

Children at the SEEDA-assisted St Paul's School Nursery, Paulsgrove, Hampshire. (Photograph courtesy of Portsmouth City Council).



Introduction

Over the last three years, SEEDA has been working with partners across the region and government in support of a wide range of activities. These have aimed to tackle social exclusion and deprivation through economic development, improving the physical environment, supporting community development and providing new opportunities for employment.

SEEDA has provided a significant amount of funding through SEEDA community funding mechanisms, such as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Rural Development Programmes (RDP). Over £149 million in regeneration funding has been targeted through local partnerships to tackle social exclusion throughout the region. In Southampton, Portsmouth and Brighton and Hove and Hastings, comprehensive neighbourhood investment programmes are underway.

SEEDA was one of the founding partners in producing the South East Region Social Inclusion Statement and Action Plan. The Statement, which was launched last June at a conference in Aldershot, commits each of the regional bodies to making social inclusion an integral part of their functions. The Regional Social Inclusion Partnership includes, The Government Office for the South East, The South East England Regional Assembly, The Housing Corporation, The Health Development Agency, Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE), SEEDA and the Social Services Inspectorate.

Key Facts

The South East of England is seen as critical to the performance of the UK as a whole. It is the second largest regional economy and accounts for 16% of the UK's GDP, some £130 billion in 2001. It is the largest region with a population of eight million, accounts for 15% of the UK's total business base (255,000 VAT registered businesses) and 15% of total UK's employment (four million in 2001). The South East is the nation's principal gateway to Europe and 22% of Foreign Direct Investment in the UK was into the South East.

Despite the above there are significant variations in economic indicators across the region, and a general perception of a wealthy region means that deprived communities can be overlooked. There are 119 wards in the South East which fall within the 20% most deprived wards in the country. 704,900 people in the South East live in these areas, representing 9% of the region's residents.

- While the South East has the lowest unemployment rate of any UK region, the region has the third highest number (150,000) of unemployed people in England;
- There are 548,000 people failing to meet basic literacy standards and 483,000 lacking basic numeracy skills in the South East;
- Estimates suggest that there is an ethnic minority population of 4% in the region as a whole, with higher concentrations in Slough (27.1%), North Kent (16.3%), Southampton (5%), Oxford (9.4%) and Reading (9.7%). There is also a significant refugee and asylum seeker population and the region will continue to be significantly effected by inward economic migration from other parts of the UK, as well as Europe and beyond;
- 9% of households in the region are in receipt of incapacity or disablement benefits and the ILO unemployment rate for disabled people of working age is 3.9% against a rate of 3% for able-bodied people.

Some of SEEDA's specific initiatives to address Social and Economic Exclusion are:

◆ Financial Exclusion *Community Development Finance Initiatives (CDFIs) Portsmouth Area Regeneration Trust (PART)*

As a Community Development Finance Initiative (CDFI), Portsmouth Area Regeneration Trust (PART) is designed to provide the financially excluded with access to more affordable credit and other financial services. PART grants loans to people who are unable to borrow from other organisations, like banks and building societies. It works on a not-for-profit basis that uses any income it generates to serve the community of Portsmouth and districts near by. PART was initiated by Portsmouth Housing Association Group, along with, SEEDA through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), Lloyds TSB Bank plc, South East Hampshire Enterprise Agencies, Portsmouth City Council, National Lottery Charity Board, the University of Salford, shareholders and charities. Many of the Trust's clients do not have access to a bank account or building society account and are forced to borrow from other loan organisations that lend at interest rates that can start at 50% APR. If you are on a low wage or on benefits then the repayments can become a problem, so some will borrow more money, to pay off the first loan, again at high interest rates, and so their finances, spiral out of control.

PART's clients are on low incomes (benefits or low wages) and, or have poor credit histories. Many come from socially excluded groups and PART is the only realistic and affordable means of borrowing. Since the project started it has lent £235,697 to 423 customers.

The services provided cover:

- Consumption loans. For essentials like children's clothes, furniture, bereavement costs;
- Energy Loans. To fund energy efficiency programmes;
- Fresh Start loans. To refinance and break out of the spiral of debt;
- Home Improvement Loans. To enable elderly owner-occupiers to stay in their own homes and to assist with regenerating older property.
- Learning Loans. To help gain vocational and educational qualifications;
- Micro enterprise loans. To help embryonic businesses develop;

Aylesham Health Centre at the heart of the Kent Coalfields, one of SEEDA's major community regeneration initiatives.



- Seedcorn loans. To cover the cost of returning to work or training programmes;
- Referral and collection agent for new and existing members of Portsmouth Savers Credit Union (PSCU);
- Cheque cashing facility.

