Social inclusion in the digital age

Housing advice for everyone project report

Shelter
After more than a decade of government agendas to modernise and deliver services online, along with initiatives to broaden internet access through training, access to broadband and providing equipment, we still find ourselves grappling with how to achieve real and sustainable equality of outcome for all. There are so many issues to address – literacy, accessibility and capability, to name a few.

Having poured substantial sums into all of those activities, the governments in Westminster and in Scotland are now turning their attention to the concept of Public Legal Education (PLE), which has been described as:

‘… a range of activities and initiatives that aim to improve people’s lives and empower communities… By building skills and confidence PLE can help people to access services, get better homes and jobs and believe in themselves and their future.’

www.plenet.org.uk/what-is-public-legal-education

PLE represents the more difficult aspect of digital inclusion. Similar to training, it is located at the interface between users and technology, but PLE needs to go much further than teaching a new set of skills. It is concerned with the successful handling of life issues – identifying a problem, knowing where to get help, and acting on information. Where those life issues impact on people’s housing (and most of them can) the stakes are extremely high.

After creating a website containing the knowledge and many of the tools to successfully negotiate the housing maze, we at Shelter Scotland wanted to explore how we could make sure everyone is able to benefit from that vast resource – hence this pilot project. With a small amount of money and a large degree of enthusiasm for the task, we were very fortunate to recruit a project manager with a huge array of skills and experience – strategic planning, community development, training, groupwork, filmmaking and sophisticated thinking around issues of equality and empowerment. The project was interesting, challenging, enlightening, full of surprises, and certainly never boring. I hope this report manages to give a flavour of what was achieved and is a motivator for the work that remains to be done.

Barb Kempnich
Web and Information Resources Manager
Social inclusion in the digital age

It’s always exciting to have the chance to work on a new and stimulating project. Although the area of digital inclusion isn’t new, using it within a housing advice context at a national level certainly is.

This publication has been written in a style that echoes our inclusion agenda – reaching out as a real person to other real people. To this end a narrative approach has been employed to take the reader on a journey. On that journey they are in possession not only of dry facts, but will hopefully be inspired by the process itself. They will get a flavour of the potent force that empowerment provides, and discover how answers and strategies developed collaboratively can release energy and creativity that is much greater than the initial investment.

It’s been a privilege to work with the Web and Information Resources team at Shelter Scotland and undertake this groundbreaking work. The commitment of this dedicated, highly skilled and multi-talented group of people made it possible to achieve an enormous amount in a very short time. Having worked in health and education I’m used to working as part of a multidisciplinary team and it was with delight that I received generous support from every one of my colleagues at one time or another in helping to shape and form this project.

It can be hard to make the effort to participate in a research pilot. I am grateful to all our project partners and volunteers who took time from busy schedules to contribute to the development of this cutting-edge project. Shelter Scotland deserves credit for piloting such a new approach.

Many thanks to Elaine MacIntyre and Joyce Horsman who developed so many motivating ‘real-life stories’ and who made their subject matter come to life on training days, especially with such a wide diversity of participants. Thanks also to David Gibb and Ann Gilmour from the Shelter Edinburgh Advice Service for their invaluable input, and Sue Clowes from Shelter’s Somerset and Dorset Advice Services who shared her passion for promoting self-help. Finally, thanks to the project reference group and in particular, Barb Kempnich who had the vision to identify the need for this work and the commitment to make it happen.

Jen Clark
Project Manager
Table of contents

Executive summary

Why digital inclusion?
- Cultural context 7
- Do I want to drive? 8
- Information is ‘out there’ 8
- Language and meaning 8
- The challenge 9
- Our approach 9

What we did
- Partnership development 11
- Project identity 12
- Advice map graphic 12
- Promotional material 12
- Easy access web pages 13
- Film 14
- User input 14
- Training 14
- Protocols 15
- Web buddy handbook 15
- Web buddy sessions 15

Case studies
- SOAR 19
- EverybodyOnline Gorgie-Dalry project 20
- Edinburgh’s Telford College 21
- McDonald Road Library 22
- Reaching Out 23
- Independent web buddy sessions 23
- Edinburgh Mela 23

Appendices
- 1. Partner planning pro forma 24
- 2. Session guide and data collection form 26
- 3. Training evaluation form 31
Executive summary

Housing advice for everyone – Shelter Scotland’s digital inclusion feasibility pilot – aimed to address social inclusion by making the most of the vast resources Shelter provides online. It did this by raising awareness, facilitating and encouraging self help and prevention, and improving the usability and accessibility of the advice section of the website.

This document outlines the activities and outcomes of a digital inclusion project conducted by Shelter Scotland from 2007 to 2009. It provides a context and rationale for this proactive strategy and outlines the main activities undertaken and their outcomes. It also aims to encourage the use of digital inclusion within a social empowerment context and to highlight its use as a tool for developing self-help and early intervention approaches to resolving life issues. The specific context is housing advice, but the issues are relevant to anyone interested in inclusion and community building in the digital age.

