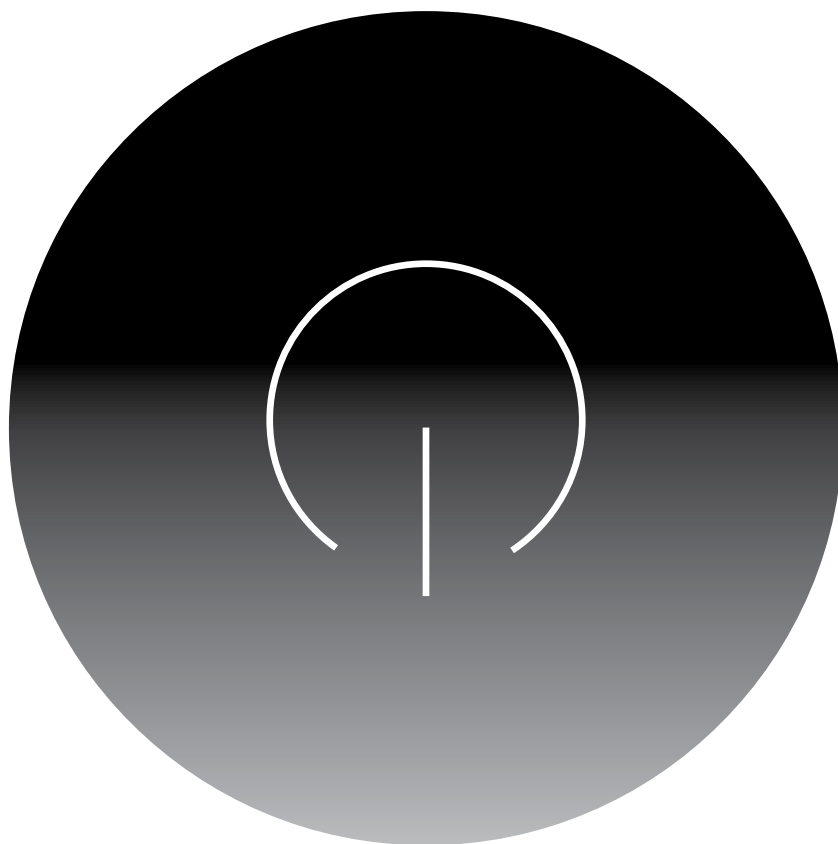


A Handbook for Digital Inclusion Through Socially Engaged Practice **Keeping in Touch**



**Developed by Constance Fleuriot, Clodagh Miskelly
and the team at Knowle West Media Centre**

Funded by Arts & Humanities Research Council & Bristol City Council



Introduction

This handbook is intended to be a useful introduction to things to think about when developing a 'socially engaged' project that uses digital media or mobile technologies in some way. It is written for as wide an audience as possible, including neighbourhood partnerships, community activists, voluntary organisations and statutory agencies. It includes guidelines for increasing digital inclusion through socially engaged practice, with case study examples of good-practice projects and some useful practical tips.

The handbook begins by clarifying what we mean by 'socially engaged practice' and 'digital inclusion'. It then explains the benefits of such practice and goes on to outline nine key elements of socially engaged practice for successfully nurturing greater digital inclusion, using Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC) projects as examples.

This content has been developed through ongoing evaluation of projects at KWMC and the 'Keeping in Touch' project.

Digital Inclusion

The words 'digital inclusion' get used a lot. In this handbook we take the term to mean understanding how to give everyone the opportunity to:

- Develop and use the skills they need to engage with new technologies
- Have access to the relevant equipment
- Understand the benefits of using digital media

Access is more than just the presence of equipment: it's about having the time and the space to get to grips with how things work and having opportunities to use those technologies in a creative way.

Organisations like Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC) support people of all ages to engage with digital media for the first time, often by getting involved in producing content, such as taking photos or making videos. This initial engagement is sustained through continued opportunities and this is crucial to people continuing to be digitally engaged: without ongoing support it would be easy to imagine their use of digital media declining. This sustained engagement supports people to realise the value that digital inclusion might have within their own lives and its relevance to their specific priorities, interests and needs.

There is always a need to ensure a variety of inclusive ways to connect (with) people. It is also important that there are different ways for people to be involved in the same project, in order for that project to be inclusive. Diverse but connected approaches and ways to engage should also help a project be more sustainable, especially if it has been built up with a group of people within a community, rather than being imposed when already fully-formed and with a fixed way of doing things.

