

WCVA Making the Connections Case Study:



Cloud9 Rhymney



Methodology for Case Studies

Case studies were nominated by the local MtC workers as good examples of the learning in the project. WCVA then selected a range from these studies to illustrate different aspects of the learning; engaging independent consultants to verify the details and write up their findings. The case studies therefore show both difficulties and successes of the project, aiming to inform the on-going development of Local Service Boards and the redesign of public services with the active involvement of third sector organisations, and most importantly, citizens. More details of the WCVA's work in this area can be found in *Putting People at the Centre* ([web link](#)).

Introduction

The Cloud 9 project was launched in November 2014. It has been developed by a partnership involving Communities 2.0 (Get Caerphilly Online), Communities First, Hapus.eu, Smart Money Cymru, the local MtC Officer and Rhymney Comprehensive School.

The aim is to help young people and their families use and take advantage of new technology. By making information technology (IT) central to learning and individual development, Cloud9 aims to support pupils and their families and to overcome digital exclusion.

Cloud9 helps families to purchase affordable devices and enables them to access resources such as the Welsh Government's Hwb+. The focus on families is a key aspect of the initiative, giving access to improved ICT skills, to communication tools such as Skype, Facebook and to financial services.

How was the need identified?

The Cloud9 initiative grew from a previous innovative project run by Rhymney Comprehensive School called 'Bring Your Own Device to school' (BYOD) programme. The aim of this project was make IT central to learning and individual development in an area of low income levels.

Income levels directly correlate to relative digital exclusion - in 2013, only 1 in 10 (9 per cent) of those in managerial and professional occupations did not use the internet compared to more than three in ten (31per cent) of those who had semi-routine and routine occupations¹.

Robert Davies, Head at Rhymney Comprehensive School, is convinced that the project will have an impact within the school, 'BYOD allows students to use their own technology in the classroom to make learning more fun and interactive than ever before. Students can interact with other pupils and experts, they have more authority over their own learning, and they can pose questions, do research and take virtual field trips. The possibilities are endless!'

¹ Welsh Government (2014) *National Survey for Wales, 2013-14* - Internet use. SB 74/2014. Cited in Bevan Foundation (2014) "Rethinking Poverty – implications for action."

What happened?

Geraint Jones, the local MtC officer realised that people from a variety of different organisations were talking about digital exclusion as an issue. He was able to bring these people together and broker a collaborative approach which resulted in the Cloud9 project. The partnership of organisations was formed.

Geraint talked to organisations interested in the project or which had expressed concerns about the issue. He brokered relationships and called together the partnership.

Involving the young people in the design of the initiative was important from the outset. An 'Apprentice' style event was held in March 2014 with Rhymney Comprehensive School Council. They were challenged to create a logo and marketing strategy to publicise the opportunities presented by Cloud9 to the communities of the Upper Rhymney Valley via the school. This led to creation and adoption of the school council suggestion of Cloud9 as the project identity. The partnership felt that the name was both positive and technology related.

Cloud9 aims to benefit whole families, not just students. Gill Rogers and Lucy Shaw, Communities First Officers for the Rhymney Valley cluster and a core part of the development team, said, 'this project has excited us all due to the potential widespread benefits for the whole community. Online shopping can be far cheaper, having access to important Government Sites such as Universal Jobmatch and the possibility of creating intergenerational learning from home, all should have far reaching results'.

The partnership had to work through a number of operational issues.

One issue was how to ensure that the scheme was free of stigma by being seen as being only available to 'deprived' children. The partnership has worked hard to ensure that the scheme is open to all. Geraint, with his business and social enterprise background was able to build bridges with a local credit union. Ethical finance options will be available from Smart Money Cymru to pay for the equipment.

Another was how to manage the ordering of equipment. The school was understandably not keen on bulk storage of equipment. Working with a local supplier meant that these concerns could be overcome.

Cloud9 was launched in November 2014, offering a laptop and an android tablet to any pupil in the school. Local businesses have been encouraged to offer technical support as this will not be the responsibility of the project.

The scheme is publicised through the school. It has received widespread interest from across South Wales with other areas looking to replicate the scheme.

What was the role of Making the Connections?

The MtC project was central to the delivery of the project in the following ways:

- by identifying and clarifying the need as expressed by various organisations
- by brokering relationships between organisations which had expressed an interest in the project
- by identifying organisations to fill missing gaps, in this case brokering a relationship with a credit union to provide finance
- by working through operational issues with project partners
- by chairing meetings and giving the project direction
- by ensuring sustainability by working with the school to ensure its long term future.

Learning

This case study has demonstrated the following learning points:

- the need for clarity on who does what and by when in partnerships involving 5 or 6 organisations;
- the need to ensure that technology projects have a good grasp of current and emerging technology and that they are agile enough to respond to technological developments;
- the initiative is aimed at the whole family, not just at pupils. This was in order to cascade the learning experience and also to nurture wider care of the equipment;
- concerns about stigma were addressed early on in the project design. The initiative is open to all pupils. There is no referral scheme. Ethical finance is provided by the credit union.

The project went live on 12 February 2015 having been delayed due to supply problems caused by Christmas demand.

What happens next?

The initiative launched right at the end of the MtC project and its impacts are likely to emerge slowly over time as students progress with their learning.

Matthew Lloyd, Communities 2.0 ICT Broker for Caerphilly, believes there is huge potential for Cloud9, 'while helping to develop the project it became very clear that Cloud9 could become something very exciting. Not just for the pupils and their attainment but also for their families and support network'.

Rhymney Comprehensive has taken over the project and is keen to see it expand both throughout the school and to feeder primary schools as well.

The initiative will be monitored by the Communities First clusters within the context of their delivery plan.