The original idea was to test an approach whereby volunteers would support people needing assistance with finding housing information online. However, it soon became clear that before that could happen, the right environment needed to be created. Among other things, this involved:

- developing positive, inclusive and empowering ways of describing and promoting Shelter’s web resources
- creating a doorway to the website that would encourage web novices and anyone who is easily overwhelmed by too much information
- finding a range of partners who were active in their communities and who could see that housing issues are central to the health and well-being of their interest group.

As well as describing the various resources developed, this report outlines the approach taken, the challenges faced, and the unexpected outcomes.

The most compelling findings of the project were:

- early intervention within a community setting has a profound effect on raising awareness and challenging the stigma that can exist around housing issues
- it is possible to successfully reach new audiences by bringing community development and web-based delivery of services together
- people are far more capable of interpreting complex information and taking action on their own or a friend’s behalf than we often give them credit for
- ‘web buddying’ provides a very popular and fulfilling volunteering opportunity
- as in other areas of community engagement, building genuine relationships is central.

It is hoped that this report can be used as both an encouragement and a resource for others who want to pursue their own digital inclusion agenda.
Why digital inclusion?

How would you feel if you didn’t have basic computer skills? How much harder would it be to organise different aspects of your life if you didn’t feel confident enough to search and find the right information or the best bargains on the web?

These days it is well recognised that services offered by organisations, whether they are businesses, charities or government agencies, need to be accessible by as many people as possible. Yet even legislation to ensure those with physical disabilities can access public buildings is only fairly recent in the UK.

It’s interesting to notice how quickly a cultural shift can take place around what seems ‘normal’. In my grandmother’s day transportation was mostly by horse. In my young life fridges, phones and television were all types of new technology. And with new technology came new ways of living.

Our workplaces would seem truly strange if we were somehow taken back to the fairly recent time when our desks didn’t have a computer on them. The thing about something becoming normal is it’s easy to forget that for someone else ‘normal’ can be very different.

If I’m used to searching out information on websites, copying, pasting, using the buttons on a mouse, I may forget that there are loads of people who still think a mouse is something that lives under a fridge. There are many people who will happily use an automated teller machine (ATM), but have somehow missed out on developing, or becoming confident with, the skills needed to access and successfully use digital information.

As far back as 1986, before communication methods radically changed shape, the World Health Organisation recognised in its groundbreaking Ottawa Charter that in order for people to achieve well-being in its broadest sense, they need to be able to ‘access information, life skills and opportunities for making healthy choices’.

Digital inclusion initiatives aim to reduce the new divide that is emerging as our ability to make life-affirming choices becomes more and more dependent on being able to make full use of the world wide web.

Cultural context

Think back for a moment to the 1960s civil rights movement in the USA when many African Americans weren’t able to vote because they couldn’t sign their name. This meant that a huge number of people were disenfranchised. To address this, grass roots literacy programs came into being. And from these networks, as initial reading and writing skills were achieved, new priorities developed around profiling concerns and providing peer support so that a plurality of voices could be heard. There were challenges and struggles in this process, but we now have the first black president of a world superpower. That’s quite a leap in a few decades.

Just as our thinking changes dramatically as society shifts, proactive thinking can create new ways of doing things.
Do I want to drive?

Cars have been around for a long time now and it would be hard to find anyone who didn’t have a good idea of what they do, or know that they require a driver to operate them. Yet not everyone learns to drive, or even wants to. Some people use their vehicle for local journeys and never consider going on a motorway, some are happy to travel anywhere in a car, and some can drive large passenger vehicles. Different levels of driving ability and different needs require different skills. This is supported by training, testing, licensing and registration.

People who don’t drive, and many who do, choose to travel by public transport. As a passenger, all I need to know is where I am and where I need to get to. I can trust other people to sort out the bit in between. And I can trust that they will have been assessed as competent to do their job.

Information and services provided electronically can be excellent. This is still a developing area however, and standards vary enormously from site to site. Advice and information can be hard to access, confusingly named, out of date, missing, misleading, and at times even incorrect. In addition to that there will always be people who lack confidence to act on the information they do access, or need a hand to find out more.

Information is ‘out there’

Although the digital information age is still relatively new, major changes are taking place in how organisations offer services. Led by government moves to offer services online, many organisations are reducing front line staff and managing demand by directing people to a website. In many cases these sites contain a dazzling array of menus, sub-menus and other choices. How would you feel if you didn’t have basic computer skills? How much harder would it be to sort out all sorts of things in life if you didn’t feel confident to search and get the right information or the best bargains on the web?

Language and meaning

Websites are predominantly a written medium, although technological advancements mean that access to audio and video is becoming increasingly viable. Issues such as reaching out to various cultural groups through inclusive language, images and design are all crucial. So too is providing for those with limited skill or particular concerns such as dyslexia and poor literacy. This is why a feedback loop between site users and site creators is so important.

In western culture the written word has a level of influence not extended to oral delivery. Choosing one phrase over another can, and does, make an enormous difference to the meaning we create. This is an important consideration for the language-based medium of the web that is re-sculpting the world of advice and information systems. Shelter for example, works with issues that concern what many people term ‘the homeless’. The words and frameworks we use to describe things have an enormous impact on the structures we develop and how we use them in society.

