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Editorial

Welcome to the ninth and last edition of the CitizenFirst Newsletter – firstly let me say that we are somewhat saddened that this day has come.

As Lead Partner of CitizenFirst, the Mid-West Regional Authority are delighted to have led such an important project on behalf of four other European Local/Regional Authorities. Since 2003, were it all began at the INTERREG IIIB event in Cork, Ireland, the CitizenFirst Project has led to a number of successes. Core to this has been the refocus of public authorities to the provision of more citizen-centric services.



Thousands of citizens are now confident to use online services, communities have been strengthened and a number of new neighbourhood groups have been set up. Significant numbers of people are now involved in volunteering. Strong partnerships between agencies have been set up which are likely to result in further important initiatives. More people have been involved in local governance and a stronger relationship has been developed between public bodies and the citizens they serve.

Further testament to this success has recognised by the European Commission nominating the Citizen-First Project to receive an eInclusion Award on 1st December 2008 in Vienna. The Mid-West Regional Authority will accept this award on behalf of the Partnership who comprise Cambridgeshire County Council (UK), Eindhoven Regional Government (NL), City of Kortrijk and City of Ieper (BE).

Well done to all who participated in CitizenFirst!

Liam Conneally,
Project Manager, CitizenFirst Director,
Mid-West Regional Authority, Ireland

CitizenFirst the Future Pathways to e-Inclusion

Pathways to e-Inclusion is a 3 to 4 year regional initiative project being led by Cambridgeshire County Council within the Information and Knowledge Economy sub-theme of the INTERREG 4c Information Society strand, for submission to the 2nd funding call in early in 2009.

Pathways to e-Inclusion will identify best practice and develop innovative approaches in three areas key to the development of participation in the Information Society.

ACCESS: enabling access to services, motivating involvement in the information society, developing the use of volunteers

SKILLS: drawing together skills development practices and policies, comparison of experiences from implementation pilots

CONTENT: developing content for the project partners and other local agencies, assessment of lessons learnt across partner areas

The project will share its experiences and lessons in the form of toolkits, best practice guides and online bulletin boards with a view to influencing future policy development across Europe. For further information on Pathways to eInclusion contact Rebecca Morgan on 00 44 1223 718042 or by email at rebecca.morgan@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

ISSIDORA – Innovative Strategies for Sustainable Integrated Development Of Rural Areas

The Citizen-First partners hope to build on their partnership with the development of a new project called ISSIDORA. This project focuses on improving the quality of life in rural areas by developing and implementing innovative, sustainable and integrated strategies for rural community development.

The partners are already working on the development of their rural communities in which they all face specific challenges and there is also one common challenge: to create a more holistically attractive proposition to retain young, skilled and creative people, and to exploit the talents of the full demographic range of the population including the silver generation, people with disability, new migrant populations, and those seeking a move from a hurried urban life to achieve a greater work-life balance and harmony. The key challenge for the ISSIDORA partners is to develop and implement a "model" for rural community development in which a bottom up approach and community driven integrated development are included so it will also empower the people living in the communities.

The ISSIDORA project is currently being developed and will be submitted in Interreg IVB NWE early 2009. Apart from the goals that were described before, an important goal is also to capitalize on the partnership that was created in the Citizen-First project that proved to be a very valuable transnational cooperation. In the ISSIDORA project this partnership will be extended further on this solid foundation.

CitizenFirst - a medal winner at the e-Inclusion Awards 2008



CitizenFirst, has been selected as one of the five medal winners in the Inclusive Public Services category of the e-Inclusion Awards 2008. As Lead Partner, the Mid-West Regional Authority has been invited to the

European e-Inclusion Ministerial Conference and Exhibition in Vienna from 30 November to 2 December 2008. For more information on the Awards visit www.ec.europa.eu/information_society/events/e-inclusion/2008

Final International CitizenFirst Conference

The final CitizenFirst conference, "Citizen First... using Technology to include ALL Citizens" was held in Ennis, Ireland, on 25-26 September 2008, to consider the issues and share the experience and best practice of the 4 CitizenFirst regions.



