

Welcome to the second issue of the CitizenFirst Newsletter.

Information and communication technologies, or ICTs, play a key role in all our daily lives, in our work, education, public services and in our homes. More and more new and complex services can be accessed electronically through a range of devices. However in many regions, lack of access and awareness have posed considerable barriers to communities to avail of these services. The CitizenFirst Partnership are continuing to address these deficiencies through their Regional Demonstration Pilots, some of which are highlighted in this newsletter. In particular Mid-West Ireland has a wide range of ICT initiatives in operation and central to the success of these initiatives is Partnership among the key Regional Actors and the Communities.

ICT for an inclusive society is a key priority of the EU Riga Declaration, June 2006. As Project Manager I am delighted to inform you that following a recent Programme Steering Committee of INTERREG IIIB NWE, CitizenFirst has received a six-month extension to further examine their citizen-centric pilots to include those populations at risk of digital marginalisation and develop a series of guidelines for eInclusive eGovernment.



Tom Kirby,  
Project Manager, CitizenFirst  
Director, Mid-West Regional  
Authority, Ireland

## The economics of delivering online services to citizen in rural areas

While a lot of the talk in Europe is about delivering new generations of eGovernment services to citizen, rural dwellers may be left behind because of the lack or poor broadband infrastructure.

In Ireland, the government is implementing a number of initiatives to get citizen to transact online with public agencies. Recently, the government relaunched its life-event information portal <http://www.citizensinformation.ie>, last week the local authorities launched an online initiative to get citizen to update their voting registration details. However, for citizen in rural areas, accessing those services still depend largely on the availability of broadband in their areas. Despite being one of the highest economic performers in Europe Ireland still lags behind in terms of broadband penetration. To counteract the commercial interest in serving rural and dispersed areas, the government has set up Group Broadband Schemes which allow communities to partly fund the installation of broadband infrastructure.

In the Mid West Region of Ireland the Mid West Regional Authority served as the regional champion for the scheme and its role was to help communities with the funding application process. While the installation is ongoing a number of issues and lessons have already being learnt:

- > There needs to be a certain amount of flexibility around the application process. Communities may not get organized quickly enough to meet administrative deadlines.

- > The national body should support communities in the selection of service providers. Communities often lack the expertise needed to assess the technical but also the financial capacity of small service providers. Providers which answer those tenders tend to be new and with limited experience.
- > The Introduction of infrastructures such as broadband should be a seamless one but in the case of rural communities support is needed to ensure communities are not left disappointed by their first contact with the technology.



However, speaking with Barry O'Halloran from BBnet, a service provider under the Group Broadband Scheme in the Mid West Region, rural communities which are light on can benefit from the access. He cites a large number of people being able to change their lifestyle by working from home at least once a week thus reducing their commute time and improving their quality of life.

## New Information Kiosk in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary - Puts Information at your Fingertips

An example of partnership in action was displayed in the Mid-West Region by the coming together of North Tipperary County Council, The Mid-West Regional Authority, Nenagh Town Council, Shannon Development, the Health Service Executive (HSE), and North Tipperary County Enterprise Board, to launch a new computerized **Information Kiosk** in Banba Square, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. This initiative was co-funded under the EU INTERREG IIIB Programme. The impressive Kiosk, blending it with its environs, is an excellent initiative to improve the delivery of information to members of the public and visitors to Nenagh. Information displayed on the Kiosk will be updated regularly by North Tipperary County Council. >

From left to right;  
Aine Mc Carthy (IT, North Tipperary Co. Council),  
Jimmy O'Loughlin (Shannon Development)  
Margerite Arthur (HSE),  
Tom Kirby (Mid-West Regional Authority),  
Paddy Heffernan (Nenagh Town Manager),  
Mattie Ryan (Chairperson MWRA),  
Geraldine Ryan (Tipperary North County Enterprise Board),  
Gerard Lynch (Head of Information Systems NTCC)

At the launch, Councillor Mattie Ryan, Chairman of the Mid-West Regional Authority was very impressed by the considerable collection of information on display at the Kiosk and said "By the touch of a finger locals and visitors can gain access to a comprehensive range of information on public services, travel information, tourist locations, places to dine, emergency information, business information, links to other informative web sites and more". The touch screen interface of the Kiosk creates a user friendly experience which will attract, engage, and assist everyone regardless of age and background. The customer-focused kiosk is also wheelchair accessible and the screen is a large, easy-to-see high resolution touch screen.

