elsewhere. A common theme was the ability to see outcomes rather than outputs: to focus on the bigger picture without putting fences around the possibilities.

While all showed some risk-taking, it was noteworthy that two of the schemes that were most prepared to take risks came from outside the



traditional regeneration professions.

Music for Life stemmed from the desire of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra to make a difference on its doorstep. The contrast between an internationally-renowned orchestra and the level of musical activity in nearby Kensington was striking. To bridge the gap Music for Life was created, a five-year project to bring musical education to local schools and to involve the community in the orchestra's programmes.

Kensington is a new deal for communities area, with all the problems that qualify a deprived area for new deal funding. Poor housing, low educational attainment and limited job prospects all loomed higher on the agenda than cultural activities. To use music as a force for regeneration seemed to some irrelevant at best, self-indulgent at worst.

As Judith Agnew from the Philharmonic explained: 'We suffered from an attitude that classical music is elitist and this was just an audience development exercise. By us saying we would be working for at least five years, working every week with the children, we could use peer power from the children – "come and see me perform". We were totally frank about how committed we were to being there.'

There are now some 60 children at five primary schools learning musical instruments, and many have continued their interest into secondary education.

“ One of the first things we did over 12 months was to build honest relationships and a bond of trust. ”

West Cumbria Social Enterprise Hub

Management of Kids Zone
The staff of Kids Zone are now collectively a Workers' Co-op, and are therefore legally responsible for the management of all facilities provided by Kids Zone. Workington Kids Zone Ltd. is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Childcare Tax Credits
Did you know that you can claim for up to 20% of your childcare costs from the Inland Revenue? Dependent on your earned income, you could be paying even less for your childcare.

Childcare Vouchers
Kids Zone is now registered to accept Childcare Vouchers. Please see about which providers we are registered with! To find out more please give us a call.

Childcare Co-Op
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Kids Zone - Providers of Childcare
Kiddie Junior School, High Street, Workington, Cumbria
Tel: 07989 673543
Email: kidszone@ninetel.co.uk
www.kidszone.coop

Inspected and Registered with Ofsted
Tel: 07989 673543
www.kidszone.coop

While these might not be the results a regeneration agency normally looks for, the ripple effects are significant. One head teacher, Charles Daniels at Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, reported that pupils' behaviour had been transformed since the start of Music for Life.

Two Ofsted inspection reports have mentioned the impact of Music for Life; attendance at four of the five schools has improved; and key stage 2 results in maths, science and English are markedly better. Adults, too, have got

“ People think going through the pouring rain night after night, is it worth it? A lot of people fell by the wayside, but others came in. As soon as we got financial close and contractual close a lot of people started to see the light at the end of the tunnel. ”

Grove Village



involved, with a growing number joining a community choir.

CommIT – the Community ICT Solutions project run by Lancaster University Volunteering Unit – is another example of daring to reach beyond the obvious. Again, this initiative came from an organisation that is not part of the usual matrix of sustainable communities professions and was under no statutory or contractual obligation to devote the time and effort needed to make the idea work.

The idea behind CommIT is that students at Lancaster University use their computer skills to help community groups. This has involved assessing the needs of voluntary organisations, brokering partnerships between students and community groups, and working with mental health service users and young offenders.

Working through Blackpool Council for Voluntary Services, the university teamed up with 20 community organisations to conduct a ‘healthcheck’ of their ICT needs.

The scheme works because there is a bedrock of mutual benefit. The student volunteers learn about working with communities and applying their knowledge in practical contexts,

which makes them more employable; community groups and their users learn how to use technology and apply it to their needs, and reach a stage where they can take part in formal accredited learning.

Learning by valuing: building trust, resolving conflicts

The need to build relationships of respect and honesty, to overcome negative perceptions and assumptions, and to resolve conflicts equitably was a strong theme of several shortlisted projects.

Participants learned how to value each others’ aspirations and contributions, and as this mutual respect grew, they learned much about working together and resolving difficulties.

