

**Evaluation by Wider Impact Consultancy**  
*Innovators in Regeneration and Community Well Being*

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Photograph: Stoke on Trent LSP Director, Alan Turley awarding certificates to the 'Class of 2005'

**North Staffordshire Regen College Pilot**  
**Managed by Wedgwood Memorial College, Barlaston**

**An Independent Evaluation Commissioned by the**  
**Regen College Steering Group**

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An independent evaluation of the North Staffordshire Regen College pilot programme has been undertaken by Wider Impact Consultancy on behalf of the Regen College Steering Group.

The pilot has been managed by Wedgwood Memorial College, Barlaston, following a 2004 feasibility study, which recommended piloting the Regen School model that has been successfully developed in Sheffield. The principle funder for the North Staffordshire pilot programme was Health Action for Stoke.

Following feasibility study recommendations, a multi agency Steering Group was formed. The Steering Group supported the Managing Agent and a dedicated Development Officer, to deliver the pilot programme during 2005. Central to the programme has been the delivery of an accredited 'Skills for Sustainability' Course, for which 12 local people were recruited.

Students were supported by 12 local mentors, who themselves received accredited training to support their roles.

The majority of students were involved in community based projects, which were supported by skills and experience gained from attending the course and practical 'hands on' support from mentors.

It became clear during the ongoing evaluation that the pilot delivered what students were looking for. This was evidenced by all 12 students completing the course and achieving individual and group objectives. Of the 12 students, 9 have been successful in achieving OCN accreditation.

Most importantly is the enthusiasm of students for the programme. This has been reflected in the analysis of data and information, outcomes noted by case studies and similarity of more long term outcomes achieved by the Sheffield Regen School.

Final evaluation concludes the pilot programme has its achieved aims and objectives and has the potential to:

- Play a significant role in the personal development of local people, which includes diverse and 'hard to reach' individuals and groups;
- Play a significant role in the social, physical and economic regeneration of local communities;
- Support and add value to local and regional strategies, in particular the delivery of Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

Following such positive outcomes, the Steering Group has developed a Business Plan, which will aim to continue the Regen College for a further 3 years. Central to further success will be the linking of the model into local and regional strategies and securing significant revenue funding.

## **2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Wider Impact Consultancy would like to thank the following for their efforts in making this report possible:

The 'Class of 2005', mentors and Steering Group members, in particular, David Scott, Antonia Ryan, Lynne Nelson, Hazel Cooke, John Webbe, Judith Robinson, Jill Ward and Nick Mannion.

Judy Kurth, Health Action for Stoke

Alan Turley, Stoke on Trent Local Strategic Partnership Director

Kirstie Davison, Wedgwood Memorial College

Sheffield Regen School team members

Contributions have included information for case studies, data, information and, most importantly honest feedback on the effectiveness of the North Staffordshire Pilot, Regen College pilot.

### 3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

To report on the achievement of key aims and outcomes agreed with the principle funder of the pilot programme (Health Action for Stoke):

#### **Pilot Aims** (April 2003)

1. Run and evaluate a pilot course with up to 20 students;
2. Provide a learning, mentoring and practical support programme for a wide range of people;
3. In addition to people benefiting as students, up to 10 mentors, from a range of organisations, will be trained to support students and share their expertise and experience;
4. Production of a final report at the end of the pilot period;
5. Recommendations regarding the feasibility of extending the programme across Staffordshire.

#### **Anticipated Outcomes** (April 2003)

In the longer term, the expectation is that around 50 people per annum will benefit directly from participation in the programme as students. Key outcomes include:

- Establish a formal Steering Group and management structure for the programme;
- Agreement with regard to the detail of the programme and its name;
- Affiliation to Regen School UK secured, if deemed appropriate, by the Steering Group;
- Develop a 5 year Business Plan and funding strategy;
- Secure funding to take the programme forward beyond the development and piloting phases;
- Development and accreditation of a comprehensive learning programme to support the programme that will consist of core and optional elements, assessed at different levels, to suit different learner needs;
- Develop and accreditation of mentor learning;
- Agreements with appropriate local learning providers with regard to the delivery of the learning programme;
- Identification and training of a team of up to 20 mentors to support students on the programme;
- Development and implementation of a marketing strategy for promoting the programme to potential students, organisations and funders;
- Development and implementation of an integrated evaluation process for the programme.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The methods used for this independent evaluation have been:

- Analysis and reviewing of data and information kindly provided by the Managing Agent (Wedgwood Memorial College);
- Interviews and detailed case studies of individuals who represent three key distinct groups:
  - Students
  - Mentors
  - Steering Group Members
- An ongoing evaluation of student progress, utilising the 'Rickter' evaluation model;
- An observational study of students completing a group task to produce a promotional video at the end of the course;
- Interviews with individuals who represent the key funder for the programme (Health Action Stoke) and key local support agencies;
- Visits to the Regen School, based in Sheffield and the analysis of information and data kindly supplied by their team members.

## 5. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGEN COLLEGE

Established in Sheffield, the Regeneration College model is described as a ‘cross between a course and a support system’. This is because it offers learning opportunities to local people, whilst they are engaged in community projects, with the support of an experienced mentor. Regeneration College ‘students’ can be community members, project staff, or volunteers with local agencies; however projects must have community benefit.

Following interest in developing the model in North Staffordshire, key agencies such as Staffordshire University, Stoke Health Action Zone, Newcastle-under-Lyme NHS and the Cultural Trends Unit, commissioned a feasibility study during 2004, to assess the relevance and applicability of the model for providing learning/training in the area.

The feasibility study recommended piloting the model, supported by a multi agency Steering Group made up of representatives from local community groups, voluntary and statutory agencies and partnerships.

Funding was secured locally to deliver a pilot programme, during 2005, based at and managed by Wedgwood Memorial College, Barlaston. This enabled 12 local people to be recruited and supported by 12 experienced mentors.

### Skills for Sustainability Course

Described as a practical course, with an emphasis on learning through doing; students are encouraged to apply skills, tools and knowledge obtained by attending the Skills for Sustainability course to their own projects.

The ‘Skills for Sustainability’ OCN\* accredited course, developed within North Staffordshire, commenced late September with a 2 day residential element and ended in late November. Details of programme units are outlined at table 1.

**Table 1. Skills for Sustainability Units**

Venue	Unit	Date
Wedgwood Memorial College	Business Planning for Project Development	20-21 September
Wedgwood Memorial College	Developing a Funding Strategy	6 October
Wedgwood Memorial College	People Teamwork and Performance	18 October
Wedgwood Memorial College	Sustainability and Social Enterprise	10 November
Wedgwood Memorial College	Monitoring and Evaluation	24 November

\* OCN - Open College Network West Midlands

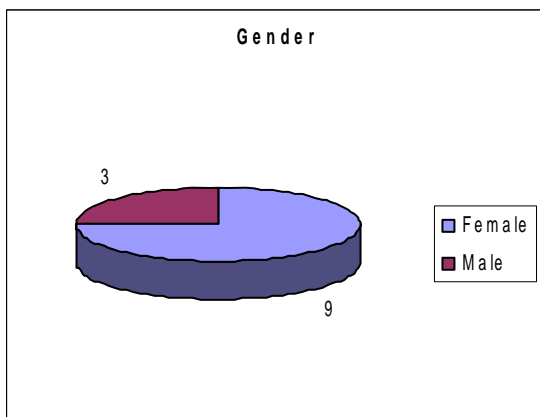
## 6. EVALUATION

### STUDENT PROFILE

Whilst analysis can only be based on a first intake of 12 students, the researcher has been impressed with the student mix, which demonstrated the potential for ensuring 'opportunities for all', in relation to under represented groups and hard to reach local communities.

