



# making IT personal

joining the DOTs

*Working for digital inclusion in South Yorkshire*

**2010 Report**



"My parents live in Sheffield but my sister and her three children live in Germany. They got a laptop as a Christmas present so I suggested that my mother could use Skype to call her grandchildren. I have helped mum install Skype and create a new account from the Skype website. I then showed her how to use it. She gave my sister in Germany a surprise video call on Christmas day. Now my mother wants to attempt a conference call with all of us on my nephew's birthday."

## Mercy

"My neighbour's husband's car broke down on the motorway and he didn't have any breakdown cover. She wanted to purchase breakdown cover and she didn't know what to do. I advised her that the World Wide Web had made searching for the right breakdown cover much easier. I helped her go online to search for cover as there are a number of price and feature comparison sites out there as well as sites with personal reviews which helped her make her decision. She chose a company. I then showed her how to set up Paypal to pay for it."



"If we can support a lot of tenants to get some knowledge they can pass it on – so not only will that combat the issue of, you know, them not understanding the technology – there's the friendship side, there's the social side to that... feeling like they have achieved something... the end-user will often, you know, engage better with a tenant because, you know, they are on the same level – same understanding. So I think there's a lot of benefits to it, I really do, for my organisation."

## Eleanor

Deputy manager at Bakersfield Court  
Extra Care Housing Scheme



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"Earlier this year it was suggested by the Department for Revenue & Customs that libraries could, with their People's Network service, help people fill in their VAT returns online. A lady came into our Reference and Information library wanting help to fill in the VAT return online as they did not have their own computer. They rang me from the desk and I went down to help the lady, but what quickly became apparent was that she had no knowledge of computers, she couldn't even use the mouse. So I had to show her how to use the mouse and I then taught her how URLs worked. Next we had to work on keyboard skills. Then we had to set her up with a password and a user name and she learned the importance of keeping these secure. She just about managed to complete her VAT return but with far more help from me as a DOT than a DOT would normally expect to have to give someone. She realised fortunately that while I was able to help with one off things like this and she was welcome to come into the library to get help from me, what she really needed was an IT course for beginners. I found a relevant course for her and she has just started it."

**Karen**



# Why MITP:JtD?

The UK Government's Digital Champion, Martha Lane Fox, estimates that around 20% of the adult population have never been online. In the South Yorkshire area of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield the figure is more like 30%. This means that even more of our citizens are missing out on opportunities for the better life that digital technology can offer, from finding work through online shopping to digital photography and video phoning grandchildren in Australia.

There are a number of reasons why people don't use digital technology:

- They don't see it as relevant to their lives
- They are frightened of the technology
- They shy away from opportunities to learn about it
- They don't have access to technology

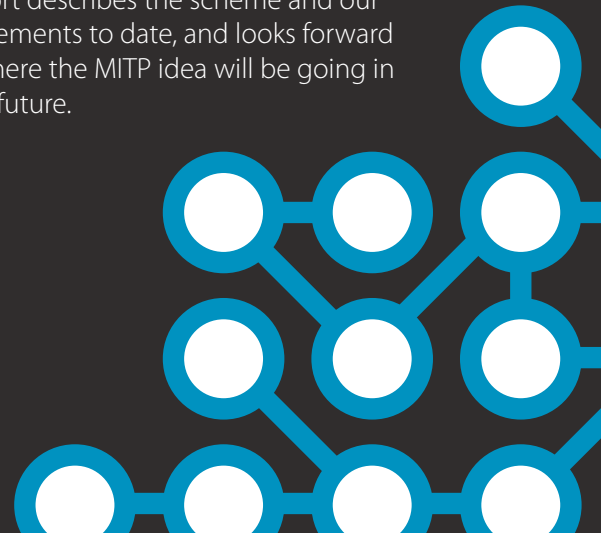
For some, being digitally excluded is part and parcel of a broader pattern of being unable or unwilling to participate in mainstream economic and social life.

And as economic recovery depends more and more on providing services and conducting business online, the lag in digital skills in our region threatens the prosperity of all our residents.

This is why the four local authorities and their partners have adopted an ambitious plan to encourage all South Yorkshire residents to use digital technology and go online, called Making IT Personal (MITP). At the heart of this is the idea that people can be encouraged to engage with technology through informal mentoring from volunteers in the community, people they can trust who may not be IT experts but who are one step ahead. These volunteer mentors – whom we call Digital Outreach Trainers or DOTs for short – can help make technology relevant and accessible. And for some this can be the start of a learning journey that will improve their skills and life chances.

