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# **Hume Global Learning Village Learning Together Strategy 2004/2008**

## **EVALUATION A REPORT ON PROGRESS TO DATE**

August 2005

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hume City Council has a strong determination to address issues of social and economic disadvantage by implementing strategies to strengthen the Hume community. Lifelong learning is one of the nine key themes to achieve the community's vision for Hume City in 2030. This involves the development of Hume City as a learning community through the development of the Hume Global Learning Village.

This report documents the development of the Hume Global Learning Village and outlines initial work to put in place an evaluation strategy which will map the progress of Learning Together – 2004/2005 – a strategy plan for the development of Hume City as a learning community with key actions.

Evaluation is an important part of the process and it is better to commence tracking this at the beginning. The evaluation processes in this project are governed by the following simple principles.

- Objectives are clearly defined, based on sound planning, and reflect organisational priorities.
- Different evaluation techniques are used where appropriate.
- Performance indicators are simple, relevant, comprehensible, reliable and useful.
- Performance indicators address issues of quality, quantity and cost.
- Evaluation does not promote adverse behaviour.
- Data capture is cost-justified.

This report captures the evaluation to date and some of our key learnings. This evaluation process will continue, but the key themes reported on are:

- The importance of leadership from local government to drive the development of the learning community
- The common vision for the development of Hume City as a learning community
- The passionate leadership and team at Hume City Council Learning Community Department who coordinate and broker the activities developed in the Learning Together Strategy
- The development of a learning community which relies on connections, networks and partnerships
- Sustainability which is linked to resourcing and this is why it is important to have local government involved
- Lifelong learning which underpins the development of a learning community
- Participation and celebration are key elements.

The report concludes with some practical operational and strategic elements in the development of a learning community that other learning communities to consider.

# SECTION 1: THE HUME GLOBAL LEARNING VILLAGE

## 1.1 Hume City as a Learning Community

Hume is a hive of activity and has a rapidly expanding population of 155,000. With its 675 indigenous residents, it has the eighth largest indigenous population in Victoria. It is a very culturally diverse population with 128 nationalities speaking 101 languages, with 35% of the population being foreign born. It is also proud to be a multi-faith community, with many religions practised in Hume.

Hume City has a number of quality learning centres working together to achieve lifelong learning, including preschools, primary and secondary schools, neighbourhood houses, libraries, the Hume Global Learning Centre, Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE in Broadmeadows and the Sunbury campus of Victoria University.

It is located 20 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. It covers the regions of Sunbury, Craigieburn and Broadmeadows. Within those regions there are a number of industries including Melbourne International Airport, freight, engineering, automotive manufacturing, steel, plastics, electronics, communications and tourism.

While it is recognised that Hume City has a great number of strengths, its past history has resulted in social and economic inequities. For example, Hume has significantly lower levels of employment, education and training than the Melbourne metropolitan average (Hume City Council, 2004). According to a study of communities in metropolitan and regional urban centres across Australia (CR-SURF, 2003), Broadmeadows is ranked among one of the most vulnerable statistical local areas (SLAs) in Australia. A vulnerable area is one with low human capital, with a high proportion of the population with no qualifications or have completed less than Year 10. Also a relatively low proportion of the population are engaged in full time work.

Hume City Council has a strong determination to address these issues over the coming years. This vision was facilitated by Hume City Council from community input. Lifelong learning is one of the nine key themes to achieve the community's vision for Hume City in 2030. This involved the development of Hume as a learning community through the development of the Hume Global Learning Village. Before exploring what this means, it is worth investigating the meaning of a learning community in this context.

There are many ways to define a learning community but one of the most useful was that used in the UK as follows:

*A learning community is one that addresses the learning needs of its locality through partnership. It uses the strengths of social and institutional relationships to bring about cultural shifts in perceptions of the value of learning. Learning communities explicitly use learning as a way of promoting social cohesion, regeneration and economic development which involves all parts of the community (Cara & Ranson, 1998).*

The term learning community is also used to encompass terms such as learning cities and learning towns (Adult Learning Australia 2000, Yarnit 2000, Faris & Peterson 2000). Faris & Peterson

(2000) also identify the development of learning communities as a way of creating sustainable futures for communities. It is about capacity building individuals and groups in communities to enable sustainable economic development promote social inclusion and cohesion and encourage civic and social participation. It is really saying that the production and distribution of knowledge is the responsibility of all sectors of the community.

David McNulty (2004) says that learning communities develop learning as a key tool for preparing their citizens for a new era. A learning community enables citizens to

- know and understand changes
- acquire and improve the skills to adapt successfully to changes
- shape and influence changes so that they can be agents of the future not victims of it.

Faris & Peterson (2000) argue that learning communities need to mobilise the learning resources and expertise across a number of sectors, which includes the following:

- Government (local, state and federal)
- Economic (private and cooperative organisations)
- Public amenities and agencies (libraries, recreation, social agencies, arts, health bodies, museums etc)
- Education (pre-school to university) and
- Voluntary/ community/ individual citizens

It utilises the total formal and non-formal learning resources of a community to provide immediate impact as well as supporting the longer term goals of the community. Through this type of approach the learning community builds on previous initiatives that are already in place rather than competing with them.

This learning community approach is explored in the next section through the development of the Hume Global Learning Village. It is a learning community which is led by local government, but it is critically a partnership with organisations and individuals from different sectors. So it describes the building of partnerships and networks, community participation and high level support from state government and businesses located in the region and eminent people from all walks of life. The long term aim is that local people will participate in learning opportunities provided by Hume Global Learning Village and take pride in Hume as a learning community.

## 1.2 Hume Global Learning Village – the Start

Hume City Council believes that enhancing learning opportunities is a key element in reducing economic and social disadvantage and strengthening personal and community wellbeing. As part of this commitment, Council established two learning centres – the Hume Global Learning Centre in Broadmeadows and the Visy Cares Learning Centre in Meadow Heights. In addition, Hume City Council in 2003 initiated the establishment of the Hume Global Learning Village (HGLV) which is a network of learning organisations who are collectively taking action to promote learning opportunities and improve learning achievements in Hume.

Many key stakeholders were involved in developing the village concept – this included people such as senior council officers, Councillors, the Social Justice and Safe City Task Force chaired by Frank McGuire. These people understand this concept to mean networks of hard infrastructure such as buildings and meeting places, organisations, businesses, enterprises as well as people – individuals, families and communities. Vanessa Little, General Manager, Learning Community

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Department, Hume City, is charged with turning the village concept into something the average citizen on the street can relate to and enjoy.

The Hume Social Justice Charter 2005 provides a social justice framework and documents a Citizens' Bill of Rights. Through the Charter Hume City Council seeks to promote respect for each and every citizen, to strengthen community participation and wellbeing, and to reduce the causes of disadvantage. The Hume Global Learning Village is the long term mechanism by which the Social Justice Charter is being implemented. This is an asset based approach building on the resilience and diversity of the community

The Village network is lead by a Committee chaired by Ken Thompson, Principal of Gladstone Park Secondary College. In addition the Council has established a high level (and mostly external) Advisory Board, chaired by the Hon. John Cain, former Premier of Victoria, to provide advice and support to the Council on achieving the vision of being a learning community.

### ***Hume Global Learning Centre***

The Hume Global Learning Centre (HGLC) is a landmark building in Broadmeadows that houses 'The Age' Library plus a range of computer training rooms, meeting rooms, Internet access and a cafe. The Centre was funded by Council, with significant support from the Victorian Government's Community Support Fund, The Age newspaper; Ford Australia and the Pratt Foundation. The building was officially opened on 12 March 2003 and services commenced operation in early May 2003. The meeting and training rooms are available for hire and the Council actively seeks partnerships with local adult and neighbourhood learning centres and organisations like U3A to run courses in the Centre. The Council does not act as a community training provider. It is often noted in speeches that prior to this Broadmeadows did not have a public library and the development of this new, innovative place was part of a broader investment in learning across the municipality.