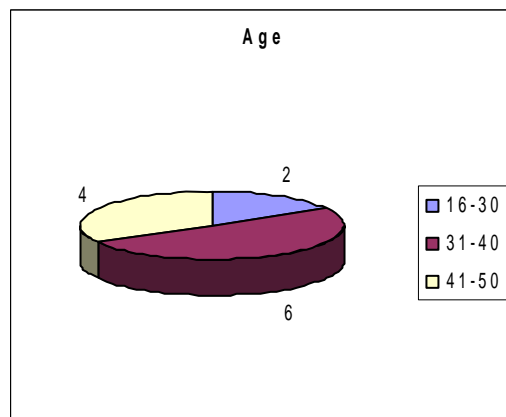
#### Gender

Graph 1 – Gender Breakdown

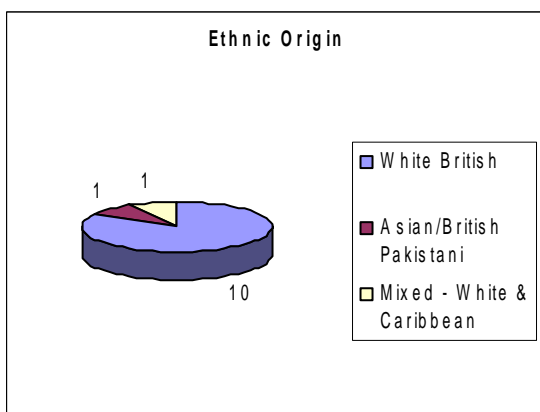


#### Age

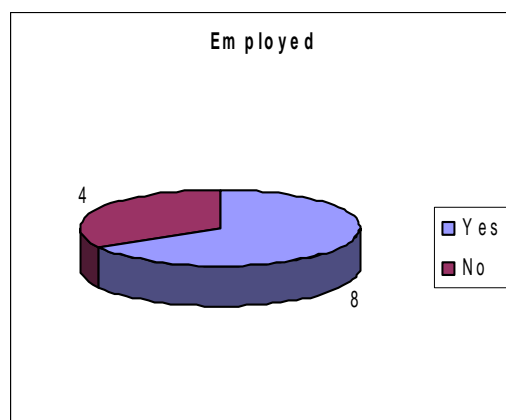
Graph 2 – Age Breakdown



Graph 3 - Ethnic Origin



Graph 4 – Employment Status



#### Additional Information

- 5 students were at level NVQ 2 on entry
- 11 students were involved in a community based project
- 3 students took advantage of free childcare facilities
- 1 student had a disability



Examples of locally based projects, students are involved in, included:

- Parent and Children Centres;
- 'Start Up' projects for long-term unemployed single parents (exploring the development of social enterprises);
- Youth Inclusion Programme (YIP);
- Asian Women's Groups;
- Residents Associations - located in high crime, deprived areas;
- Girl Guide Unit;
- Multi-agency Area Implementation Team initiatives (AITs);
- A project introducing, 'hard to reach' disaffected young people, living in deprived areas, to sport and healthy living.

### Geographical Spread

All students were North Staffordshire based and home areas were:

- |                 |              |                |
|-----------------|--------------|----------------|
| • Abbey Hulton* | • Leek       | • Sneyd Green* |
| • Blurton*      | • Longton*   | • Stanfields*  |
| • Bucknall*     | • Moss Green | • Trentham (2) |
| • Chesterton    | • Norton     |                |

Stoke on Trent is currently ranked the 18<sup>th</sup> most deprived Local Authority area in the Country. Areas highlighted by an asterisk fall within the Local Authorities most deprived areas (Source: Stoke on Trent Local Strategic Partnership, Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy 2005 – 2008; The English Indices of Deprivation 2004 Stoke on Trent, Knowledge Management Unit, Stoke on Trent City Council).

### Student Needs

Table 1 presents a summary of student needs, prior to joining the course.

**Table 2. Student Needs**

STUDENT NEED	TOTAL	STUDENT NEED	TOTAL
Access to funding support	5	Marketing	2
Access to Services	9	Partnership Working	6
Business planning/Organisational Skills	9	Presentation skills	1
Confidence	1	Working with others/supporting groups	7
Knowledge of regeneration issues	7		

Source: Wedgwood Memorial College April 2006

## COURSE OUTCOMES

### Student Achievements

It is impressive that all 12 students completed the course, despite the reservations of a number of students regarding issues best explained by comments such as, *'Walking into a learning environment for the first time since leaving school; 'Meeting people I have never met before'; and 'Thinking I will be the only one who knows nothing about regeneration'*.

### Skills for Sustainability Course

**Appendix A** provides an outline of the Skills for Sustainability course in the form of a Learning Grid – described by students as, *'The tool box for sustainability'*.

Table 3 summarises course results in relation to OCN accreditation.

Out of 12 students who completed the course:

- **3** gained level 2 in at least 4 units
- **9** gained level 3/2 in the majority of units

**Table 3. OCN Accreditation Skills for Sustainability Course**

UNIT TITLE	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 2	NOT ACCHIEVED	PORTFOLIO NOT SUBMITTED
Business Planning for Project Development	7	2	1	2
Developing a Funding Strategy	6	3	1	2
People Teamwork & Performance	6	3	1	2
Sustainability & Social Enterprise	6	3	1	2
Monitoring & Evaluation	6	3	1	2

**Source:** Wedgwood Memorial College, April 2006

It will be noted that one student did not achieve the required number of credits for the course and two students have not submitted portfolios:

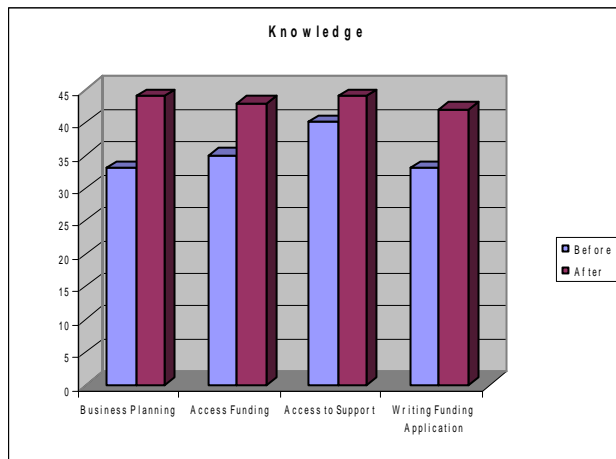
- The student who unfortunately did not achieve the required credits, despite submitting a portfolio, is receiving appropriate support;
- The two students, who did not submit portfolios, apparently did not feel ready for personal reasons. There is, however, indication they plan to join a future course to update and complete their learning experience.

## STUDENT PROGRESS

Whilst accreditation is an important element of the course, meetings with students quickly reveal important qualitative outcomes highly valued by the students.

Utilising the Rickter model, the following graphs chart the ‘distance travelled’ by students during their time with the Regen College. It is apparent that, without exception, students’ **knowledge**, **confidence** and **communication** skills have improved – meeting student needs, documented prior to attendance (see table 1).

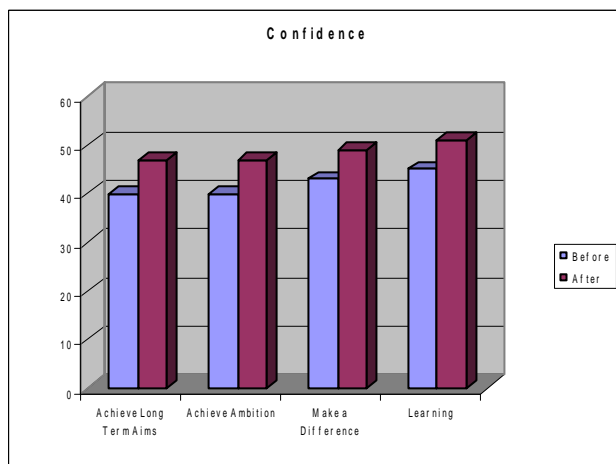
**Graph 5 – Knowledge**



### Observations

- Students have travelled the furthest distance in areas associated with business planning;
- Students’ skills and confidence, linked to knowledge of accessing funding opportunities, writing funding applications and accessing appropriate support services, have improved.

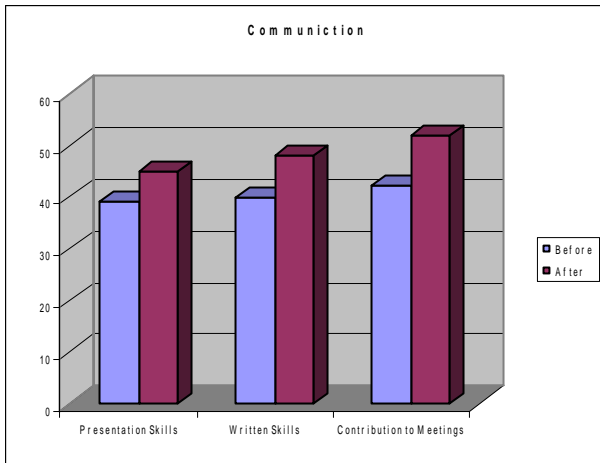
**Graph 6 – Confidence**



### Observations

- Students started the course apparently confident of their abilities. However it noticeable that their confidence had risen in areas associated with achieving long term aims, ambitions, making a difference and gaining access to further learning opportunities.

