"Everyone gets hooked"

exploring ICTs in low-income neighbourhoods

Report on research carried out for the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team on Access to IT

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"People want it and they want somewhere to come, somewhere they can just nip in. Everyone gets hooked."

Discussion group at Great Houghton, Barnsley, March 1999

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Description of the programme

The programme of work reported here took place in 1999 to inform the investigations of the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team on 'Access to IT' (PAT15). A note about PAT15 is included at Appendix A. The work was funded by the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) which provided the secretariat for PAT15.

Seven localities were identified for the programme:
- Great Houghton, Barnsley
- Windhill, Shipley East, Bradford
- Harlesden and South Kilburn, Brent
- Hangleton and Knoll, Hove
- Scotswood, Newcastle upon Tyne
- Earlham, Norwich
- Granby Island, Plymouth.

The programme was designed to have four main activities.
- Work with a local project or community organisation to run an 'ICT Awareness Day' in each locality.
- Work with the project or organisation to run discussion groups and carry out a questionnaire survey, seeking comments on what people might expect to use the technology for, what were their motivations for gaining access, how and when would they want to gain access, what difference would they expect it to make to their lives and to their communities, and so on.
- Follow up about one month later with an in-depth seminar in the locality. This would include local residents, representatives of the community and voluntary sectors, and key partners including the local authority, the TEC, education, health, and private sector partners. The purpose would be to explore the strategic issues involved in establishing a sustainable facility to provide access. We would be looking for insights into the key aspects such as partnership, management and ownership. The intention was that this seminar could begin with the involvement of all participants in the 'neighbourhoods online game', developed by Drew Mackie and David Wilcox precisely for this kind of scenario. In practice most of the projects played the game on a different occasion.
- Preparation of a written report.

A note agreed at a sub-group meeting of PAT15 said that the projects should:
"minimise disruption in local communities and not raise unrealistic expectations, nor should they give the impression that resources will flow into the locality during, or as a consequence of, the exercise.

Good practice dictates that where possible local residents should benefit, for example in having the opportunity to acquire new research skills, in exploring the potential of ICTs to contribute to their quality of life, and in having opportunities to articulate their experience and views."

One consequence of this approach was to give each project as much autonomy as possible, so that independent decisions were taken for example on the content of the questionnaire and on the way in which the seminar was organised. While each project undoubtedly gained from this approach, not having to fit their activities into a stringent framework, it did mean that comprehensive findings were not always possible. The goodwill generated, however, resulted in the sharing of numerous insights which are reported here. In addition, development work continues through 2000 and 2001 in Brent, Hove, Newcastle, Plymouth, and Shipley, thanks to support from the Department for Education and Employment, and the DTI.

1.2 The context

It is important to stress that this work took place in neighbourhoods where there was little or no community access to ICTs. At the outset, only in Shipley was there any form of community access - in their case the use of computers and an online connection at Windhill Community Centre for supported learning at Shipley College. All the localities could be described as low-income, not connected, and marginalised. The purpose of the research, in working with these constituencies, was to explore attitudes to new information and communications technology, and perceptions of its potential, with a view to informing policy.

Of course, most people have at least a vague grasp of this potential, but a huge number are discouraged from getting connected by the complexity, lack of apparent pertinence to their lives, and risk of expensive pitfalls. Others might be seduced into the information society by some uncertain promise of employability. An important influence in 1999 was the rapid development of 'free' Internet provision following the introduction of Freeserve. This phenomenon followed increased high street sales of mobile telephones and computers, a high volume of newspaper and television advertisements, broad media coverage, and repeated central government reference to ICTs and the Internet. The effect was a significant free-market popularisation of online technology, providing a breathless context of hyperbole, promise and scepticism - of motivation for those who knew someone who knew about it, and exclusion for those who didn't. In all this, public sector agencies, particularly schools, colleges and local authorities, have had particular difficulty keeping up. It has been left largely to community and voluntary agencies to provide impartial advice, support and training for those on low incomes who might be seeking to explore new ICTs.

All this activity takes place on the platform of assumptions that ICTs bring personal, social and economic benefit. For many people, opportunities are needed to test these assumptions in circumstances which relate to their day-to-day lives.

The impact of ICT in economic and social contexts is both broad and deep, because of its diversity and its permeation into so many aspects of everyday life. It can serve to extinguish local economies or transform them. It touches everyone who handles cash or receives published news or uses a telephone. This is increasingly recognised in policy, not least because of the need in economic terms to have a population which is able to adjust to, and exploit, new economic opportunities in the global context. The higher the proportion of that population which is excluded from the benefits of the Network Age, the greater the burden on the remainder. All this adds weight in policy to the fundamental argument that people on low-incomes, and those marginalised for other reasons, should not be excluded from the benefits which the technology offers.

The use of ICTs is bringing about significant changes which can be directed both in the interests of strong economic development and in confronting social exclusion. The social inclusion imperative requires an understanding of the contribution of information and communication to social inclusion in low-income neighbourhoods, and how people can exploit ICTs to that end, particularly through community activity, because this multiplies value. This report is intended to contribute to that understanding.

Summary of main findings from PAT15 local projects, 1999

The projects were concerned with ICT familiarisation in low-income neighbourhoods. The main activities took place in Barnsley, Brent, Hove, Newcastle, Plymouth and Shipley. An ICT Awareness Day was run in each locality and this was supplemented with research carried out by local people.

Structured opportunities for awareness and familiarisation, in appropriate settings, are a highly effective way of introducing ICTs to people in low-income neighbourhoods. (5.6)

There is a clear need for a basic level of **community activity or community development** as a foundation for any familiarisation initiative. This meant that the nature of the Awareness Day and its publicity were sensitive to local interests and were supported. It would be difficult to establish research activities of this kind in more fractured neighbourhoods or where there was no trusted contact with local people. The relative integration of the neighbourhoods in which we worked does not negate the need for basic community development and community involvement where this does not already exist. (5.6)

The main reason why people do not own computers is that they are perceived as too expensive to buy or run. Twenty per cent of those who did not own a computer felt that they did not know enough, and 14% felt that they didn't need one. Only 14% of those asked said they hadn't had the chance to try one. Only a tiny proportion of respondents were worried about the effects of content on the Internet, or of games. There is evidence that 'fear of messing it up' is a reason for non-ownership. (4.3)

The research shows the importance of recognising the **diversity** of applications, interests and motivations. Once people get the chance to see the range of possibilities which ICTs provide, they can often quickly see the potential for their own lives, and this might be to do with skills for employability, helping to run their family business, keeping up with or encouraging their children, pursuing a hobby, gaining information, cultural expression, or plain old-fashioned curiosity. (5)

Community provision of ICTs offers different and complementary benefits to home access, which are quickly recognised by people whose way of life includes social networks based around community buildings. The key attributes of community access are:
- **integration with existing community provision and support networks;**
- **'localness', and**
- **the shared experience.** (5.4)

The projects demonstrated that **local champions**, who help stimulate interest and activity, will often emerge when an occasion is provided for them. But there is no reason to assume that they will necessarily; and when they do come forward, we should be in a position to support and nurture them. (5.5)

A single ICT Awareness Day is not sufficient to uncover and meet the likely potential interest and need. **Repetition of the events** over a period of several weeks would multiply their effectiveness, taking advantage of the power of word-of-mouth at neighbourhood level. A structured programme of similar events, providing basic awareness and familiarisation, and possibly including activities targeted at specific social groups, could make a signiciant impact on some of the barriers to the use of ICTs in low-income neighbourhoods. (5.6) It is important not to under-estimate the role of technical support in running ICT Awareness Days. (4.1)

