PLAYFORD LITERACIES:

BUILDING LITERACY CAPACITY IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES
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Also available as a downloadable pdf file from the Playford Literacies website www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cslplc/research/building.asp
# CONTENTS

Executive summary.................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter 1: Background to the project ...................................................................................... 3
  What was innovative about this project? .............................................................................. 4
    Build from existing resources ....................................................................................... 4
    A ‘whole of city’ approach to service delivery .............................................................. 5
  LLN definitions that complement local context ............................................................... 6
  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 7

Chapter 2: Key findings ............................................................................................................ 9
  Networking: past, present and future ............................................................................... 10
  Building knowledge about educators .............................................................................. 11
  Building knowledge about LLN learners ....................................................................... 11
  Information: access and circulation ............................................................................... 12
  Summary ......................................................................................................................... 13

Chapter 3: Methods ................................................................................................................ 15
  design of project activity ............................................................................................... 16
    ‘Sampling’ and data sources: some issues .................................................................. 17
  Summary ......................................................................................................................... 19

Chapter 4: Networking: past, present and future ................................................................. 21
  Northern region language literacy and numeracy project (2004) ....................... 22
  University of South Australia Northern Adelaide Partnerships (UNAP) .................. 23
  Lapsit (2006) .................................................................................................................. 24
  The Adult Literacy Northern Adelaide (ALNA) Group (2006) ................................. 25
  Extending existing networks......................................................................................... 27
    Connecting networks to generate new expertise ......................................................... 27
    Connecting with wider understandings of LLN ......................................................... 29
    Connecting with new sites and sources of experience .............................................. 31
    Connecting to state government networks ............................................................... 33
    Connecting with wider LLN networks ...................................................................... 35
  Connecting up: a summary ......................................................................................... 37

Chapter 5: Building knowledge about educators ............................................................... 39
  Collection of data .......................................................................................................... 39
    Some caveats about method ...................................................................................... 40
  A selective profile of LLN educators ......................................................................... 41
  Summary ......................................................................................................................... 42
Chapter 6: Building knowledge about LLN learners ......................................................... 45
  Collection of data ........................................................................................................ 46
    Some caveats about method .................................................................................. 47
  Moving along learning pathways ............................................................................ 48
    Residents as learners and LLN repertoires......................................................... 48
    Thoughts about choosing providers................................................................. 51
    The cost of learning ............................................................................................. 52
  Summary .................................................................................................................. 54

Chapter 7: Information: access and flow ................................................................. 55
  Mapping LLN opportunities ................................................................................... 57

References .................................................................................................................. 61
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents what was learnt as a range of government, education and human service organisations collaborated to build language, literacy and numeracy (LLN)\(^1\) capacity in a local government region. These collaborations occurred in the context of different definitions and understandings of LLN. Cross-sectoral considerations were important as schools, vocational education and training organisations, a university, and community centres contributed to the goals. Capacity building occurred in a number of ways: building on existing networks and creating new ones; building knowledge of educators and LLN learners in the region; and paying attention to how information about provision circulated around the region. The community engagement model adopted by local government provided a distinctive way of understanding LLN as integrated and embedded in residents’ daily lives – not an add-on course or intensive bridging experience but something they integrated into their everyday life, at work, in a formal program of study, or in community activity. From this perspective, LLN provision was everywhere in the region and on everyone’s mind in general but not the responsibility of a single agency in particular. As a result it was difficult to identify where systematic cross-sectoral discussion occurred.

**Networking:** An investigation of networking indicates that different networks generate different ways of understanding and supporting LLN provision in the region. There is an important role for people, positions and agencies to act as ‘connectors’. ‘Connecting up’ happens systematically and serendipitously. Connecting up generates different kinds of capacity building outcomes depending on the expertise and underlying assumptions of LLN provision within a network.

**Building knowledge about educators:** When LLN provision is embedded in a community engagement model of local government activity, it is difficult to identify who is doing what to build LLN capacity. Knowledge about LLN provision is often context specific (for example related to a community centre or industry site or TAFE campus). Existing LLN knowledge and the imperatives of particular work roles – volunteers, coordinators, educators and managers – influenced the professional development needs of workers. Some of these needs may align with the structured goals and purposes of an accredited qualification. Other roles require a more fluid or immediate response to their professional development needs.

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\(^1\) Throughout this report LLN is used as a catch-all term to refer to language, literacy and numeracy needs and forms of provision within the region. Other projects have dealt with the distinctive differences between these forms of provision (Hammond, Wickert, Burns, Joyce & Miller 1992; Johnston 2002; Lee, Chapman & Roe 1993; Scheeres, Gonczi, Hager & Morley-Warner 1993). For this project, the focus was on creating a culture of capacity building across the region in the belief that discussion about the specificities would constitute an ongoing agenda.

*Playford Literacies*
**Building knowledge about LLN learners:** A survey undertaken with two major education organisations within the region captured learners responses to a range of issues associated with general education. The respondents would not normally be considered as ‘real’ LLN learners operating at the lower end of LLN competence. Rather these learners were already engaged in learning. Learners’ responses demonstrated that LLN learning takes a range of forms: the bridging pathway idea of LLN as the required support prior to entering work or training; the higher order literacies required to participate in learning; and the literacies of Vocational Education and Training (VET) that facilitate access and retention. Focusing on these forms of LLN emphasises the importance of ‘brokers’: educators and managers in organisations who know their way around a complex web of cross-sectoral service providers in a region and can help residents ‘plug-in’ to provision at different points along their pathway.

**Information about LLN provision in Playford:** Residents, service providers, and even those involved in the explicit delivery of LLN provision, have trouble maintaining current knowledge of the various forms of provision and support networks in the region. The different ways of conceptualising LLN provision, the different definitions, and the ever-changing work practices across the region make it difficult to keep abreast of what is available. Some dissemination strategies have been developed but information dates quickly. Shared capacity building occurred when certain common features were present: people were located in organisations with substantial infrastructure and regardless of levels of seniority or authority, employees had some control over their day to day work tasks.

Two issues were particularly apparent. First, LLN provision is an important cross-sectoral issue and all educators and service providers need to know how to respond to learners’ LLN needs by acting as brokers for services in the region. Second, the region is undergoing substantial socioeconomic, institutional, urban and cultural change. For LLN provision to support residents during this period of change providers will need an understanding of past activities, the opportunities and challenges generated by previous networking, and an awareness of the distinctive challenges raised by the whole of city approach to community engagement.
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The City of Playford is a local government area situated in northern Adelaide (see the City’s website for an overview of the region and current urban development plans [www.playford.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm]). Community engagement in Playford is grounded in a philosophical approach that identifies whole of government resources to address its objectives, and then brings those resources together in ways that aim to ‘create sustainable services and outcomes that will make a real and lasting community difference’ (City of Playford no date, p. 21). The City addresses many of the employment and training issues facing residents in the region through a holistic community engagement approach.

A long history of collaboration exists between education and training providers and community agencies within the region and much had been done over the years to respond to language, literacy and numeracy needs. However, across many projects and professional conversations, specific themes continued to surface and it was difficult to find time to network with other providers. Current information about provision – times, places, costs, entry criteria, accredited outcomes – was hard to find. Providers experienced recurring obstacles regarding the language of marketing and managing sustainable growth of provision, in relation to educators available to deliver programs. Opportunities for more systematic levels of collaborative engagement were unevenly distributed across the region.
This report is based on activity undertaken for an Adult Literacy National Project (Innovative Projects 2007/2008) funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The aim of the project was to use national funding to partner with state government, private, and public agencies to undertake an activity-based program to enhance language, literacy and numeracy provision in the region. The project was driven by a local government derived ‘community engagement framework’. This framework served as a touchstone for meeting residents’ LLN needs. The national, state and local government dynamics at play, combined with understandings of LLN informing the project indicated from the beginning that capacity building responses were likely to be multifaceted.

WHAT WAS INNOVATIVE ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

Three particular guidelines established this as an innovative project, although each on their own simply seemed like a common-sense way to approach working with a community to strengthen LLN awareness for residents and service providers.

1. Build from existing resources rather than creating new networks.
2. Adopt the local government derived ‘whole of city’ approach to service delivery.
3. Use LLN theories that complement the locally derived model of community engagement.

BUILD FROM EXISTING RESOURCES

This project used what was already known about LLN provision in the region to build more sustainable information sharing networks. The aim was not to create a new network. A history of collaboration already existed within the region; between some of the project partners; between agencies within the region; and within agencies that had a long history of engagement with residents.

The aim of Playford Literacies, as this project came to be known, was to strengthen the connections produced from these collaborations via buy-in from all levels of government, with local and state government participation, and federal funding secured via Playford Literacies.

Of those involved in day to day LLN teaching, few used the term ‘literacy teacher’. More often than not they called themselves educators or learning facilitators. Despite this, most people recognised the central role of LLN learning for work and life. Some were one step removed from the teaching/learning experience, involved more as ‘brokers’ of learning (Harreveld 2004).
In addition the university sector, while not actually involved in the delivery of LLN *per se*, joined as an active partner with a specific interest in supporting LLN providers ([www.unisa.edu.au/unap/default.asp](http://www.unisa.edu.au/unap/default.asp)).

This range of partners and networks provided a strong resource base for exploring sustainable LLN provision across the region.

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**A ‘WHOLE OF CITY’ APPROACH TO SERVICE DELIVERY**

The local government partner, the City of Playford, used an approach to service delivery that had many elements in common with recent work on whole of government and holistic models of response to community needs ([www.playford.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Community_engagement_model.pdf](http://www.playford.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Community_engagement_model.pdf)).

Council activity rested with internal work groups that implemented the whole of city philosophy. In this particular project employees in the Life Long Learning Group worked with a number of stakeholders to identify how LLN was integrated into a whole of city approach to support residents to make choices about employment and civic engagement. There were three aspects of the whole of city philosophy relevant to this project.

1. *Organic collaboration* formed the basis of partnerships to achieve sustainable responses to education and training (and therefore also LLN) needs. This approach provided a counterbalance to the more compartmentalised, silo-like nature of conventional service delivery.

2. Particular attention paid to service delivery aligned with *transition periods* experienced by residents: movement between home and school, from primary to high school, from school to work, from care giving responsibilities back into the workforce and so on. These transitions periods often highlighted individual LLN difficulties as the need for new LLN skills and knowledge became apparent.

3. The Life Long Learning Group within Council used a discourse of *learning pathways* to emphasise the character of transition periods as a part of life rather than zones that prompted withdrawal – ‘support’ and then re-entry to training, employment, further study or any form of community engagement in which residents might be involved.

According to this whole of city approach, learning was everywhere in Playford, yet not necessarily badged as such. Other local governments had made explicit decisions to align their approach with learning community policies, frameworks and literature ([cweb.salisbury.sa.gov.au/manifest/servlet/page?pg=16289&stypen=html](http://cweb.salisbury.sa.gov.au/manifest/servlet/page?pg=16289&stypen=html)).
The Playford approach was also compatible with notions of community engagement common to many adult literacy and learning initiatives (Castleton & McDonald 2002; Hartley & Horne 2006; OECD 2003; Wickert & McGuirk 2005). However, in adopting this metaphor of ‘mobility’ – always going somewhere – Playford Literacies could not simply draw on the usual structures and naming conventions that organised LLN provision in the region.

On the one hand, LLN provision was not fully revealed by accessing providers funded to deliver the federal Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP, www.llnp.deewr.gov.au/about_the_program.htm). Similarly, other providers would be missed if delivery of accredited LLN curriculum was the criteria for inclusion (for example Introduction to Vocational Education Curriculum in South Australia). Courses with explicit LLN learning objectives could be identified but these too would exclude provision where LLN objectives were less explicit.

Playford Literacies was not just about identifying delivery options within the region. Rather the primary focus was to enhance a form of provision that did not require residents to suspend what they were doing, to ‘do LLN’ and then negotiate re-entry into employment, community learning or family care responsibilities. This had implications for broader service delivery functions than LLN teaching. It suggested broader engagement with the functions, structures, networking capacity, and overlapping responsibilities of agencies within the region.

Finally, staying on track was particularly important to residents because of the substantial socioeconomic and educational challenges facing the region. Playford Literacies was not about learning LLN per se, but about creating the conditions to ensure ‘that every citizen in society has the social, economic, educational, cultural and recreational wherewithal to enjoy life and draw the most personal satisfaction from it’ (Dunstan, cited in Social Inclusion Board 2009, p. 2).

In the context of Playford Literacies this meant as much as possible creating the conditions for residents to earn and learn.