**Graph 7 – Communication Skills**



**Observations**

- It is noticeable that students feel they have gained confidence in their ability to contribute to multi agency meetings;
- Examination of the reasons for this includes the skills gained from units such as People, Teamwork and Performance; and efforts made to explain ‘jargon’, which is often used at meetings.

## CASE STUDIES

The researcher has taken the opportunity to meet students:

- As a group (10 students);
- On a 1:1 case studies basis (3 students) to gain understanding of issues such as:
  - Reasons for attending – motivation
  - Personal achievements – distance travelled
  - Reasons for success - lessons learnt
  - Future plans – aspirations
  - Added value – role of the Regen College

The researcher has also taken opportunity to meet with 2 mentors and 3 Steering Group members on a 1:1 case study basis.

## GROUP EXERCISE

The researcher took the opportunity to meet with the majority of students at the end of the Skills for Sustainability course to obtain their views on their learning experiences. Methodology involved tasking the group with the production of a 'promotional video', aimed at future students and potential sponsors.

The researcher was impressed with the energy the group paid to the task and the degree of teamwork involved. Participants were keen to debrief their experiences during the course, which started to unfold as they discussed and agreed the content of a script for a '**Regen Rap**' (see **Appendix B**).

The Regen Rap became the back drop for the video, later produced by Staffordshire University on behalf of the Regen College (copies available). Discussion points and comments included:

- **'What the course was about we had little knowledge'** – course content was new to the students, even though a number were involved in regeneration activities prior to attending the course.

It was clear the course had been challenging to a number of the students and there was a general consensus of achievement in having completed the course.

It was also clear that the students had gained a good understanding of regeneration issues having attended the course; and were utilising terms such as '*business planning*', '*partnership working*', '*social, physical and economic regeneration*' and '*sustainable development*' during discussions, with clear knowledge and understanding of the subjects.

- **'We came along worried and scared'** – it was agreed that the experience of further education, knowledge building and team working is a stressful activity and one which a number had avoided prior to joining the course.

It became clear during discussions that the method of delivery of the course was appropriate – facilitation, utilising practical examples and experiences, rather than lecturing, played a significant role in making the course a success.

It was also noticeable that the students had bonded as a group quite quickly. This had been achieved, in the most part, by a residential, which was well received by students. Indeed, it was suggested that this bonding was a reason why the course had stayed together – *'I came from my sick bed, rather than miss a day'*. *'I would have been letting everyone down if I had not come'*.

The group were clearly very supportive of each other, commenting they would be looking to continue this supportive approach in the future.

It was clear, that the course had taught some students *'the value of partnership working'*; and they will be looking to become *'part of multi agency partnerships in the future'*. It was noticeable that they were keen to *'share ideas with others, rather than work in isolation'*.

A much repeated word by the group as a whole was, *'confidence'*. It was clear that prior to attending the course, the majority of students lacked confidence – indeed it was agreed that words such as apprehension and fear were most appropriate in relation to how they had previously viewed the outside world in relation to education, personal development and working in partnership with others.

- ***'A business plan had come to light'*** – an understanding of the need to plan and structure activities achieved during the course was clearly a turning point for the majority of the group. While they were aware of terms such as business planning and budgets, this was the first time they understood the importance and relevance of these to their roles.

The course had also provided practical and useful examples of how they could utilise such tools in their current and future activities. The majority of students were already working on their business plans, with the support of the Development Officer.

- ***'And now I have the skills to sustain'*** – it is clear the group viewed the course as extremely valuable in relation to future careers and activities. Without exception, students were looking forward, to utilising the skills gained for long-term plans within their communities.

Most significantly, an impact of the course on a number of students was how it was helping them to plan their personal lives, as well as their professional careers. The words, *'I can'* were common during the exercise, as students made it clear they had been given, *'the tools to do whatever I decide to do'*.

- ***'Cuz we all can learn and have fun we know'*** – it quickly became clear that the course had been pitched at the appropriate level for the group. Whilst course content was clearly challenging, it had been delivered with *'great care and understanding'* by the Development Officer and facilitators.

A comment, *'no-one ever said you are wrong'*, best explains why students enjoyed the course. *'for the first time, teachers were not putting me down and were taking time to listen and agree with my views'*.

As a result, individuals were, *'willing to make mistakes'* – *'without worrying if I would be ridiculed by others'*. The majority of students agreed the course had been a *'unique experience'* – *'I can't believe the support we have given each other. I have never known this anywhere before'*.

It was also clear the course had opened up future opportunities for learning. Students talked about *'furthering their experience and knowledge'*, with a number looking towards courses at local colleges and Staffordshire University.

## Summary

The excellent and clearly valued support provided by mentors was discussed at length by the group - as was the ongoing support with OCN portfolios by the Development Officer. It was acknowledged that a great deal of care and attention had been given to 'matching' mentors with students.

Whilst they were an established group, there did not appear to be any long-term dependence on the group – rather an understanding that working in partnership, *'drawing on the experience, skills and friendship of others'*, is *'preferable to working in isolation'*.

As highlighted above, the key to individual future success seems to be the new found skills, confidence and knowledge of where to locate support when required. While students had enjoyed being part of a group, they seemed to have no doubts in their own individual abilities to *'make a real difference to my life'*.

Negatives such as *'apprehension'*, *'fear factor'*, *'hiding behind others'* and *'being nervous'*, have been replaced by positives such as:

- 'I loved it'
- 'I now have the tools'
- 'I have a chance to use what I have learnt'
- 'I now have a proper action plan'
- 'I can stand up as a team player'
- 'I now want more'

## STUDENT CASE STUDIES

The researcher took opportunity to carry out detailed case studies of three students from different backgrounds. Full student case studies are available at **Appendix C to E**

The following are highlighted extracts:

### Case Study 1 David Scott



David has been unable to work since a series of life threatening strokes in 2003. This does not, however, mean he has been inactive during his recovery, as he has found avenues to channel his abilities and interests, which are helping him, rebuild his life and hopefully take him off benefits.

Prior to attending the Regen College he was involved with the Greater Chesterton Neighbourhood Action Plan, local Community Forum and 'One Stop Shop', based in his local area.

He did not hesitate when **Aspire Housing** offered to sponsor his attendance at the Regen College. In his own words, *'It was just what I needed. There were big gaps in my knowledge base. As residents we need to know about things such as business plans if we are to raise our own funds and prove we can manage budgets and the like. I was aware about words such as regeneration, but if was honest, a lot of it was jargon to me and I sometimes felt lost at meetings with agencies that turned up to help us'*.

To say David made the right decision in attending the College is clearly an understatement. . *'I have now realised that planning a project, like a business takes a lot more preparation, time, resources and commitment. I am now more aware of the process and I have been given the tools, to be able to make a contribution and therefore a real difference.*

There is an air of confidence about David and he is pleased to be in the position of being offered part time work experience by the Aspire Housing Regeneration Team, which could also include becoming involved as a volunteer at a local Community Farm initiative. While the work will be unpaid, it has the potential to, *'Provide me with an opportunity to update my skills and CV'*.

As will be updated later in this report (Summary of Findings), David has utilised the skills and experience gained from the Regen College for the benefit of his wider community and has no doubt of the role, that the Regen College has played in him continuing to meet his objectives.



### Case Study 2 Antonia Ryan (Toni)



Toni came to the Regen College wearing two hats. The first as the Stoke on Trent City Council's Positive Intervention Coordinator; and the second as the Leader of her local Girl Guide Unit.

When asked what she was looking for from the course, Toni was clear. *'Systems, which would help me to do my job better and help me manage and sustain the Guide Unit. I was particularly interested in the business planning and succession strategies units of the course.'*

*'I was also looking for ways of joining up community safety with the regeneration agenda. I attend the multi-agency Area Implementation Team (AIT) and it is clear agencies and departments can no longer work in isolation if we are to make a real difference in this City.'*

Toni is equally clear about what she gained from the course – utilising an example of her performance at a recent meeting. *'I have been attending funding meetings for a number of years and an agency keeps coming back for the same funding year on year. This year I questioned them, pointing out opportunities to 'match' what they get from us, or to explore other sources. I put them on notice that it would become harder next year to justify funding from us, unless they had done what I suggested. I was 'gob smacked'! I was amazed at my performance. Since then my manager is asking me to support him with business planning and other areas I would not have tackled before.'*

Since meeting to discuss her case study, Toni is delighted to have recently been seconded to the Youth Inclusion Support Services (YISS), which is part of Youth Offending Services, who work with young people at risk of anti social or offending behaviour. Her work there is to link the work of the Community Safety and Anti Social Behaviour Team to the prevention agenda, delivered by the Youth Offending Services.

