



**ITCanHelp**

Free computer help for disabled people



## Newsletter January 2012 – Issue 5

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## Chairman's Letter

### New Year Thanks and Congratulations



I feel very excited as we go into 2012 as part of AbilityNet with continuing strong support from BCS. In the first nine months of 2011, our volunteers provided help as many times as they did in the whole of 2010. Congratulations to everyone involved in assisting our clients, and also to Paul Toms and everyone who has helped to make more disabled people aware of our existence and the free service we offer. There is more to do and I'm sure that being part of

AbilityNet will help us to raise our profile with people who could benefit from our assistance. Following Josie Ray's appointment as ITCanHelp Administrator, I'd like to thank Josie and Anne Stafford, members of the Steering Group, Chris Mays of BCS and everyone involved within AbilityNet, ITCanHelp and BCS, for the hard and effective work they have put in on the transition process. As issues came up by email discussion or webinar they seemed to be dealt with in a positive way by everyone concerned.

### Continuing BCS Involvement

We are very grateful to BCS for their continued commitment as the main funders of ITCanHelp. We have set up continuing contacts with BCS, and I am keeping in regular touch with Judith Taylor, Head of Group/Branch Member Services BCS, to

make sure we keep the contacts going well. We have already discussed featuring the work of ITCanHelp and volunteering opportunities at BCS Branch/Group Convention in March 2012. Anne Stafford spoke to Croydon Branch in December and Neville Bramhall will be taking up an invitation to speak at a joint Manchester Branch/Health group (North) meeting later in January.

### **Meeting with Chair and CEO of AbilityNet**

I met Michael Taylor, Chair of AbilityNet and Nigel Lewis, CEO. Michael expressed his commitment to and enthusiasm for inclusive IT for disabled people, personally and as Chair of Trustees. He is keen to promote the work of ITCanHelp and sees volunteering as a key part of AbilityNet's strategy and service offering. Michael and Nigel stressed the strong BCS involvement in AbilityNet, both historic and in the current AbilityNet Board.

### **New website**

A contract has been awarded for 4-6 month project to include AbilityNet, ITCanHelp and iT4C. There will be new facilities and possibilities for content. Our webmaster, John Ray, will join the working party on developing the requirement for the website.

### **Assessment - A new opportunity for volunteers?**

AbilityNet does not have funding for paid assessors to provide free assessments for disabled people. Nigel reported that at regional ITCanHelp volunteer meetings, some people expressed enthusiasm for training in assessment, saying that in fact some client's needs include an element of assessment. AbilityNet will explore the possibility of offering their assessor training course to volunteers, though it was stressed that this would be an offer for those who wished to develop this role, not in any sense a requirement.

### **Volunteers' Meetings**

Nigel had been impressed with the meetings he had attended and suggested exploring seeking sponsorship for one or more volunteers' conventions in the coming year for both IT4C and ITCanHelp volunteers.

### **IT4Good Awards**

These will take place again in the coming year. We hope there will be an award category for volunteering and we will encourage nominations from within ITCanHelp.

### **Fundraising – Can you help?**

We are grateful to BCS for their continued commitment to funding ITCanHelp. However, after six years of support, we have received our last grant of £7,500 from the Marchday foundation. From next year we will need additional funding to be able to sustain and develop our work.

If you have any fundraising ideas, or would like to take on the voluntary role of organising fundraising for ITCanHelp in conjunction with AbilityNet's fundraising team, please get in touch with me.

Bob Twitchin, Chair, ITCanHelp, [btwitchin@itcanhelp.org.uk](mailto:btwitchin@itcanhelp.org.uk)

## Assessors

AbilityNet is looking for skilled assessors especially across the South of England & Wales, if you are experienced in assessing people's IT needs or know anyone who is please pass on the details. The full time jobs closing date might be extended so please check the AbilityNet website's [recruitment page](#) for more details and get in touch if you are interested.

Thank you to those volunteers who are interested in training in this subject, there will be more information about how we can help in the coming months.

