

Derbyshire CircuitRiders: Assessing the impact

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Contents

	Page
1. About this evaluation	3
2. History and background of Derbyshire CircuitRiders	3
3. Our ethos	4
4. Derbyshire IT champion	5
a. Role	5
b. Targets	5
c. Actual outputs	5
i. Work with groups	5
ii. Suppliers directory	9
iii. Volunteering opportunities	9
iv. Comprehensive IT strategy	10
5. Technical support – Purple Zebra	11
a. Role	11
b. Targets	12
c. Actual outputs	12
6. Mobile IT training project	15
a. Role	15
b. Targets	16
c. Actual outputs	16
i. One to one sessions	16
ii. Classroom sessions	20
iii. Profile of learners	21
7. Web design service	22
8. Other initiatives /work	23
a. IT working group	23
b. Events	23
c. Regional working – unofficial champion	23
d. Mobile IT suite	24
9. Joined up thinking	25
10. Learning points	26
11. The future	27
12. Conclusion	28
Appendices	
i. IT champion impact questionnaire	29
ii. Mobile IT Training Project impact questionnaire	31
iii. Mobile IT Training Project Case Studies	33
iv. Web design services evaluation	35

About this evaluation

Derbyshire CircuitRiders is the generic name given to a number of initiatives developed by High Peak CVS which offer various types of IT support to voluntary and community groups in different areas of the county.

This report is intended to demonstrate the success and impacts of the initiatives, and summarises the activities and learning gained. It tracks both outcomes and outputs, and is designed to be a useful resource for other practitioners within the voluntary sector who are considering developing projects to meet the IT needs of frontline organisations as well as demonstrating to funders the success of the work.

In particular, this report focuses on 4 separate areas:

- Derbyshire IT Champion
- Technical support provided by PurpleZebra
- P-MITT (Peak Mobile IT project)
- High Peak CVS web design activity

Since September 2005, the four initiatives have worked with and supported 83 different voluntary and community groups and organisations in Derbyshire. 71 of these organisations are frontline groups, the remaining 12 infrastructure providers.

History and background of Derbyshire CircuitRiders

Our Derbyshire CircuitRiders initiatives were developed in direct response to the findings and needs outlined in the “Is Derbyshire doing IT?” research and report, carried out as part of the “Early Spend” phase of the Infrastructure Investment programme in spring / summer 2004.

“Is Derbyshire doing IT?” consisted of over 20 face to face interviews with infrastructure organisations across the county, and asking about IT usage, concerns and needs. The report identifying IT needs and gaps in provision, best practice and how the inward investment could be utilised to improve capacity and effectiveness. The study, along with others completed across the country, clearly showed that voluntary sector organisations know and can identify benefits of using IT, but don’t always have the resources or “know how” to make best use of it.

In addition, as part of the Infrastructure Early Investment programme Nottinghamshire and Herefordshire (among others) also conducted surveys and research into how the VCS use and view ICT. These reinforced many of the

findings in the Derbyshire report and confirmed many of the ideas concerning development of initiatives to meet the needs identified.

In summary, the needs identified in the report that the CircuitRiders projects were developed to meet were:

- Impartial consultancy – planning of IT, impartial advice on purchasing, promoting use of new technology
- Training in IT applications
- Technical support and maintenance
- Developing websites and use of new media to promote organisations

In the report, the issues of information and IT were interlinked. Therefore, in addition to the initiatives identified above it is important to note that two further findings (the recommendation for a joint website to enable voluntary sector infrastructure organisations to share information and funding of a county wide information workers group have also been implemented through a separate, ChangeUp funded, project. Finally, the development of a joint infrastructure database (highlighted in the report) is now the subject of a Big Lottery BASIS bid.

Our ethos

Our approach and ethos in raising awareness of IT in the voluntary sector, and providing a range of IT solutions, is that IT is not about the “individual shiny boxes” but instead is **about what you do with them**: the way that it can empower and help organisations become more effective and efficient in their everyday activities and mission. IT is not a means to an end – it is a useful tool to collaborate, communicate, campaign.

Derbyshire IT champion

Role

The Derbyshire IT champion post is funded through ChangeUp investment to:

- Take a strategic role in the provision of IT to the VCS sector in the county
- Provide an impartial consultancy role about IT issues for organisations
- Provide a link between organisations and suppliers
- Develop IT volunteering opportunities, and the infrastructure needed to support managers of volunteers carrying out the IT opportunities, in conjunction with volunteer centres
- Develop a co-ordinated approach in IT purchasing for the sector in Derbyshire
- Identify, appraise and develop the use of new technologies such as remote meeting, workgroup solutions and VPN in organisations that are keen to benefit – the “go with the grain” philosophy
- Identify and secure additional resources and funding for IT for the VCS in Derbyshire

ChangeUp funding was initially for one year, although this has now been extended until April 2007. Due to delays in having funding approved and recruitment, the worker did not come in to post until the start of September 2005. This evaluation therefore covers the period of nine months, until July 2006.

Targets

The targets for the initiative were:

- 40 VCS groups & organisations advised
- 30 VCS groups & organisations increasing their use of ICT
- Creation of list of ICT suppliers relevant to the Derbyshire VCS
- 20 IT volunteering opportunities created in conjunction with volunteer centres
- Development of a comprehensive IT strategy for the sector

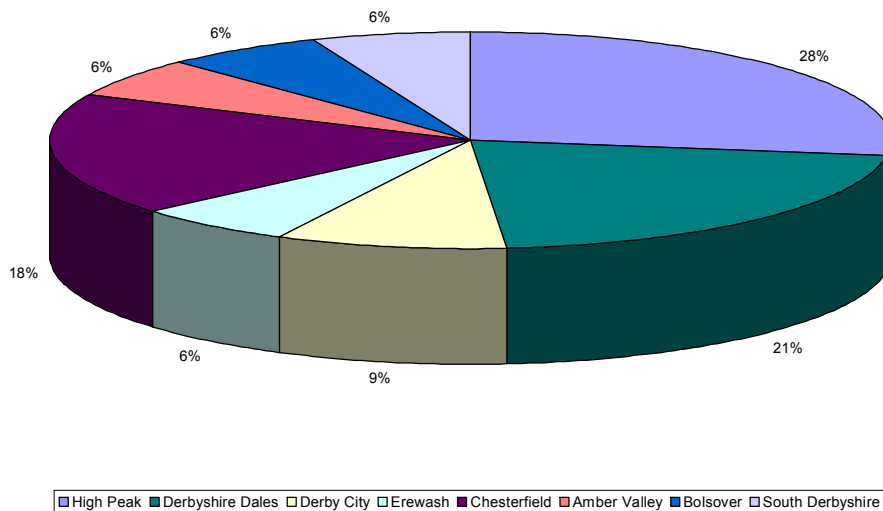
Actual outputs

Work with groups

To date, over 40 groups have been advised. This advice has been, in the main, face-to-face with the champion travelling to organisations across the county, although there has been a small amount of “low intensity” email and telephone support and advice given.

