Digital inclusion, social impact: a research study
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I’ll admit, when they first sat me down in front of the computer I was clueless. But when they showed me how to search and email using myguide, it was as if someone had flicked on a light switch.”
1. Foreword

Soft outcomes, hard facts

Every day, UK online centres across England see the impact of their work on the lives of the socially marginalised or disadvantaged people they work with. They see people sending their first email, downloading their first picture or doing their first internet search. Every day they see those firsts building into a larger picture of increased confidence, decreased isolation and improved quality of life. We wanted to see if those changes could build into hard, measurable and fundable outcomes.

Getting a qualification or a new job are tangible results of ICT use. They weren’t out of scope for the Social Impact Demonstrator projects which formed this study, but neither were they the ultimate goal. The projects set out to achieve two important things: first to explore the correlation between digital inclusion and social inclusion; second to capture and measure the size, shape and ultimately the value of the social impacts ICT can enable.

Until now, the social impact of UK online centres and the digital and personal competence it develops has not been systematically researched. From previous research we know 75 per cent of people counted as socially excluded are also digitally excluded. It follows that action on one front may influence on the other, and this report explores that theme. The argument is convincing: connecting people to technology can connect them to new skills for work and life, information, services, friends and family, conveniences, savings and opportunities. The anecdotal evidence is even more compelling, but by its nature resists accumulation. It’s very difficult to add up the individual ‘soft’ results of digital inclusion into robust, qualitative data.

In this report, ICT-driven social impacts are categorised loosely into three areas, social proficiency – for instance self confidence and/or links with family and friends, cognitive proficiency – improved ICT, literacy and numeracy skills, and finally improved life chances. It is of course the latter that is so difficult to define.

Let’s look at two different cases – an isolated older learner, and a young person with a chaotic home and school life. Formal learning and qualifications aren’t necessarily the right route or outcome for either. But how do we prove learning about computers and the internet has helped them progress from a point A to a point B without a formal framework to assess it, and when points A and B can be so wildly different in each case? And if we can’t quantify it, how do we know it’s taking place or that it’s worth paying for?

Catherine, 72, has lived with Multiple Sclerosis for more than 40 years. Her mother and chief carer died leaving her alone and depressed. With the help of adaptive equipment and a UK online centre tutor in her own home, computers and the internet have helped her make new friends, find new interests and independence, and most importantly find a new enthusiasm for life.

Jessica, just 17, was so shy she couldn’t even get to school most days, let alone stay and learn there. With the help of her UK online centre she’s found new confidence, and being able to communicate via the computer has helped her meet new people and gain the skills she’d missed out on. From an anxious girl, she’s blossomed into a happy and positive young woman thinking about a career in social care.
Soft impacts can lead to recognisable progression and achievements. Jessica is now moving onto further learning and planning her future – but she would never have begun her journey with a qualification in mind or coped with a formal setting. In other cases, like Catherine’s, there isn’t a definite milestone to count. Catherine doesn’t need a qualification nor to build her CV, but her journey has helped her progress with a life that didn’t seem worth living a few months ago, gain the independence to stay in her home and the social connections to start enjoying herself. Measuring the value of that impact is practically impossible.

This is an attempt to quantify soft outcomes, and put a structure of evaluation over what is essentially – or at least traditionally – a qualitative study. Measuring social impact isn’t easy, but it’s vital if we are to take forward the Government’s vision for digital equality and informal learning. We need to establish a value for more general and soft skills, and provide new ways of proving they can build into something employers, communities, and the country as a whole can benefit from.

Increased confidence, social participation and improved quality of life are not just difficult to quantify, they also often involve personal attention and long-term intervention. The ability to adapt curriculums to different people’s interests was vital in engaging these target audiences, as was the ability to address their complex social problems holistically. For all 20 very different projects, this meant establishing strong relationships with communities, community intermediaries and individuals. When it comes to social impact, it is clear there are no quick fixes. Yet even over the relatively short duration of these demonstrator projects, the aggregated evidence shows some positive results. The percentages may not be huge, but the direction of travel is highly suggestive.

Most notable is the recorded increase in general self-confidence, wider engagement with the local community and increased use of public services. Also significant is the reduced anxiety about education and qualifications, and the very positive progression results recorded for people with mental health problems. For many, this has been a life changing experience, and some of those personal testimonials, re-featured in this report. They are of course just the tip of the iceberg.

These projects were not about the low-hanging fruit – those on the cusp of engagement – but about making a deep impact on seriously marginalised individuals. Over the course of this study, it’s estimated more than 12,000 ‘excluded’ people took part in the projects. Breaking that down by the total value of the funding, that’s around £163 per head to reach and support each individual. I’d encourage you to think about that £163 as you read Catherine and Jessica’s stories in more detail, and judge for yourself if the results on their lives have been worth the cost of intervention.

For me, these projects have done what they said on the tin; they’ve demonstrated social impact. They’ve also established models of effective engagement and local partnership, and they’ve indicated how social impacts can in fact be measured and counted.

This research is only a first step. What we need now is a substantial longitudinal study which can examine whether the gains in cognitive and social skills reported here lead, over time, to even more significant improvements in social cohesion, civic participation, and life chances. If we can make soft outcomes yield hard facts we can prove – once and for all – the connection between digital inclusion and social impact.

Helen Milner
Managing Director
UK online centres
2. Introduction

In September 2006, the Cabinet Office launched its Social Exclusion Action Plan. The plan set out the actions to be taken across government to improve the life chances of those caught in a cycle of social, financial, and aspirational disadvantage. Also announced in the plan was a £2 million grant for UK online centres, funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

The Social Impact Demonstrator grants were for UK online centre-led projects working in partnership with other community organisations to reach socially disadvantaged people and engage them in ICT activities. The projects test the hypothesis that becoming competent and confident in using computers increases personal and social confidence and reduces social exclusion. They also establish models of best practice for finding, motivating and progressing some of the hardest to reach groups in society. These were identified as families in poverty, older people, those supporting children in care, teenage parents and those at risk of pregnancy, and adults with mental health issues.

The 20 projects were picked by a panel of judges, including representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors. They were looking for innovation in both engagement strategies and the use of ICT, strong and relevant community partnerships, and quality, not just quantity, of participation.

More than 150 UK online centres were involved in delivering the 20 Social Impact Demonstrator projects, which ran for up to fifteen months from January 2007 to March 2008. The nature of the different projects was intentionally varied, but all were designed to get people online for the first time and help them learn new skills, connect with their communities and interact with public services. Models included outreach initiatives, home access pilots and home delivery, group sessions and one-to-one tuition. All the projects collected data about their visitors and programmes, using a research structure designed by Ipsos MORI.

This report brings together those research findings with qualitative evidence from each project, and some more in-depth insights into the findings and experiences of individual projects.

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“I never thought just a few months ago that I’d be so at home with computers, or have so much more confidence. I love being a Mum but I’ve also loved finding a bit of me that was there before (the kids) came along.”
3. The projects

3.1 Profile:
Aberfeldy Neighbourhood Centre

The Aberfeldy UK online centre is in Tower Hamlets and serves the deprived Aberfeldy Estate, which includes Bangladeshi, Somali and refugee communities. The project targeted families, who took part in an eight week course at the centre. Four weeks in, social enterprise partner Digibridge provided people with a recycled computer and internet connection at home, and volunteers paid them a home visit once a week to help the families make the most of the technology. The equipment remained with the families after completion of the project. People were taken through the basics of ICT, and introduced to government e-services and family resources online.

Project insights:

- 66% of centre-based participants progressed and 87% of home-supported participants progressed onto further training or employment
- 84% of centre-based participants and 97% of home-supported participants said the internet had made a difference to their lives
- 63% of centre-based participants and 97% of home-supported participants are now confident in using online public services
- 85% of centre-based and 94% of home supported participants are continuing to use the internet
- 44% of centre-based and 56% of home-supported participants paid to keep broadband running in their homes after the initial six months
- 84% of participants were unemployed, 77% in social housing and 39% with no formal qualifications.
- The family learning computer club was particularly well-received and well attended.
Rubi, 25, is mum to six year old Rasul and three and a half year old Saif. She says: “Since I left school six or seven years ago, I’ve spent most of my time being a full-time wife and mother. Now my family is growing. I want to start looking for a job. The problem is that to do anything at all these days you need to know how to use computers – especially if you want a job that fits in around school hours. “Even though Rasul and Saif are so small they’re more familiar with computers than I am! Already Rasul comes home with homework, and we do his spelling words together. I can see a day coming very soon when having a computer at home is going to be important for his schoolwork, and I want to be able to understand what he’s doing and help him along.

“I did use computers a bit when I was at school, but that seems a very long time ago now! I’d never been on the internet before, but you hear everywhere about all these new online services.”

All of these things were on Rubi’s mind when she saw an advert for the UK online centres scheme at Aberfeldy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. She adds: “The Aberfeldy Neighbourhood Centre has a crèche, so I didn’t have to worry about finding childcare. It made it all so easy there was no excuse not to do it! I was very nervous at first, because for so long I’ve just been in the routine of being a mum and I wasn’t sure I could still learn things! Our tutor put everyone at ease, though. Soon everyone was getting along really well and we were all having fun, chatting away and helping each other out. There were lots of mums there like me, and lots of Asian and Bangladeshi women, so I felt really comfortable.

“Since I started the class I’ve just learned so much. I’ve done word processing, and spreadsheets, and learned about the internet and email for the first time. I’ve even got my own email account, so now I’m emailing my friend in India instead of having to write to her by hand. Typing saves so much time and I can spell check it all and set it out right. I’m now also using internet banking which saves me going to the bank.

“We’ve been and looked at all sorts of information on all sorts of sites, from search engines, to family benefit stuff on Directgov, to kids’ games on CBeebies! On a Wednesday we bring the children in with us and play on the computers with them. They love it! It’s great to be able to use what we’re learning with them, and for them to see what we’re doing.

“As well as websites, the class has also covered some computer security things so you can block off certain websites, and make sure you’re safe from viruses. We’ve also looked at financial information and budgeting – how to use price comparison sites so you can find the best deals and manage your money. With the help of the centre I’ve also typed up a new CV, with all my new skills on it. I feel so much more confident now about finding a job, and I’m starting to look for office work on lots of job websites.

“I never thought just a few months ago that I’d be so at home with computers, or that I’d have so much more confidence. I love being a mum, but I’ve also loved finding a bit of me that was there before Rasul and Saif came along. I have a very bubbly personality and that’s coming out again now, and I feel like I’ve found a bit of myself again that maybe I’d lost for a while.”
3.2 Profile:

**Age Concern Leeds**

This project focussed on over 60s who were unable to attend classes, for instance those with mental health issues, or those unwilling or unable to leave their homes. There were two strands of the project – mobile IAG and home delivery. The first strand saw the team visit local care homes and talk to people about how computers and the internet could help them in everyday life, demonstrating how to fill in online forms and giving information, advice and guidance. The second strand saw a member of the team delivering training in the home environment, and provided 18 computers and internet connections for participants in receipt of benefits, plus connection to an online environment where they could communicate with peers and carers.

