

## Action Community Enterprises CIC (ACE)

Supporting inclusion by being a part of the solution; improving opportunities for children, young people, their families and adults in education and training, resulting in social mobility across Norfolk.

# Transforming ACE



Working in Partnership with Local Authorities, Colleges, Schools, Partner Agencies and Local Communities, to provide services around Education, Training and Support

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## **Background**

Action Community Enterprises CIC (ACE) was formed in July 2011 and operates as a not-for-profit social enterprise under the legal structure of a Community Interest Company (CIC). ACE's ethos is to provide a more inclusive, individualised approach to education, training and support.

Currently ACE works with children, young people, their families and adults; working in partnership with local authorities, colleges, school, partner agencies and local communities to provide services around education, training and support.

Current work includes:

- Early interventions and vocational qualifications for schools.
- Norwich Inclusion Charter – re-engagement / early interventions schools work
- 16 + study programmes, adult learning via College of West Anglia (CWA)
- NEET – Engagement and Progression course via City College Norwich (CCN)
- Building Better Opportunities (BBO) Young people – ON Track
- Building Better Opportunities (BBO) Adults – Norfolk Community College
- Outreach work to housing providers Hostel to Home programme (YMCA)

Through the delivery of these programmes, projects and partnerships, ACE aims to provide opportunities for learning; supporting people to gain skills, qualifications and develop confidence to enable them to take up their place in society.

## **Difficult Times**

The past two years have been a difficult time for educational and third sector organisations, some of the difficulties have been down to austerity, other changes down to educational and schools funding, together with the concerns and implications about Brexit. This, together with more local educational issues around funding, NEETS and school exclusions, has impacted on social exclusion.

Several education, training and third sector organisations have folded in the past 12 months, as this field becomes more difficult to sustain. These challenges have resulted in a complete re-think of the core services that ACE offers and how we operate in the future. To this end, ACE has remodelled the business and developed a new business model and strategy going forward (Document: ACE Inclusion Provision map – see Appendix A).

## **Strategy going forward**

Our strategy is about meeting the ever-changing needs of education and training, while ensuring ACE has the funding and revenues to operate. To this end ACE has split its work into 4 divisions as follows:

- Pre-16 education and support (schools)
- Post 16 education (College)
- Projects
- Partnerships

Although there will be some cross over between the divisions, the rationale behind this split is to dilute risk and promote sustainability. The divisions are based on both funding streams and user groups; designed to support the development of social mobility and enable individuals to work towards taking their place in society.

## **Pre-16 Education**

**Our Aim:** *To support schools to re-integrate students back into mainstream education, rather than preventing them from being excluded*

ACE will develop a school stakeholder group which will enable ACE to offer greater value for money, while retaining the quality of the services. Supporting inclusion will be a priority: this will be done by working in partnership with the school, the students and their families. Early intervention will be key; shorter interventions like 'Flying Star, Back2Basics and Try the Trades' that will promote the development of empathy, taking responsibility for one's own actions and help them understand the impact their behaviour has on others, as well as inspiring them through vocational activities. We will use our specialist teachers and vocational elements to support students to learn new skills and practice self-regulation, all in a safe and supported environment.

ACE will also allocate time and resources for bespoke activities and courses as requested by the stakeholder group. These could include:

- Specific vocational qualifications, both in and out of school
- Student reintegration, mentoring and coaching in school as a follow up to work completed at ACE
- Alternative to exclusion days
- Working with school staff
  - Behaviour support training
  - Classroom management
  - Supporting students with SEN and/or low attainment
- Working with parents
  - Parenting course
  - Brain friendly learning at home courses for parents
  - Principals of Paul Dix's work (When the Adults Change, Everything Changes)

## **Post 16 Education**

**Aim:** *To become the provider of choice for young people and adults undertaking programmes of study and vocational qualifications.*

This is a growth area for ACE and will provide funding to offer a variety of learning opportunities and qualifications. Working in partnership with College of West Anglia (CWA) to provide a number of funded learning opportunities:

- Study programmes/college courses - based at ACE's Rackheath centre, at Level 1 and 2 in the following sectors: construction, engineering, motor vehicle technology, catering, hospitality, enterprise and business, public services and sport and leisure. These courses are for 16 to 18-year olds and include maths, English, work experience and a vocational qualification.
- Adult learning (19+) – ACE has access to funding for adults who are unemployed and have not already gained a full level 2 qualification. ACE plans to work smarter with this funding, using it to complement other work, both within and outside of ACE, to ensure both inclusion and opportunity for adults to enable them to take their place in society. This will improve not just their own lives, but those around them too.

