

Voluntary and Community Action

Free or Low Cost ICT Solutions

Resource Sheet No. 2

January 2008

If voluntary organisations and community groups are to continue to deliver and enhance the benefits they provide to service users in an environment of change, competition and increasing expectations, they must operate effective ICT based operations and develop robust ICT strategies. This information sheet explores some of the free and low cost solutions and resources available to groups in Bedfordshire.

Resource sheets are designed to help voluntary organisations and community groups in Bedfordshire find information quickly and easily on the most relevant subjects.



If you have any suggestions for future sheets please give us a call on 01525 850559.



Why is ICT Important?

Efficient use of ICT allows organisations to operate more effectively and underpin their long-term sustainability. Well managed ICT can:

- save you money, time and resources
- help you communicate with more people quickly and easily
- manage information
- provide services in more innovative ways.

Help at the Hub

The ICT Hub have developed a comprehensive knowledgebase of practical advice on a huge range of ICT issues. This includes the *Starting Out Guides* specifically targeted at small groups covering the very basics of ICT and written assuming no prior knowledge of computers. www.ictHub.org.uk

ICT Management in a Nutshell

Also well worth a read is the newly published and excellent non-technical *Guide to Managing ICT in the Voluntary and Community Sector* downloadable from www.ictHub.org.uk/publications

Other resources on the Hub's website include *Funding For ICT*, and introductions to 'New Media' and 'Open Source'.

Donated Computers

If you are after a free computer then look no further than Bedfordshire County Council's ICT Department who donate PCs and laptops to local registered charities or local voluntary groups. Since October 2006, over 100 organisations have benefited, with over 137 PCs and 41 laptops donated.

The PCs have had their disks wiped clean of all data and software programs, so need to be re-configured and relevant

software licences purchased. Send a headed letter stating requirements to Tony Pompa, Data Centre Manager, ICT, Bedfordshire County Council, County Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford MK42 9AP and he will try to organise a donation. Tel: 01234 228596, Email: tony.pompa@bedscc.gov.uk





Software

Donated

Charity Technology Trust's CTX Programme brings donated Microsoft, Symantec (anti-virus and internet security software) and other products to qualifying UK charities. Charities are required to pay a small administration fee, but will still make savings of between 92-96% on typical retail prices. For further information, please visit www.ctxchange.org/getting_started

Free

Although Microsoft products have become the standard for most computer users, their dominance is now being challenged by OpenOffice. This is a software package which is available free of charge from www.openoffice.org and provides a similar range of options. Although it has some limitations it will work well for most day-to-day users of word processing, spreadsheets, presentations and much more, and is well worth a try before paying for Microsoft Office. If you are interested in exploring Open Source visit the ICT Hub for more information.

Free Websites

Web pages can really help a local organisation. The local dramatics society can promote their upcoming performance, review their last show, or ask for helpers. The local sports teams can give directions to their ground, post the team sheet, announce the changed practice times, show photos from the last game and drum up a crowd for the next game.

Community Website Builder

This service allows registered charities, voluntary organisations and community groups to build and maintain their own websites free of charge. To qualify you must provide a clear benefit to the community.

www.communitykit.co.uk/

The Local Channel

The Local Channel provides free websites to parish, town and community councils as well as not for profit organisations, groups, teams, clubs and societies.

Web pages are free, easy to build and The Local Channel provides a very friendly free-phone help line should you need it.

www.thelocalchannel.co.uk

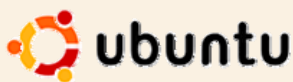
Other free website builders that you might like to investigate before taking the plunge include:

- www.pages.google.com
- www.officelive.co.uk
- www.communigate.co.uk
- www.geocities.com

IT Volunteers

If you would like an IT volunteer to help with a project contact Volunteer Centre South Bedfordshire who will register your opportunity on the national www.do-it.org database and help recruit the right person for you. Give them a call on 01525 850559 or email them at volunteer@action-centralbeds.org.uk for more information.

iT4Communities is an initiative to encourage companies and individuals with professional IT skills to volunteer these skills for the benefit of the community. This



Ubuntu is the Open Source alternative to Microsoft Windows and aims to provide an up-to-date yet stable operating system with a strong focus on usability, regular releases, and ease of installation. The name comes from the southern African concept of *ubuntu* which may be rendered roughly as "humanity toward others", "we are people because of other people", or "I am who I am because of who we all are".