In addressing the conference, Máire Hctor the Irish Government's Minister for Older People acknowledged that older people are the least likely to use, and therefore benefit from ICT "the internet as a tool can offer so much to older people, and they don't need to be missing out." Minister Hctor stressed that we need to communicate to older people that it is relevant and what it can do for them. Then we need to assist them in participating, which entails ensuring that they can access the technology and that they have the confidence and skills to get what they want out of it. The Minister concluded by stressed the "need to focus on the citizen and their needs ... to get the technology working for people. Sharing information on what works is so important, but it is not always done. It is an important aspect of this Citizen First initiative."

Focus on the Lessons and Recommendations from Citizen First for eInclusion

The other keynote speakers explained that the INTERREG IVB Programme is now active and has even more budget to support projects like CitizenFirst over the coming years, as long as they are relevant to their regions, are value for money and involve true transnational cooperation.

The key lessons from the CitizenFirst project are that the core elements of eInclusion are: 1. Access, 2. Awareness/Motivation, 3. Empowerment and 4. Partnership. This latter is about engaging with the right people in the right way. Public agencies, in particular, must avoid doing things to, rather than in partnership with, communities. The use of volunteers is core to this – but be aware that volunteers need a lot of training and support. Our citizens can be empowered using ICT to address community needs and aspirations, but this requires (a) community involvement from the start, (b) the power of persuasion/advocacy, involving local champions, (c) community buy-in and (d) sustainability. Without such proactive actions, ICT can even further alienate disadvantaged groups and increase the Digital Divide.

In keeping with the eInclusion theme of the conference, 6 very diverse show case practical examples from across the 4 regions were presented. As well as their infectious enthusiasm, the presenters highlighted the very diverse ways in which services can be citizen-centric and inclusive, and that even across the very different regions most of the problems and issues are common.

They highlighted:

1. Enthusiastic and committed champions both in the agencies and communities are required, and they need to be able to devote a lot of their time and efforts to work with people.



Ms. Máire Hctor, Irish Minister of State responsible for the Elderly with Cllr. Bernard Hanrahan, Chairperson of the Mid-West Regional Authority

2. Disadvantaged areas and groups do not see the new technologies as being relevant to their lives. They need awareness, access, training and support in the use of such technologies and services.

3. Actions need to meet needs at the levels they present (where the people themselves and their communities are at).

4. Capacity development is key – build on the Community's own knowledge and experience. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is one good approach .

5. Working in partnership can have a huge impact on communities and people's lives, but it takes a lot of time and resources, and can be quite alien to the current culture of most public organisations.