**Project insights:**

- 79 people took part in centre based courses
- 21 people were supported in community venues or in their own homes
- Outreach was vital in reaching and motivating older people, and equipment was installed at four community venues
- Peer to peer learning has proved particularly effective, and an informal self-help group has developed so people with a little more experience with computers and the internet are helping less experienced users.
Case study:
Catherine’s story

Catherine was a young teacher when her life was taken over by Multiple Sclerosis. As the illness progressed, she ended up back home being cared for by her mother, and becoming increasingly dependent on her help. When her mother died not long ago, Catherine, 72, was left devastated and at a complete loss. She was introduced to the UK online centre at Age Concern Leeds by the Age Concern Mental Health Team.

Catherine explains: “I found it very difficult to get myself going again after my mum died. I had a home visitor from Age Concern in Leeds who came round to help me to cope, and he kept saying I should go out and learn about technology, but it just seemed too daunting. I was very upset about the death of my mother, and the last thing I wanted to do was think about learning something so alien to me. I hadn’t done any sort of learning since I gave up my teacher training way back in the fifties, and I just didn’t see the point of starting.

“But the Age Concern visitor kept encouraging me, so eventually I agreed to have a go. The next week Mark, the tutor, came to my house and sat down with me to teach me all the basics. I’d never used a computer in my life, so I didn’t have a clue where to start. I also found using a mouse quite difficult, so Mark gave me a different type – a roller-ball mouse – and that made a difference. For the first few weeks we concentrated on getting to know how to use the mouse and the keyboard. What made it even harder was because of my MS I have double vision, which really slowed me down. It took some perseverance with the optician and four new pairs of specs – but I got there!”

But despite Catherine’s difficulties, she persevered and within weeks she had moved on to word processing, emailing and using internet search engines, and even instant messaging.

“Learning how to use email and the internet changed my life completely,” says Catherine. “Suddenly, I seemed to have no time to do anything else. Because of my MS I find it very difficult to get about, when I do go out I have to get taxis everywhere so it’s very expensive. Because of that, I didn’t go into the UK online centre at Age Concern, but I met many other ladies who used it by getting to know them on email. Age Concern gave me a list of ladies from the centre and I emailed them all and became friends with many of them. I did ask Mark if there were any nice men there, but unfortunately not!

“It’s also a way of finding out things I’d never have been able to find before. I recently had to go to the hospital to see about choosing an electric wheelchair. As I got home I found the hospital website, and then learned all about the different types of wheelchair and what they could do – it was so interesting. That spurred me on to look up other things – I have to eat a gluten-free diet, so I looked up lots of new recipes. Now, I know I can look things up whenever I want, and all from my own home, giving me a freedom that I hadn’t had for a long time.

“Learning something so new to me has been my greatest achievement,” she says. “When people talked about computers, I couldn’t imagine what on earth they saw in them. Now, because I know how to use them, my life is so busy. I hardly ever watch TV anymore because there’s so much I can do on the computer. I think it’s wonderful, and it really has opened up a whole new world to me.”
3.3 Profile:
Age Concern Newcastle

The Get up and Go project involved five Age Concern UK online centres across Newcastle. Programmes were tailored for each area and community to provide a responsive, supported introduction to computers and the internet. The idea was to create a new curriculum and good practice guide for working with older people, and individual grants were given to different groups to develop their own programmes and ideas. The project also produced a learning resource pack for tutors, and raised awareness about the issues facing older people and how technology can be harnessed to tackle them.

Project insights:

- 984 people were engaged through the project
- The project developed a successful template for consortium working between local Age Concern organisations
- The team established a successful model of ICT engagement with older people, from confidence building to social interaction, information, new skills and new opportunities
- The project stimulated general volunteering at Age Concern centres
- An Older People’s Strategic board is working with Newcastle and Northumbria Universities to continue to track social impact on older people.
Tina is 77 years-old and has beaten depression by learning how to use computers and the internet at the Age Concern UK online centre in Sunderland. Over the past five years Tina, who used to work as a technician in a hospital kidney unit, has lost her husband and has been recovering from breast cancer.

She says: “Losing a loved one and having a serious illness are two very difficult experiences, and having to go through both in such a short space of time hit me really hard. I didn’t want to go out, I didn’t want to do anything or see anyone. I was in the house all the time and literally climbing the walls. My two daughters said I had to go out and meet my friends, but they were all in the cemetery. It was a very lonely time.

“Then my family suggested that I speak to Age Concern and ask if they had any courses I could do. At first, I was very nervous and apprehensive. I left school at 14 years of age and hadn’t done any formal learning since then. My parents were quite old-fashioned and didn’t think girls needed an education, so I worked as a shop assistant. I felt quite daunted about learning something new. But, once I’d started the class, I made lots of friends – four in particular – and now I thoroughly enjoy it!

“Through the UK online centre ‘Get up and Go’ sessions, I’ve done desktop publishing, family tree research and an introduction to the internet – learning how to do searches and send emails. I’ve learned how to email and even done some shopping online – something I never dreamed I’d be able to do. It means you don’t have to spend lots of time queuing up and battling the crowds so it’s really convenient. There’s just so much computers can help you do – like writing letters to friends and making spreadsheets to keep track of your finances. I’ve became particularly interested in family history, and I’m using the internet to search for information and I’ve even created a database to record what I find.

“Family history is absolutely fascinating, and during my research I’ve found some lovely surprises! One of my ancestors actually has a portion of the moon named after him – it’s amazing! I just had no idea that there was a slice of space out there connected to me.

“I can honestly say that going in to the Sunderland UK online centre was the best thing I’ve ever done. I feel brighter and better in myself, and I’m certainly not lonely or down in the dumps anymore. My friends and I can ring each other and arrange to meet at the drop-in computer classes. I’m always at the UK online centre or one of the local libraries doing research into my family history. Now I’m not just sat at home all the time, and my children have to give me a ring and arrange a slot in my busy schedule! That’s a huge change from just a few months ago when I barely left the house. I’m very proud about what I’ve achieved. I’d recommend learning about computers to anyone – even complete beginners and technophobes. It’s never too late to learn and it could change your life – for the better.”

“I feel brighter and better in myself, and I’m certainly not lonely or down in the dumps anymore.”
3.4 Profile:

The Association of Bristol Community Learning Centres – led by CSV Avon

The Association of Bristol Community Learning Centres is an unincorporated association of six UK online centres in Bristol – CSV Avon, CSV Media, Future Learning CIC, St Werburgh’s Community Association, Bristol Wireless Ltd. and the Malcolm X Centre. The project saw more than 50 homes receive computers, software and wireless internet access over the course of 15 months. It also gave the centres the opportunity to expand their capacity to include additional laptops, an interactive whiteboard and development workers to deliver sessions to different groups in different locations. Target groups were engaged in a wide range of online activities including the use of government e-services, family history and health care sessions, and even new media and community radio projects.

Project insights:

- The installation of home computers and internet access benefitted both parents and children, who started to learn together. Parents often became more involved with their children’s school work and education.
- The community media strand led by CSV Media was highly successful in engaging hard to reach groups in both technology and in the Bristol community. Three community groups produced their own radio programmes, one participant now has their own show, and others have formed production teams who also broadcast regularly.
- The project has developed new partnerships and solidified old ones, including with the DC10 Pus project and Connecting Bristol.
- The work has contributed to the development of a new project in Bristol which is being implemented in partnership with Bristol City Council, Future Learning and Bristol Wireless.
Case study:
Gavin’s story

A death in his family meant that Gavin left school without qualifications, but he worked his way up to a management position in the Civil Service. While he’d used ICT in his everyday working life, a spell of unemployment led Gavin to look for a formal ICT qualification. He discovered CSV Avon Training UK online centre, and they suggested he give the computers a go and do an assessment to see where his ICT skills were. With their help, he’s now enrolled onto an ITQ 3 course at the local college, and he’s still at the UK online centre getting extra support for his course and volunteering to help others get to grips with computers.

Gavin explains: “The jobs I’ve done have all been word of mouth. I’m forty years-old and I’ve never applied for a job. I just had no confidence. When you (apply for a job) with the Civil Service the first page is all about your qualifications and when you’re like me and you’ve got no formal qualifications, you’ve got no confidence in filling out the form. I’m very good at meeting people face-to-face and explaining what I’ve done… but when it comes to putting it down on paper I’m not good because I’ve never had to do it. Coming here has been of great benefit – people actually giving me the confidence to do it. With this qualification I would be qualified to do an HEO job – Higher Executive Officer, and that’s what I’m hoping it will lead to.”

“I’ve never had to do it. Coming here has been of great benefit – people actually giving me the confidence to do it.”
3.5 Profile:  
**Depaul Trust working with Newcastle Clubhouse**

The Depaul Trust working with Newcastle Clubhouse supports people from a homeless background and those living with the effects of mental illness. ICT has become an important part of what they do, helping people gain new skills, research hobbies and interests, develop coping strategies and routines to manage their lives and begin to re-integrate with the community. The project also helped clients gain accredited Literacy, Numeracy and Citizenship qualification as part of the Skills Choice programme which was created for the Social Impact Demonstrator programme. The project also saw partnerships set up with other community centres and groups, including the Rathbone Felling centre, which deals with young people who have dropped out of the education system, and MPC North, a training centre which helps prepare young people for a career in the Army.

**Project insights:**

- Partnership with Sunderland University enabled PGCE students to become volunteers in the project and gain teaching hours as part of their course.
- 63 learners gained 120 qualifications at Entry Level 3 to Level 2.
- 95 learners with mental health issues benefited from the programme. 38 moved onto further training, voluntary work placements, employment or other defined progression routes, and 45 said their confidence and self esteem had increased as a result of their participation.
- 81 teenagers at risk benefited from the programme, most with skills levels below Level 1. Half went on to further training, voluntary work placements, employment or other defined progression routes.
- The success of the project has enabled alternative funding for informal learning for the next three years.
Crippling shyness meant that seventeen year old Jessica had a very difficult time at school. Her attendance was sporadic and she fell behind with her learning. When she was first referred onto the Rathbone Felling centre she was still very nervous and found new people and places very difficult. Gradually she’s gained not just new skills and qualifications but new confidence and new friends at the centre.

“I didn’t like school, I kept running away,” says Jessica. “Because I left school early I had to go to Connexions, a service which offers advice to young people. They told me about the UK online centre at Rathbone so I decided to go and see what it was like.

“I thought it would be like school so I was nervous. But it was alright, it wasn’t like school at all. I didn’t have to wear a uniform or be in a lesson with lots of other people. I could work at my own pace and I didn’t have to work with other kids. Elaine taught me for everything so I didn’t have to keep changing teachers all the time, and I really like Elaine. She’s worked with me ever since I started the programme and I know that I can trust her and go to her with any problems I have.

I think school just doesn’t suit everyone. I felt much more comfortable at the centre, and because I wasn’t so nervous I could think better, and I could get to know people.”

Jessica started off on a tailored Preparation for Progression course, and her attendance improved with her confidence. She successfully completed the course and moved on to tackle some of the subjects she’d missed out on by missing school – ICT, English and Maths.