The two major motivations for people in low-income neighbourhoods to explore ICTs are:
- **employability,**
- **and helping or keeping up with children.**

The other key motivations are:
- education, (informal) research, homework
- supporting own work or business, and
- leisure, communities of interest. (5.2)

The main barrier inhibiting the engagement of people in low-income neighbourhoods with ICTs is *confidence*. This is associated with a number of other issues such as the complexity of the technology, its diversity, lack of opportunities, and low levels of basic skills. The technology is powerful in providing an entry point into learning. It offers a new skill for many people, irrespective of class or educational background, and is not associated with earlier school failure. Once people achieve early successes with IT, they then feel more confident to tackle other basic skills needs. (5.3)

Most of those who attended the events were clearly **'actively interested' or already converted**. It is important to offer events for such people because their interest can atrophy or become disillusion if opportunities are not provided. However, there is another job to be done, which takes longer and involves working with community activists and practitioners, in order to attract those who are indifferent or too profoundly excluded to be attracted to community buildings and events. (6)

3 The locations

The research reflects experience in seven locations in England, as follows:
- Great Houghton, Barnsley
- Shipley East, Bradford
- Harlesden and South Kilburn, Brent
- Hangleton and Knoll, Hove
- Scotswood, Newcastle upon Tyne
- Earlham, Norwich
- Granby Island, Plymouth.

CDF had previously been working on Information Society issues with Barnsley and Doncaster TEC, and this resulted in the organisation of an ICT Awareness Day at Great Houghton, Barnsley, in March 1999. A questionnaire survey was carried out, compatible with the other surveys, and the findings are incorporated into this report below. No further work in Barnsley was involved.

Preparatory work was carried out in Norwich and an ICT Day was organised in June. However, there was a very poor turnout and it was decided to organise another event two weeks later. On this occasion the turnout was even lower and the exercise was abandoned. An informal review suggested a combination of likely reasons which are worth recording here:
- over-commitment of community workers in a demanding range of regeneration initiatives
- relatively few local activists, and high levels of 'partnership fatigue' and 'consultation fatigue' among them
- lack of a local 'champion', paid or volunteer, who understood what was involved and had the time and energy to own the initiative and drive it forward
- a local community which lacked cohesion, partly for topographical reasons, with no obvious local centre.

In Brent, initial survey work was carried out in the Harlesden area. The ICT Awareness Day was subsequently organised in nearby South Kilburn and the survey work augmented there. The results of this work have been quantified separately.

The remainder of this section describes the characteristics of the five other areas where research activities took place.

Granby Island, Devonport

Granby Island Community Centre, in Devonport, lies on the edge of three wards in the city of Plymouth: Keyham (population 13,424); Stoke (12,106); and St Peter (11,314). Devonport is cut off from the Tamar River by the Royal Dockyard's 15 ft high wall. The area was previously called Dock, and it was known for its foul stews and press-gang. It lost its independence to Plymouth during the nineteenth century. Pre-war Devonport was an affluent area, centred around the naval base. Most local residents were employed either directly by the dockyard, or by the huge number of companies and firms that depended on it. During the war Devonport was heavily bombed by German aircraft trying to hit the dockyard. In the 1950s half of the High Street was taken over by the Navy, and no civilian has had access to it since. Concerns taken over included a bank and a branch of Woolworth's. The damage caused to the sense of community has barely been addressed.

Since the defence reviews of the 1980s, employment at the dockyard has fallen from about 25,000 to 3,500. When HMS Ark Royal underwent its last major refit, 10,000 were employed on that project alone. Devonport now has 9% of its population unemployed. The local economy has experienced a steady decline since, partly because the land is still held by the MoD: alternative industry has not come into the area.

> *"With the withdrawal of Defence as an employer, unemployment rose, but there were some advantages - Granby Island Community Centre is an ex-MoD property, now put to a better use."*
> (Councillor Tom Wildy)

Historic Devonport has now been split into part of two other wards, St Peters and Keyham, but each of these areas score highly among the most deprived wards in England and Wales, in fact St Peters has been rated the most deprived ward in Great Britain and ninth n Europe. Devonport's approximate population is 14,000 with 19% of the population under sixteen; 4.5% are pensioners, a tenth of these being over the age of 75. Approximately one per cent are from black and ethnic groups. There are 2,567 households in Devonport, most of the properties being owned by the local authority. A small but growing proportion is infill housing association property, with some privately owned accommodation.

Devonport has a history of community involvement and a well-established network between agencies active within the community. However it is only recently that local people have started to make their views known in the citywide forum.

"In the past local people came together to find solutions to their problems, and local agencies tended to work to their own agendas, but recently these sides have started to come together both to identify problems and to work towards partnership solutions."
(Sam Swabey, Granby Island Community Centre)

The Hangleton, Knoll and Portslade Area

Hangleton and Knoll is relatively isolated from the rest of Hove and Portslade and the wider Brighton conurbation by a by-pass cutting through the downs to the north and west, and a major road to the south. The Hangleton Ward consists of two main areas: in the south a large, owner-occupied sector; and to the north a predominately local authority estate. Hangleton was built mainly in the 1950s, with no planned community facilities. There are four small parades of shops, with Brighton and its shopping centres 6 miles away.

The split nature of the area tends to divide the population and to contrast poverty and relative affluence. The majority of needs are sited on the local authority estate, where there is a high proportion of families with children, and of single parent families.

The Knoll estate is to the north of Hove. It comprises between 700-800 dwellings with a population of over 2,000. The estate was built mainly in the 1920s with few community resources. There are no shops at all on the estate, with a small parade on the south side of the Old Shoreham Road, but the nearest bank, post office, supermarket, petrol station and chemist are all off the estate. The estate is isolated by being bounded by main roads on three sides.

The average household size is considerably larger than the national average, with high numbers of young people and children. The estate has a history of high incidence of child neglect and abuse, often accentuated by the poor living conditions within the decaying property.

The Hangleton and Knoll area has a number of significant features:

- Population of Hangleton and Knoll is approx. 13,000 and for North Portslade 9,700
- *High dependent population* with 24% of residents under 16 and 22% over 60
- 4.6% of households are overcrowded (borough average 2.3%)
- 10% of households are "large" - more than 5 people - compared to Borough average of 4.3%

- Significant number of families under stress: the Hangleton and Knoll social services patch office accounts for over 30% of all the referrals concerning children to Hove Social Services
- Low levels of employment - *45% of the working age residents have no paid employment*, compared to a borough wide figure of 18%
- High and growing concentration of lone parent households - 6% of total households in 1991 compared to 4% in 1981. (The borough average in 1991 was 2.7%)
- 20% of families with children are headed by a lone parent
- 70% of lone parents are not in paid employment
- It is an area of low incomes - 70% of council tenants are in receipt of housing benefit and income support
- There is evidence of a high level of drug misuse amongst young people
- 12% of reported crime in Hove takes place in Hangleton and Knoll, and 20% of reported crimes are committed by young people under the age of 18.

The Hangleton and Knoll Project works additionally in neighbouring Portslade, employing community development workers who are accountable to the Portslade Community Project.

North Portslade is situated in a long, narrow valley on the north west edge of Hove. Descriptions of the area often include a sense of isolation, both politically and geographically. Until recently there was one main route of access through the village into the northernmost part, which compounded the sense of being cut off.

