

Peter's story

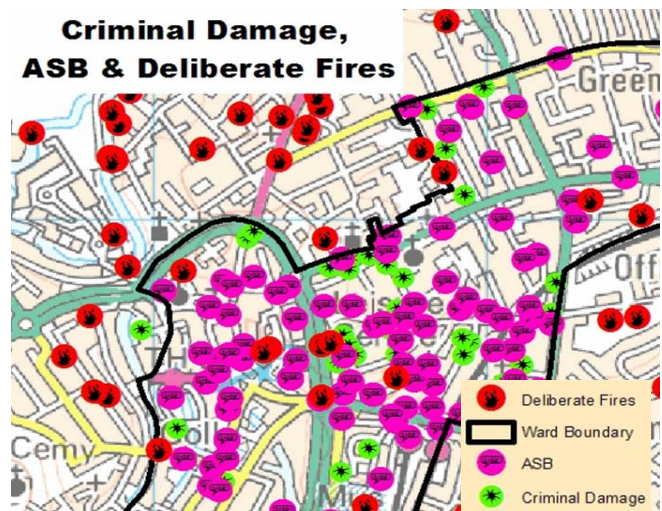
A vision of how technology can enhance inclusion

Introduction

It was early July and Peter hadn't left his home for more than three weeks. He didn't need to. As a small time drug dealer his regular clients fetched him anything he needed. His mother brought home food from the supermarket where she worked. He also felt a responsibility to look after his grandmother who had returned home in June after a short stay in hospital because she broke her wrist during a fall.

Peter was 16 and he lived on the most deprived street in Walsall. He didn't know this, but local councillors and members of the Local Strategic Partnership did. The partnership had recently established a local intelligence system to collect information that would provide a better evidence base for local regeneration activities and to enable them to better target resources and initiatives. Information about local population characteristics, health, education, crime, housing and homelessness were available on their web site and could be viewed by anyone. More detailed confidential analysis was undertaken for local policymakers at street level to develop initiatives focused on 'NEET' groups - people aged between 16 and 18 who do not participate in society.

Information collected from the police (incidents of criminal damage), the fire service (deliberate fires), local courts (Anti-social Behaviour Orders) and truancy figures from Peter's school were mapped and used to draw up priority areas for action. Data from previous years showed that the peak time for teenage nuisance and criminal activities was during the summer.



Armed with this information the partnership decided to focus their activities at the start of the school holidays.

Peter hadn't been to school for several weeks, much of his time at home was spent playing computer games. If marks were awarded for gaming he would

have received an A*, this was more than could be said for his academic abilities. His school had severe doubts that he would achieve five GCSEs.



He was intrigued when two men climbed on top of the orange van parked outside his house and unfurled what he thought might be a satellite dish, but after three weeks at home this hadn't been sufficient reason for him to venture into the daylight.

Sarah was intrigued by the words 'digivan' and unnerved by people filming her. She asked them what they were doing on her way to score from Peter.

They tentatively approached the van after Sarah explained to Peter that they had the opportunity to become budding film makers. Captivated by the large video editing suite, mixing desk and computers they immediately took up the challenge to make a video about their local area. After being given instructions about how to operate the HD camcorder and tips about shot size, composition and creative techniques they decided to make a short historical video about Walsall during World War II. They wanted to be 'different' and were not interested in other group's fascinations with making a campaigning video about the need for more skateboard parks or famous Walsall inhabitants such as Noddy Holder or the Hippo outside Lloyds bank.

They didn't think their grandparents reminiscences about working in Walsall munitions factories or Mickey Rooney staying in the city during the war were particularly exciting. But Peter was able to create some imaginative battle sequences from one of his PlayStation games to intersperse between interviews and pictures of bomb scarred Walsall buildings.

After a week working with the Digivan team they were disappointed that their video did not win the competition, but it was judged to be the best short documentary.

The Digivan was the Strategic Partnership's honey pot to engage otherwise disinterested local teenagers. The second stage of the strategy was to obtain longer-term involvement through a variety of technology facilitated media, music and gaming initiatives.

The Digivan team teased Peter about his gaming skills, eventually provoking him to show how good his gaming was by agreeing to attend the Games2Grow initiative. Under his pseudonym 'lethality' Peter had attracted some recognition on Internet gaming sites and he was confident he would do well. Peter also realised he need to straighten his life out after he received a number of threats from other drug dealers. He thought that either he or his small time drug dealing days were numbered.

