

120 community internet projects
around the UK have benefitted
from AOL Innovation in the
Community Awards since 2003.

www.aol.co.uk/innovation

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Encouraging UK charities
and community groups to
use the internet to connect,
support and inspire.

The AOL Innovation in the Community Awards

In association with Citizens Online

Foreword

The internet and other digital technologies are powerful tools for charities and community groups, both for raising awareness and funds and helping to connect, support and inspire people. But setting up a successful online project requires money, equipment, expertise and more. That's where the AOL Innovation in the Community Awards can play an important role.

The catalyst for the awards scheme was a request from a children's homework club to fund the purchase of a toaster so that pupils could enjoy breakfast while they worked at their computers. That got us thinking. How could we help voluntary organisations to make the most of the internet regardless of whether they needed support to fund PCs, hardware, software...or a new toaster?

So, in 2003, AOL and Citizens Online teamed up to help UK charities and community groups harness the power of the Web. Since then, 120 projects have benefitted from AOL Innovation in the Community Awards of £2,000 each, plus a year's free AOL subscription, and every year, we – and the judges – are very excited to see how the internet is helping so many communities around the country.

The winning projects certainly foster digital inclusion, with many helping users to dip their toes in the internet waters for the first time. As a trusted partner, voluntary organisations are providing access points to those who don't have a computer at home and helping make the internet useful and intriguing to those who are sceptical or need easing into the digital world.

Outside of providing internet access, many groups have recognised the power of the internet for giving much

needed support. From chat rooms on health issues to online neighbourhood watch schemes, email bereavement counselling to Web-based support networks for carers, broadband, mobile and other digital technologies are helping to provide essential lifelines.

We would love to showcase every award recipient in this booklet but, as we are limited on space, we have chosen six case studies to demonstrate how the UK voluntary sector is embracing the online medium. We hope they inspire you in the same way they inspired us.



Karen Thomson, President, AOL Europe



John Fisher, Chief Executive, Citizens Online



“The website is often the first port of call for young people. It's a focal point for them to share their stories and connect with others.”

Shelley Gilbert
Grief Encounter



“Now that people can follow the gardening course on the internet, we hope to get the whole community growing delicious organic food and doing their bit for the environment.”

Andy Rowland
ecodyfi



“Technologies such as faxing, typetalk, text messaging and email are such a valuable alternative to using the telephone for deaf people and everyone was really enthusiastic about learning new skills.”

Nadine Ardati
Sign



“Having audio clips on our website is a great way of educating children about the contribution the World War II veterans made to life as we know it today.”

Martin Gibson
Erskine



“The website means that people can quickly see what's available so they don't have to wait until the next Give or Take Day.”

Lisa Donovan
Forest Recycling Project



“Many of our children haven't travelled outside of our inner city area, so the computer gives them the opportunity to learn about other countries and cultures through online text, pictures and video clips.”

Emily Taylor
St John's Pre School

Grief Encounter

www.griefencounter.com

Power of online help

With a vision that every bereaved child and family in the UK gets the best help following their loss, Grief Encounter realised that the internet could make a huge difference to the support it offers.

The charity received an AOL Innovation in the Community Award in 2005 to make its website more child-friendly and interactive.

As its founder Shelley Gilbert says: "Our site is often the first port of call for young people who want to find out more about our services or contact us for advice. So we decided to develop an interactive version of our workbook, which encourages conversation between bereaved children and adults, and to offer email counselling."

The workbook takes children through the different stages of grief and encourages them to remember their loved one by writing stories and gathering photographs. Grief Encounter is also creating an area on the website where children will be able to light a virtual candle in memory of their special person.



For the many children who may feel isolated following the loss of a family member, being able to get sensitive email advice from the charity's counsellors can help them to make sense of what has happened to them and reassure them that they are not alone. Shelley explains: "Grief is a very lonely place."



"The death of a parent can be a complex process for a child and it can be difficult for the rest of their family to handle without guidance."

"We've found that the website is a focal point for young people to share their stories and connect with people in similar situations. In fact, we've had lots of emails from children saying how good it feels to talk about their experiences."

ecodyfi
www.ecodyfi.org.uk



Green fingers turn to the keyboard and mouse

As climate change becomes a hard reality and increasing numbers of people rethink their approach to their food and lifestyle to take more account of sustainability factors, one community group in Powys has decided to use the online medium to spread the organic word.



Ecodyfi, situated in the Dyfi valley in mid-Wales, saw such a positive response to its weekly organic gardening course 'Get Growing' that it decided to use its website to gain a broader audience.

Andy Rowland of ecodyfi explains: "We wanted to use the Web to get more local residents excited about organic gardening. After all, growing and eating organic vegetables is not just good for individuals, it's good for

the whole community. There are the obvious health benefits, but it also keeps money in the local economy, reduces pollution from importing produce from elsewhere in the world, and is a great opportunity to meet new people."