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**LLN DEFINITIONS THAT COMPLEMENT LOCAL CONTEXT**

The whole of city approach to community engagement had a certain resonance with contemporary shifts in theoretical and practical understandings of LLN. As Wickert and McGuirk (2005) explain, people hold different views about the definitions, understandings and purposes of LLN. Moreover theoretical contributions to diverse ways of understanding the role of LLN in work and life are continuously changing (Hunter 2004). To paraphrase Australian research (Wickert 1989) there were no single measures of literacy, no single definitions and no single ways of reporting on learning that held sway in this project. Two particular theoretical frameworks for LLN were pertinent.
First, the idea of *multiliteracies* was helpful as it reflected the different types of LLN practices used in work, family and community interactions. This was well captured by the South Australian state government initiative, *Breaking secret codes: making literacy everybody’s business* (DFEEST 2008). The ‘Secret Codes’ initiative captured the practicalities of different contexts, purposes and practices in a list of familiar and ‘new’ literacies: functional, critical, cultural, computer, community, financial, health and environmental:

‘multiliteracies’ is a term used to describe sets of skills and knowledge needed by people to participate in families, communities and workplaces. These skills vary in different cultural settings, and become even more complex in contexts where new technologies and media are involved.... ‘new’ literacies... include... technological literacy...media literacy...employment literacy.

The state government initiative argued for the need to ‘break the secret codes’ obstructing access to employment and study. This was particularly relevant in areas such as Playford where the whole of city approach was a direct response to the experiences of urban redevelopment and intergenerational unemployment common in the region. In that respect the *Secret Codes* and *Playford Literacies* projects had much in common.

Mary Hamilton provided another touchstone, arguing that literacy practices are *embedded social practices* that change ‘moment-by-moment [as]... people take hold of literacy for themselves, to serve their own purposes and needs’ (Hamilton 2006). Under these circumstances attempts to induct people into the ‘officially sanctioned, standardised institutional discourses of literacy’ are important as they provide people with the literacies necessary to engage with formal learning, employment and so on. However, this may downplay the role of local literacies in people’s lives, and the ways in which they use ‘imromptu strategies and the use of immediately available resources’ as they position themselves for employment/employability.

A community engagement model of service delivery works with residents always in transition. The question is not which of formal, vernacular or multiliteracies is most appropriate. Rather the question is how to create the conditions to mobilise relevant literacies at different points in residents’ lives and how to maintain that momentum especially during difficult periods. If this is the model of LLN provision to work towards then other questions of structural support and resourcing are then understood in terms of the basic guidelines driving this model.

**CONCLUSION**

Two particular understandings of ‘literacy practice’ – multiliteracies and embedded social practices – resonated with the organic approach to community engagement promoted by the City of Playford. Three guidelines provided a framework for action.
as the activity-base project progressed. These guidelines echoed LLN research from the 1990s which argued for a ‘built in not bolted on’ approach to industry training (Bradley et al. 2000; Wignall 1999). The mobile and multifaceted attributes of this kind of provision make it difficult for funding agencies, organisations and advocates, to argue for more LLN in a region where the demand and take-up is difficult to capture in conventional counts of LLN curriculum delivery and student hours. Despite these challenges there remained good reasons to pursue a capacity building space which was open to multiple perspectives. For this project the goal of capacity building followed the line of thought explored by Stokes, Stacy and Lake (2006, p. 4) and informed by McKnight’s work:

*People have capacities to manage in their current situations, but need to be better resourced so they are able to solve their own problems. The focus is on acknowledging existing abilities and strengthening them in order to tackle issues more comprehensively and effectively.*

Yet the whole of city approach was particularly challenging and innovative when used as a framework for delivery of professional development, accumulation of resources and identification of suitable participants to provide data about LLN capacity building in the region. Looking for LLN provision, and hence providers to inform capacity building, meant directing attention to sites where funding, curricula and learning objectives were not necessarily explicit about LLN outcomes: in effect looking for LLN provision where one would not normally expect to find it.

The remainder of this report details the key learning associated with attempts to build that multifaceted space of LLN provision.

Chapter 2 summarises the key findings across four areas related to the capacity building focus of the project: networking; knowledge about educators; knowledge about learners; and insights about dissemination of information.

Chapter 3 elaborates the project methodology expanding on data collection methods that facilitated the achievement of objectives, but also created challenges given the diverse LLN understandings and practices at play in the region.

Chapters 4 to 7 examine in more detail the outcomes for each of the four areas identified as important sites for LLN capacity building across the region.
CHAPTER 2: KEY FINDINGS

This report documents what was learnt as a range of government, education and human service organisations collaborated to build LLN capacity in a local government region. These collaborations occurred in the context of different definitions and understandings of LLN provision. Cross-sectoral considerations were important as schools, vocational education and training organisations, and community centres contributed to the goals.

Capacity building occurred in a number of ways: building on existing networks and creating new ones; building knowledge of educators and LLN learners in the region; and paying attention to how information about provision circulated around the region.

The community engagement model adopted by local government provided a distinctive way of understanding LLN as integrated and embedded in residents’ daily lives. In other words, it was not an add-on course or intensive bridging experience, but something they integrated into their everyday life, at work, in a formal program of study, or in community activity.

From this perspective, LLN provision was everywhere in Playford and on everyone’s mind in general but not the responsibility of a single agency in particular. As a result it was difficult to identify any places where systematic cross-sectoral discussion occurred.
An investigation of networking indicates that different networks generate different ways of understanding and supporting LLN provision in the region. Paying attention to a network’s history and underlying LLN premises highlights the distinctive contributions and also expertise located within that network.

National, state and local government resources were important sources of support, as were universities, TAFE institutes and neighbourhood networks. They contributed to capacity building, but they also had particular organisational cultures, communication practices, financial and calendar year expectations for reporting, and their own core business imperatives, not always visible to ‘outsiders’.

The contemporary culture of workplaces (e-communication, casual employment conditions, multi-site delivery and cross-sectoral, hence cross-organisational, engagement) fragmented working conditions.

Schooling networks focusing on early childhood literacies provided important connections to residents’ LLN practices as parents. These connections were not necessarily accessible if the primary frame of reference for networking was vocational learning or enhancing skills in information technologies (IT). The matrix of networks in the region provided an important overview of the range of activities captured by LLN provision.

Successful capacity building relied on seizing opportunities at the same time as educators emphasised the distinctive features of LLN provision. The necessary supports for explicit LLN provision – knowledge about how language works across texts, communication practices, and numeracy processes – are sometimes lost in a community engagement model. There is still some debate about where explicit LLN provision sits in relation to the more broadly conceived community engagement model.

There is an important role for people, positions and agencies to act as ‘connectors’. ‘Connecting up’ happens systematically and serendipitously. Connecting up generated different kinds of capacity building outcomes:

- Identification of new LLN expertise and knowledge
- Identification of existing but untapped expertise
- New learning paths brokered for individual residents
- Professional development opportunities and potentially new employment opportunities
- New literacy champions in the region.
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EDUCATORS

When LLN provision is embedded in a community engagement model of working with residents it is difficult to identify who is doing what to build LLN capacity.

Collecting information about educators is important, but not to define and delineate an LLN workforce. On the contrary, information about the existing educator workforce can open up debate about who is doing what, where, and at which points in a complex configuration of LLN provision. This has implications for professional development and collaboration given the apparently low numbers of educators currently operating in this particular region.

Other data from an admittedly selective survey of educators undertaken during the project suggests that:

- Knowledge about LLN provision is often context specific (for example TAFE, community centres, industry sites, and public schools)
- Professional development requirements are often context specific
- It is difficult to keep abreast of information about LLN provision
- LLN knowledge and imperatives differ depending on one’s role in an organisation
- The imperatives of particular workplace roles – volunteer coordinators, educators and managers – influence the professional development needs of workers. Some of these needs may align with the structured goals and purposes of an accredited qualification. Other roles require a more fluid or immediate response to their professional development needs.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LLN LEARNERS

The two models of LLN practice informing the project – socially embedded practices and multiliteracies – did not preclude discussion of formal LLN learning opportunities. Rather these theories reconfigured LLN practices as embedded and integrated in learning, work and life. From this perspective LLN learning took different forms depending on site and context. Four particular forms were identified in this project:

- Preparatory and basic levels of LLN provision that built skills prior to entering work or training, but was not necessarily named LLN learning
- Explicit learning LLN associated with LLN funding, curriculum outcomes or learning objectives, and not necessarily oriented to low levels of LLN competence
- Higher order literacies that people would use as they participate in general education programs, but, again, may not call LLN learning
- Literacies for and about learning that support access, retention and progress.
Expanding the focus of LLN learning outcomes foregrounds a range of capacity building issues not obvious if one uses the narrower framework of explicit LLN funding, curriculum and learning objectives as a model of LLN provision within a region.

Learners articulated the need for ‘brokers’ to provide them with knowledge and strategies to locate, connect and remain networked with service providers.

Community providers play an important connecting role in the region. Lower level LLN learning is often promoted via IT and computing classes, to avoid positioning LLN learning in ‘bottom rung’ or deficit learning frameworks. Some partnerships pay particular attention to connecting this early LLN learning with more formal learning opportunities and the people who benefit most from this are learners who seize the opportunity to keep moving on.

Learners are generally aware of the costs associated with learning. This might be directly related to financial issues, but was also associated with time (travel or simply studying and therefore having less time available for family or community commitments) and the sheer range of responsibilities they juggle in meeting their education and training commitments.

**INFORMATION: ACCESS AND CIRCULATION**

The City of Playford’s whole of city approach to service delivery – built in, integrated, embedded – recognises the complex interface between working, learning and living. But it is hard to capture and take in such a complex approach to service delivery. The understandings of LLN informing this project were also fluid, making closure equally difficult. The kind of investment planned for Playford over the next 10 years (2008-2018) indicates an important role for LLN in its explicit and embedded forms. It appears from this and other projects that residents, service providers, and even those involved in the explicit delivery of LLN provision, have trouble maintaining current knowledge of the various forms of provision and support networks in the region. The different ways of conceptualising LLN provision, the different definitions, and the ever-changing work practices across the region, make it difficult to keep abreast of what is available. Some strategies have addressed a primary tension identified in this project: disseminating information about programs even as that information routinely changes.

Attention will also need to be paid to building networks as LLN provision emerges as a cross-sectoral issue of relevance. In this respect all educators will need to know how to respond to learners’ LLN needs. Moreover, service providers will also need a current awareness of the challenges and opportunities, if they are to help keep learners ‘on track’ and enhance their opportunities for learning, working and living.
SUMMARY

For long term LLN providers, and those familiar with the day to day initiatives of the Playford community engagement approach, the outcomes of this project may well seem limited. Many times during the past year local providers have commented that they had ‘seen all this before’, ‘been here before’, ‘tried this before’. This particular project seemed to offer no new traction for them.

- There were no guarantees of increased student numbers as a result of participating in the project. In fact, given the pressures on existing staff many organisations were operating at capacity and did not have the financial or human resources to respond to any substantial influx of learners.

- There were options to access additional funds but collaborative partnerships required substantial in-kind contributions. The additional effort required competed with core business demands.

- Organisational visibility may have been improved for some participants, but this was often at the expense of casually employed educators across most organisations involved. Managers may have made broad in-principle commitments to the project but other employees were often expected to actualise the collaboration, often with no extra support and no reduction in existing work demands.

When ‘buy-in’ was immediate, common features could be ascertained: people were located in organisations where the infrastructure was substantial and coordinated; and employees had a degree of security and control over their working lives, regardless of their level of seniority or authority in the organisation.

Playford is a region undergoing substantial socioeconomic, institutional, urban and cultural change. For LLN provision to feed in and support residents during this period of change providers need an understanding of past activities, the opportunities and challenges generated by previous networking, and an awareness of the distinctive challenges and opportunities raised by the whole of city approach to community engagement.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The original submission for this project proposed a set of distinct but inter-related professional development, research and advocacy activities designed to enhance LLN provision in the region. Five main strands of activity were originally proposed:

1. Identify, generate and map stronger understandings of existing opportunities and outcomes from literacy provision.

2. Identify, generate and map training and professional development pathways for local educators.

3. Complete an adult LLN skills and expertise audit of the Playford region.

4. Facilitate public debate about adult literacies in Playford.

5. Provide a model of local government facilitation of literacy capacity through learning communities.

Partnerships were critical for successful completion of activities. Existing partnerships looked for ways to ensure ongoing sustainability. New partnerships were necessary for the project to achieve its overall goal of moving to the next level of systematic LLN capacity building in the region. As noted in Chapter 1, existing
collaborations included cross-sectoral partnerships between and with service agencies and three levels of government.²

Activities were reconfigured for the purposes of this report to present a ‘helicopter view’ of the learning gained during the project. This learning was summarised in Chapter 2 against 5 main areas: the character of capacity building and LLN informing the project; networking; knowledge about educators; knowledge about LLN learners; and issues of access to information. For readers interested in a more detailed account of the findings, four additional chapters elaborate the issues:

• Chapter 4: Networking issues: past, present and future
• Chapter 5: Building knowledge about educators
• Chapter 6: Building knowledge about LLN learners
• Chapter 7: Information: access and flow.

