



**Shortlist: Knowle West Media Centre with  
Community Development through videos**

**The Challenge**

The University of Local Knowledge (ULK) project is taking place in a community that rates highly in the government's deprivation indicators particularly in relation to education achievement (bottom 3%), health, employment, disability and fear of crime. Knowle West has 5,500 households made up of 20,000 people, 3 miles from the centre of Bristol. It is a 1940's predominately white working class estate that has suffered cycles of unemployment since the 70's. The challenge is to turn around the idea that the community is "deprived" and needs to be 'done to' and instead build on the strengths, experience, skills and expertise that resides within a community. ULK was devised to challenge hierarchies of knowledge and to reveal and value expertise within the community. The challenge is also to engage with a significant proportion of the local population. We believe that to be digitally excluded is to be increasingly socially excluded. This project provides us with an opportunity to engage large numbers of those who are 'hard to reach' and digitally excluded, in activity that supports them to use the internet, to collaboratively produce and view content that is relevant to them, develops new insights into the ways that people use the internet, and develops a community toolkit. The project has many contexts: it is an artwork, an academic research project, an education project and a local citizen-journalism project.

**The Solution**

ULK was conceived in partnership with American artist, Suzanne Lacy, and includes the University of Bristol, BBC, University of West of England, Arnolfini, and Bristol City Council. We aimed to produce 700 short films of 40 seconds to 4 minutes that showed the different community skills and knowledge. To launch the project we held a community meal on the green in Knowle West, involving horses, performances from local musicians, and food produced in the community. Over 250 people came and ate a three-course meal in the sun.  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/knowlewestmedia#p/c/D9F9B07A93CC9F63/2/nocb6P1BT9A>  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/knowlewestmedia#p/c/D9F9B07A93CC9F63/1/DMn5icVyQd4>  
We spent many months with residents and academics exploring the structure and categorization of knowledge and looking at how a community develops a body of knowledge and why. We made the films over a period of two years; new contributions constantly came in from friends or relatives of people who had already participated. We held outreach sessions, events, workshops, screenings and get-togethers for people to share ideas. We raised some funds as the project progressed, but could only have delivered this project with the support of others. For example the BBC digitized all the film, the universities helped support the launch event and the seminars, and the University of Bristol successfully applied for the research funding. 4 seminar discussions took place across Knowle West as part of ULK, where academics were paired in conversation with local experts to discuss a subject of mutual interest. Each 'seminar' was an intimate event designed for a small number of participants to exchange ideas and knowledge on an equal footing. Guests were invited to observe these discussions with the intention of generating writing, research and debate about hierarchical notions of knowledge and power. The seminar subjects were: Horse Welfare, Education and Exclusion, Grandparent Guardians and Mechanical Engineering. All the films have been edited at KWMC, and ongoing events and discussion with residents inform the development of the project. On October 20th 2011 45 residents introduced the project to HRH the Earl of Wessex and presented some of their short films at the KWMC AGM. Their enthusiasm and pride in the project is immense.

**The Achievement**

900 short films have been produced, exceeding our target. The films range from how to catch and skin a rabbit, to how to deal with serious illness, look after bees, and be a grandparent carer. They are extremely varied and represent the community in a completely new way. Many have the potential to be longer pieces, other work as courses or collectively as bodies of specific knowledge. Academics have been enthusiastic about the insights and opportunities that the seminars and films present for rethinking the value of knowledge in the community and academic learning. At a recent event we had all the films available for residents to browse – we were encouraged by the interest and time that people spent viewing them and the positive feedback. This project raises aspirations, and confidence and there is an opportunity to build on the virtual university we are creating through applying and spreading the 'knowledge' in the real physical world. The next step is the development of the web platform for the 900 films, develop the toolkit and apply the project for the benefit other communities across the world. High-speed Internet access makes this project possible, and the potential for knowledge sharing, learning, and the virtual world supporting positive action and change in disadvantaged communities is extremely exciting.