An AOL Innovation in the Community Award in 2005 meant that ecodyfi could publish its gardening course materials online, so that people can follow the lessons week-by-week and apply what they learn in their own gardens.



The Web course offers tips on what to do each week in an organic garden, from filling a trench for potatoes with horse manure in March to giving onions, leeks, tomatoes and sweetcorn a dose of diluted nettle tea in July.

Ecodyfi also plans to link up with schools so that local children can visit its organic market garden at Ynyslas Gardens, near Borth, and then follow the gardeners' progress online.

"The internet is a powerful tool for learning and now that people can follow the course from home we hope to get the whole community growing delicious organic food and doing their bit for the environment," adds Andy. "Our aim is to foster the sustainable regeneration of the Dyfi valley – the website is playing a vital role in that."

A close-up photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue sleeveless top, signing to a man. The man is seen in profile, wearing a hearing aid in his left ear. The woman's hands are positioned in front of her, with fingers spread in a signing gesture. She is wearing a blue beaded bracelet and a silver ring. The background is blurred.

Sign
www.signcharity.org.uk

Web and mobile skills boost independence

Many people have found the Web provides them with the means to communicate and maintain contact in a way that was not possible previously. For attendees at Sign's centre in South West London a day without surfing the Web or firing off a few emails or texts has become a thing of the past.

Sign works to empower deaf people with mental health problems to live independently and the charity's Bridge day centre offers a place of learning, working, socialising, relaxing and receiving information or advice.



Recognising that online tools such as email and text messaging play a crucial role in services for deaf people, Sign used its 2004 AOL Innovation in

the Community Award to fund a communications skills course at The Bridge. A specialist trainer from deafax, an organisation that uses technology to help improve the lives of deaf people, was brought in to help.



As Nadine Ardati, Sign's training manager at The Bridge, explains: "Our trainees learnt about faxing, typetalk, text messaging, email, chat rooms and much more. These technologies are such a valuable alternative to using the telephone for deaf people and everyone was really enthusiastic about learning new skills."

One participant, a 51-year old who is deaf and has learning difficulties, previously relied on other people to communicate for her. The course

soon changed that. She now has a fax machine at home, her own email address at The Bridge's internet café, and is learning to text message.

"Some of our trainees are now so confident that they are doing basic computer work here at The Bridge, typing up letters and helping staff with other administrative duties. They are contributing to the running of the centre, which is very much part of our ethos," adds Nadine. "Computers, the internet and other technologies are really helping them to get involved and lead more independent lives."

Sign repeated its success in the scheme in 2005 and 2006, using its most recent award to install videophones and webcams in its centres and some clients' homes.

Erskine
www.erskine.org.uk



World War II memories preserved on the Web

It is often said that young people have no concept what the older generation went through to secure the freedom of Europe during the Second World War. The Scottish charity Erskine is hoping in part to address this by using the internet to preserve the memories of war veterans in its care and share their experiences with local children.



Erskine, which cares for ex-Service men and women in various areas of Scotland, put its 2004 AOL Innovation in the Community Award towards extending the depth of content on its website ahead of the 60th anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day, including the creation of a new schools site.

With more than half of the residents at Erskine's homes having served in World War II, the charity decided to enhance the site with audio footage of the veterans recounting their experiences of war.

Martin Gibson, Chief Executive of Erskine, explains: "We knew that many of our residents have fascinating stories to tell so we interviewed them to capture their memories. Having the emotion of the voice has much more impact than static words on a Web page."

"As the Government is keen to promote interaction between younger and older generations, we thought that having audio clips of interviews with ex-Service men and women would be a great way of forging that link and educating children about the contribution the World War II veterans made to life as we know it today."



The website has made a huge difference to Erskine residents, supporters, volunteers and the local community. As well as being able to share in the veterans' experiences, anyone looking for a care facility for a member of their family can now read about Erskine's offering online. The charity has seen both an increase in the number of visitors to the website and in the number of online donations from supporters, including some international gifts.

As Martin Gibson says: "Winning this award pushed us to go one step further and I can only imagine what we might be able to do with the website in the future."

Forest Recycling Project

www.giveortake.org



Local residents log on for swap shop

The Forest Recycling Project (FRP) in North East London has taken the adage 'Waste not want not' to heart with an innovative online recycling programme that makes the most of household goods that would normally be thrown out with the rubbish.



One of the FRP's most successful recycling schemes, 'Give or Take Day', sees local residents donate unwanted furniture, toys, electrical items, books and other stuff to anyone who wants it - for free. It is a simple way for people to give away things they no longer want and take home things they do.



The FRP applied for an AOL Innovation in the Community Award in 2004 to put Give or Take on the Web, extending the scheme from its monthly event format and making it accessible to people outside of Waltham Forest.

