

Swinburne University of Technology  
Institute for Social Research

## Industry Report 1

# Introducing Reach for the Clouds

2003



SWIN  
BUR  
NE

INSTITUTE  
FOR SOCIAL  
RESEARCH

The Wired High Rise research project is studying the social impact of a ‘wired community’ established in Atherton Gardens, a low-income inner city high-rise public housing estate in Fitzroy, Victoria. This is the first in a series of detailed new analyses of information technology skills, the impact on families and communities of access to computers and computer networks, and subsequent patterns of use. The study is breaking new ground by exploring the impact of a new computer network on an ethnically diverse low-income population, concentrated in the one inner-city site. It will provide a fund of information that is directly relevant to the social policy concerns of local, State and Commonwealth government agencies.

The project is funded by the Australian Research Council’s Strategic Partnerships with Industry – Research and Training Scheme. It is a partnership between: (i) the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University of Technology; (ii) the InfoXchange, a non-profit Internet Service Provider and web developer; (iii) the Office of Housing, the Victorian Government’s public housing authority located within the Department of Human Services; and (iv) the Primary Health Branch of the Department of Human Services.

**Wired High Rise research team:**

Dr Denise Meredyth  
Dr Julian Thomas  
Scott Ewing  
Dr Liza Hopkins  
Alison Jarman  
Associate Professor David Hayward

**Contact: [wired@swin.edu.au](mailto:wired@swin.edu.au)**

**Web address: <http://www.sisr.net/wiredhighrise>**

## CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 THE REACH FOR THE CLOUDS PROJECT</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Aims of Reach for the Clouds	2
1.2 Progress in establishing the network	3
<b>2 EVALUATING THE NETWORK</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Our aims and objectives	5
2.2 Stages of research	5
<b>3 CONCEPTUAL AND POLICY ISSUES</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 The digital divide and information poverty	7
3.2 The social consequences of computer access	7
<b>4 THE SOCIAL SETTING</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 The Atherton Gardens estate	11
4.2 Developing a profile of residents	12
4.3 Atherton Gardens in brief	14
<b>5 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>6 SELECTED FURTHER READING</b>	<b>18</b>

## **TABLES and FIGURES**

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Reach for the Clouds: the timeline to date</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Table 2</b>	<b>The research and evaluation timeline</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Table 3</b>	<b>Examples of social capital at Atherton Gardens</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Table 4</b>	<b>Networked social capital at Atherton Gardens: hypothetical examples</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Table 5</b>	<b>Age of respondent, 2002</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Table 6</b>	<b>Household type, survey and census comparison</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Figure 1</b>	<b>Length of residence on the estate, 2002</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Table 7</b>	<b>Country of Birth of Respondent, 2002</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Table 5</b>	<b>Language spoken at home, survey and census comparison</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Table 6</b>	<b>Religious affiliation, 2001</b>	<b>17</b>

## **Introduction**

This report is the first in a series examining an innovative social enterprise called Reach for the Clouds (RFTC). RFTC is an initiative of InfoXchange, a not for profit Internet Service Provider and web developer. It entails establishing a 'wired community' in Atherton Gardens, a high rise public housing estate in Fitzroy, Melbourne.

Our research aims to gauge the benefits of the RFTC network. We are concerned with understanding its contribution to promoting social and economic participation, building community, and enhancing the social capital of Atherton Gardens.

The research has been funded through the Australian Research Council's Linkage programme, in partnership with InfoXchange, the Office of Housing, and the Community Health Branch of the Department of Human Services.

This first report provides a concise account of the RFTC project, its social setting, and our research. We begin with the aims and context of RFTC, and describe progress on rolling out the network to date. We then outline how our own research and evaluation will proceed, before explaining our approach to two of the key problems RFTC aims to redress: the digital divide and social exclusion. Finally we describe in more detail the characteristics of the Atherton Gardens population.

Our second report, released simultaneously with this one, is concerned with our initial 2002 resident survey, providing a detailed baseline against which we can judge the future impact of the RFTC network. Our third and fourth reports, which will be published in 2004, will examine the distinctive organisational features of RFTC, and compare the results of a subsequent survey with the 2002 outcomes.

## **1 The Reach for the Clouds project**

InfoXchange is the primary agency involved in RFTC, in collaboration with local and state government departments (Department of Human Services, City of Yarra), private companies (Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard) and not for profit agencies (Brotherhood of St Laurence, Outreach Victoria, Jesuit Social Services).

Beginning life in 1988 as an on-line coordination system for emergency accommodation, InfoXchange has since expanded its activities, in line with its mission to 'use technology for social justice', to encompass a complete range of technology services for community agencies. They have also established a fully searchable community support services database and run a weekly Infocast of material relevant to health and welfare workers across Australia.

InfoXchange developed its digital divide strategy during the latter half of the 1990s. In 1996 it successfully secured state government support to install publicly accessible internet connected computers on several high rise housing estates in Melbourne. During 1998 and 1999 InfoXchange began developing a more ambitious initiative to provide computers in public housing residents' homes. The impetus for this came

both from residents who wanted internet access at home, having already utilised public access points, as well as large numbers of internet-ready computers being made available for recycling as a result of the Y2K bug.

