Get IT Together

Annual Report for Leeds

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Introduction

The Get IT Together Programme

The Get IT Together programme promotes digital inclusion amongst disadvantaged communities. The approach involves a 3-year community development process, managed by a full time coordinator, who works with the local community to:

- Understand the rationale for using ICT and the barriers
- Capacity build and supports local partners
- Plug gaps in provision
- Manage volunteers to support the programme
- Deploy a range of national offerings that support digital inclusion
- Ensure new internet users progress on a learner journey and feel a positive impact from going online.
- Embed the programme in and align with local strategies

Get IT Together has been established in through a national partnership involving BT and Citizens Online, along with key local partners. 24 further national partners support the programme with their complimentary offerings, such as free software, internet safety trainings or specific routes to engagement with those who are offline.

Get IT Together in Leeds

The project in Leeds is a partnership between Citizens Online, BT and Leeds City Council and Voluntary Action Leeds. The work is led locally by Project Coordinator Vic Berry. Other partners that have worked with the project this year include Touchstone Support, Connect Housing, Unity Homes and Enterprise, ENE Homes Leeds, John O’Gaunts Tenants Association and Aire Valley Homes Leeds, LS 14 Digital Lounge, Education Achievement Academy, Ingeus, Burley Lodge Centre (Now known as Better Leeds Communities), Northcall Community Cafe, St. Anne’s Community Support, Drighlington Community Library, Ramgarhia Sport Centre, Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation (BITMO) and Job Centre Plus (Job Clubs).

Objectives

Each of the Get IT Together projects around the country has a specific strategic focus. In Leeds, the focus is to contribute to the worklessness agenda. This will include improving people’s IT skills to help them move closer to employment and to prepare for the Digital by Default element of the welfare reform changes.
Round up of the last year

It has been an enormous challenge to re-energise the existing close partnerships and volunteers as well as promoting the project across the entire city region to develop new partners.

Working with existing contacts during the first part of year involved setting up and delivering some taster session to provide partners and learners with examples of how Get IT Together can assist them. At first this was achieved with borrowing Council equipment and securing the interest of partner agencies to host the first training events. Project led provision was immediately stepped up with Citizens Online providing 5 refurbished Dell Laptop Computers and Mobile WiFi equipment operating on the new G4 network. These taster sessions were then used to attract learners, volunteers and new close partners that were interested in developing more access IT training in the community.

The Job Centres, Job Clubs and Work Programme Providers have been key players in promoting courses to learners in the community. Social housing providers and tenants’ organisations have been very active not only in promoting, hosting, staffing and equipping training events.

By the summer Get IT Together Leeds had developed a strong reputation for reliability and quality so demand for putting on new classes increased so tutors and processing volunteer applications have been out sourced in order to scale up the programme towards the latter part of the year.

Training has been delivered at 21 venues across Leeds (see map below), with partners including Connect Housing, LS14 Digital Lounge and the Burley Lodge Centre.

There have been 49 courses delivered in 2013 which includes over 502 tutor hours spent delivering training. Participant and partner feedback has been overwhelmingly positive throughout.

Get IT Together resources have been the main supporting materials used throughout the year. The range of modular handouts has been invaluable in keeping a wide range of differentiated learners engaged during the sessions.
There were enormous benefits of mobile WiFi and laptop computers to be able to bring IT to community that have been previously digitally excluded. Often where technology was already in place out of date and poorly maintained making some venues located unusable unless mobile equipment could be brought in (examples include Fredrick Hurdle Day Centre and Ramgharia Sports Centre). The Ramgharia Sport Centre venue was used for regular lunch clubs for men and women, separate classes were organised with an Asian tutor who was familiar with 5 commonly spoken languages.

The use of new mobile technology has been a source of inspiration to local social housing providers looking into extending IT access in shelter housing and remote community centres. Leeds Federated Housing has won funding from the Homes and Communities Agency to set up a mobile resources facility. Leeds Housing is extended Internet provision in local centres where there is demand, and hope to link into the Leeds City Council Mobile Information Service. Get IT Together supported the launch of the John O’Gaunt’s tenants Association IT drop-in sessions providing guide book tuition, and volunteer help. A further project is expected to develop in 2014 with a similar project being launched in Cottingley, South Leeds.

Multi-deprivation and lack of skills within target groups, has meant that tutors needed to support people with English has second language, as well find that many on those learner referred through the job centre routes were lacking in basic literacy skills. In addition complicated lives and lifestyles meant that attendance at class was poor. The Leeds project once established as being capable of delivering classes quickly looked at weekly drop-in sessions (Provided at the Digital Lounge and Temple Lawn Community Rooms,), one day intensive classes (delivered at Ingeus and St. Anne’s Community Services as well as structured weekly classes between 5 and 8 weeks (Examples include Connect Housing and Hawksworth Wood Children’s Centre).

This flexible approach to provision has enabled the project to deliver on gap-filling and co-ordinating existing facilities across Leeds. It has also benefitted learners who have a range of requirements and not all can attend or want to attend a regular formal training session.