And so the Making IT Personal: Joining the DOTs scheme was launched, with support from the European Social Fund, in 2009 and began to recruit DOTs in spring of 2010.

This report describes the scheme and our achievements to date, and looks forward to where the MITP idea will be going in the future.



# What is a DOT

## - and why should anyone want to be one?



Our core idea is that anyone who uses digital technology at all can be a DOT – and everyone should be one!

A DOT is someone who lives or works where you do, or uses the same shops or services, or has the same interests, and who is prepared to show you how you can do things better and do better things using technology. DOTs are informal mentors – informal because they are not trainers by profession (or if they are that is incidental) and because the learning takes place anywhere: in the street, in shops, post offices, doctors' waiting rooms, the pub, wherever people meet each other.

To be a DOT all you need is to:

- Know how to do something with digital technology – whether it be on your mobile phone, digital TV, digital camera, or on a computer
- Be willing to pass on your know-how to those around you.

And what is the offer to DOTs – why should anyone want to be a DOT?

- Recognition for your efforts in helping others
- Becoming part of an online community of like-minded people
- The chance to learn more about digital technology from other DOTs
- The opportunity to get accredited for being a DOT (all DOTs get the option to acquire Open College Network Level 2 accreditation) and access to more advanced courses.

Our aim is that over time those whom DOTs help will want to pass on what they have learnt to others, so they will become DOTs in turn – and so we create a viral effect that will spread throughout the South Yorkshire community.

## Srabanti

"It can be so useful and can make people's lives a lot easier. The DOT scheme is good because people can learn at their own pace in their own house. There are some people who may be old or housewives who find it difficult to go to college. Through IT they can become part of a social network and access services online - they can become digital citizens. People have asked me how to do online banking, find websites, book holidays online, design invitations cards, or even technical things like transfer iTunes to their iPod. By being a DOT I am more involved in my community, I am helping neighbours. And by being a DOT you get the recognition in society – people have faith in you and go to you for help."





# How is MITP:JtD different from other schemes?

The idea of volunteer digital champions and community-based mentors is not unique. However, the way we are developing the scheme in South Yorkshire is a bit different from many others:

- We are not recruiting a special cohort of people to be digital outreach trainers. Our idea is that anyone can be a DOT and the potential number is unlimited
- Being a DOT is a volunteer activity. Although there may be many instances where someone becomes a DOT as part of their paid employment, this will not be the norm. Mostly people will not be paid for being a DOT
- DOTs need not have advanced IT knowledge. They just need to have know-how about some use of digital technology, and the willingness to pass on what they know.

We think this approach can work because it emphasises informal learning that takes place in the community or workplace, so offering a low threshold that people have to cross to take their first steps in using digital technology or in learning how to do new things with it. And because anyone can be a DOT it offers the prospect of cascading skills and knowledge to those who won't be reached by more formal courses, no matter how basic or good they are, or who would be daunted by a more official-looking approach even in outreach centres or community halls.

Making this happen requires a different approach to the training and accreditation of the volunteer mentors as well. After a straightforward registration process DOTs become approved through submitting evidence that shows they are helping others and that they understand the limits of the advice they can offer. In other words we are testing their mentoring skills not their technical knowledge. DOTs are encouraged and given opportunities to increase their technical knowledge but this is not a prerequisite for being a DOT.

What we are beginning to create in this way is a community of DOTs that to a large extent is self-organising and self-regulating – although they are given guidance on what they should and shouldn't do, when they need CRB checks, and the like. A low-overhead model that can offer the realistic prospect of being sustainable in times when funding is tight.



"My neighbour Phil is writing a book which he has now submitted to a publisher. I have helped him to email the manuscript to me to check spelling and grammar, using Google Docs in the process, to correct the text and send back to him. I also advised him to save the manuscript to a memory stick so that if his rather old PC no longer worked, he would at least have been able to save the work he had done. I did state that I could only do a certain amount of checking for him due to other commitments, and we agreed he would just send the first few chapters. I passed a discarded copy of a book to Phil giving details of publishers, as a starting point for suggestions as to who to email the manuscript to. Phil is now using his PC with greater confidence, getting to grips with emailing and producing text."

