

COMMUNITIES AND COMPUTERS A REPORT



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**Communities and Computers:
Learning from the Residents.net
Project**

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INTRODUCTION

THE PROJECT

The Residents.net project involved distributing over 100 computers with subsidised Internet access to community groups in Hull. The money for the capital spend, that is the computers and connection paid up front, came from the Active Communities Unit of the Home Office. They provided just under £200,000 to pay for 117 computers and the associated Internet costs for each one. As there was no revenue funding as part of the project, Volcom used synergy with other projects to provide relevant training and support for these groups. Residents.net is a three-year project, with the computers being rolled out from March 2003, and the Internet connection deal being valid from then until March 2006. At that point the computers become the property of the groups.

Each group received an up to date PC, with colour printer, speakers and software. The Internet connection worked on a dial-up system through a local ISP, and worked out at a cost of 5.5p for 4 hours. On top of this there was a website for the project (www.hullresidents.net) which contained information useful to community groups, and acted as a route for groups to contact Volcom with any training requests and issues. There were also areas on the site that encouraged groups to put up information about themselves, and to use the site as a way of communicating with each other. As well as this, each group had email addresses for members through a webmail account, and Volcom used these to provide the groups with information about the project, and information that was relevant to their group.

Volcom was also able to provide technical support and training. The technical support came from Chisholms, from whom the computers were purchased, and from Volcom's IT Development Worker. Training, whether at Volcom's offices or at the groups' own premises, was provided through other projects that Volcom was running.

Residents.net aimed to provide cheap and local access to computers and the Internet for groups who otherwise would not have it. Groups had to apply for the computers, and they were given out to those who did not have computers already and had no locally available public provision suitable for the group. Groups were able to site the computer where they wanted, as long as it was accessible to all the members and users of the group, and was in a place where they could use it to its potential. So computers ended up in sheltered accommodation, people's homes, churches, community centres, and even a café.

If you would like to contact any of the groups mentioned in the report, or find out more about the work they do call Volcom: 01482 382521 or office@volcom.org.uk

There were three main aims within the project:

To get people in the groups using the computer and the Internet, and to build their IT skills

To create a network of groups who communicated with and supported each other

To use the computer and associated services to support groups and the work they do

THE RESEARCH

As Residents.net was moving towards its conclusion, it was felt to be an appropriate time to evaluate what the groups had used the computers for, the impact they had seen, and any issues that had arisen with the project. This information will help Volcom evaluate the project itself, but will also be useful in putting together a forward plan to support the groups into the future.

At the time of the research there were 100 Residents.net computers in the community. Throughout the project so far, whilst most computers have remained with a group throughout the life of the project, some groups have taken them on, and then given them up, as the groups have changed, moved or ceased activities.

The research aimed to use a questionnaire to get information from all of the 100 current groups. Questionnaires were mailed out, then reminder copies were sent to those who did not reply, and in the end groups who still did not reply were telephoned. Some of the questionnaires were filled out over the telephone. In total, 89 groups answered the questions.

Once the questionnaires were in, the research team collated the replies and selected some groups to follow up and interview as case studies. These were selected as they reflected the diversity of the types of groups involved in the Residents.net project, and the breadth of activities, as well as highlighting some of the exciting things that were happening.

THE REPORT

This report uses all the data that was collected, and so includes statistical data and quotes from the questionnaire, as well as quotes from the case study interviews. The case studies themselves can be found throughout the report, and serve as evidence for our conclusions.

The findings below are split into six sections relating to the location of the computer, how groups used the computer, the training they had from Volcom, how they got to know other Residents.net groups, what they thought of the project, and the impact of the project on their IT skills. This is followed by our conclusions.

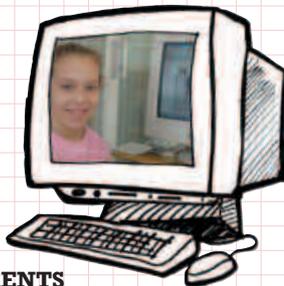
LOCATION OF THE COMPUTER

One important part of the Residents.net project was the flexibility of location for the computers. Rather than limiting suitable locations to community centres and other public buildings, there was the flexibility to put the computer in the best location for each community group to use it, wherever that may have been. The important issue was that the location enabled the group members to make use of the computer easily, and that all had reasonable access to it. As can be seen from the graph below, the computers ended up in lots of different places. The largest number ended up at the premises that a group operated from, but a significant number were actually located at the house of a group member.

However, the figures alone do not tell the whole story. For example, Africa Forum's computer is at the heart of the home of one of their members, situated next to the cooker in the kitchen! Also, some of the computers have not necessarily been static. For example, Spamedia have been using their computer to deliver OCN Community Video Skills courses, as well as for organisational administration. Therefore,

"the computer moves to various training venues and so [the answer] for the [location] question is both at a member's house, at a community centre and 'other'."

Another group, the Grandparents Support Group, move the computer around the houses of their



CASE STUDY GRANDPARENTS SUPPORT GROUP

The Residents.net PC for this group is unique because it has lived in so many different homes! The Grandparents Support Group exists to support those grandparents who, for whatever reason, are bringing up their grandchildren in their own homes. As many of the grandparents have a limited income, they cannot afford to own their own computers. The group does not have its own premises, so it was decided that the members would share the PC amongst the different families, with each family taking it in turns to have the computer in their home for a number of months. So far, the PC has been looked after by four families, and we spoke to members of the family currently housing the computer. The family consists of a grandmother, grandfather and three granddaughters, aged 10, 17 and 21.

The computer is mostly used by the 17 year old girl for college work and downloading music, and the 10 year old who does schoolwork, plays games and downloads posters on it. The main highlight of this project for the families involved was the fact that the children could have computer and internet access in their own home, and did not feel disadvantaged compared to other children. The benefits were shown when we asked the 10 year old girl about the kinds of things she did on the computer for school and she replied:

"Like, if we was doing stuff on the computer like doing poems, you can go home and make your own up and then the teacher goes, 'Ahh, that's good!' [big beaming smile] and stuff like that."

members, so that each can have the benefit of using it with their families for a set time. However, most groups have the computer in a fixed location.