### Case Study 2 Lynne Nelson



Having left the pottery industry in 1986, as an experienced Lithographer, to bring up her family, Lynne returned to paid employment by spending time in the retail sector; until she realised her potential as a 'Regenerator' in the fields of care and supporting people.

Currently the Senior Development Worker within the innovative and successful 'Start Up' initiative, Lynne is quite clear why she joined the Regen College programme. *'I was looking for practical knowledge and skills in areas such as bid writing, business planning, net working and 'jargon busting', which would help me to do my job better.'*

Lynne is extremely passionate about her work with Start Up and used her time at the Regen College to support and 'add value' to a project she is working on in the deprived area of Middleport, Stoke on Trent. This involves engaging with local people, tackling issues such as low aspirations, a lack of child care facilities, poor public transport and a shortage of neighbourhood based support from key agencies. Lynne is helping to fill these gaps, working to develop and launch community based solutions such as social enterprises.

There is no need to ask if Lynne achieved her objectives at the Regen College; energy and enthusiasm literally flows from her. *'We were all so hungry for what was on offer and there was a common bond to work together to achieve our aims. Without doubt, we all came away with a box full of tools, which we can apply to our jobs and projects'*.

Asked why the programme was so successful, Lynne has no doubts, *'It was the common bond to work together. The Regen College supporting this, by arranging the residential at the start of the course. We were able to bond, understand each others fears, needs and aspirations. The facilities at Wedgwood Memorial College, Barlaston helped a great deal. It is so relaxed and it's good to feel so important in such a special place'*.

Expanding on what the course provided, Lynne is keen to praise the training staff and mentors, *'It was strange at first, for the first time in our lives; no-one ever said you were wrong. The style of learning was very supportive and they were willing to let us learn from our mistakes. I really valued the support my mentor gave to me. As well as using his skills and experience to support my project, he clearly understood where I was coming from. He was there at times of crisis and never missed a chance to praise me when things were going well.'*

One word seems to summarise what the Regen College has given to Lynne, *'Confidence, without doubt. This applies to most of us. We all had our own fears and worries. Mine was walking into meetings, worried I did not know what was being discussed. I went to a meeting last week - full of important people. It was amazing, I had no trouble at all understanding what was going on and had the confidence to contribute to the debate. It felt good!'*

Building on such confidence, Lynne is proud to point out; she is now exploring furthering her education and has applied to Staffordshire University to enroll on a BA course in Business Management.

## 7. THE MENTORS STORY

The researcher took opportunity to meet with a number of the twelve recruited and trained mentors, to gain an understanding why they took time out of their busy lives to support the students; and what they believed the students, the wider community and they themselves gained from the experience.

Two mentors were interviewed in depth – **both of whom achieved OCN accreditation for their roles as mentors during the course period.** A full case study is available at **Appendix F.** (Photograph: Mentor, Karen Kelly, Stoke on Trent City Council Regeneration & Community Policy & Strategy Officer, being presented with a certificate)



**John Webbe** is the Regeneration Manager for Touchstone Housing and has a wide and respected portfolio of experience in regeneration and mentoring. Asked why he takes time out of his busy schedule to volunteer as a mentor, John is clear, *'Apart from obviously helping someone develop their career and life as a whole, it makes you a better, more rounded person'*.

**Hazel Cooke** owns and manages the successful Graythwaite Guest House in Newcastle and has recently launched a new venture as a Life Coach and Mentor. Hazel is *'Passionate about regeneration and takes a great deal of pleasure from seeing people blossom'*.

Both therefore agree, mentoring is a two way process and both are impressed with the opportunities the Regen College is giving to students and mentors. For example, John is impressed with how they were matched with students. *'I was asked to support Lynne, who works for Start Up. She is closely involved with a project in Middleport where I am based. It has proved useful to 'share notes' and help her through times of stress and confusion as she progressed through the course. Her project is 'real' and clearly matters to local people. To be honest, it was more about reassuring her she was on track. She clearly benefited from what the Regen College had on offer'*.

Hazel makes no apologies for understanding how being a mentor can help her own career. *'I jumped at the chance to become involved. It is a learning process for me as well and the fact it is accredited is a huge bonus. But most importantly, it gave me a chance to support 'real people' who have so much to gain themselves'*.

As a group, whilst being debriefed, mentors acknowledged, *'We are investing in future development, putting something back. It is a joy when you see 'the lights come on' after you have nurtured someone through a difficult or confusing period. We are working with 'spark plugs', who have a huge role to play in the regeneration of our local communities'*.

All the mentors are extremely supportive of the Regen College and most are more than willing to continue - mostly in a voluntary capacity, without thought of payment. *'Its amazing when you see how much an individual can achieve at the Regen College. As well as providing extremely useful knowledge and information to students, it is a supportive, caring and 'fun' environment, where those who need it most are encouraged to learn and develop'*

## 8. ROLE OF THE MULTI AGENCY STEERING GROUP

Following the feasibility study recommendation that, *'A steering group made up of representatives from local community groups, voluntary and statutory agencies and partnerships is established'*; representatives from the following agencies freely committed their time to the Regen College:

Health Action for Stoke, Staffordshire University, Wedgwood Memorial College, Start Up, Knutton and Cross Heath Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder, Staffordshire University, Touchstone Housing, RENEW North Staffordshire, Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent (VAST), Learning & Skills Council, Beth Johnson Housing Association, College in the Community, Aspire Housing.



The research took time to interview three Steering Group members, **Judith Robinson**, Staffordshire University, Head of Cultural & Community Development; **Jill Ward**, Wedgwood Memorial College Principal and **Nick Mannion**, Neighbourhood Manager, Knutton and Cross Heath Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder. A full case study is available at **Appendix G**.

As Chair of the Steering Group and agency member who, *'first identified the potential of the Regen College'*, Judith is, *'Positive about what the model has to offer North Staffordshire. It's about developing the learning experience at the sharp end - within communities. We need to take the lid off and unlock the potential within our area. The pilot has proven we can be as successful as other areas in achieving this. We know have a deficit of skills to deliver regeneration ...'*

Judith's views on learning are not surprisingly echoed by Jill, *'We need to develop a philosophy for learning, linked to a framework for progression. We need to raise the expectation of the people of North Staffordshire, in particular local residents, who need to have the confidence to understand this is not an isolated place, which will accept second best ...'*

Nick builds on this, *'We need to improve the role of residents in a direct way, in the governance of their communities; in other words a move towards neighbourhood management. Funded and managed properly, the Regen College has great potential for North Staffordshire to 'grow our own within our neighbourhoods, increase peoples' aspirations and break this negative impression of North Staffordshire'*.

**Judy Kurth** Development Manager, Health Action for Stoke and principal funder of the pilot, summarises, *'The Regen College has proven it has the potential to improve the quality of life for local people. It achieves this by helping to deliver energy, confidence and a passion for regeneration right at the heart of our communities – a bottom up approach. We have an opportunity here to create social entrepreneurs, 'spark plugs', who should have the loudest voice of all'*.

## 9. LESSONS LEARNT

As a pilot, the programme was successful in highlighting 'what works', and as importantly, 'what can be improved on next time'.

### STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

#### Course Content

As a whole, the majority of students appear happy with the course, although a number have commented on the order of delivery of units i.e. Business Planning, being the first unit within the Skills for Sustainability Course.

Quite understandably, business planning is an intense subject, therefore a number of students felt that this unit should be preceded by an introduction element, which would help 'set the scene' for what is one of the most important and valued elements of the course.

Suggested course format offered by students being:

1. An Introduction to Project Planning
2. Business Planning for Project Development
3. People Teamwork and Performance
4. Developing a Funding Strategy
5. Sustainability and Social Enterprise
6. Monitoring and Evaluation

#### Support Materials

A local agency representative has commented on the quality of information packages and course support materials, which need to be improved if students are to be attracted to the course and kept fully aware of course content and benefits.

#### Mentors

Whilst mentor support has been valued, a number of students have commented on linkage with mentors, suggesting more time is allocated to 'getting to know' mentors, before decisions are made regarding who mentors whom.

Other students suggest that time is taken to explain the role of mentors, in order to gain a greater understanding of their roles.

In one case, a student's mentor became unavailable due to sickness and suggests that a pool of unallocated mentors is maintained to fill in for such occasions.

#### Post Course Support

Having been 'energised', a number of students (particularly those unemployed), have indicated they would value sign posting of where post course support is available – with particular reference to career and personal development opportunities, linked to local regeneration.

