

# 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](#)

## 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.



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.

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.

## 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'.

## Buchan Observer

Wednesday 11th March 2009

A BUCHAN community-based initiative aimed at regenerating two Aberdeenshire communities has been recognised at a national awards ceremony.

The Reaching Out project, which led to the development of community facilities in Fraserburgh and Peterhead, scooped the Best Team award at last week's COSLA Excellence Awards in Edinburgh.

It also picked up a silver award in the Advancing Community and Citizen well-being category...

The Reaching Out project, developed under the umbrella of the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership, is best known for the establishment of the 'Hot Spot' in Peterhead and the 'Link-Up' building in Fraserburgh...

The venues act as a 'one-stop-shop' for information and advice on a range of issues, including housing matters, money, health and well-being, steps to employment and educational opportunities...

## 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.

## 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.

