

# Supporting Economic Renewal by Building Skills in the Community

Kickstarting Local Careers and  
Enterprise

## **Our Story So Far**

- **INDEPENDENT:** First library service to be divested from a county council in 2012
- **COMMUNITY DRIVEN:** Charity encompassing 44 community groups who support each of our libraries
- **DIRECTLY MEETING LOCAL NEED:** Empowered local managers develop services, activities and experiences that meet community need

## Advocacy, Work with Business in the Community and What Works and What Doesn't!

- Community Business Support: Pc's, free Wi-Fi, skills, employment advice, career pathways etc.
- Business Information: Conferences, events and workshops
- Workplace Wellbeing focus
- The basics work well as we're accessible and neutral
- More direct and specialist support has proved challenging to fund

## **Relationships and Partnerships and Embedding the Value of Libraries to the Broader Economic Renewal Agenda**

- Developing relationship with the LEP particularly around wellbeing
- Developing partnerships with local support organisations
- Working with DWP
- Creating meaningful corporate partnerships – East of England Co-op, Barclays etc.
- Presenting libraries as an accessible, multi-functional one stop shop for advice, support or onward signposting (developing a brand for business ‘Hive’)

## **Challenges in building relationships**

- Perceptions of what libraries offer
- Up front capital investment to build more focused and specific support services that meet key partner needs
- Credibility amongst the established business community
- Route to market – promoting our offer to potential partners and businesses

## **Our Role in Economic Renewal and Meeting the Goals of Suffolk County Council**

- Libraries have developed their role as a network offering digital access but still more join up with other county-wide initiatives required
- Community-driven model enables the meeting of local needs that could be a powerful tool in supporting grass roots business

## **Impact of COVID-19**

- Key projects put on hold
- Long tail of re-introduction of physical support
- Greater awareness of the role of the library at the heart of the community
- New pathways to work and innovation will create opportunities for libraries and our community-based support offer

## **The Suffolk context**

- Suffolk: traditionally high employment but low, agricultural wage
- COVID impact is already huge, esp. hospitality sector
- Libraries already seeing the economic devastation caused by COVID with huge uptick in people requiring support from us
- No resting on laurels – taking a front foot approach to these issues



## **Kickstart commitment**

- We knew we wanted to be part of this
- As an independent org we could be flexible
- We will be taking on at least 30 young people
- A blend of frontline and back office – mixed skills!
- A holistic development pathway for the trainees
- To prepare this cohort for the workplace

## **Hiccups & hurdles**

- The great Gateway debacle
- COVID continues to rear its ugly head
- Flexibility and an open mind has helped us offset COVID challenges
- Adapting to a changing situation when we don't always understand the goalposts
- Keeping the young people at the forefront of considerations

## **Ways of working**

- It has required managers to adapt their skill sets and really sharpen key competencies
- Even our most experienced managers are on a learning curve
- Sharpened our commitment to helping with employment & worklessness in Suffolk
- It's not a 'one and done' – what's next for us?

## **Building relationships**

- Libraries have always worked with DWP
- This required a new kind of relationship & a new 'language'
- Understanding each other's priorities
- Elevated our status with DCMS and MPs
- Even as an arm's length org this has allowed us to shine with our funding council
- Opens the door to other relationships