Thank you

Anne Stafford

## Greetings, thanks and farewells

In welcoming all those who have joined us since the last newsletter, I'd like to mention especially

Somerset - Sean Kelly	Cambridgeshire - Andrew Grief
Scotland - David Lorimer	N Yorkshire - Ian Johnstone
Wiltshire - Andrew Wootten	Northern Ireland - Ronald Parker
London - Steven Hirschorn	West Midlands - Syed Hussain
Yorkshire - Shehzad Arian	Lincolnshire - Les Binns
Wiltshire - Carrie Woollatt	Wiltshire - Barry Fitzpatrick
Hertfordshire - Kwong Li	Wiltshire - Stephen Clark
London - Anna Shipman	Cumbria - Trevor Aiston
London West - Samir Sacicant	Warwickshire - Barrie Humphries
East Anglia - Lee Norman	Manchester North - Nathan Millward
London - Ade Bamgbose	Nottinghamshire - Peter Grant
Lancashire - Jonathan Salkeld	W Yorkshire - Jose De Pipa
Essex - Lisa Shotton	

**A Very Warm welcome to all our  
new Volunteers**

Chris Proudley is stepping down as CC for Bedfordshire, but will continue volunteering with us. Tony Glynos will be taking over.

John Foreman is stepping down as CC Lincolnshire, Simon Chin will be taking over.

Bill Hanks has taken over as CC Cheshire West, from Tom Denbigh.

Michael Lomax has taken on the role of CC for Manchester North, from Benita Anombem, who was kindly managing that area temporarily.

## **Marketing**

ITCanHelp still has adverts in both Ability and Disability magazines, but need to discuss changes for the coming year with help from AbilityNet's Marketing Manager.

## **Regional Meetings**

### **East Anglia, Beds, Bucks and Herts**

Here's the view from John Davie CC for Cambridgeshire of how the meeting went.

This resume is intended to give recipients a flavour of the business conducted and the comment that was generated. It is not intended to be a formal record – apologies are tendered for any misinterpretations omissions or errors.

As well as assembling a forum from across the ITCanHelp Anglia region, the meeting's prime function was to introduce AbilityNet. The meeting addressed in particular the forthcoming adoption of ITCanHelp as a functional part of AbilityNet. The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) was represented and provided a presentation of the RNIB's organisation and activities throughout the UK.

### **Business**

Mr Nigel Lewis (AbilityNet) addressed the meeting explaining the structure, function and operations of AbilityNet identifying where ITCanHelp would sit within the organisation. The general impression was that it would be 'business as usual' for ITCanHelp with the benefits of the 'marriage' becoming evident as the two organisations meshed. The date for the formal integration was set to come into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011.

In essence AbilityNet is an 'Enabling' organisation assessing and bringing IT capability to organisations and individuals within the disabled community. Mr Lewis emphasised the 'assessment' expertise and capability within AbilityNet. The contribution of the ITCanHelp cadre of Volunteers and the attendant infrastructure can perhaps be seen as the 'boots on the ground' supporting individuals with their equipment and keeping them 'on-air'.

Ms Anne Stafford (AbilityNet) introduced IT4Communities, (IT4C) a prime component of AbilityNet. IT4C currently has 200 projects in various states of maturity and has some 8K Volunteers nationwide. IT4C brings assessment and help, identifying the IT needs of the many organisations concerned with disability. This help is essentially 'System' based, helping with equipment procurement and identifying training needs.

Regarding the 'nuts and bolts' of the ITCanHelp tie-up with AbilityNet, there is now a dedicated administrator for ITCanHelp Josie Ray who is taking over the functions carried out by Christine who reverts fulltime to admin with BCS. The impression was that there would be no 'sea-change' in the manner in which ITCanHelp conducts its business. The ITCanHelp Management Group will continue in being, carrying out its designated functions, reporting and advising AbilityNet as to ITCanHelp business. In addition the Management Group will undertake to promote and support AbilityNet's strategic aims and objectives.

Areas were discussed where AbilityNet expertise could benefit ITCanHelp operations: System level advice and help from IT4C's Volunteers: Tapping into AbilityNet's Client assessment process: Making use of the AbilityNet IT Equipment Procurement and Loan Service: Better, and expanded, liaison with 'local' disability organisations who are, (or have been) targeted by AbilityNet, this with the objective of broadening ITCanHelp's footprint and gaining more Clients for our Volunteers. Mr Lewis emphasised that AbilityNet was committed to expanding its 'Client base'.

The meeting was then addressed by Ms Pip Harris of the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB). She outlined the activities of the RNIB, its structure and its coverage of the UK. An interesting factor was the number of RNIB volunteers in the IT field who were supporting clients.

A comment was made that Cambridgeshire ITCanHelp helped a good percentage of clients who were either partially sighted or blind. This was seen as an area where an ITCanHelp volunteer could profit from the experience of the RNIB volunteer and provide an enhanced service to a particular client. Worthy of note is the RNIB help No. 0303 123 9999 or the web contact 'helpline@rnib.org.uk'. Ms Harris noted perhaps an opportunity to help ITCanHelp volunteers with training aimed at helping with partially sighted or blind clients, looking at the IT aids and software available in the field.

