

BCS Group helps disabled people get more from life with the aid of Information Technology



13 June 2007: A British Computer Society (BCS) member's group that assists disabled people with computer technology problems is looking for more people in need of help. ITCanHelp (ITCH) responds to 800 to 1000 calls for assistance each year but has the capacity to help many more people.

Bob Twitchin, Chair of ITCanHelp explains: "ITCH provides disabled people with fast and reliable IT solutions such as the setting up of computers, printers, scanners, sorting out broadband connections and problem solving. Whilst the service is relatively well used, we have many more volunteers who are ready to provide assistance across the UK."

Information Technology plays a vital part in helping to improve the quality of life for significant numbers of disabled people by enabling them to participate more fully in society. IT is often the only way in which disabled people can communicate easily with family and friends.

ITCH was established in 1994 by Ken Stoner, a BCS member who was himself severely disabled by Motor Neurone Disease. His aim was to address the shortfall in the availability of technical assistance for disabled people using computers. Since its inception over 5,000 people have used the services offered. ITCH is built around a network of volunteers who offer disabled people free, computer-related assistance either in their own homes or at other locations such as day centres. Services offered include:

- 1 Installing new equipment and software
- 2 Helping to connect people to the Internet and use e-mail
- 3 Getting them started with standard packages such as word processing
- 4 Solving any technical problems that may arise
- 5 Giving advice and assistance with hardware and software upgrades
- 6 Helping people to get the most out of their computer and software

Bob says: "Requests for help come from all over the UK from disabled people, their carers or other people acting on their behalf. Every application is assessed by a county co-ordinator, who contacts the volunteers in the region closest to the applicant to see who can respond soonest. Many of our volunteers are members of the BCS, the professional body for the IT profession, and all are qualified to deal with a range of technology problems. They carry photo ID cards and have gone through a careful vetting programme."

Since 2005, ITCanHelp has worked in partnership with AbilityNet, a charity which is a UK leader in expertise on computing for disabled people.

To request help from the ITCH Network Client Helpline call the AbilityNet freephone (and Minicom) on: 0800 269545 or e-mail: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk. More information can be found at www.itcanhelp.org.uk

Editors:

Case study examples of the type of help on offer are available upon request.

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The British Computer Society (BCS) is the Chartered industry body for IT professionals, the Chartered Engineering Institution for Information Technology and a Chartered Science Institution. With our rapidly growing membership, BCS is playing an increasingly pivotal role in leading the development and implementation of world class standards for the IT profession through innovative products, services and support.

Through our specific "Professionalism in IT" programme, BCS is leading and building IT professionalism to levels which are currently only seen in more traditional long standing professions such as law, medicine, and accountancy but which will increasingly become the de facto standards for IT professionals.

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