

Providing educational opportunities for poor children

"Visio has been tremendous in helping us to strategise" – John McConnell.



Many – perhaps most – users of the CTX scheme are small charities, organisations for which the programme can make a huge difference in providing a modern IT infrastructure. Scholarships for Street Kids (S4SK) must be one of the tiniest, however. With a turnover of just £9,000 it is managed by a small group of Quakers from Keighley in West Yorkshire, who nevertheless have used

that small pot of money to improve the lives of some of the poorest children in the developing world.

John McConnell is a trustee at the charity, and the man who originally started the ball rolling. While teaching in South East Asia, he was moved by an encounter with a young mother who was begging in the street with her baby: "This mother clearly loved her baby, but she had absolutely nothing to give her—no home, no toys, no prospects.' One day, she was so tired that she almost dropped her baby. It was at that point that I felt I really had to do something. I bought them a bamboo house for what we would pay for a garden shed here. She had ideas of keeping hens and opening a small shop, and I left some money to invest in such projects with a friend. However, there was to be no happy ending. The mother died just months later, of a brain tumour. My money paid for her medical treatment and funeral. It was this, and subsequent efforts to make sure her baby was well cared for, that brought me into contact with young people who beg and scavenge to provide money for their families. At that time, I had no idea of starting an organisation."

As John further examined the issue of poverty in that region, it seemed that something that could make a difference to these young people was education. "The first grants I made were to two boys in an orphanage. One worked in a candle factory, the other was unemployed. Both were interested in music. I bought instruments for them, and enrolled them in music college. They graduated this year—one with an award for 'excellence in performance'. I gave some more grants, and friends helped too," he explains. Before too long, the charity – as it became – was facilitating the employment of part-time teachers and a development worker in the region. "We enrolled 34 kids into school, this year" he says, "We run an informal class for scavenging children, and give scholarships for vocational training and college courses. It's all on a small scale – but it does get direct to the young people, and it makes a world of difference for the kids we help."

John discovered CTX via a colleague, and has used the scheme to equip the charity with the basic software that it needs to function. With an organisation as small as S4SK, the question of 'what would you have done without these software donations' simply doesn't arise. "We wouldn't have been able to purchase anything," states John. "It would have been such a slice of our budget. So CTX has been a tremendous help."

As well as the 'basics,' using CTX has introduced the charity to software that will help it expand and prosper. John cites Microsoft Visio and Expression Web 3 as examples. "We'd never have thought of Visio, which has been tremendous in helping us to strategise. Although we are small, some of the things that we do are quite complex, and this software has been very useful," he says.

"We are now looking to transfer our website to Expression Web," he continues. "We're hoping this will give us a more professional, stable and reliable environment – and this will save us time."

John is not an IT professional, and suggests that small charities would welcome help at the planning stage – what software might they need to take them forward? In terms of the donations themselves, he is enthusiastic about the CTX concept and very pleased with the end result.

"CTX are very friendly and helpful – they've been great," he says. "It's a very good service."

Who are they?
SCHOLARSHIPS FOR
STREET KIDS.

Where are they?
Yorkshire, working on
projects in developing
countries.

What do they do?
Aim to help very poor
children by providing
educational opportunities.

How big are they?
A turnover of just £6,000.

What did they receive?
Microsoft software: Visio,
Office Professional Plus,
PowerPoint, Expression
Web 3, Windows upgrades.

The outcome?
This tiny charity has been
equipped with the latest
software.

www.s4sk.org.uk