



CASE STUDY

Cyberhus

by
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This document is part of the overall European project LINKS-UP - Learning 2.0 for an Inclusive Knowledge Society – Understanding the Picture. Further case studies and project results can be downloaded from the project website <http://www.linksup.eu>.

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author(s), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Cyberhus is a Danish 100% non-profit organization located in Aarhus. Cyberhus was founded in 2004 as a partner charity under the youth charity, Ungdommens Vel ('Youth Welfare') and is today staffed by more than 70 people - mainly volunteers. Cyberhus is a virtual house or club that offers online counselling for vulnerable children and teens. Counselling is undertaken mainly by volunteer chat-counsellors, all with relevant educational backgrounds, such as teachers, pedagogues, social workers and psychology students. In December 2008 Cyberhus was ranked among the 5 best European websites for marginalized young people (E-inclusion). From September onwards Cyberhus has been chosen as the Danish helpline in the European network INSAFE.

Cyberhus is organized within the 100-year-old national association Ungdommens Vel ('Youth Welfare'), which run youth shelters, children's homes, institutions for at-risk children, therapy groups, youth hostels and continuation schools throughout Denmark: www.ungdommens-vel.dk

96% of Cyberhus' users are children and teens aged between 9 and 18. They have more than 9000 unique visitors every month. From the starting period in 2004 there were 4421 online one on one chats consultations / sessions.

Case profile – Cyberhus in a nutshell

	Cyberhus Online counselling and more
Website	http://www.cyberhus.dk
Status	Active/running (since May 2004)
Interviewed person	Kristian Lund
Funded and promoted by...	Cyberhus is a 100% non-profit making online youth service supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs, private funds and the local authorities.
Location of the Learning Activities	Formal setting
Target group(s)	Vulnerable children and teenagers
Number of users	More than 4000 children and parents since 2007
Educational Sector(s)	Therapeutically based
Category of the Learning Activities	Informal
Web 2.0 technologies used...	Social bookmarking, feeds, Blogs, Online chat, peer-to-peer debate forums
Methods to support inclusion	Social networks, skill development

Short description and key characteristics

Cyberhus is first and foremost an anonymous online counselling service, offering chat, question and answer columns and forums to provide kids and young people with help and encouragement. They focus on excluded and vulnerable young, but believe that everyone can be vulnerable at some point in their lives. They mainly use volunteers for

direct online contact with kids and young people, but have their own moderators and supervisors to support and ensure the quality of the counselling.

In addition, Cyberhus helps schools and parents tackle new challenges brought on by ubiquitous computers and phones, and they are involved in national and European initiatives that deal with vulnerable youths and the 'new media'.

The Danish non-profit Ungdommens Vel ('Youth Welfare'), that runs a wide variety of youth homes, counselling services, schools and drop-in youth clubs started Cyberhus, based on an idea by Anni Marquard, who was and is the main force in starting and operating Cyberhus. Apart from the Ministry of Social Affairs, a few counties and foundations have helped out Cyberhus financially. They are still organisationally part of Ungdommens Vel. Cyberhus forms partnerships on a project basis, and the core counselling functions run almost entirely in-house. A few organisations such as Centre for Voldtægtsofre i Århus and Børnetinget do some of their counselling through Cyberhus' question and answers-columns.

Dimension of learning and inclusion

Cyberhus its counselling services do not provide learning per se, the focus also lays within their school service, Cyberskole, and related activities. Cyberskolen visits classrooms to inform and discuss web ethics and netiquette. Initially, this was for the 14-16 year age group, but by 2008 it was mostly kids around age 10-12. They have found that this is the age where kids are beginning to use the net, have the most to learn and are most open to discussion. They have also done workshops centred around a forum theatre show which they helped to develop, and will soon begin a shoot-your-own-film campaign (called Mobiler Mod Mobning, or Mobiles Against Bullying) against online bullying. Furthermore they have follow-up parents evenings where they inform and discuss children's online life and the parents' role in guiding and helping. They do not use a particular pedagogic model but they focus on user participation and discussion rather than getting a certain curriculum across. The topics they cover are far too vast to cover in any comprehensive fashion, so enabling discussion of the topics that are most relevant and interesting to the group at hand works better.

With a normal school visit they deliver over two standard lessons (2x45 minutes), they present their selves and the topic, the kids answer predefined questions in their online forums, two and two together, and after a break they have a discussion for the entire class, based on those answers. For parents evenings, they have a list of points, facts and topics they want to cover, but encourage as much discussion as the group can and will in between delivering this. Most of the time is spent reacting to and controlling the discussion.

Apart from being specially geared towards the excluded and vulnerable, they hope to help those with decreased social abilities in using the net positively. Their Mobiler Mod Mobning project is directly aimed at bullying, and hence towards inclusion. Everyone and every problem is welcome at Cyberhus, and they have been able to foster this outlook in their user forums, with very little need for adult moderation. They are more involved with alleviating problems, than in helping towards some positive goal. To some extend, these cannot be separated, and they obviously encourage seeking help, staying in school, participating in social and work life, etc. as part of counselling.

Innovative elements and key success factors

Other initiatives now offer counselling, but mostly in addition to other services and always to a specific group or with regards to a certain kind of problems. Cyberhus is unique in offering general help to any problem, even if you cannot articulate what that problem is! This enables them to help those with the least understanding of their situation, or the most fear of it - often those most in need.

It also means early help for those with seemingly lesser problems, that can be alleviated more easily before they begin to seem or become bigger. Cyberhus' innovation is based on a positive outlook on the new media.

Kids and young people are socialising and living their lives 'out there', and it seems the most natural thing in the world to reach out for that, teach and involve ourselves in that life.

Cyberhus offers help and encouragement to those who are in need of inclusion in society in order to take the steps they need towards a better life, including better inclusion. They also 'mix' users of very varying backgrounds and problems; users may give and receive advice from others that are very different from them selves, or just see that others have the same sort of problems, despite their social and economic differences. They are an anonymous service, despite they have a few opportunities for collecting statistics - they know how many answers they provide, and how many chats they offer per year. And they firmly believe that encouragement, advice and being able to discuss your problems is helpful – they have many successful sessions that end with Cyberhus being able to suggest a next step in resolving a difficult issue.



Figure 1: Das Clubhaus auf Cyberhus <http://www.cyberhus.dk/>

The first figure shows the homepage of Cyberhus with recent videos, upcoming events. If you click on the front door of you will get access to four environments / stages with different locations according the visitor's interests and needs.



Figure 2: An online room at Cyberhus <http://www.cyberhus.dk/>

The second figure shows an online room with the possibility to choose what you want to do. For instance if you click on the sofa you are able to chat functionality, containing the schedule and the chat rooms.

Problems encountered and lessons learned

Cyberhus' original and core service is 'counselling', primarily 'chat counselling'. This has changed little in structure or form, except from longer opening hours and continuous improvements as their experience and knowledge grows. When they changed to a modern CMS system (Drupal) in January 2009, they saw an explosion in use of our forums and question and answers columns, which led to an increased focus on moderation and ensuring the quality of their answers. This meant bringing in more volunteers and partners, and learning to guide and help a larger number of same. Since the launch in 2004, the Chat counselling staff has completed more than 3600 online conversations with children and young people. They have also gathered a lot of knowledge about young people and their use of the net, and they are currently making the move becoming more of a knowledge centre on these issues.

Cyberhus is focused on the moderation and the netiquette of their users directly; a social blunder or outlash from a user is less of a problem and more of a learning opportunity - if nothing else, for the other young who learn to adapt and see how such issues can be dealt with positively by other youths or adults

Collaborating institutions in LINKS-UP



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