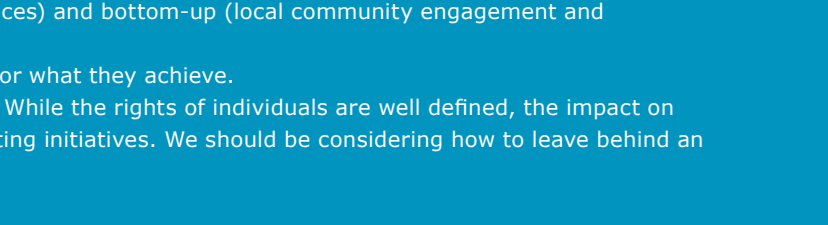
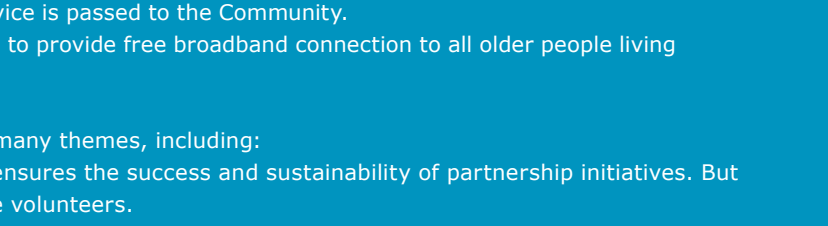
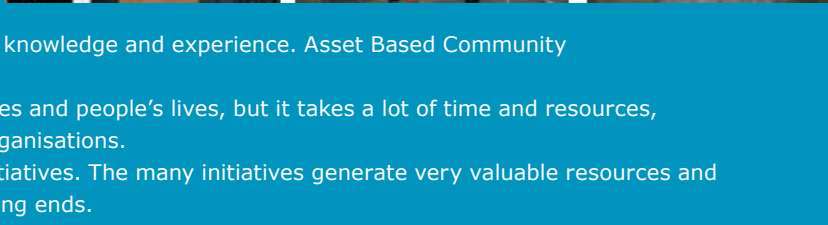
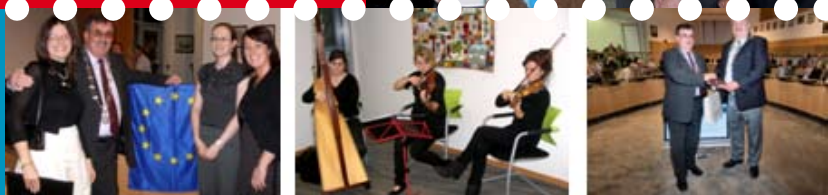
6. Sustainability must be addressed from the beginning of all initiatives. The many initiatives generate very valuable resources and experience, but these can be quickly lost once the initial funding ends.

7. Sustainability is enhanced if ownership and control of the service is passed to the Community.

8. Access to services is critical, so there should be a programme to provide free broadband connection to all older people living alone or in remote areas.

The subsequent open discussion with all delegates highlighted many themes, including:

- The importance of volunteerism as the common factor that ensures the success and sustainability of partnership initiatives. But this takes time, effort and resources to fund and support the volunteers.
- We need to blend parallel top-down (infrastructure and services) and bottom-up (local community engagement and volunteering) approaches.
- Training is greatly enhanced if people are given recognition for what they achieve.
- There needs to be a definition of the Rights of Communities. While the rights of individuals are well defined, the impact on social and cultural networks can never be included in evaluating initiatives. We should be considering how to leave behind an infrastructure to sustain the communities.



Liam Conneally summarised the conclusions of the conference by observing that when Government and public bodies are introducing new services via technology to streamline costs, they should ask people what they want, rather than just proscribing technology for technology's sake. While everyone is arguing about making broadband universal, no one is arguing about training marginal groups in ICT. The next generation of public services to be made available via the internet should be done by talking first to those in our communities who risk exclusion for social or economic reasons. Technology, training and skills can make all the difference to these people. Fear barriers around technology need to be broken down, and new services should always have inclusion in mind.

A full report of the conference can be downloaded from www.citizen-first.net

1 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asset-Based_Community_Development

The Future of Citizen First

Citizen First for eInclusion in Cambridgeshire UK

Our Citizen First for e-Inclusion team has been working to ensure sustainability beyond the completion of the project, focussing on promoting libraries as an ongoing resource for communities, recruiting volunteers to act as mentors within communities, purchasing mobile broadband equipment to create a lasting resource and establishing links with partner organisations who can continue to support local delivery.

The project team has been concentrating on key target groups in the final stages of the project – new arrivals to the UK, ex-offenders, Traveller communities and the rurally isolated.

Our work with Fridaybridge International Camp has proved particularly successful, three visits to this large migrant agricultural workers camp have now been made – using a 'Passport to 35 Languages DVD' which has been a popular basis for learning. This informal style of learning has encouraged the mainly Bulgarian and Polish workers to practice speaking English out loud, and to learn the correct English for medication, finding a dentist and for make-up products!