While much material exists on how to form partnerships – negotiation skills, ideal legal structures and so on – it is clear that much of the learning about effective partnership takes place in situ, as individuals and organisations discover how to work together. Effective facilitation can help to breed empathy and understanding.

The Stockport BME Children’s Project demonstrates how such relationships can be built and how members of a partnership can learn how to overcome difficulties.

The project was designed to tackle the lack of culturally relevant education for black and minority ethnic children in Stockport, a borough with a large white majority. It aimed to enable children to learn about their own culture, with tutors from their own communities. Instead of working separately with each community, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council’s community development team brought several minority groups together to agree a consistent approach, and provided support where there was a lack of

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We want to be looking into the future and looking at where change might be happening. People come to us and want bits of data and we try to challenge them to think about what it means.

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Stats and Maps



community infrastructure: a Chinese group was established to enable children of Chinese background to benefit from the programme.

The different community groups learned to work together for the first time, and for many it was also their first experience of a long-term partnership with a statutory agency. But almost immediately the project faced a major challenge, when funding was reduced from £78,000 in 2005 to £45,000 in 2006.

‘Our greatest fear was the groups would lose solidarity and start fighting over their share of the budget,’ said Phoebe Spence, a member of the community development team at Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council.

‘That’s what happened at our first meeting. Each came in and started pitching against each other. At the second meeting the groups presented to each other the value of what they did, and what would happen if they had to cut. It then became very difficult with the empathy that was there for groups to be cruel to each other and take a bigger share of funding.’

By learning to face this challenge in a mutually supportive way, groups built respect for each other and ensured the project could survive and flourish.

Several of the other shortlisted projects had to resolve conflicts or overcome scepticism to reach a stage where their ideas and proposals were valued and acted on. Castle Park House in Frodsham had to deal with political opposition; the LKC Awards team had to convince funding agencies that young people could be trusted to stage an event.

Relationships of trust have been vital to the progress of the West Cumbria Social Enterprise Hub. The hub provides advice and support to fledgeling social enterprises, many of which were struggling to make the transition from charities to sustainable businesses.



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The budget needed to be bent quite significantly, so we did. Some bean counter said it didn't say anything about buses in the

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project budget, so the partners creatively decided to ignore him.
Dig Manchester

The advice service was contracted out to a specialist company, Co-operative and Mutual Solutions (CMS), which then had to convince local enterprises that it was there to help and not to steal their business. Similarly, CMS had to persuade individual social enterprises that they could work together without threatening each other’s livelihoods.

‘We have gone out of our way to establish relationships between social enterprises,’ CMS director Gareth Nash said. ‘I think that’s key because we won’t be here for ever.’

Learning by reflecting: the importance of evaluation

Evaluation is a formal element of most larger regeneration projects, and substantial budgets are often set aside for it. Smaller initiatives frequently take a more informal approach, with less rigorous gathering of information. In all cases,



The most important thing we learned was to have the ability to change the masterplan and be more flexible and adapt.
Castlefields

however, the importance of stepping back and considering what has been achieved cannot be underestimated.

The shortlisted projects in the Exemplar Learning Programme showed a range of approaches, from independent monitoring and analysis to relatively brief post-event assessments.

The Families Learning for Employment Programme (FLEP), a national pilot scheme based in Wythenshawe, south Manchester, shows one such approach. This scheme aims to improve parents' employability by involving them in their children's education, and links a wide range of agencies that share similar objectives. It is being monitored closely by the Department for Communities and Local Government, via an evaluation team from KPMG. Detailed statistics are being gathered about who is benefiting from the programme and how.

Perhaps more significant in terms of

learning transferable lessons is the way two of the shortlisted projects used evaluation to rethink and refocus their work while it was still in progress.

East Manchester Home Front is a small-scale project that involves residents in the area's regeneration through short 'taster' courses on practical DIY and gardening, encouraging them to develop literacy and numeracy skills and support local regeneration projects. Some residents have progressed to more advanced construction skills training.

While the sessions were popular, a formal evaluation after the first round of courses showed that the training in basic skills could be improved. The steering group took the decision to change the trainer; while this was a tough choice, there was a clear improvement in quality as a result.