“I really like English, that’s my favourite subject,” says Jessica. “I like to write, about anything at all really. For my most recent writing assignment I wrote about my boyfriend. Because I know him I found it quite easy to write, and that essay helped me to pass my Adult Literacy Entry 3 course.”

As well as progressing well with her studies, Jessica is enjoying an active social life and her confidence continues to grow daily. I’ve got lots of friends here now,” she says. “I didn’t have many friends at school because I just couldn’t talk to anybody. Here I can be me, and I’m not so afraid of people any more. All the tutors are really nice and friendly, and I feel lots happier. I didn’t know about emails until I came here, and I really enjoyed learning what to do. Now I can keep in touch with all my centre friends by email, which is good because I can just chat away using the keyboard.”

“I’d like to go to college once I’ve finished at the Rathbone centre. I don’t know exactly what I want to do there yet, but I’d definitely like to carry on learning. I’d maybe like to do something in health and social care. I’d quite like to look after old people – even help them with ICT and help them get online. I know from my own experience that using computers and the internet can really open up the world for people, and I’d like to help other people do that.

“Coming to the centre has really helped me and I feel able to look forward now. Before I couldn’t cope with thinking too far ahead because it made me scared. Now I’m so much happier and I’m much braver too. It’s like it’s made everything in my life easier. Jessica recently won a UK online centres Award for her achievements. “I was so shocked that I’d won an award,” she says.
3.6 Profile:

Destinations@Saltburn

Destinations@Saltburn is located in an area of the Tees Valley that lies between the urban areas around Redcar and Guisborough and the rural area of East Cleveland. The project worked closely with the University of Teesside, other UK online centres, schools, the emergency services and groups such as the Prince’s Trust in order to develop community links and engage with target groups. The programme was designed to supply a range of activities both at the centre and other outreach venues. The focus was on overcoming social isolation – amongst teenagers, older people and families in poverty, and there was a strong emphasis on using new media to engage and motivate those groups. Outputs include ‘digital villages’ which have been set up to help people communicate ideas, share community resources and keep in touch across the Saltburn area.

Project insights:

- The digital village concept has been popular and successful, with three digital village communities receiving funding to continue the work of the project.
- 91% of participants agreed that being part of a digital village has been of value.
- Groups have effectively used new technologies to find and use a collaborative voice – for instance a local campaign against the development of Greenfield sites and a local MIND group using digital video and radio to explain their work and objectives.
- Volunteers who have benefited from the project are now contributing to continuing activities.
- Technology has been the ideal medium to develop intergenerational activities and understanding, and successful relationships have been developed with several local schools.
- Partnership working has been instrumental in developing and delivering all aspects of the project.
Case study:
John’s story

John, aged 73, is just about to begin his second ICT course at Destinations@Saltburn, and he’s a huge convert to technology. He says: “Over the last few years I began to notice that when reading articles in the newspaper or magazines, there are fewer addresses and telephone numbers for contact information – everything points you towards a website. I had no idea how to go about using the internet or emails and began to feel I was being left behind. I knew nothing about technology. My only experience of it had been specific equipment used during my working life.

“Destinations @ Saltburn is an internet café and I used to go in there to drink coffee. There was always a lively atmosphere with people doing all kinds of things on computers. I got chatting to Carol and Sue who work there, and they suggested that I sign up for a course. I was a little nervous at first because it was all so new. But the staff were very helpful and gave me all the time and help I needed to get the most from the course.

“The course taught me all about the terminology, how to get started and find your way around a computer – all of which was totally new to me. It took me a little while but eventually it all started to become clear and my confidence just grew and grew. Before long I was also learning how to send and receive emails, use the internet, create zip files and basic word processing documents. It even covered the basics of spreadsheets.

“Being retired, I didn’t need computer skills to help me get a job, but I was very keen to make sure I wasn’t left behind. At my age I don’t want to be bothered with exams and I don’t need a qualification for my CV – I just want to understand what everyone else is talking about and be able to participate in the age of technology. Nowadays the internet is a first port of call for anyone looking for information. It was important to me to be able access that information, particularly as we live in a part of the country that’s quite rural. It can be a long way to the nearest convenience and with computers you can keep connected practically anywhere. You can get your shopping delivered, get your pension, look at your bank account and all sorts. In fact it’s getting to the point where if you’re not up to speed you’re left out, and I didn’t want that to happen to me.

“I’m not afraid of technology any more and I can’t wait to start my new course. When you get older and stop working sometimes your world shrinks down. Computers and the internet can open it back up again, and I for one am a huge fan.”
3.7 Profile:
EngAGE – Cambridgeshire Library Learning Services

The EngAGE project was delivered by a partnership consisting of Cambridgeshire County Council Libraries and Adult Services, Age Concern and Cambridge Housing Society. The courses were aimed at local residents aged 50 plus with little or no experience of using computers and the internet. Various outreach programmes were established at local libraries across the county, residential homes and sheltered housing schemes. The project also engaged peer to peer mentors to help deliver the sessions, and made use of care staff and trusted intermediaries in order to drive and support participation.

Project insights:
- 797 people were engaged through the project, 496 of whom were using the internet for the very first time
- Strong partnerships were developed with Age Concern and Cambridge Housing Society, helping the project deliver in isolated and community locations
- The EngAGE volunteer programme was a great success and has given the project sustainability
- 779 people progressed onto further learning, advice and guidance or other opportunities
- The project was able to contribute towards its local authority’s Local Area Agreement – for instance 227 people were given initial assessments for Skills for Life and progressed onto relevant courses.
Case study: Carol’s story

Carol, aged 69, suffered a stroke a couple of years ago and now lives in sheltered housing. As a visitor to Whittlesey Library, she heard about the EngAGE project at the library’s UK online centre. She decided to go along, and hasn’t looked back since. From getting her new tax disc online to looking up new recipes, researching her flat green bowling hobby to keeping in touch with her nephew in Canada, computers and the internet have become an important part of her life.

Carol says: “I don’t think some people realise that the internet gets you out and about more – you’ve got all the world’s information at your fingertips and you find all sorts of new hobbies you want to explore. My life is so different now – I feel brand new, like my life’s going in a completely different direction. Many retired people like me are always looking for something new in their lives because they aren’t able to do the things they used to do when they were younger.

Learning how to use the internet has been so liberating for me – it’s wonderful, I’ve got a new skill and I’ve made so many new friends since I’ve been going to the UK online centre. The internet has really opened my eyes to new possibilities and has given me so much confidence to go out there and try new things.”

“The internet has really opened my eyes to new possibilities and has given me so much confidence to go out there and try new things.”
3.8 Profile:
Everton Development Trust
– Keep in Touch Project

The Everton Development Trust is a drop-in UK online centre based in one of the poorest parts of Liverpool. Their Social Impact Demonstrator project focused on older people, and saw them taking tutors and equipment out to venues including social clubs, OAP associations and residential homes. After careful venue research and initial recruitment sessions, they set up an ADSL internet connection for the duration of the courses at each venue. Content was focussed on demystifying ICT and demonstrating ways of keeping in touch with friends, family, government and the local community, and subjects ranged from email to digital photography, e-government services to local history. A key partnership was developed with CDS Housing, a sheltered housing scheme for older people in the area.

**Project insights:**
- 480 participants took part in the project
- 89% of participants completed their course
- 5% went on to buy their own PC and internet connection
- 200 tenants in CDS Housing have gained free, permanent wi-fi, with a computer installed in every block of CDS sheltered housing in the city as a result of the project.
Joining the Keep in Touch computer course at their local social club has broadened the horizons of husband and wife John and Marie from Liverpool. John says: “All our friends and family appeared to have an email address apart from us, but to be quite truthful, we didn’t really know what an email address was! We both enrolled on the computer course and quickly realised that knowing how to use a computer can really help your everyday life. We’re keen gardeners and we told the EDT trainers that we were really interested in growing vegetables, but we needed to know more about it. So, they showed us how to search for information over the internet – you can find just about anything on there!”

Marie was thrilled to learn how easy it was to keep in touch with far flung friends and family via email. “Writing a letter to someone takes so long, but I was amazed to find out that you could send an email to someone in America and the same email to someone near home, but they’ll both arrive at the same time! It’s made it much easier to keep in touch with our friends.

John concludes: “Keep in Touch has given us the confidence to go onto a computer and find whatever information we need. In fact, we are so proud of what we have achieved, our certificates have pride of place in the glass case in the living room!”

“we are so proud of what we have achieved, our certificates have pride of place in the glass case in the living room!”
3.9 Profile:
Friends Centre Brighton

The Friends Centre Social Impact Demonstrator project was led by the Friends Centre and was a partnership involving five other organisations: The Hangleton and Knoll Project (HaKIT), a UK online centre and community development project; Tarner Neighbourhood Management Team; Sussex Community Internet Project; Phoenix Community Centre; and Tarner Wireless Internet Group. There were three main areas of work. The first was to develop and support free internet access in five Tarner community centres for local residents. The second was to develop a flexible and responsive learning programme in Tarner, Hangleton and Knoll to support residents in getting online. The final strand was to help develop local residents’ groups that would be able to take forward the project once funding had ended. That saw the centres taking equipment out into community groups and embedding ICT into their routine.

**Project insights:**
- 363 people were engaged through the project
- The project brought new community partnerships together to tackle digital exclusion
- Volunteering was particularly important in the project, providing progression opportunities for local people and helping improve the sustainability of the project and individual groups
- 23% of participants were unemployed – with 19% being unemployed for six months or over
- 15% of participants were disabled
- 30% needed help with basic skills.
Mike, 60, spent the last six years as a full-time carer for the daughter of a close friend. Sophia had been diagnosed with ME, and after battling with the severely debilitating illness for several years she passed away, aged just 32.

“Sophia’s mum had battled with doctors and health professionals for years over the correct treatment for her daughter,” says Mike. “When Sophia died, her mum felt that there was a lot of misinformation being given about ME, and Sophia’s case in particular, and she desperately wanted to set up a website that would give her a voice.”

Before becoming a carer for Sophia, Mike had spent much of his working life as an interior decorator. The internet was a complete mystery, and he had no idea how to go about adding his own pages to it.

When he discovered that his local community centre, the Phoenix Centre, was offering free IT courses and internet access, Mike jumped at the chance to find out more. He went down and met tutor David, and explained what he wanted to do. Mike continues: “David was incredibly helpful. He gave me lots of information and that kick-started me into learning more. He was always there to support me and point me in the right direction, and with his help I was able to learn how to create a simple website. It was a slow process. From going into the UK online centre for the first time to the website going live was about nine months, but with David’s help I persevered and eventually got the website up and running.”

Mike’s dedication and determination to succeed with his website didn’t go unnoticed, and within a few months David asked if he would consider volunteering at the centre to help others get to grips with IT. “I was going into the centre two or three times a week to work on the site and use the free broadband, and while I was there I was happy to pass on what I was learning to other people,” explains Mike. “I jumped at the chance to make it a bit more official – I really wanted to get involved in the local community and get people talking to each other.

“It’s a joy to watch people’s faces when you can explain very simply what a computer is and what it can do for them. You take that fear away. The emphasis is on getting people to learn at their own pace, not just thrusting information down their throats, which is how teaching should be. Giving people free access to information gives them the tools they need to make improvements within their lives, and it’s fantastic to be involved with that.

