



Kensington's Vision Is Strengthening a Community Through Broadband

They are very different, London's Kensington with its palaces and swish department stores, and Liverpool's Kensington, a regeneration area just east of the city centre. But Liverpool's has something London's doesn't - a strong community spirit.

Kensington Vision is reinforcing this spirit through a new Internet-based information service for the area's residents. This provides a mix of news, sports coverage, video diaries, and information on topics such as jobs and training.

The programmes are transmitted via set top boxes to televisions, or over broadband to Internet-connected computers. To widen access, the project is giving away 100 12 month broadband connections to the whole community and, in a pilot area, 80 freeview set top boxes with a very high speed connection. Five community access points have also been established.

Providing education and health information

The service is truly local, with most items suggested by people in the community, and many of the programmes actually produced by them. Kensington Vision provides the training and equipment needed to turn residents ideas into a finished product. Steve Faragher, the project's Community Information Developer puts it this way: "We are trying to create an on-line community that mirrors the real community in the area."

He adds, "Since the project began, hundreds of local people have become involved in a diverse range of



Kensington Vision's Diane Keggins and TV actress and director Noreen Kershaw with members of Gears Residents Association

"It has really helped to bring people together - engaging them to become more involved in community life and enabling them to learn new skills"

Key Facts

- **Hundreds of people in a low-income neighbourhood participate in an on-line information service, accessed over the Internet or through TV set top boxes**
- **Improved community sustainability by empowering and skilling area residents, who control and prepare much of the site's content**
- **The project has developed its own software.**



“The ability of the technology to help us to bring people together is phenomenal, and this is only the beginning”

subjects. It has really helped to bring people together and enabled them to learn new skills. The key to it all is conducting training in a jargon-free environment and using software that is easy to handle.”

Internet usage is up

Few Kensington residents have web access at home. However, the attraction of seeing neighbours and friends, and of getting local information, persuaded many people with no web experience to get involved. Steve Faragher says that, “once you get people on-line, they are very soon hooked and wonder how they ever did without it.”

Kensington Vision’s main aim is to build community relations in an area with many ethnic minorities and asylum seekers. By using the technology they provide, people are becoming more engaged with local life and their neighbours, regardless of background. “Technology can be a great leveller - it brings people together because they share a common interest,” says Steve.

He gives the example of two boys from Sierra Leone who made a video of a football tournament they had arranged. “They were so enthusiastic,” Steve remembers, “and this really comes across in their video. A subject such as football provides a real commonality between people and helps to break down barriers between different factions of our community.”

Kensington Vision is now developing an education service that will enable both children and parents to access school work, and a lifestyle service to provide information on health. This will include contact details of local sports clubs, dietary advice, and exercise regimes.

The project has also developed its own software that allows users to build a simple website in just a few minutes. “The software will be simple to use and very intuitive, even for the most technophobic users,” says Niren Basu, the project’s Usability Specialist.

Start-up media company established

Local resident Paul Reynolds has gained so much from the project that he has set up his own video company, PR Promotions. “I’d been made redundant,” he remembers, “and got involved in producing and editing digital material for Kensington Vision. I’m now applying the skills to School Idol - about finding potential pop stars amongst Liverpool school children. The winning group or individual has a day at the professional Parr Street recording studio to produce their own CD. TV companies have shown an interest and I’m hoping that it can be extended into other cities.”

“In future,” Niren Basu concludes, “we want to make our work even more responsive. We’ll have a message board system that allows users to comment on the content of the website. We can see what people are most interested in, and alter the content of the site accordingly. The ability of the technology to help us to bring people together is phenomenal, and this is only the beginning.”

Further Information

The Northwest Regional Development Agency wants the region’s people and businesses to benefit from the new opportunities created by the digital revolution. It has worked with partners to establish Digital Development Agencies in Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and Lancashire to achieve this at local level. The agencies help identify ICT priorities for their areas, work with local organisations to identify projects to address them, and secure the resources to make these projects happen.