Developing new tourism marketing programmes and new tourism products in the Shannon Region such as these Information Kiosks, shows that these organisations are proactively responding to the requirements of tourists and locals. Nenagh visitors and locals alike can also access government information and services at the Touch Screen Information Kiosk which will allow residents and visitors to interact with the aforementioned organizations seven days a week, 365 days a year.

North Tipperary County Council Mayor John Carroll commented "We've rolled out several ICT initiatives this year including the launch of Aertel page 622 and on-line access to planning and Motor Tax at a number of terminals within the Civic Offices. Developing tools like this will continue to make it easier for members of the public to get access to information on our services"

*(Similar Information Kiosks have been installed by Clare County Council in association with the Mid-West Regional Authority and INTERREG IIIB, more information will follow in next Newsletter)*



## eTown initiative- thinking ahead in housing development

Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare was selected as the first E-Town development in Ireland. The aim of the initiative is to achieve a "Live/Work balance in tailor-made accommodation, create clusters of businesses and bring new economic activity back into local communities"  
-Kevin Thompstone, chief executive, Shannon Development. The idea is that smaller communities can only be sustainable if they are able to offer their residents the possibility to work and live in the community. >

It is expected that with broadband, new ICT applications, physical presence in the office becomes less and less essential and people should be able to readdress the imbalance that can exist between work/personal life.

The presence of state of the art infrastructure can also promote the development of quality employment in smaller communities which would traditionally not be considered by commercial interest as viable location for set up of operations.

The E-Towns project incorporates physical development, as well facilitating town planning, broadband access and community-based ani-

mation and training to help create an alternative enterprise culture in each community. The project is funded to the tune of €4 million by Shannon Development. The development in Miltown Malbay will consist of a 240,000 sq. ft. development of a 2.2 acre site. Twelve residential homes along with individual workspace units are being constructed on the site and will be completed at the end of 2007. As well as provide the infrastructure some training was given to some members of the community. In Miltown Malbay 12 member of the community completed a 6-month course in Web Authoring and as Community Trainers. >

## Limerick City Community ICT Steering Group

*The Irish Government announced recently further funding of €1.45 million for community groups through the Access Skills and Content (ASC) Initiative (under the eInclusion Fund). The ASC Initiative was established to target those who are at greatest risk of being left behind in the move to the Information Society. 76 projects countrywide will receive funding to address e-Inclusion. "This initiative is designed to promote access, skills and the creation of content for community-based groups and organisations who primarily cater to the needs of older people and people with disabilities."*  
- Minister of State, Mr. Tom Kitt.

A community group in the Mid-West Region of Ireland to receive funding through this initiative is the **Limerick City Community ICT Steering Group**. The funding of €44,500 will assist in the establishment of an Information and Learning Resource Hub and the creation of Info Booths in each of the 5 Community Locations identified where community learners can easily access detailed, accurate, up-to-date information on all learning opportunities.

**Limerick City Community ICT Steering Group** is a network consisting of representatives from five community centres in socially and economically disadvan-

taged areas in Limerick City, PAUL Partnership and City of Limerick VEC. Located in each of the communities are community-owned and managed Centres which are supported by the PAUL Partnership. It is estimated that each year over four thousand people are using the services of these Centres.

The activities of the group include

- > building the ICT Capacity of the Community sector in Limerick to bridge the digital divide;
- > working to ensure that the necessary ICT infrastructure, supports, and resources are available and effectively utilised by all centres for the benefit of their communities;
- > the development and effective use of a range of tools to improve communication (1) within each community and (2) between each of the communities.

The Group current project focuses on the implementation of community based **Info-Booths** in each of five community based locations. These booths will be one-stop-shops for information on learning opportunities available to community learners in their communities, city-wide, regionally, nationally and on-line. They will be centrally linked to the Information and Learning Resource Hub with content updated centrally to ensure it is current and relevant.



## New project worker

Cambridgeshire is sorry to report that Dave Taylor has moved on to another organisation to pursue his career. We are sorry to see him go and wish him well in his new role. He has done an enormous amount of work on the Citizen First Project and will be hard to replace. We have asked Michael Mulquin of I.S. Communications, to take over the overall coordination and the evaluation and reporting work. He is familiarising himself with work packages and project files at the moment. Michael was already on the UK Regional Steering Committee, assisted us with our Digital Challenge bid, and is well known in the UK and elsewhere in the field of community ICT and digital homes. He visited the Neunen project with us last year. Michael will be doing our interim report as his first substantive task.