“Going into the centre has made a massive difference to my life. Creating the website for Sophia, and then going on to be able to pass on the knowledge I’ve learned gives me so much joy. The website is going to expand, and I’m going to make it interactive, so other people can put up information about what they’ve been through, and share comfort and advice. I went into the centre to create the website for Sophia and her mum, and as well as achieving that I’ve made new friends, I’ve learned new skills, and I’ve become involved with the local community.”
3.10 Profile:
The Grimsby Institute

North East Lincolnshire is a rural area, and many older residents are isolated in small communities with poor public services or transport links. The Social Impact Demonstrator project allowed the Institute to link up with local organisations to reach out to older people in their rural communities. Dedicated tutors ran sessions at venues including local libraries, village halls, and community centres. They made use of the ICT equipment already available, and encouraged local residents to make use of it, and find out how using computers and the internet could improve or enhance their lives. Courses ranged from one-off taster sessions to short programmes so people could try out the technology, gain confidence and progress at their own pace.

**Project insights:**
- 348 people were engaged in the project
- 15 local libraries delivered the project
- 87% of participants surveyed after the project said they now had the skills to access online services confidently
- 72 people progressed onto information advice and guidance sessions or further learning
- 96% of library staff felt it would be beneficial for library users to have ongoing supported access to technology.
Case study: Ken’s story

It seemed to 72 year old Ken that everywhere he turned there were references to the internet, websites and e-mail, and he suspected there was a whole virtual world he was missing out on. He’d tried a computer course before, but had been put off because it wasn’t really suitable for complete beginners. When he found out about a course in computers and the internet at Louth, he decided to give it another go.

Ken says: “The course was excellent, it made everything seem so simple and started with the basics. Laura, the tutor, was outstanding. She had this way of not making you feel like an idiot or using technical terms. We’ve never heard of the long words, especially the elderly people. She really put everyone at their ease. Because I’d never used the internet before I had a real fear of doing something wrong, or pressing the wrong button, but thanks to Laura now I know it doesn’t matter. I really can’t speak highly enough of her, and of the course.

“Now that I’ve seen just how easy it is, and how much I can do, I’m going to get myself a new computer at home and get linked up to broadband. It can make such a difference to your life, especially if you live in an isolated area like us. I can drive at the moment, but I might not be able to in three or four years and we still need to do our shopping. Now I know how to use the internet I can do all that online.”

“It (the internet) can make such a difference to your life, especially if you live in an isolated area like us.”
3.11 Profile:
Harold Tomlins Centre

The Harold Tomlins Centre is one of eight sites managed by Chester Aid to The Homeless (CATH). It provides services including food, bathing and clothing provision, medical services, resettlement advice and a full education and training programme. The centre works primarily with the homeless, those with mental health issues, ex-offenders, and those with drug and alcohol problems. A five point plan – Living and Learning with CATH – was developed as part of the project, focusing on independent living and job search goals. All five stages involved ICT use, from creating an email address to building a CV, learning how to search for places to live and jobs online right through to skills checks and the chance to take formal qualifications.

Project insights:
- 88 homeless people took part in the project, and 75 had mental health issues
- The internet provided a structure that was otherwise missing in people’s lives – eg an email address for personal and official correspondence
- The autonomy of surfing helped to improve client’s skills, mental and physical stability
- The use of new social networking technologies to contact old friends has a positive impact on people re-integrating with society
- 80% of participants progressed to further learning or advice and guidance
- 91% of participants went on to a planned move into alternative accommodation.
Just eighteen months ago, father-of-two Shaun, 39, had hit rock bottom. Following the breakdown of his marriage Shaun became depressed and turned to drink and drugs, and ended up losing his job and his home. After stays in numerous hostels, Shaun found himself at the door of Harold Tomlins Day Centre. For Shaun, it was a chance at a new start.

He says: “When I first went in to the centre, I really was about as low as I could go. My marriage and my family meant everything to me, and losing that just made me lose myself. I started drinking heavily to blot it all out, and when that didn’t make it any better I started taking drugs. The team at the centre worked with me to try and get me to understand where I was, and why, and what I actually wanted to do about it. I was also introduced to the UK online centre, and it was then things started looking better. "I’m now on track for an access course at college, and my goal is that it will enable me to study history at university – which is pretty unbelievable really. I honestly never thought I’d say this, but I love learning new things. At first, it was just a case of distraction – a bit of an escape, I reckoned – now it’s more like a guiding light.

“The thing is, you can’t hide from things. You can’t hide from learning just because you didn’t like school, and you can’t hide from your mistakes, no matter how hard you try. I’d dug myself into a hole I couldn’t get out of, and I didn’t know where to turn. I’d lost my wife and my home, but I think what hurt the most was that I’d lost my kids’ respect. One day I woke up in a dosshouse and looked around. I wanted more out of life – I wanted self respect. And to get that I realised that I’d have to earn back the respect of my kids. “So with the help of the Harold Tomlins centre I sobered up, cleaned up, and started seeing things with fresh eyes. Now I’ve got an amazing relationship with my children – it’s wonderful. I’ve got my own flat too, so they come round and visit me at weekends. They are fourteen and ten, and they’re so smart – but now I’m able to help them out with their homework on the internet. We actually have fun together, like a proper family, and for the first time in a long time I actually feel good about myself.

“My life now is unrecognisable compared with a couple of years ago. I’m really proud of what I’ve achieved, but I couldn’t have done it alone. If it wasn’t for John and the others at the centre, I reckon I’d still be floundering. Their counselling has brought me on no end, and they opened my eyes to online learning too – it’s the combination of advice, support and opportunity that has made such a difference.

“I’ll admit, when they first sat me down in front of the computer I was clueless – but when they showed me how to search and email using myguide, it was as if someone had flicked on a light switch. I first came here with just the clothes I was wearing. Now, I’m back on my feet again and, thanks to the UK online centre and the wonders of the world wide web, I’m getting an education. The support I’ve received at the centre has opened so many doors for me – there’s no telling where I can go or what I can do now. I’ve got a whole new lease of life, and more importantly my kids have got their Dad back.”
3.12 Profile: Hendon 2000

The Hendon 2000 UK online centre is located in an urban area within one of the more deprived wards of Sunderland. The project aimed to boost the take-up of government e-services by disadvantaged groups through the development of a citywide VCS (voluntary and community sector) based network. The project targeted VCS partners and built their capacity to support people in using online public services, adopting a tailored approach so the communities each partner worked with were introduced to relevant sites and information. A wide partnership was created with over 30 VCS partners, including other UK online centres, and charities, as well as publicly funded initiatives such as the City’s Digital Challenge.

Project insights:
- 1090 people engaged, and more than half went on to further learning or information, advice and guidance session
- 370 families in poverty, 43 people with mental health issues and 110 teenagers at risk took part in the project
When Christina, 40, was diagnosed with osteoporosis, she was determined to keep active as long as possible. When her symptoms became too severe she had to give up her job, but decided she needed something else to concentrate on. She enrolled on several courses at Bridge, a women’s community centre based in Washington, Tyne and Wear, and when the chance to learn about computers came up, she was first in the queue.

“I’d been a bit scared at first,” she admits. “But it was so laid back and down to earth, and everyone was in the same position as me because it was a course for beginners. The tutors really knew where we were coming from, they didn’t use any terminology that we didn’t understand and they made me feel really relaxed. The social side of things was a real benefit as well – we were all in the same boat and that helped us to bond and make friends, and before long we were all going out for lunch together.

“The courses themselves were very easy. They started with the very basics, from how to switch it on. It really put everyone at their ease, because no-one was embarrassed to admit how little they knew. We went through using the keyboard and the mouse, and got to grips with it just by doing small, simple tasks. It wasn’t a race, everyone worked at their own pace and helped each other out. Once we knew our way around the computer, the tutor set us up with a myguide email account, and we emailed each other in the room to get used to it. Then she showed us how to do simple web searches, using sites like NHS Direct.”

NHS Direct was particularly useful for Christina, as one of her primary reasons for getting online was to find out about her condition.

“Being able to look up so much information about osteoporosis was, and still is, incredibly useful for me,” she says. “There’s so much information out there. New drugs being launched onto the market, websites that give lists of specialist doctors that you can call and ask for information, or your nearest specialist consultant. It was all very helpful, practical information that I otherwise wouldn’t have known. I was on one particular tablet which didn’t agree with me, so I looked up other possibilities. I found one which seemed ideal, so I went to my doctor and asked him about it and he agreed and changed my medication to the one I’d discovered on the internet.

“Another thing that’s been very helpful for me is finding out what help is available as my mobility decreases. I needed physiotherapy, and I discovered from the NHS website that I was entitled to free home visits, rather than having to get myself to the hospital. That was a huge benefit, because by the time I’m up and ready and travelled the four miles to my local hospital I’m exhausted.”

Because of Christina’s limited mobility, the internet has become a lifeline for everyday tasks and ensured that she has retained her independence. She adds: “Just little things like being able to do my shopping online mean I can carry out my day to day living without relying on other people. Without the internet, I would need personal care, I’d need to ask people favours. I don’t want to have to beg for help every time I need some groceries, and now I’m online I don’t have to.

“The internet and IT have made such a difference to my life. I want to keep busy, and keep my mind occupied. I’m happy if I’m learning, and it might lead to a job – in an ideal world I’ll get better and I’ll go back to work. But in the meantime it’s my outlet, my release. It’s given me my independence.”
3.13 Profile: Inverteign Family Learning Centre partnership

This project involved four UK online centres in the South West – Inverteign Family Learning Centre, Project COSMIC, High Moorland Community Action and Holsmart – working in partnership with a wide range of organisations to deliver services to both urban and rural communities. The project focussed on family learning and delivery in rural areas. It aimed to engage parents and older people in the surrounding communities and make ICT relevant and fun. Families were encouraged to learn skills to support their children’s learning and well-being, while older people were encouraged to get involved by developing ICT skills to enhance their hobbies or keep in touch with far flung family and friends. By focussing on the benefits of computers and the internet, the project engaged new people in both formal courses and internet drop-in sessions.

**Project insights:**

- Key success factors include: multiagency partnerships, offering varied progression routes, user involvement in management, planning and delivery and recognition of the importance of non-threatening engagement activities
- Strong partnerships were developed with a wide range of public sector and third sector organisations including schools, Surestart, Health Visitors and local mental health services
- Within the family learning strand of the project:
  - One in three parents did not have internet access at home
  - Following the project, 90% had used Directgov or their local authority site and 80% had used the internet to find health information
  - 75% completed an ICT course with over 66% getting a qualification
  - 88% of parents felt more confident helping their children with school work
  - 85% said they were more confident about getting a job, 32% were either looking for work or had started working, and two out of three parents were engaged with voluntary work
  - 93% came back to the centre for more learning
  - More than half of parents had experienced feeling low or depressed, and 95% said that being in the centre had helped
  - 95% said using the centre made a big or enormous difference to making them feel part of the community.
Case study:
Margaret’s story

When 66 year old Margaret retired from work due to ill health, she left her home town of Hayes in Middlesex and moved to the coastal town of Teignmouth in Devon. Learning about computers was a way to get out and meet people, and she was particularly keen to learn about email to keep in touch with her son in Dubai.

