

HP Digital Community Centres

Helping people create self-sustainable improvements in their lives



We are looking at unemployed people becoming employable. All those people live in a family and the family is part of the community. It's like throwing a stone into a body of water and watching the ripples expand.

Iris Colyn, former National Director of ORT South Africa



Dikhatole, South Africa, is not a place where you would expect to cruise the information highway. For one thing, it doesn't even have paved roads. And the families living there are on the frontline of society's worst problems — unemployment, crime and inadequate schools.

But it does have an HP Digital Community Centre.

The Digital Community Centre is providing members of the poverty-stricken community with basic computer, Internet and business skills. Its teachers, childcare practitioners and unemployed youth have all benefited. In the four years of its existence, the Centre has trained 1500 young people in various employment skills with around 70% finding work or a learnership in the formal sector as a result.

HP, with a long tradition of community engagement in the 120 countries where it operates, believes that computer literacy can empower at least some of Dikhatole's residents to escape from poverty.

What Dikhatole has in common with other HP Digital Community Centres — there are twelve in the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region — is that many of the people living there, given a chance, will create self-sustainable improvements in their lives. The DCCs are the latest initiatives in an HP programme which aims to provide some of the world's underserved communities with the infrastructure and tools for learning and development. They focus on how IT can be used for a range of activities, from job-seeking to better management of community groups and even launching a small business. The community projects also address a wide range of population groups, including students, teachers and the unemployed.



Opportunity Knocks, even Here

HP sees long-term market opportunity in developed and underdeveloped regions currently unaddressed by technology. Moving beyond traditional philanthropy, HP is strengthening the link between philanthropic investments and long-term business objectives. The approach is to engage closely with the community, just as we engage with our customers, to understand the specific needs and issues they would like technology to help solve.

Communities in Europe, the Middle East and Africa have been carefully selected based on the role of ICT in their future development, their capacity to execute and sustain their vision and plans, and the strength and stability of HP's network of partnerships in the region.

The Digital Community Centre usually involves a range of partnerships, an "eco-system" with many organisations (business, government, NGO) bringing different things to the project. Every one of the partners in a DCC plays a key role and shares expertise, resources and accountability. In South Africa, Russia and the Ukraine, for example, one of HP's partners is ORT — one of the largest non-profit organisations in the field of vocational and technology training.

The Digital Community Centre in Dublin, initiated by the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) three years ago, is helping the city's inner-city communities fulfil their aspirations for participation in the digital age.

Last year over 1200 participants, young and old, took part in the 120 different programmes offered by the Centre — ranging from how to send email, to basic IT skills and digital videography. The project has been viewed as so successful that in 2003, Ireland's Information Society Commission suggested that the Digital Community Centre serve as model for addressing to a large extent the country's digital divide.

The Hungarian Digital Community Centre was established in December 2002 and has since become a national centre of excellence for environmental education. It is located in the city of Miskolc, in the region of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén. The DCC created the first multimedia centre of its kind at the country's Petroleum and Gas Institute to train teachers and their students on the usage of an online training platform in the environmental field. In March 2005, the Miskolc DCC launched the 'Envirotrainer' programme, a distance learning course that prepares secondary school teachers for transferring state-of-the-art environmental knowledge to their students. The Internet-based training covers areas such as waste and water management, technology and innovation.



The Digital Community Project will influence greatly the way residents of these communities live, learn and earn.

Dr Thomas Cooke,
head of Dublin Institute of Technology's Community Links Programme

Train the Trainers

The unrest that swept across France in the autumn of 2005 took place in deprived suburbs like the ones just north of the French capital. Some 85 nationalities and ethnic groups live side by side in these districts. Unemployment among the young residents is between 30 and 40%. Lacking hope of a job, many turn to drugs, crime and the black market.

It is here, in the Seine Saint-Denis area, that HP has created a Digital Community Centre in partnership with local communities in four cities (Villetaneuse, Bobigny, Blanc-Mesnil and Epinay) and two organisations that specialise in vocational training. Villetaneuse and Bobigny Technology Universities are leading the project. The centres offer technology training and award official diplomas – necessary for job applications in France. The main objective is to save young people from delinquency. More than 3000 people have been trained since it began in 2002 and many of them have found jobs at the Paris International airport in nearby Roissy Charles de Gaulle.

In its initial phase, a 'train-the-trainer' programme enrolled budding IT specialists from the local neighbourhood and set them to work teaching other kids. The trainers have served as a positive role model, someone to look up to rather than the local drug dealer. The next phase is to link all four communities into a digital campus, a sort of virtual university. HP and partners are now creating vocational content that will be accessible via an HP-hosted 'e-room'. Two teams of students from the Technology University of Bobigny are developing the content under the leadership of learning and teaching consultant BH consulting.

Towards Sustainability

What began as a broad effort by HP to apply technology to closing the digital divide is now focused largely on using ICT to accelerate enterprise and entrepreneurship, and thereby stimulate economic growth.

From day one, the goal of each Digital Community Centre is to reach longer-term sustainability with on-going funding from local government or other agencies. HP and its partners have worked closely with local government, businesses, and members of the community to ensure that the impact of a Digital Community Centre will be sustainable after three years of HP's initial engagement.

At a glance

Twelve HP Digital Community Centres are located in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA).

Mission

Bringing the tools for learning and competing in the digital economy to communities where they can make the greatest difference.

HP Digital Community Centres in collaboration with local NGO's

- France – Saint-Denis
- Ghana – Kumasi
- Hungary – Miskolc
- Ireland – Dublin
- Jordan – Wahdat
- Northern Ireland – Belfast
- Russia – Tula
- Scotland – Govan
- Senegal – Fatick
- South Africa – Dikhatole
- Ukraine – Slavutych
- Portugal – Alta de Lisboa

Links

EMEA Philanthropy
www.hp.com/hpinfo/grants/emea/

DCC programme
www.hp.com/hpinfo/grants/emea/emea_dcc.html



Challenge

- Helping to bridge the digital divide by creating sustainable and replicable solutions for underserved communities.

Solution

- Create Digital Community Centres – with the potential to become sustainable within three years – that provide ICT infrastructure to underserved communities in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Results

- A clear increase in the level of employable people (especially young people) in targeted communities through IT training and a change in their attitude towards the future.

Contact

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