

Talk for Older People's Forum on 29 April 2009 by Alistair Fraser

Computers in Homes and Wanganui's Digital Situation

Kia ora koutou and good afternoon

Thanks to Sally Patrick and Marie Gorinski for giving me this opportunity to talk to you today. As many of you know, I am a passionate enthusiast for the digital world and this afternoon as well as updating you about Computers in Homes I'd like to share a few observations and insights about some of the things happening in Wanganui relevant to Older People. At the end, I hope we will have time for any questions too.

You may find me talking without a PowerPoint or handout surprising; however, I have chosen to because I want to emphasise that for me computing is only a means to an end to build stronger social and economic capital. It's not really about computers; it's about people and relationships, face to face engagement, and using computers to build social cohesiveness through digital literacy.

Computers are making a huge impact on older people, whether or not they use them; but of all the age demographics older people have the lowest user uptake by far. In the last StatisticsNZ household use of information and communications technology (ICT) survey, undertaken in December 2006, only 39% of people aged between 65 and 74, and 17% of people over 75 years NZ-wide reported using the internet.

Individual on-line purchases are a useful indicator for ICT take up. In December 2006 there were 915,000 New Zealanders purchasing on line. This was 29% of the population. Of these people only 4% (36,000) were older adults aged over 65 years.

Another important finding was that only 6% of all age groups surveyed reported using a computer at a community internet access facility.

The next NZ-wide household use of ICT survey is being undertaken at the end of this year and it will be interesting to see how much the picture has changed.

In Wanganui our uptake is at the lower end of the usage scale but we have been making steady progress to address this. Now we have the Wanganui District Library's Aotearoa Peoples Network and this great facility and service has turned around our community internet access. The high usage shows there is a huge demand out there and plenty of potential for establishing more community free internet access points.

I would like to encourage you and your organisation to consider providing more of these for your clients and customers. I know many of you have already done this or are planning it

because you can see the benefits of using computers and free access to the internet as a 'magnet' to get people in the door.

It is important for Wanganui to have a strong community education capability and it is great to see our providers placing more emphasis on being digital and using computers.

I would like to congratulate SeniorNet for providing their popular classes and leading the way for older people. Another fantastic development is the Community Education Service beginning computer classes last year and seeing these quickly become a popular and important section of their programme. The Whanganui Learning Centre has also taken up the challenge and has integrated digital literacy into its kaupapa.

I would like to see a strong inclusion for digital capacity and capability in the Wanganui Positive Ageing Strategy. Action output identifiers for these should be included in the objectives.

The Wanganui Computers in Homes project has shown the benefits of having a computer at home for families, and our participants have included grandparents who are key caregivers. They have found being digital has transformed their lives to bring them closer to their families and the community, and given them increased confidence and a greater awareness of their environment.

We have completed our first agreement with the Digital Strategy Community Partnership Fund and have just made a new funding application for another 150 families to participate in Computers in Homes in the Wanganui District. We will know if we are successful in June. If so, we will begin recruiting families immediately and classes will start before the end of this year.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the Wanganui District Council for Computers in Homes and the work of the project Steering Group and partners. In particular, I would like to recognise Councillor Sue Westwood as Chairman. Sue has been a fantastic champion for us and we are very lucky to have her awesome strategic thinking capabilities and powerful governance skills for ensuring we are accountable, results focused, and really make a difference.

Computers in Homes, in partnership with Microsoft NZ have introduced a new initiative this year called the Stepping UP programme. This will provide free, community-based digital learning for nearly 5,000 adults NZ-wide, including Computers in Homes graduates, from 2009 to 2011.

Wanganui has been chosen as one of the first districts in New Zealand to pilot the programme. The Whanganui Learning Centre has been contracted to deliver Stepping UP for 200 participants this year. They see this programme as a perfect fit to meet their goal of increasing digital adult literacy.

Wanganui is fast becoming recognised and acknowledged nationally for its collaboration and shared learning capabilities and its commitment to digital enablement. This is an important strength for us to build on and leverage going forward.

Breaking down the barriers to digital participation and acquiring a better understanding of the issues has been identified by the Computers in Homes project steering group as a priority for us this year.

It is great to see the Wanganui District Council has included digital capability provisions into our Draft 10 Year Plan for 2009-19. This includes Computers in Homes – YAY.

It also is neat to see Heather Cox is talking about youth activities today too. No doubt she will tell you about the Computer Clubhouse proposal which she has been facilitating. The Computer Club House is a partner application with Computers in Homes to the Community Partnership Fund. I have really enjoyed working with her and the project partners to ensure our activities are aligned.

Over the last year the Council has made considerable progress towards facilitating better broadband services for us through having its expression of interest selected for inclusion into the previous governments Broadband Investment Fund (BIF). This fund has now been withdrawn but will be replaced with a new government initiative. Submissions have just closed for this and we can expect to know more about the plans over the next few months.

Wanganui is likely to be one of the priority districts for government digital investment. We are one of only seven regions included in the New Zealand Schools' SuperLoop Group. They have just made a comprehensive and persuasive submission.

The proposed Wanganui Education Loop shows what can be done through collaboration and is a fantastic opportunity for Wanganui. I would like to congratulate Vivianne Murphy, Principal of Wanganui Girls College for facilitating and championing this fantastic initiative and the commitment by everyone involved so far. Once again the Wanganui District Council has actively helped get the proposal together and no doubt the education loop will become a core component of its wider plans for a better district digital infrastructure.

One other issue I'd like to talk about today is eWaste (electronic computer waste). At our eDay in October last year we collected around 39 tonnes of eWaste in Wanganui and around 950 tonnes was collected nationally. This is only scratching the surface and the national eDay coordinators are hoping to confirm soon if funding is available to run eDay again this year. They have just sent invitations to Councils to register to operate eDay in 2009 and I would like to take this chance in my talk today to urge Wanganui District Councillors to support and promote this again for a 3rd year.

It is good to see Stu Hylton is here today as he has been the Council Coordinator for organising our eDays in 2007 and 2008. Thanks for making these possible Stu and to be run so effectively for us.

eDay is a finalist in this year's PriceWaterhouseCoopers New Zealand High-Tech Awards in the Outstanding Industry Initiative category. These are being announced in Christchurch this Friday.

Once again, thanks to Sally and Marie and you all for having me this afternoon. It has been a great chance to focus my thoughts into something I can share and hopefully it will have helped you to think about our digital situation and what you can do to make more the opportunity.

Alistair Fraser
Project Coordinator
Wanganui Computers in Homes
Tel: 06 348 9504
Mob: 027 418 6545
Fax: 06 348 9501
P O Box 45, Wanganui

www.wanganuicomputersinhomes.blogspot.com

www.computersinhomes.org.nz

alistair@crystaladventures.co.nz

References

Statistics NZ Household ICT

<http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/hot-off-the-press/household-use-of-information-and-communication-technologies-survey-2006/household-use-ict-2006-hotp.htm>

Tables

<http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/hot-off-the-press/household-use-of-information-and-communication-technologies-survey-2006/household-use-ict-2006-hotp.htm?page=para017Master>

eDay finalist in the PriceWaterhouseCoopers NZ Hi-Tech Awards

<http://www.hitech.org.nz/finalists-announced-for-2009-pwc-hi-tech-awards.html>

Dublin Older People

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUKzPbCxoMs>

<http://www.dublin.ie/neighbourhood/olderperson-computer-training.htm>

Essex Older People

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omm3pe71I9k>