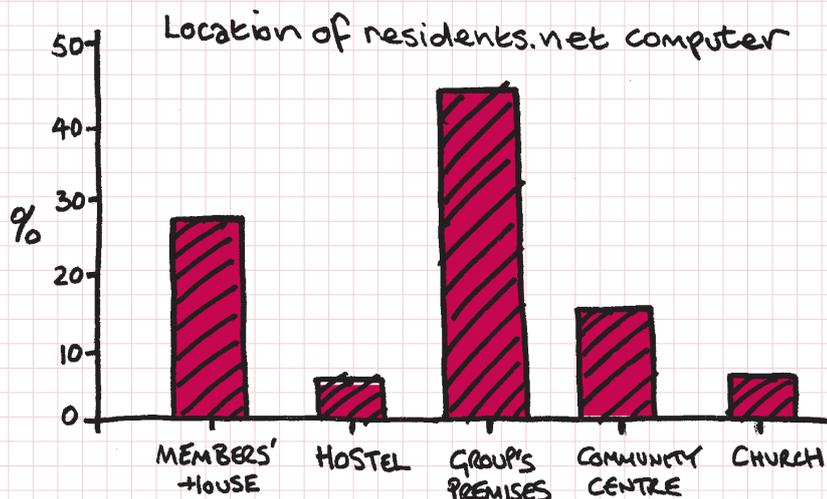
The location has been critical to the success of the project. The fact that the computers have been in the places where people meet regularly and feel comfortable has meant that those who are a bit nervous of using computers, especially the elderly, have had a go and as a result increased their skills. For example, at Clowes Memorial Methodist Church they said that the computer had given **"...many more people access to a computer in a non-threatening environment."**

USE OF THE RESIDENTS.NET COMPUTERS

The questionnaire investigated the numbers of people using each Residents.net computer and the frequency of their use, shown in the two graphs on the right.

It can be seen that the computers were being well used by most groups. The majority of computers were used at least daily, and just under 80% were used at least every couple of days. Most computers (57%) were only used by a small number of people (between 1 and 5) during the week, but a fair proportion (24%) were used by between six and ten people on an average week. On the basis of these figures, then, Residents.net computers were being used by between 328 and over 688 people in an average week.

In some places the internet was available to members of the general public on a drop-in basis, as well as members of the particular community group involved in the project. As the table below shows, the people using the computers come from a variety of socio-economic groups. Most computers were used by those who were in employment, in retirement or were unemployed. A significant proportion of the computers were also used by young people and students, as well as those who were sick or disabled, or were looking after the home.





CASE STUDY

ROPER STREET HOSTEL

Roper Street offers crisis accommodation to homeless people whilst a more permanent place to live is arranged. Many residents are addressing their drug or alcohol problems during their stay. The Residents.net computer is located in the common room of the hostel for residents to use, and staff say that "it's constantly in use" by residents. In fact, it is so popular that they often have to cap the time individuals can spend on it so that everyone can use it. The residents use the computer for all sorts of activities, such as playing games, emailing people and finding out information relevant to their accommodation situation. For example, one resident who had not contacted his mother for 10 years used the computer to set up an email address to use to communicate with her.

Most of the residents use the computer and the value of it is demonstrated by the fact that it has never been tampered with, and residents have gone out to get new mice when the old ones have worn out from use! As the staff explain, "It's been a well used resource, and people use it all the time, these people wouldn't have any access at all to a computer in any shape or form...so I think it's nice that people, they're learning computer skills, learning, even if it's just playing games and things like that."

Group	Computers used by group of people (%)
Employed	60%
Retired	58%
Unemployed	53%
Students	36%
School Children (Pre 16)	33%
Long-term sick/disabled	33%
Looking after home family	29%

Respondents could choose multiple options

Whilst there has been a wide variety of different people using the computers across the different Residents.net groups, there has also been diversity within the groups and in some groups the computer has brought people of different ages and backgrounds together. Many of the groups have provided access to a computer for people that would not normally be interested in or be able to use a computer:

"Mature students have used the internet access to research and complete assignments. Younger students/children have used the internet facility to access educational sites. Group members have used internet facility for research regarding start/end of Ramadhan etc. The computer was of great value as we seek to establish a computer/homework club to raise standards of children's education."

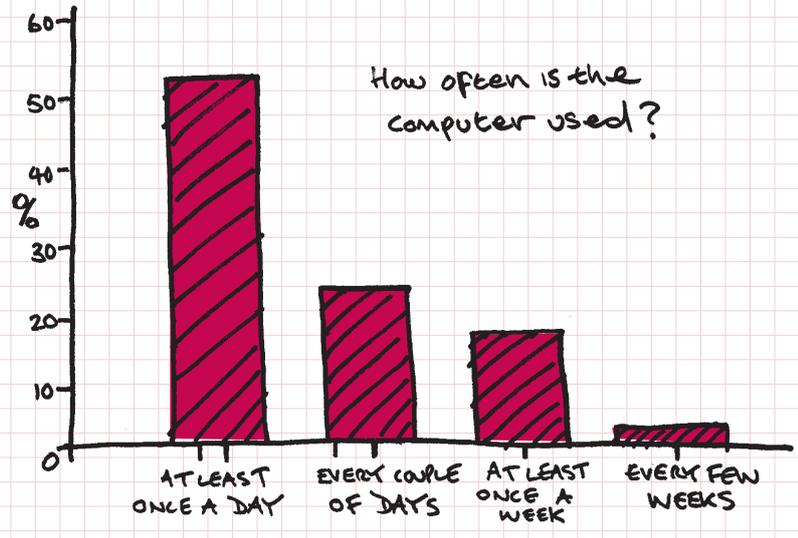
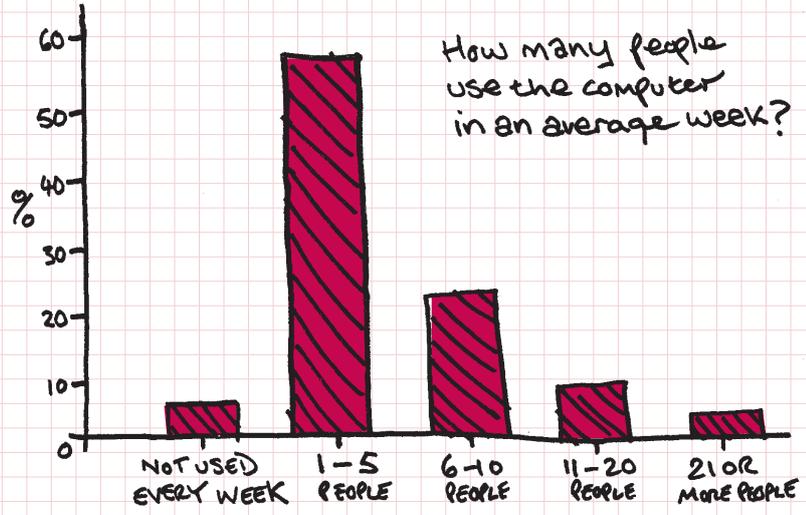
Community Development Foundation