Definitions can pigeonhole people and inadvertently label them as ‘other’. Consider how differently we might feel if instead of ‘the homeless’, a term like ‘people who are experiencing concerns with their home’ was used. By changing a few words we’ve moved away from a ‘them and us’ perception, thus leaving room for a person’s situation to change. This produces a paradigm shift that allows us to open up our thinking and develop a model that includes everyone’s needs – one where no one is left out.
The challenge

So far digital inclusion initiatives in Scotland have tended to focus on providing internet access and equipment, and training people to use it. Less attention has been given to ensure that as websites develop and become central repositories of complex information and advice, we don’t inadvertently leave people behind.

Working with the issues that digital inclusion engenders does much more than inspire us to develop better websites, it gives us an opportunity for fertile interaction with the fundamentals of how we do what we do, why we do what we do, and whether we can do it better.

Our approach

The Scottish Government defines digital inclusion as ‘social inclusion in the knowledge and information society’. Having developed an excellent website, we at Shelter Scotland wanted to ensure it is used by as broad a range of people as possible – including hard to reach groups. We wanted to observe how people were using the site, and above all, find a way of providing help and support to those who need it, when they need it, and in places where they feel comfortable.

From the perspective of cultural analysis and inclusion, we turned to proven models in other fields such as user involvement in mental health, and community development and peer support in a range of other health settings.

Our digital inclusion project aimed to bring community engagement and empowerment to the delivery of web-based advice. This involved moving beyond a traditional top-down model where the service is devised by professionals and delivered to users in a one-way direction, and moving towards a genuine two-way system with a feedback loop that would enable continuous improvement – depicted in the diagram below. The values and principles underlying this methodology supported a consistent approach to the diverse range of activities undertaken as part of this project – from creating new web pages to training volunteers.

---

**Traditional top-down model**

- Professional
- Service
- User group

**Community development model**

- Professional
- Service
- User group
What we did

...we worked in partnership with a range of organisations. Each partner had access to its own target group and had a different reason for wanting to work with Shelter. We supported each partner to develop an approach to our digital inclusion agenda that also suited their own objectives and ways of working.

Our pilot explored ways of offering hands-on support to people who need it to access and interpret online information. This practical support was largely provided by volunteers whose role was to be an ally to advice seekers. ‘Web buddies’ were not housing advisers or computer experts, they were enablers, helping people to access and understand information appropriate to their needs and their situation.

Supporting people to help themselves and each other is a pioneering new area for housing advice. Most people are affected at some point in their life by an issue to do with where they live. However, there is a huge lack of awareness that help is available and that people don’t need to be in crisis before they seek assistance.

Although people recognise Shelter by name, the organisation’s work is not always well understood. The sorts of things that lead to concerns with housing are life issues. For instance, the single biggest contributor to someone losing their home is relationship breakdown, yet there is not currently a widespread level of networking between organisations that allows these sorts of social factors and housing problems to be properly connected.

The original idea had been that Shelter Scotland’s advice centres would be the locus of activity. However, changes in how advice was being delivered meant that this was not going to be possible, and a different approach had to be devised.

To achieve the aims of ‘Housing advice for everyone’, as the project came to be named, we worked in partnership with a range of organisations. Each partner had access to its own target group and had a different reason for wanting to work with Shelter. We supported each one to develop an approach to our digital inclusion agenda that also suited their own objectives and ways of working. As a result, a range of community engagement and user-involvement approaches was developed.

Partner agencies had many different core activities – a community cafe, a library, a computer skills training provider, resettlement support for people experiencing homelessness, community colleges, disability advice, and a multicultural festival, among others.

The project generated huge interest among a variety of groups and organisations. Although requiring much initial ‘courting’ of partners, requests to participate in the project exceeded our ability to support them. In fact, we were still getting expressions of interest after the pilot had finished.

The diagram (see next page) gives an overview of the activities undertaken throughout the life of the project. Detailed descriptions of these, and selected case studies, are contained in subsequent sections.
Partnership development

Over 70 agencies and projects were approached about being involved in the project. These potential partners were identified and assessed according to the following criteria:

- community of interest likely to experience disadvantage in relation to housing and/or access to technology (e.g., young people, newly arrived migrants, people experiencing relationship breakdown, older people, unemployed people, people with disabilities)
- actively engaged with community of interest and committed to user-involvement
- accessible, welcoming facilities
- ability and willingness to be actively involved
- range of organisation types and styles of delivery
- geographic spread
- ability to fit into pilot timeline.

Eleven organisations were involved in the pilot as primary partners, with many more being involved in other ways. For example, a community regeneration partnership provided a means whereby several small agencies accessed web buddy training.

Each partner was encouraged to develop a way of providing ‘assisted access’ that was compatible with its normal way of working and that would bring benefits to, and achieve the specific objectives of, the organisation or service.
Partners were asked to complete a project pro forma outlining their proposed activities (see Appendix 1). They were encouraged not to feel limited by this outline but to use it as a starting place. The pro forma provided an added benefit of acting as a prompt so that important promotional activities were not forgotten. It also provided a benchmark against which actual work could be assessed at the end of the pilot.