The Games2 Grow initiative was targeted at the NEET audience and aimed to engage them with a series of game based 'missions'. Each mission was undertaken on hand held Nintendo DS machines or larger TV based Nintendo Wii or Microsoft xbox's. Players accumulated credits from the missions they successfully completed and they could view their performance against their friends at an online portal. The hand held missions involved answering a series of questions about maths, English, history or geography. The Nintendo Wii tennis mission used the motion sensors built into each player's wireless control pad and required players to swing the control pad like a tennis racquet and move around the room. A pedometer was used to record how far each player moved during the mission.



Peter excelled at the games on the xbox. These Second World War missions involved Peter working with others in 'shoot-em up' games. These required him to work in a team and develop his leadership skills by passing on his



games expertise and knowledge of tactics. Missions also involved teams in undertaking research online to find information about key Second World War cities such as Arnheim, Dover and Potsdam. They also had to learn about and make a gas mask. The best part of these missions were that Peter's group were in

competition with other Games2Grow centres throughout the West Midlands. This provided the added challenge that Peter and his friends always responded to. With Peter's gaming skills they had a huge advantage.

Peter slowly gained respect amongst his colleagues and the staff at the initiative and he started to accept the help they could provide to improve his life. He was not willing to talk to them about his drug habit but the anonymity provided by the Talk to Frank web site through emails, MSN Messenger and the free phone line was useful in learning more about the effects of drugs and in weaning himself off the hold they had over him.



The a-z of drugs

Games2Grow staff were aware from the first day he joined that Peter never stayed longer than a couple of hours at the centre. After he left he would never revisit on the same day, but towards the end of the summer vacation he returned after absences of 20 or 30 minutes. Staff feared he might still be taking drugs, but when they challenged him about this he explained his need to return home on a regular basis to check his grandmother was OK.

In June, on one of his rare days at school, Peter returned home to find his grandmother sitting at the foot of the stairs with a badly swollen wrist. She had only fallen down a few steps but the fear that it could have been far worse worried Peter and his mother. They were both anxious about what they would do at the end of the school holidays, when neither of them might be around to keep an eye on her. Peter explained his dilemma to staff and they offered to contact social services to see if they could help.

Within a couple of days a social worker visited Peter and his mother at their home and they discussed benefits that the family might be able to receive and



the telecare services available to monitor Peter's grandmother.

When Peter's mother started work at the supermarket earlier in the year her Income Support ceased. The social worker identified that she was eligible for Housing and Council Tax Benefit. Using a laptop computer an application for both benefits was completed to record her new circumstances. The eBenefits calculator on the laptop also assessed the

family's eligibility for 59 other welfare benefits. They found they would also be eligible for working and child tax credits and free prescriptions. They were given an indicative level of entitlement so they knew how much rent to pay until the new claim had been processed. All the information was immediately entered on to the council's administrative system at the end of the visit using a wireless internet link.

The most comforting part of the visit was the advice Peter and his mother were given about the assistive technology that could be installed to provide his grandmother with greater privacy, dignity and safety. Their main concern arose from their grandmother's fall. They were told that they might be eligible for social services or housing department (as part of a Disabled Facilities Grant) funding and a Supporting People Grant to install a variety of devices that would help to monitor their grandmother's well being. These included:-

- Fall monitors to alert them whenever falls occur.
- Wrist bands to monitor pulse, blood pressure or temperature.
- Fridge or front door open/close detectors.
- Chair monitors to detect when someone leaves a chair.
- Bed monitors to indicate when someone lies down or gets up.
- Movement sensors to detect a lack of movement.
- Video phones and cameras linked to a computer.
- Sensors with a verbal prompt to turn off the gas or close a door.
- Pill dispenser monitors to ensure medication is not missed.
- Alarms which are triggered when someone 'wanders' beyond a defined area.



It was explained that Peter's grandmother might only require a fall monitor and a 'panic' alarm, linked to a call centre, which would provide verbal reassurance to his grandmother if they were activated. If further help was needed (or notification of all incidents was requested) Peter or his mother could be contacted by mobile phone. If there was an emergency a key safe outside the front door would allow emergency services to enter their home.

The social services worker highlighted that many devices and monitors were becoming more sophisticated and by linking them together some systems are



now able to monitor the normal habits of a person and deviations from this normal pattern are also notified to the call centre.