Promoting the project and marketing specific courses has been primarily through public and voluntary sector agencies themselves. Where possible speaking opportunities e.g. community exhibitions and taster sessions have been used to promote the project and link in with local events.
Examples include BITMO GATE Exhibitions and Taster drop-in sessions, Tenants’ Association meetings at Garthforth and Micklefield as well as a briefing session for front line Council and Third Sector agencies (picture above; Get IT Together Leeds Coordinator, Vic Berry with Hilary Benn MP at the opening of the new BITMO GATE November 2013).

Now after the first year of re-launching Get IT Together Leeds there is a good database of key contacts within the Council, social housing providers, Job Centre Plus and associate contractors is now being maintained. This database provide a way for front line staff to link clients and customers into locally provided community based IT training as well as appropriate volunteering opportunities the project offers. For example Interserve who is responsible for delivering the Work Programme for DWP were able to refer clients to local hosts; housing associations and social enterprises to get basic start up training. This ensured free class spaces could be filled. The best examples of this working in practice were the St. Anne’s Community hosted a summer school by offer the free use of the media suite located in the City centre’s bus station. These one day intensive IT start up class appealed to both job seekers and social housing residents alike and were well attended.

Get IT Together Leeds also provided an opportunity for volunteer development and created employment and career development opportunities. During the year regular volunteer meetings have been held at the Penny Hill Job Shop and Hunslet Library. These have been primarily organised to get volunteer feedback on their experience as well make sure volunteers are fully briefed on policies and procedures as well as guidance on using handouts and web resources.

The meetings have had interesting discussions have included strategies for work with people differentiated learners and tools that can help learners with high support needs, for example people with physical disabilities, or overseas students that have limited English. Above all it the experience that volunteers get in doing this work that improved prospects for made work. All the initial volunteers that started with Get IT Together Leeds in 2012 have gone into work or further training.

In scaling up activities in August and September it was possible to create short term employment opportunities for tutors and learning assistants. So far Get IT Together Leeds has contracted 4 additional tutors; Alan Sanderson, Fareen Hassan, Steve Thompson and Douglas Villegas. Each contractor has either been developing their own consultancy businesses or wish to gain teaching experience (Picture left: Fareen Hasan (right) working with student at Briarsdale Croft, January since this time Fareen in not work part time and is an contracted tutor with the Get IT Together Leeds.
Case Studies

**Touchstone Support** had been loaned Council Laptop equipment under a Libraries Loaning scheme in 2012. The new coordinator reenergized interest in getting online with weekly drop in sessions for both Men and Women that attended single sex support groups. Touchstone is an organisation that supports people with mental health problems. As part of the Digital Unite Week a special event aimed at getting centre users motivating to use main stream IT access points at their local library so they can keep their newly learnt skills fresh.

**Social Housing Providers, Connect Housing and Unity Homes and Enterprise**, worked together with Get IT Together Leeds to several host IT classes for residents and job seekers across the year. As staff and volunteers have gained experience and confidence, Get IT Together have provide model Scheme of Work, Session Plans and printable resources for their own staff and volunteers to use in future classes.

**Educational Achievement Academy open new resources centre for ESOL Students.** Educational Achievement Academy is a social enterprise working in Chapeltown, a demographic with several nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. The Academy had been gifted redundant PCs from Leeds Metropolitan University and had got voluntary help in refurbishing the machines by installing free Linux operating systems. Not only is the new IT suite is an important resource for students attending the centre, Educational Achievement Academy is a practical working example of low cost IT and internet access that can provide a source of inspiration to individuals and small community based organisations. In July 2013 evening classes were delivered for daytime workers want to improve their IT skills. Daytime classes were delivered for those not in daytime jobs and were studying English attending other classes at the centre. Volunteer, Xavier originally from France has been living in Leeds for 20 years was able to demonstrate and explain common difficulties of using English, auto spell checkers and translators.

**Fredrick Hurdle Day Centre** demonstrated that it is never too old to learn new tricks. In July 2013 Get It Together Leeds delivered a series of 3 basic IT classes with the help Day Centre staff, Centre users found the classes challenging but enjoyable and from some participant the classes were a real physical and mental workout. Although staff were familiar with basic IT skills all staff were able learn more about how to support centre users with special needs. All the participants were between the ages of 80 and 90 years of age, below are some of comment about the classes:

“It was marvellous I could see my old garden back in Newcastle and I have not been back there for over 40 years .”

“I really enjoyed reading some of the Ukrainian newspapers in my own language.”

“I know what I am supposed to do with mouse now but my hands and fingers won’t go to where I want them to go”.

**LS14 Digital Lounge** is one of the best community IT access points in North East Leeds, it is open every week Monday to Thursday 10am to 4pm. The Digital Lounge is located in a small shopping parade within the Seacroft Estate. The centre has 9 desk top computers, some laptops, free WiFi, headphones, overhead projector and staff or volunteers on hand to help. A friendly local centre is
located in an area where many cannot afford equipment and struggle to manage chaotic life styles. Get IT Together Leeds has tried contrasting approaches to attempt to engage with hard to reach groups in need. The centre gets constant footfall, Get It Together has ran basic 5 week IT introductions with an emphasis on skills need to seek work such email, registering on employment websites, editing and storing CVs. Although these initial classes were very successful, some of the students were successful in finding work. Attendance and commitment to a regular weekly class for 5 weeks was not accomplished for many students. Working in close partnership with LS14 Trust Get IT Together Leeds is funding an IT one-to-one trainer to run drop-in support sessions from Monday to Wednesday. Students would be given flexibility to complete 4 hours one-to-one support with tutor, Chris Holmes. This pilot ran for 3 months and is being reviewed with of expanding the role of the onsite tutor to lead class for 2014.