During the general discussions a number of interesting topics were aired: Mr. Les Fearn (CC - Essex) stated that one of the Essex volunteers was fully up to speed on Apple Mac and would be happy to offer help and advice. Mr. Scott (Cambs Volunteer) added to the subject saying he used a Apple Mac emulator on his PC allowing insight to the functions and operation of this operating system and its applications: Mr. Toms brought us up to speed on the latest with the ITCanHelp USB stick: Remote help was discussed, utilising 'Team Viewer'.

Mr. Toms closed the meeting and thanked all those that attended and the delegates from AbilityNet and RNIB for traveling a considerable distances to address the meeting.

Thanks must also go to Mrs. Rose Toms who kept the tea and coffee cooking and sorted our buffet lunch!!

## **Scotland**

A Training Day for Volunteers in Scotland was held in Dundee on 22 October. We are fortunate in being able to hold our events at the University of Dundee, where Andy McMahon is IT Disability Support Specialist. The setting for our event was the University's Disability Support Lab, where there is an impressive range of hardware and software for ITCanHelp Volunteers to explore.

It was very disappointing that only six people attended (including Andy McMahon and myself who were running the event). However, we do appreciate that Volunteers give up their time to help Clients and that giving up a Saturday on top is a lot to ask. Although Dundee is a good location for rail travel from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, many of our Volunteers live considerable distances from a main station. Indeed, we have a team in the Western Isles, who would find any mainland venue time-consuming to attend.

However, on the bright side, we had at least one representative from all Areas except Western Isles. It was a particular pleasure to welcome John Watson, the newest Area Organiser (Argyll) to the meeting. John had made a very long journey from the West, by an ingenious route where he over-nighted in Glasgow in accommodation owned by his housing association and travelled by bus (with his free pass) - a superb effort and at virtually no cost to us! I gave a short introductory briefing summarising developments in the past 12 months. The establishment of a new AO in Argyll brings the number of teams in Scotland to six. We operate here in Areas, not Counties, each AO having a large territory to manage. The move to AbilityNet was the big item that we wanted to cover in the morning. Bob Twitchin, Anne Stafford and Dianne Cockburn (who stood in for Nigel Lewis) joined us by Skype video link. This was the first time we had had any virtual participation at a Scottish meeting, and the first time that Volunteers had had an opportunity to 'meet' and talk to senior colleagues from the South. The video link worked very well indeed. Andy looked after tweaking Skype from time to time and adjusting the digital projector and I moved on a local copy of PowerPoint slides in sync with the speaker. At the Dundee end, we found the experience a far richer one than having these important new developments described by me. I am very grateful to Bob, Anne and Dianne for giving up their Saturday morning to be with us.

We had lunch at a local Bistro where we were able to chat as a group and get to know each other better.

In the afternoon Andy gave us a very useful session on some of the latest Apple devices and their built-in accessibility features. We were also able to see some of the latest kit in the Disability Support Unit. Andy spoke mostly about supporting visually impaired users. Although most of our work is in supporting standard Windows PCs, it is good to be able to introduce Volunteers to leading-edge developments in mainstream devices such as iPad and iPhone that offer excellent and cheaper alternatives to expensive screen-reading software and in some cases can be a portable and very attractive alternative. Apple's built in Voiceover screen-reader was demonstrated and we had a chance to try it out. Andy also showed us the latest text capture devices from Humanware. I was amazed how light and portable text capture has become, with just a small camera on a tripod that can be folded up and carried. My session in the afternoon covered safety issues. The session was designed to remind Volunteers of the different ways in which we have to protect our clients, and ourselves in carrying out this work. It was an opportunity to re-familiarise attendees with the various Policy documents we have in place. We also discussed good practice in handling of Clients' contact details. Scenarios were used to seed discussions about issues we need to consider, for example when making purchases on behalf of clients; when selecting a tool for remote assistance; when carrying out a software fix or hardware repair.

All of us who met face-to-face enjoyed it and thought it was beneficial, yet the very small numbers call into question the viability of a Scotland-wide meeting. I would be interested to hear the views of Scottish Volunteers on whether we should retain an annual Training Day, or if they would prefer other frequencies or formats of communication. For example, AbilityNet make use of Webinars which could be a method to explore.

Alison Crerar, National Organiser, Scotland. [Scotland@itcanhelp.org.uk](mailto:Scotland@itcanhelp.org.uk)

## **South West - Bristol**

Like the curate's egg, this event was good in some parts and pretty appalling in others.