She says: “My son has been in Dubai for the last 15 years, and we’d always kept in touch by letter. But his nearest post-box was about half an hour away from where he worked, so it wasn’t very convenient. Although he works with computers, he’d never suggested keeping in touch by email – I don’t think he thought I was capable!”

“When I first went into the centre I wasn’t really sure what to expect, but I was immediately made to feel very welcome. I thought you’d need a huge amount of knowledge to get started, so I was surprised to learn how easy it all was and I picked it up a lot more quickly than I thought I would.

“We started to learn about email by first of all emailing each other in the room, and seeing how quickly it arrived. Then the tutors set us up with our own email account, and before long I even knew how to add attachments! When my son found out I could email, he was amazed! I cropped some photographs of my grandson and sent them to him, and he was really proud of me. I also have family in Australia and America, as well as relatives all over England and it’s so easy to keep in touch with them all now.”

Margaret became a regular at the centre and even took an exam in Word Processing. She says: “I was relaxed in the exam, because it was at the centre and I felt comfortable there. I didn’t feel at all threatened, whereas if I’d have gone to college I would have done. In fact if college was the only option I wouldn’t have done it – I wouldn’t have had the courage to walk in the first place. When I left work I lost all confidence in myself. When I was younger I found it difficult to learn as I was always being told I was awful, so I believed it. At the centre it was such a gradual process, and as I progressed I realised that I could do it. As soon as that happened, my confidence began to flow back.”

“The more I learned, the more confident I became, and one day I was asked if I would help to run one of the classes. I would never have dreamed of being able to do anything like that before, but I was thrilled to be given the chance to help others learn what I had. The work I do is mainly with the blind group that attends the UK online centre. I’ll get everything turned on and set up the computers with the special programme they use, then it’s just a case of helping the tutor, giving individual tuition if someone needs help, making tea and coffee and generally just having a good time!

“The social aspect of the centre is wonderful – everyone is so friendly. I got to know lots of people, and as a newcomer to the area it really helped me to settle in. I recommend the UK online centre to everyone I meet. I tell them what a lovely place it is, and that it’s just like meeting a group of friends.”

“When I was younger I found it difficult to learn as I was always being told I was awful, so I believed it. At the centre it was such a gradual process, and as I progressed I realised that I could do it.”
3.14 Profile:
Leeds Central Library and Leeds Library and Information Service

This project, coordinated by Leeds Central Library, was delivered through a range of local partners including the entire network of 60 plus local libraries, an IT bus run by a local learning organisation, a team of education officers in local schools and the Interplay Theatre, which provides alternative education for disengaged and excluded pupils. The range of venues allowed the project to target families in deprived areas and disaffected teenagers. Course content was adapted to the audience and ranged from switching a computer on to multi-media music sampling and film editing. The flexibility of this multi-venue, multi-discipline approach allowed project tutors to work with intermediaries and individuals to build programmes which suited them, and helped them progress in confidence, skills and in many cases aspirations.

Project insights:
> 1334 participants were engaged through the project
> Many new partnerships were formed with local organisations as a result of the project, including an extended schools cluster
> 453 participants progressed onto an IAG session or further learning
> More than 50 people gained formal qualifications
> Boardmaker software – an image bank resource useful for people with autism or communication difficulties – was installed in 10 libraries across Leeds.
Graham, 15, has been going along Interplay Theatre to work towards his NOCN multi-media qualification. He explains: “Basically this has been like a second chance for me. Lots of people don’t get that. It’s really changed me round, and now I’m like properly settled down.”

“I first got kicked out of school in Year 7. I used to get really angry, and batter people. I don’t really know why. I never went back til Year 9. The High School was too big for me – I’m used to small places. I just ignored people, kept to myself. But then it’s like I’d suddenly get scared and lash out at people again.”

“I felt like a wild rabbit in that school, out of place. I didn’t belong there. This place is different – it doesn’t feel like a school. What with all the multi-media and all that, doing it is actually fun. It is work, but all right work – interesting work. It’s like I can be me here.”

“When I started I was proper nervous, and I didn’t want to talk to nobody. In five minutes, though, I was chatting away to Sal, my tutor, like a friend. She showed me all this stuff I’d never seen before and it was really exciting. It felt proper good to be here. It’s easier to make friends here too, because it’s like just a bunch of mates making music. There was this lad who welcomed me when I first came, and now we’re like cousins. I’ve not really had that before.”

“At the moment I’m doing this DVing – it’s like putting visual effects to a music track – like a music video. My music is baseline – b-line. And there’s all these computer programmes you do it on, and edit it and stuff. The blokes from the Library UK online centres project showed me this new one, Acid, and now I’m using that. I love it – I love all the multi-media stuff. Everything. “Doing my music on the computers calms me down. It’s like I’m a different person now. If I hadn’t come here, I reckon I’d be in a cop station somewhere. I certainly wouldn’t be getting an education, and qualifications and stuff. I missed so much school – most of Year 7 and 8 and 9 – but now I feel like I’ve caught back up. I’ve made it right.”

“My dad can’t believe it. My mum and step dad can’t either. They’ve seen my stuff and I think they’re proud of me. I’m actually really proud of myself. I’m achieving what I need. When I was at school I was failing proper badly.”

“I never really liked learning before but now I hope I can go on and do more. I never thought about the future much either, but I’ve got this like, Grand Plan. I want to stay on here for Year 11, then go to do media stuff at college, and then get a job at the BBC or set-up my own multi-media business.”

“When people start here now, I try and make them welcome. I know what they feel like – like I did. Like life wasn’t worth living, like really angry. But you’ve got to get on with it, and find something better. This place helps people do that.”
3.15 Profile: The Lighthouse Project

The Lighthouse Project operates five centres across the boroughs of Sandwell and Dudley, serving a wide range of communities. Visitors face issues from low self esteem to isolation, mental and physical health issues to poverty, abuse and violence. Participants moved through a programme of ICT activities supplemented by other personal development and learning opportunities, IAG, counselling, pre-employment support programmes, volunteering experience and vocational training courses.

Project insights:

- By joining together new services and activities with existing provision within the Lighthouse and partner organisations, the project provided access to the majority of key support services under one roof
- By coordinating responses to the issues which create disadvantage, the project helped people rather than merely providing courses
- Volunteering opportunities were a key step in raising personal and family aspirations
- All participants were unemployed or benefit dependent
- 78% of participants progressed from initial engagement activities into information, advice and guidance, further learning, volunteering or employment
- 58 participants went on to gain employment.
Trouble at school and a series of failed relationships sent Simon, 25, into a downward spiral of depression and self-harm in his late teens. After losing his job and seeing his health deteriorate, Simon knew he had to make some big changes in his life. He says: “I knew I had to break the pattern – I’d shut myself away at home for nearly four years, hiding from the world, but I was just getting worse. I was getting more and more anxious and started having problems eating – I lost so much weight I was unrecognisable. It all started at school really. I was a quiet kid, a bit of a loner, and I used to get bullied for what I wore and how I had my hair. Then I spent my teenage years and early twenties falling in and out of some pretty destructive relationships which shattered my self-esteem. I ended up in a right state – some days I was waking up in the afternoon and I’d get straight on the booze. At my lowest, I got into the habit of cutting myself away from what I wore and how I had my hair. Then I spent my teenage years and early twenties falling in and out of some pretty destructive relationships which shredded my self-esteem.

“I ended up in a right state – some days I was waking up in the afternoon and I’d get straight on the booze. At my lowest, I got into the habit of cutting myself away from what I wore and how I had my hair. Then I spent my teenage years and early twenties falling in and out of some pretty destructive relationships which shredded my self-esteem. “I’ve always been into computers and knew they held free IT courses there, so I plucked up the courage and went for it. I was really nervous about going, I didn’t really know what to expect, but the staff were so warm and welcoming. Pretty soon I was really enjoying myself – something I hadn’t done in ages. After refreshing his basic email and internet skills, Simon started on some more of the advanced courses to add to his CV, and worked his way through CLAIT and his European Computer Driving Licence. Staff quickly recognised his natural aptitude for ICT, and asked if he’d consider becoming a volunteer to help beginners learn about computers.

“I was stunned that they thought I could do it,” he says. “It was a wonderful feeling knowing that somebody had so much faith in me. I snapped up their offer, and it was one of the best things I’ve ever done. Most of the people who come in here have never used a computer before, and many have quite a lot else going on in their lives, whether it’s money or family or work or whatever. They’re just like me, and I think that helps, because I can tell them if I can do it, anyone can. The web is a wonderful resource that absolutely everyone should know how to use.”

Simon is now part of the furniture of the centre, and does everything from making the tea to pulling up weeds. “I’ve usually got a paintbrush in my hand,” he says, “and I help out in the garden too. Wherever there’s a job that needs doing, I’m more than happy to pitch in. I know it’s an old cliché, but we really are one big happy family here! It’s one of the few places that I feel truly equal, and that it’s OK to be myself. It’s so refreshing to be appreciated for doing something which is so motivating and inspiring. “For me, volunteering for the Lighthouse Centre has been such a confidence-builder and a real life-changer – it’s helped me connect with people again. I’m now doing something I love every day, and I jump out of bed in the morning just to get going. One of the most special feelings in the world is knowing that I’m helping people access new skills and opportunities in order to make changes in their own lives. What’s more, I’m also directly contributing towards the number of people smiling in my community. That’s priceless.”
3.16 Profile: Probe – Hull

This project linked Social Impact Demonstrator funding to another initiative – Slivers of Time. Slivers of Time is a programme where those looking for work but unable to commit to full time or fixed hours every week can register their availability and skills and ‘sell’ their time to local employers. Not everyone comes to Slivers of Time with the skills they need to work, and the demonstrator project bridged this gap, helping those without the confidence or right skills for the job market get up to speed. People were identified for the project through various partners including Jobcentre Plus offices. The focus was very much on skills for life and independence as well as skills for work, and people were taken through a varied programme which could adapt to their individual needs and experiences.

Project insights:

- Marketing activity with partners like Connexions, Surestart and other agencies was key to recruiting participants
- Set up a fully operational Slivers of Time programme that will now continue beyond the project
- Focusing on specific industries – catering and hospitality – helped to establish the project
- 44 participants had gone on to take a work assignment through Slivers of Time by the end of the project.
Kerry Gleeson, 45, thought he had his future mapped out for him when he trained to be a pub licensee. But as Hull’s pub industry began to collapse, he quickly realised he’d need to find an alternative income. Then his wife bought home an advert for Slivers of Time and computer courses at the nearby Probe UK online centre.

Kerry explains: “The letter advertised this new employment service called Slivers of Time, offered by the centre to try get people back into work. It sounded perfect for me, but the problem was, it was all based on the internet and I had never used a computer before. It just wasn’t something I’d ever learned because it hadn’t seemed relevant. They didn’t have computers when I was at school and when you’ve worked in manual jobs all your life, you don’t tend to come across technology like that. I honestly didn’t know where to start. But they were actually offering free IT tuition sessions for complete beginners, and I knew I had to give it a go.