The project has a remit to work across the county – the first time that one CVS had taken on a pan-Derbyshire project like this. An analysis of the geographic spread of groups advised makes interesting reading:

Geographic spread of work

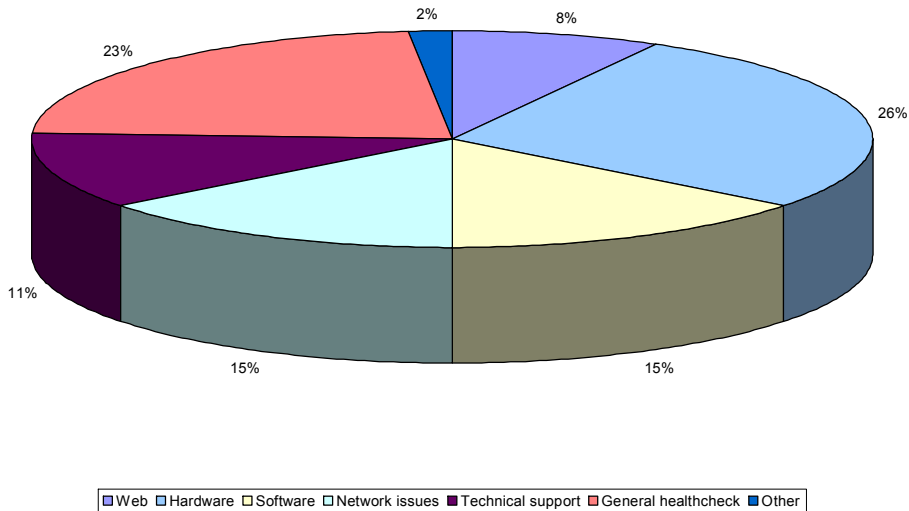


As can be seen, the High Peak accounts for over a quarter of the number of organisations advised, followed by Derbyshire Dales and then the Chesterfield / NE Derbyshire area. The geographic spread of work does not reflect the real proportions of VCS organisations across the county – for example there are a higher number of VCS organisations in Derby than in Derbyshire Dales. There are, we believe, two main reasons for the geographic spread of work being as it is:

1. Derby CVS already have an IT development worker, working in four specific wards of the city. We have therefore not deliberately “targeted” Derby
2. Although marketing materials went out across the county, mainly with CVS newsletters, the value of personal referral should not be underestimated, particularly via development workers. Development workers are ‘trusted advisors’ and therefore groups are more likely to respond to their suggestions than a leaflet. The IT champion has had most contact with the development work teams in High Peak and Derbyshire Dales CVSs, explaining his role, and because of this, received the largest number of referrals from them.

Overall, the type of work with VCS groups that the IT champion has done was as expected:

Type of advice given



(please note that some organisations meet multiple categories)

The IT champion was never envisaged to be a ‘hands on’ role. Instead, the vision was that it would provide impartial advice and information, signposting groups to relevant suppliers where necessary, and with on-site technical support provided by PurpleZebra or commercial providers. This role was designed like this to ensure the IT champion didn’t get drawn into doing low-key, low impact tasks for organisations that had little overall strategic impact on their use of IT – for example getting drawn into changing printer cartridges because “our printers don’t work”. However, the reality has been that there is not just *either* impartial consultancy *or* paid-for technical support – our experience has been that it is a continuum with a large grey area in the middle which was outside the remit of the original project, where groups (particularly those with a very small turnover) could not afford to buy in support.

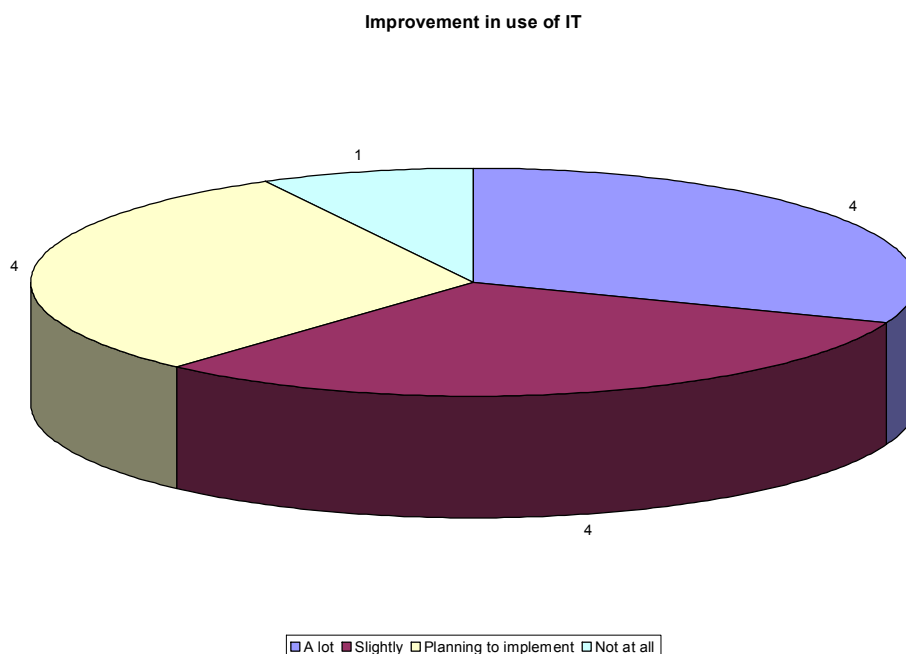
To establish the number of groups increasing their use of ICT through advice from the champion, all organisations received an “impact questionnaire” approximately three months after the support from the champion was completed. A copy of the questionnaire and letter sent with it is included at appendix i. Whilst this is not a full, longitudinal study of impact, it does help in getting a sense of what the project has helped groups achieve.

Of the 40 groups advised to date, 18 impact assessments have been sent out. Although less than half of the total number of groups worked with so far, this is because in the remaining cases work with the organisation is ‘ongoing’ – waiting follow up, or is a more extensive piece work than just one or two visits and a

report. In at least 5 cases, work is not yet complete as the organisations are seeking funding to implement the findings of the Champion's report and move to the next stage of the work.

Of these 18 assessments, 13 have been completed and returned (72% return rate). Overwhelmingly, these assessments were positive about the quality of information and service received from the IT champion. A small concern, particularly from the early visits and subsequent reports produced, expressed by a couple of groups, was that they felt that the report produced by the IT champion was too technical. These initial reports also tended to focus on technical aspects of IT – state of equipment, software and security etc, rather than take a wider view of how the organisation can best use IT and some of the wider issues – budgeting and calculating ownership costs, developing policies or looking at wider issues of how best IT can improve or enhance the operations of the organisation. We have since incorporated this active learning into subsequent work and in the way reports and information are presented, hopefully to give a more rounded appraisal.

In answer to the question “to what extent has the information and advice given helped your organisation increase improve its use of IT to meet its aims?” respondents gave the following replies:



Exploring how the groups have implemented (or planning to implement) the advice and advice brought some interesting and reassuring answers:

- Technical issue – receipt of email
- Better understanding of future requirements and how to budget for them

- Planning upgrade of most of the computers, review of back up and security procedures
- Helped clarify needs and draw up plan to meet them
- Looking to update current system
- Knowledge of networking extra computers has been gained and is set to go subject to funding
- Looking at funding to install new IT system

A further five assessments have been sent to organisations in the last week.

Suppliers directory

Producing a list of IT supplier was a key output for the project. It was developed because of a *real* need for a directory of suppliers of IT services that was useful and relevant for voluntary sector organisations throughout Derbyshire, and that was easy to access from a central information point. It has been designed to enable organisations find useful sources of support and advice from providers that understand the voluntary sector. It contains approximately 30 different suppliers, and is available to download centrally.