## CoCoWeb, a tool to make supply and demand of welfare services meet.

The Eindhoven Regional Government is investigating whether ICT (information and communication technology) can provide a counterweight to the decreasing product and service range available in rural areas of South East Brabant. Citizens find that all sorts of products and services are getting scanty items in their community. As a result of the closure of shops, libraries, banks, governmental annexes, healthcare organisations and schools, not only the activity and liveliness disappear from the communities but the social entrepreneurship is lost as well.

At the same time there are however other developments going on that provide chances to improve the quality of life in small rural communities. More and more service suppliers discover that the digital highway provides possibilities for them to stay close to their customers in a virtual way.

The purpose of the **Virtueel Plein project**, and specifically the **CoCoWeb-pilot**, is to create networks of citizens and volunteers that provide welfare services. In these networks, the needs of all participants are clustered. Through collecting and connecting all the different needs in the community, new possibilities emerge. In this project an important role is granted to ICT-applications to promote processes of network emerging. **The CoCoWeb-pilot** in the **Virtueel Plein project** is a central meeting place, like a town square, but in a digital reality of computer networks and the internet. It is the central environment to exchange local and regional information, as well as welfare services. It forms a digital meeting place, a platform for supply and demand.



## Ieperjongt: Virtual community for local teenagers

Within the framework of the Citizen First project, the city of Ieper is piloting eCommunity-eGovernment services. One of the purposes of the Ieper Action Pilot is to research, demonstrate and evaluate how local authorities together with the citizens can take part in developing interactive communities.

In February 2006, a community website for local youngsters (<http://www.ieperjongt.be>) was launched as one of the eCommunity building test-beds of the Citizen First project. This website was developed according to the needs and desires of Ieper teenagers. A major communication campaign was set up to promote the project and attract local adolescents to the virtual community. Since the logo of the virtual community is an egg, all communication activities focussed on this theme. Thousand eggs with a sticker on it and accompanying information flyers were distributed to local teenagers at several school gates in town. A big communication activity was organised on

the central square of Ieper, which was broadcast in live stream on the website. This campaign was accompanied by an online contest to tease youngsters to visit the website.

To this end, the project team worked together with the local youth centre and the youth servant of the city. They are the points of contact for and driving forces behind the youth community. They stimulate teenagers to participate in the community and to deliver content for the youth platform (interviews, news, polls, ...). In addition to this youth platform, teenagers can also refer to activities they are organising on a decentralised calendar (e.g., parties, scouting dinner parties, performances). In the future the website will further be developed into a communication tool for the city youth services to reach and inform local youngsters. ○



## More public internet access in Kortrijk and the Friday Internetday-project

Physical access issues, such as insufficient computing and telecommunications infrastructure, high costs or poor or unreliable services are an important cause of the digital divide. To overcome social, cultural, educational and spatial isolation, the city of Kortrijk provided free public internet access points for its citizens, in the city and the surrounding more rural communities. Observation learns that the PI-APs are indeed constantly in use.

Therefore, the city of Kortrijk wants to increase internet access in the boroughs and the city centre by installing an extra 50 public PCs with the same software and applications as the PIAPs. Moreover, the new public computers will have an electronic identity card reader. 25 computers are planned to be installed in the city library, the other public computers will be installed in youth and social welfare places in more deprived areas.

As 25 public PCs will be installed in the library of the city of Kortrijk the project partners are convinced that adequate internet assistance for new users is necessary (e-learning and lifelong learning). People who still encounter problems using the internet or the PC are welcome in the library of Kortrijk every Friday (15:30-18:30) to find help and assistance. With the project **Friday Internetday** the city of Kortrijk hopes to stimulate the use of computer and internet, even also after a possible intensive ICT- training, and to expand the initiative to other locations where a public PC is available. ○



The CitizenFirst project is a project funded by the INTERREG IIIB North West Europe Programme.

More information on the CitizenFirst project: [www.citizen-first.net](http://www.citizen-first.net)

More information on the INTERREG IIIB NWE-ENO Programme: [www.nweurope.org](http://www.nweurope.org)

Lead Partner / Project coordinator: Mid-West Regional Authority Friar Court, Abbey Street, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, Mid-West Region, Ireland  
Contact: [collinsmwra@eircom.net](mailto:collinsmwra@eircom.net)