## MENTOR PERSPECTIVE

It is noticeable that not all students fully utilised the support available from mentors; indeed there is at least one case of student and mentor never meeting during the programme. Whilst reasons have not been fully explored, feedback suggests a number of students were reluctant due to uncertainty about the mentors' role; and it being a new experience, which they did not feel comfortable with.

It is also noticeable that those students who made positive links with their mentors were most successful in terms of OCN accreditation.

There is no doubt that this frustrated under utilised mentors, who were looking forward to supporting the students.

While those mentors who made positive connections with students were happy with their involvement with the Regen College, a number of suggestions were offered:

- More time is spent linking students to mentors;
- More time is spent explaining the role of mentors to students;
- Mentors are provided with a wider understanding of the Skills for Sustainability course, which will help mentors to gain an understanding of student 'pressure/stress points' during the course;
- Early, positive action is taken to address issues related to the student/mentor relationship as they arise.

## STEERING GROUP PERSPECTIVE

The researcher has been impressed with Steering Group members, who have continued to attend meetings and provide valuable 'in kind' support and advice to the Regen College, throughout the pilot period.

Understanding objectives have been to deliver a pilot programme; the following observations from Steering Group members have been noted:

- The 'identity' of the Regen College needs to be clear i.e. part of a national programme (linked to the Sheffield Regen School model), and/or part of a more local strategy?
- To date, marketing has been disjointed. Apart from Steering Group member organisations, there is a general lack of external knowledge about the pilot;
- To date, uncertainty regarding strategic direction and development has had a knock on effect in relation to securing limited continuation funding and wider multi agency support.

## 10. COMPARISONS WITH SHEFFIELD REGEN SCHOOL

Wider Impact Consultancy is grateful to have been provided access to research carried out on behalf of the Regen School based in Sheffield, during 2004 and 2005.

The Sheffield Regen School has been in existence for four and a half years and has pioneered practical, community led training for people who want to regenerate their neighbourhoods. Its 'Toolkit for Regeneration' programme, consists of a blend of different components, which help participants develop the skills and knowledge, or 'tools' they need to make their project ideas work. See [www.regenschool.com](http://www.regenschool.com).



It is noticeable that Sheffield outcomes are similar to those noted by the North Staffordshire Regen College:

- Students are enthused by the programme and hold it in high regard;
- Group bonding and support, enabled by a residential element, plays a significant role in making the course a success;
- The role of mentors is central to the success of the programme;
- Students who complete the course take benefits away, which help develop their personal lives, careers, projects and the wider community.

Statistical data supplied by the Sheffield Regen School includes:

- **95%** of students indicated the Regen School had been useful to their projects or enterprise;
- **81%** were satisfied with their mentor;
- **96%** would recommend Regen School to others;
- **77%** said attendance had improved their knowledge of regeneration;
- **73%** identified that the number of contacts with like minded organisations had increased as a result of their experience with Regen School;
- **32%** of respondents have been promoted or found work since involvement with the Regen School;
- Before starting Regen School the average annual turnover of a project was **£48,000**;
- The average annual turnover has risen to **£234,000** between the completion of Regen School and the completion of the survey (2005).

Student comments on how projects have benefited include:

*'Regen School gave us an insight into how things can be achieved. A large project no longer daunts us. We have passed on our new found knowledge to other aspiring projects and members of our own group'. 'We are working towards establishing a Community Development Trust'.*

## 11. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It is significant that all 12 students completed the programme and are quite rightly extremely proud and enthusiastic about this achievement. There is evidence that the programme has provided the knowledge, skills and confidence students were looking for to enable them to make a real difference in their roles as **Community Enablers**.

**Aims agreed with the principal funder** (Health Action Stoke):

Wider Impact Consultancy is satisfied that aims agreed with the principle funder have been achieved:

1. Run and evaluate a pilot course with up to 20 students (**12 students completed the pilot course**);
2. Provide a learning, mentoring and practical support programme for a wide range of people (**proven by hard and soft outcomes**);
3. In addition to people benefiting as students, up to 10 mentors from a range of organisations will be trained to support students and share their expertise and experience (**12 mentors trained**);
4. Production of a final report at the end of the pilot period (**Wider Impact Consultancy, June 2006**);
5. Recommendations regarding the feasibility of extending the programme across Staffordshire (**Wider Impact Consultancy, June 2006**).

Significant factors in making the course a success appear to be:

- Course content – useful, appropriate and challenging;
- Opportunities to practice what they were learning on ‘real’ projects and within workplaces;
- Selection of a diverse group of well-suited students, able to offer varying support and guidance to the group as a whole;
- Group ‘bonding’, enabled by the residential element of the course;
- The role played by the Development Officer and ‘teaching staff’ – facilitating, rather than lecturing;
- Selection and ‘matching’ of committed and valued mentors with students;
- The role played by mentors, offering continued support throughout the programme.

### Wider Impacts

This early evaluation indicates that students are using their new found knowledge, skills and confidence to take their learning back into North Staffordshire neighbourhoods, supporting the wider community to develop new initiatives linked to multi-agency initiatives such as youth support services, community based adult learning and social enterprise initiatives.



For example:

As the adjacent *Sentinel* article (18 April 2006) demonstrates, Regen College 'graduate' **David Scott**, is now Chairperson of the recently formed Chesterton Tenants & Residents Association.

David has also recently agreed to become a Trustee of the Knutton Community Farm project - a local social enterprise initiative.

David is keen to point out, *'It was the Regen College which gave me the confidence to believe in myself – and I am now making a difference in my neighbourhood, passing on my skills and experience to other members of the local community'*.



**Antonia Ryan (Toni)** has recently been seconded to the Youth Inclusion Support Services (YISS), which is part of Youth Offending Services. Toni is helping to support the team work with young people 'at risk' of anti social or offending behaviour. Her role there is to link the work of the Community Safety and Anti Social Behaviour Team to the prevention agenda delivered by the Youth Offending Services.

**Lynne Nelson** is proud to point out; she is now exploring furthering her education and has applied to Staffordshire University to enrol on a BA course in Business Management.

**Three students** from the 'Class of 2005' have indicated interest in becoming mentors to future students.

### Summary

It is clear students and mentors have enjoyed and valued the course and will be using the skills and experience gained to the benefit of current and future careers. There is general consensus from students that the course will have a wider impact on individual's lives in relation to:

- How they perform in current and future roles;
- Personal and career development;
- Future aspirations and achievements.

## 12. THE WAY FORWARD

### Agreed Outcomes (Regen College Steering Group, April 2006)

The Steering Group is quite rightly pleased with the outcomes of the pilot and has agreed development of a 3 year Business Plan.

#### Products on offer to include:

- Participants, (core NOCN accredited) Programme
- Regeneration Training Days
- Annual Regeneration Conference
- Reflective Workshops
- Developing Effective Community Leadership

#### Outputs

- **90** students to receive NOCN accredited training;
- **24** new mentors to be recruited and trained;
- **180** people interested in working within regeneration sector to attend training days;
- **225** managers and participants engaged in regeneration to attend annual conferences;
- **60** participants and mentors reflecting on the ongoing development of the programme;
- **55** people offered further development opportunities.

#### Anticipated Outcomes

- Increased engagement of people within their communities;
- Raised achievement and aspirations within communities;
- Increased professional competency;
- Increase in the number of effective community projects;
- Increase in the knowledge, skills and self belief of participants;
- Increase in the sharing of experience and networking across the region.

### 13. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is agreement from the current Steering Group that the Regen College will continue and a 3 year Business Plan has now been developed.

Building on the success of the Regen College pilot, and original outcomes agreed with Health Action for Stoke, the research recommends:

1. The Steering Group agree the 'identity' of the product i.e. a 'branch' of a national (Sheffield based) programme and/or a more locally based 'stand alone' programme;
2. The role of the current 'Managing Agent', Wedgwood Memorial College is reviewed; with a view to confirming role and responsibilities for a further 3 years, or agreeing a new Managing Agent, and/or revised governance structure;
3. Steps are taken to enable the concept of the Regen College to be embraced within the County of Staffordshire. The model has potential to benefit a wider region than North Staffordshire alone;
4. Membership of the Steering Group is reviewed to enable wider participation by appropriate agencies, mentors and student representatives (e.g. Class of 2005), which will 'add value' to the initiative, ensuring the programme remains 'fit for purpose'; and associated services and initiatives across the County are 'joined up', supporting joint development in terms of strategic delivery and funding support;
5. The Business Plan is supported by the Steering Group; and should include the following urgent actions:
  - Locating continuation funding;
  - Marketing e.g.
    - Agreeing the Regen College 'brand', which could include a new logo and strap line;
    - Creation of high quality publicity and course support materials;
    - Publicising the success of the pilot;
    - Development and implementation of an integrated monitoring and evaluation process for the programme, which should include 'tracking' progress of students and mentors.
6. The Steering Group celebrate the success of the pilot and consider arranging a high profile 'graduation' event, at which students and mentors are formally presented with certificates and those involved with the pilot are thanked. Opportunity should also be taken to invite and inform prospective partners, supporters and funders; ensuring they are made aware of the initiatives potential wider impacts.