Compass Regeneration Academy is a much larger project: housing

Our biggest failing was not realising how good the scheme was – it took a while for the penny to drop. The project is so good we would move anything to make room for it.
Music for Life





organisations across Merseyside have joined forces to train the 'stars of tomorrow' to plug skills gaps in their workforce. The academy has a strong emphasis on practical learning, but because the organisers were venturing into new territory they arranged a formal evaluation of the first phase by a team from the University of Manchester.

The evaluation resulted in several significant changes. The course was shortened; more emphasis was placed on practical work; and access was extended to non-graduates. The course now leads to a formal qualification through the City and Guilds Institute of Management and Leadership.

Learning by owning: a personal passion to succeed

Ownership is a word that is often used loosely: it can suggest close involvement without actually committing anybody to anything. Genuine ownership involves taking responsibility, going the extra mile, being unwilling to countenance failure. Ownership says, in a nutshell, 'this is about me'.

Such ownership can occur in projects created and led by statutory organisations, but seldom grows without the close involvement of the local community or a project's intended beneficiaries. Ownership is sometimes learned, but is more often a catalyst for learning.

Most of the shortlisted projects, and especially the five selected exemplars, displayed such ownership. Participants were determined to make things happen because success or failure mattered to them personally.

Dig Manchester, a community archaeology project based in Wythenshawe in the south of the city, showed that ownership is not the preserve of a select few. Nearly 1,200

people took part in the excavation of Northenden Mill over four weeks in the summer of 2006, and the excitement and involvement was shared among children, older people, schools, university staff, artists and regeneration professionals.

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There are no magic solutions to this work, but there are magic ingredients, and the first is starting from what the community wants for itself.
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Stockport BME Children's Project

The sense that 'this is about us' was heightened by the contrast between the participants' enthusiasm about discovering their heritage and the poor reputation of Wythenshawe among the wider public. Dig Manchester challenged that reputation and fostered local pride. Now that the dig is over, an online heritage trail has been created for Wythenshawe and links have been forged with a local history group.

The local ownership of the project was also seen in a 'can do' approach to funding: when the partners realised the budget needed to be 'bent significantly' to pay for transport from schools to the excavation site, they just got on with it.

This 'it's about us' dimension was also central to the impact of the Stockport BME Children's Project: the different community groups involved felt so strongly about the need for children



It wasn't about meeting the demands of the community or anyone else, but looking for everybody round the table to gain.

Castle Park House



to discover their heritage that they determined the scheme would succeed even when faced with funding cuts.

Ownership was also demonstrated through strong lines of accountability: the tutors were employed by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, but reported first of all to community representatives.

Sharing the learning: how to pool the knowledge

Some projects are better than others at identifying what they have learned and passing it on. In time-limited schemes, sharing learning is often not a priority: evaluations concentrate on outputs achieved and targets hit rather than pinpointing what can be replicated.

Three positive approaches can be seen in the projects shortlisted for the Exemplar Learning Programme. These are integrated learning, where provision is made at the start for lessons to be shared; continuity, where learning can be built into future development; and handover, where the achievements of one project are handed on to another agency to take forward.

Some of the shortlisted projects were set up as pilots or exemplars

– FLEP, Grove Village and Salford Sports Village – and here delegations from outside have been welcomed and there is an assumption that achievements will be shared. Support from national government or institutions provides an opportunity for experience to feed into the development of policy and practice.

Compass Regeneration Academy and Stats and Maps are examples of schemes where continuity is intended. What is learned is then applied to the future development of the project; this also gives outsiders a chance to learn from what has been achieved.

East Manchester Home Front and CommIT are schemes that aim to take people to a particular stage: they provide training in practical skills that enable people to progress into more formal education. In both cases the end is the beginning of something else. Here, though, the extent to which learning can be shared depends to a great degree on the ability of the next agency down the line to identify and use what has been learned.

There is a final group of projects where there is no obvious strategy for sharing the learning. This doesn't mean learning is not passed on: the enthusiasm to take part in the Exemplar Learning Programme itself reveals a desire to share experience.