Let's take the bad parts first. The local BCS branch had kindly offered to host the event, but unfortunately the local college wasn't geared up to meet our IT requirements. So, despite bringing our own computer equipment, we weren't able to make a video connection to our external presenters, and had to make do with an audio link only. The real hero of the day was Nigel Lewis, CEO of AbilityNet and one of our key presenters, who offered his iPhone to connect to the loudspeaker system and provide this audio link. The catering service, although ultimately good, was initially very slow.

Moving on to the good aspects of the event, despite all the technical horrors, people were very happy with the sessions and would welcome further events within the

region. I received one or two last minute apologies for various health and other reasons, so there were ultimately about two dozen folks there.

The presentations were well received. The first session was presented jointly by Bob Twitchin remotely and Nigel Lewis in the hall, on the major subject of the impending transfer of organisational location from the BCS to AbilityNet, and ran very smoothly once the technical problems had been resolved.

Anne Stafford from iT4Communities and Pip Harris & Angela from the RNIB also gave very good presentations with PowerPoint, and these were followed in the afternoon by a remote link with Andy McMahon in Dundee, accompanied by a visual presentation by myself, which enabled him to update us on various matters relating to information and training material.

Finally, the panel session went off very well, many folks contributed, and there was a fairly informal discussion of a range of matters.

Conclusions – an event well worth holding, and much appreciated by those attending as an opportunity to meet others and put faces to names. I asked about future events, and the overwhelmingly enthusiastic response was that they would like to do it again, probably on an annual basis. Given the availability of a suitable location and facilities, this could be a resounding success.

Topics of interest to our volunteers – lots of experience of our products, such as remote systems and USB pens etc. so helpful suggestions there to consider. Great enthusiasm to continue developing our services and find ways of growing, and general support for the strategic shift to AbilityNet. The main concern was over the present relatively low levels of activity, apart from Wiltshire, where Peter Allison's folk feel that they are called out about every fortnight on average, so feel well used. I suspect it's a lot to do with local networking activity on the ground, and reinforces the point raised recently with the Management Group, that we need to concentrate time and attention on recruiting CCs or equivalent; it does seem to make a big difference.

Best wishes,

Philip Pughe-Morgan, Area Organiser, South West

### **Staying Safe Online**

[Click here](#) for a handy link that helps you stay safe online.

## Client Activity Records

It has become clearer during the preparations for transfer to the AbilityNet umbrella that we need to be better organised in future in the way we gather and record information on client activity; this will be of great help in justifying our existence to our sponsors.

At present the way in which we collect and record this information is very arbitrary, and varies considerably from place to place. Some volunteers are requested to use a pre-printed proforma including details of each visit, the problems tackled and outcomes achieved, as well sometimes as a summary comment by the client on their perception of the volunteer's attendance. At the other end of the spectrum, in quite a few places there is simply an exchange of e-mails between volunteers and local co-ordinators, which may include a greater or lesser amount of detail.

Two questions arise so far. One is whether to move towards a standardised method of recording activity of this kind. The other is that it has also emerged that, while we regard ourselves as an AA type breakdown service, attending to the immediate problem but not providing a continuing clinic service to individual clients, in practice quite a few volunteers do in fact continue to provide unofficial support to clients once assisted. While there is nothing fundamentally wrong with this, provided that it doesn't cause unnecessary delays in responding to further requests from new clients, it does raise the question of whether we should record such activity as part of our overall portfolio. It's a delicate matter because we don't want to make volunteers feel they are placed under an undue pressure to handle even more administration, and of course many volunteers already help family & friends etc in a personal capacity, and not necessarily as members of ITCanHelp.

Nevertheless, it is timely to review our practice, and this will also include the way in which activity information is aggregated and used at national level – at present the statistical data provided is very minimal, and there is scope for developing this to provide a much more accurate picture of what we are achieving as a charity.

So, volunteers are asked to reflect on the range of unofficial additional support they provide to clients, and consider whether it would be helpful for us to collect information on this, while coordinators and organisers are requested to consider the best format of collecting information for record keeping and subsequent transmission to HQ. Finally, the Management Group is requested to consider whether to extend the range of information collected nationally, to support our future strategic growth and resource bids to support it.