Since the 1930s the area has seen a huge expansion out of the old village into the surrounding area. Valley Road and the adjoining developments were built in the post-war period. Building continued throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, when a lot of council housing was built. During this period large numbers of people moved from South to North Portslade because of house clearances to make way for road widening schemes and trading estates.

Downs Park estate was built in the 1970s. As is the case today, a lot of housing was built but no facilities were provided. The 1990s have seen more large-scale developments, this time for a mix of private housing for sale and housing association for rent, but again with hardly any community provision.

Scotswood

Scotswood is in the west end of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne and is built on the banks of the River Tyne. It lies in the heart of what was once a thriving industrial inner city area, where until fairly recently (c1960s) there were high levels of male employment in traditional heavy manufacturing industries such as armament, shipbuilding and mining. Since the late 1960s the area has been in steady decline with the closure of factories, shops and leisure facilities. More recently there has been extensive public sector housing demolition.

Almost 90% of the housing is local authority owned. The remaining 10% is split between the private sector and three housing associations. There are approximately 3,800 households in the ward. There is a high level of void council tenancies in the area.

Scotswood has a high proportion of young people, with over 40% of the population aged under 25. Among 16-25 year olds, it is estimated that in parts of the estate as many as one in eight is not in employment, education or training. The take up rate for New Deal has been very low, particularly by lone parents, and a childcare coordinator has been appointed to help young mothers access suitable childcare. Numbers of young lone mothers are high and match the figures for the city as a whole. Ethnic minority representation is very low, as it is elsewhere in the city: less than 2% in Scotswood with a city average of 2.5 - 3%.

Adult unemployment remains high and there is plenty of evidence of third generation unemployment. There are no locally-based training providers in Scotswood, and although Newcastle College has an annexe in the neighbourhood, very few local people have the confidence to use it for training, education or even leisure purposes.

The Scotswood community has a long history of community action and has had a community development project since the late 1970s. The Scotswood Area Strategy is the product of vigorous local campaigning after the so-called 'riots' in Newcastle in the summer of 1991, and regeneration investment began to follow. However, despite high levels of community involvement, many of the improvements made are felt to have been cosmetic and Scotswood remains relatively isolated and poorly served by public transport. One resident commented pointedly: 'I can see the Metro Centre but I can't get there'. The majority of shops have closed recently as has the swimming pool and children's play house.

Shipley East

Shipley East is part of the Bradford Objective 2 area. This area has very high levels of multiple deprivation and labour market disadvantage, with Bradford ranked in the *1998 Index of Local Deprivation* as the 28th most deprived local authority in the country. This overall ranking in fact masks the true level of deprivation in the city. Of the nine wards in the Bradford Objective 2 area, all but one fall among the 10% most deprived wards in England. The district is characterised by high unemployment, low skills levels and low levels of educational attainment, with skills shortages reported by employers.

The research focused primarily on the Shipley East neighbourhoods of Windhill and Bolton Woods, each having a population of approximately 4,000. This is a mainly white area, with only twelve ethnic minority families living in Shipley East, the ethnic minority community in Shipley being housed mainly in the nearby community of Frizinghall.

Unemployment in Shipley East stands at 6.9%, close to the District average. Shipley East's ranking in the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation places it in the worst 9% of wards in the country. Some 39% of the population of Shipley East are in receipt of Housing or Council Tax benefit.

Over a third of households in Shipley East live in local authority built housing, concentrated in three estates including Windhill. Across the ward, the accommodation includes one of the largest percentages of flats suitable for single people, resulting in a large number of young and unemployed people likely to find their first home within this area. The proportion of single parent families and of pensioner-only households is above the District average. In Bolton Woods, 28% of the households are headed by a lone parent. Car ownership is low, and 57% of the population have no access to a car. Certain parts of Shipley, notably Windhill, score significantly higher than the Bradford District on all or most indicators of poverty, disadvantage and poor health. Shipley East has one of the highest Standardised Mortality Ratios and 19% of residents in Windhill described themselves in 1991 as suffering from a limiting long term illness. Evidence from the *1998 Index of Local Deprivation* suggests that between 1991 and 1998 all but one of the Bradford Objective 2 wards have experienced a rise in the rankings, meaning that relative to other areas they have become more deprived. Windhill has well above average levels of total crime, with assaults, car crimes and burglaries particularly high.

South Kilburn

The London Borough of Brent encompasses inner-city conditions as well as the more prosperous suburban life, and consequently has areas of considerable wealth and extreme poverty. The population is the most culturally and racially diverse of all the local authorities in England and Wales. Black and ethnic minorities form just over half (50.26%) of Brent's population. These ethnic communities enhance the cultural life of the borough, which is home to a unique mix of festivals and religious celebrations. Brent is said to be the most ethnically diverse borough in Europe.

Brent has a population of approximately 249,000. South Kilburn comes within the Carlton Ward. According to 1996 figures it has a total population of 6,121, of which 2,994 are male. The age breakdown is as follows:
    31% aged 0-19
    58% aged 20-64
    11% aged 65+

Carlton Ward suffers from multiple deprivation and is the twenty-eighth most deprived of London's 782 wards. Housing stock is largely council-owned and has suffered from under-investment on a wide-scale. The Directory of Social Indicators includes the following for Carlton:
- highest Jarman score (deprivation index) in the borough
- 27% unemployment including 37% male unemployment (June 1998)
- 81% households receiving benefit
- highest pre-natal mortality rate in the borough.

From the ward population of 6,121, approximately 3,000 are council tenants (including leaseholders) which represents 73% of the housing stock compared with the borough average of 12%. Owner occupation is at 12% compared with the borough average of 59%.

The council has a Regeneration Unit based in South Kilburn, which coordinates regeneration activities and provides links to small business support services as part of its core work. The Unit surveyed one third of South Kilburn residents in early 1999 and found:
- 34% of households have someone with a long term illness or disability
- Only 30% of households have access to a private car
- 71% of all households receive one or more of five benefits
- 24% of main household income earners are not working but are seeking work
- 48% of households have a gross weekly income of less than £100.

"South Kilburn is on the border of the borough. There is displacement and a sense of being forgotten." (Councillor Mary Arnold)

4 The activities

4.1 IT Awareness Days

'I ran here in my slippers so as not to miss the day' (Hangleton resident)

Awareness Days were run in Great Houghton, Scotswood, Windhill, Granby Island, Hangleton, Earlham, and South Kilburn. They were organised by the projects themselves, with publicity and associated events involving local people and agencies. Six computers and two printers were provided for loan by Recommit (http://www.recommit.co.uk) a company which specialises in reconditioning computers. This provision was usually augmented with equipment brought in from elsewhere. In Brent, the venue was a local primary school which has, exceptionally, a one-to-one ration of pupils to computers: some of the school's computers and software were included in the overall provision. In those cases where online access was not available, it was made possible through a special grant from BT, which included line installation and covered the costs of access on the day. Thus the Internet and email were among the applications available. The events were referred to as 'IT Days' rather than 'ICT Days' because it was felt that the term is more readily understood.

Each project made its own decisions on the best day of the week to run the event, the timing, publicity, and involvement of other agencies (for example in demonstration or technical support). In two cases (Norwich, Brent) decisions had to be taken on finding and negotiating a suitable location.