"We realised how useful it would be for people to be able to access a Give or Take scheme from home or from computers at their offices, SureStart centres, or their local community group. Using the drop-down menus on the website, they can quickly see what's available so they don't have to wait for the next Give or Take Day," explains Lisa Donovan of FRP. "They can also use the website to request items they need, adding a whole new dimension to the Give or Take concept."

Within months of its launch in 2005, the Give or Take website was receiving more than 1,000 hits a day. FRP is blown away by the success of the site, with most items snapped up within two days of being advertised.

Building on this, FRP is developing a section on the website to encourage local businesses to recycle, has taken its recycled computers project online, and is in talks with other local councils about rolling out versions of the website for them.

As Lisa says: "The award has been a real catalyst and has really changed the way we do things for the better."

St John's Pre-School



Internet offers magical journey for children

Pre-schoolers in the Toxteth area of Liverpool are enjoying virtual journeys around the world thanks to the high-speed internet.

St John's Pre-School received an AOL Innovation in the Community Award in 2004 after nursery assistant Emily Taylor watched Aladdin and came up with the idea of a virtual magic carpet that could be used to educate and entertain the children. The group put its award towards a top-of-the-range computer, software, monitor, printer and a large rug – the “magic carpet”.



Emily explains: “We wanted to get a new PC with broadband internet access so that if one of the children had a question about something we’re talking about, they could go on to the computer to get the answer.

Many of our children haven't travelled outside of our inner city area, so the computer gives them the opportunity to learn about other countries and cultures through online text, pictures and video clips. It has helped to open their minds and travel virtually to other places in the world that they could only have dreamt of otherwise.”



Having a broadband connection has been crucial for St John's Pre-School. As Emily says: “Children have short attention spans, so broadband is key – they would simply lose interest if we had a normal dial-up connection and they were having to wait ages to download stuff.”

The magic carpet has had a particularly positive influence on an autistic boy who attends the group. He brings in DVDs and plays computer games with other children, helping to develop his social and sensory skills.

In addition, many of the group's adult volunteers have been able to learn new IT skills.

Emily adds: “When the children arrive, the first thing they ask is ‘Can we put the computer on?’ They are coming on leaps and bounds and the four year olds, in particular, are really confident about using the internet now. It's absolutely wonderful, especially as many of them don't have a computer at home.”

Winners 2003

Age Concern Leominster & District – www.ageconcern.org.uk
Age Concern Stafford & District – www.ageconcern.org.uk
Artlink Exchange, Hull – www.artlinkexchange.co.uk
Berkshire County Blind Society – www.bcbs.org.uk
BeyondAbuse.org, Glasgow
British Institute for Brain Injured Children, Bridgwater – www.bibic.org.uk
Bladder Pain Syndrome Association, Belvedere – www.b-p-s-a.org.uk
Bowbridge Primary School, Newark – www.bowbridgeprimary.com
Discus Duke of Edinburgh's Award Project, East Manchester
Gloucestershire Young Carers Project – www.glosyoungcarers.org.uk
Guy Fox History Project, Southwark – www.guyfox.org.uk
Headon-cum-Upton Village Hall, Retford
Lineham Farm Children's Centre, Leeds – www.linehamfarm.org.uk
Manchester Family Service Unit – www.fsu.org.uk/units/manchester.php
Medical Engineering Resource Unit, Carshalton – www.meru.org.uk
Mothers of Sexually Abused Children, Greenwich – www.mosac.org.uk
Muslim Youth Helpline, Wembley – www.myh.org.uk
Norfolk Young People's Development Group
North Tyneside Disability Forum – www.ntynedisforum.org
Oily Cart, Wandsworth – www.oilycart.org.uk
Platform One, Isle of Wight – www.platformone.org
Project Ability, Glasgow – www.project-ability.co.uk
Rame Conservation Trust, Cornwall
Refugees First, Plymouth
Roe Valley Women's Network, Northern Ireland
Sahara Asian Project, Greenwich
South West Area Project, South West Cwmbran – www.swapkids.org.uk
Waterloo Residents Association, Midlands
Women's Health, Shoreditch – www.womenshealthlondon.org.uk
Working With Words, Woolwich – www.workingwithwords.org