## 14. CONCLUSIONS

Whilst it is too early to make informed long term judgements, available evidence based on the feasibility study, data and information gained from the pilot and feedback from the Sheffield Regen School, indicates development of the Regen College has potential to play a significant role in:

### Supporting local communities

- Providing access to a new learning facility, which will enable recruitment of students from diverse and hard to reach communities;
- Encourage the involvement of students and the wider community to play lead roles in the regeneration of local communities;
- Enabling students to work within, and for the benefit of, those communities;
- Utilising knowledge and skills to equip the wider community to tackle issues such as poor health, poverty and debt.

### Enabling Communities

- Providing students with the skills, experience and confidence to project manage projects and initiatives at local community level;
- Providing students and the wider community with the skills and knowledge to apply for funding to support locally based projects and initiatives.

### Learning Communities

- Delivery of an accredited course to those who may otherwise be reluctant to participate in such activity;
- Providing a practical style of learning, which is enjoyable and non-threatening, ensuring students 'stay the course' and make recommendations to their peers to follow their lead;
- Raising ambitions of students, which will be passed onto the wider community to become involved in formal and informal education.

### Supporting People into Work

- Providing students and the wider community with the qualifications, skills, knowledge and confidence to develop themselves as individuals, with the potential to meet local shortages in areas such as locally based community based services.

## APPENDIX A

## Skill for Sustainability Course 'Learning Grid'

UNIT TITLE	OCN LEVEL 3 LEARNING OUTCOMES
<b>Business Planning for Project Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand why a Business Plan is essential for project development</li> <li>• Recognise and use specific tools and techniques to identify the projects purpose, aims and objectives</li> <li>• Construct an outline Business Plan</li> </ul>
<b>Developing a Funding Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the components of a funding strategy</li> <li>• Recognise how to construct a funding case statement</li> <li>• Undertake a basis fundraising audit</li> <li>• Generate a fundraising implementation plan</li> <li>• Know how to draft a basic contingency plan</li> </ul>
<b>People Teamwork &amp; Performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the advantages of working in a team</li> <li>• Understand the different roles in a team</li> <li>• Recognise each team members preferred team role</li> <li>• Understand the impact of team dynamics on current and future project activities</li> <li>• Improve team performance</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainability and Social Enterprise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the concepts of sustainability, social enterprise and social business</li> <li>• Recognise options for sustainability</li> <li>• Explore external market influences</li> <li>• Form an action plan highlighting future activity</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the difference between monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>• Understand different methods of gathering and collating information</li> <li>• Understanding the principles of evaluation and why it is important</li> <li>• Understanding how to measure and evaluate a projects impact against given government indicators for sustainable communities</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B

**'REGEN RAP'**

1. When we were asked to go to Regen College.  
What the course was about we had little knowledge.  
We came along all worried and scared.  
To give our answers rite or wrong we dared.
2. Sometimes when I'm here it goes over our head.  
Then in the middle of the nite I'd wake up in my bed.
3. A business plan had come to light.  
I had to get a pen then sit and rite.
4. Where I will go I'm unsure where.  
But now I have the tools to get me there.
5. Then when my chance comes along.  
I'll always remember my course and this song.
6. And now we have the skills to sustain.  
All things we have learnt with us they'll remain.
7. So what we urge is you to give it a go.  
Cuz we all can learn and have fun we know.

**Source:** 'Class of 2005', Video Exercise

## APPENDIX C

## Case Study 1 David Scott

David is an inspiration to anyone facing misfortune in their life. Up until June 2003, David worked for Stoke on Trent City Council as a Maintenance Officer. Without warning he suffered a series of life threatening strokes and is now disabled. For many people this would have been the end of their life, but not for David. He has found new avenues to channel his abilities and interests, which are helping him, re-build his life and hopefully take him off benefits, which he is clearly uncomfortable with.

David lives in Chesterton, a close community, the majority of the housing being managed by Registered Social Landlord, Aspire Housing. He cares for his community and is very keen to become involved in its regeneration. *'I am interested in finding out more about regeneration, especially as I have had some experience of Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Initiative after being a Board Member on the one in Knutton and Cross Heath and a Member of the steering group responsible for the Area Action Plan, relating to Knutton & Cross Heath Area of Major Intervention.*

*I have expressed my interest in being involved with the Greater Chesterton Neighbourhood Action Plan. I am already involved with the local Community Forum and the One-Stop-Shop in Chesterton and in hopefully starting up a Residents Focus Group on the estate where I live.*

*'What has become clear is, we don't want Aspire Housing, or anyone else doing everything for us. We want control of what we do and we want what we create to be around for a long time. We know it going to take longer this way, but we just want things to be right for us and our children; who are the future of this community'.*

David did not hesitate when Aspire Housing offered to sponsor his attendance at the Regen College. *'It was just what I needed. There were big gaps in my knowledge base. As residents we need to know about things such as business plans if we are to raise our own funds and prove we can manage budgets and the like. I was aware about words such as regeneration, but if was honest, a lot of it was jargon to me and I sometimes felt lost at meetings with agencies that turned up to help us'.*

Attending the course at the Regen College was not an easy decision for David. *'My wife is not well and attending the residential was a big worry, as we have young children to look after. Whilst it was not compulsory to stay over night, I could see the benefits. I also worked out there would be a lot of work involved. However, the staff there are so good and provided a lot of reassurance and confidence that I could keep up with everyone'.*

To say David made the right decision is clearly an understatement. *'I have now realised that planning a project, like a business takes a lot more preparation, time, resources and commitment. I am now more aware of the process and I have been given the tools, to be able to make a contribution and therefore a real difference.*

Continued

David is not slow to praise the Regen College approach. *'I have enjoyed the whole experience, it has been some time since I was in that setting and I found it initially very daunting, but quickly found my feet after realising that everyone else, including some of the tutors felt the same way. I have also learnt that my disabilities did not have as much of an impact, as I thought. I can do what I want to do and make a difference'.*

*'It is a very supportive environment. The teaching staff and mentors were super. There was support when you needed it and most importantly, praise when it was due. The students were also encouraged to support each other. Most importantly it was fun. I will never forget hearing the 'Regeneration Rap' for the first time, after the group video exercise. To see people who were once so shy and nervous about coming on the course creating the rap and performing was a joy. It summarised what the College has given us – confidence!'*

*I feel that all participants have gained knowledge, which has a 'wider impact' than originally thought. We have all been given the tools to look at a project from it's inception through to reality. We have all received an insight in to the process, which normally only seems to have been previously given to individuals at management levels.*

There is an air of confidence about David and he is pleased to be in the position of being offered part time work experience by the Aspire Housing Regeneration Team, which could also include becoming involved as a volunteer at a local Community Farm initiative. While the work will be unpaid, it has the potential to, *'Provide me with an opportunity to update my skills and CV'.*

*'I don't want to stay on benefits, no one does. The Regen College and Aspire Housing have provided me with opportunities, which could well help me to find the way back to meaningful paid work to support my family. I am still not fully recovered, but opportunities such as this are just what I need. I am also interested in representing the Holdich Ward on Newcastle Borough as a Councillor'.*

Almost as a footnote, David says, *'Thank you Regen College for allowing me to attend the course. I only hope that we are not the only participants to have been given this privilege'.*

In the mean time David cannot talk for too long. He is heavily involved in his voluntary work and *'Needs to get on!'*



## APPENDIX D

## Case Study 2 Antonia Ryan (Toni)

To describe Toni as 'busy' does not do her justice. During the day, she successfully manages her role as Stoke on Trent City Council's Positive Intervention Co-ordinator. In her 'own time', as well as supporting a growing family, she more or less single handedly, manages and holds together her local Girl Guide Unit.