In developing the list, all suppliers / potential suppliers were contacted to check that they were happy to be listed and, more importantly, that they understood the sector and had worked with organisations within it before.

The suppliers directory has been well received, and is available from the High Peak CVS website:

<http://www.highpeakcvv.org/developments/index.asp#DirectoryIT>

We believe that, whilst the IT hub is producing a national suppliers directory, there is still a need to have a specific list covering Derbyshire – it is more detailed, and includes some smaller IT suppliers that are more likely to be relevant to small VCS organizations.

A second edition of the suppliers list is currently being researched, to be available in September.

Volunteering opportunities

This element of the project has been most difficult, for various reasons. It was decided that the IT champion would personally not be able to support IT volunteers, and so instead would attempt to work with volunteer centres, offering them support to understand and promote IT volunteering.

Unfortunately, Volunteer Centres in Derbyshire are undergoing a period of change because of the ChangeUp process, and so have not been able engage with this element of the project.

However, some useful work has been undertaken: some simple guides have been developed (from information from IT4communities and Volunteering England) for potential IT volunteers and organisations considering using IT volunteers. Secondly, a seminar has been organised, delivered by IT4communities, on the benefits of IT volunteers.

This strand of the project will be developed further over the next year.

Comprehensive IT strategy

A central part of the role of the IT champion was to develop a vision or strategy for IT in the sector in Derbyshire. Entitled "*Bridging the Digital Divide in Derbyshire: An ICT Strategic Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector*" this was completed in July 2006, and aims to help coordinate thinking, plans and activities with regard to the development of ICT. In consequence, the strategies primary goals are to:

- Raise the profile of ICT within the VCS throughout Derbyshire.
- Provide a framework for a joined-up approach to ICT development.
- Align ICT development with other local, regional and national strategies.

This strategic framework is less about solutions and more about identifying the issues, gaps and trends that need to be addressed over the coming years.

Although far too early to assess how useful this framework has been to others, the research in developing it has been very helpful in aiding our understanding and how our projects should evolve over the next few years.

his piece of work has provided some useful learning, and reminded us of the importance of recognising individual skill sets: we originally expected the IT champion to research and write the report, but found that this was not an area that they felt comfortable with – whilst they may have lots of technical skills, writing a strategy was not a forte. We therefore used an external facilitator / researcher to help us with the process.

Technical support – Purple Zebra

Role

The aim of this initiative was to provide low-cost technical support and maintenance to the VCS, to allow organisations to make best use of the benefits of ICT.

Rather than develop a project “in house”, we decided to work in partnership with EnProve, who already had considerable experience of technical support in Nottinghamshire and into the NE part of Derbyshire. Enprove were one of the partners in a joint development of a parallel project in Nottinghamshire, which has evolved into a stand alone social enterprise, Purple Zebra.

Funding from the ChangeUp programme was gained for PurpleZebra to employ a dedicated technician for Derbyshire. Funding was for one year, with organizations receiving technical support free during this period, with financial forecasting carried out by Enprove predicting that the service would be sustainable through charging at the end of this period.

The technician’s was seen as a “hands on” role: visiting organisations who commit to the service on a regular basis, ensuring that preventative maintenance is carried-out and that any problems with the IT infrastructure that they have invested in are promptly resolved. Visits would be scheduled using the existing administration structure in Nottinghamshire – there was no need or desire to duplicate it in Derbyshire. Delivery of the service in Derbyshire would simply be a bolt-on to the work in Nottinghamshire.

As PurpleZebra (in the guise of EnProve) already operated in Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire, (with many of the organizations there receiving free IT support under an Alliance SSP funded project) it was agreed that the ChangeUp funding would be used to target organizations in the central belt of the county: High Peak, Derbyshire Dales and Amber Valley.

It was envisaged that organisations would receive this service free of charge for the first six months. As already outlined, longer term sustainability would be through charging, with three different options offered:

- Regular support visit (contract)
- As required regular support visit (contract or support tickets)
- Ad-hoc visit (pay as you go)

At the end of six months, they would start to pay 50% of the full rate, and 100% of the rate by the end of the year. The full rate was proposed at £25 per hour.

Targets

The agreed outputs for PurpleZebra, using the ChangeUp funding, were:

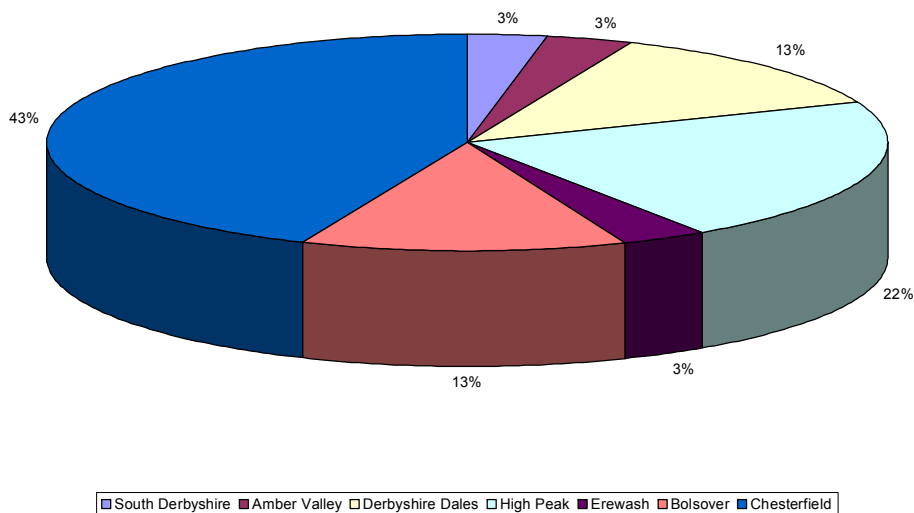
- 84 VCS organisations supported

- 288 Total number of visits / calls to organisations, *of which*
 - 50% proactive (health checks, to install new equipment etc)
 - 50% reactive (responding to equipment breakdown etc)

Actual outputs

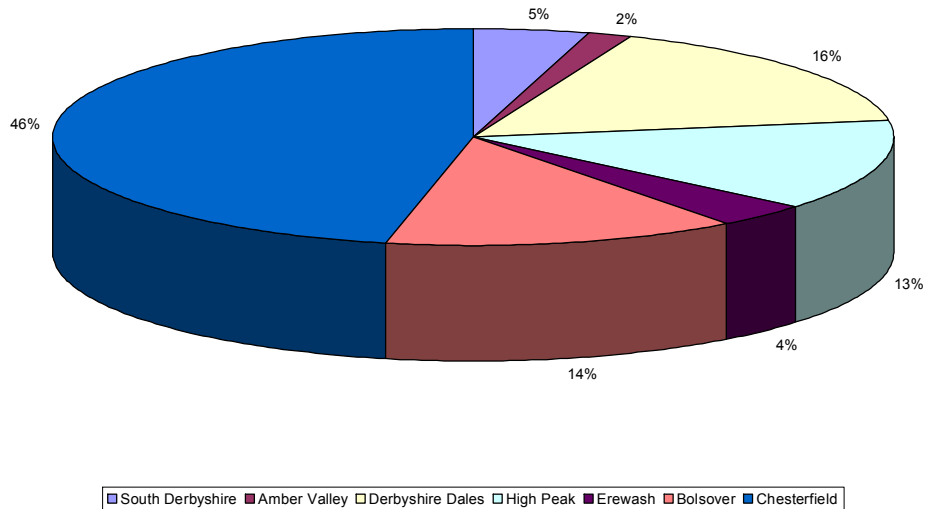
To date, PurpeZebra have worked with a total of 33 different organisations in Derbyshire, with just under half of the organizations being based in the Chesterfield area:

Geographic location of organisations supported



They have made approximately 130 visits to organizations, again with a strong bias towards the north west of the county:

Proportion of visits in each area



This work totals 255 hours of support to organisations. It is interesting to note that, if this work was charged directly to groups (rather than available free under the ChangeUp or SRB funding) it would be worth £10,200 (based on PurpleZebra's standard rate of £40/ph).