The project involves offering to install a free refurbished computer in each willing household on the Atherton Gardens estate in Fitzroy, and connecting them to a community Intranet. The computers have word processing, database and spreadsheet software installed, will be upgraded and maintained, and will be fully capable of accessing the Atherton Gardens network. These computers are typically end of lease machines donated by government and business. They have been refurbished through the Green PC scheme, another project devised by InfoXchange, and partially funded by the Community Jobs Program. Green PC trains long-term unemployed people to undertake the renovation and refurbishment of discarded computers. They are then sold at low cost to community groups and individuals.

The RFTC project will provide households in Atherton Gardens with one of these free refurbished computers, with a broadband connection to a local intranet and the option of low-cost Internet access. Access to the Atherton intranet and email will be free, following a \$5 registration fee. The network server will allow the storage of a wide range of information provided by partner agencies. A number of community agencies, including Outreach Victoria, the North Yarra Community Health Centre, the Fitzroy Learning Network and the City of Yarra are potential content providers, as are State and Commonwealth agencies. It is intended that ultimately the network will be owned and operated by residents.

Residents of the estate have access to extensive training and support, which is free of charge during the set-up phase. Twenty-four-hour access with support will be available. Initially, the aim was to draw on the labour of residents, in association with Work for the Dole programs run by Recruitnet and co-ordinated by Outreach Victoria. The project has provided a computer room with additional equipment such as zip drives and printers. This is available to tenants between 9am and 5pm on weekdays, with additional training sessions and access from 5:30 – 7pm. Residents are also offered training in computer and internet skills, through the involvement of volunteers, including some from the estate itself.

The initiative has been developed in collaboration with the Atherton Gardens Residents Association (AGRA) and local community groups. The project will make special provision for people with disabilities and people from language backgrounds other than English.

Expected benefits for the resident community include: improved access to services from government and other agencies; increased computer skills and literacy; facilitation of access to employment, education and training; potential for development of online community enterprises; and greater access to information and communication, around which community building activities can take place.

### **1.1 Aims of Reach for the Clouds**

According to the earliest formal outline of the project, a Project Implementation Document (PID) produced by InfoXchange in November 2000, the longer-term aim of RFTC was to develop a self-funded, tenant-focused and managed computer

network on the Atherton Gardens estate within two years. InfoXchange's stated aim in that document was to enable the resident-run network to become self-sustaining and at that point to hand over maintenance and ownership of the network to residents. Sustainability, the document noted, depended on many factors, including a sufficient take-up rate on the estate, developing community enterprises online, and continued funding and support from the various stakeholders in the project.

## **1.2 Progress in establishing the network**

The idea for RFTC grew out of a previous collaboration between InfoXchange and the Office of Housing establishing a computer centre on a housing estate. By 1999 a proposal had been developed requesting \$20,000 from Multimedia Victoria to prepare a PID.

Atherton Gardens was chosen as the site for the project as the estate was to be wired as part of an electronic concierge initiative, which was later moved to the Collingwood estate. Multimedia Victoria provided \$10,000 for the PID, which canvassed the various options for creating a network on the estate and estimated the first year cost of the project to be \$677,000 of which around \$250,000 would be the cost of wiring the buildings.

In March 2001 the Office of Housing agreed to fund the wiring and a contract was awarded in September 2001. By early 2002 the initial wiring work was completed.

Computer training for residents began in August 2001 and the first computer was given to a resident at a ceremony in the community centre in November. Resident training continued throughout 2002 and into 2003.

Three year funding for operational costs was secured from the Community Support Fund in June 2002 and an official launch held on the estate on 23 June.

At the time of writing, in early February 2003, 382 RFTC computers have been distributed to Atherton Gardens residents, and 361 residents have attended the training programs, including some who have been trained as trainers for other residents. The network is operational in one tower and connection of the towers (which was not part of the original wiring work) should be completed by mid-February.

Meetings to launch particular stages of the project (for example the handing over of the first computer to a resident) or provide updates on the project have been well attended and provide a useful indicator of the appeal of the project for residents.

**Table 1 Reach for the Clouds: the timeline to date**

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>The planning process</b>	<b>Milestones</b>
1999 <i>December</i>	Funding (\$20,000) sought from Multimedia Victoria (MMV)	
2000  <i>July</i> <i>November</i>	MMV agrees to provide \$10,000 for Project Initiation Document (PID) Applications submitted to Community Jobs Program (CJP) and BYTE First meeting of RFTC Steering Committee PID completed	
2001 <i>March</i> <i>May</i>  <i>July</i>  <i>August</i>  <i>November</i>	Commitment by Office of Housing to support the project  Community Support Fund (CSF) agrees to provide \$10,000 to develop another funding application  Application for CSF funding submitted	Green PC launch First training group begins BYTE training commences Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard committed to hardware donations  First training group finishes Wiring contract put out to tender First PCs distributed Wiring commences
2002 <i>February</i> <i>March</i>  <i>May</i>  <i>June</i>  <i>December</i>	First meeting of tenant's intranet working group Office of Housing provides \$55,000 in bridging funding Recurrent funding from CSF secured (\$830,000 over 3 years) Project Coordinator departs RFTC and e-ACE launch (June 23) Steering Committee phased out, and replaced by e-ACE reference group New Project Coordinator appointed	Wiring of buildings completed
<b>2003</b>		Wiring between buildings to be completed Network up and running

