

# CITIZENS' CURRICULUM CASE STUDY

ROCHDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL

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### Introduction

Taking a Citizens' Curriculum approach ensures all individuals have the core set of skills they need for the 21st Century, including English, maths, ESOL, digital, civic, health and financial capabilities. NIACE is committed to widening access to these skills, particularly amongst under-represented groups in society, as well as improving the range and quality of provision available to all adults. These interrelated skills, which underpin lifelong learning, can be made more accessible by being contextualised and developed as an integrated curriculum offer or framework.

In 2015/16, the development of a Citizens' Curriculum was taken forward by thirteen pilots across a range of organisations including colleges, local authorities and charities. The pilots tapped into what motivates adults to learn, ensuring that more people are learning skills which are relevant to their lives, their needs and their work. Particular areas of focus included provision for homeless / vulnerably housed adults, offenders, ex-offenders, migrants, families and disadvantaged young adults. The pilots provided insight into methods of adopting a Citizens' Curriculum approach, how effective the approach is in engaging disadvantaged learners, the impact on learners and providers, and key success factors for both the learner and the provider. This case study tells the story of one of the pilots.

### Background

Rochdale Borough Council is based in Greater Manchester and provides public services to Heywood, Middleton, Rochdale and Littleborough and The Pennines. They are currently involved in the Greater Manchester public service reform programme, one of four national pilots which are trialling a joint working approach to the delivery of public services, involving the private, community and voluntary sectors. Rochdale Borough Council saw the Citizens' Curriculum pilot as a way to test a number of approaches they had developed to potentially support the devolution of skills provision across Greater Manchester.

### How it worked

The Council focused their pilot on the Kirkholt neighbourhood of Rochdale and targeted young people and working age adults. The Council embedded the Citizens' Curriculum approach into three different strands of delivery.

In the first, 'general' strand of the pilot, the Council wanted to increase access to and participation in the existing learning provision available in the borough. In order to achieve this, they delivered training to intermediaries who were working with families across Kirkholt. The Council offered a training programme to a group of 25 people working in various roles across the public sector, such as social workers, police officers and mental health workers. The programme was designed to help

these workers recognise the value of learning, particularly around the literacy and health capabilities of the Citizens' Curriculum, and how this can contribute to the development of resilience and independence in the individuals they work with. The training also aimed to enable the workforce to engage with members of the community more effectively and increase the number of people accessing the different services available. This would then support members of the community to improve in different areas relating to the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities, such as health and financial capability, as well increase their overall engagement in the community. This included training workers on how to have constructive conversations with individuals about their aspirations and goals.

*'We also trained them in the techniques of having those conversations. So for people who are really ready to change but didn't know how they used solution focused conversations. For people who kind of wanted change but we're a bit ambivalent they've been using motivational interviewing. For people who were quite resistant to change they've been using restorative practice approaches, which are about looking at understanding the consequences of your current behaviour and the impact it has on other people, and then looking at a plan to change that.'* (Pilot lead)

The second strand of the pilot targeted a specific group within the local community who were least likely to either participate in or benefit from learning. The Council coordinated two projects within this strand. The first was the 'Lone Young Parents' project which adopted an 'assertive engagement model' to involve learners in the design of the curriculum and ensure that the programme met their needs and interests. This involved working closely with individuals from the target group for up to 12 weeks before the start of the programme. Project staff had informal chats with young parents and established a presence in baby clinics and schools. They also spoke to health visitors and got contact details of young women who could potentially benefit from being involved in the project. Staff could then write to or phone these individuals, and in some instances accompanied crèche workers on visits to speak to young mothers face-to-face. The aim of these conversations was to explore the aspirations and learning needs of lone young parents, in order to develop a curriculum which would be engaging and relevant to them.

*'So they're kind of developing the curriculum based on individual stories of what they need. Then the provision is made as easily accessible as possible, right down to sending taxis out to the house and the taxi has to wait.'* (Pilot lead)

In total, 10 young women were engaged onto the project, which aimed to not only equip them with skills but also help them to recognise the value of learning for life. The activities learners were involved in covered a range of topics and skills relating to the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities, including parenting and play; domestic violence; sexual health; drug use; housing; finance and budgeting; assertiveness;

and communication skills. Over the 13 week programme they built up a portfolio and made a scrapbook.

The final strand of the Council's Citizens' Curriculum pilot was an intensive approach which focussed specifically on families who were placing a high demand on services. Typically these were identified through police data on call outs to their homes. The Council then worked with a variety of agencies, including the police, housing and mental health services, to establish what information was known about these families.

Once the family's situation was defined, project staff identified an 'in': a member of the family that needed or was asking for help and support. They established a relationship with this member of the family and supported them to access support or learning opportunities which would improve their situation. This helped individuals address issues relating to all of the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities, including mental health problems, debt and finance issues, basic skills needs and social exclusion. The Council found that once that person was comfortable and happy, other members of the family wanted to get involved in more positive activities, such as learning, well being or civic opportunities. By the end of the pilot, the Council had engaged 13 families onto this programme.

## Impacts and Outcomes

### For learners

Learners across the pilot experienced a range of positive outcomes as a result of participating in the project. Learners on the Lone Young Parents programme felt that the course had been very beneficial for their confidence in at least one area. For example, some learners felt more confident to talk in a group while others commented that they now had the courage to get outside and leave the house, or ask for something in a shop.