Overall, the number of organisations supported is significantly below expectations and there are a number of factors for this which are discussed below. To date, only four organizations have entered into formal service contracts with PurpleZebra at the end of their free support period.

However, on a positive note PurpleZebra have created a niche in supplying computer and other IT equipment and software to groups, and offer good value for money. They have clearly demonstrated that there is a demand and need for delivering this type of service within the sector locally.

Work in Derbyshire is expected to contribute just 15%-20% of the overall turnover of PurpleZebra in the current financial year.

Clearly, take up of the IT technical support service has been significantly lower than expected. We believe that there are a number of reasons for this:

- Larger organizations with a budget for technical support have, in the main, already sourced this elsewhere. They have been resistant to changing providers
- There is a smaller proportion of larger organizations with a formal budget for IT than initially expected

- PurpleZebra have been viewed as a Nottinghamshire organisation – the original plan to site a technician in Derbyshire, with a base in an infrastructure organization in the target area, was not pursued. This would have given PurpleZebra greater visibility in the county, even though they are actually based on the Derbyshire / Nottinghamshire border
- No ongoing “PC health checks” with organisations. These monthly visits (as per the Enprove model, and funded using the ChangeUp monies) would have helped to establish the reputation of Purple Zebra
- Unclear and overly ambitious pricing. From a “standing start”, (i.e. where organisations had not paid or had any technical support previously) £40+VAT per hour has proved too big a jump, given many do not yet understand the benefits of IT, and have not yet built it into budgets. Although a £99 package for 12 months telephone/remote support and discounts on the standard rate for the first year (effectively reducing the hourly rate down to £33) were available, pricing seemed overly complicated
- Less funding available for marketing than needed

PurpleZebra have recently started gaining assessments from customers about their work, but it is too soon to formally analyse these.

Mobile IT training project

Role

Funding was obtained from the Learning and Skills Council and College of the Peak for a pilot project to provide a peripatetic ICT tutor to visit voluntary and community organisations and other SMEs across the High Peak and Derbyshire Dales.

The tutor delivers one-to-one ICT skills training for staff members and volunteers, in a “surgery” or “drop in” format, answering specific training needs and encouraging them to work towards ICT related qualifications, as well as delivering a number of short, non-accredited and OCN accredited tailored sessions.

The need for this type of provision locally was identified in the “Is Derbyshire doing IT?” research. Three quarters of the senior managers interviewed said that staff did not have adequate IT skills to meet the needs of the organisation. Whilst most organisations could access existing providers delivering IT courses (for example training clubs, adult education delivering CLAIT, ECDL etc), and some organisations had done so in the past, over half the senior managers felt these courses often did not address the real needs of staff.

Courses were not always appropriate or accessible, for a number of reasons:

- **Rurality** – courses not delivered close enough to the organisation
- **Resources** – Length of time to complete courses often meant that organisations were unable to release staff (paid and unpaid) for the length of time to attend
- **Reluctance** - of staff to attend a formal / structured IT course
- **Relevance** – CLAIT / ECDL etc not always seen relevant to need of individual or sector

One of the overwhelming messages was the need for workplace based, low-key provision – something that was not available.

This project aimed to address these issues by delivering learning in a very user centred way – and close to the point of need. The tutor was contacted by organisations and asked to visit, and then worked with individuals in the workplace to identify gaps in their IT skills, and provide the training and coaching to meet those needs. Clients are encouraged to undertake ICT qualifications, using whichever delivery method is appropriate to them, using the tutor for support, where relevant.

The project tutor is also developing a small portfolio of OCNs, again deliverable in the workplace in a flexible way.

A second element of the project was delivering a small number of more formal, structured sessions, to help build specific skills and where there is an identified need – for example web page design, using Publisher to create newsletters. These have been delivered at accessible venues, close to point of need.

Targets

Combined targets from both funders are:

- 1000 Guided learning hours
- 50 individuals accessing training
- ... Of which 20 undertaking accredited learning outcomes
- 6 Class room based sessions
- 12 organisations benefiting from project

Actual outputs

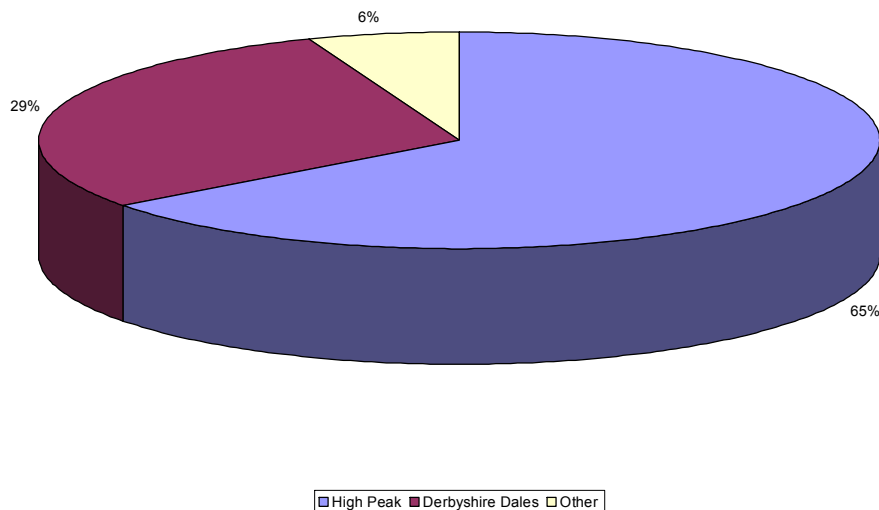
To date, the project has delivered 537 guided learning hours, including 13 classroom sessions. 88 individuals have received training from the project, from 55 organisations.

One to one sessions

Individual learners who have received the one-to-one tuition have been evaluated using an “impact questionnaire” in the same way as the IT champion. 17 questionnaires have been returned to date. The questionnaire can be found at appendix ii.

