

## De Montfort University Social Responsibility Square Mile Programme (Mile<sup>2</sup>)

### Section 1 about the project

#### Summary

This programme aims to deliver the best of De Montfort University to the local community. Through 30 unique projects, Mile<sup>2</sup> aims to widen participation, raise aspirations, create greater community cohesion and deliver life-changing skills to residents in a defined area of Leicester.

#### Project partners

Hewlett Packard, In Training, L4A (Learning for the 4<sup>th</sup> Age), Leicester City Council, Centrica, Big Difference Company (founders of the Leicester Comedy Festival) are some of the partners which support some of the work we do.

### Section 2 The results

#### The problem

Research undertaken by academics at De Montfort identified a community located no more than 10 minutes walk away from the campus that ranked highly on a number of council deprivation indexes. High unemployment, lack of youth provision, high computer illiteracy, language barriers and lack of investment were some of the problems that faced the area.

#### The approach

De Montfort's Vice Chancellor, Professor Dominic Shellard put out a call to all faculties and professional service staff for project proposals designed to tackle the issues identified. Parallel to this, a project team was assembled to begin consultation with various sections of the community. This consultation period was vital for sustainability, by including residents in shaping and developing projects aims and objectives, Mile<sup>2</sup> had vast community support from the outset.

#### Our goals

The primary objective of the programme has been to utilize the best of De Montfort University to provide life-changing skills and opportunities to the local community, through a sustainable programme of projects.

Secondary objectives have included;

- Enhancing the student experience through volunteering on Mile<sup>2</sup> projects.
- To engage with at least 25% of the community (2400 residents).
- Demonstrate to the wider HE sector that sustainable community engagement can be achieved on a small budget.

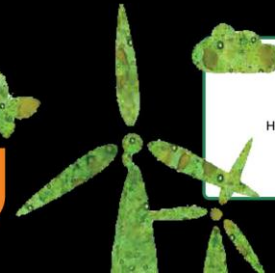


#### Profile

- HEI
- 27,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 2700 staff
- Urban



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## Obstacles and solutions

Communication with residents who had no access to internet	Text messaging campaign, QR code campaign, personalized marketing, advertisement through community leaders and local organizations.
Expanding popular projects to meet demand.	In some cases the solution was to reallocate project funding, however in other cases the team have had to apply for grants. A sustainable solution has been to provide students with the training they need to run projects on Mile <sup>2s</sup> behalf, therefore expanding project capacity whilst enhancing students' employability.
Maintaining resident engagement	Creation of a unique residents panel, designed to help shape and develop Mile <sup>2</sup> projects. This panel also has access to its own funding through the Community First initiative ( <a href="http://www.communityfirst.org.uk/">http://www.communityfirst.org.uk/</a> ), to allow residents to fund independent projects that matter to them.

## Performance and results

Within 18 Months, Mile<sup>2</sup> has engaged around 2700 residents within its 30 projects. Some of the successes include:

- 107 residents referred for specialist advice as part of the free hearing screenings project.
- 12 residents have entered employment as a result of Free English sessions
- In just 12 weeks of the I.T. training project 16 residents have completed their basic ECDL.
- 200 7 to 17-year-olds have taken part in the Moving Together dance project.
- 470 10 to 11-year-olds have taken part the "Play Dough" project, which aims to enhance schools Math's curriculum whilst learning about the stock market.
- Hundreds of Mile<sup>2</sup> residents are helping De Montfort academics research the use of complementary medicine for type 2 diabetes.
- 40 students have been working intensively to help expand and grow eight local businesses as part of the "Business Works" project.
- Ex-England Cricketer Paul Nixon, has been running coaching sessions for young residents and students to inspire participation in sport and increase the number of qualified sports coaches in the area.

## Section 3 The future

### Lessons learned

The Mile<sup>2</sup> programme is unlike anything attempted by De Montfort University's previously, and is unique to the sector in the range of projects and the support it has received both internally and externally.

A number of lessons were learned as a result of this new approach to community engagement, but perhaps most important of all has been to secure the community's "buy in" from the outset. All projects have been designed in partnership with residents; often meaning an extensive alteration of proposed projects. This approach, whilst ensuring sustainability, means that projects are well attended from the outset and, as a result, help benefit a larger section of the community.

## Sharing your project

How the team communicates the programme and its projects determine success and failure. Therefore Mile<sup>2</sup> has a comprehensive communication strategy to ensure the programme reaches far and wide. The team also extensively uses social media (Twitter and Facebook) to promote projects and opportunities to residents and students. There is also a live blog on DMU's Mile<sup>2</sup> webpages that gives an insight as to what the team has been working towards on a daily basis.

Externally Mile<sup>2</sup> works closely with local media (BBC radio Leicester and the Leicester Mercury) to promote upcoming projects and project successes. At a local level a quarterly Mile<sup>2</sup> magazine has been created and is posted to every home to allow all residents to see what is available to them in their area. Vitally, Mile<sup>2</sup> works with local Police, church groups and schools to disseminate literature on behalf of the programme.

## What has it meant to your institution to win a Green Gown Award?

Winning both the Green Gown awards for Social Responsibility and International Social Responsibility has dramatically raised the external profile of the project. It has helped the team form key working partnerships with groups such as businesses such as Centrica.

Attention from the wider HE sector has also dramatically increased as a result, with a number of high profile FE and HE institutions looking to replicate or partner with Mile<sup>2</sup> to help make a difference in their respective local communities.

The sense of pride Mile<sup>2</sup> team in winning these awards cannot be understated. It has been a vindication of the team's innovative approach to community engagement, as well as recognition for the extensive institution effort put in to designing and delivering these projects.

## Further information

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