"Four or five people use it on a regular basis, all of whom wouldn't have access to a computer otherwise. Some of them pass on computer skills to one another."

Terry Street Hostel

"[A] multicultural youth diversion project makes great use of the computer when they meet, searching on the internet and producing leaflets. Researching information on immigration cases is very important."

Hull Afro Caribbean Centre



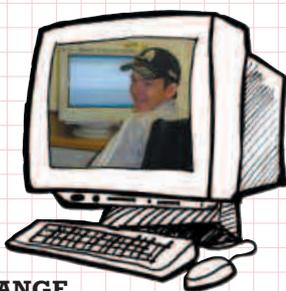
In the questionnaire groups were asked about the kinds of tasks they carried out on the computer. They were given a list from which they could select multiple options. The vast majority of the computers were used for surfing the internet, emailing and word processing. Just over half of the computers have been used for desktop publishing, whilst just under a third have been used for doing spreadsheets and just under a quarter for doing online courses. Other tasks the computers were used for included work for school or courses, research into topics, gaming and doing digital photography.

Task	Computers used for this task (%)
Using the Internet	93%
Word Processing	85%
Sending/Receiving Email	78%
Desktop Publishing	54%
Using Spreadsheets	30%
Other	23%
Online Courses	14%

Respondents could choose multiple options

Groups were also asked about the sorts of things they have been able to do since getting the Residents.net computer. The computers have been put to a wide variety of purposes including learning, dealing with the groups' administration, communicating by email and letter as well as producing publicity for groups. The internet has been searched for many different purposes and, if nothing else, individuals have enjoyed spending time playing games on the computer.

The project was conceived in order to provide cheap and accessible internet access to community groups across the city. Some common activities that groups used the internet for include; children using the internet to do homework, people researching their family tree, unemployed users doing job search, students using the internet to find information for their course work and assignments. People also used the internet to keep up to date with information by looking at news websites and looking for changes in



CASE STUDY

BILTON GRANGE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Bilton Grange Community Association runs a community centre on the Bilton Grange estate in East Hull. The centre is open all week throughout the day, and often into the evening, running lots of different activities such as adult education, dance activities and toddler groups. The computer is in the main area of the centre, and people can drop-in and use it whenever the centre is open. Most people in the area can't afford to be online at home, and so the ability to go online for free at the centre has been very positive for people. Many different groups and individuals regularly use the computer and the staff are enthusiastic about what Residents.net has achieved there,

"...it has brought the Internet into the centre which we wouldn't have had and it's brought like, it's broken down the barriers that people have with the Internet- especially the older people, you know, it's people of all ages who have been on it...It's not like being stuck in a bedroom with a computer is it? They all teach each other as well- its great!"

The Residents.net computer has been such a success that there is now a whole computer suite at the centre to cater for demand!



CASE STUDY

HULL ATHLETICS CLUB

The City of Hull Athletics Club has a Residents.net computer in the house of one of the committee members. The computer assists with the running of the club and comes in handy when there are races and training events to organise. When the club was set up they could not afford a computer but being on the internet makes it easier to stay in touch with the club's 200 members. The monthly newsletter is produced on the computer and then emailed or printed and sent to members. Race results are also distributed easily and minutes from committee meetings typed up professionally. The rest of the member's family benefit too... with a daughter away at university everyone can stay in touch - including checking homework sent by email!

policy to do with their work. Asylum seekers and refugees were also able to stay in touch with what was happening in their home countries through the internet. Travel arrangements were made online both on behalf of individuals and for group trips. Some people used the internet to do shopping or to use auction sites like e-bay and one business, a car repair firm, found the internet (accessed at a local café) a useful source of spare parts.

Some of the many different uses made of Residents.net computers are highlighted below.

"Accessing funding for groups e.g. Toddlers, Youth Club, Asylum Seeker emailing home, funding information on web for groups, Publicity producing materials."

Church on the Way

"Many people have used the net to access tax credit info website on the Gov.UK sites. One student has completed two LearnDirect courses (a retired gentleman) Jobsites in this and other parts of the country have been accessed as have Yahoo Ebay etc, we have accessed Residents.net email system for housing info and contacting council officers at all levels."

Longhill Residents Association

"We have been able to achieve so many places for fishing trips on the internet by email and for trips away for a week for the children and pensioners and for me to send letters."

Park View Fishing Club

"Our computer has been used to help people to find out about illnesses with the help of medical people, help us to run our play activities, and many more."

