Voice and Power for Homeless and Vulnerable People through New and Emerging Technologies

Your Entry

Please do not exceed 1500 words in total.

1. Your contact details

| Organisation | SHP (Single Homeless Project) |

2. Name of the project you are entering for The LankellyChase Digital Empowerment Awards

“Unheard Holler” – SHP Client Blogging Project

3. Award category you are entering

Voice

4. Describe your project in one sentence

In 2011 SHP set up Unheard Holler (http://unheardholler.blogspot.com) as a platform for the people passing through SHP to express their views, either in writing or on video, on social issues and other topics that are important to them.

5. Specify the setting(s) where your project is delivered (eg homeless agency, housing organisation etc )?

Homelessness charity – the project will take place in our five training hubs across London and in hostels where there is IT equipment for residents’ use.
6. What are the project’s objectives?

The project’s main objectives are to:

- Give unrepresented people a platform to air their views on matters that are important or of interest to them, and challenge negative stereotypes by telling stories from their point of view rather than reading how the media (mostly negatively) portrays them, using a range of media and formats, including video, photos, poems and drawings.
- Encourage service users to broaden their horizons; to think outside their own situations and engage with issues that affect society as a whole.
- Act as a vehicle for engaging informally more hard-to-reach people in gaining digital skills, developing communication/journalism skills, and improving their confidence in using IT and various kinds of media. Many of the people we support are not used to formal teaching, may have literacy or numeracy issues, or may have had bad experiences in education, and consequently new and creative ways of engaging them in IT and learning are needed.
- Enhance the digital and writing skills of people already familiar with computers to make their skills stand out more to potential employers.
- Enable SHP clients to contribute articles to mainstream publications (e.g. Big Issue, Inside Housing, etc.)
- Raise awareness and engage the interest and participation of mainstream media, other voluntary and statutory organisations, and the general public in issues affecting homeless and vulnerable people.
- Help change public perceptions of people who struggle with issues around mental health, addiction and homelessness. "We've experienced and seen the things that journalists write about and at Unheard Holler, we're doing it for ourselves. We blog about social issues like housing, mental health and addiction and share the ideas that we are passionate about. We want our opinions to help shape yours. Thanks for reading."

7. What are the project’s activities?

Each year since 2011 we have worked with social enterprise, On Road Media, to run blogging workshops for SHP clients; we have also run sessions for SHP services staff to enable them to support people in their services who wish to learn how to blog. We are currently embedding the blogging project by ensuring that regular workshops are delivered by staff and volunteers at each of our five training hubs across London, and that training is also available to our hostel residents.

When we first launched Unheard Holler, service users also attended workshops facilitated by volunteer journalists, which helped them gain inspiration and shape their thoughts into words. A group of clients also formed a steering group, which set the purpose and tone of the blog.

The blog covers personal experiences and social issues like housing, mental health and addiction, as
well as general subjects chosen by the bloggers. The content of *Unheard Holler* is restricted to those who have passed through the doors of SHP; the comments section is open to everyone, and we have had interest not only from the general public and other SHP service users, but also from the media, as well as other organisations offering information and advice.

Participants are taught how to use flip cameras, film interviews, conduct ‘vox pops’ and edit short videos, as well as how to set up a blog, write a blog post with at least one image and one hyperlink for *Unheard Holler*, and make their own video blogs. Clients can shoot videos on issues of the day and topics that interest them, and upload their work onto *YouTube*. This approach gives people with no experience of using the internet or a computer a chance to learn in a fun and non-threatening environment, using cameras and microphones rather than written formats.

With more and more functions and resources going online, we are anxious to ensure that our clients develop enough IT skills to be able to live independently and avoid becoming even more excluded. Part of our aim in offering this project, then, is to attract interest from clients who are otherwise daunted and reluctant to engage in formal IT training. This project is a ‘back door’ way of familiarising them with computers and in how to access information on the internet, which inevitably involves learning basic IT skills.

8. **What has been the impact / achievement of the project?**

Our partners, On Road Media, have worked with over 80 SHP clients and staff since 2011, helping them to gain confidence in going online, blogging and creating videos. Nearly 20 video blogs have been created by clients during and outside the workshops, and the blog has been viewed over 31,000 times.

In 2012, the blog was nominated for 2 awards: the Nominet Internet Awards and Technology 4 Good.

Through *Unheard Holler* we have:

- Created a forum for SHP service users to air their views, and share personal experiences and ideas for a better society.
- Developed a group blog that enables our clients to encourage and inspire one another, and to use the same platform on which to express a wide range of views and concerns.
- Provided a positive way to help our service users re-engage with the community and express passions and ideas in a meaningful way.
- Attracted the attention of other organisations, who have offered advice (e.g. Dogs’ Trust - [http://unheardholler.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/hobo-and-hound.html](http://unheardholler.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/hobo-and-hound.html))
- Attracted the attention of the press, who have picked up on some of the issues raised (e.g. BBC Newsnight featured information picked up from this blog which became a major news
item: [http://unheardholler.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/uclh-and-olympic-vips.html](http://unheardholler.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/uclh-and-olympic-vips.html)

- Recruited the voluntary services of one of our ex-clients, who, having attended the original workshops, is now running one of the SHP blogging workshops in north London. He also regularly presents the blog to other organisations and explains how the workshops engage clients and encourage those less likely to go online, to share their story/artwork/poetry/thoughts.

Below are some recent examples of SHP service users’ work on *Unheard Holler*:

- *What do you think about the situation in Syria?* ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCSJ0eGuZ0w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCSJ0eGuZ0w))
- *How do you feel about people being on benefits?* ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7H0z5oXTWU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7H0z5oXTWU))
- *The Mental Health Forms* by Louise Goodson ([http://unheardholler.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/the-mental-health-forms.html](http://unheardholler.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/the-mental-health-forms.html))
- *An Alien sends a Postcard from Ridley Road* by Sam ([http://unheardholler.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/an-alien-sends-postcard-from-ridley-road.html](http://unheardholler.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/an-alien-sends-postcard-from-ridley-road.html))

9. How is your project evaluated?

- On Road Media and SHP gauge the impact of the blogging training by asking participants to complete feedback forms, which enable us to ascertain whether they feel more confident not only in blogging, but also in accessing the internet and using computers in general.
- We also gather feedback from clients by filming short videos following workshops. Clients film these together in pairs and address questions such as: *How did you find today’s workshop? What did you learn and do? What did you enjoy most? What will you do in the future to develop the skills you gained today?* These short videos are used in reporting following the workshop.
- Briefings are held with SHP support workers following workshops to assess the client’s development, activities carried out and general feedback. This information is also collated and used to improve the project as whole.
- Consultations are always held with key support workers to look at ways to engage more clients, maintain the blog and improve the workshops. This information is also collated in a final report.
10. How would you spend the prize money to develop the project?

To take it to the next stage we need funding to:

- Recruit volunteer journalists to work with clients, inspire them, and teach them the principles of writing articles and news stories and help get some of their work published not only on *Unheard Holler* but also in print publications, such as The Big Issue.
- Recruit volunteer scribes for those bloggers whose limited writing skills impact on their ability to express their ideas.
- Pay travel expenses of the service users’ working group
- Cover the cost of publicising the project on a regular basis.