DESIGN OF PROJECT ACTIVITY

The main aim of the project was to use federal funding to partner with state government, private, and public agencies to build the capacity of LLN providers in the local government region of Playford.

Capacity building goals of the project were achieved through various means: delivery and evaluation of professional development activity within the region; consultations with providers; review of literature associated with previous projects and service provision in the local government region; and structured responses to surveys distributed to educators, local industry and learners.

These activities served different purposes. At times they were designed to inform people generally about the project and at other times they captured a sample population to ‘research’ views about LLN provision. Sometimes they aimed to seek information about the distinctive character of the Playford approach to community engagement and at other times they simply aimed to identify people who might access professional development related to LLN skills sets required in the region.

² Some of the original partners included: City of Playford Life Long Learning Unit; Workplace Education TAFE SA; a community engagement program located within a university; and a state government unit with responsibility for adult and community education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of inquiry</th>
<th>Data generating activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking: past present and future</td>
<td>• Review of previous LLN projects and findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review of related projects, for example those on capacity building, employment and training and so on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participation in network meetings and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey of industry views of LLN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Strategic projects to connect existing networks and expertise: Library Services; state literacy council collaboration; partnership with state units and public providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Delivery of professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building knowledge about educators</td>
<td>• Educator survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Evaluation of professional development events</td>
</tr>
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<td>Building knowledge about learners</td>
<td>• Learner survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supporting innovative practices (e.g. student blog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collection and analysis of TAFE data on student enrolments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information: access and flow</td>
<td>• Review of provision in the region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consultation with service providers in the region</td>
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</table>

Each of these activities addressed the capacity building orientation of this project. They generated knowledge about local provision and identified resources to enhance individual or organisational capacity to provide LLN. They did this by paying attention to existing resources with the assumption that people are often able to “develop mutual goals, pool resources, advocate to bring in resources they do not yet have and develop strategies for sustaining the outcomes of their joint work’ (Stokes et al. 2006, p. 4).

‘SAMPLING’ AND DATA SOURCES: SOME ISSUES

The activity-based nature of the project was one of its attractions for providers in the region. For some it offered the opportunity to network and access project resources (money, expertise, time and labour) to leverage their own goals for LLN provision. However, the range of activities noted in the above table, do not offer easy coherence when examining them for consistent approaches to sampling and design. Issues of design of research oriented activities – particularly the surveys – are dealt with in future chapters. However, ‘sampling’ of participants across the activities is an issue that requires some clarification.
In the main, project activities aimed to find out more about those providers and networks where LLN outcomes were not an explicit part of the funding arrangements, curriculum delivered, or learning outcomes claimed for a course. However activities were sometimes aligned with skills development, hence participants would volunteer to attend primarily for individual gain. Other activities required time and effort on the part of the participant, for limited return – surveys about provision for example.

Three distinct ‘approach’ strategies were activated. A list of LLN providers was constructed from stakeholders receiving state or federal funding to deliver formal and non-formal LLN programs. Names on this list were updated regularly as people changed jobs or moved on to other organisations within the region – such events were common during the life of the project. In addition government funding units and major public and private providers were identified from publicly available funding lists. Both of these strategies ensured that what was already known about ‘official’ or recognised LLN provision in the region would be included in data gathering exercises.

An email distribution list was developed comprising ‘opportunistic connections’. This list was composed via personal and professional networks, ideas raised during Steering Committee meetings, professional contacts activated during the project, and accidental encounters. The list was used to disseminate invitations to professional development events, seminars and public speaking events tangentially connected to the project as well as alerts about recently released reports. People on this list were encouraged to distribute the information as they pleased.

A more deliberate strategy, snowballing, was also activated where research activity (in particular the educator and learner surveys) collected data on LLN provision in the region.

Snowball sampling relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. While this technique can dramatically lower search costs, it comes at the expense of introducing bias because the technique itself reduces the likelihood that the sample will represent a good cross section from the population (StatPac 1997-2007).

In this case the aim was not to generate a ‘representative’ data set from LLN providers in the region, but rather to seek out those hidden contacts and members of the population who did not call themselves LLN providers. Such ‘hidden’ contacts had access to a set of networking and capacity building practices not included in accounts of ‘official’ LLN provision in the region. Council employees were particularly helpful in providing connections to people undertaking whole of city service delivery, and involved in LLN support, but not named as such.

Snowballing was particularly useful given the two particular features of the context in which the project unfolded:
• Many people were reluctance to name educational training activities using LLN terminology
• Much of the service delivery in the region incorporated aspects of LLN provision, but not necessarily LLN teaching.

Snowballing had a number of advantages. It revealed sites and people involved in LLN activity but often not named as such precisely because ‘literacy’ provision seemed so counter-intuitive to the locally derived community engagement model. It generated unexpected capacity building outcomes as organisations and individual leaders saw opportunities to develop a more visible articulation between the whole of city approach to education and training and the more concrete needs associated with LLN provision. Snowballing also brought to the surface historical activity not publicly available in existing documentation (Peterson 2001; Shore 1997, 2002; Wallace 2004).

However snowballing also created some disadvantages. There were distinct shortcomings from the point of view of managing the project and maintaining rigorous definitions of the sample groups for research activity. Snowballing attracted new activity-based collaborations with complex reporting imperatives to federal, state and local government agencies. However, partners were not necessarily required to report to the Playford Literacies project in any official way, hence tracking of outcomes was imprecise and often time-consuming to clarify and quantify. Because the understandings of LLN used in the project were quite fluid, snowballing produced a data set that identified members of the population associated with LLN provision, but there were few ways in which the specific definitions of LLN could be tracked. This resulted in very broad parameters for what counted as an LLN informant.

Finally, snowballing was a deliberate strategy used to engage new partners. The collaborations changed form as new activities were generated. Managers from existing networks and those who initiated new partnerships often made genuine organisational commitments to the overall agenda of building regional capacity. However, the day to day negotiation of these commitments was often left to a different group of people to realise. There was always a tension therefore between the demands of core business activities – for example teaching commitments, consulting activities, intra-organisational meetings – and responding to Playford Literacies agendas and activities.

SUMMARY

In summary, data collection balanced the twin issues of building capacity by broadening awareness of the project and locating participants for specific instances of data collection. The latter included: a learner survey; industry views about LLN; and a survey of educators operating in the region.
The agenda at one point was to accumulate knowledge. This knowledge was then fed back into dialogues about LLN provision in the region (for example via UniSA Northern Adelaide Partnerships (UNAP) meetings; South Australian Council for Adult Literacy (SACAL) activities; Steering Group meetings; and discussions with Council employees). In ideal terms Playford Literacies would contribute to the strategies already in place for building LLN capacity, rather than creating a new space for debate.

At another point the purpose of snowballing was to attract ‘new blood’ or bring to the surface hidden networks. Many new partners joined along the way, but the characteristics of snowball sampling and the deliberate strategy of valuing all kinds of LLN provision, meant that it was difficult to draw tight generalisation around the sampling procedures for activities with so many different agendas.

While this innovative project had very real timelines and identifiable deliverables, the challenge was to persist with a project design which was multifaceted and unwieldy at times, yet had the potential to reveal forms of activity not previously recognised as LLN provision.
CHAPTER 4: NETWORKING: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Things are changing on a daily basis in the Playford region. There are new roads, new infrastructure, new housing estates, and in some parts of the city demographic and urban change beyond recognition. These developments impact on the lives of residents (www.unisa.edu.au/northernsummit/default.asp) in substantial ways. The urban redevelopment in Playford has many agendas but because of the substantial history of socioeconomic disadvantage in the region much of the literature about redevelopment includes claims for improving residents’ lives. Socioeconomic renewal has been a key theme of change in Playford for many years. In the lead up to this project it was obvious that networks were important. They were important for day-to-day service delivery. They also helped practitioners position themselves in relation to the dynamics of policy and funding changes.

This chapter provides a brief overview of related networks with links to further information for readers interested in a more complete history of the region.

The selected projects described below do not provide a comprehensive overview of LLN projects and stakeholders in northern Adelaide, past, present and future. Rather they emphasise how regional networks were created from projects within the
region. Some of these previous projects would not normally be identified with adult LLN provision and others were admittedly less than successful in achieving adult LLN outcomes for the region.

People researching capacity building (Garlick, cited in McGinty 2002) suggest that one important task of projects such as Playford Literacies is to collect information about what is known in a region. This builds a body of resources for current and future workers. These resources do not serve as the final word on LLN activity, nor do they indicate that some unsuccessful activities should not be tried again in future projects. Rather they provide a point for ongoing debate about what is said/not said, tried/not tried and learnt/not learnt in the process of building networks to sustain a diverse range of LLN provision for residents within a region. Four ‘case studies’ are offered as examples with this in mind:

- A state funded project designed to explore LLN networks in northern Adelaide
- A university program designed to work in partnership to improve social, education and economic outcomes for people in a region of well-recognised disadvantaged
- A ‘family literacy’ project that promotes early reading skills in childcare and early learning centres
- A loosely connected network of service providers concerned about waning support for LLN in a region clearly in need of sustainable employment and community engagement pathways for residents.

The ‘cases’ provide information about how existing programs, networks, or services – not always named or acknowledged as official LLN providers – offer the potential for LLN capacity building. They demonstrate how different networks generated different ways of understanding and building LLN practices. LLN practices were defined, described, measured and funded differently when investigated from the perspective of particular industry, community, school-based, early childhood or vocational networks.

**NORTHERN REGION LANGUAGE LITERACY AND NUMERACY PROJECT (2004)**

The Northern Region Language Literacy and Numeracy Project was a state funded project (Wallace 2004) undertaken at a time when local funding agencies were exploring the benefits of learning networks as a framework to strengthen LLN provision. Of the northern Adelaide region it was noted:

A summary of the full project can be downloaded at
Adult LLN in this region displays great strengths in addressing the needs of learners in one of the most needy regions in the nation. Dedicated educators and tutors perform wonderful work, often with limited funds. Many of the educators are visionary - people who think strategically and laterally. They manage to nurture some of society's most at-risk 'second chance' learners in a supportive environment, using Best Practice models of delivery and service.

...At the same time it is apparent that there are weaknesses in the sector, weaknesses that mean that much of the vision cannot be achieved, and that goals are often compromised (Wallace 2004, pp. 5-6).

Many challenges faced the community sector as it worked to improve LLN outcomes for residents: it was ‘a fractured sector, with poor levels of communication and cooperation between community, LLNP and TAFE providers’ (Wallace 2006, p. 6). The report identified major barriers to a more cohesive culture of provision:

Funding is often piecemeal and short-term, and this creates feelings of insecurity for programs, and hence of educators’ jobs. Insecurity, in turn, creates insular blinkered vision and less of a willingness to focus on the needs of the learners. Instead there is a focus on educators’ and centres’ needs (p. 6).

This difficult balance between poorly resourced workers and the overarching culture of an educational field has been noted elsewhere, particularly where the meagre resources available for LLN policy, delivery and resources development, seem to severely constrain capacity building (Paltridge 2005; Shore 1997, 2001, 2002). Amongst other things Wallace noted significant gaps: skills shortages amongst educators/tutors and coordinators; information gaps for learners, providers and referral agencies; digital literacy gaps for learners and educators; transport difficulties; a lack of resources and adequate responses for Indigenous learners; and, gaps in actual LLN provision.

Playford Literacies acknowledged the history of uneven resourcing in the region. The findings from the Wallace report, despite their gloomy tone, were a starting point for many of the providers in the region. The recommendations provided an opportunity to raise issues as diverse as funding, educator qualifications, collaborative partnerships and local competition.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA NORTHERN ADELAIDE PARTNERSHIPS (UNAP)

UNAP is a University of South Australia (UniSA) program that adopts a ‘strategic, holistic and collaborative approach to building the capacity and resilience of the northern Adelaide community’ (www.unisa.edu.au/unap/Why.asp). It directs university resources towards projects in the northern Adelaide region, all with a view to generating positive impact on residents’ lives. UNAP’s networks extended well
beyond LLN provision however UNAP staff recognised the central role of LLN in region wide activities to improve education and training in northern Adelaide.