## **2 Evaluating the network**

### **2.1 Our aims and objectives**

The aim of the Wired High Rise research project is to conduct an independent evaluation of RFTC. Our objectives are:

1. To study the impact of free domestic access to computers and the RFTC network on a low-income high-rise residential community;
2. To identify ways in which RFTC may enable low-income communities to use new technologies for their own economic and social benefit;
3. To assess the extent to which the RFTC network enables service providers to tailor services more directly and effectively to meet client needs.
4. To investigate the implications of the RFTC network for broader debates in information and social policy.

### **2.2 Stages of research**

The research has been divided into four stages:

1. Contextual research on the rationales, aims and expectations informing RFTC, in the context of debates on social policy, social partnerships, information poverty, the digital divide, community-building and social capital. This involves interviews with participants and stakeholders in the RFTC project, attendance at InfoXchange and residents' meetings and a continuing literature review.
2. Research on the social composition of the Atherton Gardens estate before the establishment of the computer network. This involves focus groups with residents, interviews with workers on the estate and a survey of residents, involving face-to-face interviews using translators and designed to be repeated in two years' time, when the network is well established. A control group for the survey has been established on the Collingwood estate.
3. Interviews with households on the estate on how they are using the computers and computer network, and the collection of data on patterns of use, drawn from the Atherton Gardens server. Follow-up survey designed to track residents' changing patterns of computer use, linked to social indicators. Follow-up interviews with project participants and stakeholders indicating the extent to which the initiative has met expectations.
4. Evaluation of the impact of the Atherton Gardens computer network on residents' ability to seek information, to communicate with others and to make use of social services, including housing and primary health services.

The research is currently at the end of the second stage. Interviews, literature reviews, focus groups and the first survey have all been completed. This has provided the basis for the longer-term evaluation of the social impact of the network.

We have adapted our research program to take into account the changing timeline for the RFTC network roll out.

**Table 2 The research and evaluation timeline**

<p><i>2001</i> Stage 1</p> <p>Stage 2</p>	<p>Literature reviews on wired community, social capital, the digital divide and information poverty Collation of Office of Housing and ABS secondary data on Atherton Gardens and residents Establishment of steering committee Discussion with residents' association Conduct of focus groups Attendance at residents' meetings Conference presentations and refereed articles</p>
<p><i>2002</i></p>	<p>Development and piloting of survey instrument Focus groups with participants, help-desk staff, trainers and new participants Interviews with trainers and help-desk staff Survey of Atherton Gardens tenants and Collingwood control group Development of model for monthly reports on usage, derived from server data Conference presentations, refereed articles and drafting of industry reports 1 and 2</p>
<p><i>2003</i> Stage 3</p>	<p>Collation and analysis of monthly reports on network use; Analysis of aggregated data from online activity passed on to researchers by InfoXchange Interviews with households Circulation of draft of industry report 3</p>
<p><i>2004</i> Stage 4</p>	<p>Follow-up survey of residents and control group to measure impact Focus groups with residents, help-desk staff, trainers and new participants Conference papers, refereed articles and industry reports 3 and 4</p>

### **3 Conceptual and policy issues**

Turning to the intellectual context for the project, two critical issues lie behind the RFTC initiative: how governments and communities can or should respond to the emerging problem of the digital divide; and how electronic networks may help reduce social exclusion by facilitating communication and participation.

#### **3.1 The digital divide and information poverty**

In Australia as elsewhere, there are disparities in access to information and communication technologies: this is the problem referred to as the digital divide. There is no doubt that personal computers and Internet connections have become more affordable in recent years, and previously marginalised groups are rapidly gaining Internet access at home. However, educated urban and high-income individuals are still the group most likely to have access to computers and the Internet. Those in isolated and rural areas are likely to have lower rates of access, as are indigenous people and those with little English or poor literacy. Other disparities in technology access and use are related to gender, occupation, family type and disability.

According to the ABS, in 2000 only 24 per cent of Australian households earning less than \$25,000 had a computer at home while only 10 per cent had home access to the internet. This disparity is exacerbated for adults by the impact of work. Only 14 per cent of those earning less than \$40,000 were able to access the internet at work, compared to 48 per cent earning \$40,000 to less than \$80,000 and 68 per cent of those earning \$80,000 or more.