### ***Visy Cares Learning Centre***

The Visy Cares Learning Centre at Meadow Heights is a smaller, multi-purpose building housing the Meadow Heights Learning Shop, an Internet cafe, meeting/training rooms, an occasional care service and a maternal and child health centre. The Centre was built with funding provided by the Council, the Victorian Government's Community Support Fund, the Victorian Department of Recreation and Sport, and the Visy Cares Program. Operations commenced in February 2003.

Hume City Council also assisted with the development of two other learning centres which are part of Kangan Batman TAFE, that is, the Gunung-William-Balluk Learning Centre specialising in indigenous education and the Craigieburn Flexible Learning Centre which is part of the broader Malcolm Creek Learning Centre that also houses childcare and a primary school.

### ***Council's Learning Department***

Responsibility for operating the Hume Global Learning Centre (and facilitating the work of the HGLV) sits within the Learning Community Department of Council. This Department, headed by Vanessa Little, includes the City's libraries and a Learning Support Team. The Visy Cares Learning Centre is managed by a community board of management. Hume City Council owns both buildings. This is a unique position within Australia.

### ***Hume Global Learning Village***

The Hume Global Learning Village (HGLV) is a network of learning organisations that was established in 2003 for the purpose of taking action to promote learning opportunities and improve learning achievements in Hume.

The inaugural meeting was held on 30 May 2003 at which an interim committee was established to manage the operation of the Village network. Their first task was to develop a *Statement of Understanding* that outlined the vision and philosophy of the Global Learning Village. Organisations were asked to agree to the Statement of Understanding when joining the Village Network. The Committee was formalised in June 2003 and remains under the chairmanship of Ken Thompson. It holds bimonthly forum style meetings, receives a quarterly hard copy newsletter and regular email alerts.

## **1.3 Development of a Strategy for the Hume Global Learning Village**

In November 2003, a consultant was employed to work with the members of the Village to prepare a Strategy Plan for the Village. The Strategy Plan did not concern itself with the operation of the Hume Global Learning Centre or the Visy Cares Learning Centre (the buildings). Rather the primary focus was to develop strategies to be implemented by the Village—the many and diverse array of people and organisations that have an interest in promoting learning within Hume City.

In terms of the Village, Hume City Council is but one of many stakeholders and the learning centres are just two of a range of possible venues for undertaking learning. The Strategy Plan was commissioned by Hume City Council, as part of its contribution to the operation of the Village. Its development highlights the collective thoughts and commitments of Village members. Implementation of the plan requires the collaboration of many organisations and people.

### ***Strategy Methodology***

The project consultant, Kimbra White, commenced work in November 2003. By this time, much discussion and debate had already been undertaken by Village members, about the role and purpose of the Village. A Statement of Understanding had been agreed upon and this Statement has provided a strong foundation for this strategy.

The strategies were developed through a series of conversations held in specially convened small groups of Village members. Further conversations were held during two meetings of the Advisory Board, two meetings of the Village Forum and several meetings of the Village Committee. A Strategy subcommittee was also established for the purpose of providing input into the methodology and development of the strategy. At the second of the Forum meetings Village members were asked to nominate the projects for which they would like to take the lead role and those for which they would like to be involved. Community conversations were also held with representatives of community groups.

The Project Consultant facilitated all meetings, developed the strategies and prepared the final report which contained 56 strategies under 8 key themes. Other contributions to the report were made by Luciana Arantes, a Learning Communities Department staff member, who researched and wrote the history of the Hume Global Learning Village and Peter Kearns, who provided a substantial paper on 'International and Australian Approaches to Building Learning Communities'

At the completion of the project the Council published the strategies from the final report as a Strategy document, linked to Council's Plan.

### **Key Themes in the Strategy**

During the series of consultations that were held to develop this Plan, a number of themes became evident. These themes have been used to provide the framework for the strategies that are contained in this report and are as follows:

1. Inspiring lifelong learning in Hume
2. Starting out—starting school
3. Moving on—school to further education and employment
4. Continuing on—learning in community settings
5. Language literacy and numeracy skills
6. Information technology uptake and virtual communities
7. Information about learning opportunities
8. Village Network.

None of these themes can be implemented without a vision that drives the strategy. The following vision of Hume as a learning community is central to its development:

*'For Hume to be a learning community where people embrace learning as a way of life, for all their life, thereby creating a community that values learning as the key to strengthening individual and community wellbeing'.*

This vision statement certainly embraces lifelong learning in terms of lifelong and lifewide learning. To quote the European Commission, "lifelong learning is about learning across the lifespan, from cradle to grave, from the early years through adult life – including the Third Age – encompassing a common core of knowledge and skills which goes beyond basic numeracy and literacy".

In fact in developing the scope of Hume as a learning community it is considered that it covers the following:

- Learning takes place in many locations:
  - in homes with friends and relatives
  - in community groups and recreation clubs
  - in schools, TAFE and universities
  - in neighbourhood houses, community centres and libraries
  - in workplaces.
- Learning is a lifelong process
- Learning is undertaken by people from all cultures, abilities, interests, ages and skills
- Learning is important for the following reasons:
  - people are able to find worthwhile/meaningful jobs
  - people are receptive to new ideas, change in society and change in the workplace
  - people can take an active part in their communities (socially engaged and networked or bonding social capital)
  - people are open to engaging with a wide range of people, groups and organisations (bridging social capital).

Learning is important in strengthening the links between people, creating networks, building and sustaining communities, and encouraging active citizenship. Learning is vital for a skilled, responsive workforce and therefore a sustainable, vibrant economy. This focus taken by Hume City aligns with the Faris and Peterson (2000) view that lifelong learning is as an organising

principle and social goal in the development of a learning community. It also consistent with a phases of life approach, as sited in Kearns (2005), the German Strategy for Lifelong Learning among other things, recognises that the reasons for learning and the forms of learning depend on the learner's phase of life – from childhood through to older people.

***Implementation of the Strategy Plan***

Implementation of the strategies in the Plan relies on the participation of many people and learning organisations in Hume. It also relies on mobilising resources, from both existing agencies and new sources, such as government departments, the business sector and philanthropic trusts. Hume City considered the Plan within its corporate planning process and funded a number of the strategies. The Village Committee is the key body for coordinating subcommittees and monitoring the progress of the strategies.

**1.4 Measuring Success and Evaluation**

The Strategy Plan recommended that an action research program be put in place to support, inform and monitor the work of the Learning Community as it proceeds and hence the Village Committee established a Research Sub Committee. Its first job has been to establish an evaluation framework for the Hume Global Learning Village Strategy.

## SECTION 2: EVALUATION PROJECT

### 2.1 Why is Evaluation Important?

#### 2.1.1 What is evaluation?

Type 'what is evaluation' into Google and around 121 million results will be returned. Do it in another twelve months and the number will be even greater. Evaluation means different things to people.

*“Using collected information to make informed decisions about continued instruction, programs, and activities.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Evaluation has several distinguishing characteristics relating to focus, methodology, and function. Evaluation (1) assesses the effectiveness of an ongoing program in achieving its objectives, (2) relies on the standards of project design to distinguish a program’s effects from those of other forces, and (3) aims at program improvement through a modification of current operations.”<sup>2</sup>*

*“The forming of a judgement based on the collection of data with a view to determining the quality of one or more tasks and improving the way they are performed.”<sup>3</sup>*

*“A process that attempts to determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of activities in the light of their objectives.”<sup>4</sup>*

What tends to be common in the definitions of evaluation, however, whether they relate to formative, normative, summative or other types of evaluation, is that evaluation is a process. It is a process that involves the use of information to reflect on what has happened. It might also involve the specification, collection and capture of information through a variety of quantitative and qualitative research and data capture techniques. It might use this information to determine whether an activity, program or strategy has achieved its objectives, or been good or bad, or been undertaken in a way that facilitates engagement and collaboration.

But in its simplest terms, evaluation is about learning – looking at what we have done and thinking about how we might do it better.