The UNAP approach reflected many of the principles embedded in the City of Playford’s community engagement approach. UNAP executive support played a critical role in channelling the energies of a network of people to address concerns emerging from the 2006 Lapsit pilot program noted below – that is undergraduate student concerns about apparent low levels of literacy among parents participating in Lapsit activities in the northern Adelaide region.

The role of UNAP in sustaining Playford Literacies momentum was also substantial and points to the importance of university partnerships that move beyond the core business of preparing professionals for human service and education work via undergraduate degrees.4

LAPSIT (2006)

The Lapsit Program might under other circumstances be called a ‘family literacy’ program. Lapsit was created from a partnership between the Cities of Salisbury and Playford Library Services and university staff working in an early childhood pre-service teacher education program. Lapsit encouraged caregivers (parents, relatives and friends) to read books, play, sing songs and generally engage with their children to promote language development and emergent literacy skills. Final year students enrolled in a pre-service early childhood education degree program facilitated the sessions.

In 2006 a pilot Lapsit program, with Australian Government Sustainable Regions funding, was run in Salisbury and Playford communities across 19 early childhood sites (for example, playgroups and child parent centres) with 83 UniSA students working as facilitators. A number of the students found that parents had limited literacy skills. Some parents were unsure about the reading tasks involved or were simply unfamiliar with any of the tasks associated with the Lapsit activities. Others wanted advice about building early literacy skills with their child(ren).

Students and university lecturers shared their concerns about parent and care-giver literacy skills. As part of its regional networking role UNAP was already providing executive support to the Lapsit program – prompting meetings, taking minutes, and tracking actions completed – thus providing the organising glue that coordinated and sustained momentum across the many moving parts of Lapsit activity (see www.unisa.edu.au/unap/Projects/Lapsit.asp for further information).

4 See also the Office of Community Based Research (web.uvic.ca/ocbr/index.html) and the Festival of Literacies (www.literaciesoise.ca/index.html) for other useful models of cross-sectoral collaboration with university workers.

Playford Literacies
From these beginnings, the Adult Literacy Northern Adelaide (ALNA) Group – a network of people interested in adult literacy issues in northern Adelaide – was formed.

**THE ADULT LITERACY NORTHERN ADELAIDE (ALNA) GROUP (2006)**

In 2006 UNAP staff drew adult literacy workers and service providers together for an initial meeting, to explore some of the observations of parent literacy skills noted during the Lapsit pilot project. The group brainstormed challenges experienced across the region and strategies LLN providers and other service agencies needed to address in order to move forward (ALNA 2006). Themes noted in the minutes touched on: access to information; the challenges of cross-sectoral collaboration; accessing funding to support different components of provision including delivery; a need to address delivery issues for learners and educators; and the issue of maintaining a broad awareness of sustainable funding opportunities for project work, research and professional development. Participants agreed on two key actions: a ‘mapping exercise’ and a community forum. The mapping exercise would ‘update an existing mapping resource on Adult Literacy... includ[ing] resources, existing programs and existing curriculum ...so duplication does not occur and links can be identified’ (ALNA, 2006). The Community Forum aimed to ‘identify and begin planning collaborative initiatives to advance adult literacy in the Northern Region’.

An ALNA briefing paper summarised Forum outcomes under three key issues (ALNA 2007):

- **Complexity.** Adult literacy is a complex issue with no simple solutions. It is challenging to convey what adult literacy is, including the range of literacies within a community; the connections (or not) with employment capacity; the challenges associated with building community participation; and, the difficulty of building a sustainable resource base.

- **Knowledge sharing.** It is difficult to know what is being done, who is involved in adult literacy in the northern Adelaide region and who might take overarching responsibility for things such as professional development and minimal maintenance of professional standards. The integrated nature of some provision and the relative lack of visibility of programs mean people are unclear about how to work in meaningful ways to build capacity when they can’t map provision more systematically.

- **Collaborative strategies.** Project work was a viable way to progress collaborative regional work as it would draw on the interest and momentum achieved in smaller groups.
Not surprisingly these themes resonated with those identified by Wallace (2004) and with observations of people involved in the Lapsit program and generated recurring obstacles across marketing, management and dissemination of information about education and training provision. Despite the fact that some people and organisations had been working for decades on improving education and training opportunities for adults and young people, it was difficult to attract permanent support for LLN provision in the area.

New funding initiatives (Australian Government Sustainable Regions, Australians Working Together, SA Works) provided a range of opportunities, each time bringing new partners together around issues which in the northern Adelaide region seemed at times intractable: school retention; sustainable employment pathways; community engagement; and always just below the surface, matters of how residents managed the LLN demands made of them as parents, workers, friends and community activists.

There was no common language to name what people understood as the work of LLN provision across sectors as diverse as schools, adult campuses, community centres, private and public training organisations, and large and small industrial enterprises. Hence it was difficult to find a shared language for what counted as ‘best practice’ and an enduring reluctance across all sectors to use ‘the L(literacy) word’ as a shorthand or catch-all code for common elements of service delivery. In the absence of agreed terms (or at least an agreed shorthand) to capture the range and diversity of stakeholder interests, activities and goals, a tendency developed to use terminology which represented what others ‘did not do’. This seemed to alienate and divide rather than build bridges between many providers.

Among self-identified literacy workers, community literacy provision was often noted as the bedrock of LLN delivery in Playford, and the northern Adelaide region more generally. From this perspective neighbourhood houses and community centres were offered as enduring motifs of what counted as ‘adult literacy in the north’. And yet previous projects and annual reports indicated that community provision was severely stretched in its capacity to solve the problems of adult literacy in the north. Despite ‘organisations and individuals who give wholeheartedly to their fellow citizens’ (Wallace 2004, p. 5), qualified workers and program finances were in short supply.

Because there were so many different ways to recognise and acknowledge LLN provision there was no agreement regarding qualifications required for positions as varied as volunteers, educators, workplace trainers, or service providers who brokered education and training opportunities with residents. Meanwhile national surveys (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007) continued to suggest that LLN demands were likely to be significant in the region.
As new partners moved in to work on LLN in the region there was often limited recognition of the long history of previous work undertaken. People often started from scratch developing new maps of provision with their own priorities about what was most important in terms of provision in the region. There was also the ever-present scepticism from media reports implying that residents were not particularly interested in improving their skills and employment options (see for example www.unisa.edu.au/northernsummit/media.asp and www.advertiser.com.au/letsfightback).

The current project, Playford Literacies, grew from this potted history. The aim was to connect Playford networks in more visible ways with LLN networks operating across metropolitan Adelaide in the belief that the sharing of knowledge with other service providers would benefit both sets of networks.

EXTENDING EXISTING NETWORKS

The above examples of ongoing and past networking created opportunities and challenges for service providers and funding agencies in the region. From these beginnings Playford Literacies initiated professional development activities, surveys, general consultations about provision, and support for innovative projects. One of the most enduring features across this work was a recurring theme of ‘connecting’.

CONNECTING NETWORKS TO GENERATE NEW EXPERTISE

One aim of Playford Literacies was to provide professional development opportunities for people within the region, but during a Steering Committee meeting it became clear that professional development should not focus too narrowly on LLN ‘delivery’. City of Playford Library Service employees had a close association with the Lapsit program and were keen to develop a stronger awareness of adult LLN issues amongst library staff. Parents often brought children to the Library and Lapsit reading kits were available for parents to borrow. With such things in mind, one Library Manager realised the important role librarians could play in introducing parents and other residents to LLN opportunities. She also had the vision to extend librarians’ understandings of LLN issues in the region and thus improve residents’ engagement with libraries. Playford Literacies played a brokering role between the Library Service and a South Australian workgroup within TAFE, Workplace Education which provided customised training to meet industry needs.

During 2008 Workplace Education ran LLN awareness workshops as part of an in-house staff development program for library staff. The broad expertise and ability to respond to a range of workplace issues meant there were positive synergies between the facilitator and the library staff managing the program as they sought to extend knowledge of LLN issues and identify practical responses to workplace issues. A number of outcomes were achieved.

Playford Literacies
1. Using the principles learnt during the training, library staff undertook a substantial review of library signage, materials used by the library staff on a daily basis, and redesign of the library membership form.

2. Library staff assembled existing resources to address LLN teaching and recreational needs, renamed them as ‘Fast Reads’ and relocated the material in a more accessible place within the library in order to provide better access for residents with LLN difficulties.

3. Staff also reviewed ways to improve access to the library website and email and internet classes run by the library.

The library training was conducted in a way that embedded it in ongoing professional development for staff. This reflected the broader culture of community engagement encouraged in Playford. Outside expertise (a facilitator from Workplace Education) was contracted to do the training. However, at each point along the way planning ensured that the training was seen to be relevant and usable back in the workplace – the library. As noted above, a number of immediate results were achieved and have raised many issues for staff to consider as they communicate with the public about promoting library services in the future. Additionally the outcomes continue to have flow-on effects for the 55,000 library members using the library every year.

Numerous other initiatives have flowed from this connection. Library service staff were introduced to the South Australian VET Toolbox Champion support infrastructure (see oes.tafesa.janison.com/tbcs/index.html) and are reviewing this as a potential support for future workplace learning. Other plans include, inviting organisations to present as part of the ongoing professional development program for library staff, and ongoing work with private training providers specialising in disability employment training and LLN.

Library staff have also begun to consider ways in which they might support LLN and wider adult learning initiatives by housing learning opportunities at the library. A grant was submitted in partnership with Para West Adult Campus, a local public school campus to state funded South Australia Works: Adult Community Education (ACE) Program (2008-9 funding round) to undertake a pilot program with ‘young parents with identified [low level] literacy issues and who are socially isolated and disempowered to participate fully in their community’. The program planned to address the isolation experienced by young people, especially over the annual Christmas period (late December to early February), with particular emphasis on ‘expanding existing learning and support networks and mitigating the dependency on existing networks’. While unsuccessful in the initial funding round the partnership provides evidence of organisations moving to expand their networks and help learners to be more aware of, and proactive, in entering new networks. Other initiatives include English language classes for newly arrived refugees.
This was an unexpected partnership and the outcomes were substantial. On the one hand library staff had direct experience of immediately relevant workplace learning. Moreover they could identify new professional knowledge acquired as a result of the LLN staff development workshops. Of importance in the long term, the City of Playford Library Service has emerged as a local ‘literacy champion’ with direct experience of the benefits of connecting up with LLN ‘experts’.

The word ‘expert’ is often disparaged when used in the context of local community capacity building. Here, is it used deliberately to demonstrate how two networks came together to generate new knowledge to improve service provision for residents.

CONNECTING WITH WIDER UNDERSTANDINGS OF LLN

As noted by Wallace (2004) community centre provision was often considered the norm for LLN provision in northern Adelaide. Yet the whole of city approach to data collection about LLN activity indicated much more was happening. This additional activity was hard to see though. Often it was not named as LLN provision. Sometimes it was simply not congruent with what was commonly accepted as ‘real’ LLN provision, for instance, delivery of courses for people with minimal to low levels of reading and writing, or programs for newly arrived migrants and others with poor English language skills.

*Playford Literacies* aimed to broaden the debate about what counted as an LLN context within the region by approaching industry to build a picture of contemporary industry understandings. Resources were limited and the aim was not to undertake an extensive evaluation of workplace English language and literacy delivery in the region (see [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/programmes_funding/programme_categories/special_needs_disadvantage/well](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/programmes_funding/programme_categories/special_needs_disadvantage/well) for conditions of Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) funding). Rather this activity aimed to provide a focus for future discussions within and across the networks.

Rather than ‘starting from scratch’, an existing partnership with Workplace Education helped to provide momentum. A survey was provided to participants at a regional industry conference convened by a local business enterprise centre ([www.nabec.com.au](http://www.nabec.com.au)). Conference participants were drawn from a range of employers and trainers in the region: many small businesses (air conditioning services, stationery/office furniture suppliers, fitness services and so on); a

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5 Workplace Education already worked with industry in the region. They were represented on the *Playford Literacies* Steering committee, had provided valuable information about industry network and worked successfully to introduce new levels of awareness about LLN practices and workplace learning with the City of Playford Library Services (see previous discussion of the partnership with City of Playford Library Services).
substantial number of companies from the finance sector; and a number of private and government employment services. The aim of the survey was not to seek a representative sample of industry views, but to generate a very selective profile of current data about LLN from the industries represented.6

Responses to the term *workplace language and literacy*, were often collapsed to ‘communication’ in general, substantiating other consultations in the region indicating ‘literacy’ was not a useful word to describe the issue. A majority cited ‘communication’ and ‘understanding’ possibly because these terms were used as the title for the survey. Two themes dominated survey responses.

1. Workplace language and literacy was about efficient communication and using of documents as ‘tools’.

2. Literacy was more easily thought of as a cultural and social practice when non-English speaking people, people with disabilities or non-Anglo cultures were a visible presence in the workplace.