Peter and his mother were relieved to learn about these devices. Previously Peter's mother had thought she might need to stop working and care for his grandmother if Peter went back to school or started a job after the school holidays. The devices provide them both with sufficient peace of mind to know their grandmother would be 'safe' even if neither of them was at home.

On August 22nd Peter received his GCSE results. They were better than he expected and he managed to scrape through in five subjects. His friends and staff at the Games2Grow initiative were delighted. Peter was more impressed by his achievement of completing more missions successfully than anyone during the summer vacation, but his was secretly relieved that he was able to make a fresh start at school.

He had never taken careers guidance seriously at school, but now he knew he could return to school he decided to think more seriously about a career. Peter's biggest problem was that it would be two weeks until the end of the school holiday when he could see his careers adviser again.

He had decided after a summer immersed in gaming that he wanted to be a games developer. He looked at several careers guidance websites on the Internet before finding CareersMatch. Answering the self assessment questions about his skills and the 59 question aptitude test was tedious, but Peter was keen to find out what jobs the online careers guide thought he would be best suited to. He was comforted when two of the twelve jobs he was matched with involved computer software development and programming.



He became intrigued about how much he might expect to earn in his new career. The thought of a salary in the range of £19,000 to £55,000 indicated by the Jobs4u web site was a stimulus to learn more. His Games2Grow portal assessment had already confirmed he had the creative and problem-solving

skills required to become a games designer and his *lethality* gaming nickname was increasingly gaining respect from online gaming bloggers as his game playing ability reached new heights. He was now confident that with a bit of application he could become a £55,000 per year, Porsche driving, star games designer. He was also pleased that the Jobs4u specification suggested that “most computer games developers train on the job”.

GAMES TESTERS WANTED

Video games testers required. You will be a keen gamer, playing games for at least 25 hours per week. We need people to play-test pre-release games to find bugs and glitches. Must have good spoken and written English skills.

Further Details [click here.....](#)

He then realised his biggest problem was going to be getting that job in the first place. Gaming - the Online Games Industry Magazine website¹ “assisting you gain Games Industry experience” seemed to offer him some salvation. Peter couldn’t afford the £5.95 per month subscription required to obtain further details to become a games tester. But he was sharp enough to know it was probably a scam in any case.

This problem did cause him to remember that earlier in the year each pupil in his year had been given a mentor who they could talk to about careers, training and jobs. Ricky Alfonso was Peter’s mentor. They had met in January when Peter’s careers teacher took a small group to npower to meet their mentors. They hadn’t really ‘hit it off’, but Ricky had told Peter to email or phone him if ever he needed some help.

Ricky was surprised when he received Peter’s voicemail message. The previously grunting and uninterested teenager had transformed into someone who sounded confident and had a desire to pursue his chosen career. He opened his email to send a reply and found Peter had already sent him a message entitled “Dear eMentor, you probably don’t remember me but . . .”

npower was a member of the Walsall Education and Business Partnership. Ricky had provided work experience placements for a few students from Peter’s school in the past, He knew the Partnership had a database of employers



¹ Gaming - the Online Games Industry Magazine website is fictional and is not intended to represent any past or present magazine or website.

willing to offer support for students. He searched the online work experience database and found a software company called Chameleon developing games. Ricky sent an email about Peter's metamorphosis and desire to enter the games industry to Chameleon's partnership liaison manager.

Peter's email from Chameleon mentioned that Ricky had contacted them, but he was never quite sure how they knew his gaming nickname. The email was positive, it acknowledged lethality's online gaming reputation and it concluded by offering a work experience placement in the October Half term subject to a successful interview in six days time.

Peter's heart sunk. He thought he could cope with the interview but he was asked to send a curriculum vitae two days prior to the interview. He knew what a cv was, but preparing one was amongst the many lessons he had missed at school.

Peter remembered that the CareersMatch website had mentioned something about cv's when he was completing the aptitude tests. At the time he was frustrated at having to provide a lot of information about his name; age; address; school; GCSE's, hobbies and interests, but when he logged in again and went to the cv pages he found this information had been neatly entered in a cv template and all he needed to do was add a few extra details about why he wanted a job in the gaming industry and the names of two referees. Peter, didn't have time to search for his teachers through the school during the holiday and he wasn't sure they would have given him a particularly good reference in any case. So he asked Ricky and the manager of the Games2Grow initiative if they would look at his cv and act as referees for him. Both were impressed at the care and enthusiasm Peter had managed to portray in his cv.