“Once I was shown the basics, like how to use the mouse and what all the things on the monitor mean, I began to see just how simple it all is. They showed me how to email and use search engines too – it’s amazing that you can just type in a word and you can find out anything about anything. After I’d got to grips with all that, the staff at Probe helped me register on the Slivers of Time website. You enter details about the kind of work you want to do and when you’re available – then you get a text message on your mobile when the work comes your way. It’s genius!”

Kerry had banked on running a pub by now, having already completed his personal license, but following a downturn in the industry prospects were looking bleak. What’s more, on return to his practised trade of painting and decorating, he still struggled to find enough work to make a living.

He continues: “There just didn’t seem to be the work out there, I was lucky if I hit 15 hours a week, and I was having to rely on my wife, Debbie, for money. I felt really useless not being able to provide for us. It sounds silly but it really did make me feel like less of a man. It was just so depressing being stuck at home most of the time, and I could usually be found with a bottle of booze in my hand. It was a pretty miserable time. But then Debbie came home with that leaflet and I saw an opportunity to get my life back on track again.

“Since Slivers of Time I’ve branched out into general maintenance work. One week I’ll be hanging doors, the next I’ll be putting up fences. I’m working in all sorts of places – both domestic and commercial properties – even in pubs! I love the variety, and now instead of feeling sorry for myself, I can look forward to a full pay packet at the end of the month.

“I still go along to Probe when I can fit it in – I’ve got a lot to thank them for. Without the help and support of the UK online centre staff, I wouldn’t have the ICT skills I needed to get back into full-time work. My life is completely different – I’m now working around 40 hours a week, and my income has more than doubled – all thanks to the internet.

“No one wants to be thought of as a sponger. Round where I live there are families who for generations have never had jobs – I didn’t want to live my life like that. I’m dead proud to be bringing home the bacon again.”
3.17 Profile: 
**Selby Learning Zone**

The Selby Learning Zone is based in the Tottenham area of North London. The project targeted local residents without ICT skills, including those who don’t speak English as a first language and people with mental health issues or learning difficulties. Where possible, the project aimed to progress people through a programme of computer and internet skills and onto qualifications, workplace skills, CV building and online job hunting.

**Project insights:**
- 687 people were engaged through the project
- 306 progressed into further learning, advice and guidance
- 298 learned and used job search and employability techniques
- 46 went into employment or voluntary work
- Before starting out on their journey, only 7% of participants felt they had excellent or good confidence in life. After their time at Selby 60% felt their confidence in life was excellent or good.
Case study: Dympna’s story

After the death of her mother and being made redundant, Dympna, 44, was finding it hard to pick herself up again, and even harder to find more work. With the support of Selby Learning Zone, though, she’s getting back on her feet again.

She explains: “When depression hits you, you don’t want to go anywhere, do anything or see anybody. But you can’t just sit and stare at four walls all day – it’s not good for you. Going into Selby Learning Zone UK online centre has helped me tremendously because I’ve got somewhere to go and something positive to do. The staff are so kind and supportive – they can’t do enough to help you. It’s been so good for me because it’s helping me keep on smiling, and that’s the best advice I could give to anyone.

“The internet has been my biggest discovery. I was a bit nervous at first because if you’re not used to it you don’t know if you’re going to press a button or go off onto the wrong site or whatever. It’s such a big place, and without being pointed in the right direction by the tutors I’d have never found anything – I wouldn’t have known where to start! Now I’ve got the confidence to explore the internet by myself, and I can search for jobs and fill in application forms online. It makes the whole process so much easier. There must be literally millions of jobs out there, and now I’m much more confident I’m going to find something.”
3.18 Profile: Suffolk Libraries

The Suffolk Libraries project was a collaboration of sixteen libraries spread across the county. Some are in the middle of bustling market towns such as Bury St Edmunds while others are just one person operations in very rural areas. The funding meant extra resources for the library service, including a project coordinator who helped smaller libraries organise and run local activities. The key target audiences were older people and teenage parents, and several community partnerships were set up to reach and understand the needs of each group. As a direct result, general awareness has been raised across the county about what libraries can do for people, and what services people can access via the library UK online centres.

Project insights:

- 517 people were engaged through the project, with 496 never having been on the internet before
- New contacts and partnerships were established with carers’ organisations, Health Visitors, Midwives, Connexions, Housing Associations and Travellers’ support services
- Key areas of impact included:
  - Encouraging healthy lifestyles
  - Contributing to mental and physical well-being
  - Supporting care and recovery
  - Supporting older people to live independent lives
  - Empowering communities and civic participation.
Jean, 79, has been a keen user of libraries for most of her adult life. When her husband passed away 18 months ago, she threw herself in the social activities provided by her local library in Felixstowe. She was excited but nervous when they started offering computer classes, but the friendly staff soon put her at her ease.

Jean says: “The whole thing was very welcoming, and the fact that it was at the library where I felt very comfortable and had lots of friends was fantastic. I would never have even considered doing a computer course if it hadn’t been there. I found email very easy – considering my age! I set up a myguide email address and told my nephew about it, and he was thrilled. He gave me his email address too, and I make sure I send him a message regularly. I even email my friends and neighbours now too, so they all have to email me back. I’m still childish enough to get excited when I check my inbox and see I have lots of messages waiting for me!”

“I really never thought that when I was 79 I would make new friends, and good friends at that, but I have and I really value that. I’ve learnt such a lot, and I would say without a doubt that it’s made a huge difference to my life. I’ve enjoyed my computer classes so much, and I’m determined to carry on and find out as much as I can.”

“Case study:
Jean’s story”
3.19 Profile: Windhill Community Association

This project involved Windhill and Bolton Woods Community Centres in East Shipley, and saw partnerships developed with Shipley College, local community groups and local schools. Participants included older people, young people and particularly young families, and part of the funding paid for crèche facilities so mums and dads could take part in the ICT sessions without worrying about childcare. Tutors from Shipley College helped many people progress through basic ICT activities and even onto other courses and employment. They supported activities from basic computing to family history research, digital photography, editing and online shopping. Groups were encouraged to use their new skills to benefit the community, setting up their own activities or creating their own displays about subjects important to them. Inter-generational learning and understanding were key, with parents and grandparents encouraged to learn alongside their children.

**Project insights:**

- 128 people engaged
- Two family learning groups and one mother and toddler’s group established as part of the project
- Successful work with teenagers through a computer club has led to further funding for activities with this audience
- 27 participants progressed on to qualification programmes
- Five people found employment.
Sarah, 31, was concentrating on being a full time mum to her two children when a friend told her about computer courses at the Windhill Community Centre. She decided to go along and brush up on her rusty ICT skills. Now not only has she worked her way through various courses and qualifications, she’s also teamed up with other mums to create toddlers group Doodles. From creating the website to designing the adverts, researching activities to applying for funding, the skills they’ve gained at the UK online centre have been instrumental in setting up the group.

Sarah says: “Windhill Community UK online centre brought us all together, and gave us the skills we needed to get Doodles off the ground. The process of setting everything up has been a really good experience for everyone involved, and I’m proud of all of us for how much we’ve achieved by working together, and by putting our new IT skills to good use!

“From a personal perspective, my life has changed phenomenally since I’ve been on the course, and I now have so much confidence. I think when you’re a stay-at-home mum you’re constantly ‘mum’ and not yourself. It’s so important to get out and about and get some time that’s about you, some adult conversation and some friends to share the everyday stresses and strains of being a parent with. Doing this course has been like finding myself again, and I hope that Doodles will inspire other people to do the same.”

“From a personal perspective, my life has changed phenomenally since I’ve been on the course, and I now have so much confidence.”
3.20 Profile:

Windmill Hill City Farm

Windmill Hill City Farm is based in South Bristol and describes itself as ‘a place where people grow’. The project focussed on families in poverty and adults with mental health issues. The seven-step Make it Yours programme was developed as part of the project, and covered ICT basics, literacy and numeracy skills checks, telling stories with images and words, moving on in learning and work, and taking control of ICT for the future. Within the framework people were encouraged to pursue their own goals and take charge of their learning, using computers, digital photography and online resources to research their areas of interest and describe their experiences. Mentoring and volunteering were important parts of the process, which aimed to build confidence and skills, social interaction and community involvement.

Project insights:

- Weekly outreach sessions in a local women’s hostel and residential homes have proved extremely effective in building skills and self-esteem in a comfortable and safe space
- Further partnerships have been developed through a weekly job club delivered with the Shaw Trust, and with the Children’s and Family Centre, leading to links with Health Visitors, Community development workers, tenant support staff and local schools
- Digital photography allowed centre users to express themselves creatively through ICT, and more than 2,000 people came to see the final exhibition of participants’ work
- 85 people went on to further learning and 180 people went on to employment related activity
- 22 people went on to get a job.
Case study: Glen’s story

Glen, 45, from Bristol lives alone and from the age of seven has suffered from a severe form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Despite the challenges he faces everyday in dealing with his illness, Glen has managed to turn his life around.

He explains: “All my life I have battled with OCD. It’s had a terrible effect on me – I can’t work, I have been in and out of hospital and I am constantly working out how and what to do next. It can be exhausting, and frustrating, and sometimes it feels like more than I can cope with. Coming to the Windmill Hill City Farm UK online centre has changed my life, offering me some relief from all of that – I can now actually enjoy myself for a change.

“My Community Care Worker recommended that I should go to the computer centre at Windmill Hill City Farm and have a look at the courses and support available. I didn’t even know it existed before this but I am so pleased I went in as I’ve learnt so much.

“Using the internet has literally provided me with a lifeline. I started off nice and simple using a website called myguide which was great, and I can just go at my own pace. Due to the severity of my disability I have been held back in so many ways. Through the internet I’ve learned more about my own OCD condition and it’s helped me to gain a better understanding of my illness and new treatments and research going on around the world.

“I can find medical information, and now I’m also particularly interested in Google Maps to work out travelling routes so I know where I’m going and what it’s all going to be like. It really has made my day to day life so much easier to manage. I also use the internet to look up ancestry stuff, family and general history information. I’m now quite confident about using a computer and the internet. I can search independently with just occasional help from the friendly staff when I get stuck.

“I go to the Farm three times a week, and into the computer centre every Tuesday. Even though it’s hard, I have a reason to get out of the house, and something to look forward to. Before, getting out of the house was a nightmare. Now, come what may, I always get to my courses and get to the centre because I know I’ll enjoy it so much when I get there.

“My confidence has grown considerably since starting at the UK online centre. Even my Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychologist have noticed just how it’s improved. The staff are magic and always helpful – even when I get bagged down in things or when I start to get anxious, just knowing I’ve got someone I trust in the background ready to help is really reassuring. Coming to the centre has improved my life considerably – I don’t know what I’d do without it now.”

