

**Appendix L Carpenters Connect, Newham, London
UK Initiative**

Community Initiative of the Year

Carpenters Connect

Local Government Chronicle Awards 2003

Introduction

Carpenters Connect grew from a successful bid under the DfES¹ “Wired-Up Communities” programme to create an online community on Newham’s Carpenters Estate in Stratford, East London. Carpenters Connect is an iDTV² network – and much more. It is remarkable for a number of reasons:

- Although the Council, which is the accountable body leads the project, the enthusiasm of the Carpenters Tenants Management Organisation and Estate Tenants provide much of the drive and resource for the project.
- The breadth and vision of the project has grown steadily, and spawned a number of groundbreaking sub-projects.
- Carpenters Connect has developed a number of firsts, and approaches that can successfully be redeployed or replicated among other communities.
- Newham.net Limited – the borough’s independent telecommunications company is intimately involved in developing the project, and operates its network.
- It has brought together a range of talented organisation and individuals working together to exploit the developing technologies.

Wired Up Communities is an experimental education and community initiative funded by the Dept for Education and Skills to give people access to new technologies and 'bridge the digital divide' (www.dfes.gov.uk/wired/).

The Project Portfolio

Carpenters Connect Network

The network supporting Carpenters Connect is based on linking all the Estate’s 600 flats by structured cabling³, effectively making them part of the borough Extranet, which includes the Council’s Wide Area Network⁴. The Council has “piggy-backed” its project to upgrade the aerial system in its social housing to install the network, with fibre-optic provision between buildings, linked back to the Council’s Data and Telecommunications Centre by its innovative wireless broadband infrastructure.

NeosNetworks helped to plan and install the network infrastructure, working with Blick Systems, who were contracted to do the aerial upgrade. Each home has been provided with two network points, one of which is used to connect a TV set-top box supplied by Pace Communications. The other network point is able to be used for connection of any other computing device. The network is connected via servers installed in the Estate’s Tower Blocks to provide

¹ Department for Education & Skills

² Interactive Digital Television

³ A Category 5 Local Area Network

⁴ Other partners connected to the Newham Extranet include the East London Centre, Newham College, Newham Sixth Form College, Saint Luke's Business Centre, Stratford Advice Arcade plus another 18 advice centres, Stratford Circus, the University of East London, the Theatre Royal and Waterhouse Studios.

applications, storage and management facilities, and then to the borough Extranet with free Internet access.

Carpenters Connect TV

Core to the project is a menu system that provides access to the various digital TV services developed for Carpenters Connect. It is aimed to provide all “free-to-air” TV programmes, whether they are broadcast by satellite, cable or terrestrial means. This has not yet been achieved due to insufficient budget, but it is believed that an alternative method is viable at a cost of just a few thousand pounds. In the meantime, residents have access to whichever programmes are available by the traditional aerial system.

Tenants also have access to a range of community interest and neighbourhood video material. This includes thirty films that were commissioned and produced through DKTV⁵. DKTV was a separate interactive digital TV service, in which Newham Council was a founding partner, providing a range of interactive services such as ordering housing repairs, and whose community programme achieved higher audited viewing figures than channels 4 or 5 on the HomeChoice platform. Although the company has now gone into receivership, HomeChoice, in Newham, is still carrying its programme and there are plans to further build-upon and integrate its services with Carpenters Connect.

The video and content also includes films and documentaries from “Home2Home”

Home2Home

Home2Home is a new company that has been established as part of Carpenters Connect working with The Media Trust. The Media Trust (www.mediatrust.org) helps charities communicate. It does so by encouraging media and communications professionals to volunteer their skills and time - working in Public Relations, marketing, online media and design, running a video and television production department and broadcasting the Community Channel on Sky Digital channel 663 and at www.communitychannel.org.

The Media Trust began working with the Carpenters Connect project in January 2002. Home2Home is establishing its own website and TV channel catering exclusively for the estate. Training is central to the project, and The Media Trust is working closely with residents to make their own films about the estate and beyond, and to add to their website.

