

An arm round the shoulder.

"CTX is so straightforward and seamless" –
John O'Donnell.



John O'Donnell chuckles when I cite a line from his charity's website: 'ReachOut! is not about 'getting young people off the street.'

"That phrase has such a negative connotation," he laughs. "You know – that 'young people are a nuisance' attitude. We're the diametric opposite of that! We believe that everyone has a genius – a special value – and we want to encourage and develop that – to make it grow. Young people need to know that somebody is listening to them – not telling them to shut up."

ReachOut! provides and supports mentoring programmes for children and early-teens – pairing them with young adults with a view to helping them through a vital stage in life. "Most mentors are students," explains John. "They are people who can put a metaphorical arm round the shoulder like a big brother or a big sister would, and say 'let's support each other to be the best we can be.'"

The relationships have a two-way benefit. "The mentors get huge enjoyment from it," reports John, "and learn skills: to support, to overcome resistance, to keep on going, to be creative about dealing with problems and to be able to nudge people in the direction that's best. In fact every question that an employer might ask them is in there – from reliability to punctuality to working as part of a team."

"For the young person, we're asking 'what do you want to do?' and 'what sort of person do you want to be'. To steer them towards their academic and career aspirations, and to build their character as an individual."

The charity started as a small project in Manchester's Moss Side area in 1994 and, as Development Manager, John has witnessed the growth and 'professionalisation' of the organisation. Now, following two rounds of IT donations from the CTX programme, the charity has networked offices in Manchester and London.

"The CTX equipment runs the offices," John says. "Before, we couldn't cope with the network demands as more people were joining – but the new Cisco stuff is just unbelievably reliable – you plug it in and you forget about it! And on the software front, we were just muddling along before – and now we have a very professional setup. We can prepare presentations for schools and for parents; we can access things whilst people are on the phone. We're not an educational establishment, but resources like Math and Encarta allow us to prepare worksheets for our mentors – we couldn't have done this before."

Saving money is clearly important for any charity, but John is keen to point out that dealing with CTX has required very little investment of his time either. "As far as I'm concerned, CTX is brilliant. It's fantastic it exists, and it's so straightforward and seamless. Often, funding requests require loads and loads of bureaucracy – whereas the only delay we found was at our end – getting hold of a trustee to sign the form! There's a single point of contact, and the whole process is almost laughably easy."

"People don't realise that all this software would have cost us hundreds and hundreds of pounds – that's money that we could use for our core activities. People tend to want to fund direct volunteers not software, and CTX has allowed us to resolve that dilemma."

Who are they?
REACHOUT!

Where are they?
Manchester and London.

What do they do?
Set up mentoring partnerships to help young people fulfil their potential in life.

What did they receive?
Cisco 24-port Ethernet switch, plus a variety of Microsoft products including Small Business Server with associated licenses and upgrades, MapPoint, Encarta Premium, Math, Student, Office Professional 2003

The outcome?
Office systems transformed into a modern, professional setup.

www.reachoutuk.org