First Avenue Community Association

As well as researching information on the internet, the computers were also used to facilitate communication in both hi-tech and low-tech ways. Many groups used email to communicate with people

CASE STUDY RECYCLING UNLIMITED



Recycling Unlimited started out with a project that involved breaking up pallets and using the wood to make garden furniture. Now the project has expanded to also include premises which have a shop selling second-hand goods, and training rooms above. The Residents.net computer is within the training area, and is used as part of the training courses, some of which are delivered online. Courses that run at Recycling Unlimited include ESOL, forklift truck introduction, basic skills courses and basic health and safety. The staff say that most of the people who go there need one to one attention, and don't want to go to mainstream education providers. The project is popular, as the staff explain,

"...over the last year we've had 120 people through our hands, and are still here some of them, [doing] training of some sort. And many of those, most of them, have used a computer at some time, and many of them have used it on a regular basis."

For the project overall, the staff said they considered the Residents.net computer,

"...one of the best things that we've had..."

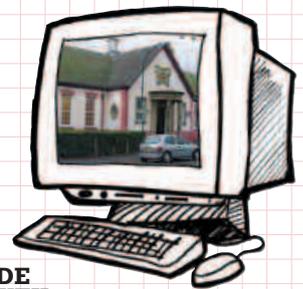
both inside and outside of their organisation. In particular, email was useful for relatives to stay in touch with family abroad. There were many others ways that group members used the computer to communicate information, for example by writing letters, producing newsletters, and designing posters and leaflets to advertise the group and events that had been planned. One group produced a commemorative book about their collective experience of the war years using their Residents.net computer.

In one way or another, the computers were a great source of learning. Information and skills about how to use the computer were passed on to and between group members both formally and informally. Often those with more experience of using computers found themselves coaching the less knowledgeable or confident. Access to a computer prompted some people to enrol onto IT classes at college as they now had a computer they could practise on. Others took online courses through LearnDirect. One computer went to a group that used it to deliver OCN Video Skills course in the community. Access to the internet provided groups with a phenomenal learning tool once they had mastered how to use it.

Another important use of the computers has been for administration. Many of the groups have found that the computer is now an essential tool for keeping their accounts and databases as well as writing up minutes from meetings and disseminating information by email. Researching and applying for funding has also been made easier with access to a computer and the internet and as such the computers can be said to have increased the capacity of many of the organisations they have gone to.

Part of the Residents.net project involved setting up a website as a source of local information and a focus to encourage and enable the different groups to communicate with one another. The majority of respondents (78%) had used the website that was set up for the project. The table on the following page shows what the website was used for. As can be seen, the website was mostly used to find information, news or links to other sites. Nearly a third also used it to find training courses.

CASE STUDY HUMBERSIDE POLICE YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE



Humberside Police Youth and Community Centre has two Residents.net computers in their community centre. These have brought internet access to the organisation that would not have been possible otherwise without extra funding. Previously, staff have used their home computer to send emails or research information on the internet, now they can do it there and then making their job much easier! Volcom's infomails have also helped everyone involved in the organisation to stay in touch with what's going on across the city and in other areas. The computers are used by the clubs that run from the centre to write letters, keep membership details and print forms and membership cards. Time on the internet can be pre-booked if required by clubs. A website is in the process of being constructed for the organisation.

CASE STUDY EAST PARK BAPTIST CHURCH



East Park Baptist Church has a Residents.net computer located in their church building. As it is the only computer at the premises, it is often used by the minister and others using the building. The minister uses the computer for work when at church and has found the Volcom infomails especially useful. As he explains, **"...some have been very useful, some of the information that's there we've acted upon when we've had activities. There was something that came through...firms that provide prizes for community groups and we latched onto that for our quiz night..."**

Other major users of the computer are the Boys and Girls Brigade groups located there. They regularly use the computer for activities that contribute to achieving their badges. Recently, for example, the Internet was used to find information about William Wilberforce from which a display was produced.

Activity	Computers used for activity (%)
To find information	87%
To look up news	47%
To use links	41%
To find training courses	31%
To make training request	13%
To enter your group's details	13%

Respondents could choose multiple options

The table shows how important information is to the Residents.net groups. Another service that the groups receive from Volcom is regular infomails sent to their email accounts. These keep

groups informed of events, funding opportunities and resources available to them.

When groups were asked to tell us the best thing about the Residents.net project, some of them highlighted the infomail service:

"Introduction to computers. Lots of news updates - information."

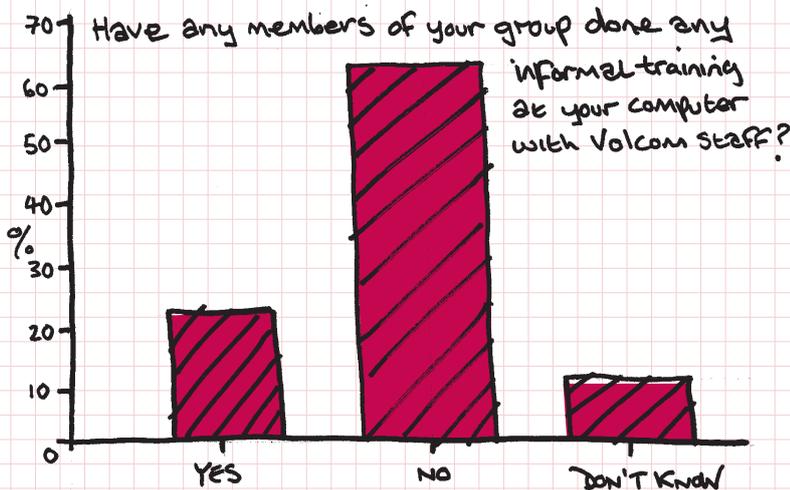
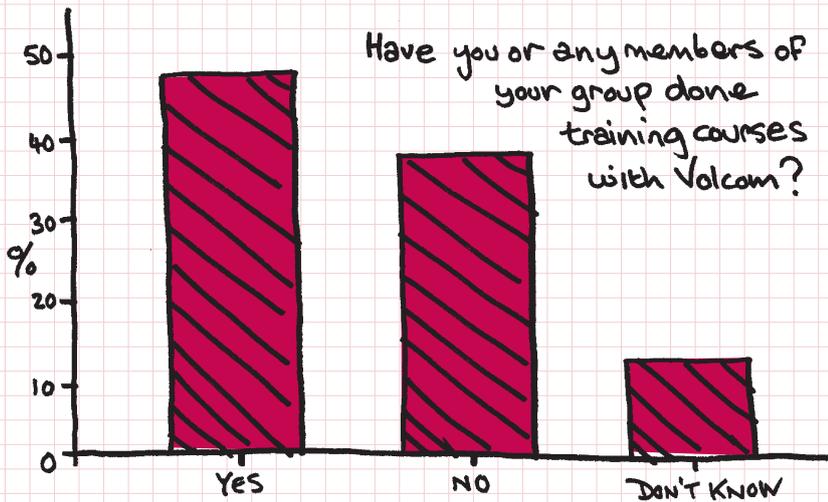
Bayswater Residents