A new delivery experience for our team has been working with ex-offenders at the probation services in Cambridge, Huntingdon and Peterborough. Despite difficulties around working with such a client group (security of equipment and irregular attendance for example) the sessions have proved a success, with several learners progressing onto more advanced work, including mail merge and IT qualifications.

As Citizen First for e-Inclusion draws to a close, our team continue to make plans to sustain delivery into the future – discussions are being held with the Head at Parson Drove school in the Fens to enable volunteers to continue offering IT learning there, a relaunch of volunteer supported learning with the Traveller community in High Barns, Ely is planned and a new partnership with volunteers at the Rosmini Centre for newly-arrived migrants in Wisbech is currently being established.

The benefits of Citizen First for e-Inclusion in Cambridgeshire will be felt long after the end of the project in October 2008. ●



Group of workers in a learning session at the Fridaybridge International Agricultural Work Camp in Fenland

Citizen First for eInclusion in Eindhoven

In the 'Virtueel Plein' extension project (october 2007-oktober 2008) the goal was to develop an integrated 'Virtueel Plein' that is connected to broadband. Second goal was to deliver a mechanism to multiply this integrated Virtueel Plein throughout the rest of the Eindhoven Region. The integrated Virtueel Plein includes various services, partly developed by the citizens themselves (C2C e-services) and partly developed and customised by professional service providers such as e-government services, commercial services and services delivered by not-for-profit organisations such as home care organisations. The integrated Virtueel Plein pilot has taken place in the village Hoogeloon, mostly because of the strong and resilient community.

In the pilot, which took place in Hoogeloon, there were two main target groups:

1. The elderly, especially people with no, or little, computer and/or internet experience (with and without disabilities).
2. Young people with computer and internet skills to strengthen the computer and internet support for the elderly.

Also in the project a local entrepreneur was involved for the customisation of the website to make it tailor made for the users in Hoogeloon.

In Hoogeloon there are two (semi) public internet access points set up during the project where people can get support during their exploration of the online world and all its services. The starting page of these access points is www.hoogeloon.info where all the local services are provided. Also internet courses are implemented which are organised by members (volunteers) of the PC First Aid service. These courses are held at the local school using school laptops and software.

In coöperation with the seven managers of the voluntary services in Hoogeloon (repair service, chauffeur service, meal service, etc.) process schedules were made to transform the traditional services into e-services in order to stimulate the use of internet and computers by the elderly. These new e-services can all be found on www.hoogeloon.info in a special members section where they are accompanied by the professional e-services from commercial service providers. An example is the button which leads to a demonstration of internetbanking which was created by the Rabobank and is supported by this bank as well, to teach users how to use the internetbanking facility. Contacts with the local and with a regional newspaper has resulted in a page with Hoogeloon oriented news, all focussed on the users from this geographical area.

An important contribution to the development of this website facility was made by a local software company, Het Collectief, who created this webspace and have set this up in such a way (modular) that other villages can very easily follow the example that has been set in Hoogeloon.

The local working group has developed into a foundation, which is a legal entity, that will take care of the further development of www.hoogeloon.info. This foundation is set up by the people from Hoogeloon, for the people of Hoogeloon, which makes the project sustainable and community owned. ●

Life after Citizen First in Kortrijk



Citizen First is dead, long live Citizen First! After 4 years, a year later than foreseen, the Citizen First project has ended on the 31st October 2008. But this does not mean Kortrijk's activities in bridging the digital divide end! As a matter of fact, there are several Citizen First activities and sub-projects that are outliving the lifespan of the project.

The Citizen First project had two corner stones for the City of Kortrijk: the network of Public Internet Access Points (PIAP's) and the free computer courses. The Network of PIAP's will remain and will even be extended.