Socially Engaged Practice

Socially Engaged Practice is about doing something but also thinking about it: reflecting on it and responding to it. It is a process that allows you to come up with 'solutions' based on local people's ideas, concerns and priorities. Being socially engaged is about supporting people to do the things that they want to do, which may not necessarily be what you expected. Socially engaged practice is also a means by which we can determine how relevant digital inclusion is to different people, their priorities and their needs.

Strategies for Success

Both Keeping in Touch and Knowle West Media Centre have found the following basic strategies useful for devising and planning socially engaged projects that nurture digital inclusion:

- ▶ Take your time in order to develop mutual trust and understanding between all involved.
- ▶ Map out the context you are working in:
 - find the key connectors – people and projects - and the relationships between them.
 - consider the digital and non-digital communication methods in use.
- ▶ Listen to what people say about what they want:
 - make space for exchange and dialogue
 - try and talk to people who aren't already part of the dialogue, who might be currently overlooked - ask yourself "Who is missing?".
- ▶ Find out what everyday technologies people are already using; find out what they are familiar with and build on that first.
- ▶ Understand when you need to give one-to-one support to people.
- ▶ Ensure that your staff and volunteers are:
 - approachable, friendly, supportive, understanding, trustworthy, and able to listen and respond to what the local community tells them.
 - aware of the potential of everyday technologies.
 - aware of how technologies can be adapted to fit individual needs, or know who to ask about this.
- ▶ Remember not to leave behind the old ways that people use to connect, such as posters, notice boards and face-to-face conversations.
- ▶ Remember that people need to see how any technology is relevant to their own lives before they invest time in learning how to use it. Remember that the technology will be relevant to different people for different reasons. For example, for many people the trip to the post office to get their car tax sorted is preferable to doing it online because of the social interaction they have when they visit the post office: "If I did those things online I wouldn't see people and catch up."

The case studies shared in the Nine Top Tips that follow should help you think about strategies you can use to engage people in your project and motivate them to use digital media in ways that are meaningful or useful to them.

Digital Inclusion through Socially Engaged Practice: Nine Top Tips

- 1 Know the community
- 2 Listen
- 3 Devise innovative projects based on local priorities
- 4 Extend your reach
- 5 Value differences
- 6 Devise different ways to engage people
- 7 Support people to develop in directions that are relevant to them
- 8 Sustain engagement with people
- 9 Work in partnership

1 Know the community

Get to know people. If you take time to develop relationships with people you will be more likely to be recognised, valued and trusted for supporting people to voice their own opinions and perspectives. It is important for people to get to know a key member of staff and for that member of staff to keep in touch and take the time to develop meaningful relationships. Our experience has shown that it has been crucial for people to get to know staff so that they trust them and know that they have expertise, power (through connections) and principles that they can rely on.

A key detail of this approach is taking time to get to know people which is a necessarily slow process.

Do build in plenty of time to build trust and mutual understanding with partners and local residents.

Don't have unrealistic expectations for a 'quick fix'.

Case study: Knowle West Web

Knowle West Web was originally a project about getting more people online through wireless connectivity and online 'taster' access. Initially the project involved lots of door-knocking in the local community: just getting out there and speaking to people. Through this process KWMC was better placed to respond to residents' priorities.

A key detail was to listen to and work with people over a long enough period to enable them to trust the KWMC team, even if what they were talking about wasn't something tangible that could be shown. This developed, over time, into a project that offered free computers to residents.

Being able to provide people with a free computer led to a significant shift in the project: it gathered far more momentum and engaged more people. The free computer offer helped to establish the mutual trust and respect that was key to the success of the project.

5

A mark of the project's success was that many people who engaged recognised the benefits of 'being digital', through using the free computer, to the extent that it motivated them to prioritise saving money to buy their own computer. Therefore, it was a real community-sharing project because people returned the free computers when they were able to get their own, so others could use them:

"Using the Knowle West Web free wireless encouraged me to buy an up to date computer and use the Internet. I found a good job, learned new skills, made new friends... and found love too! The kids loved it the moment we got the wireless and now it's upstairs for them, and I've upgraded to a main supplier for faster broadband downstairs, so I can do even more with it! I am so glad I took up the offer of free wireless with Knowle West Web, without it I would never have all these great new things in my life!" (Linda, Knowle West Web user)

The comment below echoes this. It also identifies the value and impact the project had for a diverse range of local people, by connecting them to the wider city and the opportunities it presents:

"I had not used the Internet before I got the free computer, but now I'm having loads of fun with it. I search for what's going on locally, I never knew so much was going on in Bristol." (Jeff, resident of Knowle West)



6

2 Listen

Converse with people and find out local priorities, interests and needs, and how they might change over time and differ between contexts. This will help to avoid assumptions about what people's priorities might be or that their priorities are the same.