"Information and friendly support. More confidence."

Friends of Isaac Newton

IT TRAINING OFFERED BY VOLCOM TO RESIDENTS.NET GROUPS

Groups were offered formal training courses at Volcom and were also offered informal training with Volcom's IT Development Worker at their own computer, either to groups or individuals. As the graphs below illustrate, the formal



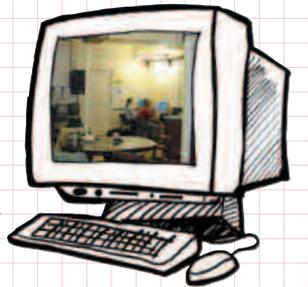
CASE STUDY

ARKH

ARKH is an organisation that exists to support asylum seekers and refugees in Hull. From their premises they run courses, social activities and support groups. Having the Residents.net computer meant,

"...it's allowed us to have Internet access at a point when we couldn't afford to have broadband and connect any of our own computers up to the internet."

There have been many benefits for the project. Staff have used the computer for organisational administration and for keeping in touch with other organisations. Asylum seekers and refugees have been able to log on to newspapers in their own languages and communicate with friends and family in other countries by email. The project's football team started using the Internet to check football results and information, and then enrolled on an IT course provided by Volcom at the centre. The cheap internet and training offered by Volcom were considered to be the best things about the project for this group.



CASE STUDY

RESPECT

Respect is a community organisation working in a deprived area of North Hull called the Quadrant. From their premises they run lots of different activities for the community, such as youth clubs, homework clubs, pop-ins and learning opportunities. The staff said that they applied for the computer because;

"We wanted the people who come here to have the opportunity of using a PC, learning some skills and also get onto the Internet and all that that brings."

They now run pop-in sessions so that local residents can come in and use the computers for free. They have also managed to get IT trainers to come along to a morning pop-in, and to their youth work events, to help people informally to gain skills on the computer. This has all been very popular, and the organisation managed to secure funding for three more computers from elsewhere due to the popularity of the original one.

courses have been used by more groups than the informal training. Nearly half (48%) of groups had had some members come on a course at Volcom, whilst 23% of groups had done informal training at their computer.

When looking at the above results, it should be noted that using the training offered by Volcom was not the only way in which group members learnt and improved their computer skills.

Groups that had the resources or people with sufficient confidence and competence using computers were able to organise their own training. Respect and Endike Community Care are two examples of groups that did this.

“Some people have difficulty in learning IT skills on a formal course, we find the informal system we use by letting them determine their own pace gets good results. The people used to pass on the skills, have themselves used the same system.”

Maurice Rawling Centre

Although the groups had been offered some training, several of the groups said that they would like to receive more and some thought that they would benefit from one-to-one training at their own computer. Some groups had been promised training on laptops at their own premises, which they had not received. The groups who requested this tended to have members that were less mobile and therefore unable to come to Volcom for training.

WHAT GROUPS THOUGHT ABOUT RESIDENTS.NET

The groups were asked what they considered to be the best thing about Residents.net, and also about anything that could have been done better.

THE ‘BEST THING’ ABOUT RESIDENTS.NET

The groups that received a Residents.net computer represent a broad cross-section of interests and activities. They work with different sections of society and this can be seen when looking at



CASE STUDY

ENDIKE COMMUNITY CENTRE

Endike Community Care is a day-care centre for elderly people. Members are picked up and taken to the centre where they can eat in the café, play bingo, watch telly or simply relax in the day room. The computer has created quite a lot of interest and there is now a computer suite furnished with the Residents.net computer as well as computers donated by staff. The Internet has been so popular that the centre will shortly be getting broadband. One of the staff members with good computer skills has been doing classes with the members and teaching them the basics. One client was able to book her holiday on the internet, with help from the staff, and has also been able to keep in touch with relatives abroad.

Earlier this year the centre put together a commemorative book for the World War II celebrations with contributions from all the members, staff said “without the help of the computer, we wouldn’t have been able to do this”. Trainees and people on work placement enjoy using the computer as well and one trainee set up a website for the organisation. Staff have found the internet useful to research unfamiliar medical terms;

“...often when we get clients coming to us and they’ve got something that I’ve not heard of, you can actually look it up on the net, you know, so that part’s invaluable as well.”

what the groups have got out of the project. For many of the groups, having access to the internet was the best thing about the project. They mentioned the cheapness and value of the internet package which allowed many people, who would not otherwise have the opportunity, to access information and advice through the internet.

For example, Church on the Way stated that the project had:

“enabled us to have internet access that would not have been possible otherwise.”

And the Thursday Local History Project said that the best thing about the project was:

“having easy, cheap access to an online computer.”

Other groups mentioned that simply having access to a computer was the best thing about the project, although it was not always clear from their comments whether this included access to the internet and emails, or whether just having the computer itself was the best bit. As Danny’s Dream commented:

“without a computer our group would be unable to continue.”