**Project identity**

Creating a cohesive identity for the project involved ensuring that both the website and promotional materials conveyed a positive, empowering message and were suitable for the diverse target audiences of partner organisations. It was also important to have a consistency of both message and visual design between the website and print media.

The project’s focus on prevention, education, early intervention and self help needed a moderate but upbeat tone. A background paper titled ‘Words, meaning and messages’ helped initiate discussions and guide thinking around this, and ultimately led to the development of the project’s strapline, ‘Housing advice for everyone’ and the accompanying graphic which depicted people from different backgrounds and age groups. Both of these elements were repeated on all promotional materials, and on the web pages developed as part of the project.

**Advice map graphic**

The Chartered Institute of Housing’s 2008 publication *Modernising Housing Advice* describes the efforts of various agencies to extend the range of services offered under the banner of housing advice, and to provide multiple access points to advice services. It concludes that ‘creating an environment that encourages people to think about problems before they happen and to act on them before they “need” to will be a be a significant challenge for services’.

From a community development perspective it was clear that a graphic representation of the ‘advice continuum’ would be helpful. An ‘advice map’ (see below) was created to alert those seeking assistance that there are many types of advice on offer and that people can access services at different points and in different ways.

The advice map also helped users to make informed decisions about what sort of assistance they wanted in the first instance, and highlighted that it is possible to progress from one to another.

**Promotional material**

Throughout the course of the project, the following items were created and distributed:

- 500 multi-purpose posters
- 1,000 leaflets
- 1,000 business cards
- 2,000 pens
- 500 mouse mats
- a film of real-life stories.
Easy access web pages

Shelter’s online advice is relatively text heavy, as housing issues can be very complex. In order for people to find the right practical information, they need to understand the background and context of their situation. For example, a tenant’s rights are linked to the type of tenancy agreement they have, so it’s important to know this when seeking assistance.

To simplify things for specific user groups, the website offers a number of alternative entry points (or portals). For example, there is a portal for young people and another for people with disabilities. These portals highlight the issues most likely to affect members of that group. Ultimately, they link through to the main part of the website that contains more detailed information.

To assist inexperienced web users, a new ‘Easy access’ portal was created. These pages were designed to encourage intuitive skills development and enable users to build confidence in navigating web pages and using a mouse. They also highlighted some of the issues covered on the site as a way of encouraging further exploration.

The Easy access pages also help people find relevant information without getting overwhelmed by too much detail. They offer:

- a general orientation to the website and what it offers through real-life stories and tasters about the sorts of information available in both audio visual and text formats
- information about what to do in emergency situations
- guidance about the advice-seeking process – how to access advice, how to prepare, what to expect
- an introduction to the idea of web buddying and where to find a web buddy.
Film

Included in the Easy access pages is a short film produced in collaboration with one of the project partners, the Gorgie-Dalry project, run by EverybodyOnline in Edinburgh. The film highlights how housing issues can, and do, affect everyone at some time in their lives, thus directly addressing the stigma that can be associated with housing problems. The film encourages people to use Shelter’s website to help themselves.

The film was produced on a very low budget using non-professional actors who volunteered their time. Although only intended to be used as a training aid, it has averaged over 220 views every month since being posted on YouTube.

User input

One of the outcomes of the project was the amount of invaluable feedback received about the website and how people use it. On some occasions we were pleasantly surprised by people’s ability to engage with the content in often very sophisticated ways. We also received many practical suggestions about how to make things clearer or easier. These suggestions came from both web buddy training days and from support sessions with members of the public. The value of this feedback loop cannot be understated as it provided a breadth and richness of detail that formal usability testing can never achieve, and it had a lasting impact on the staff who attended and led various sessions.

Training

Fifty-five people attended one of the seven training days held in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Fraserburgh and Dumfries. Trainees included both volunteers and staff from the organisations taking part in the pilot.

Training days were conducted by the project manager with support and expertise provided by other Web and Information Resources team members. In addition to receiving the user feedback already mentioned, this brought staff who write the website content into the ‘real world’ and enabled them to interact directly with people using the site.

Trainees completed an evaluation form and gave very positive feedback about their experience, as the charts on the next page indicate.
Protocols
Both online and offline protocols were developed to support and guide web buddy sessions and provide a means of standardised data collection. These can be found in the appendices.

Web buddy handbook
As Shelter’s online advice is vast, containing over 900 pages of information and self-help tools, a handbook was designed to be a support for web buddies. It contains information and step-by-step guidance about the web buddy role. The following excerpt provides a flavour.

‘As a housing advice for everyone web buddy you are doing much more than supplying someone with information. You are enabling people to learn the skills to take action on their own behalf, know what sorts of help and support exist if they need it, be more proactive in seeking assistance, and take power in challenging life situations.’

Web buddy sessions
Venues were generally well equipped for offering web buddy support. Although Shelter had set aside a number of decommissioned PCs to install in venues, none of these were needed.
Most web buddy sessions lasted around an hour and a half, and 41 individual sessions were recorded using an online form. In addition, there have been a large number of informal, unrecorded support activities conducted by partners in various other locations including Edinburgh’s Telford College and at the Hot Spot café in Peterhead and the Link Up community centre in Fraserburgh.