Do listen to what people have to say and prove to them that you have taken their thoughts on board.

Don't ask lots of questions and then never be seen again.

Case study: www.knowlewest.co.uk

The Knowle West community website is a relevant online community resource as local people are supported by KWMC to develop its content. People have been motivated to use and learn about digital media in order to communicate their opinions, news and ideas to their community. In this way, user-led content has defined the website and its function. The website has been developed in direct response to local priorities, interests and needs, with the website design being evidence that people's ideas were taken on board.

Anyone in the neighbourhood who wants to upload content can do so themselves, via their own account. The website's content maintains its relevance to the audience as it includes up to date information and reflects shifts in priorities. The relevance of the information is a motivating factor in engaging more people in the debates and exchanges contained on the site and, therefore, in the use of new media. Engaging more people provides further, and varied, content for the site.

The website represents a snapshot of local opinion and priorities at any given time. Significantly, it is also a valuable record of these priorities, interests and needs, and the ways in which they have changed and been responded to. The website is an ideal vehicle by which organisations can show that they've listened and how they have acted on what they've been told.



Image: A screen shot of www.knowlewest.co.uk

3 Devise innovative projects based on local priorities

Work with local people to identify activities that **they** are interested in. These activities give people a 'reason' to practice and develop their digital skills, by doing something that is useful or interesting to them.

Do involve people who you intend to work with in the planning of a project.

Don't try to devise projects independently of those the project is intended to benefit.

Case Study: ProFound Media

The ProFound Media project was devised by KWMC's young filmmakers group, 'Digital Fish', who said that they wanted a project that would: "extend our corridor of experiences so that more doors of opportunity are open to us."

The project was planned and developed around this central aim. The specific aims were to enable young people to acquire a range of professional and vocational skills in media, in order to explore issues that were relevant to them and represent themselves and their opinions through professional quality media productions. ProFound Media was structured to offer a range of experiences that would build on the young people's existing skills and expertise and support each young person engaging at KWMC to take their own individual next step toward realising their own aspirations.

To this end, the project began with the recruitment of the ProFound project Co-ordinator. The application and interview process were useful learning experiences for all who applied. The successful candidate, Katie Snook, then had the opportunity to develop a range of vocational skills through her work:

"It has really helped me gain experience and knowledge needed for the 'real world' and possible jobs in the future." (Katie Snook: ProFound Coordinator, 2010)

Katie's first task was to find out what young people attending the different groups across the KWMC Youth Programme (young filmmakers, journalists, photographers, music makers, etc) specifically wanted to do within ProFound, the themes they wanted to explore and the professionals they needed to work with to develop their ideas into professional products. Consequently, they worked with a wide range of professionals, from Flash software experts to theatre and performance experts.

During ProFound, young people extended their uses of new media and became 'digital producers', learning skills in Flash software to develop an online game and using digital media to produce the film 'Stop Now Bully'. They also became more familiar with the everyday vocational uses of new media.



Poster for the 'Body Image' photography exhibition by Nlarge Photography. The idea for the exhibition was conceived and developed during the ProFound Media project. Nlarge were then commissioned to expand the work by the National Osteoporosis Society.

4 Extend your reach

Respond to the different priorities that emerge, reflect on the relevance of the approaches, language and design you're using, and incorporate creative activities as potential routes to digital inclusion.

Do look for new ways of doing things, based on ideas that emerge during a project.

Don't keep doing things the same way because that's worked before, or because that's the way you've always done it.

Case study: Edible Landscapes Movement (ELM)

The route to digital inclusion is not necessarily through computers: it can happen by responding to people's priorities and needs, identified through human exchange and by using devices that are more easily available, such as mobile devices.

ELM developed in response to local interest in growing food and the increasing need to have cheap healthy food, but also as a means of supporting local people to develop digital and vocational skills. At the beginning of the project, volunteers tended to feel nervous about using computers and had little or no confidence in their ability to do so. Many volunteers had never used digital media equipment or computers before and many had also never grown fruit and vegetables or eaten locally produced fruit and vegetables.

The project's activities and direction were further developed in response to the fact that many of the volunteers had little or no access to computers outside of KWMC. The focus became about using mobile phones to access or upload online information, for example the timelines created by the volunteers:

www.knowlewest.co.uk/projects/elm



One participant sums up how ELM has increased his gardening and digital skills:

"I really enjoyed my experience at the ELM placement. I learnt new things about plants and gardening and I met some really nice people. I have learnt about gardening, potting plants, names of different species of plants. I think coming to KWMC has been useful for my future; it has built my confidence in using computers. I feel much more confident now in using computers and using the internet. I've set up an email address and will use it in the future to help with my job search [Ian also did this in the ELM sessions]. I set up a timeline which I put my photos onto [which Ian put on his CV for the Jobcentre]. I will probably continue to take photos in the future."