The choice of days was as follows:
>   Barnsley, Brent, and Hove all chose Saturday.
>   Granby Island chose a Bank Holiday Monday, the beginning of half term week, also the beginning of a week-long community festival celebrating the opening of the new community centre.
>   Windhill ran their event on a Friday.
>   Newcastle opted for a Tuesday.
>   Earlham chose a Wednesday for both their attempts.

It is difficult to draw conclusions from this. Only the Earlham events could be described as disappointing, and there may be good reasons for avoiding weekends in areas where, for example, football matches or other commitments dominate life. It is a decision to be taken locally by people who are sensitive to local interests. In some areas, for instance, it is likely that more men would attend on a Saturday; but since attracting women to ICTs may be more of an issue than getting men to visit community centres, a weekday event with a creche could be the most appropriate.

It should also be remembered that it is not necessarily a numbers game. At Windhill, for example, there was initial disappointment with the relatively low

turnout (40 people) - even though it was a hot summer's day. But on reflection it was felt that a more rewarding experience was provided for those who did come, since more time and attention could be given to them. This relates to the issue of the extent to which these exercises were reaching those most receptive to ICTs, or reaching the most excluded people. We discuss this further in section 6 below. It also raises the need to see such events as part of a wider programme, and offer a range of opportunities targeted more systematically at particular social groups or areas. We consider this point in section 5.6 below.

The centres offered food and drink, a creche or activities for children, expert support, a range of applications, demonstration of a digital camera, the world wide web, document scanning, desktop publishing, games, word-processing, email and chat rooms, music software, scanning, and so on.

> *'It was nice to be able to just try things'.* (Windhill resident)

The need for good technical support, both in advance and on the day, should not be under-estimated. For some people, just going along on the day was clearly a social challenge, and the slightest upset might have sent them away again. An off-putting experience in such circumstances, due to poor or failing equipment, especially if they felt in some way responsible for it, could have meant that it was almost impossible to re-engage them. People's early experience of ICTs should be trouble-free without being falsely orchestrated.

> *'I were frightened to death...'* (Houghton discussion)

It is important to consider the nature of the technical support which is available to community centres and projects. Often a local college, as in the case of Shipley, is in a position to take the lead and is trusted in its relationships with local centres. Elsewhere, the best example we have come across is SCIP, the Sussex Community Internet Project (http://www.scip.org.uk), a voluntary sector agency which supports community and voluntary organisations in exploring and exploiting ICTs. SCIP was fundamental to the success of the Hangleton Awareness Day. Their work covers a sufficiently wide geographical area (mostly local authority-wide) to be viable, while retaining local sensitivity and an awareness of community sector concerns. Technical support on this model needs sound ongoing resourcing (not short-term hit-and-miss funding) since it provides the platform for the community and voluntary sectors to exploit ICTs.

Questionnaires were provided for completion and various attractions were on offer to help lure people in. At Scotswood, a football signed by the city's FA Cup finalists was raffled; in South Kilburn, an iMac computer was bought and raffled. Informal discussion groups were gathered in adjoining rooms.

In Granby, a junk-band was set up outside the centre and occasional sessions of barely-orchestrated drumming celebrated the opening of the new community

centre. Visitors had their hands painted to decorate the interior walls, and a range of other activities took place. In the computer room, there was a fascinating division for much of the day between women and girls, on the one hand, enjoying participating in a chat-room online; and on the other hand, young boys playing games on CDROMs.

In Hangleton, Sounds Phenomenal, a local music group for young people, brought along their computer with the equivalent of a recording studio loaded on to it, to demonstrate how they use IT as part of their work.

> *'I came to see how email works. I brought a document to scan and then wanted to email…'*
> (Windhill resident)

At Windhill, a web site was created for the day and people were encouraged to place a note about their experience. (See http://www.itday.freeserve.co.uk)

At Houghton, a video-conference link was established with Barnsley Football club on the morning before the game, and local children asked questions of some of the players.

A video-conferencing link was also provided at Scotswood, to communicate with Michael Wills, Champion Minister for PAT15 at the DTI. Residents discussed their needs and interests with the minister and told him of their belief that community access to ICTs could make a real difference to the quality of life in Scotswood.

We should also record here that staff and activists who organised and helped on the days reported that they had been learners too. 'It's a brilliant model for staff development. And everybody's really high about the day, which tells me this could be a really good way of re-energising and keeping the momentum in the partnership.' (Margaret Robson, Shipley Communities Online)

4.2 The Neighbourhoods Online exercise

This exercise, formerly called the 'Communities Online game', was devised and developed by Drew Mackie and David Wilcox to help community organisations explore ICTs. The game is played using cards in a workshop context, usually with a group of about 15-20 local residents. The first part of the exercise involves people in describing their locality, in terms of its environment, economy and community; and whether they feel those elements to be robust, stable or fragile. In the second stage, groups are given a set of cards depicting ICT options which they might choose for their neighbourhood, such as 'email for all', 'e-commerce', 'community resource centre', 'community newspaper online' and so on. Each card has a price of one, two or three units, and the group is limited to spending ten units, so they cannot choose everything. In practice the exercise has been a very successful device for engaging people and helping them to begin to discuss ICTs in the context of community development.

The exercise is freely available on the Internet and can be downloaded, with instructions, from http://www.partnerships.org.uk/nolgame. Some reports of where the game has been played are also available at that address.

The exercise was carried out at Hangleton and Knoll, Scotswood, Granby Island, and Bolton Woods in Shipley. A version of the exercise, developed and extended for the purpose, was played at both seminars in Shipley, involving a high proportion of paid workers from a broad range of services and agencies. Another version is being developed for use in Brent, and it has been repeated twice, run by local activists, in Plymouth.

4.3 Questionnaire survey

Table 1 shows the statistical results from the survey, including the findings from Harlesden and Great Houghton. The following points should be noted.

- An outline questionnaire was provided to each project, and while they were asked to use it as a basis for their survey, they were not required to adhere either to the questions or to the wording. Some felt that it was too long, or chose to change or omit certain questions. As a consequence, as Table 1 shows, the data are not complete across all locations for all questions. Nonetheless there are useful figures on computer ownership and reasons for non-ownership in these neighbourhoods. It's also the case that some of the findings from individual projects are of interest in themselves; for example the proportion of people in Granby Island (51%) whose non-ownership of a computer is partly or wholly accounted for through 'fear of messing it up'.
- The research constraints meant that it was difficult for some of the projects to spend time increasing the number of completed questionnaires after the main batch had been provided during the Awareness Day. This means that the numbers of completed questionnaires is lower than had been hoped for, particularly where fine weather on the day affected turnout.
- It is also the case that over-dependence on the Awareness Day as an opportunity for completing questionnaires probably resulted in a high proportion of forms being completed by people who already had used computers, and by those who own a computer or have access to one at home. In Scotswood, individual interviews were conducted by the Family Support Worker in the community bakery and were with residents who did not attend the Awareness Day. 'Their knowledge, enthusiasm and interest were decidedly lower than the participants in the focus group and in the Computer Awareness Day'. (Scotswood report) In section 6 below we discuss the question of reaching more excluded people.
-

A total of 716 completed questionnaires were received. Of these, 464 people (65%) had used a computer before: 252 people (35%) had not. This figure is disappointing but neither surprising nor particularly disturbing, given that research of this kind and the associated activities are likely to attract people who are 'IT-aware'.