**Gillian**



# The learning ladder

The core of the MITP scheme is the informal learning that DOTs provide to draw people into use of digital technology. However those who become engaged in the scheme, whether as DOTs or those whom DOTs help, are able to take advantage of a ladder of learning opportunities that run from entry level right up to foundation degree. The doors are opened to the wide range of IT-related courses run by local colleges and in learning centres across the area, and likewise we hope that many of those on these courses will become DOTs themselves.

The scheme also offers access to a range of learning approaches:

1. The informal learning offered by DOTs or that DOTs can share in their community.
2. The semi-formal self-learning bite-sized materials on different technologies that can be downloaded from the DOT website, and to which DOTs can add.
3. Formal courses.

DOTs, once approved, can go on to gain an OCN accreditation at either Level 2 or Level 3. The evidence they provide to become approved counts as the first stage towards this accreditation, registration for which is optional. For those wishing to study at higher levels the scheme has funded the development of new modules on Sheffield College's e-Communications Foundation Degree, covering the digital delivery of public services in particular.

For those engaging with digital technology for the first time we have also developed a suite of new learning materials branded as 'Fast Forward'. These materials have several unique features:

- They can be used in a variety of settings – online or face to face. Being used for blended learning is ideal.
- At entry level through to Level 1, they develop basic digital skills as part and parcel of learning basic literacy – for example, through learning about sentences and capitalisation while developing basic keyboard skills.
- They provide progression from these basic skills to applying them to employability skills – where to look for jobs online, composing an application letter, completing an online application form.
- They are strongly locally contextualised with different versions for Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, with learning activities using local landmarks and personalities.



The Fast Forward approach is attracting a lot of attention and is being taken up by many community learning organisations keen to offer new learning opportunities to their clients. And Fast Forward Malta – one of our transnational partners – will be out in early 2011!



"I am Stephen and I am an approved DOT. I joined a refugee education and employment project as a volunteer tutor. Through that I became a student on the e-Communications Foundation Degree course and I joined the DOT scheme so that I would learn more about sharing my skills with my work colleagues and friends. An example of my work as a DOT is with my friend Sami. I have helped her extend her use of her mobile phone and computer. I helped her to register an account with her mobile provider so that she can manage her billings and check the statements online. I advised her to set a strong but easy-to-remember password of at least eight characters consisting of letters and numbers. This has led her to gain the confidence to setup online accounts and with my encouragement she herself has opened Skype and Facebook accounts. She has really enjoyed being able to connect up with old friends on Facebook. Sami is now looking for a job and I have shown her how to create a profile on a recruitment agency's website so that she can search for vacancies at her convenience and apply online as well as receive jobs alerts that are of interest to her. What is great about the DOT scheme is that you learn a lot about technologies yourself from other DOTs on the forum and through downloading the tutorials there."



**Stephen**

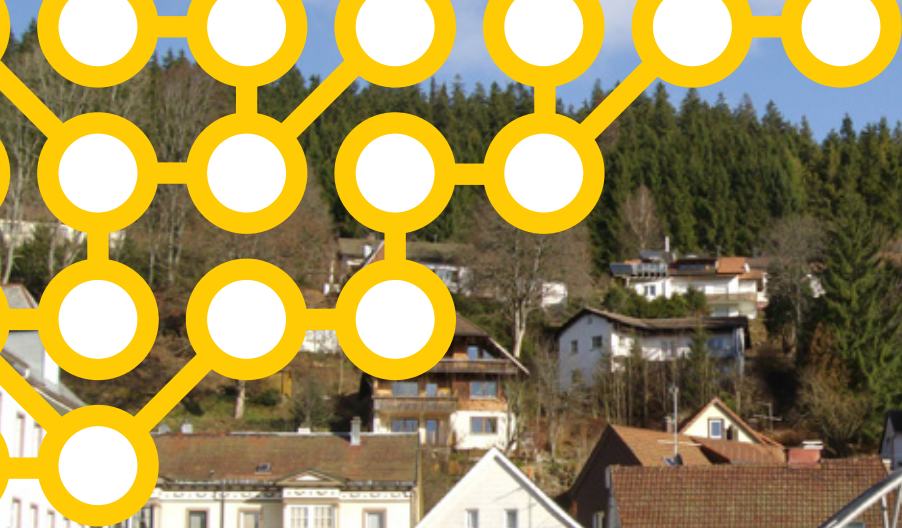
# How are we doing?