Ask where she finds time to manage her time so successfully, Toni provides a straight forward approach – *'Structure – I am an organized person, who needs things to be in order. This is one of the reasons why I enrolled on the Regen College programme. I was looking for systems, which would help me to do my job better and help me manage and sustain the Guide Unit. I was particularly interested in the business planning and succession strategies units of the course.'*

There is no doubt Toni is committed to her role within the City Council and how she can help to improve the performance of her department. *'I was also looking for ways of joining up community safety with the regeneration agenda. I attend the multi-agency Area Implementation Team and it is clear agencies and departments can no longer work in isolation if we are to make a real difference in this City'.*

Toni quickly reels off what she gained from the Regen College, *'Tools to do my job better and to support the Guide Unit. These included knowledge about subjects such as business planning, fund raising, project management, social enterprise and most importantly to my Unit at the moment, succession strategies'.*

Asked why information about succession strategies is so important, Toni is sure of her response, *'Guide Units are at risk because of poor funding streams, and a shortage of volunteers. For example, we are vulnerable if the Guides don't turn up because subs cannot be collected. What the course taught me is there can be a variety of ways to maximize and guarantee income, such as payment of subs in advance, linked to incentives. Before attending the course I didn't pay too much attention to such issues and I have no doubt now that by not addressing this issue, then we would have faced closure – like a lot of Guide Units in other areas of the Country. And that would be a disaster'.*

In some ways, Toni under plays the importance of the Guide movement as a community facility and it is only when prompted expands, *'The Guides provide something really useful to young girls. As well as keeping them away from trouble, it teaches life skills such as team building and taking responsibility – the things employers are looking for. A couple of my older girls are responding well to extra responsibility and are helping me with the running of the Unit. I know this will help them get into University. We pull in girls from a wide area around Packmoor and from a variety of cultures and backgrounds'.*

Continued

Returning to the Regen College, Toni explains why it worked for her, *'Most importantly I enjoyed it. The residential element was key at first. It helped us to bond, as most of us were apprehensive about staying overnight in the company of people you have never met before. I for one was prepared to go home if I didn't like it. I'm glad I didn't because it helped to spend quality time with such a wide range of people'. It taught me the importance of group work or partnership working'.*

*'The courses were challenging at times, but subjects were delivered in a non threatening way by the tutors and my mentor was always there to fill in the gaps and provide reassurance'.*

Toni is keen to give examples how the Regen College is helping her with her job. *'I have been attending funding meetings for a number of years and an agency keeps coming back for the same funding year on year. This year I questioned them, pointing out opportunities to 'match' what they get from us, or to explore other sources. I put them on notice that it would become harder next year to justify funding from us, unless they had done what I suggested. I was 'gob smacked'! I was amazed at my performance. Since then my manager is asking me to support him with business planning and other areas I would not have tackled before'.*

With an air of confidence Toni efficiently rolls off developing partnerships she and her team are exploring, such as, *'Links with Renew North Staffordshire, building on the Government's 'Respect' agenda and Renew's objectives for inclusive communities, linked to the economic regeneration of Stoke on Trent. I am becoming directly involved in community based multi-agency master planning, enabling safer, cleaner communities and ideas such as alley gates and innovative community based responses to issues such as anti-social behaviour'.*

Asked where her career may develop as a result of attending the Regen College, Toni is in no rush to respond. *'I'm not sure at the moment. I have a lot going on in my life, but the Regen College has provided me with the tools to do my job better, support my Guide Unit and the knowledge that I have the skills and abilities to do whatever I decide to do'.*

Toni is not surprisingly supportive of the Regen College. *'It provides a safe, enjoyable, learning environment, enabling people from a wide variety of backgrounds to support and learn from each other to achieve individual and community aims. It has a 'can do' culture, never saying 'you are wrong'. It is all about people and communities'.*

Toni has recently been seconded to the Youth Inclusion Support Services (YISS), which is part of Youth Offending Services. Toni is helping to support the team work with young people 'at risk' of anti social or offending behaviour. Her work there is to link the work of the Community Safety and Anti Social Behaviour Team to the prevention agenda delivered by the Youth Offending Services.

## APPENDIX E

## Case Study 3 Lynne Nelson

Having left the pottery industry in 1986 as an experienced Lithographer to bring up her family, Lynne returned to paid employment by spending time in the retail sector; until she realised her potential as a 'Regenerator' in the fields of care and supporting people.

First steps included voluntary unpaid work within her children's play group, leading to paid employment as a Play Leader. Significantly, during her period of transition into the field of regeneration, Lynne wisely took advantage of training opportunities supported by Stoke on Trent City Council, achieving qualifications such as:

- Play Works Basic Foundation Training
- NVQ Level 3 Play Work
- NEBS introduction to Management
- NVQ Level 3, Early Years Care & Education
- NEBS Management NVQ Level 4
- NVQ Level 3, Working with Children with Special Needs

Realising her ambition and potential, Lynne moved on from play groups to full time employment as a Development Officer with Sure Start, leading to her current role as a Senior Development Worker within the innovative and successful 'Start Up' initiative - a 'bolt on' project linked to Sure Start.

Asked why she accepted the opportunity to join the Regen College programme, Lynne is quite clear. *'I was looking for practical knowledge and skills in areas such as bid writing, business planning, net working and 'jargon busting', which would help me to do my job better'*. Lynne is extremely passionate about her work with Start Up and used her time at the Regen College to support and 'add value' to a project she is working on in the deprived area of Middleport, Stoke on Trent. This involves engaging with local people, tackling issues such as low aspirations, a lack of child care facilities, poor public transport and a shortage of neighbourhood based support from key agencies. Lynne is helping to fill these gaps, working to develop and launch community based solutions such as social enterprises.

There is no need to ask if Lynne achieved her objectives at the Regen College; energy and enthusiasm literally flows from her. *'We were all so hungry for what was on offer and there was a common bond to work together to achieve our aims. Without doubt, we all came away with a box full of tools, which we can apply to our jobs and projects'*.

Asked why the programme was so successful, Lynne has no doubts, *'It was the common bond to work together. The Regen College supporting this, by arranging the residential at the start of the course. We were able to bond, understand each others fears, needs and aspirations. The facilities at the Wedgwood Memorial College helped a great deal. It so relaxed and its good to feel so important in such as special place'*. Continued

Expanding on what the course provided, Lynne is keen to praise the training staff and mentors, *'It was strange at first, for the first time in our lives; no-one ever said you were wrong. The style of learning was very supportive and they were willing to let us learn from our mistakes. I really valued the support my mentor gave to me. As well as using his skills and experience to support my project, he clearly understood where I was coming from. He was there at times of crisis and never missed a chance to praise me when things were going well.'*

Examples of what Lynne and fellow students took away, included, *'Knowledge – loads of it. For example, I now understand the importance of business planning, succession strategies, social enterprise, monitoring and evaluation and am confident I will be able to help the community write funding applications. One of the best parts is, I now understand most of the jargon and am holding my own at mutli-agency meetings. Before attending the Regen College, most of what was being said went over my head. I can now contribute in my own right'*.

One word seems to summarise what the Regen College has given to Lynne, *'Confidence, without doubt. This applies to most of us. We all had our own fears and worries. Mine was walking into meetings, worried I did not know what was being discussed. I went to a meeting last week - full of important people. It was amazing, I had no trouble at all understanding what was going on and had the confidence to contribute to the debate. It felt good!'*

Most significantly Lynne is keen to pass on her skills and experience to the communities she works in. *'A young woman said to me a while ago, I wish I could be successful like you. I smiled at her and said you are like me! I chatted to her, explaining my journey, from where she is now, to where I am. I promised her, I would help her - and there are loads like her, just needing some practical support and guidance'*.

Lynne has clearly reached a cross road in her life and is looking for new challenges. *'The Regen College has opened a large door for me. For the first time in my life, I am thinking about me. Not in a selfish way, more in an ambitious way. I want to be appreciated for my achievements and achieve my full potential for the benefit of my family and local people like that young woman who wanted to be like me.'*

*'I have made contact with Staffordshire University, as it has become clear I need 'letters' after my name if I am able to apply for the posts I am really interested in. I plan to study in areas associated with regeneration and community work. And you know what – I now have the confidence to know I can do whatever I want to do!'*

*'I am fed up with those who say people in Stoke on Trent don't have the skills needed to regenerate our communities. More courses like what the Regen College has on offer are part of the answer. I will have no doubt in recommending others such as that young woman I was talking about to get involved'*.

## APPENDIX F

## The Mentors Story

Hazel Cooke and John Webbe are both professionals in their fields. Hazel owns and manages the successful Graythwaite Guest House in Newcastle and has recently launched a new venture a life coach and mentor. She is, *'Passionate about regeneration and takes a great deal of pleasure from seeing people blossom. It's wonderful seeing people growing with confidence as you help them unlock their potential'*.