Three milestones have been achieved in the extension period of the project. Firstly, there is the computer corner for people with a visual handicap in the city's central library. The ICT department investigated all available hardware and software in close cooperation with the library and 'blindenzorg Licht en Liefde', a non-profit organisation that is committed to helping people with a visual handicap. This cooperation will certainly outlive the lifespan of the Citizen First project. It was decided to purchase and install a PC with a 24" screen fitted with magnifying and speech software, a reading machine that can scan any form of printed text and read it out loud and a Daisy reader.

Secondly, Mentor finished a publication called "Internetknuffel" (Internet Cuddle). This book teaches children with a mental handicap to use the Internet safely. It is an instruction book with assignments that gives the children tips. It is written with simple text and many pictograms. The direct target group is children 10-12 with a mental handicap, but this book is, because it is very visual and structured, also suitable for younger children in regular or special preliminary schools.

Thirdly, seven courses for elderly people (60+) were organised using a new mobile computer class and hotspot technology. These laptop computers and mobile internet access points make for maximum flexibility in organising computer courses in any location. In this case, the computer courses were organised in the community centres. With both Mentor and the City of Kortrijk now having mobile computer classes, it is possible to organise courses in multiple locations simultaneously.



As you can see the Citizen First project has a large legacy. It gives us the opportunity to continue initiatives in bridging the digital divide for the foreseeable future, never possible without the project. The Citizen First project lives on!

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
More information on the INTERREG IIIB NWE-ENO Programme: www.nweurope.org

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Citizen First for eInclusion in the Mid-West of Ireland

As the CitizenFirst Project approaches official completion, the Mid-West Regional Authority would like to commend all Partners & the eInclusion Pilots for their commitment in ensuring the sustainability and viability of their work into the future. The Mid-West eInclusion Pilots have contributed greatly to improving the lives of people through ICT.



One of the key recommendations of the Clare Elderly Project was to "strengthen the relationships of Older People with their family, neighbours and neighbourhood through the use of ICTs and Webcam in particular. The bottom up approach was essential to both community and older People's engagement. The sustainability of the project is strengthened by the involvement of community groups, volunteers and by the appeal of the technology to a new audience. In addition while older people are not in a strong financial position to fund up-grading the technology they, in conjunction with their support groups are in a better position to demand policy change which may result in wider broadband availability and lower access costs.

Central to the Access Limerick project was to "Enhance the quality of life of people with reduced mobility, their family and carers by providing up to date information on the accessibility of local cultural and recreational services and in turn promoting the good work organisations have done". An online directory will be available to people visiting the City of Limerick enabling people with disabilities to identify accessible recreational and cultural facilities; information to visitors in advance of their trip of where the accessible services are and how accessible they are. The Access Limerick facility will be a long-term service for people with disabilities and it is thanks to the CitizenFirst Project that it got off the ground!

The CitizenFirst Project enabled Limerick County Libraries undertake a promotional campaign to highlight the new Assistive Technology Service available in the County's 24 Library Branches. This involved the production of an instructional DVD on the new technologies and the loaning of laptops within each library (including the Mobile Library) to enable people to access Internet services using their Wi-Fi/3G networks. It is anticipated that the Assistive Technology Service will enhance the independence of our users with disabilities in accessing our ICT Services.

Our work with the Disadvantaged Communities of Limerick City in cooperation with Limerick City ICT Steering Group enabled us to support Community Groups to effectively exploit technology for the benefit of their communities. Research commissioned by the Steering Group completed in 2007 highlighted a number of key blockages to eInclusion. It highlighted a significant challenge in promoting greater engagement with ICT. In particular the issues of access and awareness were identified as critical in addressing digital exclusion. CitizenFirst enabled an increase in the relevance of ICT in the lives of these communities and work with these target groups will continue into the future.

Finally the Mid-West Regional Authority accessible website has highlighted the need for public authorities to re-examine how they present and organise their information. We are the first Regional Authority in Ireland to re-develop its website with accessibility as the core functionality while also using it as an important tool to inform the public, agencies & Europe of their activities. ○

Contacts

CITIZEN FIRST