The following charts (see below) show who received formal help from web buddies and how they found the experience. This data was collected using an online form that had the dual purpose of providing a structure for web buddy sessions, and collecting both demographic and user satisfaction data (see Appendix 2). This information is contrasted with similar data gathered from people filling in a user feedback survey on the website. It shows that through this digital inclusion initiative, we reached a whole new group of users who don’t normally access Shelter’s online advice.

**Gender**

Those receiving help from web buddies were predominantly men (60 per cent, compared with 40 per cent of women). This is in marked contrast to Shelter’s online survey where only 25 per cent of respondents are men and 75 per cent women.

**Age**

This chart shows a breakdown of age by gender for people receiving assistance from web buddies. It is interesting to note that men dominate in the 18–25, 40–49, and 50–59 age groups, whereas women stand out in the 60 and over group. These differences may simply be the result of a small sample size, but are worth considering.
This chart compares people using web buddies with those using the site on their own. Of particular interest is the larger proportion of web buddy users aged 50 and over compared with other web users. A similar pattern occurs in the 26–29 group, while those aged 40–49 are more prominent as independent web users.

**Current housing situation**

This chart provides one of the most compelling comparisons between web buddy users and independent web users. Note the contrast in the categories of ‘homeowner’, ‘temporary accommodation’ and both social and private renting.
About the experience

A surprisingly high proportion of those working with a web buddy said they easily found the information they needed. In addition, these people were less likely than other web users to say they didn’t find what they were looking for.

Everyone who answered this question said they would recommend the website to someone else. In the web survey, 94% say they would recommend it.

Again, everyone who answered this question said they found getting assistance from a web buddy useful.

‘The help provided has been tremendous.’
Service user
Case studies

Partner agencies had different core activities – a community cafe, a library, an ICT training provider, resettlement support for people experiencing homelessness, community colleges, disability advice and a multi-cultural festival, among others.

SOAR

Background
This is a group of highly motivated people who have first hand experience of being homeless. Over a considerable period of time together they have developed skills in, and understanding of, the value and importance of peer support. The group originally operated under the auspices of the Glasgow Simon Community Resettlement and Training Service (RTS) which had a strong philosophy of user involvement and peer support. The group operates in a way that provides opportunities for people to contribute and share their skills and experiences. This allows considerable resources to be accessed, both among group members and in the wider community.

Activities
Initially an RTS staff member and a volunteer attended web buddy training in Edinburgh with the intention of learning and cascading the web buddy model as part of their training and empowerment activities in hostels across Glasgow. When the RTS lost its funding, the group reformed independently as SOAR to continue its work on a voluntary basis. Two subsequent training sessions were conducted in Glasgow. This group is still running and using the web buddy approach.

An option that we explored when the group was still part of the Simon Community was a funding bid to the Scottish Arts Council to develop a series of public performances and discussions as a means of profiling housing as a life issue. Although this was not successful, it provided relationship-building opportunities that were hugely beneficial in later work.

Challenges
Initially the RTS was the project partner. Some group members had very little computer experience, while others had good skills. The process of RTS losing its funding in the middle of the pilot meant that timescales were affected.

Learning
One of the most important characteristics of a successful group is its cohesiveness and commitment to core values. The egalitarian relationship between group members, and their interaction with associated support or paid staff is also crucial. Where quality relationships exist, the direction can change easily and well.

Unexpected outcomes
Through its existing contacts the SOAR group brought sub-partners to the project, which led to the involvement of the Glasgow Lodging House Mission, who offered their learning centre for training sessions. Several staff members also attended the two web buddy trainings.

Because of their personal experiences, SOAR members were very engaged with housing and homelessness issues and had a good understanding of ‘the system’ and how to negotiate it. This resulted in valuable insights that were beneficial to the wider project. One of the SOAR volunteers subsequently won a TalkTalk Digital Heroes Award.

Resources
From a virtually non-existent budget, a wide-ranging impact was created, which still continues. The various organisations involved contributed what they had to give. Shelter tailored the training to this group’s particular needs and skills. SOAR’s experience in holistic user-centred work was both practical and conceptually sophisticated. As mentioned, the Lodging House Mission provided a welcoming venue and encouraged the ongoing involvement of their staff.

I found it extremely eye-opening and interesting to see how people at the Lodging House Mission use this website. It was heartening to see people get to grips with the site so quickly, and also extremely useful for highlighting usability problems and finding ways to fix them.

Get advice writer
Social inclusion in the digital age

EverybodyOnline Gorgie-Dalry project

Background
At the partner development stage Shelter’s project manager read about CitizensOnline supporting people throughout Britain to learn computer skills through, among other things, interacting with core websites. She followed this up to suggest that ‘Get advice’ become one of the main sites used for training in Scotland. The advantage of this would be that all sorts of people would visit ‘Get advice’ as an incidental part of a broader training. Once they were aware of the site’s existence and its wide relevance, they would be ideally placed to use it successfully should the need arise. This would have the added benefit of broadening people’s understanding of what Shelter does.