Recent research and policy documents identify access to computers and connectivity in home and school as critical to information technology skills, school performance and life chances. The context for this is that ICTs are seen as key learning resources for school students, and the cost of providing them is increasingly being pushed onto individual families. School-aged children appear to be educationally disadvantaged by lack of access to both computers and Internet connections in the home. Households with low incomes and in the most disadvantaged areas are less likely to have computer access, as are one-parent households. Home owners appear to be more likely to own computers and have internet access than are private renters or those in public housing.

The link between education, social exclusion and information poverty is also important due to the increasing use of online services by government, community and business agencies. Consumers and citizens are now encouraged to bank, manage tax and find social services online, but many are either unable or reluctant to do so. For many, low levels of literacy and English-speaking ability remain barriers.

#### **3.2 The social consequences of computer access**

Existing research offers some evidence that computer use and connectivity can reduce social isolation and address social needs. The internet, chat groups and email can assist in forming communities of interest and in helping socially isolated people to find support and resources. They may help to sustain contact between individuals,

groups and families separated by distance and migration. They may also atomise communities, by promoting interaction with screens rather than face-to-face contact or civic participation. One way to interpret such patterns is in terms of the relationship between communication technologies, social connection, community-building and social capital.

Communication plays a primary role in the maintenance of social networks. In recent years, as local governments, commercial developers and others have invested in creating local networks and ‘virtual cities’ (Web-based versions of place-based communities), increasing attention has been paid to the creation and effects of online communities. The question is whether virtual communities enhance and extend ‘real’ ones. The existing research suggests that successful online communities tend to build on existing patterns of social contact. Without pre-existing face-to-face contact, online communication may not engender high levels of trust, honesty and responsibility, though it can create communities strongly linked by interest. This means that it is important to understand the patterns of social interaction that pre-exist the establishment of the network or online community.

The starting point for many social researchers is Putnam’s concept of social capital as the ‘features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’. According to this model, communities become prosperous and successful where people are civic minded: when they bond with others outside the family, know their neighbours, volunteer and inform themselves about politics. This has informed various empirical assessments of the effectiveness of community development programs by organisations ranging from the World Bank to the Australian Institute of Family Studies. By incorporating indicators developed by other field researchers (Bullen and Onyx, 1999; Stone and Hughes, 2001; ABS 2000), we hope to make WHR comparable with other projects. It is possible to adapt models used to assess levels of social capital in a particular place, using indices such as the following, derived from existing and comparable projects:

- Social networks and support structures;
- Economic and civic participation;
- Participation in education and learning;
- Employment and job seeking activities;
- Involvement in local activities;
- Awareness of political and public affairs;
- Trust and tolerance.

Social capital research in Australia has generally concentrated on largely positive interactions in small, culturally homogeneous rural towns or urban districts. Community is understood as a geographically co-located group using shared facilities (schools, hospitals, parks), participating in the same political process (local council area) and sharing an interest in local issues and amenities. However, communities can be understood more pluralistically, as groups of individuals linked by shared interests and concerns. These groups are not limited to place: they can co-exist and are not mutually exclusive. They may be more or less exclusive, allowing individuals to enter and exit identifications and affiliations. Within such groups, there may be different kinds of social exchange and different dimensions of membership.

The difficulty is to distinguish between the shared interests that bind narrow and exclusive groupings based on loyalty to kith and kin from those that foster the general good. The literature makes a useful distinction between ‘bonding’ capital (or strong ties within small groups) and ‘bridging’ capital (or weak relationships between numerous people). Bonding social capital, built up in small, tightly knit groups, can be of direct day-to-day value to members. Bridging social capital, held by more loosely aligned groups, offers members access to resources beyond their immediate social circle.

Combining this distinction with that between informal and formal ties, we can start to map different kinds of associations and social resources on the estate. Atherton Gardens residents cannot be regarded as part of a single ‘community’, but as a complex set of associations. People and households are linked in different ways: by language, by gender, by faith and recreational interest. Many of these groups show high levels of bonding capital. Bridging does take place between groups, but there is limited communication.

**Table 3 Examples of social capital at Atherton Gardens**

	<b>Informal relationships</b>	<b>Formal relationships</b>
<b>Bridging</b>	Community gardening Sausage sizzles Conversations about children, childcare etc Meeting in the shop, community centre, lift or lobby Participating in others' customs e.g. Chinese New year celebrations Putting or answering notices in foyer	AGRA Training activities Jesuit Social Services-organised excursions Community art projects Library group Interactions with social services Relations with local schools Relations with local library
<b>Bonding</b>	Shared meals. Shared shopping trips. Speaking to neighbours Shared religious observance	Language classes Language and ethnicity-based associations e.g. Fitzroy Chinese Residents Association and Mandarin Social Support Group Vietnamese Mothers Support Group Faith-based groupings

It is possible to adapt this matrix to the pattern of online communication and exchange that we expect the network may engender. Potential uses of the computer network are set out below.