Therefore, evaluation is not just about gathering data. Evaluation is about getting answers to questions.

The first set of evaluation questions tend to be quantitative, descriptive, and have specific and measurable answers. They are questions related to what happened. That is, what happened, or is about to happen, to whom, and when and where?

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<sup>1</sup> North American Division Office of Education.

<sup>2</sup> US Bureau of Justice Assistance Center for Program Evaluation.

<sup>3</sup> Eurydice – The Information Network on Education in Europe.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The second set of evaluation questions is more qualitative, and looks for answers to the question 'Why'? In this case an evaluation looks for issues of cause and effect, of relationships between factors or people, and of external factors and the capacity to influence and control them.

### **2.1.2 Why is evaluation important?**

Evaluation is essential to good organisational practices. Effective organisations use evaluations to make informed judgments about:

- the extent to which stated objectives and desired outcomes are being achieved, and the continued appropriateness of those objectives
- the ways in which operational effectiveness and efficiency can be improved
- the efficient and appropriate use of resources.

One purpose of evaluation is to be able to measure success, and demonstrate whether the objectives of an initiative were achieved. Knowing whether you did what you set out to do is critical in all human endeavour. It matters in business, it matters in government, it matters in communities and it matters at an individual level. Evaluation is the way that we will know if our plan or strategy is effective, and the only way we will be able to prove it. Evaluation can tell us what has been achieved, whether it was what we wanted to achieve, what might have influenced our achievement, and how we might be able to manage or control those factors in the future.

Which is a second purpose of evaluation, to be able to identify opportunities for improvement, and how we can do things better. This might mean better decision making processes, better ways of working together, better awareness of the environment in which we are operating, better attention to our clients, colleagues or community, or better management of resources.

Leading to a third purpose of evaluation, and one which is particularly important for government and business organisations. That is, assessment of the accountability for resources and the delivery of outputs and achievement of outcomes. Where scarce resources are dedicated to an initiative it is important to be able to justify expenditure to those who provide the funds and resources that their investment or contribution has been worthwhile. Evaluation is a means of assessing accountability and, potentially arguing for the provision of more resources to pursue and achieve objectives.

Evaluation is important not because it 'solves' the questions of effectiveness and efficiency, but because it provides more accurate and meaningful performance 'clues' for decision-makers. In the absence of this information people will still make decisions. Evaluation information:

- increases the quality of decisions
- increases confidence in decisions
- enables justification of decisions
- increases the probability that future decisions will be right.

### **2.1.3 What to watch out for**

Evaluations can be extremely valuable and powerful learning exercises, with the capacity to generate operational and process improvements and stimulate celebration. At the same time, they can also be difficult and create problems. Therefore, when considering and undertaking an evaluation it is important to be aware of issues such as:

- planning for evaluation
- the impact of external factors on outcomes

- the behavioural response of people affected by an evaluation.

Too often, the need for an evaluation is not thought of until the activity is at or coming to an end. Depending on what the evaluation is trying to find out this may be too late. For example, if the evaluation needs to measure change, as in changes in behaviour or attitudes or conditions or service outcomes, then measurements need to occur at the start and at the end, and often in between. If the evaluation occurs after the event the initial data collection processes may not have been put in place. It is also useful to start thinking about evaluation early on as it ensures that learning happens continually throughout an initiative and may provide the opportunity for process improvement along the way.

The extent to which we achieve what we set out to achieve is often influenced by external factors or the changing environment. If economic or social conditions change, if resources are diverted elsewhere, priorities shift, specialist skills are no longer available, or there is a change in personnel, this may affect what happens. Things seldom work out as planned and an evaluation can help us to be prepared and take account of this in assessing what is going on.

It is also true that evaluation can change behaviour and outcomes. For example, where targets are set and rewards are provided for achievement of those targets, it is human nature to do what it takes to achieve those goals. This may introduce undesirable outcomes, such as shifting of attention away from other priorities or competitive behaviour.

Finally, it must always be remembered that an evaluation is a learning exercise that is a component of an overall initiative. It should not take over and become the focus of the activity. If evaluation is about doing what we do better, we need to make sure we spend most of our time doing things, and not just evaluating.

## **2.2 Building an Evaluation Framework for the Learning Strategy**

### **2.2.1 An Action Research Approach**

The Hume Global Learning Village Learning Strategy (the Strategy) is a long-term multi-dimensional initiative. Therefore, when it came to thinking about building an evaluation framework for the Strategy it was important that the framework be flexible and have the capacity to cater for many different sorts of projects and respond to changes over time.

The Strategy's Research and Evaluation Program took an action research approach to evaluation by looking to establish a framework that set in place principles for evaluation and a broad process that could be applied consistently to the Strategy as a whole and each of the many unique projects and activities that are being implemented. An action research project involves a cycle of investigating the issues, planning, taking action, implementing and evaluating outcomes (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Wadsworth, 1998). Evaluation leads to diagnosing the situation based on learning from the previous action cycle. So as a group we are continuously learning, and this report is the beginning of the process. However, as we learn we will revise our evaluation plans and implement changes and develop new actions as required.

Evaluations are governed by the following simple principles.

- Objectives are clearly defined, based on sound planning, and reflect organisational priorities.
- Different evaluation techniques are used where appropriate.
- Performance indicators are simple, relevant, comprehensible, reliable and useful.
- Performance indicators address issues of quality, quantity and cost.
- Evaluation does not promote adverse behaviour.
- Data capture is cost-justified.

The high-level process for evaluation provides a logical structure for understanding activities and relationships and measuring outcomes.

1. Understand the dynamics of performance (that is, stakeholder views, business segments, performance dimensions and characteristics)
2. Clearly define objectives
3. Describe the ‘vision of success’
4. Develop performance measures
5. Capture and analyse evaluation information
6. Interpret findings
7. Take action.

## **2.2.2 An Evaluation Workshop**

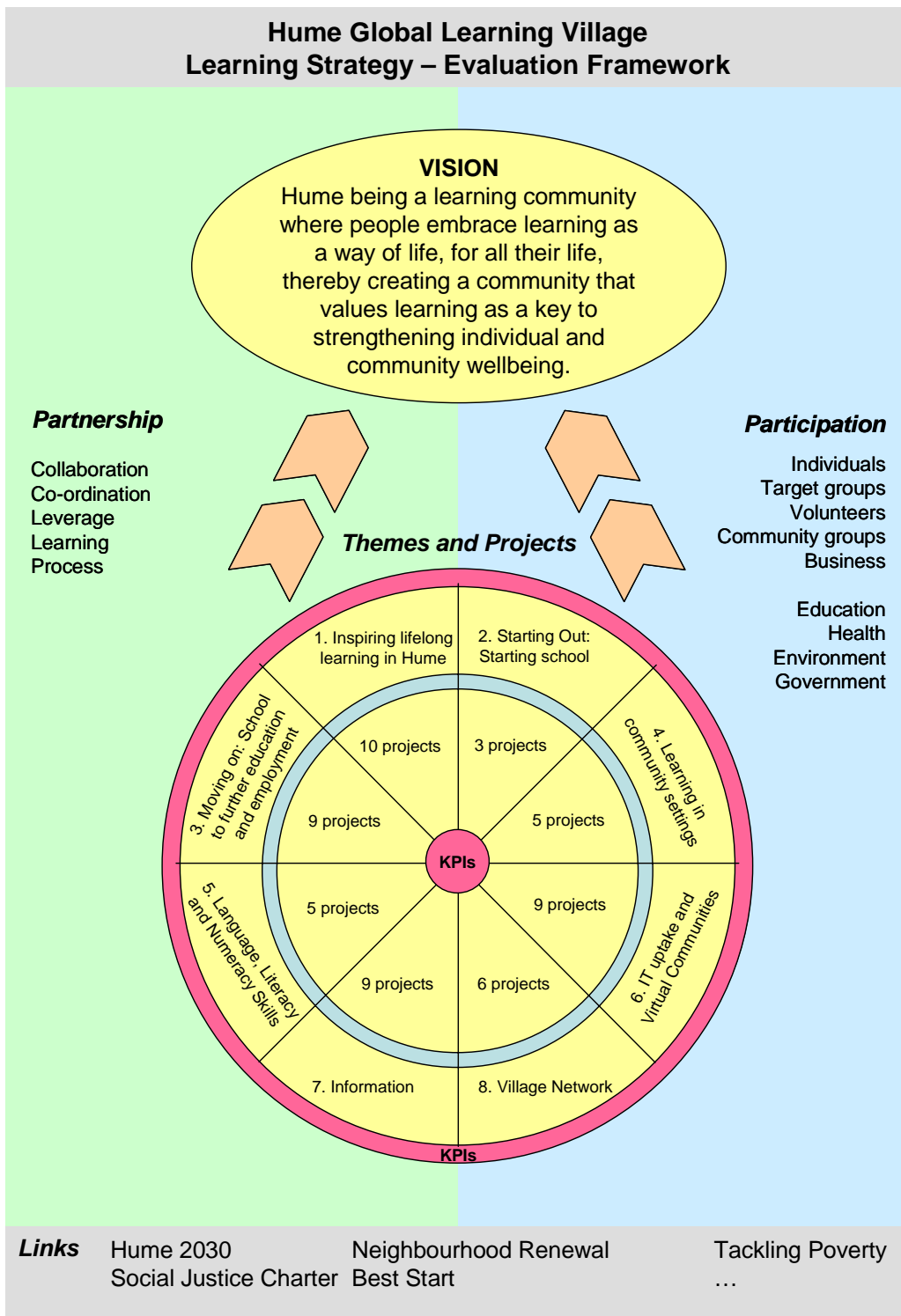
An evaluation workshop was held on November 25 2004 with a selection of project managers responsible for various Strategy projects. The aims of the workshop were to consider the role, purpose and challenges of evaluation and how these were relevant to the vision of the Strategy, and to establish some parameters about what was to be evaluated.