*'It was hard for me to walk in the shop and ask for help and things like that with my confidence, I was just too shy, but now I'll do it.'* (Learner)

The young parents also felt more comfortable to discuss sensitive topics as they felt comfortable with the other learners and had developed strong friendships within the group. Their children had also made friends in the crèche provided and parents felt that this opportunity to socialise with others their own age was developing their children's confidence and preparing them for nursery and school.

*'We've all spoken about things that have happened in our lives though; again, we all comfortable enough with each other to speak about personal stuff.'* (Learner)

As a result of being part of the Lone Young Parents programme, the learners had all signed up to other courses or would be taking part in future sessions. These covered a variety of topics including literacy, numeracy and domestic violence.

*'One of them was saying can you go on the course if you've not been through domestic abuse? I said yeah, of course you can. She said because I really want to know about it so that I can protect my friends and myself.'*  
(Tutor)

Learners on the intensive strand also reported a range of positive outcomes. As a result of being involved in the project, many families were no longer in contact with the police and had improved their mental health and wellbeing. The support worker involved with this aspect of the project gave an example of one particularly successful case study with a young person who had improved his civic capability by getting involved with a local community project (see below). Since beginning the pilot the number of families and individuals engaged with the project has been much higher than originally anticipated and the results so far have been very encouraging for those involved.

### **Case study: James\***

The support worker on the intensive strand of the pilot attended a meeting with police and housing offers to discuss a family in the community that were a cause for concern, particularly the 16-year-old son, James. The conclusion of the meeting was that there was not going to be an appropriate strategy to support him or improve his behaviour until he was in prison. To avoid this, the support worker made contact with James through his sister and spoke to him about his goals and aspirations. She quickly established that James was enrolled on a NVQ Business Admin course that did not interest him, as he wanted to do something practical. The support worker arranged for James to attend a local project called Raise The Youth which carries out practical work around the community. A month later, his attendance had increased to five days a week, he had passed a health and safety qualification and was considering applying for an Apprenticeship. James's family commented on how much his behaviour had improved: he was no longer engaged in criminal activity or causing problems within the family and his mental health and wellbeing had greatly improved. Most importantly, James had moved from being a source of trouble in the community to being actively involved in civic activities and community regeneration work. James also told his friends about his experience and that prompted some of them to get involved in local projects. In this way, James's involvement in the Citizens' Curriculum pilot had not only improved his own civic capability but also that of his friends. The support worker credited this change to the personalised nature of the intensive approach which helped her to engage James in more meaningful and enjoyable activities.

\*Name changed to preserve anonymity

### **For staff**

Staff involved in delivering all three strands of the pilot were pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm of their learners. This had a knock on effect for staff as it boosted their morale and gave them a renewed sense of purpose and achievement in their work.

*'It doesn't matter where you are, when they're there before you and they're setting up and they're dead keen then that just makes all the difference to what you're doing, doesn't it?'* (Tutor)

The opportunity to try a new way of working and take part in something different to their normal working practices or remit was also a positive experience for staff. It gave them the chance to work with new people and make connections with different organisations. This was appreciated by the staff and as a result they all thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the pilot.

*'Because it's a new area and you've had to find new trainers within the area and they've been out and done it again it's been - everybody's dead excited, they're really glad to come to work.'* (Tutor)



### **For the wider community**

One of the key impacts resulting from the pilot was improved joint working between services which related to different Citizens' Curriculum capabilities. The general strand of the pilot helped workers to gain an improved understanding of each other's jobs as well as understand how their job role and skills contribute to the wider framework of services. This improved the communication between different organisations and agencies and enabled them to identify how they could pool their resources to better support the families they were in contact with. This meant that services could work together and collaborate more easily to support specific clients, as together they had a greater understanding of a client's background, issues and support needs. It also encouraged workers to re-evaluate some of their practices to see where other improvements could be made.

*'The people who work in the early years' education sector their job is very much [about] how can you help that child improve. But actually by stepping back and looking at the whole learning environment, they're getting that improvement for the child but also they can see the improvements for the adults as well. So engaging a parent into a programme that helps them learn to read at home with their child, that's not necessarily their job to do that but they'll get massive impact for the children on the back of it.'* (Pilot lead)

One of the key aims for the pilot overall was to increase participation in learning across the borough. By the end of the project, participation in learning had increased by 1.5 percentage points, from 2.3 per cent to 3.8 per cent. This suggests that the approaches taken by the pilot were effective in engaging hard-to-reach families onto learning programmes.

### **Critical Success Factors**

- By providing childcare facilities, learners on the Lone Young Parents scheme were able to engage on a learning programme which had positive outcomes for both their children and themselves.
- Training the workforce on methods to support service users to recognise the value of learning encouraged them to engage in existing provision in the borough.
- The training for intermediaries also improved communication between services and enabled agencies to better support hard-to-reach families.
- Using an 'assertive engagement' recruitment model and a completely individualised approach to delivery was a particularly successful method of engaging young people.
- By adopting a three strand approach to delivering the Citizens' Curriculum pilot, Rochdale borough Council successfully trialled numerous ways in which they could potentially support the devolution of skills provision in Greater Manchester.

### **Further Information**

For more information about Rochdale Borough Council, visit their website at <http://www.rochdale.gov.uk/>

For more information about the NIACE Citizens' Curriculum, please contact Alex Stevenson at [alex.stevenson@niace.org.uk](mailto:alex.stevenson@niace.org.uk)