

# The Learning Cafe

Last Updated Thursday, 28 January 2010

## THE LEARNING CAFÉ

with the special menu of training and rehabilitation

“We know that getting an unemployed offender into work is one of the key factors that reduces their likelihood of committing further crimes,”  
Chief Executive Heather Munro

At Probation’s Learning Café supervised offenders receive training in catering as they work under the guidance of a qualified chef. During opening hours they help to prepare hot meals and snacks to sell to Probation staff - and men and women on supervision. The ‘trainees’ also provide food for the outside catering service, which is available to selected partnership agencies.

The catering enterprise is a joint venture between LRPT and STRIDE, a local award-winning social enterprise. The café is based at the Probation Centre on Cobden Street, Leicester.

“This work is giving men and women on supervision the opportunity to gain qualifications and valuable experience that will, hopefully, enable them to find paid employment within the catering industry,” explained Heather Munro, Chief Executive. “This opportunity does not mean we are cutting back on their supervision - The Learning Café is run on very professional guidelines and we believe that finding a job is a key part of getting former offenders to make a positive contribution to community life.”

The Learning Café is currently being funded from the Working Neighbourhoods’ Fund but the long term aim is to make the venture a self sustaining Social Enterprise by March 2011.

## REWARDS OF BECOMING A TRAINEE

After attending a one day Food Safety course, learners start training at The Learning Café for one day a week for a minimum of five weeks. This engagement leads to a National Open College Network (NOCN) Entry Level 3 Award. After the training period has been successfully completed, Probation’s Employability team give further guidance and support, which may involve the catering trainees undertaking voluntary work placements to increase their prospects of gaining employment in the future.

Heather Munro added: “We all know how difficult it can be to find a job these days. It can be even harder when you have a criminal conviction. Undertaking a voluntary work placement is a way of gaining experience and being productive in a constructive manner.”

## UNDERSTANDING THE WORKING PARTNERSHIP

The Learning Café is jointly managed with the support of STRIDE, the SHARP Training, Recycling and Income Development Enterprise, which is the trading arm of the Leicester-based housing charity SHARP.

The social enterprise also provides work experience placements and accredited training opportunities for socially disadvantaged groups including the long term unemployed, the homeless, disaffected youngsters and students excluded from school.

STRIDE Managing Director Phill Saunders commented: "Our aim is to develop The Learning Café into a viable social enterprise that will offer paid employment to suitable candidates, who may have previous criminal convictions - but have now turned their lives around."

#### OFFICIAL LAUNCH

The Learning Café was officially launched on 8th December 2009 by guest of honour, leading diet and fitness expert Rosemary Conley, who is well known for her books and DVDs that have consistently topped the best seller lists. In January 2004 Rosemary was awarded a CBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours List for her services to the fitness and diet industries. Three years earlier she was granted the Freedom of the City of Leicester, the first woman ever to receive this honour. In 1999 Rosemary was made a Deputy Lieutenant of Leicestershire. Rosemary also supports many charities and works as a Patron for STEPS, a Conductive Education School for children with cerebral palsy and other conditions, which is a charity based in Leicestershire.