



I am Chris Ricard, the Community Development Worker for the Whalley Range Community Forum, a constituted voluntary resident's group established in 1995, based in community rooms leased from a local church.

The Forum holds bi-monthly meetings to connect residents, community groups and those who represent/serve Whalley Range: e.g. Police and Councillors who provide updates and reports about local issues and initiatives.

During the daytimes we provide learning, health & wellbeing and social activities for the community - including ESOL classes, a work club, basic computer classes, fitness, older people's groups and an under 5's group. We are a 3rd Party Hate Crime Reporting Centre and Food Bank referral centre – issuing vouchers to residents in crisis.

Whalley Range is a sprawling community with no central community centre, library or learning facility - and it is difficult to access and share information

So how do we promote the Forum, our centre and our activities – and how do we reach the wider community – including those people who do not have access to the internet?

Promotion

Website Over the past couple of years we have developed our www.whalleyrange.org community website which features current vacancies and opportunities for the Work Club, a 'What's on in and around Whalley Range' guide, Crime & Safety news, Mental Health & Wellbeing support, Age-friendly Whalley Range news - and the latest recycling/environmental news and consultations.

Twitter We use Twitter across all our projects - and follow likeminded and relevant organisations. As an example we follow and retweet posts from local NHS and CCG initiatives - these groups will then reciprocate by retweeting our events and news. Spending time researching contacts on Twitter with similar interests and asking if information can be printed and shared via noticeboards in HA's, GP surgeries, schools and other community centres is a way of reaching residents without computer access so they can still participate. The Twitter feed on our website means we can tweet out latest news, posters and links to our followers.

Newsletter and mailing list We also produce a bi-monthly newsletter which is printed out and distributed to local schools, faith groups, cafes and medical centres –an electronic copy features on our website and is circulated to our email lists, to promote news, training and community events in the area. At events we encourage residents to join our email list and share info across their networks: we currently have almost 600 people on the list.

Survey Monkey, Doodle Poll, QR Codes, Flickr, YouTube, Crowdfunding and word clouds...

As a steady progression we have used survey monkey to survey residents, doodle polls to arrange meetings, QR codes on posters to direct people to our websites and specific projects – and crowdfunding to raise funds for our annual festival.

Also a Flickr site and a YouTube channel to showcase our festivals and events, to share local community group videos – and our own videos.

Learning

I am really passionate about the role of digital champion; in 2011, I participated in some training and research with the University of Manchester called MOSI-ALONG - looking at the role of digital champions as stewards, directing people on their own digital path.

This training expanded my knowledge and passion to help others get online: using simple tools such as word clouds for posters, community reporting using flip cameras to film and upload short community films to our site for a history project.

Moving forward

our aim is to teach computing for beginners and improvers across all of our sessions and to become an online learning centre, encouraging the use of free online training tools and resources for our learners, staff and volunteers - such as digital champion training, Learn My Way, Doteveryone (Go ON UK) – and Google Garage – a useful resource for our work club!

We received a small grant and plan to use our new laptops to get people of all ages from the community to attend our classes - to learn and improve their online and digital skills, share and access information and to keep in touch to reduce isolation.

The possibilities are endless: family history projects, connecting with friends and families, using Google earth to 'visit' our old homes and places all over the world where family and friends have moved away to, for online shopping, to take up/revisit interests – and of course to meet physically at our centre with other people who are also ready to discover the vast range of information available online!

It is a fact of life that people now need basic computer skills to search for jobs and claim benefits, register to vote and access council services etc. Computers are expensive and a lot of residents cannot afford the luxury of a home PC and internet access. But libraries and community spaces are providing free access to computer classes and free basic training - and by attending classes supported by digital champions people can learn at their own pace and discover the joys and benefits of the world wide web!

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Twitter: <https://twitter.com/WhalleyRangeorg> **Flickr:** www.flickr.com/photos/whalleyrange/

www.whalleyrange.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/AFWR-Annual-Report-2016-Final.pdf

Crowdfunding: www.spacehive.com/WhalleyRangeHappyFeet@Celebrate

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Whalley-Range-Community-Forum-776031435835681/