But projects like the LKC Awards and Castle Park House do not seem to have factored this sharing into their initial costs and programmes, so it appears to have happened as a result of the schemes' success. Sharing lessons can be low on the agenda when the first priority is to make something happen. Often a project has to achieve first in order to convince others that the work has been worthwhile. Such learning is fragile and easily lost.

There is scope for improving the way learning is shared by embedding it within time-limited projects. This calls



for a recognition of the value of shared learning by funding agencies and key staff: recording and communicating learning needs to be built into budgets and project management. That is not always easy when funds are tight, staff are working flat out to get a project going, and the benefits may not be felt by the project's target clientele.

From Egan to ethos

The learning we have observed among the 14 shortlisted projects can be divided into two broad categories.

In the first basket are the assessment and observation that take place at the start of a project; the experience of undertaking it; and the evaluation as it proceeds and concludes. These processes help identify skills that are needed, test them in practice and embed them in future activity. They are the specialist and generic skills identified by Egan as being in short supply and in need of nurturing throughout the professions working for sustainable communities.

The second basket contains the qualities that are needed for the job and learned on it: ownership of the project, valuing people and resolving conflicts, taking risks in pursuit of a greater gain. These qualities are closely associated with the generic skills of leadership, negotiation and communication.

Together they point to the ethos at the heart of a successful project. An ethos is more than a set of skills: it is a driving force that embodies values and principles that give a project energy and the ability to surmount obstacles.

To put it another way, the ethos is what binds the Egan principles together and generates the necessary drive to create sustainable communities in challenging contexts.

The projects that most impressed

the judging panel for the Exemplar Learning Programme were those that demonstrated this energy. One of the panel referred to the 'imagination and creativity and risk' of the applicants; another commented on the 'commitment, enthusiasm and passion and goodwill from the community right through to the professionals.' Another praised the problem-solving approach: 'People who are flexible and able to face the issue and find a solution are like gold dust.'

The recurring theme of the five selected exemplars is that 'we can': we can make music; we can create a place we want to live in; we can celebrate our culture; we can teach and learn new skills; we can use information effectively to improve our town. The central lesson of the Exemplar Learning Programme is that others can, too.

Reference

■ 1 The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1502285>



From day one our motto was: it's not just about bricks and mortar. We have a shiny new £5m building with lovely

wooden floors and art on the walls, but that's not what it's about. It's about people.

Salford Sports Village



RENEW Northwest is the Regional Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Communities. We develop dynamic and responsive learning opportunities to provide practitioners with the skills and knowledge required to deliver sustainable communities.

One of our major aims is to gather good practice and help to make it accessible to all in a way that promotes learning and helps others to benefit from the experience gained.

The RENEW Northwest Exemplar Learning Programme aims to do just that – identify and showcase examples of good practice in sustainable communities throughout the Northwest.

The programme facilitates the sharing of knowledge and learning through celebrating examples of projects where those involved have worked together to:

- Learn from experience and change practice as a result
- Find innovative ways of overcoming barriers
- Provide inclusive leadership to all who need to be involved
- Create inclusive partnerships or project teams
- Use evaluation or experience to modify practice
- Successfully ensure that the project is sustainable

This publication sets out the lessons derived from the 2007 Programme.

Summaries of the individual projects and further information about the Exemplar Learning Programme 2007 are available on the RENEW Northwest website at www.RENEW.co.uk

We welcome feedback to info@RENEW.co.uk

RENEW Rooms

**The Tea Factory, 82 Wood Street
Liverpool L1 4DQ**

Tel: +44 (0)151 703 0135 Fax: +44 (0)151 703 0136
Email: info@RENEW.co.uk Web: www.RENEW.co.uk

This publication was researched and written by Julian Dobson and designed by Chris McCarthy for NS+ Ltd, www.nsplus.co.uk, tel: 0114 229 5726.



We will welcome all children regardless of race, culture, ability and gender.

Management of Kids Zone
(The staff of Kids Zone are now called...)

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