The fact that the computers were in a safe and familiar environment was perceived to be of benefit to vulnerable groups and those normally without access to a computer. This was especially the case for groups involving elderly people.

The best bit about the project varied depending on the make-up and purpose of the group, so for example one group said the best thing about the project was simply letting people get a feel for it who were frightened before. In other groups the computer became an essential tool for sourcing information and processing admin. Helping children do homework was the best thing about the computer for another group. For a group working with drug and alcohol addicted homeless people, the best thing about the computer was that it kept people occupied and out of trouble even if they were only playing games. In another group the computer created an interest and got people working together on projects.

For many of the groups, their computer quickly became an essential tool for running the group so as well as benefiting the individuals using the computer, the whole group benefited too. The computers were used for things like

producing minutes and accounts, looking for funding and producing professional looking documents. As Humberside Police Youth and Community Centre explain,

“Before the project our group had the use of a very out of date computer with no internet access. Now we cannot manage without the computer. All aspects of running the centre are dealt with on the computer as a registered charity.”

A large proportion of the groups had little or no experience of IT, and for them the support and training offered by Volcom was one of the best parts of the project. Having a friendly expert who could give advice over the phone or visit to sort out any problems was important and reassuring for groups. For example:

“...it’s not just having the computer either...it’s having the support; being able to ring up and say ‘oh I’m not sure about this’ you know and ‘what do we do?’ and the training as well...”

Humberside Police Youth and Community Centre

Having email has enabled groups to keep in touch with their members and other groups and it has also helped individuals to stay in contact with friends and relatives, thus:

“making everyone equal in terms of communication.”

Hull LGBT Forum

Through email the groups have received support in the form of infomails from Volcom. Infomails provided the groups with snippets of news of interest to the voluntary and community sector including information about funding opportunities, training and events. Danny’s Dream explained that,

“Emails from Volcom have kept us up to date with what’s happening in our community/city. It has enabled us to keep in touch with other interested parties/voluntary/community/statutory services in connection with our ‘Life’s for Living’ project.”

There is no doubt that in the vast majority of places the Residents.net computer had a positive impact on the groups and individuals that used it. However there were some aspects of the project that groups felt could be improved upon.

CASE STUDY

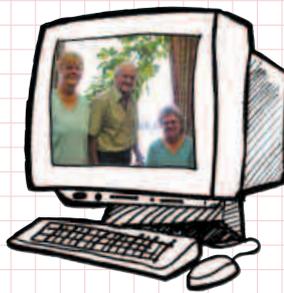
HENRY VERNONE COURT

Henry Vernone Court is a sheltered housing complex for those over 60 years old. Their Residents.net computer is in the corner of the common room/lounge area, and is used by a number of staff, tenants and tenants’ family members. People have used it for many different reasons, and it has clearly had an impact on the lives of the people living in Henry Vernone Court; the internet is used to look for information on topics as diverse as tenants’ illnesses, recipes and shopping for groceries or presents. One tenant has used it to track down friends from the war, whilst another uses the computer regularly to keep her mind active playing word games. As well as this, people are able to keep in touch with family and friends overseas and elsewhere in this country by email. It is also used to produce publicity for events they are holding.

If this computer was not situated where these people were living, these older people are unlikely to have had access to the internet and made such full use of a PC. Because it is in the lounge area, it really has become part of the furniture. As one tenant states:

“You really can’t imagine life without a computer now, really to be quite honest, I mean because you’ve got the world at your feet haven’t you. If you’ve got a computer you’ve got the world at your feet.”

It looks as if the Residents.net computer has become one of the most popular tenants!



THINGS THAT COULD HAVE WORKED BETTER

The vast majority of groups did not think there was anything that would make the Residents.net project better, or did not know what could make the project better, and made comments like,

“Residents.net is just ok as it is.”

Quakers

“We are very pleased with the service you have given us.”

Clowes Memorial Methodist Church

“It works well for our needs as it is.”

Shopmobility

However, there were some issues that arose from the responses to this question on the questionnaire. The two issues groups mentioned most often were internet access and training.

Several of the groups thought that the project would be better if the computers had a broadband internet connection. This would vastly increase the speed at which the internet worked, making it more accessible to people. In some cases groups had already decided to switch over to broadband. The fact that this has not been mentioned by more groups, now that broadband is more widely and cheaply available, is possibly due to lack of knowledge about the internet and the benefits of broadband as well as the fact that some groups make more use of the internet than others.

The groups had benefited from some of the training offered by Volcom, and several of the groups said that they would like to receive more. For example, Christopher Pickering Lodge Residents suggested that it would be good if:

“...I or someone could spend some time 1-1 with the residents to learn more.”

The Thursday Local History Project said they wanted:

“more informal training from Volcom at our Residents.net computer.”

Some groups had been promised training on laptops at their own premises, which they had not received. The groups who requested this tended to have members that were less mobile and therefore unable to come to Volcom for training. For example the Fernleigh Service Users Group said that:

“onsite training would be best – all lack basic IT skills but transport and disabilities make going elsewhere difficult.”

“Would really like on-site training with laptops (was promised at beginning). One or two have gone to Wyke to do a basic course. Training would help learn basics and make them more aware of what they can do on the computer.”

Crusoe Court tenants association

Some other groups gave specific suggestions about training that they wanted.

“Help with other computer skills, e.g. databases, spreadsheets, etc. to take our project forward.”

Danny’s Dream

“Run some database and spreadsheet training for some group members and maybe some desktop publishing.”

Africa Forum

The computer was such a success with some groups that they felt they needed another one to meet demand, although they didn’t always have the space available for two computers even if a second was available! There were issues over security and monitoring internet use for groups, especially those with young members and so open access to members of the public was not always possible.

As well as general issues, there were some specific points that related to certain groups. One group provided advice and information about sexuality and sexual health and found that they could not access relevant sites due to the restrictions placed on web searches. Another group wanted to be able to stop junk mailings, whilst free website hosting and free or cheap internet access forever was suggested by other groups. A better password system, and better connection to other groups were also suggested. Looking to the future, one group suggested a user group to discuss developments, while another group wanted Volcom to visit to discuss issues.



