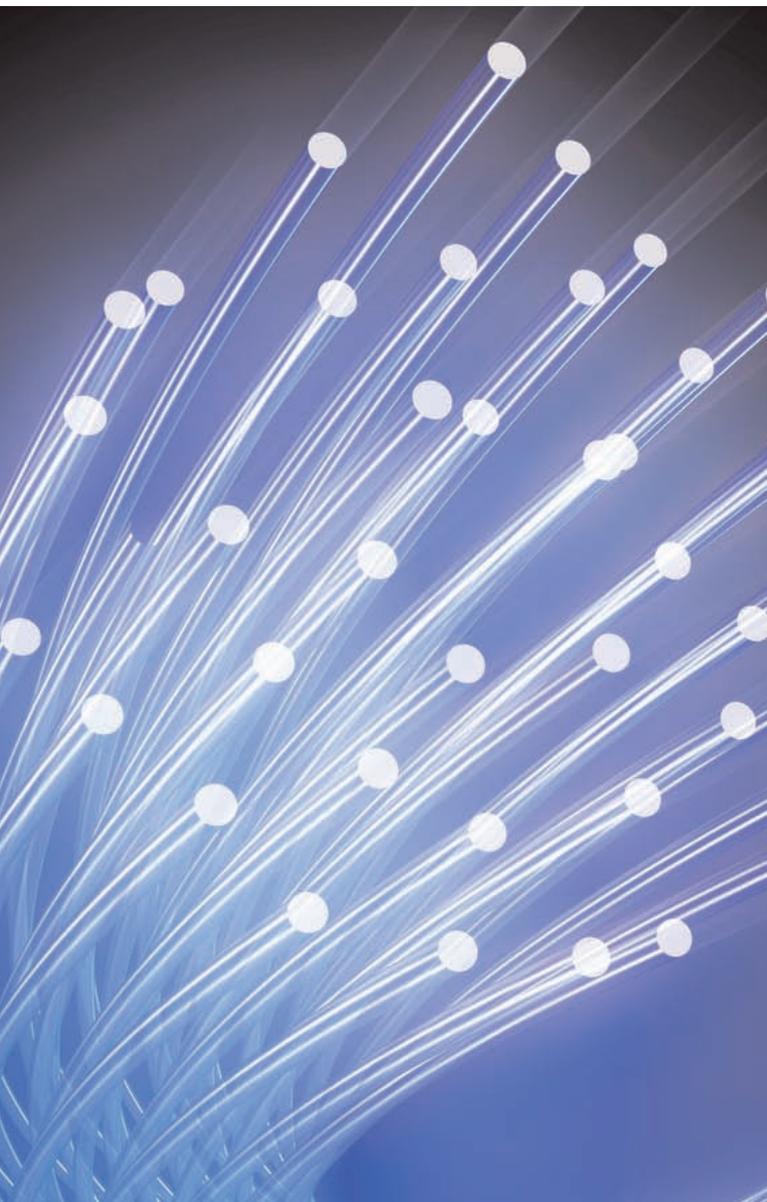




Building community spirit with superfast broadband



Churches Together in the Penzance Area (CIPTA) are working together to ensure that fibre broadband is making a real difference for everybody in the community.

The true meaning of broadband is not the highest download speed theoretically attainable, nor is it the many thousands of miles of new optical fibre laid across every geography. To realise its true potential, superfast broadband must make a real difference for everybody in the community. Bridging the gap between the technology and the many people who can benefit from its use can make digital inclusion an everyday reality, not just a laudable aspiration.

Today's lesson in making a difference to people's lives through a commitment to working together in local communities comes from a small charitable organisation of 19 affiliated churches in Cornwall called 'Churches Together in the Penzance Area' (CTIPA).

Taking the first step

St John the Baptist Church in Penzance installed a broadband connection in its community room so members of the congregation could easily get online for information and services and just to keep in touch with friends, families and events. But most of the older members were not computer literate or Internet savvy; and many had never touched a keyboard before.



Simply providing access to broadband wasn't enough to turn people into effective 'silver surfers'. The Church looked for funding for education to help people understand, and, through Transformation Cornwall, a joint venture of Anglicans, Methodists and the Church Urban Fund, they contacted BT. Through Get IT Together which is part of BT's Connected Society programme, BT agreed to run a 6-week course in September 2013, providing laptop computers for the sessions. More than 10 people signed up immediately and capacity was quickly and enthusiastically reached.

The Reverend Sian Yates, from St John the Baptist Church, Penzance, explains: “It has been a great success. We found that our silver surfers needed longer to build their confidence with new skills so the new courses, now at The Giving Shop, have been extended to 12 weeks. People are now using the Internet to save money on their shopping, their utility bills and insurance, as well as gaining easy access to email, social networking and a world of information and entertainment.”

Reaching out

Word of mouth quickly led to demand for more courses and support. CTIPA wanted to make access to the courses more visible and easily available, and offered space in its Giving Shop, located in Penzance’s main Wharfedale shopping centre. The Giving Shop is home to many church-led community-based projects and supports a food bank, street pastors, a breakfast project and women’s aid. The Giving Shop has recently been visited by the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Most Reverend Justin Welby, who called it “an amazing place of community effort” that he thought should be replicated at other shopping centres across the country.

With a grant from the Cornwall Foundation for new computers and to cover two years’ broadband service, and having identified local volunteer tutors to join others that Superfast Cornwall had nominated, a new programme was designed.

Experience from the St John the Baptist Church suggested that a longer programme was needed to build older people’s understanding and confidence in using a broad range of skills and sites. A 12-week course of 2 hours per week, supplemented with a weekly open workshop for discussing problems and sharing skills informally, was launched. Students self-grade their progression against a skills checklist and receive a small certificate at the end of the course.

Bringing people together

The 18 places available were quickly taken up, with students making a small contribution that helps to offset computing costs and boost sustainability ... and to cover the teas, coffees and biscuits! Due to demand further training is being organised, and CTIPA hopes to boost the support available with students from a local college, bringing young and older community members together.

The courses have great social value too – bringing people together and giving them the chance to make new friendships. They can now easily find out about and take part in other local activities and ventures across the Penzance area.

David Smith, Administrator of CTIPA reflected, “Older people are part of the community and need access to the same knowledge, information, services and entertainment as everyone else. They need the keenest deals for their gas and electricity, they need to manage their accounts and pay their bills easily. They need to keep in touch with friends and family locally and around the world. There is a real thirst for knowledge out there but no government funding to help. With shared goodwill and support from volunteers and commercial partners in the community, we can help people improve the quality of their daily lives.”



Silver surfer students attend a course session at The Giving Shop

Jay Chapman, Project Co-ordinator for Get IT Together in Cornwall, commented, “BT’s Get IT Together programme promotes digital inclusion amongst disadvantaged communities across the UK. Here, we are working with the Superfast Cornwall team and local partners to help bring the Internet into the heart of local communities, making sure that absolutely everybody gets the chance to benefit. We are happy to support other local interest and community groups who want to learn about and join the online world too – just get in touch to find out more.”

To find out more about how fibre broadband can benefit your organisation visit www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/for-business/

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