



## Destination Leaders Programme Case Studies



## DLP Case Study: Visit West Lothian

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# **DLP Case Study: Visit West Lothian: Anna Young**

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## **The Student**

Anna Young is Tourism Executive for Destination Organisation Visit West Lothian. Working with and reporting to a Board of Directors, Anna is responsible for coordinating all of the activity which the DMO participates in. In 2008 Anna was appointed lead officer and given the task of setting up Visit West Lothian, which included forming a Board of Directors and developing the company business plan. Since then, Anna's role has been instrumental in growing the company, establishing a more effective partnership approach to working with the private sector and moving tourism up the political agenda in West Lothian.

## **The Organisation**

The remit of Visit West Lothian is to increase visitor numbers and expenditure and enhance the visitor experience in West Lothian. West Lothian is one of the 32 council areas of Scotland, and a historic county. It borders the City of Edinburgh, Falkirk, North Lanarkshire, the Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire.

## **Anna's Story**

In this case study, Anna talks about her experience of being part of the first Edinburgh Napier Destination Leaders Programme and how this experience has led to her making strategic contributions to the development of Visit West Lothian, as well as the impact the course has had on her own personal development.

## **Reasons for participating in the Destination Leaders Programme**

I believed that the Destination Leaders programme had the potential to offer me a fantastic opportunity to share what I have learnt over the past five years and I wanted to benefit from engaging with other professionals in the tourism industry. I believe that Scotland would benefit from a stronger network of leaders within the tourism industry, and I saw the development of this course as hopefully the first step towards forging this. Since the dissolution of the area tourist boards the number of destination organisations, of varying models and remits, across Scotland has rapidly grown. This patchwork effect has often led to an increase in duplication, impacting on the country's ability to adopt a strategic approach.

## **Reasons for participating in the Destination Leaders Programme - continued**

I'm aware of the great potential that West Lothian and others areas have in being part of a wider industry network and am keen to ensure that we are involved. In addition, as awareness regarding the valuable economic role of the tourism industry continues to spread, it is anticipated that we will see significant growth in the sector.

This is also true at a local level for West Lothian. The closure of the Halls food processing plant in Broxburn has reinforced the vulnerability that alternative types of industry place on a local economy. This is in stark contrast to the tourism sector which has verified its resilience during the recession period and is able to offer a much more sustainable alternative.

## **Programme Expectations Prior to Starting the Course**

I hoped to become more confident and be more comfortable adopting the role of leader. I wanted to be inspired by other people and places. I wanted to challenge my thinking and look at things differently.

## **Course Impact: Personal and Professional**

I'm definitely more confident. I am now part of a network of colleagues who have a shared interest and passion for developing the Edinburgh City Region and Scotland to be the best it can be. It would encourage me to go on and do further study in this area at a later time. It has given me the confidence and push to apply much of my learning to West Lothian – and I feel that I have the research and knowledge to apply this with confidence.

## **Course Impact: Organisation/Destination – Learning Outcomes**

Two particular examples of work Anna and her colleagues are now developing in West Lothian which have been directly influenced by her experience on the Destination Leaders course are:

- Strategic Development/Community Engagement
- Customer Service and the role of Ambassadors in the destination

Anna says, "We learnt that implementing a coherent community strategy was a critical element to any successful destination – this was evident from hearing about Amsterdam, Melbourne and others".

## **Course Impact: Organisation/Destination – Learning Outcomes - continued**

Anna continues, “These destinations value their residents and engage fully with them in relation to developing their destination. They specifically target locals in their marketing activity and they make them feel valued by offering incentives specifically for them to encourage them to utilise their own attractions/events. They encourage a sense of ownership amongst their residents which has worked well in developing them as Ambassadors, ultimately delivering significant benefit to each of the destinations”.

West Lothian is about to refresh its existing three year tourism strategy which currently overlooks community engagement. Anna continues, “We intend to change this and place the community at the heart of what we do. This will be a significant shift for us and one which, I believe will help secure the support and buy in of locals – a critical market for us”.

As part of the her group project assignment and the community engagement activity during the DLP course, Anna and her colleagues learnt about and explored the significant role which locals in the destination have to play as ambassadors, in particular focusing on the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) market. This is a market that Anna believes Visit West Lothian had overlooked - however the DLP course changed her thinking on the VFR market and how West Lothian should be valuing this particular segment more.

With this market specifically in mind, this has informed the focus of Visit West Lothian’s next two seasonal online marketing campaigns; it now intends to be more proactive about targeting locals and communicating in a way that is specifically for them.

## The Customer Journey & Role of Ambassadors in the Destination

Before Anna started the DLP course she was keen to implement a customer service scheme in West Lothian to improve the quality of customer service on offer. As of Summer 2014, Visit West Lothian is now in the early stages of developing a scheme which it aims to pilot in the next couple of months.

Anna says, “The DLP course focused on the critical role of excellent customer service in any destination however it went further and reinforced how fundamental the visitor experience is in terms of the customer journey; and the vital role that local Ambassadors can play as part of this from the welcome to the departure of visitors”.

“Therefore, in Visit West Lothian’s proposal to develop a customer service scheme, we now plan on offering face-to-face workshops and online training but also intend to develop our own West Lothian information packs and host regular free local FAM trips”.

Anna and her team believe that the FAMs will bring the visitor experience to life for participants and the online information packs will incorporate video content to showcase what West Lothian has to offer.

### Conclusion

Anna says, “The Destination Leaders Programme has had a significant impact on my thinking which I have been able to apply to our own area of West Lothian.

It challenged my thinking and highlighted the different key elements and challenges that often present in coordinating a destination.”

### Further Information/Links

Visit West Lothian: [visitwestlothian.co.uk](http://visitwestlothian.co.uk)

Scottish Enterprise: [www.scottish-enterprise.com](http://www.scottish-enterprise.com)

DLP Case Study Videos: <http://bit.ly/1okkX9Q>