In the first case this involved understanding written and spoken language and being able to communicate effectively with clear, concise and professional written communications both internally and with external clients. In addition, how we convey messages and communicate and interpret information without offending. In the second case this involved communication which was sensitive to workplace ethics and cultures. This covered a range of issues including particular industry jargon, awareness of varying literacy levels amongst employees, and of employees who were not able to speak fluent English.

Of the organisations represented, respondents described their internal communication generally as excellent (10), good (10) average (3) and poor (1).

The top three problems in companies were listed as:

- Computer literacy (15)
- Dealing with customers and suppliers (12)
- Interpersonal conflict (10) 7

The majority of respondents (16) did not believe reading and writing problems were common in their industry. Where problems were experienced they seemed to be

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6 Of the 27 total responses, 14 were from small businesses with 1-10 employees or less; 2 from business with 10-20 employees; 1 from a business with 20-50 employees; 2 from businesses with 50-100 employees and eight from businesses with more than 100 employees.

7 Other problems noted included: working with people from overseas (8); following instructions safety (7); writing short work reports (6); reading documents (5); calculating (3).
with course content which required substantial literacy and numeracy skills such as accounting and business practices.

The majority of respondents (17) had not used a specialist communication trainer to help with workplace training. Where specialists were used they filled the role of a ‘facilitator’ or ‘workplace coach’ or had specific content expertise such as IT knowledge. Of the responses received for these surveys specialists were never employed as language and literacy specialists. Given the low numbers of respondents who believed there were literacy and numeracy problems in their business, or their sector generally, it is not surprising that few had information about who, where, and how to approach people who might offer LLN specialist expertise.

The activity-based work with industry established a baseline for discussion about industry views of literacy. For some educators and trainers this information is not new, however, others have limited access to the information and its implications for cross-sectoral collaboration.

In addition there are overlaps with other Playford Literacies findings.

In industry there is evidence of the multi-faceted nature of LLN and further support for the idea that it is through using it, ‘literacy-in-use’ (Jackson 2004, p. 2) that meanings about LLN provision are created. The kind of industry; prior professional training; the transitions workers experience as they are promoted in their organisation (or undertake new training, or move into new fields of employment), will all influence the extent to which they need support to successfully work through those transitions.

Future work with the business community may help to connect them with LLN expertise networks they may not normally access. These collaborations will also provide a more grounded way of understanding industry and workers needs, and so address the broader agendas of improving employment and training options for residents.

CONNECTING WITH NEW SITES AND SOURCES OF EXPERIENCE

The whole of city approach to service delivery promoted new ways of looking for LLN provision in the region, as it also prompted a rethinking of what provision looked like. Schools were an obvious starting place as they provided a familiar reference point for discussion of LLN skills, curriculum and assessment issues and outcomes. Of particular interest was the Para West Adult Campus, a public schooling innovation apparently unique to South Australia.8 Providers such as Para West also present new

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8 The Para West website (www.parawest.sa.edu.au) states the campus ‘is a public re-entry school for adults, which has delivered quality curriculum to adults for almost 18 years. Students can choose to study from a broad range of courses. These include vocational pathways, completion of Playford Literacies
opportunities for LLN capacity building. Some local LLN providers have collaborated with the school in the past as noted in a funding report provided to Playford Literacies by the Northern Area Community Youth Services (NACYS):

*Through partnership with the local adult re-entry school (PWAC) students are given the opportunity to re-enter formal education through a gentle non-threatening pathway program* (NACYS 2007).

These pathway programs appeared to repeat the custom of using general adult education terminology rather than referring to explicit LLN learning outcomes. Para West, the community agencies and some of the parent groups in public schools within the region, provided obvious points of reference as connecting points to alternative LLN provision.

Broader collaboration with Para West was also realised by funding a small innovative project to explore the LLN repertoires students adopted as they returned to learning. A student blog was initially planned as a developmental activity with students enrolled in Para West, the intention being to create a space for student discussion about learning across the region. It soon became apparent that IT infrastructure, access issues and duty of care responsibilities would preclude any region wide development of a student blog.

Our initial work in this area suggests that these activities are interesting and particularly useful where learners are adept at using IT. However, they are also quite time-consuming and assume substantial IT expertise of teachers using them and organisations supporting them. The student blog, however, will continue in 2009 with a group of parents involved in an adult education outreach class. As part of its commitment to connecting with community, Para West is delivering classes off-site in partnership with a public primary school in the north. This is yet another example of the way in which LLN provision changes shape and form according to the basic premises and expertise lodged within a local network.

Council employees were also important in this process of connecting new sites and sources of experience. Local industries required workers with functioning literacy skills but often resorted to testing literacy ability via a narrow range of testing instruments. Some council employees had developed skill in recognising these LLN issues and saw them as opportunities to connect human resource units in industry and educators with expertise in assessment practices.
Each of these examples – partnerships with public schools and council employees with LLN antennae at the alert to pick up on LLN issues – pushed provision beyond understanding of the explicit LLN funding/curriculum/learning objectives models commonly used to recognise LLN provision. Again we saw evidence that LLN learning was everywhere in Playford, even if not always officially labelled as such.

CONNECTING TO STATE GOVERNMENT NETWORKS

As in other states, state government funding, historical knowledge of provision, access to innovations developed in other projects and networking cross-government connections were invaluable for a regional project such as this. Moreover improved employment, education and training targets were clearly indentified in the South Australian State Strategic Plan (www.saplan.org.au/content/view/149/185). It was therefore, not unexpected that state government would be an important partner strengthening the reach of the Playford Literacies project.

The Adult Community Education and Community Partnerships Unit in the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) commits substantial financial support for professional development and LLN delivery and some of this funding was used for the Playford region. Three particular funding initiatives are relevant to this report. Firstly, the Literacy SA project, a professional support delivery service located in TAFE SA South within the Workplace Education group, was funded by the Adult Community Education and Community Partnerships Unit. Second, the unit also funded substantial delivery of literacy provision across the state including funding for providers in the Playford region.

A third state government connection, trialling a Skills Passport for low-level LLN learners had a more direct impact for the networking and capacity building role promoted in this project. It was built into the original Playford Literacies submission as a way of responding generally to concerns about limited professional development opportunities in northern Adelaide.

LLN assessment and reporting requirements differ across various sectors:

- Vocational support programs delivered in TAFE are guided by assessment practices of the VET system, delivery of accredited modules and reporting requirements associated with the National Reporting System
- Individually designed learning programs undertaken in community and neighbourhood centres (see for example Peterson 2001) and most have few official requirements for assessment of actual learning outcomes
- Para West Adult Campus offers public schooling provision guided by the legislative requirements of the South Australian Certificate in Education (SACE).
The Skills Passport was originally developed as part of the federally funded strategy *Bridging pathways: ‘Australians working together’* designed to improve pathways to accredited VET delivery and employment for people with disabilities. As a prior learning resource it focussed on LLN skills recognition at the lower ends (Level 1 and 2) of the National Reporting System (Coates, Fitzpatrick, McKenna & Makin 1995).9

The aim of the *Playford Literacies* Skills Passport activity was to trial the existing resource. This would provide some professional development for Playford LLN educators and at the same time feed advice back to the state unit regarding future access to and use of the Passport.

The context and definitions of LLN provision circulating in networks has a strong influence on what is recognised as LLN provision and so what structures, pedagogies and reporting activities exist. Participating educators worked with low-level LLN learners. They recognised the importance of demonstrating progress to learners as they moved between organisations, programs, or classes within a program.

*Sound[s] like a good opportunity for students to get recognition for years of hard work*

*The concept is great and I have pushed for something similar for quite a while. Always useful to give students recognition for effort though it is probably only useful to about 30% of our students due to age/goals, etc*

*I believe it will be an excellent tool for gauging and tracking individual students’ strengths and areas to improve on. Students may also appreciate the opportunity to track their achievements*

*I hope it is adopted by all community houses and secondary schools, TAFEs and Unis...I see it as a great way to gain a complete picture of students’ capabilities*

The trial also surfaced some tacit knowledge educators held about their practice and gave them the opportunity to articulate that expertise in a public way:

*There is no NYA [not yet achieved] - why not? It would show at least that students have been assessed*

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9 National developments have prompted changes to reporting mechanisms. In 2008 the National Reporting System (NRS) was replaced by the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) (DEEWR 2008). The Skills Framework is the required means for reporting learner progress in VET accredited delivery. Community and non-accredited delivery remains free of the mandated reporting structures. Given the importance of access to seamless education and training pathways, and pedagogical responsibilities of reporting adequately to learners about progress, it is not unreasonable to expect that community educators and those working with low-level (previously described as NRS Level 1 & 2 learners) would show some familiarity and aptitude in using these reporting frameworks.
I would like to see sub-sections (such as) NYA included, and space for comments for students’ progress.

I still think it’s a good idea but it’s a bit difficult to tick every box/match every criteria. Some of the aspects of the passport aren’t that relevant to many of our students but I think it’s still worth persisting with but in a more simplified form.

It was apparent that, in community provision in particular, reporting on student learning was not always considered a core aspect of teaching practice: ‘for this program we’ve never had to meet criteria and that’s been one of the liberating aspects of working in community education’. This fluid and responsive approach to community delivery has always been presented as one of its strengths (Peterson 2001). Times have changed though. Learning pathways, seamless integration of learning experiences and residents’ own expressed interest in improving employment and training opportunities (UniSA 2008) suggest that there is a role for reporting processes especially back to learners.

The trial provided professional development for educators that was immediate and relevant – despite a number of them indicating that assessment of learner progress was a less important issue for community based programs.

However, of more significance for the Playford Literacies networking function was the capacity to move the resource along to a further stage in its development. The report of the trial was presented to DFEEST for further action as part of their ongoing work to provide a state wide resource base to support community learning.

CONNECTING WITH WIDER LLN NETWORKS

The original submission indicated that professional development sponsored by Playford Literacies would serve two purposes: build individual capacity; and connect people with wider LLN debates and issues. Professional development therefore operated as a capacity building vehicle for individuals and organisations. This extended the ‘connecting up’ theme across diverse LLN contexts including:

- Connecting Playford educators with the more systematic professional development available to educators across metropolitan Adelaide
- Connecting workers involved in different aspects of education and training (managers, tutors, educators and coordinators) through a common LLN interest.

Professional development activity drew on a large pool of expertise, made possible precisely because of the extensive networks available to the project. When activities were focused (for example a Health Literacies seminar and a Financial Literacies forum), attendances were high and responses positive. When professional development events were general in nature attendance was often low.
Managers, for example attended professional development because they had responsibilities for staff development and wanted to ‘[e]nsure supports are in place in many ways for our learners [and] create more opportunities for our staff’. Educators were more focused on teaching and learning issues: ‘[t]he different ways that people can take in information’, ‘ways to approach learning, when dealing with mothers’, and ‘being aware of LLN in workplace[s] in that it is not ignored when assessing/completing staff with their certificates in disability work’.

Most educators agreed that literacy was important as part of the broader education and training options for Playford residents, but they were ambivalent about using the word literacy. They tried to find other words to convey that complex mix of systematic learning and the ‘impromptu strategies’ required to negotiate the ‘moment-by-moment ways in which people take hold of literacy’ (Hamilton 2006). Educators could not always articulate how LLN was embedded as a supporting aspect of more general education programs, or specific vocational training courses. They taught LLN almost by ‘stealth’: never naming it explicitly but drawing on the principles of good teaching practice to impart LLN skills and knowledge through IT, family literacy (working with parents on resources for children’s learning), or topics of interest such as music, cooking or family history projects. These service providers did not align their teaching with accredited curricula or explicit LLN learning objectives. Nor did they keep records of progress reporting against measures such as the LLN system of reporting learner progress (see discussion above of the National Reporting System).

But there was also a view that educators needed to be quite skilled to deliver LLN in this region. When asked about advice they would provide for educators planning to work in the region they mentioned many things.

*Keep an open mind regarding immediate application of the PD (get involved) - sometimes seemingly peripheral PD provides excellent long-term support, as well as introducing opportunities for networking outside the immediate work environment*

*Talk to people and gather lots of resources and then trust your own judgement*

*it is extremely important to be mentored. Gleaning information informally from someone with a wealth of experience is so useful when you want advice on the job*

Two people went into this in some depth:

*Make sure that you have excellent knowledge of/or attend professional development in: the structure of our language (grammar, spelling, punctuation, genres etc), that you learn how to start from the current experience and knowledge base of students (and how to base your program around these), that you learn how to develop integrated activities that meet*
a variety of learning outcomes and you learn how to encourage learners genuinely (without being patronising). Recognise the important role you play & how carefully you need to manage students’ learning and programs. Learn how to identify students’ learning needs and learn to source, identify or create resources which actually TEACH (as opposed to ‘busy work’). Learn how to assess (and re-develop/re-assess) the success of your teaching content and methods

Never use the title ‘Language, literacy and numeracy’ as that sends a message that you have come to ‘fix’ people and no one like to feel like they need fixing! so they will need PD on how to engage with families/adults in ways that the families decide and work with that to start with

The professional development events gave people a way to articulate their own knowledge often gained from many years experience. But it also provided a way to compare the different forms of LLN provision that surfaced in different networks as a result of the varied definitions, funding, and curriculum parameters at play, and the primary expertise within the network that determined what was recognised as LLN provision.