This ultimately led to contact with Kirsten Cook from an EverybodyOnline project that had just started in Edinburgh. Elements of a broader shared agenda quickly became clear and a number of joint activities were undertaken throughout the year, and other opportunities for mutual benefit were explored.

The Gorgie-Dalry project provides internet facilities and ICT training to local people so they have an opportunity to experience the benefits of digital technology. In recognition of the fact that digital inclusion is a fundamental building block of wider social inclusion, the project also focuses on a wide range of community development projects.

Activities
During the summer of 2008 we worked together to produce Shelter Scotland’s first film. The purpose of the film was to illustrate that housing issues affect everyone at some time in their lives and that Shelter’s website can help to resolve them. The film was made available on both organisations’ websites.

A very fertile partnership was developed with Kirsten, who contributed to a range of activities including networking, developing web buddy training, generating ideas and reinforcing the social context for the work.

While developing a training partnership with Dunedin-Canmore Housing Association and Stevenson College, Kirsten included a module based on Shelter’s website. She also agreed to distribute a set of trainer’s notes based on using our website through the EverybodyOnline network.

Challenges
This partnership presented so many options for mutually beneficial activities, that it was a challenge to stay focused on what was doable within the timeline of the pilot.

Learning
Although many potential partnerships promise to be successful, the central element is always the quality of the relationship itself. A good partnership is greater than the sum of its parts. The ability to be flexible and go with opportunities as they present themselves, while adhering to boundaries around capacity, is central to this.

Unexpected outcomes
The idea of making a film and loading it on YouTube came from Kirsten, who had just done this for her project launch. The film has taken on a life of its own and is much more successful than we envisaged. This sort of partnership, while enabling much more to be achieved than could have been planned, also brings an ease that manifests as fun and can be a great motivator.

Resources
Sharing skills, knowledge, experience, networks and very small amounts of money enabled a range of activity. Mutual understanding of, and commitment to, community development within a digital inclusion context provided much-needed moral and practical support. EverybodyOnline volunteer Alan Robertson became a staunch advocate of the digital inclusion project and volunteered for several months as a web buddy and project assistant.
Edinburgh’s Telford College

Background
Telford College is situated in a regeneration area from which a large part of the student body is drawn. The college has a large student services office who were interested in participating in the pilot. The original plan was to recruit student volunteers and train them to become web buddies who could then provide sessions for their peers.

Activities
Ten Student Services Officers were trained as web buddies in July 2008.

Drop-in web buddy sessions were initially offered by student advisers. However, as students were generally IT literate, it was concluded that the most useful approach for the college was to use the website to advise students. The site was recognised as an excellent resource and was added to materials distributed to students who requested accommodation information.

As part of a mid-project evaluation, we met with college staff to discuss ways of refocusing their activities. This resulted in a redevelopment of the original concept that better met the delivery needs of this partner.

Learning
The peer-based web buddy model was not the most suitable way of using Shelter’s web resources within this college community.

Valuable relationship building and joint strategy development took place, and this provided a rich basis for future work with colleges. Structuring work through an annual planning meeting (perhaps in the final term) would enable advance timetabling of activities and take advantage of the structure of the academic year. This would capitalise on opportunities offered to show the film and promote the site through high-profile activities such as Freshers’ Week, Volunteer Week, etc.

Unexpected outcomes
Prior to training, advisers had not appreciated the extent of services provided by Shelter, and the training enhanced their knowledge of housing related issues. Subsequently, they began referring students with complex housing issues to Shelter as well as developing their own skill base and using the website directly as an early intervention tool in more straightforward cases. Emma, our Telford liaison, reported on a case where a student had managed to avoid being made homeless by using information on the site. This is a good example of social empowerment where, with early intervention, an individual was able to help themselves and avoid losing their home.

Resources
There was a clear intention to work together to address unmet need. Shelter provided context, training, resources and project coordination. Telford supplied the training venue, and their student advisers attended training for a day. This considerable investment in staff development demonstrates an impressive commitment to the student body.
McDonald Road Library

Background

We were keen to collaborate with a library, because they are community venues that exist the length and breadth of the country. We approached several libraries in and around Edinburgh and Glasgow at the early partner development stage but, as with many other initial contacts, these direct approaches received no response.

We then approached the Edinburgh Housing Advice Strategy team (EHAS) at the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC). Our shared joint agenda and commitment to improving the ‘crisis culture’ around dealing with housing matters led to a valuable partnership. Karen Allen and her team drove the agenda forward within the council. Without this strategic alliance it is unlikely we would have accessed a library as a partner.

Once negotiations had progressed through the council, we held development meetings with team leaders from four libraries. These were incredibly valuable and contributed to the development of both training and handbook content.

Activities

As restructuring within the CEC was affecting the libraries, it became clear that staff, although interested, would not be able to support web buddy sessions. Shelter had not intended to directly undertake delivery of web buddy sessions, but it was felt that the value to be gained from trialling this type of venue was considerable.

We consequently stretched our limited resources to directly support web buddy sessions in one library. Due to footfall, ethnic diversity, accessibility and a supportive team manager, Edinburgh’s McDonald Road Library was selected.