In addition to his ICT activity at the UK online centre, Glen has also now enrolled on jewellery making and painting courses at the Farm, which he can now attend without his support worker. He continues: “The help and support I have received from Windmill Hill City Farm UK online centre has literally changed my life. It’s made me realise that whatever is going on in my life it doesn’t have to hold me back. To anyone thinking about going to a UK online centre to learn how to use the internet, I’d say just do it. There’s only one chance in life, so see what’s out there on the internet that could make yours better, easier and more enjoyable.”
4. The research

4.1 Headlines

- 12,234 people engaged through the projects
- The cost per participant was £163
- 60% of participants said they were now happy using computers and the internet
- 70% of participants said they felt confident at the end of the project
- Data supplied by the projects indicate that around 40% of participants progressed in terms of training, employment or advice and guidance
- Participants were less likely to need help with reading writing and maths after the projects (down from around 30% to just over 10%)
- Participants were more likely to spend time with friends and family and helping out in their community after the projects – 39% were meeting up with new friends and 32% volunteering (up from around 25%).

4.2 Background

4.2.1 The research

The Social Impact Demonstrator projects all participated in a year-long research programme designed by Ipsos MORI. They identified three key outcome groups – cognitive proficiency, social proficiency and improved life chances. The aim was to track people in order to find out whether gains in ICT proficiency could lead to gains in each separate area.

The assumed relationship between these elements is shown in the diagram below.

Social Impact of digital inclusion

- **ICT proficiency**
  - Access
  - Use
  - Familiarity
  - Confidence

- **Cognitive proficiency**
  - Literacy
  - Numeracy
  - Visual Memory
  - Human Capital

- **Social proficiency**
  - Self-confidence
  - Family and friends
  - Civic engagement
  - Social Capital

- **Improved life chances**
  - Income
  - Employment
  - Health
  - Education
  - Housing
  - Crime
  - Living environment

*The definition of improved life chances is based on Department of Communities and Local Government 2004 Indices of Deprivation.*
4.2.2 Methodology

Questionnaires: The study examined changes in attitudes and behaviour through three questionnaires: a new user questionnaire, a tracking survey which participants were invited to complete every couple of months as they moved through their programme; and a final questionnaire. The new user questionnaire was completed by over 1,700 people. It set a baseline for the study by gathering information about participants’ views and situation when they first started at their UK online centre. The numbers of project participants who completed and returned the tracker and final questionnaire are shown in the following table:

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<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>During first visit</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1,058 208</td>
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<td>748 215</td>
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<td>501 111</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<td>Tracker 4 sent Tracker 4 returned</td>
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<td>Final sent Final returned</td>
<td>780 191</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Due to the low response rate and therefore low sample size, the findings from Tracker 4 has not been included in the research findings.

Questionnaires and response rates

Qualitative information:
The research also included a qualitative element in the form of four focus groups with five to nine participants, and eight one-on-one in-depth interviews. These discussions proved highly effective in getting behind some of the headline figures from the quantitative data and in finding out directly from participants whether and how their experience had had an impact on their lives in terms of confidence, independence and inclusion. Comments from the group discussions and the interviews are used in this chapter to illustrate some of the impacts and effects on people’s lives, and more case study evidence can be found in Chapter 3.
4.2.3 Participants

In total, 12,234 people took part in the 20 projects for varying lengths of time. The research collected socio-demographic information for 284 participants (27% of those who took part in tracking surveys). Of these:

- 30% were suffering from a long-term illness, health problem or disability
- 18% had had mental health issues in the previous year
- 43% had no formal education qualifications
- 6% were in full-time paid employment
- One in seven was claiming income support or incapacity benefit.

The percentages of participants with a disability or claiming incapacity/income support are not dissimilar from the general profile of UK online centre users nationally. However, there were notable increases in the number of social impact demonstrator participants who had mental health difficulties or were out of work. This suggests the projects went further in reaching a greater number of more deeply excluded people.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 ICT proficiency

The study looked at ICT proficiency by tracking changes in how people felt about computers and by asking about computer use. It also identified new ICT skills acquired by participants.

Initial attitudes towards computers

Although the prevailing single sentiment expressed about computers when people started with their project was curiosity, over half of participants were far from comfortable with them—these people were either ‘frustrated’, ‘concerned’, ‘stressed’ or ‘angry’ at the idea of computers (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Initial attitudes towards computers

Before you started visiting … how did you feel about computers?

- Curious: 81%
- Happy: 26%
- Frustrated: 24%
- Neutral: 22%
- Concerned: 11%
- Stressed: 11%
- Bored: 6%
- Angry: 3%
- None: 2%

Base: Baseline 1,712 SID project users, July – December 2007
The qualitative interviews suggested that these negative feelings stemmed from lack of self-esteem, particularly among people with mental health problems.

**Typical comments:**

I was frightened of them… I thought I was going to blow it up, though everyone said of course you can’t blow it up!

I would be frightened in case I pushed the wrong button.

I never had a clue, I always wanted to know but I think I was too embarrassed to ask because people always used to make fun when I was at school, so it was an embarrassing thing.

I only feel angry because I don’t know what to do – it’s frustration isn’t it?

I thought I was too old to learn computers but the way [she] teaches it she makes it sound actually quite easy.

To start with they’re quite frightening. You know, you think “Where’ve I sent that? Where has that gone? Who’s picking that up? Have they got my address?” that kind of thing, you know?

**Changes in attitudes towards computers**

Over time, as participants engaged with their project, feelings of frustration, stress and concern gradually reduced. This shift was shown clearly in the tracking surveys, which recorded participants feeling increasingly ‘happy’ about computers (up from 26% to 60%) and reductions in the proportion feeling stressed (11% to 6%) or concerned (13% to 6%) for stressed and a reduction from 24% to 14% for frustrated) (Figure 2). Overall, participants were happier, less stressed and less concerned about computers after taking part in the social impact demonstrator projects.

Most of the participants in the qualitative phase of the research explained that a lot of their initial apprehension about computers was quickly dispelled when they started learning, and that this had encouraged them to continue learning.

**Figure 2: Changing attitudes towards computers**

How do you currently feel about computers?
Computer use and new skills

Participants became more ICT proficient over the course of the programme. Only 50% of people were using computers every day or every week two months after their first visit, compared to 85% by the time of the final questionnaire. This shows participants’ ICT proficiency and confidence growing over the year of the project.

Figure 3: Using computers more often

At the moment, how often do you use computers?*

- Every day of the week: 10% (Tracker 1), 22% (Final)
- At least once a week: 40% (Tracker 1), 45% (Final)
- At least once a month: 12% (Tracker 1), 5% (Final)
- Less often than that: 22% (Tracker 1), 3% (Final)
- I don’t currently use computers: 17% (Tracker 1), 7% (Final)

Base: Tracker 1, 209 SID project users, September 2007 – February 2008; Final, 191 SID project users, May 2008

Figure 4: New skills

What kinds of things did you learn at the centre?

- How to use computers: 70%
- How to use the internet: 65%
- How to find information on the internet: 63%
- How to use email: 62%
- How to create and save documents: 52%
- How to save and store pictures: 33%
- Met new people here: 32%
- How to edit pictures/film/sound: 19%
- Met new people over the internet: 7%
- Other: 11%

Base: Final 191 SID project users, May 2008
4.3.2 Cognitive proficiency/human capital

Cognitive proficiency and growth in human capital were tracked by looking at numeracy and literacy needs. In both of these areas there was a clear impact on the human capital over the life of the projects.

**Literacy**

When they first began visiting their UK online centre, over a quarter of those taking part in the projects said they had problems with reading and writing. During the tracking period, the proportion saying this went down and the proportion saying they did not need help went up (Figure 5). The proportion of people agreeing that they sometimes need help with reading and writing decreased from 30% (combined) to 12% (combined).

**Numeracy**

The same was true for numeracy – the percentage of people saying they needed help declined; the percentage saying they did not need help increased (Figure 6). The proportion of people needing help with numbers dropped from 30% (combined) to 13% (combined).

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**Figure 5: Reading and writing**

I sometimes need help with my reading and writing

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<th>Tend to agree</th>
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</table>

Base: SID project users, July 2007 – May 2008

Ipsos MORI
4.3.3 Social proficiency/social capital

Growth in social proficiency was assessed by looking at changes in self-confidence, relationships with friends and family and civic engagement. Most people expected that acquiring new ICT skills would help them keep up to date (55%), boost their confidence (50%) or keep in touch with family and friends (47%) – in terms of the research study, they thought that getting into computers would grow their social capital (Figure 7).
These expectations were largely fulfilled, particularly in the area of self-confidence.

**Self-confidence**

When asked about self-confidence at the outset of their project, only 60% of participants said they already felt confident, and 14% said they lacked confidence. By the time of the final tracking survey, 70% of participants felt confident and only 8% said that they lacked self-confidence (Figure 8). The greatest change was in the participants who tend to agree with the phrase “I feel confident” this increased from 31% at the start of the projects to 42% at the time of the final questionnaire.

**Relationships with friends and family**

At the beginning of their visits to UK online centres, three quarters of users already saw a lot of friends and family. Even so, over the course of the study this figure still rose slightly, to 81% (Figure 9).

The qualitative phase of the study showed more clearly the connection between using UK online centres and the use of technology increased social contact. People typically said that knowing how to use email made it easier to communicate with connections who do not live locally. Those with family overseas particularly welcomed being able to use ICT and email. Some people specifically reported increased levels of contact purely because of email. This strengthening of family and social ties was clearest among older people, who said they found email cheap and convenient for keeping in touch with people living a long way away.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tend to agree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: Confidence
I feel confident

Base: SID project users, July 2007 – May 2008
Ipsos MORI
Figure 9: Friends and family
I often see or speak to friends/family

- Strongly agree: 49% (Baseline) vs. 53% (Final)
- Tend to agree: 27% (Baseline) vs. 28% (Final)
- Neither/nor: 16% (Baseline) vs. 12% (Final)
- Tend to disagree: 5% (Baseline) vs. 6% (Final)
- Strongly disagree: 4% (Baseline) vs. 3% (Final)

Base: Baseline 1,727 SID project users, July – December 2007; Final 191 SID project users, May 2008
Ipsos MORI

Figure 10: Methods of contact with friends and family
Q. Which of these do you do ‘often’?

- Visit family/friends: 78% (T1), 76% (T2), 78% (T3)
- Phone family/friends: 88% (T1), 86% (T2), 79% (T3)
- Email family/friends: 52% (T1), 50% (T2), 55% (T3)

Base: T1-209, T2-215, T3-111, excluding non-responses
Ipsos MORI
As well as facilitating existing relationships between friends and families, learning ICT skills can help people develop new relationships and social networks with the wider community. When they first started visiting the centres, 60% of participants said that they felt part of their local community (Figure 11). This didn’t shift over time, but there was a clear increase in the number of people who said they often volunteer for a community organisation (up from 25% to 32% between Tracker 1 and Tracker 3) (Figure 12).

**Typical comments:**

It’s nice to have that contact with your family.

I’ve found that it’s really wonderful. My daughter’s gone abroad for three months so I’ve learned to do emails here, so I come each day and practice and found it very good.

I felt I was...too old to learn, but I think that what spurred me on was my daughter going abroad, so it was a challenge to learn emails.

If you come here regularly, you’ll see the same people using the computers. It kind of feels like you build up a bit of a network...It was really good starting a course, to feel part of the community.