Philip Pughe-Morgan

Area Organiser

SW England & English Midlands

## ITCanHelp Activity Numbers

Total number of visits to clients by area in 2011, including return visits:

Central West	141
Central East	128
East Anglia	345
London	217
North East	177
North West	108
South East	176
South West	271
Wales	14
Northern Ireland	78
Scotland	71
Total	1726

AbilityNet client referral numbers, through the free phone Advice and Information line, are going well. (Note: approximately 61 in November 2011- BT)

Cost per client is around £40 overall including volunteer expenses, publicity and training. It should be noted though that those in remote areas cost more to get to than those in towns and cities. Remote assistance is happening more for repeat visits which will reduce costs.

Our aim is to support clients or volunteers as widely as is practical.

To record client visits, as well as repeat visits, would be helpful for funding bids etc. We can say exactly how many we have helped.

## AbilityNet Volunteering Advisory Committee, an opportunity to participate

As you will know from the last edition of the Newsletter, AbilityNet volunteer services now consist of two groups of IT volunteers, iT4Communities and ITCanHelp. Work on going on to create a Strategy for Volunteering based on the services offered by each group linked to the overall AbilityNet Strategic Plan.

The AbilityNet Board is setting up a Volunteering Advisory Committee (VAC) to assist in creating the Strategy for Volunteering for Board approval, monitor progress against the strategy and use the practical knowledge of volunteering of members to provide feedback to the main board on future developments in volunteering and how these might affect AbilityNet volunteering services.

The Advisory Committee will report directly to the Board. The Chair of the Committee is to be Alan Pollard, past President of BCS, and a long-time supporter and friend of ITCanHelp. Alan came to the December meeting of the Steering Group to tell us of his plans for the VAC and to get the Group's thoughts on how the committee could communicate effectively with volunteers.

He made it clear that the function of the VAC is to advise the Board on strategic issues about developing volunteer services, not to get involved with operational matters. However, the SG welcomes the creation of the committee, which will provide direct input to the Board on volunteer services.

The Committee will include the AbilityNet Trustees representing BCS and the Worshipful Company of IT Professionals and the Head of Volunteering Programmes.

The Committee will review the activities of volunteering groups against AbilityNet's strategic plan and volunteering strategy, when agreed, and provide advice and guidance on delivery models and methods of volunteering programmes to meet the strategy.

It will also consider the strategic direction of AbilityNet's volunteering services and make recommendations to the Board of any changes needed to meet strategic goals and charitable objectives, review any risks of volunteering operations and report any major risks or concerns. Finally, it will promote the principles and practice of volunteering by helping AbilityNet to increase the awareness of the general public and potential users of its services.

It is expected that the committee would meet 2-3 times per year, probably in London. Four active volunteers from iT4C and IT Can Help volunteer base are to be invited to attend meetings. The volunteers would be expected to bring views and issues from the volunteers to inform the committee's discussions and to raise with the volunteer base issues on which the committee was seeking input.

After discussion, the SG proposed that:

Two volunteers from ITCanHelp should attend.

One should be a member of the Steering Group. Paul Toms, Organiser for East Anglia, has agreed to take this on.

A second volunteer should be chosen to work with Paul as our second representative at committee meetings.

We will set up an internet discussion group about ITCanHelp for all volunteers, in addition to the existing Yahoo Group for technical issues. On the new group, people will be able to raise and discuss more general issues about how ITCanHelp operates. Our representatives will be able to use this group to discuss items for the VAC.

The representatives would play an active role in communications between the committee and our volunteers.

If you are an active volunteer and think you might be interested in taking on this role, please email our ITCanHelp administrator Josie Ray [josie.ray@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:josie.ray@abilitynet.org.uk)

Bob Twitchin

[btwitchin@itcanhelp.org.uk](mailto:btwitchin@itcanhelp.org.uk)

Have you got anything you may want to contribute in our next issue? If so send to [eanglia@itcanhelp.org.uk](mailto:eanglia@itcanhelp.org.uk)

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Enabling the information society

## Steering Group

- Bob Twitchin - Chair
- Bob Jamieson - Vice Chair
- Rosemary Culley - Hampshire CC
- Dr Alison Crerar - Scotland AO
- Ann Hughes - CRB Coordinator (England & Wales)
- Andy McMahon - Volunteer Training & Development
- Philip Pughe-Morgan - ITCanHelp/ AbilityNet Liaison
- Paul Toms - Marketing/East Anglia AO
- John Hume - Treasurer
- Peter Smith - Organiser Wales
- Anne Stafford - AbilityNet Volunteering Services Manager
- Josie Ray - Administrator
- In addition, Martin Albu - N London Co-ordinator compiles quarterly activity returns
- Ray Waddington Jones represents ITCanHelp on BCS Inclusion Policy Panel.