Over a four-month period, web buddies ran two open sessions per week. Shelter staff provided backup when needed because we felt it was important that at least two buddies attended each session. A Yahoo Group was set up to enable all the web buddies to communicate with one another and manage the rota.

Challenges

The council was initially cautious about working collaboratively on an empowerment project with Shelter. As a rights-based organisation Shelter can, and does, find itself in the role of challenging the council, both at the level of advocating for people’s rights, and in the courts. As on other fronts, organisational and structural change, and the time taken for negotiations, impacted on our limited timeline.

Learning

Library team managers and their staff were very aware of the social and empowerment component of the project and recognised that this fitted with the changing role of libraries. Valuable potential for future collaboration lies here.

Particular clarity in relation to timelines and roles is important when trialling new work that involves different departments or organisations. We are grateful to EHAS for brokering the issue of access to libraries within the CEC. Involving all parties in developmental discussions at the outset would maximise effectiveness.

Unexpected outcomes

Valuable relationship building took place. It was encouraging to note that working on shared agendas enabled much groundbreaking and successful work to be undertaken.

Resources

McDonald Road Library provided its learning centre for two training days and hosted a low-key launch of the web buddy sessions. Staff were very helpful to the volunteer web buddies, Shelter staff and advice seekers. We used storage facilities at the library which allowed us to have a high-profile banner each session.

We recruited and trained a number of very high calibre volunteers. This was much easier than we had anticipated, indicating that web buddying is a very attractive volunteering opportunity. The volunteers were all required to undergo criminal records checks, and a risk assessment of the venue was undertaken prior to any sessions commencing.
Reaching Out

Part of the Peterhead and Fraserburgh regeneration partnership, the Reaching Out project invited us to run a training day for a range of their local partners. This was coordinated by Reaching Out and well attended by a diverse number of organisations. A successful partnership such as this highlights the value of appropriate joint training with both community members/volunteers and professionals.

Due to divergent timescales, formal web buddy sessions were not carried out. However, project members went on to increase their use of accurate and empowering information through skilled use of Get advice on the Shelter site. It is clear there is much room for collaborative work of this kind if capacity is available. Supporting early intervention within a community setting such as this has a profound effect on raising awareness and challenging the stigma that can exist around housing issues.

The Reaching Out project won a COSLA Excellence Award in February 2009 for having set up community venues to act as a ‘one-stop-shop for information and advice on a range of issues, including housing matters, money, health and wellbeing, steps to employment and educational opportunities’.

Edinburgh Mela

One of the greatest difficulties in challenging the crisis culture around addressing housing issues is the lack of awareness that they are life issues that impact on most of us at some point in our lives. We decided therefore to work with the Edinburgh Mela, a long-running and successful multicultural festival, to profile the site and the availability of supported sessions.

Festival organisers arranged for Shelter to offer web buddy assistance from a wi-fi enabled bus on site. This provided a unique opportunity to access some of Edinburgh’s hard-to-reach ethnic minority groups and distribute promotional materials such as pens and mouse mats to festival goers. In spite of technical difficulties with the wi-fi setup, a number of people sought assistance and were directed to useful web resources.

Independent web buddy sessions

We set up a ‘control’ situation where web buddy support was regularly made available within an accessible local venue. We used normal press and publicity strategies, but offered the service without access to a community-based network or organisation. The hypothesis was that the uptake in this situation would be poor. The outcome was as expected – there was no take-up at all within the community.

Clearly, the best way to proactively assist people to help themselves and each other is within the context of community and relationship.
...through this digital inclusion initiative, we reached a whole new group of users who don’t normally access Shelter’s online advice.

### 1. Partner planning pro forma

**Housing advice for everyone**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start date:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This can be as soon as Web Buddy training is complete</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of delivery:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(describe how you’ll deliver assisted access eg a 2 hr session weekly, when clients require etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue/s and times:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(details of where and when your activities will be taking place)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(name, email and phone)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other information</th>
<th>Details / planned activity</th>
<th>Who and when</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main target group</td>
<td>Staff names:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary target (who are you aiming to reach?)</td>
<td>Volunteer names:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web buddies</td>
<td>Training will involve one day 10.00am 4.00pm. Web buddies will be supplied with a handbook, a certificate and a badge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 1. Partner planning pro forma – continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other information</th>
<th>Details / planned activity</th>
<th>Who and when</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>Number required:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution plan:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch publicity &amp; promotional activities</td>
<td><em>(how do you plan to let people know the project is happening?)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-way assessment</td>
<td>(consider questions like:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how's it all going?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>who's coming?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what's going well?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what can be improved, and how?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-way promotional activities</td>
<td>Additional publicity required:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of pilot closure activities</td>
<td>Evaluation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publicity:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Session guide and data collection form

Session guide

Step 1 - Your location

The first thing we need to know is where you are at the moment:

- □ Annan CLIP
- □ Glasgow SOAR
- □ McDonald Road Library
- □ Other (informal session)
- □ Shelter Dumfries
- □ Telford College
- □ Edinburgh Mela
- □ Reaching Out 1
- □ Reaching Out 2
- □ Reaching Out 3
- □ Cockburn Street Neighbourhood Centre

Step 2 - Welcome

Welcome to Shelter’s website.