(Ian, ELM participant, 2011)

5 Value differences

Think of yourself as someone who is learning and finding out **with** others, not as an expert who has all the answers. Have respect for different perspectives, ideas, processes and opinions and never assume what people's interests or priorities might be. Nurture wider respect for different opinions by sharing ideas and exploring different processes. Don't just create a platform where those who are already shouting can shout louder, devise ways of ensuring that the work includes the quiet people too.

Do tailor the project to the specific needs and interests of individuals working with you.

Don't assume to know or anticipate the interests and needs of individuals on the basis of a group identity.

Case Study: The University of Local Knowledge

University of Local Knowledge (ULK) was developed through collaboration between KWMC, artist Suzanne Lacy and local people in Knowle West. It aims to challenge existing perceptions of what 'knowledge' is and how it's organised and valued, reinforcing the importance of knowledge that is gained through life experience. ULK uncovers and celebrates the skills, talents and wisdom that exist within the communities of Knowle West.

As part of ULK, over 900 films have been made to date, with local people sharing their knowledge, skills and expertise on video. ULK is tailored to the specific needs and interests of individuals working with KWMC as their own areas of expertise determine the content of the films, which are therefore diverse, with multiple themes. The interests and needs of individuals have not been assumed on the basis of a group identity. In other words, the ULK team has not assumed what it is that 'all local people' will be knowledgeable about, but has instead asked individual people to define and articulate their knowledge, whatever area of expertise it exists within.

The sense of ownership that local people feel towards the project is also very apparent. In order for local people to feel comfortable in offering their knowledge and expertise, the approach used by the ULK team at KWMC is key. The approach is one where team members do not identify themselves as 'the experts' but as people who are 'finding out' and supporting others to share what they know to their peers and beyond.

Other partners involved in the project are Arnolfini, University of the West of England, BBC and the University of Bristol, who are working with KWMC to create an innovative online platform for the project.



Image: many local young residents have a keen interest in the environment and gardening and have contributed their knowledge to ULK, challenging certain assumptions of young people.

6 Devise different ways to engage people

Opportunities to engage people can span project strands and themes. Rather than merely learning new skills – progressing **up** a ‘digital ladder’ – people can practice their skills and have meaningful reasons to do so: moving **around** a ‘digital framework’, within a ‘scaffolding of opportunities’.

Do make sure that there are as many ways as possible to engage in any one project.

Don't define all the roles or ways of participating to the exclusion of new ideas that emerge through a project.

Case Study: From ‘Silver Screen’ to studio sessions

KWMC’s wide range of ongoing projects and activities presents many opportunities for initial engagement. The breadth of these activities mean that there is almost ‘something for everyone’, from Silver Screen, an afternoon film group for older people, to studio sessions to record music. Often, people initially engage as an audience member, visiting to see a film or exhibition, but then become involved in using and producing digital media over time, as the potential of this engagement becomes apparent to them. There are many examples of KWMC projects that have not involved the use of digital media but have led to it.

Young people who took part in the Fashionate project, producing a fashion show and performance, went on to use new media more widely when they secured places in the Media Hothouse project, as detailed in a later section. Fashionate is also a good example of a project that people could engage with in a wide variety of ways. For example, young people’s roles ranged from fashion design, flyer design and the technical and practical aspects of staging a performance to producing a script, producing music and performing. Many of these roles introduced young people to new skills in digital media, but some did not. What was important was having the flexibility to support young people to contribute to the Fashionate event in ways that made the most of, and built upon, their own skills and talents, developing roles around those skills.

For some young people with less confidence, the opportunity to have minor roles, such as helping to set up or clear up, are important opportunities for initial engagement. The KWMC youth team has found that over time such young people usually become confident enough to extend their engagement and become young new media producers. However, it is important to be positive about whatever contribution or input they may have initially, rather than worrying too much about needing to ‘talk them into’ engaging in prescribed ways. This approach can encourage people to develop more active roles.



Image: The Fashionate show. Photo: N'Large Photography

7 Support people to develop in directions that are relevant to them

By responding to the aspirations and ambitions of people you work with, you can offer people a variety of tailored opportunities. This necessitates being flexible, perhaps changing the plans you made to ensure they are relevant. Offering access to local, city-wide and national networks can effectively support people to continue to pursue their goals in additional ways and introduce people to new ideas and opportunities.

Do be prepared to revisit and change your objectives (the things you will do including the partner organisations or professionals you will work with) if your original objectives won't help you to realise the aims of your work, or to have the impact you intended to have.