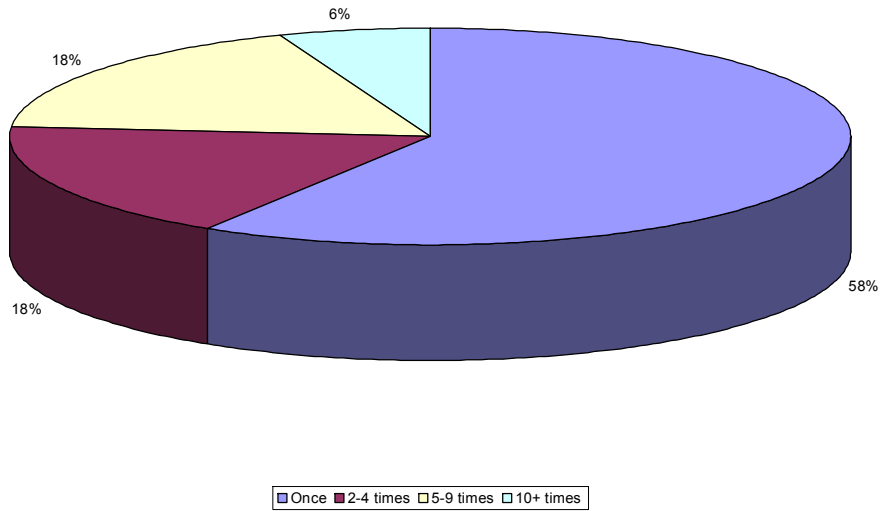
From the returned questionnaires, it can be seen that 2/3 of the individual beneficiaries have been from the High Peak, with just under 1/3 from Derbyshire Dales, and one from outside of the area (into Amber Valley).

Geographic spread of work

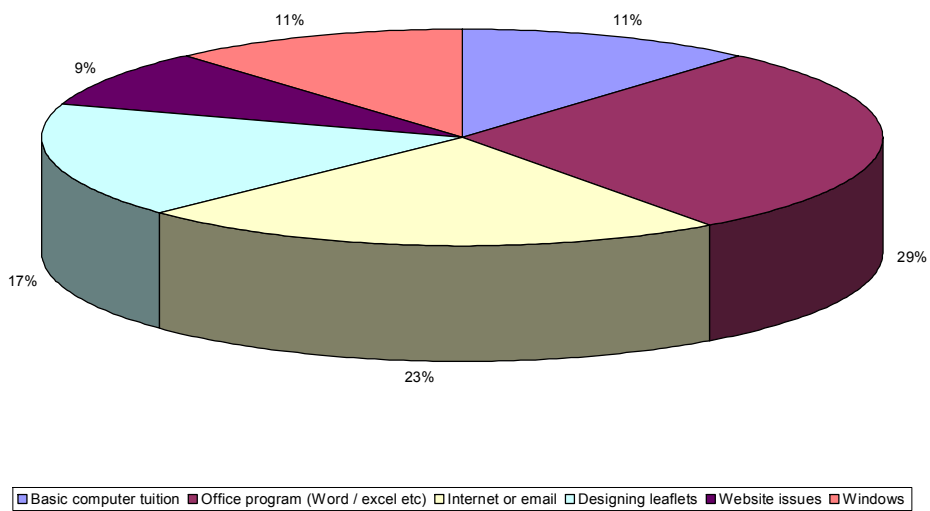


Learners decided with the tutor how many sessions they received, and there has been a considerable spread of intensity in this and the areas of IT skills people wanted to improve:

Number of sessions with tutor



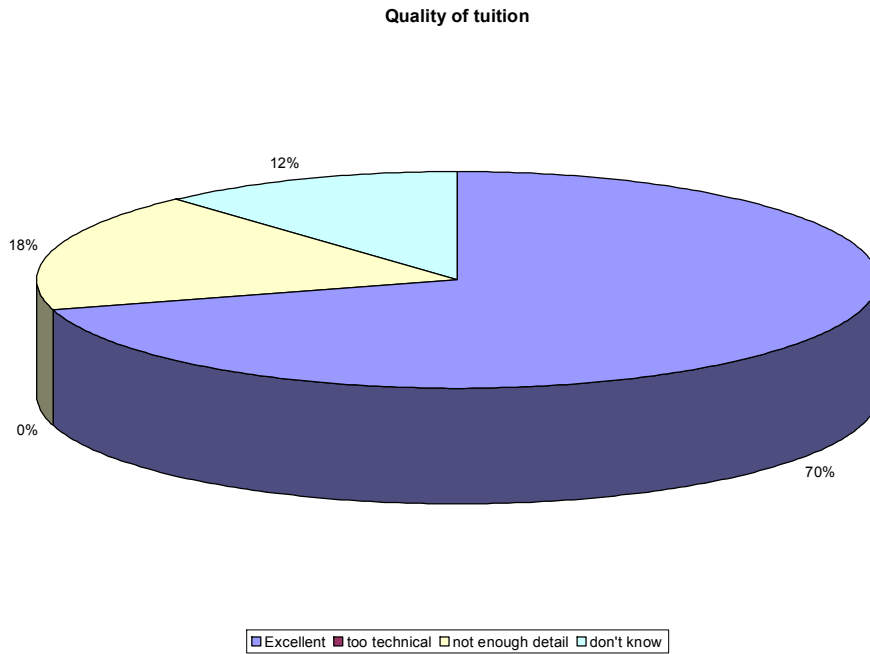
Areas of training delivered



*learners could indicate more than one area

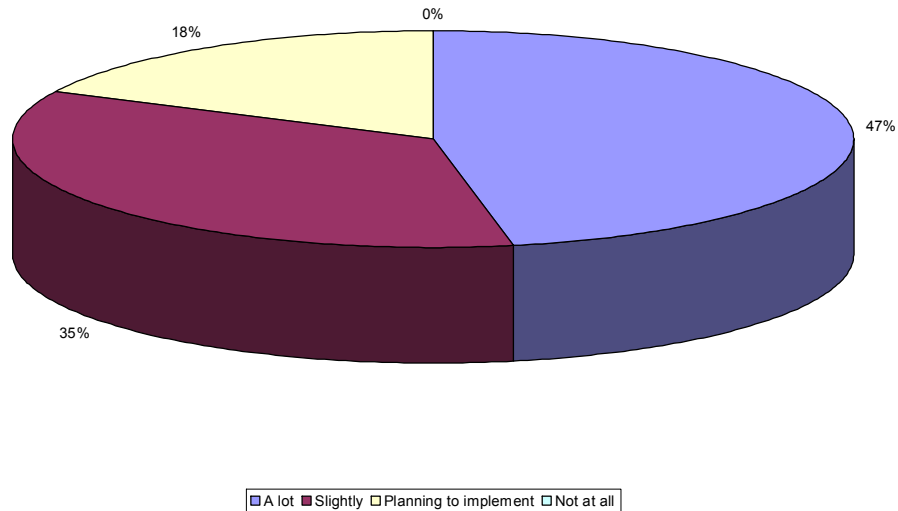
There has been a huge range in the types of learners who we have worked with – from admin and office staff in larger voluntary sector organisations, through to individual volunteers and members of self help groups. As well the tangible benefits of the IT training, there have also been periphery benefits – for example an increase in confidence.

Individual learners clearly rated the quality of tuition during the visit:



15 of the learners who returned questionnaires felt they had benefited from the service, while 2 felt they were “not sure” – none of the respondents said no. Asked whether the one-to-one sessions had helped the respondents’ organisation improve or increase its use of IT, the answer was also extremely positive:

Organisations increase in IT usage



When asked what they felt was good about the service, learners provided a range of responses:

- On site / comes to you
- Free
- Tailored to needs
- Approachable and not too technical
- One to one
- Hands on and practical

As to what they felt could be improved, the only comments were that it should be available across a wider part of the county, and with more hours available!

All of the respondents felt they were able to recommend the service to other voluntary and community groups.

To get a better sense of the types of learners that the tutor has worked with on a one to one basis, the tutor has completed 3 short case studies, which can be found at appendix iii.