CONNECTING UP: A SUMMARY

In the lead up to this project three strong storylines seemed to dominate the focus of capacity building efforts aimed at LLN provision: LLN provision is what happens in the community sector in Playford; there is no LLN provision in Playford; and LLN is everywhere in Playford. The most compelling evidence supports the third storyline. Literacy is everywhere in Playford, it is just not called ‘literacy’.

This chapter has explored the role of networks in building LLN capacity. Playford Literacies endeavoured to reflect the community engagement approach operationalised by the City of Playford and the university program that supported community engagement in the region (UNAP). This was done in two ways. Documenting some prior networks and identifying the connections to existing LLN provision in Playford. Identifying potential partners and supporting them to connect with each other or alternative sites of LLN expertise. Some existing networks were reinvigorated. Some new ones emerged. Some ceased as they ran out of funding or were hampered in efforts to find new premises and so were unable to continue their service provision.

As a result of the connecting up documented in this chapter a broader profile emerged of the full range of LLN provision within the region. As this profile emerged it became apparent that LLN provision undergoes something of a transformation as it grows around the norms of practice within a particular network: reading to children; interpretation of medical advice in a community health clinic; reconfiguration of reading resources within a library.
Under these circumstances capacity building is about creating the conditions that will promote different forms of provision, yet not require all forms to exist in each site in the region. Rather the aim is to create the conditions for them to emerge organically in response to the community engagement model adopted by local government.
CHAPTER 5: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EDUCATORS

The networks described in Chapter 4 demonstrated how capacity building produced many planned and unexpected benefits. Previous reports (Peterson 2001; Shore 2002; Wallace 2004) had documented common issues of the volunteer nature of the sector, the prevalence of hourly paid employment as the basis of learning support, and the extent to which programs relied on short term unpredictable funding. In addition the focus in those reports was on the conditions of the field in general. Another characteristic of them was what might be called secondary accounts of learning – descriptions offered by educators – rather than first hand accounts from learners or detailed accounts of educators’ experiences, qualifications, length of service in the field or examples of teaching practice.

The Playford Literacies project offered an opportunity to explore who engaged in LLN teaching, the goal being to build knowledge about educators in the region. This information (an admittedly selective and partial profile) would provide the basis for more extended discussion about such issues as experiences and skills required to support different forms of LLN provision in the region.

COLLECTION OF DATA

The diverse working conditions, locations of delivery and varied ways in which people identified (or not) as an LLN educator made it difficult to bring educators...
together to capture core information about their background, expertise and concerns about LLN provision. An electronic survey was chosen as a practical way to proceed given the resources available to the project. The survey was constructed using software available to university staff and accessible to respondents via a public link. The link was active from late November 2007 until the end of May 2008. Questions included a mix of yes/no answers, multiple choice and open-ended text responses.

Officially recognised forms of LLN provision were reasonably easy to identify. Educators working in these organisations were approached with details of the survey.

Snowballing – asking those we knew from other Playford Literacies activities to provide contacts for people they believed were involved in LLN-related activity in the region – revealed participants who understood their work to be associated with LLN provision, but did not name it as such. ‘Capturing’ their engagement with LLN provision was an important part of building and broadening understandings of LLN work in the region. Previous reports of the region provided limited detail of educators other than the difficulties under which they worked. Snowballing provided a way to access profiles that moved beyond the commonly presented portrayals of under-resourced and often undervalued workers, to gain a sense of their conditions of work.

The e-link and hard copies of the survey were promoted during initial contacts with service providers in the region. As a start up capacity building activity this provided a concrete way of talking about Playford Literacies – the project, its aims, scope, focus and broader philosophical connections with the locally derived model of community engagement.

There were 24 responses addressing the following areas:

- Demographic details
- Employment location including region and type of workplace
- Period of time involved with LLN and with current organisation
- How the respondent entered LLN work
- Current work practices and types of interactions with learners
- Professional and industrial support
- Passing on knowledge
- Opinions about their professional capacity.

SOME CAVEATS ABOUT METHOD

The choice of data collection, public link to an e-survey, snowball sampling and the ambiguity associated with respondents who met the criteria ‘involved in LLN-related activity in the region, meant the results would never meet the stringent criteria associated with sampling methods of a project with a more tightly circumscribed...
research question. However, the purpose of the educator survey was to gain a sense of who the educators were, the kind of experiential knowledge they had accumulated about LLN provision in the region, and their thoughts about key issues and connections to wider education and training.

The focus was on building a profile, clearly a selective and partial profile, but one that could be used as a springboard for further debate about what constituted an LLN practitioner in this region.

The snowball approach to data collection was a strength here as people activated different definitions, terms and parameters for LLN provision. The survey enabled them to situate themselves broadly in relation to questions about LLN employment, organisational location, experience, work practices and interaction with learners, opinions about their professional capacity, and the knowledge they believed important to pass on to future workers. Responses need to be read in the context of these intentions.

**A SELECTIVE PROFILE OF LLN EDUCATORS**

Of the 24 respondents, 9 identified their primary worksite as a community house and 11 as a TAFE site. A little under a third (7 of the 24 respondents) were unpaid volunteers. 19 of the 24 responses were from educators over 40 years of age; 12 were older than 50; only 1 person was under 30 years of age. People had lengthy periods of service within the field (some for well over 20 years) but many new people were also gaining employment.

Finding employment in the field was primarily through personal contacts and friends (9) or previous work connections (8). Only 5 respondents had gained a current position via advertisement. Of their current work only 7 described their positions as permanent, indicating the relatively casualised and part-time nature of workers who responded to the survey. The short-term nature of employment and by default the teaching and learning available to some learners was reflected in how often people met with learners. Some educators spent more than 20 hours per week with learners meeting on a regular basis, while others spent less than 4 hours once a week.

Most experienced some form of orientation or induction to their organisation but their capacity to attend professional development sessions was constrained. In two of the larger organisations it was available on a regular basis however from survey comments it was apparent that ‘backfill’ – that is replacement teaching cost – was not always available. If it was, it was often difficult to find time to get away for professional development. In smaller organisations many people were volunteer or hourly paid workers and were reluctant to commit more time to work-related activity.
In terms of practice, the top seven activities undertaken by respondents were listed as follows (the number of responses is provided in brackets with educators able to mark more than one activity included in their current work):

1. Creating new learning materials (21)
2. Extra-curricular (or pastoral) advice to learners (18)
3. Direct class teaching – groups (17)
4. One-to-one teaching (17)
5. Maintaining student records (17)
6. Marking learners’ assignments (16)
7. Interviewing new learners (16)

Other activities were clustered around five main areas:

**Administration**: attending meetings; dealing with external bodies to organise information/guest speakers; coordinating the program.

**Marketing**: marketing program offerings; gathering evidence to advocate and support ongoing funding for programs; increasing the visible impact of services to agencies that deal with clients and policies developers.

**Quality assurance**: moderating assessment tasks; monitoring productivity records to ensure student numbers; revision of Introduction to Vocational Education Certificate (IVEC) modules; completing class input forms.

**Teaching and learning**: one to one review of students’ work; behavioural management; assisting students to recognise their skills and attributes; develop class content; adapting to suit individual needs; conversation classes; talk to clients about South Australian lifestyles; liaising with colleagues on joint program initiatives.

**Professional update**: keeping abreast of government policies and reforms that affect our client group; keeping up with new resources.

Many recognised how important it was to use IT in their teaching or interactions with learners. They used the internet to keep up-to-date professionally and it was also considered a very effective medium for teaching LLN. However, as IT users educators often struggled to keep up with technology.

**SUMMARY**

The survey provided information about a small group of educators working in Playford and nearby regions. The long periods of time served as educators meant some had accumulated a wealth of experience and were quite clear about the philosophical entry point required for work in the region:

> *get to know the community and the community programs and resources. Undertake PD that enables them to relate to and be empathetic to the*
community, understand that work in my area must be for the long haul, no 10 week quick fixes

Educators seemed to gain satisfaction from their work but infrequent sessions with learners meant it was hard to see progress over short periods of time. Respondents (18) talked about providing pastoral advice to students but many discussions with educators and allied service providers indicated how difficult it was to access information about LLN provision in the wider community.

The community engagement model of service provision in the region and the varied ways in which LLN was advertised (often without naming it as such), meant LLN was integrated and everywhere, but difficult to capture when it came to providing concrete information about times, places, associated costs, entry criteria and certificated outcomes of particular courses.
CHAPTER 6: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LLN LEARNERS

Just as it had been difficult to capture a sense of LLN educators working in the region in the past, it was also difficult to portray LLN learners, especially given the reluctance to call oneself that, and the diverse sites in which acquisition of LLN skills and knowledge was acquired. Describing engagement through the lens of networks (Chapter 4) suggests LLN provision is a shape-shifting phenomenon. In workplaces, community centres, child-care centres and so on LLN becomes something different each time it is taken up in the ‘moment-by-moment ways in which people take hold of literacy for themselves, to serve their own purposes and needs’ (Hamilton, 2006). But according to Hamilton’s social practices approach to literacy, LLN learners are using literacies in formal and informal settings. The important issue is not to make one or the other the primary reference point, rather to recognise the ways in which ‘vernacular’ and ‘standardised’ literacies reflect different grids of power in similar circumstances (Hamilton 2006).

Previous reports (Wallace 2004) provided limited information about the experiences of learners. Peterson (2001) provides insights into some learners’ experiences in adult and community education as does Shore (2002), although both are generally presented as educators views about what they think learners experience.

One aim of this project was to describe aspects of engagement with LLN learning from the learner point of view in the belief that this would allow better
understanding and planning for learner pathways, pre, post, and during study. The extensive network of partnerships associated with this project (see Chapter 4), provided a strong foundation for gathering data about learners’ experiences.

COLLECTION OF DATA

A survey for students was constructed seeking information from those directly enrolled in LLN learning at the time of the survey (March – June 2008). Sections of the survey included a mixture of yes/no, multiple choice and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions enabled learners to provide comment about learning, learning support, and future plans. Questions covered the following areas:

- Demographic details
- Employment and volunteer commitments
- Past training and study experiences
- Current training and study experiences
- Choosing a training provider
- Staying with a training provider
- Travelling to/for learning
- Reasons for studying and future plans.

An electronic survey format was chosen to collect data. An external consultant was contracted to develop and load the survey using a freely available web-based software program Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). The survey was piloted with a small group of learners to assess any assumptions made about presentation, question format, language and flow. From this pilot, further alterations were made to remove repetitive wording and ambiguous terms, cluster similarly oriented questions and synchronise responses across multiple choice sections where they were similar to other multiple choice options. An electronic version was trialled a number of times to check that technical problems were not going to be a barrier to completing the survey. These records were then deleted from the datasets.

Originally, the plan was to roll out data collection with students enrolled in LLN programs. Overwhelming feedback from educators, service providers and project partners indicated that using ‘literacy’ to describe learning was counterproductive, therefore no specific mention was made of language, literacy and numeracy in the actual survey questions.

While LLN provision was difficult to pin down precisely, the partnerships underpinning existing networks suggested there would be ample opportunities to

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10 In constructing this survey there was no planned contradiction between data collection and the target population (LLN learners). Initial discussions with partners indicated the survey would either be completed by learners, voluntarily or would be used as an exercise in LLN classes and learners could be provided with support to complete it if indeed they agreed to participate.
inform LLN learners about the survey and gain a broad cross-section of responses. However, gaining access to LLN learners – that is those in funded programs, learning via officially recognised LLN curricula, or completing courses with intentional LLN objectives – proved difficult. Educators, managers and coordinators of programs were important mediators for this process but many were casually employed, in-between jobs, working on another project or difficult to contact. Data collection stalled as it became more difficult to meet with student groups, explain the purpose of the survey and invite them to participate.