Together, they have produced material like “Meet the neighbours”, a fifty-minute film giving residents each thirty seconds to introduce themselves. The end result was a vibrant family album of the estate, which drew almost 300 residents to its first screening at the “Estate Cinema”. A training film teaching people how to use a digital video camera has been made and short documentaries under the title “Carpenters Shorts” about characters and events on the estate have been produced and are being broadcast. “Down

⁵ A “Different Kind of Television”

Carpenters Way” is a forty-minute film looking at the fascinating stories behind the history of the area, the estate and the people.

As another by-product, a History Group mainly made up of older residents from the estate, has been created and is going from strength to strength. It provides a chance for people to reminisce, and the group has recently learned to use the Internet and to do research about the area. (See side panel.)

However, our biggest achievement is starting the Home2Home filmmakers Group, where a group of residents have started making a number of films about the area and what interests them. This is the very core of Home2Home – its there for the residents, and they will eventually make all the films. Along with the Home 2 Home web-site, where residents can discuss issues that concern them and create their own web pages, Home2Home hopes to give the residents of Carpenters Estate a voice, and to make sure that they are very much a Wired Up Community

Internet and E-Mail

Carpenters Connect includes both full Internet access that can be

filtered as residents choose and a “walled garden” Intranet that enables residents to communicate with one another via the Carpenters Local Area Network. There is also a TV based email service that also has a web front end allowing residents to access their email from wherever they have Internet access. The tenants have created an acceptable usage policy, which is implemented and monitored through the Tenants’ Management Organisation.

My Computer

The set-top boxes provided for Carpenters Connect actually operate as thin-client computers – another first. The project was supported by the set-top box supplier, Pace, working with IVision, as systems integrator, and Microsoft, which enabled the project to pilot the concept of allowing a community TV access to its Office software suite. Residents can run the Office Word-

The Carpenters Connect History Group

Another Wired up Communities success story has come about though the Carpenters’ Estate history group.

The group of residents were all interviewed about their lives and experiences on the Carpenters Estate and the interviews formed the basis of a 45 minute television documentary which was recently shown to all those who contributed. The documentary will soon be available for everyone on the estate to gain an insight into how things used to be.

The group began when staff from the Home 2 Home channel decided to make a programme about the rich history of the estate and local area.

Nothing like this had ever been attempted on the estate before, and to get the group up and running Emma Piquemal and Carole Gilligan invited residents to attend a regular weekly meeting where they exchanged reminiscences and shared memories of their lives on the estate.

Many of the people in the group have lived on the estate for over 30 years and talking to Emma and Carole made them realise how valuable their memories were, especially in an area that has seen as much change as Stratford.

Filming for the programme began after about four weeks and even though no one had been interviewed before, almost all were willing to take part. Emma and Carole inspired lots of memories by taking the group out to several museums across East London. All the trips were filmed and some people were also interviewed in their homes.

Jean Ferett, who has lived here since the late 1960s, can best sum up the feeling towards the project. “We started going to the group and there were a couple of people I didn’t talk to then that I speak to now. It’s nice to get out of this block instead of sitting here staring at four walls... It’s brought more into your life...every time we meet we always talk about you...the times we’ve spent with you we’ve thoroughly enjoyed.”

Processing, Powerpoint, Spreadsheet and Paint applications, use the Internet Explorer browser and Outlook Express e-mail client, saving documents and files to their own allocations of storage space on the Estate-based servers. Other applications include Encarta and an extensive range of Plato's Educational software modules at basic to advanced levels

Web-Smart

The Carpenters project worked closely with an international organisation (<http://www.wiredpatrol.org/>), established by Parry Aftab – to promote and facilitate Cyber Safety – for example, the avoidance of Internet Stalkers and Paedophiles. Working with Home2Home and the Media Trust, a forty-five minute film has been produced to support the launch of a Web-Smart campaign – another world first, but an essential initiative required to engender the confidence of many people to use the Internet without fear. The film is in three sections – Web-Smart Kids, Teenagers and Adults – and presents an engaging and informative overview of the dangers, and how to avoid them.

Learning

The Carpenters Connect project includes the Carpenters Primary School. Another aspect of the project has seen the school being equipped with up-to-date ICT facilities, such as digital whiteboards, and a pool of notebook PCs has been established, which pupils can take home to support their homework and studies. The PCs could be used for Internet access via the spare network point, and there are plans to provide access to school-based resources via the Carpenters Extranet. Facilities to help parents to support their children's studies, view reports and feedback on their work via the network are planned. In the meantime, households have already been provided with learning aids such as the Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia via their digital TV and all the educational materials produced for the National Grid for Learning and schools by Plato are available.