Classroom sessions

To date, the project has delivered 13 full day sessions with a total of 61 learners. Sessions have been delivered in:

- MS Publisher for beginners
- MS PowerPoint for beginners
- MS Excel for beginners
- Leaflets & Poster design

- Take Control of Your PC – using the computer more effectively
- Photoshop Elements

The project has used various accessible venues across the High Peak and Derbyshire Dales, although it is important to note that it has been very difficult to access venues with IT equipment in situ. To overcome this we developed a bid for a full mobile IT suite that could be used in remote locations, and this was funded by Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council in spring 2006 (see section 8d).

All learners complete an evaluation at the end of their session. This covers a range of criteria – from quality of venue, pre-course information, to course content and delivery style, each ranked on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor). Overwhelmingly these evaluations rank all elements at 1 or 2, with a small minority of 3 (average) in connection with pre course information or quality of venue. We have taken steps to ensure that these areas are addressed.

A sample of comments from the forms summarise the overall satisfaction with the programme:

- *“really informative and enjoyable”*
- *“lovely tutor for beginners, very good manner- many thanks”*
- *“very good basic beginner language – ideal!”*
- *“a good introduction for me to build on”*

The final question of the end of course evaluation relates to impact – how the course will help the learner in their daily role. Again, the comments are illuminating and positive:

- *“helpful in promoting village notice board information and resume of events”*
- *“save time in the office”*
- *“better publicity – more fundraising potential”*
- *“can make more use of computer in my place of work (a charity)”*

In June a classroom session delivered by the tutor was visited and observed by one of our funders, College of the Peak as part of our contractual arrangements. The observed teaching and learning report compiled by the assessor from College of the Peak was extremely positive:

“Session was well planned with clear objectives set for the day. Timetabling seemed to be reasonable and a good pace of learning was planned. Evaluation was planned for the end of the day and this was brought to the attention of the learners at the outset.

Room at the Bakewell ABC was well set out and appropriate for the small group. Equipment was very good and all H&S issues had been thought about e.g. trailing wires etc.

Mark has a friendly and informal style which is particularly appropriate for this kind of learning. He has a good presence and is very obviously in command of his subject area. He introduced the session well, setting out what they were going to do, what they could expect to get out of the day, and also outlining the ways in which he could assist their development as part of the wider remit of the ICT scheme. This was very much welcomed by the participants.

.....this kind of flexible approach is a good model that others in the more formal sectors should be adopting in order to target specific audiences and 'hard to reach groups'. This is short term funding and it has developed a good model which should be mainstreamed for longer term development."

The visit highlighted one area for us to develop and think about further: specifically offering progression and tracking the progression routes of learners. We are already beginning to incorporate this into the programme.

Profile of learners

The profile of learners of the learners in the first eight months shows 18% aged 61+, and 39% of the learners we have worked with so far have qualifications at level 2 or below. 50% of the organisations are small (either run solely by volunteers or with up to two paid staff) – demonstrating the need for this project to continue to address the so called "digital divide".

Web design service

High Peak CVS has been delivering web design activities for approximately three years. This directly meets the need of “Developing websites and use of new media to promote organisations” identified in the “Is Derbyshire doing IT?” report.

This area of work is not grant funded and is run as a social enterprise, with clients paying for website design, hosting and maintenance. The service has been very successful in attracting website work locally, from other parts of the county and region and nationally. It has a differentiated charging structure, with voluntary and community groups in the High Peak receiving the service “at cost”, with those across the rest of Derbyshire paying significantly less than those outside of the county. Because of commercial sensitivities it would not be appropriate to detail specific charges, profit and loss etc, here. However, it is useful to note that the enterprise has generated a significant surplus back to High Peak CVS.

To date, High Peak CVS have delivered website services to 9 organisations in Derbyshire (as well as to a larger number of other organisations outside of the county). High Peak CVS already employ two staff members in this area, and see this service expanding. We are advocates of accessible website design, and aim to raise the awareness of access needs with our clients and to deliver projects that meet website accessibility standards.

For all finished projects we ask clients to complete a feedback form (appendix iv). This feedback has been extremely positive. For example, when asked what was good about our service:

“Personal to the customer e.g. the customer has a substantial input during the development process.”

“The interest shown in our organisation, and the speed our web site was designed and up and running”

“Extremely good value for money”

“It’s nice to know that High Peak CVS will be there at the end of the phone should we have any problems. We have been assured that the site itself has been future-proof”

Asked how the website project has made a difference in the organisation, these responses were typical

“Has given us the ability of keeping grant information up to date for the public.”

“Massively! Our hits have gone from an average of 6,000 per month to over 100,000! It speaks for itself. Thank you!”

Other initiatives / work

IT working group

One of the additional benefits of High Peak CVS taking a lead around IT in the VCS in Derbyshire has been the development of a county wide IT working group, which has voluntary sector representatives with an interest in IT. This group has met 6 times, with an average of 7 people at each.

This group has provided a strong voice to help raise awareness of IT, and was central to developing the IT strategic framework document. Secondly, the networking opportunities that the meeting has given IT practitioners in the sector has been invaluable.

The group is now moving to consider gaps in provision in the county – for example in refurbishing and recycling old computer equipment, and is at the early stages of considering joint funding bids for working together in the future.

Events

Although not an “official” output in any of the individual projects, we have worked hard to organise or run a series of events aimed at raising awareness of IT in the voluntary sector.

These events include a database conference, run in conjunction with Derbyshire Dales CVS which attracted 60+ delegates; sessions in September on IT volunteering (delivered by IT4Communities) and one delivered by PurpleZebra on policies. We are also arranging session with the MediaTrust on new media to be delivered later in the year.

We have also been influential in developing the regional IT conference, in conjunction with the IT hub, which will be held in Chesterfield in October.

Regional working – unofficial champion?

Since starting our work delivering IT services, we have increasingly been involved in working with colleagues across the region and in shaping IT service delivery for the sector:

- Hosted 2 exchange visits from other infrastructure organisations keen to learn about aspects of our work
- Been an active member in the regional IT working group initiated by the IT hub
- Been a driving force in developing the regional voluntary sector IT conference
- Carried out paid consultancy work with the Lincolnshire Infrastructure Consortium to support them in thinking about issues in developing relevant IT services in their county

These opportunities have been a validation of our work and approach, and reflect the high regard of our services.

Over the last few months, we believe we have been the “unofficial” IT champion for the East Midlands, and have worked (with others in similar positions across the country) with the IT hub to help them develop their business plan for the next three years.

This business plan is likely to reflect the desire for organisations to be paid as regional champions, and we believe High Peak CVS has demonstrated a good track record and the skills to be in a position to carry out this work.

Mobile IT suite

We were successful in gaining some capital funding to purchase a suite of laptop computers and associated peripherals (digital projectors, printers etc) to support the work of the mobile IT training project, as it proved very difficult to find venues with IT suites in situ to deliver the classroom sessions.

One of the conditions in acquiring the suite was that it was available to other organisations in the High Peak and Dales to support learning. This is already proving a useful asset for groups, including New Mills University of the Third Age.