By early January 2011 we had passed 300 DOT registrations, which was our initial indicative target for summer 2011 – showing how well the DOT idea has begun to catch on. Forty-three of these had become fully approved DOTs, most of whom have gone on to achieve the optional accreditation, and between 70 and 100 are currently working towards approval.

Initial evaluation evidence shows that DOTs value all aspect of the scheme but particularly the online forums, which are very active as a way of seeking and exchanging information about uses of digital technology and other topics such as job opportunities. Initially most DOTs came from the college context but over time the diversity of DOTs is growing, with more coming from voluntary groups. A new initiative which will begin to show results in the early part of 2011 is to develop and test out the DOT idea in public and private workplace and service settings – healthcare centres, supermarkets, sheltered housing and so on.

The main intention of this initial roll-out of the DOT scheme was to develop and trial a DOT training and accreditation model, and this we have done successfully. It has not all been plain sailing – we had to give careful consideration to how to ensure quality and safeguarding of DOT activity without falling into the trap of over-formalising a scheme that was designed to capitalise on informal learning. At the moment it seems like we have achieved a good balance in this respect, although as the range of scenarios for DOTs increases we are continuing to test it out. And we are going to be reviewing the language used in the scheme and the processes we have adopted to ensure that they are as inclusive as possible.





# Transnational partnerships

A key part of the ESF funding we have received is to help form transnational partnerships so that good practice in promoting digital inclusion can be shared across the member states of the EU. To that end we have formed good partnerships with the Net Trainers Association, which has members in several countries, and the Malta Communications Authority which has responsibility for the digital inclusion policy of the Maltese Government. A visit to the University of Furtwangen in the Black Forest provided the opportunity for a very useful review of our new learning materials by expert e-learning practitioners, as well as an exchange of perspectives on digital inclusion issues in the UK and in Germany.

Meanwhile the relationship with Malta has prospered with visits both ways and the development now of Fast Forward Malta learning materials. Learning about the Maltese situation has reinforced a message which we often forget in this country – that while providing access to technology is obviously necessary, it is not sufficient for digital inclusion. In Malta many households have computers and Internet connectivity is generally good, but use of the technology declines markedly with age and educational level. Hence Malta is also interested in the DOT approach as a way of engaging those who are afraid of the technology or deterred by the idea of learning, or who don't see how technology could be useful for them.

We plan to strengthen our transnational activity during the remainder of the project, particularly with a view to building up the knowledge and understanding of our DOT mentors through giving them experience of digital inclusion work in different contexts.



# MITP:JtD in the broader context

- At South Yorkshire regional level, Making IT Personal: Joining the DOTs puts in place some of the key building blocks for a larger Making IT Personal digital inclusion programme.
- It supports the greater efficiency and customisation of public services through online delivery.
- It also helps more citizens take advantage of the public sector next generation broadband initiative, Digital Region.
- At UK national level, MITP:JtD supports the Race Online 2012 campaign to get more people online and make Britain the first nation where everyone can use the web.
  - It supports national initiatives such as the Pass IT On campaign, Get Online week and the Go On: Get More Out of Life Online campaign.
  - It also contributes towards government objectives on volunteering and more effective and transparent public services.
  - At European Union level, the project supports the 'enhancing e-skills' and 'ICT for social challenges' strands of the European Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe 2020 action plan.

