



The Digital Community Project – Report

What and who we are

The Digital Community Project is an initiative of DIT and Hewlett Packard. Together with its partners, the Project's aims are to tackle educational disadvantage through ICT, in Dublin's Inner city, specifically, twelve of the most disadvantaged flat complexes in the state.

These are:

Bridgefoot St.

Charlemont St

Dominick St

Dolphin House

Iveagh Trust

Hardwicke St

Fatima Mansions,

St Teresa's Gardens

Michael Mallin House

O'Devaney Gardens,

Whitefriar St Community

St John Bosco Youth Centre.

The Project differs from other initiatives in that it uses a partnership approach to tackle disadvantage. The partners form the Management Board of the project and meet regularly to discuss and manage the running of the programme. The Board consists of a senior executive from each of the partner's organizations, plus a representative from the community. In addition, the community has a coordinator from each centre who all meet regularly to discuss matters that affect them in running their centres.

The **Partners** are:

Hewlett Packard, who donate all the hardware for the communities e.g. Printers, Computers, Servers, Scanners and Digital Cameras. HP also contributes funding for salary for a full time manager.

Dublin Institute of Technology, who supply staff, premises and Admin facilities. DIT also contributes funding for salaries.

Eircom, provide broadband free of charge to all the centres. In addition, they give on going tech support on connectivity issues.

Digital Hub, provide added technical facilities, Funding for Technical Support and advice on Technology issues.

DICP, contribute funding for salaries as well as valuable advice on community issues.

NCTE, provide funding for our Training Programme.

Dublin City Council, provide the premises for most (ten) of the centres. In some cases a flat or in others a community centre. They refurbish the centres to a very high standard and in addition, provide heat & light, security, insurance, and help with other upgrade costs.

What we do and how we do it:

The project not only provides the hardware required to meet clients' needs. Through our sponsors Microsoft, we also provide a range of high quality software on all PC's. Unlike other projects of this type, we also provide, with funding from The Digital Hub, a full service contract with a three-hour call out for all the centres. This ensures that all the equipment is working all of the time. It also means that our clients have the confidence to go into their own centre knowing the equipment will always be in perfect order. This helps their self esteem in that they know there are being treated the same as business customers and not getting second hand service.

Our training programme also reflects this. We do not run courses with "attendance" certificates as we feel this is countering productive for our clients. Training is in accordance with our Educational Roadmap.

These consist of the following strands:

- Reactive Education, tailoring basic courses to meet the needs of clients
- FETAC Foundation Level,
- FETAC Level 1
- Microsoft IC3, basic skills with both Microsoft and DIT certification

The Digital Community Project's main aim during this year, 2005, was to consolidate the training programme we had started in 2004.

Our core training centres around the Microsoft IC3 Computer course. This involves three modules on basic computing skills. We have been successful in obtaining certification from DIT for this programme which greatly enhances its currency. Students, who complete IC3, now received three ECTS credits, which they can use against any third level course they choose. This enables them to look beyond IT as a career path.

In June President Mary McAleese attended our first graduation in DIT Aungier St. One of our graduates was eighty-four who graduated with both her daughter and her granddaughter! Fifty-eight students received certificates ranging from FETAC foundation level to IC3 plus our successful Teacher Training programme. This programme is delivered by the Teaching and Learning centre within DIT and offers students the opportunity to get a further two ECTS credits on graduation. To date we have fourteen students who have graduated, plus another fourteen who are currently nearing the end of the present course.

The range of course now available in all centres include;

- Basic Computers
- FETAC Foundation Level
- FETAC Level 1
- IC3
- Teacher Training
- Child Care
- Literacy through Clay Animation
- Video editing
- Digital Imaging
- Literacy through Digital Imaging

Our Successes

Currently, we have in addition to the courses listed above, a range of Homework clubs in most centres. A total of approx 245 children attend these clubs on a daily basis. Here they received help with Homework and a range of other school projects. A Total of 1200 people of all ages have gone through our programmes since we started three years ago.

Through our Teacher Training Programme we now have twelve people who have gone through our Programme and are being paid to train their peers within their own flat complexes. This has been a major part of our work.

We have been able for the first time through the ISC fund, to increase resources that have enabled us to provide better training for our IC3 students. In 2004, our average success rate with IC3 students on exams was 18%. This year, 2005, through the increased funding and resources available, we have increased this figure to 48%.

Literacy continues to be a major area of concern for us. To this end, we have worked during the year with the coordinators to find innovative ways of tackling this problem.

We are now introducing a range of initiatives that we feel will show results. These include the Clay Animation courses. Here we train a number of trainers who in turn deliver the Programme in the communities. Participants make figures from clay or mala, these figures are photographed using digital cameras and stored on the computer. The Software then animates the character and speech etc is added, as the student requires. It is early days to show success as yet but we are confident that this system will produce real results.

We feel that the time has now arrived where we must, as a group, demonstrate to our partners that we are looking to the future and not always totally dependent on outside funding. To this end, we have concluded an arrangement with Prodigy, who deliver the IC3 on behalf of Microsoft, that all our centres can be authorized IC3 testing and Training centres. This will give each participating centre an independent revenue stream.