You can download Ubuntu for free, request a free CD or buy it on DVD or CD. www.ubuntu.com/

may be in database or website design, help with an audit and IT management strategy, or even mending computers and training staff in the use of software. iT4Communities can be contacted on 020 7796 2144 or for more information visit their website: www.it4communities.org.uk

You should first read *Working With ICT Volunteers*, an extremely useful knowledgebase article that looks at issues to consider when using volunteers for ICT. www.ichubknowledgebase.org.uk/workingwithvolunteers

Online Tools

Free E-Campaigning

The Voice Your Views website allows organisations to set up customised campaigns aimed at a

variety of target audiences, including individual or groups of politicians at every level from local to European. Users will be able to sign up to the campaigns and follow the organiser's instructions about who to contact. <http://voiceyourviews.net/>

Google Calendar

With Google Calendar, it's easy to keep track of all your organisation's important events in one place. You decide who can see your calendar and which details they can view. So you can add events and send invitations effortlessly and share your schedule with members and supporters.

www.google.com/googlecalendar/new.html



Training

net:gain

net:gain is a highly subsidised development programme to help leaders of voluntary organisations and community groups tackle ICT planning, whatever their existing expertise, organisation size, or area of work. It is a programme delivered by the sector, for the sector bringing together like-minded people to share, discuss and tackle ICT issues in a structured and practical way. net:gain will give participants the confidence, contacts and control over how, why and where your organisation uses ICT. Contact Paul Ruskin at Advice For Life on 01353 644027 or Paul.Ruskin@afl.org.uk for more information.

Voluntary and Community Action

We regularly deliver training on various ICT issues. Visit the training pages of our website for the current training opportunities at www.action-centralbeds.org.uk. We also have the following bespoke workshops open to organisations for up to six participants:

PowerPoint

This workshop looks at what PowerPoint can do. Together we will add text, images and basic animations. You will be shown how to save your presentation, how to set up the equipment to present it and then have the opportunity to preview your presentation.

From Camera to Computer

This is an interactive workshop where you bring along your digital camera and download your photographs onto a disc. We will lead you through the basics of resizing and saving images and how to import them other programs.



Desk Top Publishing

A full day workshop for beginners who would like to use Microsoft Office Publisher to prepare and print flyers, newsletters or cards. This is the starting point for using this software package. You will learn how to add text, import photos and clipart and use WordArt.

Contact training@action-centralbeds.org.uk for more information or ring 01525 850559.

Local/Regional Sources of Support

Bedfordshire and Luton ICT Support Project

Along with its partners, Voluntary and Community Action are undertaking some research into the ICT needs of the voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire and Luton. The hoped for outcome is to obtain funding to set up an ICT support service for the sector, delivered by those who share our ethos and are committed to seeing it thrive and grow. An online survey will soon be published where you can provide more information on your organisation's ICT needs to help us plan future support. In the meantime if you have any ICT concerns, please get in touch - we are here to help. If we do not have the answers, we can signpost you to the relevant advice and support that you need. info@action-southbeds.org.uk

ICT Champion

The ICT Champion for the East of England is Paul Ruskin (based at Advice For Life in Ely). The role of an ICT champion is to:

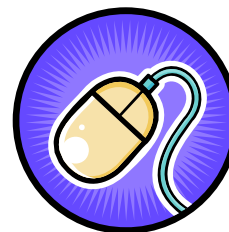
- liaise with the regional and local networks in delivering workshops and other ICT awareness raising initiatives to the voluntary sector
- identify existing service providers and share best practice to help them become more sustainable
- work with local support organisations (such as Voluntary and Community Action) to help you as front-line organisations understand and be signposted to practical ICT resources.

ICT Champion Paul Ruskin, AFL, Unit 11, E-space South, 26 St. Thomas Place, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4EX, 01353 644027, Paul.Ruskin@afl.org.uk

ICT Accessibility Champion

The national ICT Hub has appointed Cambridge OnLine as the East Region Accessibility Champion. This new role will provide voluntary organisations and community groups across the region with support, training and advice in the effective use of accessibility support for disabled people using computers.

Accessibility Champion Andrew Entecott, Cambridge OnLine, Hester Adrian Centre, Hawthorn Way, Cambridge, CB4 1AX, 01223 300407, andrew@cambridgeonline.org.uk, www.cambridgeonline.org.uk



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How we can help!

Voluntary and Community Action exists to provide help and support to the hundreds of voluntary organisations and community groups selflessly working to improve lives in their own communities and beyond.

We can offer help in a variety of ways:

- Funding Advice
- Development
- Training
- Information
- Volunteering
- Partnerships