Don't adhere to irrelevant plans and objectives that don't interest people, to the detriment of your ability to realise your aims.

Case Study: Media Hothouse

Media Hothouse was a project for local young people, encouraging entrepreneurial activity, skills development, collaboration and progression from projects to social enterprise/employment. Fifteen young people received bursaries to support them in setting up a new business and twenty one young people developed skills relevant to the workplace.

Media Hothouse made potential vocational avenues apparent to young people and, for most, it also led them to enter the creative industries. For example, Chanel Carter set up 'Little Bits & Allsorts', a recycled clothing business; Lauren Hunt established the 'People's Portrait Studio' and Matthew Lyne developed the 'Backpack Recording Studio.' Michael Smith developed his business through website creation and Sam Haylings secured a FutureJobs placement with Avon Wildlife, was selected for the BBC's Face2Face programme, and secured a 3 month work placement at the BBC. Jack Williams secured a placement at KWMC editing artists' films and was commissioned to make the Media Hothouse promotional film. Nakina Van-Meir secured an apprenticeship in events management, Lisa-Marie Carter had her first piece of writing published in the Evening Post youth supplement and Gemma Daniels worked with a professional mentor to build her costume design portfolio.

Given the different directions that young people from Media Hothouse have taken, it is clear that the project responded to, and built upon, their unique ideas and distinct practices. It achieved this through a flexible, responsive approach, where the initial structure of the project was revised to ensure that this diversity of interests could be supported:

"The project has tried to shape itself according to individual young people's needs in terms of interests, skills development, external links and one-to-one support, rather than being prescriptive from the outset."

(Kamina Walton: Project coordinator)

It was clear that such a process would demand a certain amount of lead-in time, in order to find out what support was most relevant and then to research and locate this support. The project timescale was therefore extended. There was also a difficulty in programming workshops that would be of general interest across the entire group, so group workshops were limited to a small number - in marketing, public relations and communication skills - with more time being spent in one-to-ones with industry specialists. Objectives regarding the number of workshops that would happen were revised and instead of trying to identify 'enough' workshops of generic interest, more time was spent delivering tailored support from project staff and specialist mentors from a wide range of partner organisations and professionals.



Image: Lauren Hunt and the People's Portrait Studio

8 Sustain engagement with people

By valuing people's contributions and potential leadership skills, you can support them to develop their role into one of leadership and to think and act independently.

Do support people to develop independence, through reflection and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) support, and signpost them to other relevant opportunities.

Don't limit people's potential by thinking of them solely as 'participants'.

Case study: 4NINE volunteers

Young people with an interest in music production are able to book the recording studio at KWMC and use it to record their own music. Other young people attend weekly 'Music and Lyrics' sessions. Central to both of these groups is 4NINE Records, a record label and platform from which to broadcast and promote young people's music. The recording studio is consistently popular and over-subscribed, and the Music Coordinator has limited availability for recording sessions, due to the success and expansion of the music programme. As a result of sustained engagement, many young people have been supported to develop their skills in the recording studio, to the point of being able to use it independently.

Through continued engagement and ongoing reflection between young people using the studio and the Music Coordinator, opportunities have been identified for some young people to develop roles as 4NINE Records volunteers. New volunteers attend training sessions in volunteering, which are planned and delivered by the Music Coordinator. These volunteers now run most of the recording studio sessions, which addresses issues around staff availability, but, more importantly, it supports the young people to become autonomous and develop leadership and youth work skills. Furthermore, the Music Coordinator also uses his professional networks to involve KWMC volunteers in a wider range of activities, with partners at Bristol's Colston Hall and at Basement Studios, extending volunteers' experiences and networks.

4NINE Records volunteer David 'Deep' Elliot described his experience as a volunteer with KWMC on local urban radio station Ujima:

'4NINE hook us up with radio interviews just like this one; they help us out with performances, all sorts. That's how I take advantage of them but my little way of giving back is to help younger people who are trying to get into music with writing their lyrics, with making their songs: taking that first step into the world of music.'



9 Work in partnership

By working with organisations like KWMC, who are already recognised as part of a community, you can connect more easily with that community and learn from their approaches.

Do find out which organisations are respected by the community you want to work with and develop a relationship with them.

Don't assume no one else is doing anything in that community.

Case study: Neighbourhood Partnership websites

KWMC is working with Bristol City Council to develop websites for each of Bristol's 14 Neighbourhood Partnerships. Neighbourhood Partnerships are intended to:

“...bring public sector decision making to a local level where local residents can influence how they would like to see their neighbourhood improve.”

(www.bristolpartnership.org/neighbourhood-partnerships.)