**Table 4 Networked social capital at Atherton Gardens: hypothetical examples**

	<b>Informal relationships</b>	<b>Formal relationships</b>
<b>Bridging</b>	Atherton Gardens newsgroups, web pages, email lists Online games	The Atherton Gardens Network: Management, operation and organisation Online employment and educational services
<b>Bonding</b>	Instant messaging Email Family home pages	Language and ethnicity-based newsgroups, web pages Online community services, government information

## 4 The social setting

In this section we describe in more detail the setting for RFTC. An understanding of the problems of the estate and its complex social profile is essential to any assessment of the future outcomes of the RFTC network.

### 4.1 The Atherton Gardens estate

Atherton Gardens consists of four twenty storey tower blocks, with ten flats on each floor, comprising a total of 800 dwellings, housing some 2000 individuals. While a significant minority of residents on the estate have arrived in Australia from Vietnam and speak Vietnamese as their preferred language (~40%), residents belong to more than 30 different language groups and come from countries as diverse as Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, Spain, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Chile, China, Laos, the Philippines, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Less than 30 per cent of residents were born in Australia.

Located in the inner city suburb of Fitzroy, the estate has good access to public transport, major retail, entertainment, education and employment centres and is in the centre of the largest cluster of welfare and community agencies in Melbourne. Originally constructed as part of Melbourne's slum clearance program, the estate has become increasingly differentiated from its surrounds as Fitzroy has gentrified.

Social problems facing Atherton Gardens in particular, and high rise estates in general, are widely understood. A report prepared by Jesuit Social Services in 2000, before the commencement of the research, noted that at that time the Atherton Gardens estate had a reputation for being a centre of crime, drug use and domestic violence; a reputation fed by tabloid profiles. As pointed out in a report undertaken by Ecumenical Housing in 2001, this situation is common to a greater or lesser degree to all high-rise estates. The report identified residents' concerns including the following:

- Negative community attitudes;
- Tenants feeling like second class citizens;
- Constantly being confronted by anti-social behaviour;
- Easy access by outsiders to common areas;
- Breakdown of social interaction among residents.

In the last few years, governments have directed considerable resources towards the renovation of public housing estates, both in Victoria and in other states. Through its Neighbourhood Renewal program the Victorian Office of Housing has been very active on the estate. These activities have included:

- Improving security with a 24 hour guard booth in each tower;
- The establishment of Neighbourhood Advisory Board comprising resident and agency representatives. This board will influence the distribution of funding and services to the estate and develop a Community Plan, which will become a blueprint for service delivery and physical planning on the estate;
- A capital improvement project, including comprehensive internal housing upgrades. A range of options is being discussed with the community including

providing new landscaped areas, security and recreational facilities within a significantly improved living environment;

- Introduction of tower based management, which has the potential to provide residents with employment opportunities in cleaning and maintenance.

The RFTC project is considered by the Office of Housing to be an important component of the Fitzroy Atherton Gardens Neighbourhood Renewal Project.

Currently, the community centre on the estate acts as a hub for activities. AGRA runs the community room, and is affiliated with a number of language and ethnic groups. Understandably, though, the office bearers tend to be English speaking residents who have lived on the estate for a long time. Much of the activity that takes place in the community centre is facilitated by a community development worker, Rosalind Vincent, who is employed as part of the Jesuit Social Services 'Communities Together' program.

#### **4.2 Developing a profile of residents**

There are limits to how much is known about life on the Atherton Gardens estate, or about the social profile of the residents. Some information is available through census data. At the last census, two collector districts (the smallest areas for which aggregated data is available) were exclusively based on Atherton Gardens, providing information on some 882 residents (roughly half the population). The rest of the estate is included in collector districts that are not exclusively the estate. The information from the two Atherton Gardens' collector districts is valuable in its own right and also as a means to verify the results from our own survey.

The Office of Housing has also been able to provide data on households. It is difficult to find accurate and current information, however, given the rapid turnover of tenancies on the estate and the range of languages spoken. Tenants may also be reluctant to provide information to authorities or researchers. In this instance, the Atherton Gardens tenants have been extremely co-operative, for which we are very grateful. Key factors here may have been the goodwill associated with the RFTC initiative, the support of community workers and of the tenants' association, and the role of translators in focus groups and interviews.

In late 2001, the study team in conjunction with Project Partnerships, a private consultancy firm, held a series of focus groups with residents from the high rise public housing estates in Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond. We chose to talk to groups who were already meeting on the estate including the Mandarin Social Support Group, the Elderly Chinese Residents Group and the Vietnamese Mothers Support Group. The focus groups indicated that at that time, only limited mixing took place on all the estates between members of different language or ethnic groups. Drawing on tenants' own perceptions of the patterns of social association on the estate, we developed the social capital matrix outlined above and adapted it into social indicators built into the major survey.

The survey was designed to provide the study with baseline data which could help us to quantify the social impact of the RFTC project. Given the language and literacy

issues it was decided to use face-to-face interviews to administer the survey. The questionnaire developed for the major survey (included as an appendix to Industry Report 2) covered the following topics:

- Basic household demographic information;
- Current media and technology consumption;
- Labour market and education information;
- Patterns of communication with family and friends;
- Involvement in groups and activities on and off the estate;
- Attitude to living on the estate including relationship with other residents.