Finally, by activating previous professional connections and deploying the snowball approach additional organisations arranged presentations to their learners. In the end 263 responses were received from two large organisations in the region. These were collected and manually entered into the electronic survey by Playford Literacies project staff.11 Both of these organisations (Para West Adult Campus and TAFE Women’s Education, Elizabeth Campus) offer general adult education programs with elements of explicit LLN within the overall curriculum. Students enrolled in these programs were the primary respondents for the survey.

SOME CAVEATS ABOUT METHOD

In quantitative terms the student survey was overwhelmingly successful. However, it was not originally the plan to collect data from learners enrolled in general education courses. This occurred because of the snowball approach to data collection and the broad definitions of LLN learners activated by partners and others interested in being involved. Some would argue that the results therefore have limited leverage for LLN capacity building – that is strengthening provision for ‘real’ LLN learners – those with minimal LLN skills who might register at NYA Level 1 or Level 2 on a reporting system framework.

On the contrary, however, the results add weight to the line of inquiry followed throughout this project: following the trail of ‘real’ LLN programs often obscures the full range of LLN activity occurring in a region. Difficulty accessing learners through ‘official’ LLN providers pressed us to activate snowballing, as a data collection strategy. As in other Playford Literacies activities (the industry survey, some of our professional development activities, and the work with literacy champions in the City of Playford Library Service), this snowballing strategy opened up new connections, previously unidentified data sources and alternative capacity building opportunities, even if these weren’t recognised by official LLN discourses. However, it also created a paradox for reporting.

11 Originally planned as an e-survey, the surveys were actually distributed and responses collected as hard copies over a period of three days and entered manually into Survey Monkey.
The survey responses reflect the experiences of learning with two major providers in the region. They represent responses from learners with functioning levels of LLN and how they are engaging with learning. They shed light on adult learning issues in play with engaged adult learners. Some of these involved explicit LLN repertoires, others did not. The following observations need to be read in this light.

MOVING ALONG LEARNING PATHWAYS

The survey provided data about how Playford residents build their capacity for employment and civic engagement. The learners completing the survey were enrolled in public school programs at an adult campus at Para West and in a Women’s Education program at a TAFE campus. Those who completed the survey are learning and engaged in a range of LLN practices. Sometimes this is explicit where they receive support as part of their course. Sometimes it is by ‘stealth’ as educators work with them to support their learning all the time, while never uttering the ‘L-word’. In general though the learners responding to the survey would not be considered LLN learners according to understandings of basic LLN competence often used in programs, curriculum and courses guided by explicit LLN learning objectives.

RESIDENTS AS LEARNERS AND LLN REPERTOIRES

Of the 263 respondents, 91 were male and 172 female. This imbalance is partially explained because a TAFESA Women’s Education program was included in the sample. Women’s Education has been operating for over a decade from a number of TAFE campuses in South Australia and the program has special dispensation to operate as a women only program. Nevertheless the Para West Adult Campus responses also show marked differences between male and female respondents: of the 226 responses from Para West 130 identified as female and 91 as male (5 did not respond).

There was a low full-time employment rate (4.3%) and limited part-time engagement in employment (13.7%) from respondents. The majority of learners (82%) had no paid employment commitments. Some (15%) were engaged in volunteer activities. This included work in art galleries, courts, and non-government agencies; in schools as sports coaches, canteen workers and general support aides; and in community organizations doing bookwork or financial work as the treasurer, creating web pages, offering client transport, coaching netball, and judging gymnastics.¹²

Because transport is often cited as issue for concern and a barrier to learning, the survey sought to gain information about learners’ views on travel. Only a small

¹² No detailed discussion of employment patterns is offered here, although they are areas to be explored in follow-up work in relation to previous research in the region (Spoehr et al. & National Institute of Economic and Industry Research 2002; Wilson & Mayer no date).
number of people (15) were not prepared to travel out of their suburb. Others were prepared to travel to nearby suburbs (Elizabeth or Salisbury only). Some were prepared to travel to Gawler (approximately 25 minutes away) and into the Adelaide city centre (about 40 minutes away). While Regency Park, Tea Tree Gully and Gilles Plains are suburbs which offer a wide range of learning opportunities, and not too far from the City of Playford, but more difficult to get to by circuitous transport routes.

Some of this data reinforces anecdotal and other research findings that people ‘will not travel far’ for education and training. However, responses to other questions in the survey help to put the issue of travel to training in a broader context of associated costs and other pressures.

For some it is simply a matter of not being prepared to travel far ‘at present’ suggesting that conditions aren’t good now, but they might reconsider this in the future. Others are more specific. They will travel and give a sense of the limits of that travel: ‘to the city - at a push, 60 kms or if using public transport they might travel using ‘two or three buses’. If time is taken into account they ‘would not consider travelling more than 25 minutes’.

Others display a ‘can do and will do’ attitude, indicating they would go ‘anywhere that offers the course I want to study, out of town/city also, will go anywhere once I have my driver’s license’.

Most people who responded to the survey had experienced a number of courses and some had enrolled with more than one training provider. The majority of people (61.5%) had completed courses in the past 3 years at TAFESA (57 responses) and Para West (56 responses).

Opinions about ‘best courses’ completed to date provided important information on learners’ views about what helps their learning. The main benefits covered 5 areas including: skills and knowledge for a job (76.5%); self-confidence (55.9%); social contact with other learners (42.4%); pathways to further study (47.6%); and to a lesser extent assistance to get a job (15.9%).

Two outcomes of relevance to the LLN capacity building focus of this project were the kinds of LLN learning outcomes identified by the cohort of respondents. The first kind of response made mention of LLN related activities and what residents could do as a result of their time spent in a course:

- *I felt I could write a novel with all that knowledge*
- *Showed me I do have writing talent and to keep at it*
- *Help my children with homework*

For these particular learners the majority were on a pathway to qualifications, another program, or moving towards entry to an occupation. The courses they chose
provided the ‘human capital’ skills commonly referred to in policy and training documents: knowledge about an area of business activity; required competence to pass an entry test; a certificate that demonstrates competence and paves the way to a program or occupation.

A number of ‘best courses’ were listed that presumed substantial knowledge of and competence in particular areas of LLN practice: computing/computers (30), multimedia (12), and information technology (5).13 Many respondents indicated they had undertaken more than one course. Only one group of courses, the Introduction to Vocational Education Certificate 1 and 2, provided any clear link to explicit LLN curriculum outcomes. This information suggests that respondents already have some demonstrated competence in LLN and hence would not be grouped with learners who might require more intensive support to complete courses or modules.

A second cluster of responses showed that learners also had long term goals that could be achieved from enrolment in a course. Most relevant to this project was the range of responses that suggested people were ‘going places’:

To qualify for Federal Police or Defence Force

Go to University

Finish year 12/SACE 1 [a component of the South Australian Certificate of Education]

Start my own business

Comments about ‘best courses’ also suggested that in undertaking a course learners built specific competencies as they gained personal insight into what is involved in a learning journey. They explained that as a result of participating they gained insights about ‘personal learning style and best performance’ and they also got ‘a better idea of what I want to do’.

As they worked to improve their general education skills the survey respondents acquired what might be called higher order LLN skills necessary for participation in general education and training programs, which they would not necessarily consider as LLN skills. But they also learnt what was involved if one is to successfully ‘hang in’ and complete a course – what education and training organisations understand as retention and completion issues.

13 Other courses listed: creative writing, social work, outdoor education, business, film and television, environmental studies, retail operations, art and craft, maths applications, physics, bartending/waiting staff, photography, Aboriginal studies, printing and machinery apprenticeships, psychology, English studies, sports, conservation and land management, child advocacy, outdoor recreation, construction, Film and TV, forensic science, calligraphy, engineering, health and fitness, and history.

Playford Literacies
The respondents were aware of the importance of building relationships and networks within their own families and friendship groups and with professionals who provide the important ‘linking capital’ to state agencies (Spoehr et al. 2002). Building connections with people who will support their learning is important. It provides residents with the capacity to understand and access social institutions such as health, employment, economic and government support systems as well as providing the support to remain in learning.

THOUGHTS ABOUT CHOOSING PROVIDERS

The learner survey asked people to comment on choosing a training provider and staying with a training provider. Respondents identified four main issues that inform their choice of a training provider: the courses offered (173 responses); proximity to home (138); helpful teachers (138); and a friendly atmosphere (137). In addition, some chose their current provider because friends or family were doing courses at the same place (56) or that transport was convenient (54). This compares with 138 respondents who chose the provider because it was close to their home.

Some providers build a reputation for an ‘overall experience’, which is what gives them an ‘edge’ when residents think about choosing a training provider. The provider has developed a culture of learning that takes account of important factors in residents’ lives. Such factors include affordability – ‘it offers value for money’, or it might be about developing a more holistic approach to learning that recognises previous experiences. Of the Women’s Education courses people ‘enjoyed previous study here’ (2), but there were additional reasons for choosing this program: ‘the teachers are helpful, it’s away from home and distractions, it is an adult centre, women learning area only – no male distractions or sexism, it’s all women who have been or are in those situations’. Of Para West a respondent said ‘it is good for me, I am treated with respect’. 14

Where respondents could provide extended text responses they included a number of additional pragmatic reasons and some of these resonate with ideas about learning pathways. They may choose a course which takes them closer to their desired goal: ‘psychology goes with community service’, or as 5 respondents noted ‘to complete Year 12 studies’. Others were aware of the costs of study and this

14 These comments pose a paradox for researching LLN capacity building in cross-sectoral contexts. Para West is a government funded public school and hence is subject to funding and curriculum regimes of government schooling. Residents/learners talk about Para West as a school but also as a place which has managed to distance itself from the more negative memories many residents have of their earlier schooling. Similar comments are made of the TAFE Women’s Education Program which seems to have overcome the oft-made claim that TAFE campuses are ‘unapproachable’, large, impersonal and intimidating for many ‘new learners’.
played a part in their choices: ‘it is financially affordable’ (3); ‘I can walk there’ (2), or a provider might offer pensioner concessions.

In related project activities educators commented that keeping people engaged was somewhat different from moving them along a learning pathway. Responses to questions about choosing and staying with a training provider suggest that some learners might be over-staying their time within one organisation. This is understandable, given transport issues, child care and extended family responsibilities and the financial hardship stories that surfaced. Many commented on the various issues they had to juggle in order to enrol, ‘hang in’ and complete a course. This appears to be a recurring cause for concern amongst educators and managers charged with moving people along a learning pathway.

THE COST OF LEARNING

One of the most striking themes across responses was the ever-present issue of costs associated with learning. It might simply be that the chosen provider ‘doesn’t cost me a lot of money’ or ‘because all resources are here, it’s cheap’. Cost again emerges as an issue when choosing to stay with the same training provider. This suggests learners make a choice because there are no hidden extras involved in studying at that site.

Smaller numbers of respondents appeared to make a choice on the basis that it is the only training provider in the area (15.3%) or that it was easier to get childcare (3.7%). In the case of the latter responses, Para West had substantial child care resources and one respondent reminded us that it was a ‘great starting point for mums who are looking to get work or a career’ precisely because of the child care support.

People were making decisions and weighing up the consequences of their study. There’s no doubt that cost is a factor, but students were also aware of ‘quality provision’ in both the short and long term: ‘I feel I learn at a lower pace and no rush, rush with assignments, they are competent and assure me standards and credits are same as [elsewhere]’. Despite the fact that both of these providers might be described as formal learning settings, respondents’ comments still suggest that these providers have managed to develop an overall culture which can interrupt the often gloomy memories respondents have of schooling: ‘a clean start, free of the bias of old teachers’. Teachers in these organizations seem to know what is involved in keeping learners engaged.

One of the most productive questions in the survey asked people to elaborate on the factors which would help them to continue their studies. Of the 127 responses the most common theme mentioned (44 times) was that associated with financial support, grants, scholarships and specific mention of money, closely followed by issues associated with transportation (not having any), costs associated with
transport/cars, and the need to share their own transport with other family members (14).

Future study was also affected by costs which ranged from the small and ostensibly insignificant (fees charged for courses and ‘special equipment for visual aids’) to costs associated with larger issues of ‘secure housing’ and major hospital costs which were a continual part of ongoing health issues for the respondents or family their members.

Responses reminded us that adults fund their own education in many different ways, not just in course fees. Costs were connected at different points in the survey to money for fees, learning materials, child care and transport. But residents also experience ‘financial difficulties due to increasing living costs and difficulty balancing study and work, [and] work expecting me to be available all the time’.

They argue that current study benefits are not enough to live on: ‘[I] need to work to pay for courses as Austudy not enough to live on’. The pressures they experience are captured in a stark and honest response by a middle aged woman who is prepared to travel anywhere in the greater Adelaide metropolitan area to improve her options for employment but simultaneously experiences severe hardship on a day to day basis: ‘I am so poor... books pens plastic sleeves folders and bus fares are cruel for me. I am on Newstart and in a trust house’.