Portsmouth Savers Credit Union (PSCU)

A credit union is a democratic financial co-operative owned and controlled by its members who agree to save together to create a common fund from which its members can borrow at competitive rates. The benefits of membership include:

- A convenient means of saving;
- Members can save as little or as much as they want;
- Easily arranged loans;
- Annual dividend paid on savings;
- Free life savings and loans protection insurance;
- Access to other financial services.

PSCU was established in 2000 and now has an approximate annual revenue budget of £84,000 of which £56,890 is from SEEDA. It has a board of 11 directors, a credit committee of five and an internal audit committee of three, all of which are volunteer roles in the Credit Union. Since it was established, PSCU

has attracted 1,070 members, given out 535 loans to a total value of £284,914, and holds £213,056 in members' savings.

PSCU is often quoted by the Association of British Credit Unions as being an example of a 'New Model' credit union, its professional but friendly image incorporates best practice for the new 'Live or Work' credit union. The benefits that the Credit Union brings are clear through its impressive growth rate and it is currently on target to be fully self-sufficient by 2007.

SEEDA is providing regional support for CDFIs and in June 2002 took a delegation of community development practitioners to the Community Development Finance Association (CDFA) Conference in Scotland. As a result of this, the delegation has now formed into the Regional Economic Inclusion Reference Group.

◆ Social Enterprise

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The creation of a residential community, which provides home, work and training for some of the homeless and most disadvantaged people in Brighton and Hove. The SEEDA grant secured the purchase of a property to house and employ up to 40 people. The community will also cultivate and grow much of its own food, selling any surpluses to local people. Once established the community will become self-sustaining, generating its living from its own revenues by repairing, refurbishing and selling unwanted household goods, many of which would otherwise have been thrown away at disposal sites.

SEEDA is currently involved in working with the DTI on developing and delivering the National Social Enterprise strategy. Future work for SEEDA regarding Social Enterprise includes mapping the sector and developing a network of support to grow the sector.

Capacity Building

Networking is an important strategic element of supporting community action to reduce inequality, and address exclusion where it exists in the region. Regional networks can increase the accessibility of information to communities, and those working in partnership with them. Networks also offer opportunities for learning through the experience of delivering projects and initiatives.

The Rainbow Nation was the theme of this year's Cowley Road Carnival, an event co-ordinated by East Oxford Action, a SEEDA-funded regeneration scheme.

RAISE

Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE) was formed in 2000 and is the network of networks for voluntary and community organisations in the South East. RAISE enables voluntary and community organisations in the South East to influence regional policy, for the benefit of the people they serve. To date RAISE has received £640,000 in funding from SEEDA. Through RAISE, SEEDA also funds the South East Race and Equalities Network (SEREN).

An important element in networking and improving communication is ICT. SEEDA is seeking to improve communication between the regional networks through its SEE-Online initiative.

◆ Employment Employment Access Centre Project, Wheatsheaf Trust, Southampton

The Centre provides a drop-in facility for local residents who are unemployed or looking for work and guidance, including computers, Internet access, a resource library and mentoring opportunities. The Centre also has three advisers who work specifically with ethnic minorities, lone parents and women returners. They now have six full time employment outreach staff to extend their work into the community with these groups and those with learning difficulties or poor academic attainment records. The Centre staff have been working with local employers who want to diversify their workforce by delivering cultural awareness days, to help employers understand how to work effectively with ethnic minorities and disabled people. In addition they have developed tailored mentoring, and a web site for distance support for the disabled. Activities at the Centre include a drop-in facility with access to PCs for writing letters, CVs, Internet job searches, accessing training sites (including LearnDirect), and employer web sites.

Brighton Unemployed Families Support Centre

The project is a well established centre which offers drop-in support and advice to unemployed, and homeless families. Education and training is offered, either on a drop-in basis, or as part of a programme of support for



volunteers to help run the Centre. There is a range of activities including a toy library and loans of basic household equipment, books and clothing, welfare rights counselling, IT training, courses including yoga, drama and language training, and a crèche with childcare training. The hub of the Centre is the organic wholefood café which offers low cost meals, and a space for people to meet.

◆ Skills & Learning Asian Women's Learning Centre, WEA and the East Reading Partnership

The Asian Women's Learning Centre is based in a community building, is run by the WEA and offers learning, training and crèche facilities. The Centre is the culmination of a series of events and ad hoc training activities delivered by the WEA as they have sought to develop links with the Asian community and build provision that is best suited to their needs. The local Asian community face multiple barriers to learning. These include practical issues such as childcare, domestic responsibilities, transportation and language but the Centre is now accepted as a safe place within the community and they are invited to take part in cultural festivals such as Pakistan Day.