The questionnaire was designed to be completed by one member of each household with the respondent answering questions about themselves, other individuals in the household and the household itself. A control estate was chosen (Collingwood) to provide a basis for comparison.

The survey was undertaken over six weeks starting 27 May 2002. Interviewers who could speak Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Macedonian Turkish and Arabic were employed to administer the survey. This left a number of languages spoken on the estate not covered, including Spanish, Laotian, Khmer, Somali, Dutch, Greek, Afrikaans, Dari, Polish, Russian, Farsi and sign language. One of the computer training rooms on the estate was used to conduct interviews with residents, with some residents preferring to be interviewed in their homes. Interviews were generally arranged during daylight hours.

Two hundred and sixty-nine households were contacted, with around 70 declining to be interviewed, resulting in a total of 199 responses. The response rate to the questions was high: 74% for those households contacted. Most respondents answered most of the questions (respondents were advised by the interviewers that they could choose not to answer any or all questions). The only questions not commonly answered were those regarding personal income level and personal health. Some of the respondents were also reluctant to provide details about computer use by other members of their household.

In terms of ethnicity our sample broadly accords with the Office of Housing's record of the population as a whole. Although we did not have interpreters for all of the languages spoken on the estate the sample did include people born in 31 different countries. Some bias in the results is to be expected, however. Respondents were mostly female (62.3%) which is to be expected given the large proportion of female headed households on the estate and the time of day that most interviews took place.

It is also likely that the respondents in this survey have a higher rate of computer use and knowledge than the population of the estate generally. Willingness to participate in the survey at Atherton Gardens was certainly affected by involvement with RFTC. The response rate slowed dramatically after the list of contacts provided by InfoXchange had been exhausted. This was also an issue in the control group survey on the Collingwood estate, where no project like RFTC is being implemented. To provide an incentive to participate in this survey, it was decided to arrange a raffle draw offering a chance to win one of three refurbished computers from Green PC. This produced a bias in the composition of the control group, favouring those who

already had some experience with computers and hoped to obtain one through this process.

Nevertheless, we are confident that together, our observations, focus groups and survey assist us to develop a social profile of Atherton Gardens residents.

### 4.3 Atherton Gardens in brief

Most Atherton Gardens residents have low incomes. 58% of survey respondents are from households living on less than \$20,000 p.a., while about a quarter (27%) live on less than \$10,000 p.a. This accords with our census data for the estate that shows a median household income of between \$15,000 and \$20,000

#### 4.3.1 Age

As would be expected, most respondents are in the middle age cohorts.

**Table 5 Age of respondent, 2002**

Age cohort	No	%
0-14	1	0.5
15-19	5	2.5
20-24	9	4.5
25-34	43	21.6
35-49	73	36.7
50-64	42	21.1
65-74	17	8.5
75-84	2	1.0
85+	1	0.5
Not stated	6	3.0
Total	199	100.0

Source: ISR unpublished data

A third of households interviewed were sole parent families, with a quarter of respondents living alone. Respondents living alone were mostly working age adults with few under 24 (5 or 10%) and six older than 65 years. Nearly half of the households interviewed had children (48.3%). A comparison with census results shows that our sample may under represent lone person households (30.2% from census). From the census the median age of residents on the estate is 30.

**Table 6 Household type, survey and census comparison**

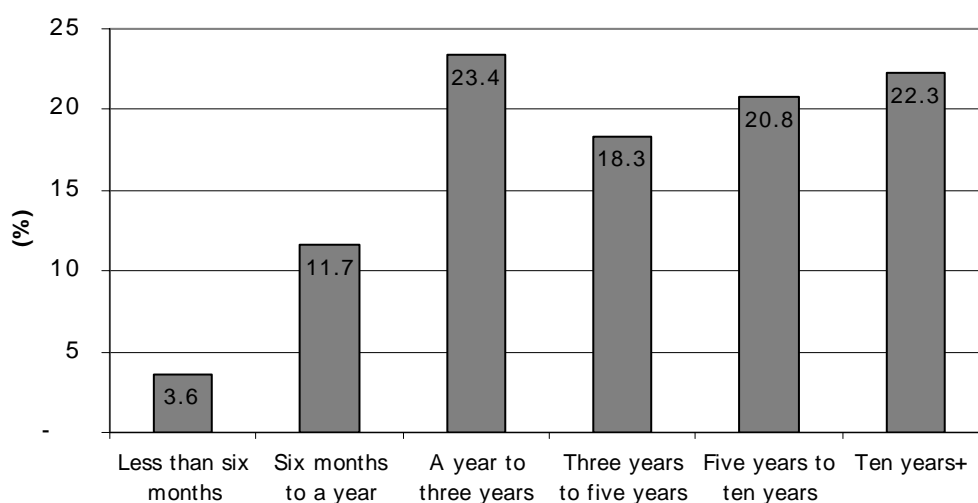
	Survey		Census
	No	%	%
Couple only	30	15.1	12.8
Couple with children	29	14.6	17.3
Sole parent	67	33.7	32.8
Lone person	51	25.6	29.6
Group household	8	4.0	4.8
Related household	14	7.0	2.7
Total	199	100.0	100.0

Source: ISR unpublished data and ABS, Census 2001

#### 4.3.2 Length of residence

Figure 1 shows that most households (57%) have lived at Atherton Gardens for less than five years with over fifteen per cent less than a year. These figures were consistent with the census (though not directly comparable as the census figures are for individuals not households).