CASE STUDY

HUMBER VIEW

Humber View sheltered housing has a Residents.net computer in the balcony overlooking the common room. This computer has given many older people the opportunity to try out new technology in a familiar environment. Five or six residents use it regularly and they all have varying degrees of IT skills. They enjoy various things from researching information on the internet; “if you’ve got any queries about anything you only go on there and Askjeeves or Google”; to playing card games like solitaire. In the future they would like to learn about digital photography, and learn more about how to use websites.

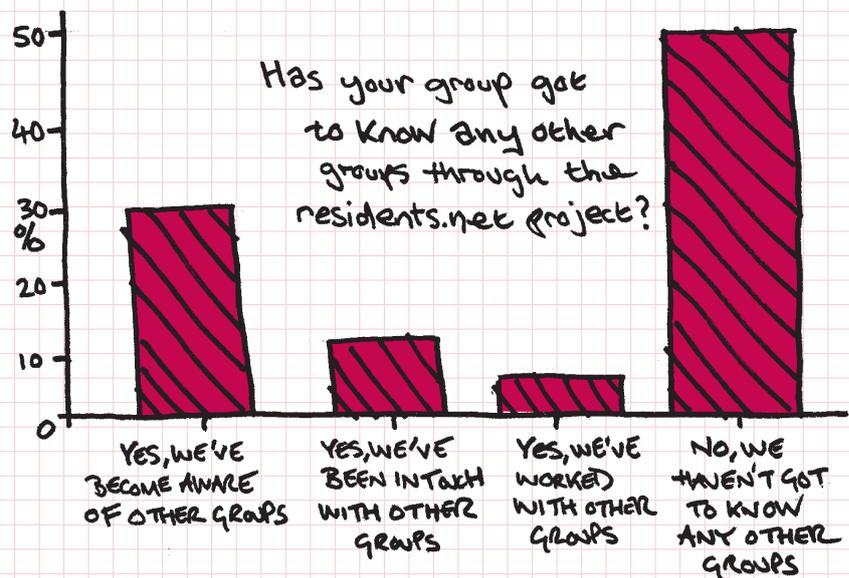
GETTING TO KNOW OTHER RESIDENTS.NET GROUPS

One of the aims of the project was to get the groups who had computers emailing each other, and to create a self-sustaining network. The graph below shows how much this has happened.

As can be seen from the graph, this has not been as successful at first glance as we might have hoped. Half of the groups have not got to know any other groups, and the half that have got to know others have mostly just become aware of those groups, rather than necessarily contacting them or working with them. However, a fifth of groups have actually been active in communicating and working together, so there are some signs of a network growing. An example of this is Christopher Pickering Lodge Residents who have used their computer to get:

“...in touch with others on Residents.net”

Of course, this does not show the whole story. The evidence shows that many of the groups use their computers for emailing other groups and individuals, and this of course



helps increase and sustain networks wider than the Residents.net groups. For example, Shopmobility used their computer to find out about other similar schemes around the country.

Many of the groups have also had contact with Volcom and each other through training and through email, often as a result of the information Volcom provides regularly to all the groups. Again, this has been part of the process of networking and getting to know other groups.

Overall then, although a strong and active network has not emerged at this stage, there are signs that some of the groups have been networking amongst each other, and further afield. It is also important to note that the potential for such a network to develop through the project in the future is still there, as the groups will retain the computers after the project ends and have built their capacity to use them.

CHANGES IN THE IT SKILLS OF GROUPS

The groups were overwhelmingly positive about the project. As the graph below shows, only a small minority felt that having a computer had not improved their group's computer skills, and nearly half said that the skills of their group had improved 'a lot'.

The groups had different stories to tell about how skills had increased, and what the impact of the Residents.net computer had been, **"Kids have acquired much higher grades and are socially more interactive through various websites."**

G and T Neighbourhood Watch

"People have been able to keep in touch with each other through emails. Many of the group have learnt skills which they have passed on to other members of the group. This has increased communication skills and built up trust between clients. The clients have used the computer to design posters to advertise their support group activities."

Survivors

"Our minutes and letters on behalf of the club are much more professional now. We reply to emails concerning rugby league. Our fundraiser and club co-ordinator are starting IT courses in order to use the computer."

Bilton Sullys

"One or two were frightened of computers - they got more used to learning to use them by messing about on the res.net computer. Don't think some of them would have had access to a computer elsewhere."

Greatfield Community Centre

In some of the organisations, the Residents.net computer has been the catalyst to obtain more computers and better facilities to meet demand. Groups such as Recycling Unlimited, Bilton Grange Community Association, Endike Community Care Association and Respect now have several computers linked to the Internet for their members and clients to use. This shows the value of the project, and the impact that it has had.



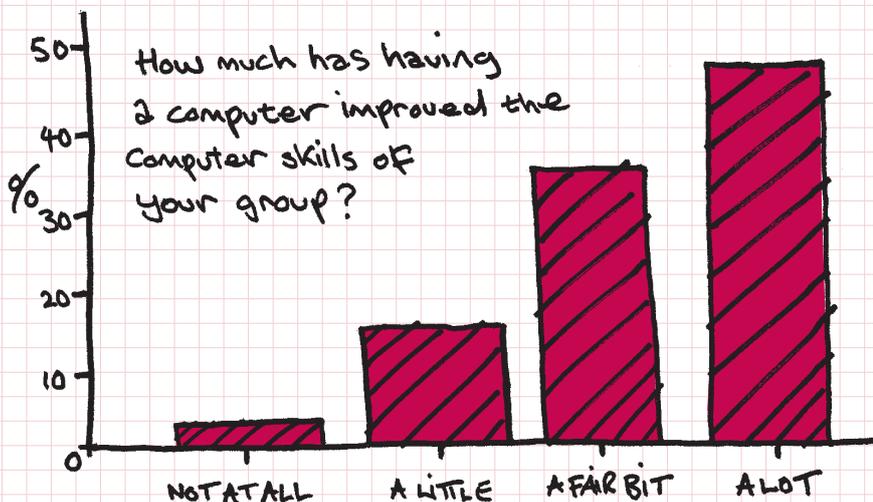
CASE STUDY

SHOPMOBILITY

Shopmobility is a service which hires out scooters and wheelchairs for people who require them for use in Hull city centre. They are located in the Princes Quay shopping centre near the car park, and the Residents.net PC is held here. A mixture of volunteers and paid staff use the computer, which is considered invaluable as it is the charity's only computer with email and internet access. They use email to communicate with board members, which saves on the cost of postage. In addition to this, it was through one of the infomails sent out by Volcom that Shopmobility found an opportunity to apply for funding for a paid member of staff - which they were successful in securing!

