

ESF innovation, transnational and mainstreaming project in the UK 2009-2012

Making IT Personal: Joining the DOTs (MITP: JtD) is an ESF innovation project helping to tackle digital inclusion in the South Yorkshire area of the UK, covering the mainly urban areas of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. As well as the local authorities it has involved local colleges and voluntary sector organisations. It has worked with partners in Germany and Malta so far and is expanding its partnerships.

The primary activity of the project has been to develop and pilot the infrastructure to support community-based volunteer digital mentors, known as **Digital Outreach Trainers** or **DOTs**, who are well placed to help family, neighbours, friends and work colleagues who lack digital skills.

Key features of DOTs:

- DOTs are not professional trainers and are not employed by the project. They are simply people who know how to do something with digital technology and who commit to passing on their knowledge and skills to others.
- The project therefore has a **viral** 'pass IT on' approach to learning in the home, community or workplace (not in a designated centre for learning about IT). People who know how to do something with digital technology become DOTs who pass on their skills to others who become DOTs in turn and pass on to others.....
- This is an informal mentoring approach and we believe that you can encourage more of it to happen by providing **recognition** and **support**:
 - **Recognition**: the status of being a DOT, the chance to gain approval and to become accredited. Approval is based on completing an online diary reflecting mentoring skills and safeguarding awareness. Accreditation is optional and covers mentoring skills not technical knowledge,
 - **Support**: an online community for peer learning and support. Technical knowledge is developed through informal learning in the online community, including bite-sized tutorials which DOTs can create, and through signposting to formal courses where appropriate.
- The DOT model fits with the UK government's Race Online campaign which encourages the viral 'pass IT on' approach by non-experts called Digital Champions. In effect, DOTs are Digital Champions but the distinctiveness of the MITP: JtD project is in developing and piloting a model for support and accreditation of these champions in order to strengthen and build on their volunteer activity.
- The project also recognises that digital exclusion is often an aspect of wider social exclusions. So we have developed innovative learning materials branded *Fast Forward* to tackle literacy, employability and digital skills in one integrated package, with a strong local focus. Those who undertake these or other digital courses are encouraged to become DOTs and so commit to passing on their learning to others.

Results to summer 2011:

- 442 people registered as DOTs, with 275 active. 40% of DOTs report their highest qualification at Level 2 or below, so are not highly educated.

- Some DOTs have supported 20-plus individuals; 25% of those they helped were having their first online experience.
- Surveys show that sharing and helping others is the highest motivation for becoming a DOT. Improving personal skills is also an important motivation for DOTs.
- Over 40% of DOTs have posted requests and comments on the online forums with over 100 messages being posted a month.
- The majority of participants have engaged in more than 1 learning intervention and continue to engage in further learning on leaving the project.
- The project won a UK Adult Learners' Week award for ESF Inspiring Project 2011.

Next steps:

- The project is now focusing on employability and employment, creating extra support and resources to help DOTs to pass on digital skills and competencies required to access labour market opportunity.
- We are also building capacity and expertise to integrate the DOT model within pre-existing community infrastructures in the public, private and third sectors

Further information:

Project website: www.makingITpersonal.eu

DOT online community: www.makingITpersonal.org.uk

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