KWMC has developed these websites, to provide a 'one stop shop' for Bristol City Council and key institutions to local communities. The sites are based on a template but are intended to be developed and shaped by local community representatives who are supported with training. This has developed in different ways according to the needs, interests and skills within the different areas of Bristol.

Neighbourhood Partnership website development has engaged people who have previously been digitally excluded, by creating accessible, useable websites. The websites have also enabled local services to become digital, as the process of developing the websites has engaged and encouraged people to use the online services. Alongside the basic sites and training, KWMC has used the Knowle West community site to inform the development of the wider Neighbourhood Partnership sites. This includes not only testing functions but also new approaches to engaging the wider community.

KWMC has links across the city and in different neighbourhoods, but is also seen as 'local'. KWMC's approach, developed and refined over many years, can be applied in different localities: KWMC has knowledge and experience of working with people literally 'on their grounds'.

Within every local area there are organisations that are well respected by the local community and it is important to work with these organisations as partners, rather than trying to start from scratch, in order to make connections and begin dialogue with that community.

Neighbourhood Partnerships - Get involved!

Bristol's partner agencies have improved the way they listen to what local people want in their neighbourhoods. Why? Because they know that local people know best what's right for their areas.

Neighbourhood Partnerships are well placed to consider local concerns. They bring together local councillors, neighbourhood police teams, community groups and local residents to shape services such as street cleaning, park maintenance, local recycling schemes, minor traffic schemes, highway maintenance and community safety.

Use the map below to find out more information on what's going on in your area and how you can get involved.



Practical tips about technologies to get you going

Using mobile phones:.....

Mobile phones are everywhere. People of all ages carry them. They can be used to record and upload photographs, text or video to online community spaces as well as read what is already there. A first step in using them for digital inclusion is to try and understand how people are using and not using their phones already. Not everyone will be aware of the potential of the mobile in their pocket and the possibilities it can afford them. There are different ways that people can use their phones to connect to your project, but it is not just a question of showing them how to use the camera or send a text.

While it may be lack of awareness of a technology that stops people from using it, it could also be lack of confidence. There are economic factors to take into consideration, such as the sort of contract or data plan they have with their phone company or service provider.

However, if people have a free texting plan they can still use the social networking website Twitter for free (see section below): you just need to show them how. The simplest, and usually the cheapest, way to make use of mobile phones is to use texting, as it costs nothing to receive a text.

Texting tools may make communications short, but they can be used for something rich or helpful, whether gathering survey data or creatively writing poetry. They can also be powerful and flexible tools for coordinating face to face activities.

Remember the basics:

- 1 keep it simple
- 2 keep it cheap or free
- 3 give people time to learn new ways of using familiar technology
- 4 set up Twitter accounts and show people how they can be used via text messaging
- 5 don't expect the project workers to use their own phones – get a dedicated project phone so that they don't have to give out their personal numbers.

Using Text messaging:.....

Example - Thumbprint City

Thumbprint City was one of the pieces of software that we looked at when we visited Kirklees for the Keeping In Touch project. Various groups were using it as an affordable way to keep in touch with group members. The Thumbprint City system allows an administrator to set up a web-based page where they or group members can add their mobile phone numbers so that they can receive text messages. The administrator can use the site to send messages to the group, which cost nothing. The only outlay is the small initial cost to set up the Thumbprint City page.

See thumbprintcity.com



Image: Participants using mobile technology in the Thumbprint City 'Lend An Ear' project. Photo from Andrew Wilson. www.thumbprintcity.com/yorkshire/ear

Twitter is a 'micro-blogging' website: it gives its users a limit of 140 characters per message or update they compose. It enables people to strike up conversations, give out details of their activities, promote themselves and make connections. Short updates are called tweets.

The Twitter 'T party' at KWMC demonstrated how to get started with a Twitter account and how to use it to share news from around the community. The abilities of the people who attended ranged from regular 'tweeters', people who had already set up a Twitter account but had never used it, and people who weren't really sure what 'tweeting' was but were up for having a go at something new.

The session was a good example of how to approach any sort of community drop-in session with technology. The session was free, people just had to turn up and bring a working phone with them, and there were enough people there with a range of expertise to help everyone have a go. There was a demonstration using a laptop hooked up to a projector, and a walk-through of how to set up a Twitter account using the website. People were shown how to link a mobile phone number to a Twitter account, how to text to Twitter and how to use the hashtagging feature to make 'tweets', show within a designated feed on a website.