John is the Regeneration Manager for Touchstone Housing and has a wide and respected portfolio of experience in regeneration and mentoring. Asked why he takes time out of his busy schedule to volunteer as a mentor, John is clear, *'Apart from obviously helping someone develop their career and life as a whole, it makes you a better, more rounded person. I support Staffordshire University, mentoring disabled students. When you work with them and begin to understand some of the obstacles and challenges they are able to overcome, it puts a new perspective on your own life'*.

Both therefore agree mentoring is a two way process and are impressed with the opportunities the Regen College is giving to students and mentors. For example, John is impressed with how they were matched with students. *'I was asked to support Lynne, who works for Start Up (Sure Start). She is closely involved with a project in Middleport where I am based; and it has proved useful to 'share notes' and help her through times of stress and confusion as she progressed through the course. Her project is 'real' and clearly matters to local people. To be honest, it was more about reassuring her she was on track. She clearly benefited from what the Regen College had on offer'*.

Hazel makes no apologies for understanding how being a mentor can help her own career. *'I jumped at the chance to become involved. It is a learning process for me as well and the fact it is accredited is a huge bonus. But most importantly, it gave me a chance to support 'real people' who have so much to gain themselves'*.

Both take their roles as mentors very seriously. As John points out, *'Our role is to offer support and guidance and to make sure we are there when needed. All of us need support at times and we must not underestimate how complex regeneration can be to a lot of people – particularly those who are at the 'sharp end', working at neighbourhood level. In relation to Lynne, I was able to use my experience as a Project Manager to help her understand issues such as business planning, budgets and how to approach multi-agency meetings'*.

Hazel adds, *'I took time to make sure my student always knew I was here and we met regularly to discuss where she was on the course. Sometimes it was just a quick phone call, to see how things were going. At other times, we would take time out over a coffee to discuss issues in more depth'*. As you would expect from both as professionals in their fields, they can't resist offering advice to the Regen College to improve the mentoring process.

Continued

*'Whilst time was a factor in making sure the pilot course was delivered at short notice to a tight and demanding budget, we would have benefited from knowing more about the course and what students were expected to achieve. This resulted in gaps in our knowledge, in that we risked failing to understand why a students may have been stressed, or short of knowledge about a particular subject.*

*It was also the case that some of the students did not seem to understand our role and there seem to be cases of students not taking full advantage of what their mentor could bring to their project and development on the course..*

*It has become apparent that those students who received the full support of a mentor did the best. We are aware that a number of students, who were reluctant to work with a mentor, have paid the price, in terms of the quality of the material they are able to submit for accreditation. These issues have been noted during de-briefing and will be addressed in the future. It's accepted we are 'part of the team' at the Regen College'.*

One word however keeps being mentioned by Hazel, John and other mentors involved in the Regen College – 'Passion'. There is clearly a passion for regeneration, linked to supporting people. All acknowledge the learning process the Regen College, mentors and students are involved in and are refreshingly keen and supportive of its aims and objectives.

As the mentors, as a group during de-briefing acknowledge. *'We are investing in future development, putting something back. It is a joy when you see 'the lights come on' after you have nurtured someone through a difficult or confusing period. We are working with 'spark plugs', who have a huge role to play in the regeneration of our local communities'.*

All the mentors are extremely supportive of the Regen College and most are more than willing to continue - mostly in a voluntary capacity, without thought of payment.

*'Its amazing when you see how much an individual can achieve at the Regen College. As well as providing extremely useful knowledge and information to students, it's a supportive, caring and 'fun' environment, where those who need it most are encouraged to learn and develop. Most importantly, they are able to learn from mistakes as well as successes. And that is the job of all those involved in the regeneration of North Staffordshire - to be there, willing to help and learn from each other' .*

## APPENDIX G

## Role of the Steering Group

Following a feasibility study recommendation that, '**A Steering Group made up of representatives from local community groups, voluntary and statutory agencies and partnerships is established**'; representatives from the following agencies freely committed varying amounts of time to the Regen College:

Health Action for Stoke, Staffordshire University, Wedgwood Memorial College, Start Up (Sure Start), Knutton and Cross Heath Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder, Staffordshire University, Touchstone Housing, RENEW North Staffordshire, Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent (VAST), Learning & Skills Council, Beth Johnson Housing Association, College in the Community, Aspire Housing.

Three committed Steering Group members are **Judith Robinson**, Staffordshire University, Head of Cultural & Community Development; **Jill Ward**, Wedgwood Memorial College Principal and **Nick Mannion**, Neighbourhood Manager, Knutton and Cross Heath Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder.

As Chair of the Steering Group and agency member who, '*first identified the potential of the Regen College, Judith is, 'Positive about what the model has to offer North Staffordshire. It's about developing the learning experience at the sharp end - within communities. We need to take the lid off and unlock the potential within our area. The pilot has proven we can be as successful as other areas in achieving this. We know have a deficit of skills to deliver regeneration. The Regen College is proving there is vast potential to bring together learners and the statutory sector to make a real difference; and the Regen College is a key to an exciting door of opportunity.*

Judith's views on learning are not surprisingly echoed by Jill, '*We need to develop a philosophy for learning, linked to a framework for progression. We need to raise the expectation of the people of North Staffordshire, in particular local residents, who need to have the confidence to understand this is not an isolated place, which will accept second best. We are living and working in a place that must be valued.*

Nick builds on this, '*We need to improve the role of residents in a direct way, in the governance of their communities; in other words a move towards neighbourhood management. Funded and managed properly, the Regen College has great potential for North Staffordshire to 'grow our own within our neighbourhoods, increase peoples' aspirations and break this negative impression of North Staffordshire'.*

There is agreement that accredited learning is an important aspect, for the mentors as well as the students. As Judith points out, '*Accreditation helps open opportunities for further learning. This was agreed early on by the Steering Group and has proved to have been a wise decision*'. What is clear is the commitment of Judith, Jill and Nick to the Steering Group; and the benefits of a '*Multi-agency partnership approach*'.

Continued

Judith points out, *'The Steering Group is important, because it is a good spread of experience and we brought together people who may not have worked together before. We network for the benefit of the pilot and North Staffordshire as whole'*. Judith adds, *'By this networking process, the Regen College was able to identify and utilise facilities such as the Wedgwood Memorial College. This was important, because it is a unique local facility, which offers a wonderful learning environment to people, who otherwise could have missed out on the opportunity'*. Nick regularly repeats the word 'we' and supports the approach of, *'Bringing together good practice and adapting it to fit our own circumstances'*.

All agree partnership working has its challenges. As Judith points out, *'We don't always agree on everything, such as the rate of payments for tutors. After a debate, there was a consensus which we was agreed on and implemented. The important point here is a will and means to work together for a common purpose'*. Nick feels it is important to keep refreshing Steering Group membership. *'I will keep contributing so long as I get a kick out of it. It must be relevant and everyone who attends should have a role to play and must be listened to'*. There is a general feeling that the pilot has taken the Steering Group to a 'cross roads' where decisions on its constitution and group membership need to be taken, based on lessons learnt from the pilot programme.

Of the future Judith is sure, *'There is enormous potential for the Regen College within North Staffordshire. It will enable local people to make positive and informed contributions to community business. It is already enabling energy, enthusiasm, linked to better skills and an understanding of what regeneration is all about. For example it facilitates an understanding of 'jargon', which will enable students to contribute to meetings, which otherwise could have gone over their heads. It is a good indicator that 12 students started and finished the course'*.

Jill agrees, *'The Regen College provides a non competitive learning environment. It should be a North Staffordshire resource, with access to a range of provision, where students want to return'*. While Nick believes it is too soon to fully assess the success of the pilot, he *'Believes it provides an environment where people could do their own thing and learn from their mistakes. It is too early to measure outcomes as they could be five years down the line. Ultimately it should be about people securing employment'*.

Asked about strengths and weaknesses, there is agreement that continuation funding will be an issue. *'It always is, but the Regen College model has great potential to meet the requirements of North Staffordshire'*.

**Judy Kurth** Development Manager, Health Action for Stoke (principal funder of the pilot) summarises, *'The Regen College has proven it has the potential to improve the quality of life for local people. It achieves this by helping to deliver energy, confidence and a passion for regeneration right at the heart of our communities – a bottom up approach. We have an opportunity here to create social entrepreneurs, 'spark plugs', who should have the loudest voice of all'*.