The workshop confirmed the need for evaluation activities to provide information on the overall Strategy, each of the Strategy’s eight themes, and the projects being undertaken as part of each theme.

The workshop also developed an evaluation framework to record the contextual factors that would influence evaluation and map the relationship between the various components of the Strategy.

## **2.2.3 An Evaluation Framework**

The evaluation framework developed at the workshop is shown diagrammatically below.



The framework has the following key features.

*Underpinning strategies and policies in Hume City*

At a mega-evaluation level, the framework acknowledges that the Strategy sits within a much broader context and is influenced by many other local and state government initiatives.

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First among these is the Hume City 2030 strategy that sets out the vision for Hume City in the next 25 years. The Learning Strategy is a valuable, but only one, component of the municipality's future directions. Hume City also has a Social Justice Charter that has overlapping interest with some areas of the Strategy, and released its 'Tackling Poverty Together' report in 2004.

The Victorian State Government has a number of community-based programs operating within Hume City that include the Department of Human Services' Neighbourhood Renewal project and the Department's Best Start project, the latter targeted at early years programs and will be integrated into the Federal Government's Communities for Children program by the end of the year.

These underpinning contextual elements sit at the base of the framework to indicate that the Strategy does not occur in a vacuum. It is influenced by and influences other initiatives, and the outcomes achieved by Strategy' projects and the processes by which they are achieved are supported by and will support these other initiatives.

### *Vision*

At a macro-level all evaluation activity must focus on the vision for the Strategy, and this is placed at the top of the framework. Just as all projects should be able to clearly demonstrate how they link to the vision, all evaluation activities should be contributing to developing a greater understanding of whether the Hume Global Learning Village is achieving its aims.

### *Models of Partnerships for Hume Global Learning Village*

There are two critical environmental components that are recognised in the framework. The first is the role of partnerships. Collaboration and co-ordination are key to the success of any project and are key to any evaluation. With other research and data collection activities happening in and around Hume and with regard to learning and educational activities, the opportunity exists for the Strategy in its evaluation activities to leverage resources and skills, share information and learn from others. Working together avoids duplication of effort and encourages consistency of communication and advocacy messages.

### *Building Capability in the Community*

The second critical environmental component is participation in the Strategy and its evaluative activities. That is, there will be many people involved in and impacted by the Strategy, and through their involvement they will form views on what has happened and why, and how things can be done better in the future. This ranges from the Council to local business and community groups through to target audience groups such as CALD<sup>5</sup> and indigenous groups and individual citizens. By engaging with these groups there is the capacity to build their awareness of and capability for learning and self-evaluation.

Just as evaluation activities should be mindful of audience groups, there are industry sectors that have specific interests in the Strategy's delivery and outcomes. These include, but are not limited to, the school, vocational education and training and higher education sectors, and the health industry sector. The Strategy promotes lifelong learning and so evaluation of its impact needs to recognise people in their many different work and recreational interactions.

Cara and Ranson (1998) identify three key success factors to building learning communities (often referred to as the three Ps). These include learning how to building **partnerships**; learning how to

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<sup>5</sup> Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

foster community **participation**; and learning how to assess **performance**. The Hume Evaluation Framework encompasses these concepts.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Themes and Projects*

At the centre of the framework are the Strategy's eight themes. Theme 1 addresses the issue of motivation to learn. Themes 2, 3 and 4 all focus on improving learning at various stages of life, from pre-school to work and in the community, to provide opportunities and to achieve better outcomes. Themes 5 and 6 address specific learning issues of language literacy, numeracy and IT skills. Theme 7 focuses on making people aware of learning opportunities, and Theme 8 concentrates on the Village network and how the members can work together to reach the Village goals.<sup>7</sup> Within each theme there are up to 10 projects that will be implemented at some time in the period from 2004 to 2008, and potentially beyond.

Project evaluation will be a key feature of the overall evaluation strategy, and progress toward the vision will be demonstrated, in part, by the micro-level evaluation activities of the 56 projects identified in the Strategy.

#### *Key Performance Indicators*

The final and most practical piece of the framework is the development of performance indicators to measure the performance of the Strategy, its themes and projects. The indicators exist at project level, where 'performance' may be associated with things such as levels of participation, project outcomes and process efficiency. At theme-level the indicators of 'performance' might be similar to these at project-level, but also extend into areas such as attitudinal changes, the strength of networks and community engagement. At the highest level, the primary indicator is the assessment of Hume City, its residents, ratepayers and other stakeholders as to whether and how the vision of a 'learning community where people embrace learning as a way of life, for all their life' has been achieved.

## **2.3 Putting Theory into Practice**

### **2.3.1 Developing indicators**

Having developed the evaluation framework, the second part of the November 2004 workshop involved an exercise in which project managers went through a collective process of thinking about their projects and developing performance indicators. This process was centred on describing a 'vision of success' for a small sample of projects.

Experience in personal, social, economic and industrial contexts has shown that the key to evaluation and understanding and measuring performance is to visualise success. That is, you can only measure success if you have a view of what a successful outcome looks like. In this context the definition of success was not limited to 'achieving the stated objectives' or 'implementing the action plan' but was taken more broadly as to be 'what it looks like when it works'. This might encompass these outcomes, but might also describe things such as:

- the number and type of people participating in a project
- the changes in behaviour or attitudes of participants, supporters and critics
- the nature of the relationships formed

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<sup>6</sup> *Practice, Progress and Value: Learning Communities – Assessing the Value They Add (1998)*, DfEE in collaboration with LCN

<sup>7</sup> Hume Global Learning Village Learning Strategy.

- the way in which the project interacts with other Strategy' projects
- the influence of external or uncontrolled factors.

A five-step process for developing performance indicators transforms the view of a successful outcome to its key attributes and consequent indicators.

1. List the project objectives.
2. List expected outcomes for each objective.
3. Identify factors affecting outcomes that may help or hinder achievement of that outcome (e.g. internal/external, un/controllable).
4. Identify attributes of success for each outcome by visualising and identifying the things that are expected to occur or change when the outcome is achieved.
5. Define performance indicators by converting the attributes to a level, rate, ratio or index.