Leigh Park Enterprise Project, Havant

The project provides support and assistance to people who have significant mental health problems through providing training and work experience in running a café. It gives the service users an opportunity to gain and sustain real work skills in a supported environment. The idea for the café arose out of a smaller project involving the preparation of lunch buffets for the Regeneration Partnership in Havant with some outside catering. The café was set up to provide cheaper, healthier food than the cafés in Leigh Park Shopping Centre and to train and help people into work. There is a concentration of unemployment in the local area but more significantly, it was known that there were people with significant mental health problems who were looking for the opportunity for real work experience. The project is an example of good practice because it gives clients the opportunity to gain real work skills, build confidence, gain qualifications and return to work. It is well run, and it has the potential to increase its revenue generation although full sustainability is unlikely in the short to medium term.

Pathways Centre, Folkestone, Kent

The Pathways Centre is a community outreach training facility being delivered in association with South Kent College. The Centre occupies converted factory space along one of the main roads into Folkestone town centre. There are currently 35 PCs available as well as self-contained training rooms with interactive white board facilities.

Pathways' Open Days have proved very popular, with most attendees signing up for courses on the spot. Pathways attracts a wide range of users – mostly non-traditional learners, first time computer users and some more experienced users looking to gain a qualification perhaps to move into a different field of work. Pathways have proved their success to South Kent College and emphasised the need for such community based provision. Research has shown that uptake of adult education in the central wards has improved since Pathways was set up and the area now compares favourably with the more affluent parts of Folkestone.

Northgate Community Centre, Canterbury, Kent

The project has set up an IT suite at Northgate Community Centre in Canterbury. It delivers free IT courses – mainly CLAIT and LearnDirect – to adults in the local community – in association with the local college. The IT facility provides a friendly environment where first time computer users can work at their own pace with one to one support if needed. All participants are offered a taster session, which enables them to decide whether the activity is right for them, it also enables the tutors to assess ability and ensure people are accessing courses at an appropriate level. Sessions are run throughout the working day and into the evening, something that helps shift workers for example, and drop in sessions and crèche facilities are also available. Learners are generally local people aged from 25 to 70 year olds, with a variety of backgrounds including people who are retired, long term sick, ex-offenders, and the unemployed.

◆ Equalities and Diversity East Oxford Action

The Rainbow Nation was the theme of this year's Cowley Road Carnival, an event co-ordinated by East Oxford Action, a SEEDA-funded regeneration scheme. Hundreds of local residents and groups took part in celebrating East Oxford's rich diversity of cultures. The value of such an event in fostering community cohesion, whilst valuing diversity, was shown only three months after the first Carnival in 2001. A number of community groups, which had come together to work on the Carnival, formed a Steering Group and mounted a number of unity events.

Oxford Refugee Support Project (ORSP)

This started as a project to meet the mental health needs of asylum seekers and refugees (10% of new patients with mental health problems in Oxford are asylum seekers or refugees). Local consultation identified additional issues such as a skills mismatch, an example of the mismatch was a qualified gynaecologist from Kosovo working as a school cleaner. This is an area where skills shortages are potentially hampering economic growth. The Access First project born out of this consultation identifies the skills and potential of asylum seekers and looks at employers' needs. It is not just a mental health project, nor merely a training programme, nor is it simply addressing

Wootton Bridge Help Centre, Isle of Wight, one of SEEDA's community regeneration projects helping the promotion of local services and facilities.

local skills shortages. It is all of these and more. Partnerships have been created, local employers are changing their attitudes. And a small under funded voluntary group has grown in expertise and confidence, and so have the asylum seekers who work with ORSP.

◆ **Childcare** *Hiscope - Portsmouth*

Adapting a model of childcare from the States this project started in 2000 and provides the opportunity for training and working with children. The total project cost is approximately £100,000 of which £20,000 is funded by SEEDA. The project has produced 2,494 training weeks and 1,500 pupils have benefited to date. There has been a positive response to the project and as a result it is being used as a good practice model for other Portsmouth projects.

◆ **Young People** *Sorted! Magazine Project*

In the Brighton area Nacro has a reputation for working with the most challenging young people who are the hardest to reach and engage. They work with young people that are often experiencing a variety of personal and family problems, have a history of low educational attainment and are suffering from low levels of confidence and self esteem. The project has been running in Brighton and Hove for the last six years, initially funded through the Brighton & Hove Regeneration Partnership. The project is based around the publication of a glossy youth magazine with participants taking part in all aspects of the magazine's publication which will include journalism, interviewing, ICT, desktop publishing, editing, research, graphics, and website design.

The idea for the project came about because design and magazine publication was something that Nacro thought would capture the



imagination of young people who were interested in the subject but would not consider, or perhaps even get onto, a college course.

Sandown Bay Young Women's Project

The Isle of Wight's Sandown Bay Area has significant levels of deprivation. Particular issues in the area include high teenage pregnancy and shortage of appropriate housing. The Girl Friendly Society set up a project using premises in Sandown to provide accommodation from which services for young women are run to improve the health of mothers and children together with improving education, skills and employment prospects. The target group is young mothers, care leavers, those with mental health problems, young carers and those excluded from school, although all young women in need are welcomed.



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