

Speech by Marlene Kinghan, Head of Communication and Participation, at the launch of the NHSSB website www.help4kids.co.uk on 28th March 2006.

Good morning everyone and thank you for inviting NICCY to speak today. As some of you may be aware the Commissioner, Nigel Williams is currently unwell and can't be with you today.

He sends his apologies and I know he wishes your project well.

However, it is my particular pleasure to represent the Commissioner here today, as I am in familiar surroundings or, as they say, **Home Ground!**

Nigel has a passion for technology – or more specifically a passion for using technology to **communicate** and, for children and young people to communicate safely.

And, believe me Nigel uses technology to stay in touch – whether it be email, instant messaging or sending text messages on his mobile – **he stays in touch!**

Before I go on I have a **confession** to make. I might be to blame for certain aspects of technology in the Northern Health and Social Services Board!

No, don't blame me every time your PC crashes. Instead blame me that the PC is there in the first place!

Some years ago – a number I'll conveniently not mention – I was a board employee. Back then – and again I'll not tell how long ago that was – I was the first person to introduce a word processor into the office where I worked.

Yes – I was at the vanguard of the technological revolution in the Board. And no matter how long I sat in front of that word processor I still couldn't get it to heat a sausage roll!



At NICCY we know that technology is something that children and young people use and we don't confuse with microwaves too often!

Children and young people are using it more and more- so much that I have been reliably informed that some prominent thinkers are already calling the way the internet is used today is 'web version 2.0'.

This means that more and more the web is about building communities, linking up, thinking through issues and sharing information, gossip, pictures, movies, ideas, and doing things.

When the web first stumbled on to people's computers, a lot of organisations thought a web site was like having a brochure people could download.

Then organisations realised it could also be like a brochure on a website that you could update and change. It was only a few years ago that the slogan was 'content is king'.

Now, it is seen that content is only part of the story.

Before talking a little about the so-called web version 2.0 I was thinking about the way **adults** use the web.

I'm sure I can guess that if I was to ask a random group of grown-ups: How many websites do you regularly visit? the number would be quite low

I'll bet it would be less than 10 different sites per day; if not less. If my Communications team or Youth Panel found out how few websites I visit per day they mightn't talk to me for a week!

So, we as adults don't '**surf**' the web on a regular basis.

Now, how many programmes do you use when you are online?

When Nigel Williams was recently giving a lecture he compared how an **adult's** computer screen might look when online to that of his **daughter's** PC.

An **adult** might have his or her web browser open looking at results on **Google**, and perhaps have his **email programme** open.



On the **young person's screen** there would be a web browser like internet Explorer open for researching homework, as well as an email programme. There might also be an Instant Messenger programme open, with messages flying between friends. There might even be a web page open with the young person putting entries on their Myspace page or their blog, or listening to the latest downloaded songs.

And if you don't know what Myspace is or blogging is – can I suggest that like me you need to know now – especially if there are teenagers in your house!

My point is that children and young people are always finding new ways to use technology; often in ways that adults didn't expect. Text messaging software was originally put on mobile phones so engineers could send fault codes to each other.

Now there are millions of messages sent each month – and the majority probably by under 21s.

The so-called web version 2.0 has changed the way people should regard websites. It is, perhaps, the beginning of true communications for organisations – communications that is two-way; communications that can support true instant responses; communications that demands new ways for organisations to exchange information with the people who use their services.

That is why we at NICCY are so encouraged when we hear of organisations such as the NHSSB using the web to communicate with young people.

In a recent **awareness** survey conducted by NICCY the web was ranked as one of the top ways people searched for contact details. And with **12,000** plus unique visits last month alone, and more than a **quarter of a million hits** in the past four weeks, we know they are using the web!

Children and young people can use the web site as an **anonymous** way of finding information – some even have multiple identities online.

That is, perhaps why the web is so useful for young people – no-one needs to see them with a leaflet in their hand when looking for **sensitive** information.

That is why help4kids.co.uk is such a useful way for young people to find help.



It is perhaps too easy for adults to think that behavioural, emotional or mental health problems fit in boxes. It is not so easy for young people to think that way – especially when they are looking for help.

We at NICCY are well aware of the issues facing children and young people facing mental health problems. We have heard from many children and young people about the issues they face accessing services.

Indeed, we conducted an online campaign to help make sure children and young people could directly tell the Government through our website what they thought of child and adolescent mental health services and how they should be improved.

Our **'Message to the Minister'** campaign attracted hundreds of visitors in a couple of weeks, with 120 direct messages that we took directly to the Minister's doorstep.

As well as this we have ongoing contact with children and young people on mental health issues.

They have told us that too often the services they need are not there. Too often they cannot seem to access those services, cannot find where they are

This NHSSB initiative goes a long way to making sure young people can find those services.

Help4kids.co.uk enables children and young people to choose from a menu – that is a great idea; giving the children and young people the ability to browse and decide if the category matches the problem they are experiencing, and where to find help.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is something we look at almost every day as our guiding document. The UNCRC outlines the rights children and young people can and should expect.

They should expect to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives; and they should have a right to the best possible life chances through education and health services.



I am glad that your new web site is working towards meeting those rights and I know that this is an important step in seeing how public services can work with children and young people; and through that aspiration can support NICCY in our mission statement – **promoting and safeguarding the rights and best interests of children and young people.**

But before I go – and seeing that we're talking about the internet – don't forget to visit our website on www.niccy.org.

And if you missed anything I said, I'll make sure a copy is on the site by tonight!

I'd like to take this opportunity to **introduce Niall Bole**, a member of the NICCY Youth Panel.

The NICCY Youth Panel is a vital part of what we do. It is a group of 42 young people who help advise us on what we are doing, assist in our research **and even** sit on interview panels for all NICCY staff.

Niall has been on the Youth Panel since its inception, and has been involved in many aspects of the Youth Panel work including the NICCY website, which I am sure he will explain.

So once again can I, on behalf of the Commissioner, congratulate you on what you have achieved – and indeed will achieve – through this fantastic project and hand you over to one of the real experts in the field.

Over to you Niall!