The results of this process for two projects are presented in Section 2.4.

### **2.3.2 Capturing data**

The process for developing performance indicators should not be initially constrained by debate about the availability of data to inform the indicators. Data collection issues were addressed once the 'best' set of indicators had been defined. This meant that any compromise in the development of evaluation information only occurred after decisions had been made about what the preferred types of evaluation information would be.

In this secondary discussion, the following questions should be asked.

- Which are the most critical indicators? (rate by priority as high, medium or low)
- What is the cost of capturing the information? (score this as high, medium or low)
- When can the information be captured? (that is, immediately, short-term, long-term)
- Who will be responsible for capturing the information?

The results of this exercise will define data collection activities are required to support the evaluation. They should also go toward defining where the data may be sourced from and what techniques may be used.

One of the best sources of information is the knowledge and experience of the people around us. Other commonly used data sources relevant to the Strategy include data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, commonwealth, state and local government agencies, education and training providers, community organisations and individuals.

The choice of research method depends on what information is required and who is going to provide it. Possible options include surveys, participation registers, focus groups, case studies, administrative data and interviews.

## **2.4 Making it Work**

### **2.4.1 Planning a Learning Festival**

Project 1.5 in the Strategy is the 'Celebration of Learning Festival'. The festival will be a city-wide event involving every possible venue in Hume from schools to sports clubs to Rotary

meetings. Every organisation or venue will be invited to stage their own interactive event to involve their local community.<sup>8</sup>

After some discussion at and after the workshop the project manager for this project determined that the 'vision of success' for the festival had two parts:

1. Business, school and community groups do something 'hands on' during the festival to contribute to Hume residents being involved in a learning opportunity.
2. People partake of these opportunities and participate in these activities.

The emphasis of the project was on creation of opportunities to learn about learning, and not the learning opportunities themselves. It was thought that the qualitative impact of the festival on engagement with and uptake of learning opportunities was considered to be information that would be gathered through other mechanisms. The performance indicators suggested for the festival were:

- The number and type of activities occurring (for example, 500 learning events across Hume over a 2 week period).
- The number and type of business, educational and community groups involved.
- The number of people (or Hume residents) who participate in any activities.
- The number of people from specific target groups (e.g. young people, disadvantaged) who participate in any activities.

### 2.4.2 Taking IT out to the Community

Project 6.1 in the Strategy is 'Taking IT out to the Community'. The project aims to spark people's interest in the Internet and show the relevance of information technology to their lives as a primary step in involving more people in computer learning. The project aims to take IT 'to the action' at recreation centres, community groups, sporting clubs, etc. and show how it can support their aims.<sup>9</sup>

The 'vision of success' for this project was split into a short-term and a long-term view.

1. Short-term. People from the Hume community go to the school, Neighbourhood house, etc. to learn to use IT ... and to use it. Hume has many places where people can go to use IT and these places are well attended.
2. Long-term. The level of computers at home and the level of Internet access is at or above Melbourne's average and people are using the technology effectively to enhance their lives.

From the outset the project will put in place processes to measure:

- The number of IT hubs established by the project (or in Hume).
- The number of people attending the IT hubs established by the project (or in Hume).
- The type of IT use of the people attending the IT hubs (e.g. use of computers – documents, spreadsheets; email to friends and family; surf the web; conduct transactions, etc.).

The project will also explore options for capturing information on the percentage of the Hume population with computers in the home, the percentage of the population with access to the

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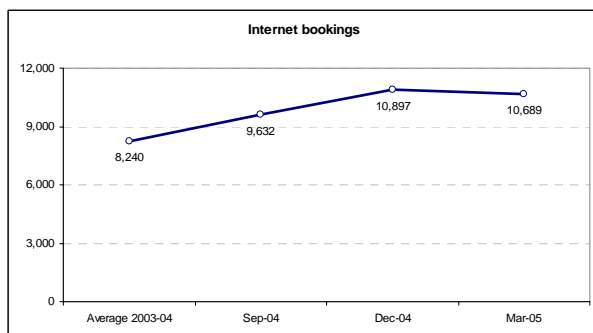
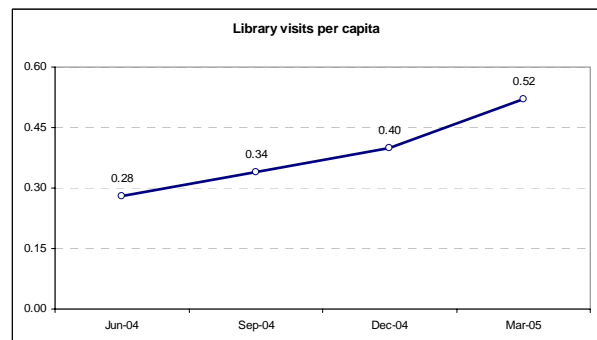
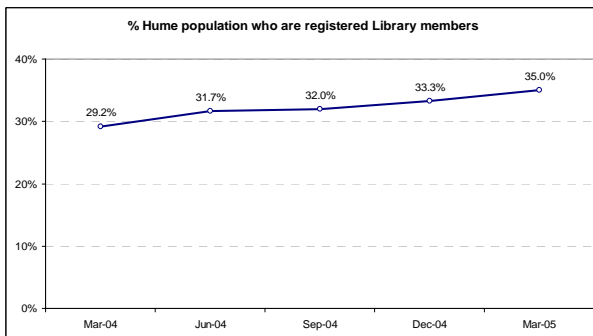
<sup>8</sup> Hume Global Learning Village Learning Strategy.

<sup>9</sup> Hume Global Learning Village Learning Strategy.

Internet and the percentage of the population contributing to online communities (a project managed by Victoria University).

### 2.4.3 Hume Libraries' Key Performance Indicators

Aside from the development of project-based performance indicators, information is produced on a regular basis about activities at the Hume Global Learning Village. Statistics from 2004 show the following trends.



Information of this type will continue to be captured and analysed as part of the overall evaluation of the Learning Strategy.

This information should also be taken along side the qualitative data. The reports also illustrate the breadth and depth of programs and activities that are listed under the headings libraries and learning support. Examples of learning support activities include U3A computer and internet training, Upfield Primary curriculum day, Ford FMEA Training, Best Start Partnership Meeting, Citizenship ceremonies, Turkish internet classes, Inter Faith Leaders Network meeting. Examples of library activities include a talk on the history of Broadmeadows, story times for Turkish, Spanish, Vietnamese and Arabic communities, and writers in residence and so on.

### 2.4.4 Evaluating Other Projects

The Strategy contains 56 projects that advance learning opportunities and outcomes in Hume in many different ways. Aside from festivals and IT hubs the Strategy will also implement or support projects that involve communication activities, engagement with schools, pre-school attendance, helping train indigenous people to be job ready, volunteering, literacy and numeracy programs and more. In some cases the projects are led and managed by Hume City Council staff, in others the project has only a supporting role.

This means that the degree of influence over outcomes of different projects varies considerably. The evaluation framework accommodates these differences, as they all fit within the total framework. The approach to assessing outcomes based on a 'vision of success' is also flexible enough to acknowledge that success for some projects is simply playing an effective support role and this is what will be measured, leaving larger scale evaluation outcome assessments to the lead state government agency and using their information to inform future decisions about the merits or otherwise of these sorts of projects.

The evaluation method will blend both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with the later best illustrated through a project such as 1.4 'Inspiring Learning Stories'. This project aims to capture the achievements of lifelong learners who have made a difference to their own lives and the lives of others. Compiling and creatively re-telling the stories of these learners is evaluation in practice, as it combines reflection on and assessment of past activities, and blends this with the personal and practical learning of the individuals involved.... as a lesson and inspiration for others. As the number and variety of stories increases the Village will be able to use these as the basis for engaging others and encouraging them to come forward and tell their stories.