**Table 1: 1999 Questionnaire survey on attitudes to ICTs**

	Granby	%	H&K	%	Harles	%	Hought	%	Kilburn	%	Scotsw	%	Windhill	%	Total	%
Total questionnaires	225		102		96		58		68		120		47		716	
Used computer before	98	43	72	71	80	83	47	81	58	85	71	59	38	81	464	65
Not used computer	127	56	30	29			11	19	10	15	49	41	9	19	252	35
Used in education	27						22				56		13			
- at work	39						18				20		14			
- for leisure	72						23				37					
- community activity	24						9				15					
Own computer	34	15	38	37	31	32	26	45	28	41	23	19	20	42	200	28
Not owned	191	85	64	65	65	68	31	54	40	59	97	81	27	58	515	72
Not owned because:																
Too expensive to buy / run	48	25	42	65	53	81	18	50	14	35	70	72	16	59	261	51
Don't know enough	27	14	10	16	17	26	13	42	8	20	22	23	5	18	102	20
Don't need one	19	10	15	23	7	11	5	16	0	0	23	24	5	18	74	14
Never had chance to try			6	9	8	12	2	6	7	17	19	20	4	15	46	14
Worried about effects			2	3			1	3			1	1	0			
Fear of messing it up	97	51														
Public access likely use:																
Internet / www	56	25	25	24			6				29	24				
education / training	47	21	9				16									
work related	18						5				32					
leisure, games			4				4									
dtp / wp / presentation			8				2				22					
research, homework, info			13				7				73	61				

Seventy-two per cent of those who responded did not own a computer. This means that the following breakdown applies to this sample:

own computer	28%
have used but don't own	37%
have not used and don't own	35%

The main reason given for non-ownership was, emphatically, that it was 'too expensive to buy or run'. (See Figure 1). In Harlesden and Scotswood, this response was pronounced (81% and 72% respectively).

Figure 1: Reasons for non-ownership of computer
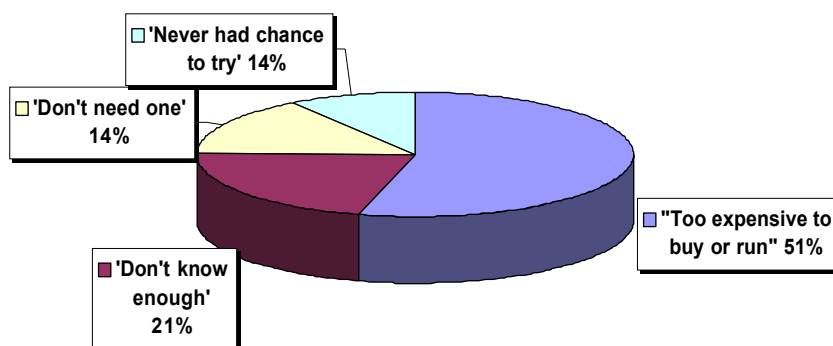
Twenty per cent of those who did not own a computer felt that they did not know enough, and 14% felt that they didn't need one. Only 14% of those asked said they hadn't had the chance to try one (this question was not asked at Granby). Four of the projects asked if people were worried about the effects of content on the Internet, or of games. Only a tiny proportion indicated that they were. As mentioned above, Granby residents expressed concern about 'messing it up' as a reason for non-ownership. This question was not raised at the other centres.

It is striking that some 61 per cent of respondents in Scotswood said that they would use public access to ICTs for 'research, homework and information'. This was reflected in comments when the Neighbourhoods Online game was run at Scotswood. Residents expressed an interest in ICTs giving 'instant and local'

access to various kinds of information, in particular health information, and information about employment opportunities.

> *'When the jobs come they're too late, by the time we hear of them they're gone…'* (Comment at Neighbourhoods Online game, Scotswood)

4.4 Seminars

The seminars were organised to address the following question: 'if this technology is seen as so important and is so widely valued, why is community access not readily available?' The seminars were designed to involve local policy-makers as well as groups and residents, in order to explore the institutional and cultural barriers to providing public and community access. The main hypothesis was that within a local authority, responsibility for the interests of communities in the Information Society is seldom identifiable; and that therefore no-one owns the task of ensuring that local people are empowered to exploit new ICTs. As a consequence, neighbourhoods are left to depend on some combination of dynamism, vision, and rugged pragmatism, which we have described elsewhere as 'down-to-earth vision'(1), as well as chance. There are many valuable instances of local authority officers understanding 'the vision' - whether it comes from them or from local residents or elsewhere - and working with local groups to attract funding. Numerous projects and a broad range of experience have followed. The sustainability of these initiatives is often unresolved, and their integration into broader social policy has too seldom been effected. A key ingredient for success, we felt, would undoubtedly be sound partnership. Our intention in this stage of the work was to explore the issues constraining local authorities and other agencies in ensuring sustainable community participation in the Information Society.

In practice, the need for local autonomy, and the changing context of the projects' work, meant that the seminars were widely different in style, scale and findings. In South Kilburn, for example, various difficulties in basing the project work in an appropriate local centre meant that we ended up with a series of small meetings, discussing issues with a range of interested parties. By contrast, in Shipley we worked with the existing, well-established partnership, running two seminars to help try and develop an *area-wide* (rather than neighbourhood) information society strategy. Thus the Shipley event was attended by the Chair of the Adult Guidance Network, a headteacher, the Director of Regeneration and Policy Support, a volunteer bureau coordinator, the Director of the Careers Service, the chair of a community association, representatives of the Education and Advice Service for Adults and of the Youth and Community Service, the Information Society Policy Officer, community workers, online learners, the Community Economic Development Manager, representatives of the TEC, and various others. Hangleton was similar, in that it brought together key players from across

Brighton and Hove. In Scotswood, the success of the Awareness Day and other activities had meant that the question 'why isn't it happening?' was out of date, and the event became a kind of open day with presentations, in order to help everyone keep up to date with each others' progress.

Seminar participants at Granby Island noted a disparity between levels of funding and awareness of potential. Some neighbourhoods have better funding opportunities but less awareness of the potential contribution of ICTs.

Key issues arising from the seminars were:
Hangleton: The need for co-ordination of a range of different initiatives across Brighton and Hove.
Granby: the solution to the various problems of access was seen to be community-led development of local web presence or 'Community Net'.
Shipley: getting key stakeholders area-wide to understand the scope of Information Society issues.
South Kilburn: the problem of 'initiative-itis' and partnership fatigue in the area, and the perception of a role for ICTs in joining-up various initiatives.
Scotswood: juggling resources and opportunities in relation to the pace at which people can go.

Reference

1 *Down-to-earth vision: community-based IT initiatives and social inclusion*. IBM and CDF, 1997.

5 The issues

5.1 'What's this stuff for?'

Exploring people's attitudes towards ICTs often brings out confusions because people may be unclear about why the technology might be relevant to them, and what might motivate them to engage with it.

> *'People's initial reaction to IT is very cautious…'* (Cllr Tony Miller, Bolton Woods, Shipley)

> (Computers) *'I'm suspicious of them, they always seems to be going wrong.'* (Hangleton resident)

It's not that people aren't prepared for technology to have diverse applications. Some of the most powerful technologies around us - cars, telephones, television - are used for a huge range of purposes and that is never questioned. We don't tend to think of the car as primarily for economic development, or of the telephone as a device for leisure, or of the television as primarily for education. Nor should we expect people necessarily to categorise ICTs in such ways. But neither can we expect people to think about such powerful new technologies in an experiential vacuum. It's important to have some way of understanding *what it's for*, and how it might relate to their day-to-day life.