We have put together in each centre, the necessary hardware that will allow us to implement this immediately. Each centre must have three people who have completed IC3 and our Teacher Training Programme. Again our thanks to The Information Society Commission Fund, who have been our main financial sponsors in 2005, without whom this could not have happened.

Two of our centres are experiencing particular problems. These are Dolphin House and Dominick Street. Dolphin House was inactive for quite some months, as the two workers there did not have their CE scheme renewed. However, they have since successfully applied for funding from the Dormant Accounts fund and a full time coordinator is due to start there shortly. Dominick St. has been closed due to the regeneration of the area. The new centre is now almost complete and will be in operation before Christmas. DCC have appointed a full time manager for the centre. This manager, Kathleen Farrell, is one of our students who have gone through our complete Training Programme.

Our model has been adopted in Belfast as part of the Peace Process. We have four centres there, two Loyalist and two Nationalists.

We have also this year, been awarded the European Digital Literacy Championship from Certiport USA. Certiport deliver global certification on behalf of Microsoft. This award was given to us for our unique contribution to tackling Digital Literacy in disadvantaged areas.

MUP

The MUP initiative from Microsoft has added a further three centres to our project, making a total of 17 centres for 2006. Details of the contribution from Microsoft through the MUP Programme are contained in our Investment Proposal Document.

The current position for these centres is that we are awaiting documentation from HP to allow us to take delivery of the hardware. Software etc will be available from our (DIT's) resources and will be installed on the PC's as soon as this documentation is forthcoming. We have already integrated the three centres into our training programme. However, only one centre, Ringsend has so far embraced the training programme fully.

We continue to encourage the other two centres to work with us in delivering training to their communities. We would like to take this opportunity to thank formally, DICP, who have put so much effort into the MUP programme on our behalf.

The three centres incorporated under the MUP programme are:

St Agatha's Community Centre

St Catherine's Community Centre

Ringsend Community Centre

GO Project

The GO (Grangegorman Online) project was a one-year project funded by the Information Society Commission up to 31st December 2005. The centres involved were gateway Arran Quay and Prussian St Community Centre. These two centres have now been incorporated into the Digital Community Project from 1st January 2006. Funding for these centres has already been paid for out of the ISC funds for 2005 and so no additional costs have been incurred with their integration.

By the 31st December 2005, we have fourteen people who have completed our IC3 and Teacher Training Programmes and are working as paid as tutors within their own communities.

Allison O'Keefe is one of these students

Case History

Allison O'Keefe is a typical example of a student who has successfully undertaken the project's training programme.

At our recent IC3 launch in The St John Bosco Youth centre, Allison spoke of her involvement in the project. Her words and her own story are very powerful. Rather than this writer trying to explain what she has achieved we have printed her story here in full unedited.

"My name is Alison, I teach IC3 in Prussia St for the Digital Community Project. I am very pleased to be here today as I myself have been a student and understand how difficult it can be. Having test centres in your own community will be of great benefit.

To give you a bit of background on myself: I finished my education in second year when I was 13. Then my family moved and I went from an all-Irish school in Glasnevin to Florida where I was until I was 16. Even after we came back to Ireland I didn't return to education until 2001. I started a program in Ballybough, which included ECDL, communications, maths and social studies.

In 2003, Peter Byrne visited our group and offered us a place on an IC3 course. We thought this was great, because before that we had thought "do our exams and what do we do now". I started in Hardwicke Street that same year and haven't looked back.

The IC3 course itself included, key applications, computing fundamentals and living online and I can't get enough of it. This year I've passed module 2 and I am now teaching. I have classes of men and women of all ages. For me it's an achievement that I could have only ever imagined.

When you live in a place where people don't think your good enough for anything or because the area you're from has a bad name, people automatically assume, you have no education, no interest in education or a career.

This is where I would like to set the record straight.

I'm an ordinary person, but I do have dreams and goals. I am now achieving more than that.

Its hard to explain, but I wake up everyday happy knowing I'm making a difference in someone's life. I'm showing other women that if I can do this with five children, anyone can. Men and women don't have to settle for "I'm just a Housewife" or "I hate this job".

It makes my day when the students in my class finish up and say "thanks Allison, great lesson and can't wait for next week". I leave those centres with a kick in my step. The support I have is unbelievable, it's like I have a team people behind me in DIT backing me up all the way. There should be more Peter Byrnes and Catherina Behans in this world! They have changed my life in ways they don't even know.

And my family has benefited as well. All my girls are talking about college, and the youngest is only 10. My eldest is also hoping to study law next year, and says part of the reason is because of me telling her that there are so many things you can do with your life if you put the effort in. That has now had a ripple effect on her sisters and it makes me very proud.

I used to think that people looked down on me, but now I know, I'm as good as anyone, and I hold my head high.

I'd just like to thank everyone involved and wish the best of luck to any new students. It's hard work but it pays off in the end."



Allison O'Keefe



IC3 Launch, in St John Bosco Youth Centre

Left to Right:

Dr. Tommy Cooke, DIT, Noel Ahern TD Minister of State, Allison O'Keefe, Digital Community, Prof. Brian Norton, President, DIT