- Hybrid programmes - being smarter with the funding to pick up young people and adults who have either failed previously or slipped through the learning gap

## **Projects**

***AIM:** To be a part of county and national projects to support children, young people and adults to improve their lives, social mobility and be able to give back to their communities and society in general.*

ACE continues to work successfully in this area and are currently working on the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) projects for both young people (ON TRACK) and adults (Norfolk Community College). This provides the opportunity to work with participants that can often be the hardest to reach and the furthest away from the labour market.

ACE is also a delivery partner for the Norfolk NEET project, which is led by City College Norwich (CCN) which provides education and training opportunities for young people who are either NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

ACE has previously worked on other projects such as the Community Challenge and sector-based work academies which proved successful in engagement for young people and adults in meeting and working with local employers, while accessing vocational training and support. ACE's experience and proven track record in this arena makes ACE an ideal partner in any project going forward.

This area of the organisation generally engages with people who need the most help and is allied closely with other divisions within ACE and outside organisations, to ensure smooth progression and support of these people as they progress through their learning journey.

## **Partnerships**

***Aim:** To work specifically with other agencies, where ACE's services can complement / support the development inclusion and opportunities for children, young people and adults alike.*

This division enables ACE to work with other organisations with different specialisms to complement and contrast the delivery of support. This area of work has been set up on the back of the frustration of the lack of co-ordinated work between organisations. We hope to promote creative working, rather than wasting time and energy on being in competition with one another.

Also, within this division is the opportunity to develop and support social enterprises and social entrepreneurs within the third sector. Rationale behind this is to ensure there are opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to take up employment and/or work experience.

## **Funding**

ACE's primary source of funding has always been trading its services, together with a handful of grants to support development of facilities and provision. Each year this becomes more difficult, as cuts to funding for both mandatory and discretionary services impacts on the ability of others to buy in services from ACE.

The diversification in delivery of ACE's services has enabled ACE to sub-contract to larger organisations which have already secured funding for the delivery of qualifications. Likewise, the project work provides funding for delivery of services over a longer period of time - often up to 3  
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years - whilst the partnership work allows ACE to use its expertise to attract funding for the delivery of services.

The pre-16 schools funding is more difficult to secure due to the cuts and changes to school funding, both locally and nationally. While Norwich City schools have access to the Norwich Area Opportunity Fund, other districts are not included in this fund. The longer-term plan is for ACE to develop a Co-Operative; inviting schools to become a member/stakeholder, which will support better value for money and enable ACE to deliver quality interventions to support schools, thereby keeping students in mainstream provision, while also preparing them for the world of work.

### **Critical success factors**

- Changing the preconceptions of ACE by young people and adults, and their parents/carers, by conveying its planned transformation
- Support from local authorities at both county and district levels
- Continued support from CWA and other colleges, as well as other likeminded agencies.
- Recruitment for programmes, especially the study programmes
- The continuation of existing services and development of future projects
- Management of cash flow
- Ability to network and work creatively with other providers

### **In Summary**

Transforming ACE is needed, not only to ensure longevity and sustainability of the organisation, but also to meet ever changing needs within the educational sector. It could be viewed that ACE is delivering similar services to those it has delivered in the past, and to some extent this is true., Splitting the business into divisions, however, will allow the organisation to work smarter with the funding. An example of this is the Post 16 division where there is funding, the risk is that this funding is reliant on recruitment of students to ACE's programmes. Likewise, funding for the projects is in place and reliant on quality of delivery.

The Pre-16 division which delivers all school related work, has in previous years been a major part of ACE's income. Cuts in schools funding have impacted on schools' ability to fund vocational elements of their option choices in years 10 and 11. This has led to a decline in numbers which has resulted in this provision being not cost effective to run. However, this does mean that ACE can direct its school work to support schools to re-integrate students and keep them in mainstream schooling. This, together with offering support services for staff professional development, parenting courses and outreach services, will enable the schools to reduce the number of students at risk of exclusion. The longer-term development of a Co-Operative will allow local schools to influence the services we offer and give greater value for money.

It is all about working smarter, not just across ACE divisions but with partners and other agencies, by giving value to both students and funders. The impact of the services ACE provides will be greater social mobility, enabling people to achieve their full potential.