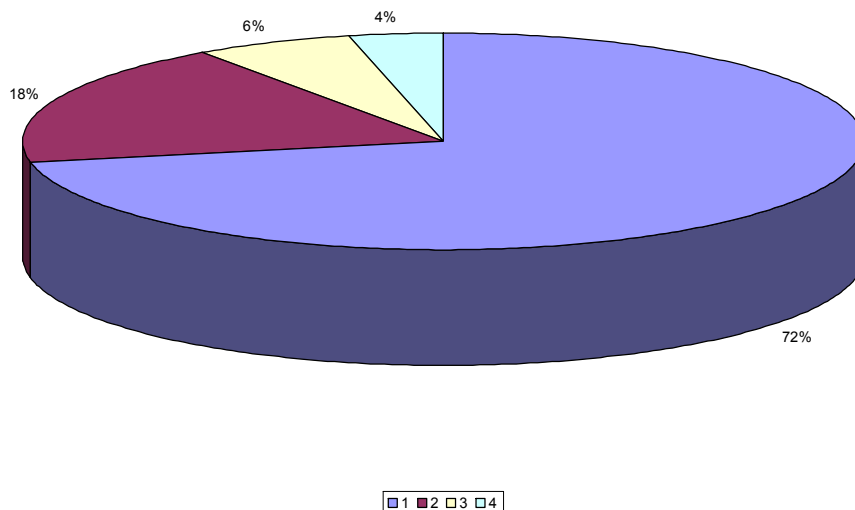
Joined up thinking

Purple Zebra, the IT champion, mobile IT tutor and our web services were designed to be a “virtual team”, offering a complete IT service to voluntary groups and referring groups to each other where appropriate.

The services have been promoted using a joint leaflet which went out to voluntary and community groups across the county via the CVS network. However, a large degree of work has come via “word of mouth”, in many cases from development work teams (for more discussion of this, refer to section 4.c.i).

Statistics about the linkages between the different elements of the IT service make interesting reading – to date we have worked with a total of 83 organisations overall. Three quarters of these have only used one element of the four services on offer. There may be a number of reasons for this: need, different geographic coverage, different funding models (some are free for example)

Percentage take up of different service elements



Of these 83 organisations, 12 have been voluntary sector infrastructure providers – the rest front line groups and organisations.

Learning points

Since initiating and working up these projects over two years ago we have learnt a huge amount, including:

- Organisations have welcomed our “blended” approach to IT service provision – with one organisation leading on and providing a range of services to the sector, and the good reputation of High Peak CVS within the sector has helped us to successfully market our services. This has not worked as well as it could where we have outsourced to a separate organisation, specifically technical support to PurpleZebra.
- The mobile IT training project is time intensive, (because it mainly works on a 1-2-1 basis) but gets results because it is tailored.
- The strategic role we have undertaken has been much larger than envisaged.
- The role of the IT champion /development worker needs to focus not just on hardware / software needs, but also funding and policies
- More work is needed with senior managers and trustees to help them incorporate IT into strategic and business planning. The net:gain programme may provide a suitable model for this locally.
- We have, to a certain degree, misunderstood the ability of organisations (particularly those with no, or a very small number, of paid staff) to afford technical support or to be able to devote the time to develop their IT
- The IT champion role with groups has mainly interacted with the “accidental techie” – the individual within the group who is, often with little. These accidental techies need ongoing support to.....
- Events have proved to be a good platform to raise awareness and to network with organisations. This has networking opportunities have led to a number of pieces of work with organisations

Overall, the findings of “Is Derbyshire doing IT?” have been validated – there was a clear need for IT services tailored to the needs of the voluntary sector in the county.

However, there are still significant gaps in understanding and acceptance of IT in Derbyshire’s voluntary and community sector, and more work needs to be done to improve awareness, knowledge, skills and budgets.

The Future

Clearly, at High Peak CVS we see our role in delivering IT services to be valuable and needed. The evidence above, detailing the reach and impact that the services have had, presents a strong case for this continuing.

That said, a number of important challenges remain. Firstly, secure funding remains an ongoing issue. Whilst the web design service is fully sustainable, we currently have concerns about the availability of grant funding specifically for the IT champion and mobile IT tutor roles beyond the end of the financial year. It is clear that a “mixed economy” of funding will be needed to sustain services – charging where appropriate (for example in the case of web design) but also providing free, or low cost solutions in certain cases – whether that be for certain types of work or size of organisation. In recent months we have been “market testing” whether the IT champion can extend his role and charge for certain elements (some technical support where he has conducted a health check, and project management), and initial results are encouraging. However, it is still unknown whether this model, alone, is truly sustainable without grant funding. It is important to also recognise that smaller groups will not be in a position to pay.

Secondly, it is currently unclear what role PurpleZebra will have in the county, given the low take up of their services. If they withdraw there will be a gap in providing technical support, although it is unclear whether “the market” is prepared to pay at a level to sustain this.

Thirdly, there is the wider issue of addressing the digital divide. To date, our services have deliberately worked with voluntary and community groups, rather than the wider community. As “bridging the Digital Divide: an ICT strategic framework for Derbyshire” sets out, there is much work to be done with individual communities. The sector is really good at engaging with disadvantaged and disengaged communities, so they have a clear role to play in narrowing this digital divide.

A fourth issue is the link between the ICT hub, regional ICT co-ordination and our projects. These links need to be reinforced, and resources available for the development of a region wide strategy.

This leads to a final point: the need to increase the range of services and products available in the county, either by providing them ourselves or by stimulating interest and encouraging other partners to develop complimentary (rather than overlapping) projects. We have already identified a number of “gaps” in the services available – senior level (board and CEO) training on the strategic benefits of ICT and how to implement them; support for “accidental techies”; the need for technology roadshows; more work around VOIP; work with funders in the county about how funding for ICT can best be supported.

Conclusion

We are pleased with the progress that our ICT projects have made, and the positive impact that they have made on the work of voluntary and community sector organisations in the county and beyond. High Peak CVS is committed to developing and extending the reach of these services to ensure that awareness of the benefits of ICT remain high and that there is support and suitable support available to help organisations make best use of it.

Tony Okotie
Services Programme Manager
High Peak CVS

September 2006

Appendix i. IT Champion impact questionnaire

1. Your name	
2. Your organisation	
3. What areas of IT did you receive information and advice about? (tick any that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Purchasing / upgrading hardware <input type="checkbox"/> Purchasing / upgrading software <input type="checkbox"/> Purchasing / installing a network <input type="checkbox"/> Where to find / buy technical support <input type="checkbox"/> General IT "health check" and needs analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____
4. Comments:	
5. During the visit , how would you rate the advice and information given? (tick one)	<input type="checkbox"/> excellent <input type="checkbox"/> too technical <input type="checkbox"/> not enough detail <input type="checkbox"/> don't know
6. Were you expecting a written report after the visit? (tick one)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
7. Did you receive a written report after the visit? (tick one)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes – please answer questions 8 & 9 <input type="checkbox"/> No – please go to question 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know –please go to question 10
8. How would you rate the written report? (tick one)	<input type="checkbox"/> excellent <input type="checkbox"/> too technical <input type="checkbox"/> not enough detail <input type="checkbox"/> don't know
9. Comments:	
10. Overall, has the information and advice given helped your organisation increase or improve its use of IT to met its aims? (tick one)	<input type="checkbox"/> a lot <input type="checkbox"/> slightly <input type="checkbox"/> it hasn't yet but planning to implement actions <input type="checkbox"/> not at all

Continued over.....

