



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 – Amanda Harston-Southern



Amanda Harston-Southern is an IT tutor at the Dearne Enterprise Centre in Goldthorpe, South Yorkshire. Being a DOT (Digital Outreach Trainer) has allowed her to exercise mentoring skills and IT knowledge outside of the classroom, as well as providing the benefits of her experience as a guide to other DOTs.

Amanda has been working as an IT tutor for two years, and prior to this was a teacher at Barnsley College. While her professional life requires her to lead the way in computing, her experience and knowledge comes from her family. "There was always a computer in the house when I was growing up. My dad used one mainly for gaming, and I was interested as well. It feels natural to work with computers, so I want to pass that on. I think because I have a background in teaching, the two work together, and I can communicate that enthusiasm."

A DOT since January 2011, Amanda has since progressed to a level two qualification and is looking forward to working towards level three and becoming an eMentor, a role which would see her helping other DOTs progress through the scheme and which her working life has partly prepared her for. Her role at the enterprise centre has allowed her to recruit several DOTs to the scheme and help them with their own diary entries. "There are two people who are now DOTs and are also working towards becoming classroom assistants. They combine the resources here with the help and guidance of the

DOTs scheme to learn important and useful things like getting pictures from a camera to a computer, or how to use the latest mobile technology. These are things that look really good on their CVs and job applications, and getting to grips with it gives them the confidence that they need. It shows employers that they can help people in a practical way.”

For her own DOT activity, Amanda has focussed away from her work environment and on her home life: “It made me think more about how I could help at home, and look for opportunities there. It’s what I suggest to other DOTs when they are having a difficult time coming up with examples for their diaries. For me, even though me and my dad have always used computers, my mum and sister and other family didn’t get into it as much. But recently they’ve wanted to learn more things.

“I’ve always been a bit obsessed with eBay, and in the past my mum would get me to sell things for her. But since she’s retired I said to her ‘you’ve got more time than me now,’ and got her to do it herself. I had to spend quite a long time with her and all the different aspects—setting up a seller and PayPal account, how to take and edit photos of items, filling in the description. It’s quite a lot of things. I started by supporting her fully then slowly withdrawing as she got to know it better. You don’t always realise what a big learning process these things are until you go through them step by step. She’s really good at it now, and she sells things for me.”

**It’s knowledge that a lot of people have.
A DOT can build on it by helping
others and work towards a qualification.**

Amanda also helped her aunt to create an online photo album, another lengthy process: “She wanted to make an album for one of her children, showing their whole life. Some of the photos were digital, but the older ones needed scanning. So we went through the process of getting all of the pictures onto a computer and to the same standard – cropping them, changing the colour levels and getting them onto the website. I did the same thing again – I helped a lot at first, showing her straightforward ways to do each thing, then withdrew as she got more confident with it.

“I like how the DOTs scheme works on these bits of knowledge about digital things that a lot of people have. It means that a DOT can build on it by helping others, and can access help for themselves from the online community, at home and in their own time, and can work towards a qualification. It looks really good on a job application form, and gives people confidence by showing them that they know enough to help other people. A classroom can sometimes be too formal for some people, and passing knowledge and enthusiasm on through family and friends is often a more natural process.”

Find out more at www.makingitpersonal.eu