**BITMO GATE** is a new established centre. The Belle Isle Estate is managed by a Tenant Management Organisation an extension has been refurbished to form the BITMO GATE which is community room with IT facility WiFi and 4 desktop computers. The new centre hope run a variety community learning project from the centre aimed at up skilling the local community to be ready for the new job being created in the City Centre. Get IT Together support the launch with an exhibition and provide several drop-in sessions during the week after the launch to generate interest in learning how to using the IT facility and learn some basic computer skills. The first course class was successful in bring together trainee volunteers and new tutors. Sessions and class were supported by other agency Leeds Federated Housing provided trainee staff and Union Learn provided a tablet technology session. Volunteer training and experience having an immediate impact on employability, Volunteer Angela Brown was successful in getting a learning support position with Leeds City College.
Looking forward

Planned Project led courses are already in place being advertised among close partner agencies starting January and February. Commissioning of new venues and close partners will be on-going.

For example Get IT Together Leeds courses starting January 2014 are:

- Unity Housing running Get IT Together sessions delivered by housing Staff and Volunteers trained by Citizens Online.
- Tree Tops Community Centre project lead working with Shakti Project providing translation support.
- Dosti Leeds project lead class with for Asian mothers.
- Fairfield Community Centre project led class working with Leeds Housing, Barca, Barnardo’s Family Support.
- Working with Drighlington Community Library and Job Club providing project led IT support sessions for the over 50’s and Job Seekers.
- St. Vincent’s Support Centre project led classes utilising under used computer training room located near the city centre, classes being promoted among Job Centre and Social housing contacts.
- Beeston Parish Centre project led Steve Thompson volunteering consultancy time to launch IT training at a new venue.
- Cow Close Community close partner work classes being run by the communities own volunteers, Get IT Together resources.
- Lovell Park Day Centre working with close partner WEA tutor, and Citizens Online volunteer, Stuart Sirell. The class aimed at centre users.

More sessions are currently being planned at new locations, starting February throughout the year. New agencies and venues are becoming aware of Get IT Together Leeds which is resulting in a continual stream of leads to follow up to assess the feasibility of expanding IT training.

Close Partners that have been involved in the project for some time there is increased confidence to beginning running class with lower levels of support from Get IT Together. Increased capacity within the volunteer team as a result of outsourcing some of the recruitment administration has created the potential to link specific individuals to specific projects or tutors. The challenge will be to continue develop volunteers and partners to help sustain activity after the Get IT Together programme concludes ie. Digital Champions in the community.

Already potential has been identified among volunteers and agencies:

- Unity and Connect Housing Staff
- LS14 Digital Lounge volunteer Chris Holmes is delivering one-to-one support to learners wants to develop his IT training career.
- Citizens Online volunteers that are active and have indicated that wish to develop into trainers; Fareen Hassan, Lucy Potter, are Sarah Kennedy.
- Contracted tutors Steve Thompson and Douglas Villegas are interested in developing training and consultancy services.
- Volunteers at the Northcall Community Cafe are now also interesting in leading course now the Cafe is offering free WiFi and has recently acquired new Window 8 laptops.

New opportunities are emerging to develop close partner agreements with the City Council’s own Mobile Information Service and Leeds Federated Housing mobile resource centre branded and
market as HUGO. The HUGO project funded by the Homes and Communities Agency has attracted high profile attention in the city.

The WiFi network within the Leeds area is being continually expanded. Get IT Together Leeds embeds local options for internet access as part of the Get IT Together training. It is envisaged that local resources and information could be provided together with Leeds Council’s own mapping to local agencies up-to-date information on public internet access points for their clients and customers. Information on low cost internet access options are being researched to ensure hard to reach groups can benefit from increase WiFi coverage.

Developing volunteer skills with own training events is an on-going part of developing skills and sustainability within the project, In January Get IT Together Leeds will setting up a Skype versus Facetime practice session communicate live with Close Partners across the city. The aim of the event to increase Close Partner agencies in using the technology as well as train volunteers in setting up hardware and software to make voice and video calls.
Appendix:
Copies of significant press releases/media and any additional material the PC feels is relevant

Digital Unite Spring Online Week - Getting services users online at Touchstone Support Event

April 2013

Leeds Carers Newsletter - Welfare Benefits are changing, come on “Get IT Together Leeds”

July 2013

Digital by Default News - Get IT Together digital inclusion programme launched in Leeds
http://www.digitalbydefaultnews.co.uk/2013/08/15/get-it-together-digital-inclusion-programme-launched-in-leeds/

Aug 2013