

## Best Practice Model for Community Archive projects

A range of innovative community involvement projects led by West Yorkshire Archive Service have been the subject of a one year study of community-based online archive projects by the Community Access to Archives Project (CAAP). The CAAP team, based at The National Archives, has been investigating the practicalities of such projects, including issues relating to the development and maintenance of community relations, identifying audience need, funding and resource implications, language barriers, technical implementation of online resources and the evaluation of community projects. CAAP research has also provided vital information for the development of the funding bid for Linking Arms, a nationwide consortium project that aims to create a single gateway to online archive resources held both in formal repositories and by groups in the community, bringing together existing online resources and incorporating new ones. It is anticipated that this range of provision will add a rich array of new sources to the archival heritage and aid their sustainability, benefiting a wide range of traditional and new users.

In the simplest terms, community archives might be defined as collections of material that encapsulate a particular community's understanding of its history and identity. This will often be personal photographs, documents, ephemera and oral history - 'unofficial' records that might not normally be preserved, let alone widely available. The community itself might be geographically based, or relate to a cultural or thematic community of interest. For the communities involved, community archive projects offer a means to explore community identity and develop community cohesion and pride, and provide opportunities for capacity building, and learning and skills development. For mainstream archives, community involvement offers a mechanism for broadening audiences and combating social exclusion, developing mutual trust between the archives service and the community, and advising on the proper care of unique material. For everyone, they offer a chance to preserve and celebrate 'grassroots' heritage.

WYAS' expertise has been of particular value to CAAP because the service has developed such a rich variety of projects addressing community involvement from a range of angles, as illustrated by the following examples:

- The Archive Ambassadors project focuses on establishing approachable access points within local communities and building relationships with voluntary groups in the community. This project is setting up an outlet for the archive service in East Leeds run by volunteers, providing training opportunities, material, equipment and support.
- This is Our History is assisting diverse groups in areas of social exclusion within Bradford to produce their own digital community archives and, in the process, discover successful mechanisms for accessing and developing relationships with groups. The involvement of voluntary organisations such as Bradford Trident (regeneration agency) is seen as vital to community liaison and mediation.

- Now Then Dewsbury ([www.nowthen.org](http://www.nowthen.org)) was initially developed as a curriculum-based resource, using interactive maps to explore the history of Dewsbury through particular buildings in the town. However, the project is now enabling the wider Dewsbury community to contribute via the website, identifying and filling gaps in the archival record with their own records and making the site a focus for heritage recording in the Dewsbury area.

WYAS also provides an example of best practice in its interaction with Commanet community archive groups. Commanet ([www.commanet.org](http://www.commanet.org)), a not for profit organisation that promotes, supports and develops community archives, has developed simple database software that allows people with relatively little technical ability to store digitized images, documents, and sound and video clips and make their archive available on CD-Rom or via the Commanet website.

The CAAP Best Practice Model and Final Report will be available from October 2004, and will include details of case studies as well as fully investigated suggestions for funding streams for community archive projects. It is hoped that the Model will be adopted by other archival and heritage organisations to facilitate the development of community archive projects.

For more information on the Community Access to Archives Project please go to <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> or contact Frieda Midgley, Project Manager or Olivia Hayward, Press and Communications Officer, on 020 8392 5330 ext 2523, or email [caap@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:caap@nationalarchives.gov.uk)