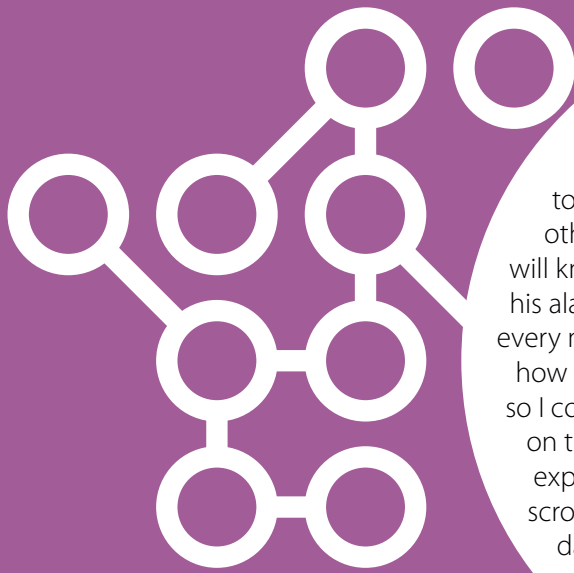


Lisa

"It sounds stupid now but I didn't give much help to my family with technology before becoming a DOT because it never occurred to me to do it. But becoming a DOT has really made me think about what it would be nice for them to be able to do. For example, I showed my auntie how to use my digital camera and our family saved up and bought one for her on condition that I would show her how to use it which I did. Her daughter then wanted to be able to put photographs she had taken into a digital photo frame so I went through how it worked with them both and they did it themselves. My auntie is interested in getting a computer but she doesn't have a clue about them so I am helping her choose the right one and I have told her where she can get free beginner courses in our area. She and my cousin are starting an IT course in January.

And you won't believe my mum. She is one of the older generation who find anything to do with technology frustrating and confusing. But she takes the information in if I explain things in a practical way. I showed her how to set up an eBay account and sell unwanted items she had acquired. I also set up a new modem for her computer. We followed the step by step instructions and my mum was impressed with how easy it actually was. I think it has given her the confidence to attempt small tasks herself in the future."

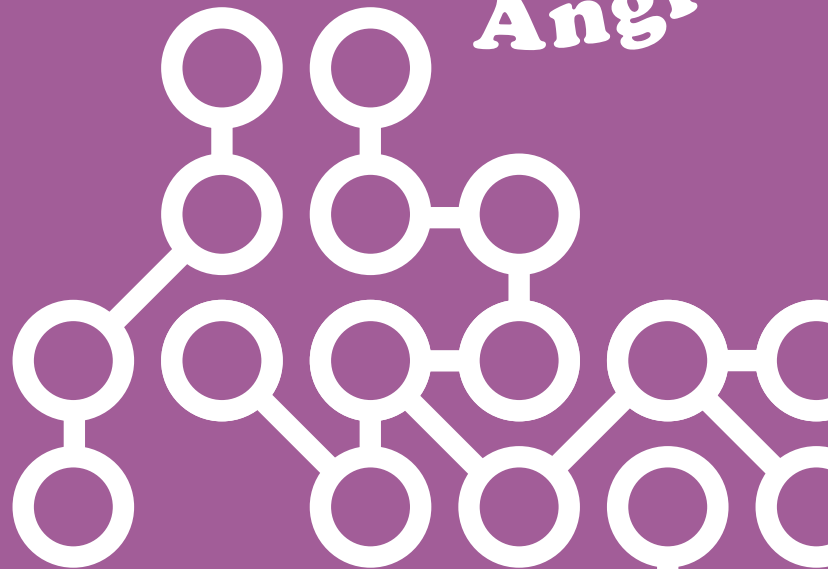




"I help friends and family as a Digital Outreach Trainer. If they need something that I don't know how to do I just get onto the website and ask the other DOTs. You can guarantee that someone will know. For example, my husband Denis said that his alarm on his mobile phone did not seem to ring every morning as a back up alarm and he didn't know how to change it. I had a different model from him so I couldn't work it out neither. But one of the DOTs on the site had the same phone as him and they explained how the settings work. He needed to scroll down the touch screen and then press the days that the alarm needed to be activated. That's the great thing about the DOT scheme, you learn from each other all the time."



**Angie**



"I have given several one to one sessions with friends and colleagues showing them the use of an iPod Touch. I have shown a friend how to use the iPod Touch so that he could get used to using an iPhone. I explained the need to download iTunes to his PC so that apps can be downloaded, and updates done. I have shown how the apps can be used for fun, and also for function. I have explained how the iPod Touch will only work with wifi, so is somewhat limited. I then showed some basic functions such as how to connect to a wireless router, tilting the IPT, and the zoom tap or pinch. I have helped him to configure an email account to use on the iPod Touch, and shown how to use the settings app. I have pointed out the 'Tips and Tricks' app to help discover more.

I have also targeted the content of other sessions to the subject area one of my colleagues is involved in. For instance, one colleague is interested in maps and navigation so I showed how Google maps can pinpoint a position; how it can give directions; how further apps can be downloaded; how Google Earth can be used to view the area.

I have explained the usefulness of this tool for searching for information and accessing services easily, and the convenience of it."

**PH**





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