Cost associated with courses (for example childcare or transport or resources required for training) are the kind of things which might stop people from studying. People have to weigh the costs of their travel against more pressing family costs and the benefits for their children. This produces many barriers which prevent them from continuing with study unless they have access to ‘assistance with fees. Having 3 children and being a single mum the course costs can be out of my league’.

Other costs were incurred trying to meet too many different commitments: holding down part time or full time work, family commitments and maintaining a regular presence in learning. So time and the sheer difficulty of fitting everything in was also an issue. Parenting responsibilities might be considered a barrier to learning (37%) but these responsibilities were not going to go away. 24% of respondents noted that there was not enough time to do the study given other demands made of them.

One of the enduring lines of argument for further education and training is that it will reap rewards in the future. In other words, learners are encouraged to forego short term gains and gratification (wages from immediate employment) or tolerate intense periods of emotional pressure and physical tiredness (severe demands on their time and reduced engagement with family and community) in order to position themselves as competitive applicants for a salary and the security that might accompany employment.
Learners sometimes see these trades between short term costs and long term gains as simply not viable. As one young woman with a string of SACE and VET certificates to her name put it, she needs ‘more of an incentive, not just having to think about the long term benefits’. The economic climate of 2008 indicates that thinking about long term benefits is an unpredictable exercise in the context of a global financial crisis which has local effects.

Document analysis of materials provided by project partners demonstrate that residents do move out of the region to learn. In examining these materials we collated material on vocational preparation courses (LLN, Women’s Education and English as a second language) at neighbouring TAFE campuses during 2007 and early 2008. Close analysis of postcodes indicated that 175 of them were in fact Playford residents. For these residents they have the kind of supports in place that mean extended travel, demands on time and delayed gratification do not completely destabilize their day to day living arrangements.

**SUMMARY**

The data from the learner survey provided information about a number of things:

- Responses to general adult learning experiences and the barriers people face as they engage with learning: access to information, issues associated with travel and so on.
- Insights into the higher order LLN repertoires required of learners as they undertake general education programs, including technology, library use, study practices and so on.
- Of particular relevance to the capacity building focus of this project was the detailed data residents provided about the costs of learning and the myriad ways in which working learning and living produced a set of costs not easily reconciled with the argument of the long term benefits of education and training.

The responses indicated that formal and informal learning experiences and sociocultural factors co-exist: family circumstances, social background, broader interests, employment pressures, and skill levels come together at various times to prompt decisions about staying in and moving on.

A small number of survey respondents indicated that ‘nothing’ would stop them from *continuing* to study. These responses resonated with those remarks noted earlier about the distance people were prepared to travel. For some people the barriers and hardship noted in reports, research and anecdotal evidence, seem to have no major bearing on their determination to step onto or stay on a learning pathway, regardless of the odds: as one male respondent (over 50 years old) remarked only a ‘natural disaster’ would stop him from studying!
CHAPTER 7: INFORMATION: ACCESS AND FLOW

During this project many professionals said they simply could not keep up with the pace of change within the region. Partners often commented that they were not aware of other services and programs available for learners. This was not simply because they had not tried to access information about other programs in the region: the pace of change; the elusive nature of LLN provision; and the limited number of public champions made it difficult to keep up. During the active data collection period of this project (November 2007 – October 2008) many events had an impact on LLN capacity building:

- One community house closed down
- New initiatives were announced including an innovative ‘joined-up’ service delivery approach coordinated by Centrelink
- Staff changed jobs within their organisation, shifted to another organisation within the region, left the region altogether, took up new roles in addition to their original role or took leave (sick leave, or much needed holiday leave).

Everyone was pressed for time in a culture where much information was available on the internet but often not current. Managers of programs often had knowledge of

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{15}} \text{ It is difficult to find mention of this in recent documents other than one line in the Council meeting minutes Tuesday 10 June 2008.} \]

the big picture of provision, but the pace of change meant that knowledge quickly
dated. Remaining up-to-date involved constant presence at meetings within the
region to stay on top of the various sources of marketing and media material
conveying programs, staff contact details and entry criteria for courses.

During the course of this project invitations to participate in professional
development and attempts to keep in touch with people – whether by official,
opportunistic or snowball methods of contact (see Chapter 2) – were confounded by
many things. These included: the turnaround time to respond to communication,
personal and local IT system capacity; movement about the region and how people
could keep track of each other; the ways in which organisations chose to distribute
information to employees; and the sheer number of moves, secondments, holidays
and general leave people took during the period of the project.

Educators were keen to attend professional development events to learn about new
pedagogical practices, but just getting there proved to be a challenge! Where
possible though, participate they did, because they believed it would ‘pay off’ in the
long run. They believed, for example, that their core business would benefit by being
in touch with a broader range of service providers. Interestingly many who did
attend such events found they also left with a better understanding of the networks
and service providers available to learners in the region.

Of significance to this project, and for communication in the region in general, was
that many practitioners did not have the kind of high tech working environment
where everyone had a web page which outlined their expertise, related networks
and past professional contributions. Many educators had limited daily access to
email. Few had access to reliable large scale IT systems that would manage long term
storage of data.

The electronic, casualised and mobile nature of contemporary work practices in the
region – moving around to many sites, working only a few days a week, relying on
email to communicate with partners not employed within their home organisation –
was exacerbated by the casualised employment practices aligned with people
working in human services occupations and those supporting LLN in particular. Some
were in a position to ‘buy-in’ to the activity-based capacity building agenda of
Playford Literacies because they believed it would leverage their core agenda for
education and training for Playford residents.

Others argued that it was not in their immediate interests to participate.
Participation created additional demands that competed with core business activity
and hence was sometimes done in their own time. Others were too busy attending
to the day-to-day demands in their organisations, or struggling with ubiquitous
staffing changes to even contemplate ‘buy-in’.

Playford Literacies
These issues are present in reports of strategy initiatives in the region (ALNA 2006, 2007; Wallace 2004). They remain ongoing matters of concern where capacity building spans a range of diverse interests and needs: pedagogy, organisational and knowledge management, and vision for future activity.

For good reason, many support mechanisms are not badged as ‘literacy events’ or ‘literacy support’. There are some sustained opportunities available to learners to build their individual literacy capacity. At first glance these are not always evident precisely because they are classified according to the language of employment pathways. ‘Looking for literacy’ is harder than it may need to be in Playford, for educators and trainers, human service providers, industry partners and others. A wide body of literature sheds light on the challenges associated with building community capacity: community development, community capacity building, community education, workplace learning, school to work transition, social inclusion (Crossley 2008; McGinty 2002; Seddon 2001; Spoehr et al. 2007; Spoehr et al. 2002; Wilson & Mayer no date).

The City of Playford whole of city approach to service delivery – built in, integrated and embedded – recognises the complex interface between working, learning and living. But it also presents a challenging issue for LLN workers (and researchers) engaging in the interface of working, learning and living.

Finding useful information is a recurring theme in recent projects undertaken in the region. Sourcing information about childcare, transport, education and training programs, residential support, employment and many more things always seems to present challenges (Diamond no date; Spoehr et al. 2002). If this is a theme across Playford residents’ lives then the work done to build LLN capacity needs to render more visible the cross-cutting LLN opportunities available in the region, and in doing so, reduce the unnecessary time learners and service providers spend looking for literacy in Playford.

The different ways of conceptualising LLN provision, the different definitions and the ever-changing work practices across the region made it hard provide accessible and accurate snapshots of available provision. However some strategies had been trialled in recent times to map what was available at any point in time.

**MAPPING LLN OPPORTUNITIES**

In the past five years four ‘maps’ of LLN courses and related provision have been developed using short term funding opportunities, support from UNAP, or drawing on the resources of service providers in the region.

1. Wallace (2004) produced a snapshot of programs available in northern Adelaide at the time of her original project.
2. The *Literacy SA* site offers a list of South Australian providers with a postcode search facility. Much of this information is sourced from original data provided to the National Reading and Writing Hotline.\(^{16}\) This information relies on providers keeping the information up-to-date. In April 2008 *Literacy SA* contacted providers to ensure information was current. In March 2009 five providers were listed in Playford local government area, one being the community house which had closed down in late 2007. The list remains a major source of information about programs but generally provides few details, usually a phone number address and a brief description, and appears to align with ‘official’ accounts of provision, that is programs supported by officially designated LLN funding.

3. UNAP staff completed an updated ‘map’ of LLN provision in northern Adelaide and provided a copy of the information to those people meeting as part of the UNAP-ALNA group. Once again participants observed that the information was useful but very short-lived.

4. During 2008 Centrelink initiated a whole of government approach to supporting disadvantaged people within the Peacheys Belt. The project, the *Centrelink Peacheys Belt Community Service Initiative* collated information on all Playford service providers. A data base was developed by Centrelink staff using Lotus Notes software. Discussions are underway with staff to explore ways of making the information available to providers generally. There are however, a number of privacy issues associated with making this material public, and at this stage the data base remains available only to Centrelink staff.

During early discussions in this project researchers did not simply want to consolidate conventional accounts of LLN provision. This resonated with the whole of city approach to community engagement adopted by the City of Playford as the local government partner. Links to accounts of asset mapping (Carruthers & Wilson 2005; Office of Learning Technologies no date; Wollondilly Shire Council 2007), provided by colleagues seemed useful, but in the end the decision was made to settle for a less ambitious activity to make reference guides available to help people understand how to ‘look for literacy in Playford’.

In late 2008 near the end of the project a comprehensive overview of ‘programs and support services offered in education, training and personal development for young people in the northern metropolitan area’ was published (Northern ICAN 2008). The

\[^{16}\text{The Reading and Writing Hotline (www.literacyline.edu.au) was funded by a recurring budget line in the DEEWR Adult Literacy National Innovative Projects funding. This funding was terminated at the end of 2008. The Hotline continued operations until the end of March 2009. Its future at the time of publication of this report was unknown.}\]
document provides comprehensive coverage of a range of explicit and embedded LLN learning programs in the region. It also provides further evidence of the extent to which LLN provision changes shape according to its location within any particular network.

For long term LLN providers, and people familiar with the day to day initiatives of the Playford community engagement approach, the outcomes of this project may well seem limited. Many times during the past year local providers have commented that they had ‘seen all this before’. This particular project seemed to offer no new traction for them.

- There were no guarantees of increased student numbers as a result of participating in the project. In fact, given the pressures on existing staff many organisations were operating at capacity and did not have the financial or human resources to respond to any substantial influx of learners.

- There were options to access additional funds but collaborative partnerships required substantial in-kind contributions. The additional effort required competed with core business demands.

- Organisational visibility may have been improved but this was often at the expense of casually employed educators across most organisations involved. Managers may have made broad in-principle commitments to the project but other employees were often expected to animate the collaboration.

When ‘buy-in’ was immediate, common features could be ascertained: people were located in organisations where the infrastructure was substantial and coordinated; employees had a degree of security and control over their working lives regardless of their level of seniority or authority in the organisation.

Without doubt, Playford is a region undergoing substantial socioeconomic, institutional and cultural change.

_The City of Playford has committed up to $23 million over the next 10 years towards a project that could involve up to $1 billion in public and private investment._

_The project will include:_

Regenerating the Peachey Belt (Smithfield Plains and Davoren Park) and developing new areas for housing north of Curtis Rd and west of Stebonheath Rd.

An increase in the population from 13,000 to 30,000

More than 4000 new homes

Improved community facilities, including schools and training facilities, shopping, health and welfare
Environmentally friendly and energy efficient initiatives (City of Playford 2008)

For LLN provision to feed into these dynamic changes, learners, providers, and external stakeholders, will need a clearer idea of what might count as LLN activity in the region. This includes an understanding of past activity, the opportunities and challenges generated by previous networking and an awareness of the distinctive challenges and opportunities raised by the whole of city approach to community engagement.

LLN practices may well lead the way for some of these changes given the socially embedded nature of LLN practices in all aspects of life. However, the cross-sectoral, inter-organisational, multifaceted nature of LLN provision also means there are no explicit areas where overlapping responsibility is taken to connect up and so sustain ongoing generation of the kind of networked outcomes documented in this project.

One of the positive outcomes of this project was the opportunity for service providers from different sites and contexts to reflect on LLN capacity within the Playford region. It became apparent that there were many strengths associated with the multifaceted approach to LLN within the region. At the same time the project noted substantial challenges for the sustainable resourcing of future provision. The project consolidated a range of cross-sectoral networks and these will serve as useful sites for future action as Playford residents and service providers continue to build on and create innovative ways to access employment and training opportunities.
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PLAYFORD LITERACIES:
BUILDING LITERACY CAPACITY IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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