

Breaking News



THE IRISH TIMES

DUBLIN

WEATHER

Dry but cloudy.
Temp between
6-11C

In the Newspaper

Daily

- [Front Page](#)
- [Ireland](#)
- [World](#)
- [Finance](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Letters](#)
- [Crossword](#)
- [Sudoku](#)
- [Article Index](#)

Daily PDFs

- [Front Page](#)
- [TV Listings](#)

Weekly Index

Tuesday

- [Health](#)
- [Education Today](#)

Wednesday

- [Motors](#)
- [An Teanga Bheo](#)
- [Commercial Property](#)

Thursday

- [Science Today](#)
- [Property](#)

Friday

- [The Ticket](#)

Saturday

- [Weekend](#)
- [News Features](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Magazine](#)

Weekly Article Index

MON | TUE | WED
THU | FRI | SAT

Archive Search

Ireland

Thu, Dec 15, 05

Internet course changes lives of asylum seekers

Lorna Siggins, Western Correspondent

Portuguese-speaking Angolans in Galway city and Brazilians in the south of the county have been connected through an innovative internet project at NUI Galway.

A cross-community training programme for refugees and asylum seekers is part of an initiative taken by the university's Digital Enterprise Research Institute. Active retirement and other community groups may also be able to use the programme's recycled computers.

The initiative has changed the lives of graduates such as Tess Kadesa from Kenya, Emma Chuwa from South Africa and Maria Fatima from Angola.

All three live with other refugees and asylum seekers at the Eglinton Hotel, Salthill, and experienced extreme isolation and loneliness on arriving in Ireland.

The six-month programme with the research institute helped them to develop their computer skills and to establish their own websites. "Some of us had never talked to each other before, but this has allowed us to communicate with each other, with family back home, to draw down information and to feel a part of society," Ms Kadesa and Ms Chuwa told The Irish Times.

Ms Fatima will now be working with institute staff to train members of the substantial Brazilian community in Gort, Co Galway. "It has been such a positive catalyst for change," said Brendan Walsh of the institute at an awards ceremony yesterday.

"Part of the plan involved contacting Galway businesses and asking them to donate outdated computers which could be recycled for school and community use. We had an enormously positive response and as a result we have eight computers for asylum seekers at the Eglinton Hotel, which will be linked to broadband in the new year."

The programme has been developed in partnership with the Galway Centre for Independent Living, which has provided the use of its own computer centre and transport for participants.

Over the past three months, research institute staff have given internet



courses to more than 160 people and have begun a series of blogging courses. One of the beneficiaries has been Mayor of Galway Brian Walsh, who has set up his own blog (www.brianwalsh.2005.blogspot.com).

At yesterday's ceremony, Galway councillors were also invited by the research institute to devote two hours to training and become the first fully "online" local authority in the State.

Some 40 Galway city and county schools have been working separately with the institute to develop their own easy-to-use websites, which pupils can update directly.

Digital Enterprise Research Institute is the largest research organisation in the world developing the next generation of internet technology and is funded by Science Foundation Ireland.

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[back to top](#)

Special Reports
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