



making IT personal

joining the DOTs

Making IT Personal: Joining the DOTs is a scheme which creates Digital Outreach Trainers (DOTs) from volunteers.

DOTs deliver informal mentoring in digital technologies in a work, community or home setting.

The DOTs scheme is a European Commission funded initiative to address digital inclusion.

DOT Story – Mercy Nguru



Mercy Nguru is a working mum with a three year old son who enjoys using the internet and digital technologies. By becoming a Digital Outreach Trainer (DOT), she has found an easy way to consolidate and improve her IT knowledge, help other people learn more as well as discovering a pathway to new qualifications.

Mercy has been a DOT since April 2010 when she enquired about joining the Sheffield College's e-communications foundation degree. Julie Hooper, Manager of the Online College, advised Mercy that, because she was returning to education after a long break, she should take a supplementary course for a year. Alongside this, she suggested that by becoming a DOT she would also ease herself into the e-communications degree a year later, as it promotes many of the bedrock skills required.

Since then, Mercy has found that being a DOT not only draws attention to the amount of IT help she already provides, but also inspires her to seek out occasions where she can be of use. She has found that the friendly community around her home in Shirecliffe provides her with many opportunities to practise mentoring.

"My neighbour's husband broke down on the motorway," she explained, "she came to me for help and because he didn't have breakdown cover I said 'OK, we can get him covered, but we'd have to do it online'. She was apprehensive because she hadn't done anything like this before, so I went through it with

her and stayed whilst she did it to answer any questions. I showed her how to search and compare solutions and it was handy my being there as she was worried about giving her bank details online. I reassured her, and we were able to sort out the best cover available.”

This example demonstrates Mercy’s approach to mentoring, which is not so much showing people how to do things as lending them a helping hand to find the best solution. “Sometimes, people want you to just solve the problem for them. I think it’s important to provide support—to take a step back and let people do it for themselves.”

Mercy finds that an inquisitive approach often leads her to learning new things herself, and the online DOTs community has been invaluable in this. “The amount you can know is never-ending, and the benefit of being a DOT is that I can ask any questions I need to on the forum. I know that somebody on there is always going to know the answer. I actually have forum updates synchronised to my phone, so I get alerted to all the new updates.”

“If you take these opportunities to show people these things it can make their lives much easier.”

She also finds opportunities to mentor with her family, having been a part of her mum’s digital journey from the very beginning. “I’ve helped her from not being able to use a computer at all to being comfortable with a laptop. My sister moved to Germany with her family and because mum missed her I got her set up on Skype so they could speak. With her first experiences on a computer she was lifting the mouse in the air because she didn’t realise how that worked. Now, because I’ve helped her along the way, she can log in and speak to my sister when she wants, and is using email. For her, getting online is a big experience, and these gradual steps mean a lot.”

The self-directed nature of the scheme is useful, especially as Mercy has pressing commitments with her family, work and college course. Mentoring activity occurs naturally in her life, as it does with all DOTs, and it’s a simple case of recording it when it does. This flexibility is ideal for those with commitments which don’t allow them to commit to formal tutoring schemes.

Mercy also points out that being a DOT is not about being an expert—“It’s surprising how much knowledge you find you have to share, and may not realise how much people need to know, so you can help with even basic things. At work, I helped two friends put items on their computer calendars, which they didn’t know they could do. They asked what it was going to do, and I said a reminder would pop up at whatever time you select.”

“I think the scheme works because each DOT is helping one more person at a time become a little bit more computer-savvy. That’s good, because you’re no longer sitting back, watching the world go by, you’re helping someone out rather than focussing on yourself. If you help one person at a time, soon this will spread to everyone.”

Find out more at www.makingitpersonal.eu