Winners 2004

Access Space, Sheffield – www.access-space.org
ASPIRE, Stanmore – www.aspire.org.uk
Bamboo Academy, Nottingham
Birmingham Repertory Theatre – www.birmingham-rep.co.uk
Bolton Lads and Girls Club – www.boltonladsandgirlsclub.co.uk
Bridge Mentoring Plus Scheme, Bridgend – www.thebridgemps.org.uk
Brunswick Square Central Lawn Association, Gloucester - www.brunswicksquare.org.uk
The Catholic Institute for International Relations – www.ciiir.org
Cirencester Opportunity Group – www.opportunity-group.co.uk
Cobhair Bharraigh, Isle of Barra
Disabled Parents Network, North London – www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk
Emergency Medical Care, Fauldhouse
Erskine, Bishopton – www.erskine.org.uk
Fahamu, Oxford – www.fahamu.org
Fairbridge, Glasgow – www.fairbridge.org.uk
Fair Shares, Moreton-in-Marsh – www.fairshares.org.uk
Family Matters, Gravesend – www.familymattersuk.org
Forest Recycling Project, Waltham Forest – www.giveortake.org
Living Streets, South London – www.livingstreets.org.uk
London Irish Women's Centre
Notting Hill Housing Trust – www.nottinghillhousing.org.uk
Oasis North London – www.onl.org.uk
OCD-UK – www.ocduk.org
Reading Single Homeless Project – www.rshp.co.uk
St John's Pre-School, Liverpool
Saint Catherine's Hospice, Scarborough – www.stcatherineshospice-nyorks.org
Sign, Beaconsfield – www.signcharity.org.uk
Solid Rock Café, Camelford – www.soulsharbour.com
Stonewall – www.stonewall.org.uk
Woldgate Travellers Association, Bridlington

Winners 2005

55+ Positive Lifestyle Lifestyle, Teignbridge – www.positivelifestyle.eclipse.co.uk
African and Caribbean Voices Association, Stratford – www.acva.org.uk
Alzheimer's Society, West Kent – www.alzheimersforum.org
Artimedia, Batley – www.artimedia.co.uk
Association of Black and Ethnic Minority Business Advisors, North London
Bowbridge Primary School, Newark – www.bowbridgeprimary.com
Bright Project, Bristol
Carers Link East Dunbartonshire – www.carerslink.org.uk
The Coalition Youth and Community Programmes, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne – www.thecoalition.org.uk
Creative Kids, North London – www.creativekids.org.uk
Crystal Clear Creators, Loughborough – www.crystalclearcreators.org
Design Options for a Versatile Environment, Portsmouth – www.d-o-v-e.org
Drake Music Project, Edinburgh – www.drakemusicscotland.org
Ecodyfi. Powys – www.ecodyfi.org.uk
Girls Friendly Society England and Wales – www.gfsplatform.org.uk
Grief Encounter – www.griefencounter.com
Heelands Rangers FC, Milton Keynes – www.heelandsrangersfc.co.uk
Jigsaw4u. Mitcham – www.jigsaw4u.org.uk
Kent Farmline – www.kentfarmline.org.uk
Lea Gratch, North London
Lesbian and Gay Foundation. Manchester – www.lgf.org.uk
Masquerade, Powys
National Association of Gifted Children, Milton Keynes – www.nagc.org
North Wales Bird Trust - www.owlrescue.co.uk
Sanibel Counselling Centre, East London – www.sanibel.org
Savile Town Community Association, Dewsbury – www.taleem.org.uk
Sign, Beaconsfield – www.signcharity.org.uk
Somerset Youth Volunteering Network – www.somersetyouth.org.uk
South Central Community Transport, Liverpool
Stroud.com

Winners 2006

Age Concern Buckinghamshire – www.ageconcernbucks.org.uk
AVM Support UK, Cramlington – www.avmsupport.org.uk
Aylesham Youth and Leisure Centre, Aylesham
Blackpool Action Force
British Computer Association of the Blind, Edinburgh - www.bcab.org.uk
CANCERactive, Buckingham – www.canceractive.com
Community First, Malvern – www.comfirst.org.uk
Deaf Connections, Glasgow – www.deafconnections.co.uk
The Disability Law Service, London – www.dls.org.uk
Dundee International Women's Centre – www.diwc.co.uk
Dunfermline Women's Aid
Ealing Community and Voluntary Service, London – www.ealingcvs.org.uk
Envision, London – www.envision.org.uk
The Friends of Finsbury Park, London – www.thefriendsoffinsburypark.org.uk
TheGuidLife, Lanarkshire – www.theguidlife.net
Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, Princes Risborough – www.hearing-dogs.co.uk
Hull Community Church
Let's Talk Counselling Service, Kelso
Lindsay Armstrong Support Group, Ayrshire – www.lindsayarmstrongsupportgroup.org.uk
Lineham Farm Children's Centre, Leeds – www.linehamfarm.org.uk
Machynlleth Community Children's Project, Gwynedd – www.mccp.org.uk
Manor Court, Cokeremouth
Market-eze, Manchester
The National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease, St Albans - www.nacc.org.uk
National Missing Persons Helpline – www.missingpersons.org
North West Organic Co-operative, Derry – www.nworganic.com
Oasis North London – www.onl.org.uk
Sign, Beaconsfield – www.signcharity.org.uk
Teesdale and Weardale Search and Rescue Team - www.twsrt.org
XLP, London – www.xlp.org.uk