

# 20 YEARS

1990 2010

# 20 YEARS



**Community Network  
celebrates 20 years of  
using telephone  
befriending groups to  
combat social exclusion**

**The power of speech**



**Loneliness  
and the feeling of  
being unwanted  
is the most  
terrible poverty**

Mother Teresa



# Celebrating the past – looking to the future

2010 sees Community Network celebrate its 20th anniversary. It's hard to believe that what began as a six-month research project into the social application of technology in Northern Ireland is now such an essential service for so many voluntary groups and individuals throughout the UK.

That initial project involved using telephone befriending groups to link up people from both sides of the sectarian divide, with the aim of breaking down barriers and creating a more inclusive society. Over the years Community Network has undergone many changes, but this principle has always remained central to the charitable work we do.

Community Network is still a relatively small organisation, but its impact on people's lives cannot be underestimated. In the following pages you will read about the innovative ways we tackle the problems of isolation and social exclusion that blight the lives of older people, the sick, carers, refugees and those suffering emotional distress.

Much of our work is funded by the telephone conferencing services we supply to the third sector. Last year, to improve this service we made a significant investment in a state-of-the-art, internet-based, audio conferencing system. The new system delivers greater audio clarity, with further improved line reliability and increased line capacity. This investment illustrates our commitment to providing a quality, competitively priced, teleconferencing service to all our customers.

Everyone connected with Community Network is proud of what we and our partner organisations have achieved so far, but our focus is on the challenges ahead. We are confident that Community Network can play an even bigger role delivering social care and well-being projects within the third sector and the wider public sector.

Finally, I would like to thank all those individuals and organisations that have supported Community Network over the last twenty years; the volunteers who make such a valuable contribution; and Community Network's Chief Executive and staff team, whose hard work and dedication transforms the lives of so many vulnerable people.



**Hugh Smith**  
*Chair, Community Network*



# Bridging the digital divide

For twenty years Community Network has pioneered the use of group telephony as a means of delivering social care in the UK. The telephone is a lifeline for many vulnerable and marginalised people, and is quite often the only form of contact with the outside world that some of our clients have. But with communication technology developing at an ever-faster pace, is it inevitable the telephone will be superseded as the principal communication tool in the work we do by internet-based forums providing audio and visual link up?

However, this supposition depends on internet use in the UK becoming as universal as telephone communication. But the prospect of this being achieved is questioned in a recent Demos report,

70% of people over 65 are digitally excluded

*Web I'm 64: Ageing, the Internet and Digital Inclusion*. The report presented a raft of research-based statistics clearly showing that many people in the UK are likely to remain digitally excluded. According to Government figures 10-million people in the UK have never used the internet, with a large proportion of this number being made up of older people.

Despite media reports of an older generation of web-savvy "Silver Surfers", research shows that 70% of people over 65 are digitally excluded. The main cause is that not having grown-up in the internet age, older people find the technology and jargon of a youth-driven IT industry too complicated to understand. But it's not just older people who have this problem: 53% of UK residents of all ages believe technology is becoming far too complex to be useful in their everyday lives.

The Demos report also drew attention to the fact that web uptake in the UK appears to have plateaued, with no more people using the internet today than were using it in 2004. Furthermore, the report states that even by 2015 the number of adults without internet connection is not expected to fall significantly.

With the arrival of the internet, expectations were high as to the benefits it could bring to the lives of older people. But this initial optimism has now waned, and serious doubts have arisen as to whether digital inclusion can ever translate into social inclusion for older people and other vulnerable groups.

Many older people prefer traditional forms of communication and view the internet as impersonal. And in contrast to the digital exclusion highlighted in the Demos report, almost everyone has access to a telephone.

Over the past two decades Community Network has shown how telephone social and well-being groups can help to address, in a meaningful and sustainable way, the complex emotional needs of older people and others who feel isolated from their communities. Far from being replaced by new technology, the telephone will play a vital role in bridging the digital divide and continue to bring friendship, comfort and emotional support to vulnerable people throughout the UK.



# The Social Inclusion Team



Sue Robinson  
and  
Belay Gessesse

The Social Inclusion Team is at the forefront of Community Network's efforts to combat the problems of isolation. Formed in 2008, the team is made up of two project officers, Sue Robinson and Belay Gessesse, who are assisted by Community Network's support staff.

The aim of the team is to promote the telephone group model as an effective way of delivering some forms of social care. This involves identifying groups of people that may benefit from participating in telephone befriending and well-being groups; liaising with relevant agencies; setting up the groups; and monitoring the effectiveness of the groups.

Already the team has played an active role in setting up the successful Seafarers Link project and telephone support groups for refugees. But its most exciting achievement to date must be securing a contract with Reading Council to support elderly people in their homes and prevent them having to go into residential care or require additional statutory services. Community Network views this breakthrough as clear evidence local authorities are beginning to recognise the potential of telephone social and support groups.

Undeniably, this approach represents a radical change in the delivery of adult social care. However, it is in line with the Government's commitment to achieving a strategic shift to prevention and early intervention, as set out in its agenda for Putting People First. With 20 years' experience in delivering effective social care via the telephone group model, Community Network believes it can assist local authorities in meeting the Government's aims.