## SECTION 3: LEARNING SO FAR

### 3.1 Developing the Learning Community in Hume City

McNulty (2004) said that in developing a learning community it is vital to put people first. Develop an appreciative inquiry or the 5 Ds, that is:

- **D**iscover what people value
- develop a **D**ream
- **D**esign the ways that will
- **D**eliver our **D**esired community

All the time asking: What can we do **NOW** in order to be able to do tomorrow what we are unable to do today?

Hume City Council believes that enhancing learning opportunities, using an asset based approach is a key element in addressing issues of economic and social disadvantage. The Hume Global Learning Village and the Learning Together Strategy are the means by which the dream is being delivered.

The main learning so far is that it is a challenge to develop a framework for such a complex strategy and that the development of an evaluation framework is a multifaceted process. It is therefore important to realise that what has been completed so far is part of a plan towards long-term evaluation. It has been very important to have the leadership of Hume City Council and in particular Vanessa Little and her team to lead the development of the learning community. The 56 themes developed by the community were prioritized to be implemented over the period 2004-2008, with 28 of these projects tagged for 2004/2005. A lead organisation is assigned each project and a person is named as reporting on progress. However, Hume City Council is responsible for leading 18 of the first projects and where possible Vanessa Little has also ensured that these activities link to Council priorities which means that budget can be allocated to ensure that some of the projects happen quickly, while at the same time ensuring that community members are also involved. The initial projects that the HCC is funding this year have a theme of inspiration, in particular - a database of inspiring Hume stories, a scholarship to support inspiring teachers in Hume and funding to support the learning festival. It is important to have early, positive examples of success. McNulty (2004) emphasized the importance of building a community's knowledge base by gathering individual stories and community stories which lead to community strengthening. McNulty said it is important to know your community's story and more importantly what you want it to be in the future.

The project plan developed by each project leader incorporates an action plan, a vision of success and how that success will be measured. The information for the 2004/2005 projects is also summarised in a table format. It has taken much longer than anticipated to start this process, but the detailed planning that is taking place is vital to ensure the impact of the learning community in Hume is measured over time.

### **3.1.1 Leadership**

A common theme in the development of networks and therefore learning communities is the qualities leaders require to manage them. Kotter (1999) observed that the issue of leadership is centrally important and is the primary force behind successful change. Without successful leadership, the probability of mistakes increases greatly and the probability of success decreases accordingly. Management works through hierarchy and systems but leadership works through people and culture.

Yarnit (2000) writing on the development of learning partnerships formed in the United Kingdom noted that managers of these partnerships played a vital role in their success. These partnerships are more 'people dependent'. A premium is put on the personal qualities of partnership managers, including "their analytical, motivational, project management, communication and presentational skills and their knowledge of the broader institutional and policy environment." The ANTA National Marketing Strategy (1999) also identified that leaders of these cross sectoral, cross organisational partnerships have to be less controlling, more emotionally astute; culturally attuned; and most important, willing to share authority and decision-making.

A number of writers (Bennis and Nanus 1985; Covey 1996; Farren and Kaye 1996; Handy 1996, 1998; Holdsworth 2000) have identified factors that appear to contribute to effective leadership during times of rapid change. Common themes include tying vision to strategic plans, trust, trend setting and forecasting. Leaders must start from a positive self regard, earn respect and empower people.

Senior council officers, Councillors, the Social Justice and Safe City Task Force chaired by Frank McGuire demonstrated leadership by developing the village concept and this is being carried forward by the General Manager, Learning Communities. It is the "putting people first" strategy that McNulty talks about that appears to be happening in action.

### **3.1.2 Partnerships**

The literature on learning communities lists partnerships as one of the key success factors (Faris 2003, Kearns 2004, McNulty, 2004, Yarnit 2000). Edgar (2001) indicates that Australia has been slow to realise that education, higher-skills training and value adding through the creative use of knowledge is the way of the future and that the solution lies in a genuine partnership between government, business and community.

The way forward is to develop new structures that recognise and reinforce such a culture of interdependence, by getting business leaders to interact with others in the community – teachers, local government, family support service providers – whose work creates a viable economic and social environment in which business can thrive (Edgar, 2001, p. 72).

Edgar (2001) and Fukuda-Parr et al (2002) believe we need to understand how to work with complex networks. "Business in the global age enters a new era of complex networks and partnerships from which innovation and profitability will grow" (Edgar, 2001, p. 72). We are now part of complex family networks and social networks, and these should not be isolated from our work networks.

Our work lives are also increasingly dependent on complex networks and work itself becomes a patchwork, stitched together over a lifetime of varied tasks. All the trends we

are seeing now will expand. Team-based work, with group membership changing to suit the project, will demand not just individual communication, negotiation and team problem-solving skills; it will also require efficient networks of suitable contacts in order to pull together the best just-in-time team. The better your contacts, the better the team you can bring to the job (Edgar, 2001, p.73).

As stated in section one, this project would not have started without collaborative partnerships. Funding provided by various Victorian State Government Departments, sponsorship by key business organisations located in the region, philanthropic organisations, and major non-government institutions. Networking is also strong through membership of the Hume Global Village Forum and already there are 300 members, which according to Vanessa Little include 53 schools, 9 neighbourhood houses, 1 resident University, 1 TAFE, numerous job network providers and also training and development departments of business. Seventy organisations are active and of these 40 very active members of the Village, that is, participate or run activities on behalf of the Hume Global Learning Village.

### 3.1.3 Social Capital

Feedback from the Hume Global Learning Village Advisory Board suggests that the building of social capital is one of the most important aspects in the long-term development of the Hume Global Learning Village.

Cavaye (2004) argues that the development of networks, trust and cooperation in communities is closely identified with the concept of social capital. The OECD (2001) defines social capital as “networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups”. Cavaye (2004), citing Woolcock (1999) highlights three related forms, that is,

- Bonding social capital or the relations between relatively homogenous groups
- Bridging social capital or ties across heterogenous groups
- Linking social capital including ties across social strata and community members accessing resources and information beyond the community itself.

Kearns (2004) argues that it “seems likely that bonding social capital is fairly strong in Hume. The challenge is likely to be to build bridging forms of social capital that link the range of diverse groups in Hume. The arts and crafts could be useful, as well as special events such as learning festivals and craft markets”.

Another challenge is measuring the impact of social capital over time. For further consideration of the complexities involved in this area refer to Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004), Australian Government Productivity Commission (2003), Black and Hughes (2001), Cavaye (2004), Healy (2005) and Mowbray (2005).

Cavaye (2004, p11) says there are common themes from the wide variety of approaches including:

- The use of qualitative and quantitative data and a mix of techniques suited to gain qualitative feedback;
- Measurements that cover attitudes, norms and trust and also networks, roles, organisation
- The importance of community members as a key source of data, and
- Two broad contexts of measurement. First goal oriented measurement which involves changes in social capital resulting from a project or intervention. Second, absolute measurement involving the assessment of levels of social capital and community wellbeing regardless of particular activities.

These issues are being considered as the evaluation framework for the Village is developed.

### **3.1.4 Participation**

#### ***Through Food, Celebration and Festivals.....***

Anecdotal evidence of the development of other learning communities in Australia and internationally suggests, celebration and food are important in the development of the culture of a learning community. Hume is no exception and each quarterly report lists a number of launches and events that celebrate significant activities in Hume, and the range of these is included in the following list:

- Launch of Hume City Plan 2030
- Inspiring Teachers Awards
- Broadmeadows Festival Launch
- Hillcrest Secondary College Awards night
- NMIT Book Party
- Hume City Council Volunteers acknowledgement event
- Hume Global Learning Village Supporters event
- Citizenship ceremonies
- Official opening of the Visy Cares Learning Centre.

Each event is accompanied by wonderful food representative of a multi-cultural society such as Hume City, and sometimes entertainment and speeches, for example, a local young person played the harp at the Inspiring Teachers Award night, while an inspiring speech was made by a very well known former AFL football coach.