11. Please describe how you have already implemented, or are planning to implement, the advice and information given?	
12. Would you feel able to recommend the CircuitRider service to other voluntary and community groups?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
13. Any other comments you would like to make?	

Thank you for your time in letting us know your views.

Please return to:

**CircuitRiders Evaluation
High Peak CVS,
1a Bingswood Trading Estate
Whaley Bridge, High Peak, SK23 7LY**

Or you can fax back on 01663 733649

Appendix ii. Mobile IT training project impact questionnaire

1. Your name	
2. Your organisation	
3. How many times have you used the service to date?	<input type="checkbox"/> Once <input type="checkbox"/> 2 – 4 times <input type="checkbox"/> 5 – 9 times <input type="checkbox"/> More than 10
4. What areas of IT did you receive information and advice about? (tick any that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Basic Computer Tuition (beginners) <input type="checkbox"/> Help with office program (word/excel etc) <input type="checkbox"/> Help with Internet or e-mail <input type="checkbox"/> Help with designing leaflets etc <input type="checkbox"/> Help with website issues <input type="checkbox"/> Help with using Windows generally <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____
5. During the visit(s) , how would you rate the help and tuition given? (tick one)	<input type="checkbox"/> excellent <input type="checkbox"/> too technical <input type="checkbox"/> not enough detail <input type="checkbox"/> don't know
6. Why did you use the service?	
7. Did you benefit from using the service?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure
8. If you ticked yes for Q7, please state here how you have benefited –	
9. What do you feel is good	

about the service?	
10. What do you feel could be improved?	
11. What is the likelihood of you using the service again in the future?	<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Likely <input type="checkbox"/> Probably, from time to time <input type="checkbox"/> Not very often <input type="checkbox"/> Unlikely <input type="checkbox"/> I will never use the service again
12. How did you find out about the service?	
13. Overall, has the information and advice given helped your organisation increase or improve its use of IT to meet its aims? (tick one)	<input type="checkbox"/> a lot <input type="checkbox"/> slightly <input type="checkbox"/> it hasn't yet but planning to implement actions <input type="checkbox"/> not at all
14. Please describe how you have already implemented, or are planning to implement, the advice and information given?	
15. Would you feel able to recommend the CircuitRider service to other voluntary and community groups?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
16. Any other comments you would like to make?	

Thank you for your time in letting us know your views.

Please return to:

**CircuitRiders Evaluation (Mobile IT Tutor)
High Peak CVS,
1a Bingswood Trading Estate
Whaley Bridge, High Peak, SK23 7LY**

Or you can fax back on 01663 733649

Appendix iii. Mobile IT Training Project Case Studies

Name: Lyn Wilson

Group: Access Glossop

Visits to date: 4

Total guided learning hours: 8

Lyn is an active member of this community group and has used the service four times. She has a computer at home and this is where the tuition has taken place. Lyn has mobility problems and currently uses a motorized scooter/wheelchair to get out and about locally. The mobile tutor service has been great for Lyn because she has been able to access the service at home and use her own equipment.

Although Lyn is not a complete beginner, there are many aspects of using a computer where she has little experience. The tutor service has helped to 'plug some gaps' in her knowledge and given her greater confidence to tackle those areas that will improve her overall knowledge and skills.

Over the four sessions Lyn has received help and guidance on several computer packages. Lyn has had some help using Microsoft Word but the main tuition has been using Microsoft Publisher. Lyn had little experience of using this program but has made great strides in learning the basics. The primary aim was to help support Lyn with the various administration work that she undertakes for the group. We have gone some way to achieving this by Lyn completing these tasks:

- Creation of a new expenses form using Word
- Designing A4 & A5 sized flyers to advertise the group
- Design of compliment slips
- Excel basics
- Basic file saving and backup procedures

Name: Kath Jarratt

Glossop Volunteer Bureau

Visits to date: 7

Total guided learning hours: 14

Kath is a paid staff member working within the volunteer bureau. She was not a complete beginner but had adequate skills in being able to word process and use the Internet/email. She had little or no experience of any other software and we started to address this during the visits. There is much admin work and data recording within the bureau and one of our aims has been to get Kath up to speed with a number of software packages. This has helped Kath to cope more easily with the day to day admin within the office and improve her overall skill set. At the initial visit Kath and I identified various areas where she lacked the required skills and we agreed a plan of action to improve her overall competencies.

These are some of the topics we have covered:

- Organising basic files and folders
- Completing a mail merge and producing labels

- Excel basics & practice in completing bureau and volunteer related spreadsheets
- Publisher basics & creating simple brochure
- Access Database basics and practice

Kath has done really well in learning a variety of software within such a short period. She is now looking at creating a website for a local group and this is next on our agenda.

Name: Jen Bollands Derbyshire Federation for Mental Health, Matlock

Visits to date: 1 Total Hrs: 2

I visited Jennifer recently for the first time. Jen works in a small office with one other person and taking time out for training is not an easy option. Accessing the tutor service is an ideal solution for Jen as the training is flexible, individually tailored, and scheduled around the client during normal office hours.

She has some previous computer experience but using mainly word processing software and the Internet. She is quite new to her current role and she has inherited admin procedures that require a person with a good all round knowledge of several computer packages. As the level of admin appears quite demanding in terms of the skills required, she has called on the tutor service to help her quickly gain the necessary skills and knowledge to get her up to speed and enable her to perform her role more effectively.

At the first session Jen was looking for help with actioning a large mail merge operation and producing labels. Jen had no experience of this but we worked through the procedure together and completed the task satisfactorily. Jen and I agreed a plan of action which will probably involve several visits. We discussed her priorities in terms of learning and here are some details of what we plan to cover in the near future:

- Organising files & folders
- Reviewing existing files for archiving/deletion
- General computer use – plug knowledge gaps
- Email – address book setup
- Desktop Publishing – posters & newsletters
- Excel spreadsheets
- Access Databases

Jen is a typical example of the type of person that has been using the tutor service. Most have a knowledge of computers, but many do not possess the broad range of skills that many roles now require.

Mark Davies
August 2006

Appendix iv. Web design services evaluation

Our website design team have recently worked with your organisation.

To help us evaluate our service, we would be grateful if you could spare just a few minutes to complete the short questionnaire below. This will help us to ensure that the project continues to evolve and respond to the needs of voluntary and community sector organisations.

Many thanks.

Your name		
Your organizations name		
1	What is good about our service?	
2	How would you rate:	
	a) Quality / information in the tender that we produced	
	b) Discussion of options and the advice given	
	c) Our understanding and explanation of access issues	
	d) Ease of use of the website	
	e) Price and value for money	
	f) Our understanding of the voluntary sector	
	g) Quality of design (the look) of the website	
	h) The ongoing support that we provide	
	i) Our compliance with your specification	
3	Did we deliver to the specified or agreed deadline?	
4	Does the website fulfill your expectations for the project?	
5	We tend to communicate a lot using email during the development process. Was this suitable, or would you have preferred more telephone / face to face contact?	

6	What areas of our service could we improve?	
7	Overall, how would you rate the delivery of the website project?	
8	How has the website project made a difference in your organization?	

Please complete and return ideally by email to: tony@highpeakcvs.org.uk
or *alternatively* by post to Website evaluation, High Peak CVS,
1a Bingswood Trading Estate, Whaley Bridge, High Peak, SK23 7LY

