

## Bereavement support successfully taken online by charity

Submitted by: Kam Mistry

Tuesday, 6 April 2004

---

Children's bereavement charity Winston's Wish has been delighted by the response to its decision to take its grief support online. The charity, the largest children's grief support provider in Europe, recently revamped its website and added a range of bereavement activities, which until now have only been delivered either face-to-face or through its national telephone helpline.

Since November 2003, five-hundred children (and a few adults) have benefited from the site's 'Skyscape of Memories' – an adaptation of one of the charity's methods of working with bereaved children - which has been created specifically for the internet in order to reach a wider audience.

The Skyscape of Memories shares the same aims as the rest of the Winston's Wish services to bereaved families. Of particular importance is to encourage people to remember someone who has died. It (the Skyscape) allows bereaved young people to create a star in memory of their deceased relatives or friends to which they can assign memories and images in the form of planets. Two-thousand planets (memories) have already been created by those using the service.

Nemisys Enterprises, an internet consultancy specialising in charity and government websites, was commissioned to produce the site and to convert the activities used by the charity in its direct work to make them effective for an online audience.

John Duffy of Nemisys explained:

"The challenge for us in developing the Skyscape and the other activities was to interpret the clinical purpose behind each activity and then deliver it in an engaging way on the web. The Skyscape allows contributors to gain support from feeling part of the greater whole – in this case the stars and planets which symbolise the grief of others – and at the same time to share their memories of a special person with a wide community. It also allows them to keep personal information private."

The website, which is funded by the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, has facilitated a greater reach for the charity's vital work without compromising the quality that is seen in its direct work with children; with all internet and email communication dealt with by the same highly-trained personnel at its Gloucestershire HQ. Whilst the site averages five-thousand visitors each month, the charity remains focused on the quality of its service delivery.

Di Stubbs, Helpline and Web Co-ordinator at Winston's Wish, explained:

"Our website, [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) is not just about providing information and taking online donations. We felt that we could do more - hence our site encourages individuals to try some of the activities and access information that we already deliver by telephone and in person. The Skyscape and the other activities for young people encourage them to express their feelings and thoughts of grief and to hold on to memories."

The site also encourages young people to discuss their experiences and responses with others via

'Talk', its message board, which is closely moderated by the charity.

With over 26,000 visits to the new site within five months and almost 600 registered users, it is clear that the charity's potential to help those in need of grief support, disseminate information and encourage contact has significantly improved.

Stubbs added:

"Supporting bereaved people via the web is not a retrograde step - it actually has quite a few advantages, for instance, the person making contact is able to maintain their anonymity and thus ensure their privacy. By communicating in the written word rather than speaking, the 'caller' may feel less embarrassed and can take their time. And don't forget, for young people the internet is rapidly becoming the preferred communication medium."

The Winston's Wish website also allows children to access medical FAQs and information on bereavement through its 'Ask Dr Doug' and 'Ask Chris' features and also contains a comprehensive A to Z of topics covering sensitive issues as diverse as burials, homework, quarrels and suicide. Poems, thoughts and lyrics can also be uploaded to the site. A young person can ask any question and will receive an email response within 24 hours from an experienced answerer.

Those who are supporting bereaved children and young people will also find information and guidance on the site with many pages aimed at parents and carers, professionals and schools.

Notes for editors:

Supporting images (various screen shots and photo of Di Stubbs) are available at:  
<http://www.nemisys.uk.com/winstonswish.htm>

Nemisys Enterprises ([www.nemisys.uk.com](http://www.nemisys.uk.com)) is a new media and marketing consultancy which specialises in large internet projects for the private and not-for-profit sectors. The company has a varied client base comprising charities, government departments and commercial organisations. Clients include the Mental Health Foundation, Winston's Wish, Dame Stephanie Shirley, Hewlett-Packard, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, British Paralympic Association, Bedfordshire County Council and the National Evaluation of the Children's Fund.

Winston's Wish is a national charity based in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. The charity provides support for bereaved children and young people up to the age of 18; and supports parents and carers. Support is offered via a telephone helpline (Family Line), face-to-face therapy and via the website, [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk). Winston's Wish was established in 1992 and by 2002 had helped over 3,750 children, families and carers through its direct work.

Of the calls to the national helpline, family members and carers make up 77% of calls, while calls from professionals working with or supporting bereaved children account for the remaining 23%. Over 12,500 people have contacted Family Line since 2001 who are in turn supporting 25,000 bereaved children.

In 1995 the charity won the BT/ChildLine Award for providing 'outstanding services to children'.

Every 30 minutes in the UK, a child is bereaved of a parent – that's 20,000 under 18 year-olds every year.

For press enquiries contact:

Kam Mistry, Tel: 07900 885117, Fax: 07005 942514 Email: kam@kamistry.com

For further information on Nemisys and sales enquiries contact:

John Duffy, Tel: 01189 629 855, Fax: 07005 942514 Email: john@nemisys.uk.com

For information on Winston's Wish contact:

Di Stubbs, Tel: 01242 515157, Fax: 01242 546187 Email: dstubbs@winstonswish.org.uk

Ends