### 4.3.4 Civic engagement: the wider community

As well as facilitating existing relationships between friends and families, learning ICT skills can help people develop new relationships and social networks with the wider community. When they first started visiting the centres, 60% of participants said that they felt part of their local community (Figure 11). This didn’t shift over time, but there was a clear increase in the number of people who said they often volunteer for a community organisation (up from 25% to 32% between Tracker 1 and Tracker 3) (Figure 12).

**Figure 11. Community links**

I feel a part of my local community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to agree</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to disagree</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Baseline 1,727 SID project users, July – December 2007; Final 191 SID project users, May 2008

**Ipsos MORI**
The focus groups and interviews showed that attending classes and drop-in sessions leads to UK online centre becoming very much a social hub for local users. Many centres, particularly those targeting adults with mental health problems, are multi-functional and host activities such as gardening, cooking day trips. As one participant put it: “I’ve made some fantastic friends here…Everyone looks out for each other – they’re brilliant.”

Civic engagement: access to services

One of the things the internet can do is help people use services in a way they find more convenient. When participants first started with UK online centres, they found mainly very local services easy to use – shops, the Post Office, their GP, library and cash points (69% – 77% found it easy). Leisure and cultural facilities were less accessible and less easy to use (between 27% and 44% found these services easy to use) (Figure 13). Over time, as participants became more familiar with computers and the internet, they also became more familiar with services near the bottom of the initial list – in particular, museums and galleries and Council offices (Figure 14) – and they were using the internet to access a wide range of services (Figure 15). Council offices increased in ease of use from 37% to 56%, and Jobcentres increased in ease of use from 27% to 34%.
Figure 13: Access to services, baseline survey
Which services are easy to use?

- Local shops: 77%
- Post Office: 75%
- Local GP: 71%
- Libraries: 70%
- Bank/cash points: 69%
- Greengrocers: 61%
- Local hospital: 49%
- Sports/leisure facilities: 44%
- Museums and galleries: 37%
- The Council/Neighbourhood office: 37%
- Theatres/concert halls: 33%
- Jobcentre: 27%

Base: SID project users, July 2007 – May 2008

Figure 14: Services became more accessible
Select any of these services that are easy for you to use

Base: SID project users, July 2007 – December 2007
Growing civic engagement was also evident in increased familiarity with official web sites. Over time, users became more aware of ‘citizen sites’ like NHS Direct, the local council, Jobcentre Plus and Direct.gov. The increase in awareness of NHS Direct for example grew from 58% to 64% between tracker one two months after the start of the project and tracker three six months after they had started with the internet (Figure 16). This was in addition to social sites like eBay, Yahoo, Wikipedia, and MSN and news/information sites like BBC and TheSite.org.

Note that this question was not asked in the baseline survey, as users had no or very limited experience of the internet. It is highly likely that the greatest awareness raising occurred between the start of the projects and the tracker one questionnaire two months into the project.
4.3.5 Improved life chances

The most ambitious and unique element of the research was the attempt to link improvements in life chances with people’s increased use of the internet. Improvements in life chances were tracked by asking participants about elements in the government’s Indices of Deprivation. They were asked if they had concerns about: income, employment, health, education and housing. They were not asked about crime and living environment. Concerns which increased over time were typically over matters generally outside the users’ control and unlikely to be influenced by UK online centres (Figure 17). Concerns which were capable of being influenced by UK online centres and using technology diminished. These were all in the area of education and skills.

**Education and skills**

When users began visiting their centres, their main cause of concern was qualifications, training and skills. We have seen that 43% had no formal qualifications. Not surprisingly then, a third said at the outset of their time with UK online centres that qualifications and skills were worrying them. In addition, one in ten said that they were concerned about reading or writing, 8% were concerned about their command of English and 7% were concerned about maths (Figure 17). All these concerns decreased over time, in the case of qualifications and skills from 33% to 14%, in the case of reading and writing to 6%, in the case of maths to 5%, and in the case of concerns about understanding/use of English from 8% to 3% (Figure 17).

Skills and qualifications are closely related to work status, and there was a slight decrease in the proportion of people worries about their work status, reducing from 13% to 10%.

On some of the indicators the percentage of people concerned actually increased – in particular the number of people worried about their financial situation and health. Although it is difficult to draw a clear parallel a future study could investigate if by having greater access to information about health and money matters, people become more aware of potential or existing issues and therefore at least temporarily became more concerned. It would be interesting to see if increasing access to information and knowledge about these areas actually manages to decrease concerns over a longer period.

It is clear that overall this study was not sufficiently long-term to firmly establish whether the growth in skills, confidence and social capital which clearly comes with using UK online centres has a permanent impact on qualification levels and life chances generally. To thoroughly investigate the impact of digital inclusion on improved life chances – in terms of income, employment and health – a longer-term study is needed.
Q. Are you concerned about any of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications, training or skills</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work status</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial situation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading or writing skills</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding/use of English</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths skills</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing situation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: SID project users, July 2007 – May 2008

Figure 17: Continuing concerns
Q. Are you concerned about any of the following?
5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Overview

The aim of this research into the UK online social impact demonstrator projects was to establish whether becoming competent in using ICT leads to gains in cognitive and social proficiency and subsequently to improvements in life chances.

The findings show that participants in the projects:

- Became confident and competent in using computers and the internet (those saying they were happy with computers went up from 26% to 60%)
- Acquired a variety of new ICT skills (70% learnt how to use a computer, 65% learnt how to use the internet and 62% learnt how to use email)
- Became less likely to need help with reading and writing (down from 28% to 12%)
- Became less likely to need help with numbers (down from 27% to 13%)
- Became less worried about their level of qualification and skills (those concerned went down from 33% to 14%)
- Grew in confidence (those saying they felt confident went up from 60% to 70% and those saying they lacked confidence went down from 14% to 8%)
- Spent more time in contact with friends and family (up from 76% to 81%)
- Were more likely to take part in voluntary work (up from 25% to 32%) than they were before they took part in their UK online centres project
- Became more familiar with and made more use of a range of public services – perceived ease of use of council services went up from 37% to 56%, and the Jobcentre Plus from 27% to 34%.
- Started to use the internet for a wide range of everyday activities – by the end of the project more than 25% of participants were using the internet to access banks, libraries, shops, their local theatres and concert halls.
- Had heard of a good range of official websites – awareness of NHS Direct went up from 58% to 64%, Directgov went up from 35% to 39%, and awareness of council websites from 54% to 57%.

In all these areas the direction of travel was positive and the research showed that participants were making considerable personal, social and cognitive gains as a result of engaging with ICT. However, even more compelling are some of the key outcomes we can glean from individual project insights.
5.2 Key outcomes and insights

Key outcomes and insights from individual project reports found:

- 12,234 people were engaged through the projects
- The cost of engagement per participant was £163
- Around 40% of participants progressed onto further learning, advice and guidance or employment
- Partnerships with local community groups and organisations were key in reaching the target audiences and delivering holistic provision addressing multiple issues
- Working with hard to reach audiences involves long-term relationships with partners and individuals
- Taking technology out to local, familiar and safe environments was essential to reach new audiences
- The flexibility to adapt the curriculum to participants needs and interests was vital in engaging and holding their interest
- Supported home access was a great success for both families and older people, with home access participants likely to consider computers and the internet a vital resource
- Informal peer to peer learning and formal volunteering were key to the sustainability of the projects, and to the progression and self-esteem of participants
- Technology was a particularly effective tool for those with mental health issues, including but not solely the homeless, helping to regulate and stabilise their everyday lives
- A helping hand to use online government services were essential in building awareness and embedding future use
- Building self-confidence and self esteem were essential first steps in skills development, and actually could be built up relatively quickly
- New technologies like social networking and digital media helped hard to reach or isolated groups express themselves in new ways, and engage in online or off-line communities
- Keeping in touch was both an important motivation and important outcome in all projects
- There is a need for longitudinal follow-up to track the true impact of the social impact demonstrator work.
5.3 Next steps

The qualitative strand of the research and the day-to-day observations of UK online centre staff point to a convincing link between digital inclusion and social impact, but while the quantitative research hints at the same direction of travel, it doesn’t quite take us far enough into long-term life chances. Certainly we can see across the board raised aspirations, self-esteem, skills levels access to information. The quickest and largest percentage changes in these areas often occurred between the baseline and first tracker after two months. These results are both effective and fast, but in order to see their effect on life improvements further down the line, a longer-term study is needed. If we want to look at impact in terms of income, employment, health, education and housing, we need to look at a study that spans years rather than months.

It is clear from these projects that there are no quick fixes when working with very isolated and very hard to reach audiences. All projects reported the need to deal with an individual rather than a learning programme, addressing complex personal issues holistically through a range of information, advice, guidance, skills development, volunteering and work experience.

Other lessons include the difficulty in identifying participants, with many unwilling to admit to mental health problems or skills needs, and the technical complications in establishing short-term broadband connections in outreach locations. These should be taken on board in any future projects, and will have implications for budgets, timelines and evaluation methods.

Perhaps the biggest outcome and legacy of the social impact demonstrator projects, however, is the models of local action and partnership which have proved so effective in engaging these audiences. Most of these have continued post funding, or helped centres secure future funding from other sources.

Talking about value for money when dealing with soft impacts and/or emotive issues is not easy or even in the scope of this report, but it is worth touching upon to show how the £2 million of funding for the social impact demonstrator projects was spent. With the projects reporting a total of 12,234 participants, the cost per participant comes out at around £163 per head.

In marketing terms, UK online centres have worked with research agency Freshminds to establish that a cost per response with a C2DE audience is around £190. Actually converting people from that initial response to active participation, however, can cost between £1,000 and £4,000 per head. When you add service delivery to that cost the price rockets even higher. Trying to compare the cost per head in actual delivery terms is complicated. As an example, a similar outreach pilot by the Department for Work and Pensions which took place between 2002-2005 found the cost of generating 500 extra job outcomes was up to £35,000 per job.

Make no mistake, reaching the hard to reach is hard, and collecting robust, quantitative data for these groups can be even harder. While it is impossible to draw direct comparisons, the social impact demonstrator cost per head costs up reasonably well against the available evidence. The £163 per head cost covers both finding customers – marketing – and delivering learning and holistic support.

What’s more, by taking on board project lessons and applying established models of engagement, there is scope to bring this figure down even further in a future and longer-term research project.

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To take this work forward, we suggest the next step would be a project which adopts these engagement models and lessons about each audience, and brings them together in one place. By focussing on a specific town or area, and utilising local government partnerships, impact can be measured over a period of years. The framework used here by Ipsos MORI can be adapted and updated to collect data from individuals and centres, which can be measured against environmental data about the region, encompassing health, housing and employment statistics.

UK online centres are currently talking to partners about how to continue the work of the social impact demonstrators using the findings and evidence from this report.
“My life is completely different – I’m now working around 40 hours a week and my income has more than doubled, all thanks to the internet. I’m dead proud to be bringing home the bacon again.”
For more information about **UK online centres**, please visit: www.ukonlinecentres.com or email us at: ukonlinecentres@ufi.com