People were helped through the processes of setting up a Twitter account and setting up their account to send and receive tweets by text message. The tag [#kwnews](#) was used to make tweets appear on the Knowle West community website: www.knowlewest.co.uk

The different ways that Twitter was set up for individual users included:

- someone who had a mobile phone but didn't have free text messages: we helped her set up a Twitter account, which involved setting up an e-mail account first.
- someone who had a Twitter account but never used it and wasn't really sure what the point was: we set up her Twitter account to send and receive tweets via her mobile phone so that she could contribute to the [#kwnews](#) feed.
- one person had a smartphone which included a Twitter application, but she had no data-plan with her mobile phone service provider to enable her to access the internet on her phone to use it: we set up her Twitter via text message, as using the smartphone app would have cost her more money to go online with her phone.

Example – Homeless SMS

An exemplary way to use Twitter by text message is demonstrated by the HomelessSMS (HSMS) project in London (www.homelessSMS.com). The developer of the project discovered that nearly all of the homeless people he talked to had mobile phones and could receive text messages (SMS messages) even if they had no credit to send one. Once they were set up to receive Twitter updates as text messages they had access to a range of timely snippets of information. They could also choose to subscribe to different channels.

Each HSMS user is set up with a Twitter account and, using it, they can follow some or all of the HSMS Twitter accounts. This starts with the [hsmsWELCOME](#) account from which they are pointed to other HSMS channels and supported to use Twitter. There are a number of accounts that can be followed according to the users' interests or the relevance of the information including:

- [hsmsTIPS](#) sends tips and advice for homeless people living in London.
- [hsmsNEWS](#) provides weather forecasts and relevant news for the homeless in London.
- [hsmsFIND](#) provides an SMS-based homeless services directory in London. You can find services by texting your postcode then the type of service you want e.g. [@hsms FIND N1 Hostel](#).
- [hsmsENJOY](#) provides updates on free entertainment opportunities for the homeless in London.
- [hsmsDO](#) provides updates on free outdoor activities for the homeless in London.
- [hsmsLEARN](#) provides updates on education/ training opportunities for the homeless in London.

As well as these 'push' services, which push information out to homeless users of HSMS, the project is also working with 'pull' features. The account [@hsmsHELP](#) is used to send out questions from homeless people using HSMS to reach an audience of 'followers' who might be able to help. The question can be read by anyone who follows [hsmsHELP](#): this might include other homeless people, those involved in services for homeless people or others who are interested or concerned. The question can be forwarded on through the Twitter networks of the people



following hsmsHELP too. Thus, Twitter works as a kind of 'digital megaphone' for the query. Answers can come back to the @hsmsHELP account, from which they are shared with the questioner and others through the relevant Twitter channels. The success of this is dependent on who follows the @hsmsHELP channel and their ability to find answers to the questions. The service also sends out inspirational quotes each day and these have also proved very popular.

@hsmsCONNECTION allows people to communicate directly about their services and only goes to people who are registered with the organisation.

When sending out messages, care is taken not to use abbreviations and to write long-form friendly messages that everyone can understand, assuming they have a level of English and literacy. Homeless SMS try to get as much information into the 140 character limit as possible and avoid sending too many messages, as this can be irritating. The project is reliant on having people to sort, source and send out information.

Homeless SMS is an interesting example of what can be done with devices that are affordable to almost everyone. It is the combination of cheap mobile phones, SMS and free use of the Twitter service that is powerful in this case and which shows clear potential in the context of service cuts and the developing trends in social intervention in the UK, which emphasise co-production approaches to care and service delivery.

The use of a free service such as Twitter means no or minimal costs. It brings benefits from its scale and its availability but also there are risks. There is no control over functionality, changes, closure or the introduction of costs by the service.

www.facebook.com 

Facebook is another free website that can be used to keep in touch with people. In order to access Facebook you must register and create a personal profile, although you can share as much or as little information as you like with other users. There are two main ways to use Facebook to keep in touch with groups of people:

- **Facebook pages**

A Page often functions as the public face of an organisation within Facebook. Pages are generally overseen and populated with information by one or two administrators. These administrators must have personal Facebook accounts in order to do this, however any activity they engage in on the page is presented as coming from the page, and hence the organisation, not them personally (unless they alter certain settings). Facebook users who click a button to 'like' the page will see updates from the page on their Facebook homepage.

With pages, communication is generally one-way - from the administrators to the fans - but there are opportunities for fans to comment on activity by the page administrators and add their own messages. These messages are 'hidden' until approved by an administrator. One drawback of pages is that the administrators cannot currently create a Facebook 'event' and invite the fans, as they are acting as the page, not as themselves. Pages are public.