> *'It's a thing of the future, computers'.* (Comment at Windhill ICT Day)

In this respect, the media attention of recent years has been a great asset in attracting people's attention and helping to raise awareness of the *diversity and potential* of ICTs. The need now is to follow that up with structured opportunities to explore more fully what can be done using the technology.

As a result of observations at the Awareness Days and the discussions held with a range of local people, we have developed an outline of the range of activities which people relate to ICTs. This is shown as Table 2.

Table 2

People use ICTs and they ...

- **acquire and develop skills**
- technical and operational skills
- communication skills
- information handling skills
- learning skills
- social skills (relating to others in a common environment)

- **learn**
- formally and informally, in supported or unsupported contexts, together or alone, by design and through serendipity
- receive ideas and information which is freely shared with them, and reciprocate

- **develop confidence and self-esteem**
- can stabilise their identity in relation to the world, countering the effect of broadcast media
- can reinforce family and community cohesion

- **pursue leisure interests and opportunities without imposing on others**
- new opportunities for shared and individual creativity
- new opportunities for participating in communities of interest

- **publish and broadcast their opinions and ideas**
- articulate their (individual or collective) experience
- express and reinforce cultural experience

- **stimulate, support and develop small businesses**
- apply ICTs to business processes

- **can be empowered to campaign and to participate in the democratic process**
- influence the decision making processes which affect them.

In several discussion groups, the awareness of ICTs as *learning technologies* was apparent. People could readily, if somewhat vaguely, appreciate that computers could offer ways of improving knowledge and skills, and they found this highly relevant to their lives. In Granby and Scotswood in particular, there was a strong appetite for learning which was frustrated by the feeling that provision in the local colleges was institutionalised and inappropriate. Since the activities, as the centres have developed into Learning Access Centres, this situation has changed markedly, and partnerships with the colleges are now flourishing.

5.2 Motivations

It should not surprise us that the reasons why people are attracted to ICTs are diverse and often highly subjective. The technology is diverse in its potential and applications, and reaches into people's lives in many ways, so it is always unlikely that there will be just one key, incontestable justification for exploring it.

Two women attended a computer course at one of the locations by supporting each other and giving one another the confidence to take the first steps. Now one of them is planning to tell her life story in multimedia.

Elsewhere the local community 'gatekeeper', always involved in stimulating community activity, told why she went on the computer course which had been offered at the community centre: 'I came to make the numbers up. I thought I would blow it up.'

> *'I came down here originally to see if I could get in some furniture for an old lady. I eventually was signed up to do the courses here… some of which were using a computer. Up till then I didn't want to know anything about them. But since then I've gone on to be computer literate… When I got to 65 my grown-up children … bought me a modem, so now I'm on the Internet.'* (Windhill resident)

One man said he came to the Houghton Awareness Day out of *curiosity*. 'I thought it would help with the grandchildren.' It seems likely that curiosity is a key supplementary motivator for many people, together with the sense of being comfortable using the technology for learning.

All the discussions and survey evidence suggested two major motivations for people in low-income neighbourhoods to explore ICTs:
- **employability, and**
- **helping or keeping up with children.**

'I want a job when my kids have grown up. I would never have gone to the college cos I thought I were too thick.' (Houghton discussion)

In Houghton, free local computer courses were mostly attended by parents keen to keep up with and support their children.

The other key motivations were:
- education, (informal) research, homework
- supporting own work or business, and
- leisure, communities of interest.

'I want to be able to play games with my grandchildren' (Windhill resident)

On several occasions we heard that school access is felt to be inadequate. The main disadvantage was felt to be in the unevenness in the level of students, where they have to share access in very small periods of time. Those who are less adept, perhaps because they have not got home access, struggle to follow what the others are doing. And one child felt strongly that if he could do his homework on the computer he would get better marks.

In Houghton we were given an example where the school children were doing homework on colour. *'There were nothing in this village.'* Other children benefited from being able to use the Internet but one parent said she 'felt awful' because her child didn't have home access.

5.3 Barriers

Apart from the obvious question of access and opportunities, which we discuss below, the activities suggested that the key barrier inhibiting the engagement of people in low-income neighbourhoods with ICTs is *confidence*. This is associated with a number of other issues such as the complexity of the technology, its diversity, lack of opportunities, and low levels of basic skills.

In a discussion about paying for community access to ICTs, one Houghton resident said: *'If people are embarrassed to come in, they're not going to pay for that embarrassment...'* In Shipley, focus group work uncovered some views of people who already had experience with computers. Those who had bought computers did not know how to make best use of them, or to use them at all, unless they had some other exposure such as through work or training.

> *'You don't know what to do when you've got it, so you just end up playing games'.* (Low Ash Focus Group)

We discuss confidence further in section 5.4 below.

The Brighton and Hove seminar noted that 'inertia' and 'perceptions' ('What's the point?') were barriers and weaknesses in the local community sector's ability to exploit ICTs. 'Lack of technical skills within the community' was also cited as a major weakness by one of the groups in that seminar.

The report from Scotswood suggested that: 'Many parents are disadvantaged by their own negative experiences of education and perceive colleges and schools as predominantly "middle class" institutions and "not for the likes of us".'

The need for development work on basic skills was a point made strongly to PAT15 at various points, and is a key theme in the work of Shipley Communities Online.

> "The access to ICTs debate begs the question: access to ICT to do what exactly? Although we can celebrate the use of visual imagery, sound and so on which is possible through IT, the fact is that sooner or later, and particularly in deprived neighbourhoods, whether it's about accessing the Internet, joining online discussion groups, writing emails, using applications for training... we will hit the issue of the basic skills deficit in the population and part of their fear of using the technology will be linked to their fear about their communication skills in general. ('*Will I be able to understand the instructions? Will I have to write anything?*')
>
> "Yet ICTs have singular advantages in tackling basic skills because of the open learning *methods* possible - allowing for working at your own pace, not having to measure yourself against anyone else, not

having to keep up with or be shown up by others in a class); the *context* (allows for convenient, non-traditional environment not like school); and the *potential* of the media - multimedia especially, for demonstrating *eg* concepts in maths, structures of language etc, and people can get away from negative memories they may have of printed material and pen and paper exercises (death by worksheet!).

"What has been striking is the way that IT is providing an entry point back into learning. IT is very powerful in that respect, because it's a new skill for many people, irrespective of class or educational background, and it's not associated with earlier school failure like say English and Maths. What we are finding is that once people achieve early successes with IT, they then feel more confident to tackle other basic skills needs.

"So one big issue is content development and models for content development. The dearth of appropriate materials for adults (and in contexts relevant to their lives - this is very important) is really lamentable. One of the UFI priority areas is materials for basic skills, so hopefully this will happen. But it's something which needs to continue to be prioritised, because deprived neighbourhoods will also often be characterised by low educational attainment, which in turn will reflect an underlying basic and key skills issue, which will become a barrier to their use of ICTs. "
(Margaret Robson, Shipley College)

At Granby Island there were clear views on the main barriers to access, which related to courses at the local colleges. Opening times, the timing of sessions, apprehension regarding tutors and venues, and the costs of formal courses were all mentioned at the seminar. People went on to describe problems relating to

- access to hardware of sufficient capacity, and
- access to compatible software.
-

Finally it was argued that it was necessary to widen access to the whole of the local community, because limited access (for example favouring one neighbourhood or targeted group) could create divisions in the city's community sector.

