

# Learning as a Driver for Change in Communities

## -Research Project Brief-

### Research Summary

This project, led by RMIT University, will explore how learning partnerships can help improve social outcomes, build community capability and strengthen community governance. In particular it will examine the outcomes of the Hume Global Learning Village partnership in Hume City from 2003 – 2012 and the Gwydir Learning Region partnership from 2004-2012. It will then review the elements of a learning community framework as a catalyst for change, and consider how that could be applied to other local government areas across Australia. Outputs include a literature review and a Learning Communities Framework publication.

### Background

The Australian Learning Community Network exists to promote the inclusive concept of learning as the key element in the development of a range of sustainable communities across Australia, through cross sectorial partnerships. Hume Global Learning Village (within the City of Hume, Victoria) and Gwydir Learning Region (within Gwydir Shire Council, NSW) are two geographic communities that have developed sophisticated models of learning regions which include an understanding that learning contributes to capacity building of local residents so that they can share in the opportunities provided by local economies and that they may be more resilient and adaptive to change.

Internationally, the concept of learning communities, cities and towns has been around since the 1970s, but came to prominence in the mid-1990s (Longworth 1999; Kearns 2001; Longworth 2006). In Australia, it can be traced to early developments in Victoria in the 1990s (Kearns 2001; Kearns, Longworth et al. 2008). By the mid-2000s learning communities were “springing up around Australia” (Rubenson & Beddie, 2004: 165). Victoria in particular has a rich history of developing and maintaining learning communities which has evolved over time. Of particular relevance to this research is how the concept has been particularly useful for local governments in the designated Urban Growth Zones of outer Melbourne. At least four of those LGAs, including Hume City, have Community Learning Plans with “action plans for planned community development” (Galbally and Wong 2008).

For over 10 years, one of the project partners, Hume City Council, has partnered with organisations and individuals to build a learning community framework as a driver of change for economic development and social inclusion. The framework is based on Hume Global Learning Village (HGLV) as a collaboration of over 800 organisations and/or individuals with an interest in learning in Hume City. This partnership empowers people to embrace learning as a way of life in the homes, community settings, educational institutions and businesses primarily in Hume. Organisations are represented from across a wide range of sectors including the business/industry sector, education, not for profit, State and Local Government. The HGLV is also open to individuals from outside the municipality, nationally and internationally who have a strong interest in lifelong learning. HGLV members come together to work collaboratively on projects and programs that have been identified through extensive community consultation and written into Council policies and strategies (HCC 2010b).

Gwydir Learning Region, also a partner in the research, has “developed a sophisticated model of a learning region that contains elements such as shared goals and vision, agreed social and economic imperatives, sophisticated conceptual foundations from the fields of education, community

development and regional development, an evolving structure and refined processes and multiple success factors.” (Mitchell, 2006, p7).

## **Research Questions**

The project asks the following questions:

- What are the impacts and the outcomes of the Hume Global Learning Village partnership as a catalyst for change in Hume City over the period 2003 - 2012?
- What are the impacts and the outcomes of the Gwydir Learning Region partnership over the period 2004-2012?
- What are the elements of a learning community framework that can be applied to other local government areas, in particular outer metropolitan/metropolitan regions, and rural and regional areas?

## **Proposed deliverables**

From this research the project will deliver:

1. A literature review that covers
  - a. Desktop review of policy/research documents relating to the development of Hume Global Learning Village over the period 2003-2012.
  - b. Desktop review of policy/research documents relating to the development of Gwydir Learning Region (2000 – 2012)
  - c. A brief general literature review that explores how learning partnerships can improve social outcomes, build community capacity and strengthen community governance.
2. Presentation of the draft Literature Review at the Australian Learning Communities Network Conference to be held in Melbourne, 23 – 25 September 2012.
3. A Project Report (Learning Community Framework publication) completed by April 2013 that outlines the key findings of the consultation process and builds on the consultations and literature to develop
  - a. A learning community framework for rural and regional local government areas in Australia.
  - b. A learning community framework for outer metropolitan/metropolitan areas of Australia.
4. Submission of one academic journal article to appropriate academic journal based on the results.

## **Research partners**

Partners in this research include ACELG, Hume City Council Research Department, RMIT University, School of Education on behalf of the Hume Global Learning Village, Australian Learning Community Network Inc. and Gwydir Shire Council on behalf of Gwydir Learning Region

RMIT University, Northern Partnerships Unit within the School of Education will act as lead researcher for the partnership/consortia. The researchers are Dr Leone Wheeler and Dr Shanti Wong from RMIT and Joel Farrell from Hume City Council.