#### ***Through Learning Opportunities***

Improving community participation in learning is one of the keys to addressing the social disadvantage issues. It is participation in learning in the pre-school years through to University and beyond. This learning can be informal and non-formal means through to formal participation, that is, a lifelong learning approach.

Hume Global Learning Village does provide non-formal learning opportunities through the learning support activities that happen within the Hume Global Learning Centre and the network of libraries. These are a direct result of the Hume Global Learning Village and as already identified in section 2.4.3 can be quantified as part of the Hume Global Learning Village Strategy.

Other activities such as the Best Start Initiative, a government funded project aimed at optimising the health, development, learning and well-being of children living or participating in the Broadmeadows Community which have happened without the Village are made much easier by the facilitation service that the Village provides, including a funded project officer.

Other formal measures, such as participation rates in formal education and qualification levels of residents will continue to be collected by other agencies and although it will be difficult to identify a causal link between the commencement of the Hume Global Learning Village and improvement of these measures, Hume Global Learning Village could be seen as one of the factors that contribute to improvement.

### **3.1.5 Sustainability**

Sustainability in relation to the Hume Global Learning Village can be viewed on a number of levels. At the project level it is the ability of the program to maintain or improve its ability to deliver the services that were set out in the project plan and when and if the goals and aims are met it is then how this links to other projects and the overall strategy.

To be effective the activities of a learning community should be maintained over a long period of time. Many of these initiatives are reliant on short-term funding and when the initial money runs out, sustainability becomes an issue (Crowe, 2003). Long-term sustainability and justification in terms of intangible benefits to the community have been identified as two of the biggest challenges faced by the support organisations, the people who run the initiatives and governments who fund them (Cisler, Breeden, Guilfooy, Roberts, & Stone, 1999; DCITA, 2003a; Kirby, 2001; Sellar, 2002)

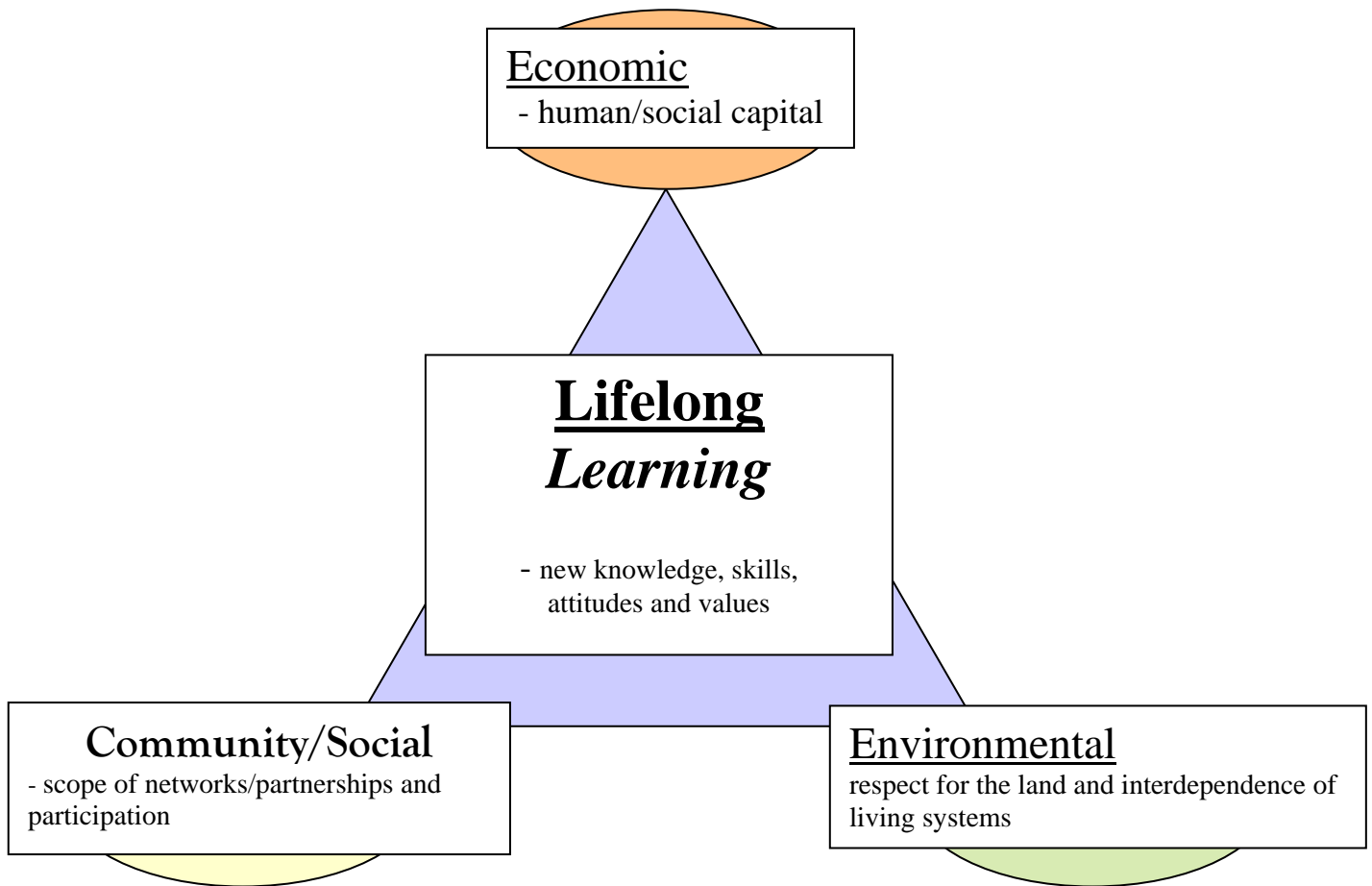
The large initial investment of time, resources and planning that has been made by employees of Hume City and its strategic partners warrants planning into the sustainability of the Hume Global Learning Village over a long period of time. In this case sustainability is linked to the provision of resources by Hume City and its strategic partners for the continuation of the Hume Global Learning Village. It then becomes part of a long term strategic planning cycle.

Another view of long-term sustainability is to link HGLV to a community strengthening viewpoint such as that provided by Kenyon (2002):

Sustainable communities maintain and improve their social, economic and environmental characteristics so that residents can continue to lead healthy, productive and enjoyable lives. Sustainable development in these communities is based on the understanding that a healthy environment and a healthy economy are both necessary for a healthy society.

Kenyon's definition comes from a community development perspective, but is very similar to Faris's triple bottom line approach (see figure below). Faris believes that a commitment to the triple bottom line increases the likelihood of success in the long-term development of a learning community. An environmental approach is founded on respect for the land and recognition that human communities are interdependent with their surrounding living systems. Fostering of broad coalitions based on partnerships is also likely to support sustainability of a learning community initiative. Finally, building on the stock of human capital (mainly formal learning) and social capital (including non-formal and informal learning) thus fostering an asset based approach. This does not forget that lifelong learning is an organising principle and social goal.

## THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE OF SUSTAINABILITY



Ron Faris 2005

**Figure**

In Hume City a broader perspective is gained by linking the Hume Global Learning Strategy to mega strategies such as Hume 2030, the Social Justice Charter and Neighbourhood renewal programs as already outline in section 2.2.3.

