Respite Breaks for disadvantaged kids.

"When we discovered it free through CTX, this was amazing" – Rod Webb-Taylor.

CHICKS (Country Holidays for Inner-City Kids) was founded in 1992 to provide 6-day residential respite breaks for some of the most disadvantaged children in the UK.

"We give kids the chance to get away from their problems," says Rod Webb-Taylor, Operations Manager at the charity. "The children that are referred to us have suffered neglect or abuse, they may have family problems, or be carers themselves; they may be growing up in poverty and won't have had a break at all, ever!"

"We take them away from all that, and give them the opportunity to do things that they wouldn't normally be able to. We're giving children the chance to be children."

CHICKS is a national charity with offices in Devon, Cornwall, Birmingham and Scotland explains Rod. "We take children from across the UK, including Scotland, Northern Ireland, London and everywhere in between. We do have an ambitious programme of expansion planned and are looking to open a new centre elsewhere in the country and this is one of the reasons why we need good IT facilities."

CHICKS aim to provide 1200 children with a free respite break this year. The administrative challenge for the organisation is greater than might first be apparent. Case notes, records, reports and statistics need to be available and easily accessible where appropriate to its fundraisers and referrers based across the UK, and the centre workers themselves need to be able to maintain what has become a huge database. Stability, security and reliability are key especially as – as Rod wryly puts it – "we're in rural Devon – if we get half a megabyte download speed then we're lucky."

Microsoft's SQL Server, donated via the CTX programme, has allowed CHICKS to manage its ongoing expansion with confidence – and without a common dilemma faced by so many charities.

"Without the donation, we'd have had to raise funds for it. But how do you raise funds for something like that? When people give us money, they understandably want us to spend it on the children, i.e. activities, play and sports equipment. But if we want to buy ink cartridges or IT hardware and software…"

"Our IT Consultant put together a list of options for us, and we were looking at four to five thousand pounds," he continues. "So when we discovered that we could get it for free through CTX, this was amazing. It's a sum equivalent to bringing half a dozen children on a respite break."

With everything now up and running, Rod describes himself as a "very satisfied customer" of CTX. And he closes by pointing out that saving money isn't enough by itself.

"There's no point in getting something cheap if it isn't good enough," he comments. "But getting the software was straightforward, and installing it was a piece of cake – even I managed it! We're now all set up, and it works very well."

Who are they?
COUNTRY HOLIDAYS FOR INNER-CITY KIDS.

Where are they?
A national charity with centres in the Southwest.

What do they do?
Provide free respite breaks for disadvantaged children.

How big are they?
44 staff; need to raise £1.4million this year for 1,200 children's breaks.

What did they receive?
Microsoft SQL Server 2008.

The outcome?
A solid base for the charity's expansion plans.

www.chicks.org.uk
Registered Charity 1080953
Scottish registration SCO40536