5.4 Access: community resource centres

In this section we discuss three key attributes of community access which we have identified:
- **integration with existing community provision and support networks;**
- **'localness', and**
- **the shared experience.**

Attitudes towards public access to ICTs are bound to be influenced by familiarity with the technology and the degree of appreciation of its potential. Many people in low-income neighbourhoods cannot foresee having home access, and even if they could, there would still be a case for local centres to provide a range of ICT options, expert support and training, and opportunities to experiment with new developments. Crucially for people in these localities, *opportunities to explore and exploit ICTs belong in a context which is part of their established community life.* There is a cultural facet to 'access' which relates to institutional barriers. Community buildings survive and flourish because people feel comfortable in them and feel a sense of ownership over what happens there.

Commenting after the Neighbourhoods Online game had been played in Scotswood, Geoff Walker of Newcastle City Council said: 'The project clearly shows to me that offering access to the Internet to a socially-excluded community will best function in a centre offering a range of community-based activities.'

> *'IT centres would offer an IT focus, but people in that community need the variety offered by a project that's wider than IT. The project works because it's an integrated project that people can be part of in a variety of ways. Some clients need basic skills training, others need a refresher course, and a qualification to verify their existing skills, others need access to the Net and a PC to work from. To some members of the community the IT skills are an added value of training or being an existing part of a community centre.'* (Shipley partnership worker)

There was certainly evidence of disappointment at not being able to get wide open access to the technology. One resident commented: *'It's frustrating to have to wait until next Wednesday…'* All the centres reported strong interest in having a fully-equipped resource in a community building. As a Houghton resident put it, *'If it were open from nine while nine, it would be used from nine while nine.'*

This is not to say that people were not interested in home access. Parents of school children in particular, as we have seen, were concerned about disadvantage compared with children who do have home access. But

community provision offers different and complementary benefits which are quickly recognised by people whose way of life includes social networks based around community buildings.

> *'When it came to access to computers for the local community, there was strong evidence of support for this, and people were able to differentiate personal benefits from those for the community fairly clearly.'* (Scotswood report)

This relates to a question raised by Sonia Liff and Fred Steward in research into the use of cybercafes and telecottages. Statistics for clients of such facilities who are in paid work lead the authors to wonder 'whether there are a significant proportion of users of such facilities who do, or could, gain access to such technology elsewhere but who still value aspects of what cybercafes and telecottages provide.' [(1)] They add that 'those looking for work, those in work and those in education, with domestic commitments or retired have more than a token presence' in the organisations they studied.

In Hangleton, people were asked what they thought local access would mean for the community, and cited the following benefits:
- a natural meeting place
- local information resource
- bringing training opportunities
- providing access to information easily and cheaply
- producing a community newspaper
- providing employment opportunities.

Three discussion groups were run in Houghton and each felt strongly that priority should be given to children who do not have home access. They felt that the establishment of community access would best be led by the local authority, with community involvement; and that the ideal was unlimited public access with informal support.

On some of their project visits, members of PAT15 heard messages about the need for *very local* provision, and these were echoed strongly in this research. The policy importance of the *localness* of provision should not be under-estimated. In Houghton one group stressed *convenience* - *'We simply wouldn't go outside the village, transport links are very poor.'* The computer course in Houghton was felt to have legitimacy because it was organised through the local regeneration partnership, which itself had been carefully established to include local interests.

A further key insight had to do with people learning and discovering in small groups. The question of online learners working in small groups or in isolation has been researched in Shipley. The value of the shared experience was in clear evidence at every Awareness Day. Community access provides non-threatening

opportunities for people to explore, without expecting to be sold something or told off or failing to attain a certain level.

> *'This way of working is so relaxed, we can work at our own pace with one-to-one help as needed; the small group all become friends and help each other as well'.* (Hangleton resident on RSA CLAIT course using the local 'Computer Bus' mobile training facility, 1998)

Perhaps it is worth stressing one of the dominant impressions of people's experiences at the Awareness Days. There were numerous instances of individuals spending plenty of time exploring the Internet or a given application. But for most of the time at every location, the computers were occupied by groups of people (not queues) *discovering together*.

> *'We sat and did things together and I didn't feel too ignorant'.* (Windhill resident)

This raised the point that computers are seen as machines for individuals - we speak of the 'personal' computer - but many users have rewarding experiences in groups of two or three, discussing what they find as they work through an educational exercise, or search on the web. Such experiences may have been born of necessity: this is typically the case in schools, where we have observed children learning together in groups of four. But we should not lose sight of the real benefit of the shared experience. The reduced costs of computers should not mean necessarily that more should be packed more tightly into a room. While there will always be a case for privacy in public access points such as public libraries, it is important to promote the social advantages of large screens and several chairs being available during infomal access.

5.5 *'Absolutely bubbling'*: personal and community development

The potential for people's experience with ICTs to boost their self-esteem, and hence their ability to identify and take advantage of opportunities, merits thorough study. Where employment and leisure opportunities are reduced, and the physical environment is depressing, many people may suffer loss of confidence and low morale. As the following comments suggest, there are plenty of examples of people who have felt that simply 'being able to do things on a computer' has transformed them, has given them a chance to make changes in their lives which previously they could not have glimpsed.

> *'It's confidence people have lost... Men who're still able to do another job but don't know how to do anything other than the mines.'* (Houghton discussion)

> *'IT does play a big part with the young people. Perhaps the best example I could think of would be a young woman who had never accessed a computer. She hadn't been to school since she was 11 and when she first came to us she was very unsure of herself in all ways and a very unconfident person. She went on the waiting list for the supported tenancy scheme and joined the Chrysalis project (a special eight week intensive programme of support). In that time she got her first experience of IT. She went up to Windhill with the tutor and came back absolutely bubbling because she had made a calendar and a card for her boyfriend. She created a portfolio and scanned this image onto a leaflet for us. So in that way IT was a definite tool for building up confidence.'* (Shipley partnership worker)

> *'Learning with computers has given me the confidence to go on and do a degree when the kids have gone to school. Now I have the confidence, I know I can do it now...'* (Houghton discussion)

We tried to explore people's expectations, and in Houghton it was made clear to us that people <u>do</u> expect spin-off benefits, beyond simply being able to use a computer for basic applications. They are looking for opportunities to improve their quality of life through employment or learning or gaining information.

What we may then begin to anticipate is a changed understanding of how this technology can give people a 'window' on the world, over which they have some meaningful control. This is in contrast to the broadcast media, which can be hugely disempowering in showing a busy world full of apparently important people whose lives are pointedly removed from that of those in low-income neighbourhoods. Access to the Internet can bring to marginalised people both a controllable way of interpreting that wider world, and an affordable means of broadcasting their experience. This may be where the true potential of ICTs to contribute to personal and community development will be realised.

Local champions
The projects demonstrated that 'local champions', who help stimulate interest and activity with ICTs, will often emerge when an occasion is provided for them. Such people may not necessarily be those with technical skills and know-how: more likely they will be those with the vision and understanding of what difference ICTS can make at local level, combined with communication skills and dynamism. At Granby, much of the preparation for the day was carried out by a local volunteer, who had previously worked for an ICT company. He had been made redundant and had subsequently suffered several personal setbacks. The boost to his confidence, working to ensure the day was a success and helping people explore the technology, was visible. We learned afterwards that he had managed to get another job.

