

# PRESTON



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## THE CITIZENZONE PROJECT

**TACKLING DIGITAL EXCLUSION AND PROMOTING ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN DEPRIVED AREAS THROUGH A MOBILE SERVICE CENTRE.**

Preston performs moderately well on unemployment rates compared to the national average but there are pockets of high unemployment in its most deprived areas. This is why Preston works closely with other partners such as Jobcentre Plus, the voluntary sector and national government funded providers of programmes to help people get into work.

It has been found that residents in the most deprived areas do not readily engage with service providers and there is a low uptake of city services as a whole. Therefore the city of Preston decided to engage with various partners across different disciplines to implement specific measures to get those furthest from the labour market into work. In this context the city of Preston launched The Citizenzone Project.

## THE CITIZENZONE PROJECT

In September 2014 the city of Preston entered into a partnership with the national Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) with the aim to support jobseekers.

The Citizenzone Project was launched to combat digital exclusion, a key determinant of social and economic deprivation. People who are digitally excluded face greater challenges entering the labour market and are more likely to face financial exclusion and money management issues. Rates of internet use also decrease in areas of higher social disadvantage.

The project provides a digital and financial advice service hub for participants of the scheme. Priority is given to residents who live within the

three identified priority areas, which are characterised by higher levels of disadvantage.

Key features of Citizenzone are:

- It provides a set of 'on-the-doorstep' coordinated services in three deprived areas through a mobile vehicle.
- It delivers regular IT training to help support participants back into employment. The training is accessed through both a referral system and local promotion, and on-going community engagement work.
- It has a robust system for participant registration, monitoring and reporting which is managed together with Jobcentre Plus and Preston College.





THE CITIZENZONE PROJECT IS **UNIQUE, VISIBLE AND MOBILE**



**2,000 PEOPLE** HAVE BECOME DIGITALLY AWARE



**TWO PEOPLE PER WEEK** ACCESS THE CITIZENZONE

- It offers up to five two-hour sessions of IT training with tutors from Preston College to people who either have not previously used a computer or who have very limited experience.
- It provides participants with basic skills to browse the internet, navigate websites, access services and do online job searches and applications.
- Participants can access the vehicle's computers to do a wide variety of online tasks including:
  1. online job searches
  2. manage online claims
  3. manage personal finances online and access online deals through for example price comparison sites
  4. access online services

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- The Citizenzone Project is unique, visible and mobile. It offers easy accessibility and a reassuring presence with its mobile one-stop-shop. It is located in the heart of these communities, in a familiar site.
- The 'on-your-doorstep' approach is very effective. It facilitates outreach and engagement of hard to reach communities and has given people the confidence to access IT sessions and e-learning opportunities.
- The courses provided not only increase the computer literacy of participants but also their self confidence and global employability. The courses are designed to give an introduction to the internet and emailing, and to show jobseekers the advantages of being able to use this new technology.
- To date the project has helped over 2,000 people to become digitally aware.
- On average, there are at least two people per week accessing the Citizenzone as a general information point.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- One of the most significant challenges was the initial low levels of uptake of services within the areas identified.
- Barriers such as access to the internet and affordability of IT equipment could jeopardise the project.
- However, Citizenzone has become an example of how to overcome a lack of engagement and how direct and frequent intervention in the most deprived communities can make a difference; along with working in partnership with the local college and Jobcentre Plus.

## INNOVATION

This project has enabled the Preston City Council to develop a productive partnership with the national Department of Work and Pensions. This partnership goes beyond the project itself with further partnership being promoted as jobseekers attending the Citizenzone IT course are encouraged to attend one of the 15 local work clubs to further improve their employability.

Furthermore, the council has also combined its welfare benefit and debt advice services with the housing and

homeless advice team to provide a more seamless service to clients. The staff at the Citizenzone can give basic advice and occasionally members of the benefit and debt advice team join the Citizenzone and offer advice on an individual basis. This coordinated approach is uncommon in local authority services generally and particularly in district authorities.