**Figure 1 Length of residence on the estate, 2002**



Source: ISR unpublished data

#### 4.3.3 Country of birth

Residents on the estate include people born in at least thirty one different countries. Comparing country of birth of respondent (Table 7) with that of all residents in our census data shows that our sample is representative of the various ethnic groups although it under represents the Turkish population.

**Table 7 Country of Birth of Respondent, 2002**

	No.	%		No.	%
Vietnam	87	43.7	England	1	0.5
Australia	25	12.6	Scotland	1	0.5
China	23	11.6	Greece	1	0.5
Macedonia	11	5.5	Belgium	1	0.5
Eritrea	9	4.5	Cambodia	1	0.5
Malaysia	4	2.0	Croatia	1	0.5
Ethiopia	3	1.5	Holland	1	0.5
Somalia	3	1.5	Krani	1	0.5
Turkey	3	1.5	Laos	1	0.5
Yugoslavia	3	1.5	Lebanon	1	0.5
Chile	2	1.0	Morocco	1	0.5
Hong Kong	2	1.0	Nauru	1	0.5
India	2	1.0	New Zealand	1	0.5
Iraq	2	1.0	Romania	1	0.5
Pakistan	2	1.0	Samoa	1	0.5
Philippines	2	1.0	Didn't answer	1	0.5
			<b>Total</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: ISR unpublished data

Just under half of the respondents to our survey said they spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all'. This is consistent with census data.

Residents see themselves as belonging to small, generally ethnically based community groups such as the Cantonese speaking group or the Turkish group.

#### 4.3.4 Language spoken at home

Table 5 compares the language spoken at home of our sample and that of the two Atherton Gardens census collector districts. Whilst almost forty per cent of those in our sample spoke Vietnamese at home, under thirty five percent of those in the census area did. Turkish speakers were under-represented in our sample (1.2% compared to 7.7% in the census data). Overall our sample accords well with the census information in terms of languages spoken at home.

**Table 5 Language spoken at home, survey and census comparison**

	Survey		Census
	%	%	%
English only	63	15.0	13.0
Chinese languages	83	19.8	23.4
Arabic	27	6.4	2.7
Vietnamese	166	39.6	34.4
Turkish	5	1.2	7.7
Macedonian	23	5.5	2.1
Other	52	12.4	16.7
Total	419	100.0	100.0

Source: ISR unpublished data and ABS, Census 2001

#### 4.3.5 Religion

In some respects, residents are linked by religion as well as, or perhaps in spite of, country of origin or language spoken. Results from the survey indicate high rates of participation and active involvement in local places of Christian, Buddhist and Muslim worship. From the census, Buddhism is the nominated religion for 36.2% of residents followed by Christianity (29.0%) and Islam (17.2%).

**Table 6 Religious affiliation, 2001**

Religion	No.	
Buddhism	266	36.2%
Christianity	213	29.0%
Islam	126	17.2%
No religion	107	14.6%
Other Religions:	19	2.6%
Hinduism	3	0.4%
Total	734	100.0%

Source: ABS, Census 2001

## 5 Conclusion

This first report has provided an introduction to the RFTC project and a profile of Atherton Gardens residents, drawing on sources including the Office of Housing, ABS data and our own research. In the second report, we provide more detail on the impact and possible outcomes of the RFTC network, offering working hypotheses which will be pursued in the follow-up survey.

## 6 Selected further reading

### 6.1 Publications from the Wired High Rise research project

1. Meredyth, D., Hopkins, L., Ewing, S. and Thomas, J. (2002) 'Measuring social capital in a networked housing estate', *First Monday*, vol. 7, no.10. Accessed February 12, 2003 at: <http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue710/meredyth/index.html>
2. Hopkins, L., Thomas, J., Meredyth, D. and Ewing, S. (in submission) 'Social capital and community building through an electronic network', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*.
3. Meredyth, D., Hopkins, L., Ewing, S. and Thomas, J. 'Wired High Rise: Using technology to combat social isolation on an inner city public housing estate', in Stewart Marshall, Wal Taylor, and Xinghuo Yu (eds.) *Using Community Informatics to Transform Regions* (in press).
4. Hopkins, L. (2001) 'What is social capital?', Swinburne University Institute for Social Research, *ISR Working Paper no 2*, accessed February 12, 2003 at: [http://www.sisr.net/publications/workingpapers/No2\\_LH\\_final.PDF](http://www.sisr.net/publications/workingpapers/No2_LH_final.PDF)
5. Ewing, S., Hayward, D., Hopkins, L. and Thomas, J. (2003) 'The new social policy and the digital age: a case study of a wired high rise public housing estate', *Just Policy* (in press).
6. Hopkins, L. (2003) 'Social capital in multiethnic communities: a case study from three inner urban high rise public housing estates', *Journal of Intercultural Studies* (in submission).
7. Meredyth, D., Thomas, J., Ewing, S. and Hopkins, L., 'Machinery and Community: The Atherton Gardens Community Network Experiment', *Southern Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, February 2003 (in press).
8. Meredyth, D. and Thomas, J. 'Digital Divides: Framing the issues', *Southern Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, February 2003 (in press).