- **Facebook groups**

Groups give more flexibility with regard to privacy settings: they can be open (found in Facebook searches and any user can join and post messages), closed (found in Facebook searches but restricted to users who have been approved by the creator/administrator) and private (unsearchable and users can only join by being added by the creator/administrator.) Users can withdraw from the group at any time. Administrators can create a Facebook 'event' and invite the group members, encouraging the information to be circulated amongst each individual's own networks.

Both pages and groups can be useful for publicising events, although there is a limit to the number of people who can be invited at once via Facebook. There is also the issue that not everyone uses Facebook. If community activists and project workers do not wish to mix their personal and professional activities, they can set up a Facebook account that is separate from their personal one, purely for use at work or during the project.

In Dalton and Rawthorpe, Huddersfield (an area that provided a case study for the 'Keeping in Touch' project), a combination of social networking sites and a Facebook page are used for projects where people have access to broadband and laptops or high-end mobile phones. Different channels are needed in Birkby, a predominantly South Asian community, where Facebook is hardly used by women. Most women there do have a mobile phone and, as a result, different Thumb Print City SMS mailing lists are being used to share local information. The channels that are preferred, available or affordable need to be used, but these channels shape the kinds of communication that are possible.

www.flickr.com

The photograph-sharing website Flickr is useful for working with people who are less comfortable with reading and writing, and for uploading photographs to a shared site to document a project and share activity and progress. Photographs can be automatically stamped with a date and geo-tagged by the camera or mobile phone to give the location where they were taken. The pictures can then be fed into a website with more explanation. Signing up to Flickr can be done via Facebook or the search engines Yahoo or Google, but can be a frustrating process.

Using blogs

A blog is a website that individuals or groups can use to record their views or document something. Blogs can be used as a project journal or diary, with everyone involved keeping a record of their own project experience. It is a useful thing to do as it encourages everyone involved to reflect on, and think about, what they have done, thereby identifying what they have learned and achieved too. As blogs are easily shared, this means that everyone involved in a project can read about each other's experiences and have discussions about the project. As a result, the process of keeping a blog can encourage ongoing evaluation of a project. Blog content provides a useful record of a project, its process and its development; consequently it can be used as evidence when evaluating and reporting about a project.

'Keeping in Touch'

The Keeping in Touch project was all about finding out how people create a sense of strong community through their everyday practices; how texting, phoning, emailing and using Facebook and Twitter can all contribute to strengthening relationships. The researchers set out with a strong desire to find out not how people connect to government or other 'official' sites but how they connect to each other.

In 2011 the Keeping In Touch project carried out a series of conversations with different people in Knowle West, Bristol, asking them how they use everyday communications technologies like mobile phones, texting, Facebook and so on in order to keep in touch with friends, family and others in their community. The conversations showed the range of abilities and everyday access to technologies, from people who never text but use mobile phones just for voice conversations, to others who use smart phones to browse the web, and people using Skype on home computers to keep in touch with friends and family overseas.

At the same time, Keeping In Touch carried out a review of projects across the UK, that aimed to connect people and strengthen senses of community. In this handbook, the outcomes of Keeping In Touch have been merged with just some of the wealth of knowledge that has been amassed over the years by Knowle West Media Centre. In merging the knowledge gathered in this way, we hope to create a useful handbook for people who want to develop their own socially engaged projects.

www.dcrc.org.uk/publications/keeping-touch

Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC)

Knowle West Media Centre is a charity and arts organisation based in South Bristol. For over 15 years they've been supporting communities to access digital technologies and arts activities and get the most out of them. KWMC runs a variety of projects and groups for young people, giving them opportunities to explore and experiment with digital media, offers a range of digital and environmental projects to encourage sustainable living, and organises a regular programme of arts activities. KWMC also has meeting, office, desk and studio space for hire.

In 2008 local residents and young people were involved in designing the KWMC building, to make it accessible and environmentally sustainable. KWMC was awarded the 'Building Community Networks Award' and was the joint winner of a 'Special Award for an Outstanding Contribution to Digital Inclusion' at the 2010 eWell-Being Awards. KWMC became an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) in 2012.

www.kwmc.org.uk
www.twitter.com/knowlewestmedia
www.facebook.com/knowlewestmedia

KWMC staff involved in the preparation of this handbook:

Bart Blazejewski, Makala Campbell, Rachel Clarke, Penny Evans,
Dr Roz Hall, Martin Hanstead, Carolyn Hassan, Joss 'Jagos' Holmes,
Russell Knights, Sue Mackinnon, Sandra Manson, Misty Tunks

The 'Keeping in Touch' project was made possible by funding from
the Arts & Humanities Research Council
and the University of the West of England (UWE),
with the support of UWE's Digital Cultures Research Centre
and Knowle West Media Centre.