The internet has also been well used, most especially in networking with other Shopmobility schemes around the UK:

"...there are about 200 schemes around the country and probably 20 or 30 of them have internet, sorry we have a website and some are very good websites actually and so we've used that to learn about what other people do, you know, and that's been useful and sometimes just to get the addresses, you know. We have actually got a printed directory but you can often get more up to date information on the internet as well."



CONCLUSION

The three main aims of the Residents.net project were to increase the level of IT skills and use of the internet within community groups in Hull, create an online community of groups with their own website who were able to communicate effectively with one another, work together and support each other; and finally for Volcom to support these groups and build their capacity.

The last aim has been the most successful. Simply providing a computer and internet access has increased the capacity of many groups. A computer has enabled groups to better organise their administration, research information and funding in particular, develop their IT skills and, through the internet, access learning on many subjects.

78% of the groups have used their computers to send and receive emails and this means they have been able to utilise Volcom's infomail service. Infomails are snippets of news, local events and funding opportunities designed to keep groups informed of what is going on locally in Hull, regionally and nationally.

A further way that Volcom has supported groups is through technical IT support. Over 22 months of the project Volcom's IT development worker has logged 268 visits and 30 phone calls to groups to assist with computer-related issues. However, we suspect that this is a gross underestimate of the work which has been carried out. This part of the project has worked well with no groups being dissatisfied with the way any problem has been dealt with. For many groups IT support was an essential part of the project as they lacked experience with IT and commercial support can be prohibitively expensive.

The aim of increasing the level of IT skills and use of the internet within community groups has also been successful. The questionnaire indicated that between 328 and over 688 are using the Residents.net computers every week. 93% of the computers are being used to surf the internet and this could mean over 640 people are going online a week.

The vast majority of groups felt that the IT skills of their members had improved since they received the Residents.net computer. Whilst there are some training requests that Volcom need to follow up, in the vast majority of cases the computers have provided an opportunity for people to 'have a go' on a computer in a familiar environment and in this way people's skills and confidence have increased.

The Residents.net project has provided the impetus in several cases for groups to organise training on IT for their members. Many groups have gone on to increase their capacity by acquiring more computers and in some cases switching to a broadband network. The fact that groups have further developed their IT resources beyond the Residents.net project can only be seen as a success of the project in convincing groups of the benefits of Information Technology.

The second aim of creating an online community of groups with their own website has happened in part, but without further facilitation is unlikely to develop further. A website exists which 78% of groups have used. However, nearly half of the groups were not aware of any other Residents.net group and only 10% had either been in touch with or worked with another Residents.net group.

Whilst the Residents.net project has yet to develop a dynamic, vibrant network using the Internet to communicate with each other, many Residents.net groups are using the Internet to contact other groups outside of the network. This part of the project has succeeded in part and the potential exists to further develop this network.

Overall, the groups who have received a Residents.net computer have been pleased with the project and have received many benefits from it; by providing access to a computer and the Internet for over 100 groups across the city, Volcom has supported many people throughout Hull.

LESSONS LEARN'T

The biggest lesson learnt from the Residents.net project is that people are ready and willing to learn informally. In many cases groups have preferred to develop their IT skills in this way and the computer has caused a ripple effect as knowledge has been passed throughout the group. This has been the case when groups have had one or two members already confident and competent using the computer. Learning has occurred almost naturally as they have passed their skills onto other people in the group and helped and encouraged them to use the computer in different ways.

The project has supported informal learning by locating computers in places that are already familiar to people, where they can feel comfortable and relaxed and be supported by people they already know. In this sense the only 'new' thing is the computer itself and this has made it easier for people unfamiliar with or frightened of technology to have a go. Residents.net groups are geographically spread fairly evenly across the city and this is important as most groups work locally and will draw their members from a particular area of Hull. The geographical spread was important to achieve so that no area of the city would be left without computer access and, most importantly, that all areas of the city would be included in the network.

The ripple effect where knowledge was passed on informally from one member to the next worked well when groups had the resources and people to provide this knowledge in the first place. However, in some groups all the members were computer novices with only limited or no experience of using computers. These groups needed external support and the Residents.net project would have worked better if these groups had been more effectively targeted for support from Volcom in the first instance. The groups that had members with IT skills benefited from the technical IT support but were able to get what they needed from the computer without training, although training was of course appreciated by those with IT experience wanting to refresh or develop their skills further.

The Residents.net computers very quickly became well used and in some cases became essential to the running of the group. For those who were at first suspicious of or unfamiliar with the technology the computers also had a myth-busting role, for example people discovered that the internet could have a positive role in a child's education and was not just a dangerous place where paedophiles lurked.

Whilst the groups have not needed much encouragement to use their computers, the Residents.net network has not taken off so easily; more effort and work are needed to get this off the ground. This is in part because the groups have yet to see part of their identity as being a 'Residents.net group' which is part of a network of other Residents.net groups. This in turn reflects the fact that the benefits of being part of an online network have not been so immediate, nor as apparent as the benefits of having access to a computer and the internet. With all other things in place, this is a good time to promote the benefits of being part of the Residents.net network.





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