



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 – Sue Harpham



Sue Harpham has been a IT helpdesk assistant for ten years at Sheffield College. While she claims to be far from an expert in computing, it's her straightforward approach and empathy with people that make her good at her job, and a natural fit for being a guide to others on the DOTs scheme. Her progress as a DOT (Digital Outreach Trainer) has helped her realise this and how best to consolidate her skills.

Sue's computing experience came through her working life, something she has picked up along the way. Because she doesn't have a technical background, Sue feels she can "relate to what people are having problems with and what they want to know. I'm good at problem solving, and I can make a bridge between technical issues and people's understanding. If you talk to someone about something they don't know you have to make sure they understand it, otherwise it won't go in." And because Sue's working life encompasses a time before computers were a common workplace feature, she can relate to the apprehension people often feel when confronted with technology for the first time.

A DOT since the scheme began in early 2010, Sue thought it looked interesting because "it said 'if you've got a skill, then get recognised for helping in the community,' which I was already doing. I wanted to be recognised for it, and the fact that I could get a qualification meant that someone else was saying I was good at what I do.

“The DOTs scheme seemed to be saying that everyone is a mentor, in a way, and the more you help people then the more skills and confidence spread through the community.”

Having gained a level three qualification, Sue is now an eMentor to DOTs making their own journey to on the scheme, and everything she has learnt she now exercises for their benefit. “The whole process was a learning curve for me, but it’s made my role as an eMentor easier. I know what I need to do to guide people when I see them doing the same things as I did. But I still need the help of my eMentors from time to time, and it’s good to know that there’s always someone to go to. DOTs is a network of people with different interests and skills, and if there’s something I want to know I can send an email or put it on the community forum – there’s always someone available with an answer.”

Beyond qualifications, going through the DOT process has made an important personal change to Sue: “It’s instilled more confidence in me, about what I know and how I can help in changing someone else’s life. We’re so far down the road in using technology now that you think everyone knows everything about it, but it’s surprising how little people do know, and how much you yourself can learn, and how much you can still help. Before being a DOT, I never thought about being a mentor, even though at work it’s what I have been doing for years. I’ve always been very capable, but always in a background role.

“I think I could move into a mentoring role anywhere now, and that’s something I never thought I’d hear myself say. It has made me think differently about what I want to achieve and how to do it.”



Sue receiving her level three award

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Sue sees her own progress reflected in the DOTs she mentors: “Most of the DOTs I’ve met have been working full time and are looking for experience, a qualification and something good to put on their CV. There’s a lot of people without qualifications just getting on with life, just learning as they go. The DOTs scheme is a way of bringing people in who would otherwise be left behind because they’re not involved with more formal training, a way of raising standards as a whole by passing information around, and it gives people a chance to be recognised for helping keep the knowledge flowing around.

“It’s getting ordinary people to engage with friends and family and the community about technology in an environment where they feel comfortable. If you take away the daunting aspect of technology it helps people feel calm and comfortable about learning to use it.”

Find out more at www.makingitpersonal.eu