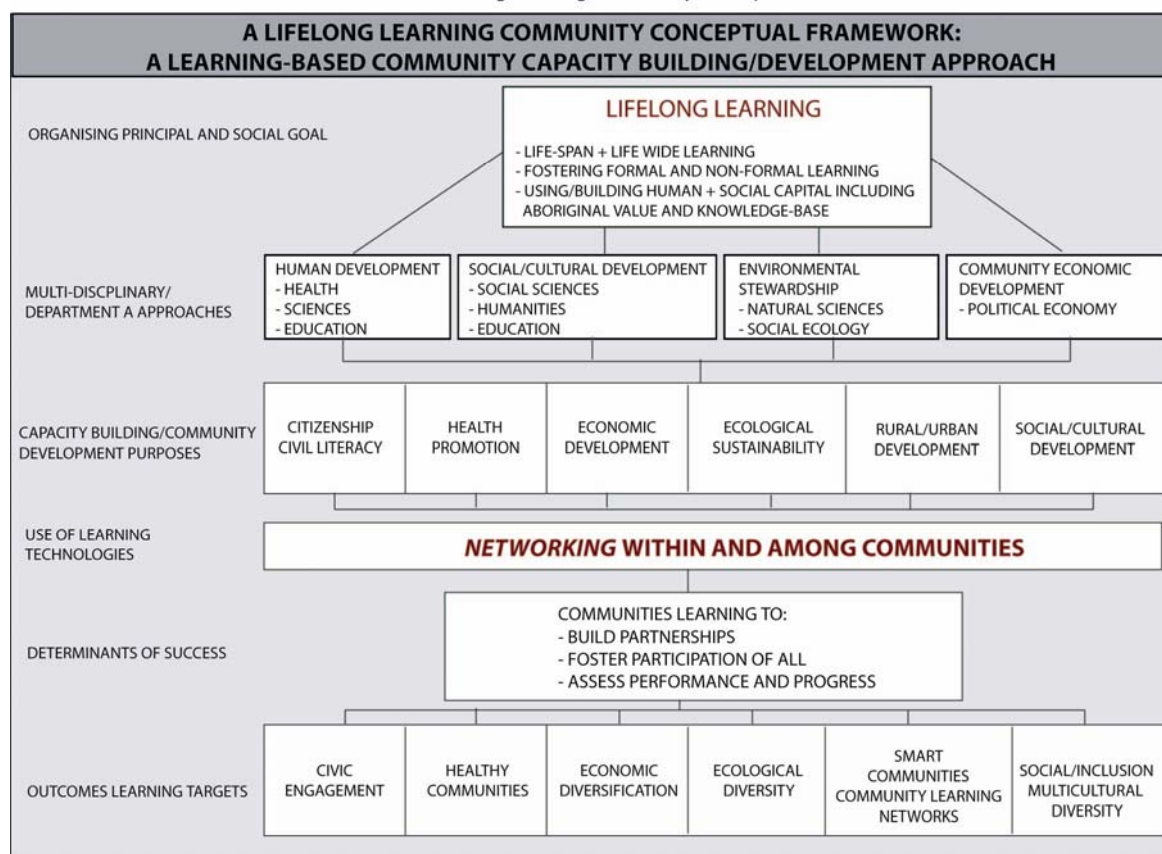
### 3.1.6 Linking Evaluation to a Lifelong Learning Framework

At this point it is timely to undertake a self check against a lifelong learning framework specifically designed for learning communities. The Faris framework is based on over 30 years of research by both UNESCO and the OECD into the application of learning community models. This framework draws from the fields of human development, ecological models, political economy and communitarian values. The basis of this framework is the key to lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social/cultural goal. In particular, Faris (2001) claims that the

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scaffolding for the framework enhances human and social capital and their contribution to human well-being, sustainable economic growth and social development. Faris (2003) believes the framework “can also serve as a basis for a possible national strategy to strengthen community life across the nation through active partnerships of all 5 sectors at local, provincial [state] and federal levels” (Faris, 2003). The model as illustrated in the figure below promotes a multidisciplinary approach and challenges the silos of government departments as well as the traditional disciplinary solitudes of many university faculties.

The Faris Lifelong Learning Community Conceptual Framework



Source: Faris (2003, p. 7)

As well as promoting 6 historic purposes of learning-based community development, the framework also encourages the appropriate use of learning technologies for networking and the notion of social learning and change. Based on British research (Cara & Ranson, 1998) and experience in British Columbia, Faris believes it is important to consider the following determinants of success:

- Build partnerships among all 5 community sectors;
- Foster participation of all, and
- Assess performance.

This framework tells us to ensure that our approach to evaluation encompasses BOTH the outcomes specified AND the determinants of success.

The Kearns (2005) report on future directions for lifelong learning in Australia also covers similar themes, which are the importance of lifelong learning, the significance of expanded partnerships and networks, linked by a shared vision and considerable innovation and the importance of local

drivers. After extensive discussions across Australia, Kearns now believes that it is preferable to map pathways to the future and identifies five pillars, or building blocks which are:

- Empowering individuals as motivated and capable lifelong learners;
- Sustaining and transforming communities through learning
- Using technology to extend learning environments and transform the way we learn
- Developing the workplace as a key learning environment to underpin economic objectives;
- Extending and reconnecting partnerships and networks to build Australia as an inclusive society.

Kearns also believes that the debate should also be discussed in terms of the work of the London University Centre on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL) which has examined the benefits of learning in such fields as health, sustaining families, and building social capital in communities. Kearns sites Schuller (2004) which underpins a conceptual model based on the interaction of three forms of capital: human, social, and identity, with identity capital referring to the characteristics of individuals that define his or her outlook and self-esteem.

Kearns reminds us for the need for action to be taken along each of five pillars, and again emphasizes the importance of connections between the pillars to ensure holistic and integrated strategies for lifelong learning can be built in many contexts, including the building of a learning community within a geographic context.

The next stage of the evaluation is to consider such frameworks in the development of Hume City as a learning community. This will be completed through student projects, or as Faris refers to it – a service learning approach where students gain academic credit for work undertaken in the community.

## **3.2 Adapting the Framework for Other Learning Communities**

At a recent launch of the Victorian Learning Communities Network, Peter Kearns said that the development of a learning community required a vision, partnerships and leadership. The Hon. John Cain indicated that it was appropriate that local government should lead a learning community initiative, but it should be backed up by policies from state government. He emphasized the importance of lifelong learning for the whole of life. While governments need to invest in initiatives such as learning communities, in his experience these things will happen when you have a few committed people, with good officers chosen and a champion who drives it. You need leadership that is articulate, passionate and believes the in cause.

Kearns has argued for a long time that Australia needs a national lifelong learning framework and in his recent report puts the case for a shift from adult education to a concept of adult learning in many contexts.

However, from observation of the work that has been completed so far at the Hume Global Learning Village and my own work (Wheeler, 2004) which involved building learning networks for over 10 years, the following are key elements that are involved in the development of a learning community.

- Ensure the needs of the people in the community come first.
- Develop a vision for the learning community.
- Identify passionate leadership to drive the development.

- Identify the governance of the learning community across several stakeholders, representing key sectors. Ensure the lead agent in this endeavour and the leadership arrangements.
- Identify an advisory board of key people who will make contributions to various aspects of the development of a learning community.
- Local government should be a key partner in the development especially to ensure sustainability.
- Lifelong learning must be a central part of the strategy.
- Develop a learning community strategy, with key themes and projects. Ensure that as far as possible to involve key sectors of the community.
- Put in place project management strategies, that is, set timelines and responsibilities.
- Back up project management with information management strategies.
- Develop an evaluation framework at the beginning of the project.
- Have fun and celebrate successes.

Vanessa Little also notes the following as key success factors:

- Lifelong learning as a strategy is woven into the work of many communities within Hume City
- The council is able to support connections without perceived bias, but with credibility
- Hume Council through its executive officer is able to support engagement and the linking of networks
- The high profile of the Advisory Board with members having a broad range of skills, contacts and resources provides important connections
- The people working for the village, both in a voluntary and paid capacity do so because they are passionate about the work.

These elements are a mix of strategic and operational strategies, but this is the reality of learning community development at the present time in Australia. The concept is still relatively new with the first learning city being declared by Albury Wodonga in 1998. Currently there are 32 communities that identify themselves with the concept and belong to the Australian Learning Community Network. Some are government funded, some are self starters and some are led by Adult education. The challenge is to keep the momentum going, to continue to share ideas across learning communities and to report on results, both quantitative and qualitative.

Any community of place can become a learning community and there are now a growing number of practitioners, academics and others who can provide advice. To find out more go to the Learning Communities Catalyst Web site (<http://www.lcc.edu.au/lcc/go>) or join the Australian Learning Communities Network.

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