> *'There's probably a lot of expertise here already isn't there?'* (Comment at Neighbourhoods Online exercise, Scotswood)

It is important not to assume that local champions will emerge necessarily. In South Kilburn the question of identifying such local champions has been seen as requiring focussed attention as the project develops there in 2000. And when they do come forward, there should be systems in place to support and nurture them, for example with training and mentoring from the private and academic sectors.

5.6 *'All I've ever done is dust one'.* Awareness and familiarisation

It is difficult for people to express views on something which is new to them and complex. Some might feel threatened or ignorant, or patronised by implication. The Awareness Days were designed to try to overcome this problem by providing meaningful initial experience in a non-threatening context. What was shown most clearly was that **structured opportunities for awareness and familiarisation, in appropriate settings, are a highly effective way of introducing ICTs to people in low-income neighbourhoods.** It should be noted that they are relatively inexpensive and, especially as part of a broader programme, are likely to have numerous indirect benefits.

> At the Windhill Awareness Day, Mavis Wheeler produced a community association newsletter using Publisher, and was photographed holding it. The image was downloaded onto the computer, and a web page created.

> Mavis said: *'It's the first time I've ever been on a computer. All I've ever done is dust one. Now I've made a newsletter'.*

It is not necessarily straightforward to move from vague awareness of the power of ICTs, to being familiar with what can be done with them, and being able to use them. At one location, the computer in the Tenants Association was barely used. But committee members are now expecting to emerge from their computer course with skills, which they can apply for the TA, with regard to publicity material, databases, letters and so on. When they went on the course *they did not anticipate this*. They had been sufficiently aware of ICTs to enrol for their course, but it took initial familiarisation for them to see the potential.

It may be that there is a tendency to see ICT 'awareness' as a simple condition preceding the desirable state of full exploitation of the technology. The activities in this programme have clarified that there is a spectrum covering:
- **awareness**
- **familiarisation**
- **exploration, and**
- **exploitation.**

The essential ingredients for all these stages are *support* **and** *opportunities*. People cannot be expected to move from a detached low level of awareness, through stimulated familiarisation, to absorbed exploration and adept use of ICTs, without expert appropriate support and ready opportunities. They need to be able to get to a local centre within buggy-pushing distance at a time which suits them, to feel that they are in a non-threatening environment among people with whom they have something in common, and have someone to turn to for advice and suggestions if necessary at every stage.

> *'Until you get started you won't know what you want.'*
> (Houghton discussion)

> *'I was thinking about going on a course to learn how to use them, and this has made my mind up.* (Windhill resident at Awareness Day)

A single ICT Awareness Day is not sufficient to uncover and meet the likely potential interest and need. **Repetition of the events** over a period of several weeks would multiply their effectiveness, taking advantage of the power of word-of-mouth at neighbourhood level. If people are not in education or employment, their 'awareness' of ICTs is likely to be based on the broadcast media, shop windows, sales leaflets, advertisements, and hearsay. With the exception of Norwich, where circumstances were unusual, the days were highly successful and a **structured programme** of similar events could make a significant impact on the barriers discussed in section 5.3 above.

be likely to contribute significantly to the momentum of community networking. There may be a case for targeting some activities, within such a programme, on specific groups, for example unemployed men over-40 long-term unemployed males, women in Asian communities, small businesses, parents of school-age children, and so on.

At several points we were alerted to the fact that community centres are not seen by everyone as being accessible. In one neighbourhood there was a historical tension over relations with a previous community centre which had to close down. Elsewhere, we noted a generation divide - *'A place like the welfare hall tends to be seen as somewhere for established groups but not for younger people.'* (Houghton worker)

This reinforces the point that *diversity* of local access is called for if we are to provide universal access to the Network Society. It is not just the use of the technology itself, which has to be made simpler. Its location and the conditions of access also have to be appropriate for a diverse range of needs and interests, and these conditions are best determined at local level.

Discussions in PAT15 naturally considered the problem which follows from this - which is, how best can we determine appropriate conditions if the local community lacks cohesion, is not organised, has no process for working through its needs and aspirations? The seminar groups at Brighton and Hove for example felt that 'lack of community infrastructure' was a major weakness. **The relative integration of the neighbourhoods in which we worked does not negate the need for basic community development and community involvement where this does not already exist.** In many cases, community development will need to precede any full-scale ICT awareness programme. But this does not mean that ICTs cannot be part of such a community development process, indeed it seems clear that they can be a powerful attractant and a resource for which local people are prepared to mobilise.

'There are people in Windhill who don't know anything about it and don't want to know anything about it… If they really knew what they could do with computers I think it would be interesting.' (Windhill resident)

Reference
1 *Cyber cafes and telecottages: increasing public access to computers and the Internet.* http://www.brunel.ac.uk/research/virtsoc/pick/pick4.htm

"Not everybody can join the digerati."
(Brenda Maddox, 'Live in peace with your second home', *New statesman,* 1 November 1999, p29)

6 Why not?

The importance of providing appropriate **opportunities and support** for people to discover the potential and pertinence of this technology should no longer be under-estimated. Consistently positive responses during the Awareness Days, among residents and professionals alike, has highlighted the value of running such events and the importance of doing so in a more thorough and systematic manner. Our most important recommendation to PAT15 is that in all low-income neighbourhoods, a programme of awareness and familiarisation should be established. The local authority should take responsibility for ensuring that a coherent programme of events and appropriate support is provided, with input from local people and organisations. Each programme should be planned in consultation with local groups and should be evaluated.

The importance of a community development approach also bears repeating. 'ICT provision and access should have a neighbourhood focus, but … it should sit within an overall community development strategy'. (Hangleton report)

> *'People are buying computers but told us that they don't know what to do with them, and end up playing games. The 'home v community access' debate skirts the question of how people will actually learn to use computers. Many people feel intimidated by colleges or other formal insitutions. The value of community access is that it provides people with an opportunity to learn, and alongside others, in a non-threatening environment.'* (Margaret Robson, Shipley College)

The questionnaire survey showed that a high proportion (65%) of respondents had used a computer before. Most of those who attended the events were clearly **'actively interested' or already converted**. It is important to offer events for such people because their interest can atrophy or become disillusion if opportunities are not provided. However, there is another job to be done, which takes longer and involves working with community activists and practitioners, in order to attract those who are indifferent or too profoundly excluded to be attracted to community buildings and events. The five projects which are continuing work in 2000 will be exploring ways of addressing this issue.

The projects we worked with were all in the the early stages of exploring the use of ICTs at local level. The activities and associated research suggest a number of requirements for their success:
- some form of technical support
- flexible opening hours
- the availability of training
- an ethos which recognises the importance of developing the community's

      capacity to manage and sustain the resource
- some management skills such as the preparation of business plans and the ability to interpret future potential applications of the technology.

The project work did not go into the issue of content in any depth, but as the individual centres develop their work it seems likely that they will begin to explore issues of:
- generating their own content
- gaining access to other content ('the universe of knowledge'), and
- organising other relevant content and relating it to local circumstances.

In communities like these, the challenge is to explain and demonstrate how to build connections (within and beyond the nieghbourhood) using ICTs, while sustaining and strengthening the conditions of local community. Nurturing the online life of communities depends on the kinds of interaction which support, and realise, local community activity. For this reason, we are concerned that public policy for the Information Age should 're-assert community', stressing the concerns of *the local* in all measures. The *connectedness* of communities is a precondition for a socially-inclusive Information Society.