With the help of your web buddy, you’ll be able to find all sorts of tips to make your home happy, safe and secure. If you don’t have a home of your own, you’ll be able to find out how to get one.

Your web buddy is here to help you find your way around the website. The web buddy is not a housing adviser. This means that if you need expert or urgent help they’ll be able to show you how to get this but they won’t give you advice themselves.

A web buddy can help you in these ways:

- getting you set up to use the computer if you haven’t used one before
- explaining how the website works
- helping you get direct help from Shelter or another agency (for example, if you are in an emergency situation, such as being in danger of eviction)
- helping you find what you’re looking for
- helping you to understand what you’re reading.

Anything you say to your web buddy will be treated in the strictest confidence, and will not be discussed with anyone else.

Step 3 - Are you comfortable using the computer?

Make sure you’re seated comfortably in front of the screen.

Do you know how to use the mouse and keyboard? If not, ask your web buddy to show you.
Step 4 - About you

Have you used a computer before?

- Never
- Only a few times
- A bit (less than once a month)
- Fairly often (about once a month)
- Quite a lot (a few times a month)
- I use one every day

How did you hear about web buddies?

- Newspaper
- Poster
- Leaflet
- From a friend
- Shelter website
- Somewhere else

How old are you?

- 17 or under
- 18-25
- 26-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

What's your gender?

- Female
- Male
2. Session guide and data collection form – continued

Step 5 - Getting started

What’s the main reason you want to use the site today?

- [ ] To find some information for myself
- [ ] To find some information for someone else
- [ ] Nothing in particular - just interested
- [ ] Other

Not everyone has the same housing rights. Housing rights depend on lots of different things, such as the kind of accommodation you live in, who you live with, and when you moved in. For example, your rights will be different depending on whether you rent your home and who you rent it from, or whether you own the place you’re living in.

Which of these best describes your situation (or the situation of the person you want information for)?

- [ ] I rent from a private landlord
- [ ] I rent from the council, a housing association or co-op
- [ ] I live with my parent(s)
- [ ] I have nowhere to live and am sleeping rough
- [ ] I'm in temporary accommodation (eg hostel, refuge, B&B)
- [ ] I'm staying with friends or relatives (other than parents)
- [ ] My home comes with my job
- [ ] I live in halls of residence or other student accommodation
- [ ] I rent a room in the same house as my landlord
- [ ] I own all or part of my home
- [ ] My partner owns the home
- [ ] None of these
2. Session guide and data collection form – continued

Step 6 - Using the site

There's all sorts of information on the Shelter website and there are many different ways of finding what you're looking for. If you feel comfortable letting your web buddy know what you're looking for, that will make it easier for them to help you find it.

If something happens that you don't understand, just ask the web buddy to explain it to you.

As you go through the site, you'll probably find out about things you need to do. You can switch back to this page at any time and make a note.

At the end of the session, you can print out your list and take it away with you. You'll need to finish filling out this form first though.

Things to do

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

- If you'd like to browse around the website, click on this link to open the Easy access pages.

- If you have a specific topic you'd like to know more about, click on this link to open the Advice topics pages.

The links will open in a new window.
2. Session guide and data collection form – continued

Step 7 - What do you think?
Did you find what you were looking for?
- Yes, easily
- Yes, but with difficulty
- No - but I found other useful information
- No
- I wasn't looking for anything in particular

Do you intend to take any action as a result of using this website today?
- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

Would you recommend this website to someone else?
- Yes
- No

Did you find it useful having a web buddy to help you?
- Yes
- No

Would you feel more confident using the site on your own in the future?
- Yes
- No - I still think I'd need help from a web buddy or someone else

Would you recommend to someone else that they get help from a web buddy?
- Yes
- No

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your experience today?

How long was the session with your web buddy today?
- Less than 10 minutes
- 10-20 minutes
- Up to half an hour
- Between half an hour and 45 minutes
- Over 45 minutes
Training evaluation form

Thank you for attending Shelter’s web buddy training. It would be very helpful to us if you would provide some feedback about your experience using this form. We will use your comments to improve future courses.

Date

Location

1. Please rate the following from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure of the day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual aids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content – was it relevant?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found the content interesting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of training methods used</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance between listening and doing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall assessment of the training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Do you feel confident to start being a web buddy?

☐ Yes ☐ With a little practice ☐ No

3. Are there any specific comments you’d like to make (eg things you found especially helpful or something you particularly liked or disliked)?
Until there’s a home for everyone

We are one of the richest countries in the world, and yet millions of people in Britain wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded, or dangerous. Many others have lost their home altogether. Bad housing robs us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

Shelter believes everyone should have a home.

We help more than 170,000 people a year fight for their rights, get back on their feet, and find and keep a home. We also tackle the root causes of bad housing by campaigning for new laws, policies, and solutions.

Our website gets more than 100,000 visits a month; visit shelter.org.uk to join our campaign, find housing advice, or make a donation.

We need your help to continue our work.
Please support us.