The Carpenters Estate has a Learn Direct Centre housed within the Tenant Management Organisation's Offices, and operated by the Newham College of Further Education, which is another close partner within the Carpenters Connect project. The Learn Direct training facilities are closely tied to the needs of the Carpenters residents and the Carpenters Connect project – addressing issues such as reskilling and the development of new employment opportunities.

StartHere

The project includes access to the whole of the information resource developed by the StartHere charity, and customised for Newham – some 6,000 pages in all. StartHere is a simple to use source of information about where to find help in a variety of circumstances – especially designed to provide help when it's needed most. It was primarily designed for kiosk access, with simple to use on-screen buttons, and straight-forward navigation, but it also works well through the Carpenters Connect TV interface. However, the Carpenters Connect project has additionally provided public access kiosks with the StartHere system installed at the Carpenters Pub, and at the local Community Centre.

Council, Games, Health and more...

Naturally, the Carpenters Connect network provides access to the Council web-site and its developing range of electronically accessible services, such as booking by e-Forms.

Also included are a number of games including, a UK first, interactive multiplayer video games that can be played without the need to own a games console.

The possibilities are endless. During the Alpha testing of the project, for example, the entire National Health Service content developed for the Hull Community project was successfully demonstrated.

Where Next?

A bid for funding from the European Regional Development Fund has been submitted via the Government Office for London, which the London Development Agency has agreed to match. The proposal is to link Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) into the network and enable them to trade electronically with customers on the Estate. It is also planned to install the Carpenters Connect system into new homes to be built on the Stratford rail-lands.

The Carpenters Connect programme board is chaired by the Council's Head of ICT, who reports to its ICT in the Community Strategy Group. A number of approaches to ensure the sustainability, and replicability, of Carpenters Connect are under consideration. Foremost among these is to continue to work with communities like those on the Carpenters Estate to engender the enthusiasm and community vision that have underpinned the projects' success. However, there are linkages to other projects under development by the Council, such as Smart Cards for school registration and meals, Leisure and Library Membership. Clearly, it is also important to work to develop scale by working with regional organisations, such as the LDA, who can help to develop economies of scale for the project.

This, however, also fits-in with a concept that the Council and Newham Online promote as the borough of Newham as an "e-Laboratory", with which other organisations and partners can work to develop their own approaches. A particular model that is emerging is the concept of e-Newham as a federation of community based organisations providing specialist services to the borough. Home2Home, for example, would become the specialist community TV Production Company for all film services to community networks throughout Newham.

The Council is very interested in the potential of the system to provide another channel for engaging with residents. The Director of Housing, who has overall responsibility for Customer Services has therefore agreed to fund two workers one of whom would primarily be responsible for content development and the other for community outreach and development.

Continued Sustainability

The Carpenters Connect service is run by Newham.net, a company limited by guarantee. This organisation will develop revenues from management of the Carpenters Connect service, sale of videos, video on demand, interactive games, high speed internet access, market research, consultancy and support of iTV pilot projects. It is anticipated that funds and content will also be made available by companies and public bodies wishing to use the service for experimental and demonstration purposes (the only comparable service is in Hull, which is a long way from Westminster!) It is unlikely that the income generated from these activities alone on a single estate will be adequate to sustain the overall service but work undertaken with London Development Agency support should extend the area of operation and hence the overall viability. A business plan has been developed for Newham.net Limited.

The Home2Home service is that part of the service that focuses on content that is solely developed for and by the residents as well as supporting residents in the use of the service. This will be established as a community enterprise to take on responsibility for local broadcasting, facilities hire, supporting local content development and facilitating mutual support amongst residents. This activity will be financed through local advertising by SMEs, production of videos for SMEs, business support agencies, academic and state organisations building on the facilities, skills and languages of the residents. It is envisaged that much of the work here will be voluntary with training input from Newham College and other partner bodies. It is hoped to develop a model that could work on other estates. The LDA funds will support the development and initial support of this community enterprise including the development of a business plan.