### 6.2 Atherton Gardens and Melbourne housing estates

1. Guinness, C. (2000) *Assessment of the service needs of low income families: Collingwood and Fitzroy Housing Estates*, Jesuit Social Services, accessed February 12, 2003 at: <http://www.jss.org.au/reports/cgdoc.pdf>
2. McNelis, S. and Reynolds, A. (2001) *Creating Better Futures for Residents of High-Rise Public Housing in Melbourne*, Melbourne: Ecumenical Housing Inc.
3. McClaren, J. and Zappalà, G. (2002) 'The 'Digital Divide' Among Financially Disadvantaged Families in Australia', *First Monday*, vol. 7, no. 11. Accessed February 12 2003, at: [http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue7\\_11/mclaren/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_11/mclaren/index.html)

### 6.3 Digital divide

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 8146.0 (2000) *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia*.
2. National Office for the Information Economy (2000) *Second Progress Report Strategic Framework For The Information Economy Action Plans*, Canberra:

NOIE, May 2000. Accessed February 12, 2003 at:

[http://www.noie.gov.au/projects/framework/reports/May2000\\_update.htm](http://www.noie.gov.au/projects/framework/reports/May2000_update.htm)

3. Norris, P. (2001) *Digital divide: civic engagement, information poverty and the internet in democratic societies*, Cambridge: CUP.
4. Compaigne, B. (ed.) (2001) *Digital divide: facing a crisis or creating a myth?*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

#### **6.4 Social capital**

1. Granovetter, M. (1973) 'The strength of weak ties'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (6), 1360-1380.
2. Woolcock, M. (1998) 'Social capital and economic development: towards a theoretical synthesis and policy framework', *Theory and Society*, 27 (2), 151-208.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000) 'Measuring Social Capital: Current Collections and Future Directions', ABS Social Capital Theme Page Discussion Paper. Accessed February 12, 2003 at:  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3110122.NSF/4a255eef008309e44a255eef00061e57/6cd8b1f3f270566aca25699f0015a02a!OpenDocument>
4. World Bank (1998) 'The Initiative on Defining, Monitoring and Measuring Social Capital', Social Capital Initiative Working Paper No. 1. Accessed February 12, 2003 at:  
<http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/wkrppr/sciwp1.pdf>
5. Stone, W. and Hughes, J. (2001) 'The Nature and Distribution of Social Capital: Initial Findings of the *Families, Social Capital & Citizenship Survey*'. Accessed February 12, 2003 at:  
<http://www.aifs.org.au/institute/pubs/papers/stone3.html>

#### **6.5 Community-building and networked community**

1. Bryson, L. and Mowbray, M. (1981) "'Community": The spray-on solution', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol.16, no. 4, pp. 255-267.
2. Galston, W. A. (1999) 'Does the Internet strengthen community?', Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy. Accessed February 12, 2003 at:  
<http://www.puaf.umd.edu/IPPP/fall1999/internetcommunity.htm>.
3. Wellman, B., Salaff, J., Dimitrova, D. and Garton, L. (1996) 'Computer networks as social networks: collaborative work, telework, and virtual community'. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22, 213-238.
4. Gurstein, M. ed (2000), *Community Informatics: Enabling Communities with Information and Communication Technologies*. Idea Group Publishing.
5. Blanchard, T. and Horan, A. (2000). "Virtual communities and social capital," In: G. David Garson (editor). *Social Dimensions of Information Technology: Issues for the New Millennium*. Hershey: Ideas Group.

#### **6.6 Information technology, education and employment**

1. Multimedia Victoria. (2001) *Reality Bytes: an in-depth analysis of young people's attitudes about technology and career skills*. February 2001:  
<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/itproject/reference/reality%20bytes.pdf>
2. DETYA (2000) *Learning for the knowledge society: an education and training action plan for the information economy*. Retrieved 22 August 2001, from <http://www.dest.gov.au/edu/edactplan.htm>

## **6.7 Useful websites**

1. Electronic Atherton Community Enterprise (e-ACE):  
<http://www.atherton.org.au>
2. National Office for the Information Economy: [www.noie.gov.au](http://www.noie.gov.au)
3. World Bank: [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics: [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)
5. Benton Foundation: [www.benton.org](http://www.benton.org)