The CareersMatch website had a list of things to prepare before the interview. His previous research had told him about what games developers did but he did not know very much about Chameleon. Their web site provided a lot of information about the company and he was surprised to find that they had developed the World War II game that Peter had excelled at for Games2Grow. Peter diligently completed the CareersMatch interview game. It wasn't a patch on the 3D interactive games he was used to but they did help him prioritise what he needed to wear, the things he needed to take with him, the questions he might be asked and the importance of making a good impression in the first two minutes. He even completed some practice

assessment tests in case he was confronted by any of these during the interview.

Peter sailed through the interview. The Chameleon MD and the head games developer were impressed by his enthusiasm and outstanding games ability. He was offered the two week work experience placement in October and asked if he would become a games tester for next version of the World War II game they were developing for Games2Grow. He agreed, but told them he would not do more than 6 hours testing a week because he needed to concentrate on his AS exams.

Peter used to dream about getting paid for gaming, this job was beyond Peter's wildest dreams. His teachers used to dream about seeing him at school, his arrival on the first day of term and attendance everyday thereafter was a revelation.

Peter monitored the CareersMatch website throughout the year looking for gaming jobs. Since he had his own account and details stored on the system he was informed by SMS text message whenever a suitable job arose. He also placed the cv he had created in their online jobs market place. Rather than requiring Peter to look for suitable jobs this service enabled prospective employers to search through the cv database and find him. He received a few email and SMS text enquiries about his availability from prospective employers but none led to anything.

At the two job interviews Peter attended he was told that he needed more work experience. He bit his tongue, asked to be given the opportunity to achieve this with the companies concerned and quickly realised he was in a 'catch 22' position. In order to get a job he needed a job.

But Peter wasn't downhearted. He was working exceptionally hard at school, but he needed to. Years of non-attendance had taken their toll. Peter's teachers were exceptionally supportive and wanted to help him achieve his goals. The online learning support provided by CareersMatch was invaluable. The short questionnaire he completed revealed his learning style and he was able to receive materials and undertake exercises in ways that met his style and enhanced the way he learned. In the evenings or at weekends he was able to access interactive learning materials for his AS courses. The online discussion forums and live chatrooms with other learners and teachers were useful for overcoming problems. And when these did not provide answers the online mentor could often find a solution or offer advice.

Peter's work experience went exceptionally well, he liked the people he worked with and the laid back attitude within the company was something he had never expected to encounter from people with 'proper jobs'. He was asked to return during the Christmas vacation and Chameleon were talking about offering him a full-time job if he successfully completed his AS exams.

Peter's glad he visited the digibus. He's still disappointed he didn't manage to stay at home for a whole month. But he had plenty of new challenges now that were rather more important.

Initiative	Example location	Back/front office user activated	Interface(s)	URL
Local Intelligence Systems	69 in England	Back	Internet	www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1508580
Digivan	London	User	Internet, digital camcorders	www.peabody.org.uk/pages/GetPage.aspx?id=214
Games2Grow	Walsall	User	Nintendo DS, Nintendo Wii, xbox	www.learnplayfoundation.com
Talk to Frank	UK	Front	Email, phone, MSN messenger	www.talktofrank.com
Benefits Calculator	Rotherham	Back	Laptop computers	www.rotherham.gov.uk/graphics/Benefits/e-Benefits
Assistive technology	Newham	Passive monitoring & active alarms	Sensors, web cameras, set top boxes, telephones	www.changeagentteam.org.uk/_library/docs/Housing/Factsheet05rev02.pdf
CareersMatch job	Scotland	User	Internet	www.careers-scotland.org.uk/./WhichCareer/CareersMatch

information				
Jobs4u	England	User	Internet	www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u
Npower eMentors	England	User	Phone and email	www.npower.com/About_npower/In_the_community/Employee_volunteers/Volunteering_as_an_e-mentor.html
Walsall Education Business Partnership	Walsall	Back and user	Internet	www.walsallebp.co.uk
Careers Scotland cv developer	Scotland	User	Internet	www.careers-scotland.org.uk
Careers Scotland cv and interview skills	Scotland	User	Internet	www.careers-scotland.org.uk
Jobcentreplus job search	England	Back and user	Internet and SMS	www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk
Redgoldfish online cv marketplace	UK	Back and user	Internet and SMS	www.redgoldfish.co.uk
Virtual Workspace online learning	UK	Back and users	Internet and phone	www.virtual-workspace.com/