If the ERDF bid is successful the Carpenters Connect partnership will be widened and become the Improving Broadband Access Content and Knowledge (IBACK) partnership. The Carpenters Estate infrastructure will provide its core test and development site. Both Home2Home and Newham.net's development will be supported by this partnership.

The knowledge and materials generated through the IBACK partnership will be available to all the partners for use in their ongoing core funded work and this means that the training, support, consultancy and promotional activity will be able to continue after the project has ended.

The IBACK Partnership

All the IBACK partners are committed to providing the resources needed to deliver this project and various of them will take the lead on various project elements. The partners are as follows:

- **Carpenters Tenant Management**
- **East London Centre.**
- **Media Trust**
- **Newham Council**
- **Newham Chamber of Commerce.**
- **Newham College of Further Education**
- **Newham.net**
- **Newham Sixth Form College**
- **Prevista Limited**
- **The University of East London**

Conclusion

Carpenters Connect represents a range of initiatives driven by a highly motivated partnership of community volunteers, Council, education and private sector organisation. It is committed to using technology to develop a sustainable model of community involvement to promote community inclusion and empowerment. The project demonstrates how the digital divide can be bridged, and the opportunities of the information age can be made available to all.

Endorsements

“Carpenters Connect is like a dream come true. The concept, apart from it being one of the best of the Wired-Up programmes, has brought together otherwise multicultural and diverse ethnic groups working together in perfect harmony.” – Tee Fabikun, Carpenters Tenant Management Organisation

“This technically challenging project has shown that, with the right approach, communities will get involved in IT projects with really positive and replicable results.” – Rick Smith, Department for Education and Skills

“The Home2Home Service has the potential to offer a challenging and unique way of communicating and engaging with local people in a way hitherto untested. It’s a very exciting concept.” – Linda Salim, Carpenters Neighbourhood Office

“Carpenters Connect is a thought leader in turning broadband technology into applications and services for a user community. The project is unique in its ambition and breadth of scope, we are looking forward to form part of it.” – Thomas Schmidt, G-Cluster (Supplier of interactive games software to Carpenters Connect).

“Neos Integration are extremely pleased to have been involved in this project from the beginning as it has given us valuable insight into the benefits technology can bring to a local community, especially one as diverse culturally as the Carpenters Estate. It’s been a real team effort, and we feel well placed to replicate this elsewhere in the country.” – Steve Tyler, NeosNetworks

“Newham.net is a company whose aim is to support the exploitation of information and communication technologies in Newham for public benefit. Carpenters Connect has helped us to build the right partnerships, to learn vital lessons and to take a major step forward in our vision of linking up all residents and organisations within the borough to each other and to the wider world.” – Michael Mulquin, Newham.net

“Newham Sixth Form College is pleased to endorse the application by Newham Council for a Local Government Chronicle Award with respect to the work carried out with the Carpenters Estate. We feel that the work already carried out, and that planned, brings enormous benefit to the area. We have been involved as part of the Newham Extranet and expect to be working with the project to deliver training, from basic IT to web-site and electronic media development as well as supporting community businesses. We have been

particularly pleased with the work done in producing the WebSmart video, which is now used as part of the curriculum in the college to warn our 16-19 year old students of some of the dangers in using the internet, as well as the benefits.” – Jacqui Mace, Newham Sixth Form College

“We’re committed to Carpenters Connect and Home2Home because we believe this project gives people new skills, opens up new opportunities for them and revitalises their community. Working with Newham Council and newham.net we’re proving how information and video technology can make a real difference to people’s lives.” – Simon Gallimore, Media Trust

"Carpenters Connect puts people centre stage and opens the door for UEL and partner educational institutions to provide a complete online learning service. It is a tremendously ambitious project that has looked-up at what Newham residents might achieve with leading edge technology, not talked down or dumbed-down. It is a real investment in the future."– John Lock, University of East London Borough Of Newham

"Pace is delighted to have worked with Newham Local Authority on the Carpenters Connect project. We are pleased that Pace's IP digital TV technology is enabling Carpenter residents to access a wealth of new information and entertainment services, including Internet, email, local authority information web-sites, games and video-on-demand. This project is an example of how Pace can work in partnership with local authorities to ensure their residents reap the benefits of the digital infotainment revolution." – Andrew Clifforth, Managing Director of Pace IPTV Division