# Anniversary timeline

## Community Network

**1990**

Community Network is formed in Belfast where one of the first users was the Northern Ireland Children's Holiday Scheme, a cross-community youth organisation



## Telephone developments



**1991**

British Telecom was rebranded and became known as BT

**1994**

BT's "It's Good to Talk" campaign is launched starring Bob Hoskins



**1996**

The "Friendship Link" Project is launched



**1999**

BT starts to deploy multi media payphones



1990 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 20

**1990**

With London's 01 code on the verge of running out of local numbers, the capital was divided into two areas, inner and outer London using dialling codes 071 and 081



**1994**

Telephone social groups for elderly housebound people in St Helens begin



16 APRIL 1995

**PHONEDAY**

AREA CODES STARTING 0 WILL START 01

**1995**

PhONEday on 16 April saw national codes throughout the UK change

**1992**

Community Network worked with the BBC to provide off-air support groups for the Woman's Hour breast cancer campaign



**1998** More take part in telephone



# 1990 – 2010



**2002**

The first telephone Christmas carol service took place and has now become an annual event



**2006**

Community Network has 900 clients

**2005**

An online version of the phone book is launched

**2010**

Community Network celebrates its 20th anniversary

**2007**

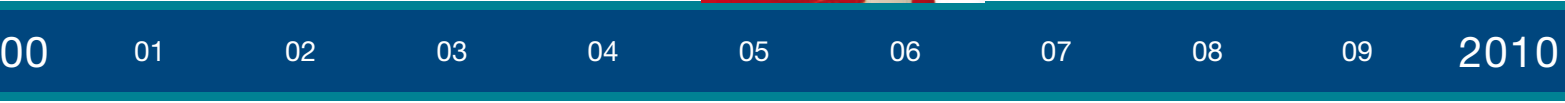
Sara Mendes da Costa took over as the new voice of the BT speaking clock



BT images for 1994, 1999 and 2007 courtesy of BT Heritage

**2010**

It is expected that pan-European 116 helpline phone numbers will be introduced in the UK



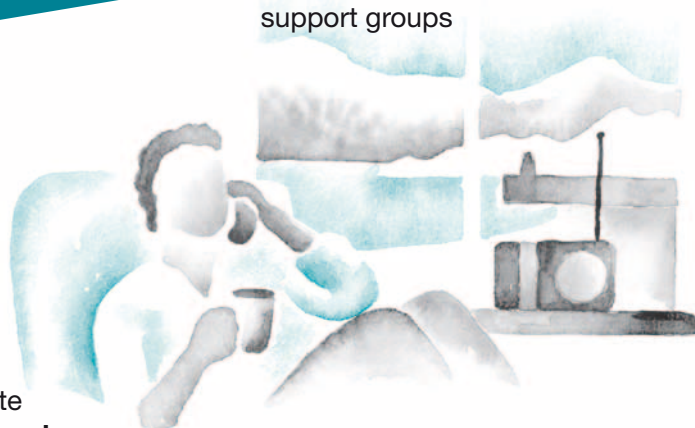
than 30,000 people  
Community Network's  
conferences

**2004**

The "Ring Around Carers" project is successfully completed; a joint project with BBC local radio that linked up over 500 carers into telephone support groups

**2008**

The Community Network Social Inclusion team is established. Two full-time members of staff are employed to set up and run telephone support groups for isolated people



**2000**

Community Network launches its first website [www.community-network.org](http://www.community-network.org)



**2001**

BT TextDirect is launched for people with a hearing or speech impairment

**2003**

Ofcom, the independent regulator and competition authority for the communications industries in the UK, is established



**2008**

Plans are in place to allow mobile phones to be used on UK-registered planes while flying in European airspace

# PROJECTS

## Seafarers Link

Seafarers Link is an award-winning telephone support and befriending project set up to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation among retired seafarers. The first group was launched in Hull and following its success other groups are now operating on Merseyside and in Cardiff.

Dave O'Connor spent 50 years at sea as a deep-sea arctic fisherman and captain in the merchant service. Now retired, he runs the Hull group and is in no doubt of the benefits it brings.

“Seafarers Link has revitalised the former seamen in the group. We swap stories about the ships on which we served and the adventures we had. We're even planning to meet up.”

In February 2010, Seafarers Link was named joint-winner in The Helpline Association's (THA) 2010 Helpline Awards sponsored by BT. The project received praised for its innovative use of technology to deliver a helpline service.

This followed Seafarers Link being named runner-up in the 2009 SupportActionNet Awards for services, projects or examples of support work that have delivered outstanding outcomes for vulnerable people.

The judges commented: “The genius is that it uses something that people already have – a telephone. Also it is spreading and is evidently having an impact.”

“I loved the thoughtfulness behind this project; seeing a very specific and unrecognised need and responding so appropriately to it. ... Wonderful!”

“I loved the thoughtfulness behind this project.”

## Carol concerts

Christmas can be a lonely time for people who are housebound. In 2002 Community Network broadcast its first telephone carol concert into people's homes, which has since become an annual event.

The idea is to include people who are housebound through old age, illness, disability or caring responsibilities whose circumstances prevent them from attending Christmas carol concerts. Unlike radio or television broadcasts the minister taking the service refers directly to those listening on the telephone, making them feel part of the congregation.

Christmas 2009 saw Community Network broadcast three carol concerts, which linked up over 200 people to concerts taking place at two

“We always get excellent feedback.”



London churches and Cardiff's Llandaff Cathedral. As well as enjoying a selection of traditional carols, the telephone congregations heard either actress Juliet Stephenson or former BBC newsreader Martyn Lewis read the lesson at the London concerts, while the world-famous Treorchy Male Voice Choir performed at the Cardiff concert.

We always get excellent feedback from the people who take part and know of one lady who invites her friends round, puts the concert on speaker phone and they all sing along.



## Delivering hope and support to refugees

Many refugees arrive in the UK having escaped from persecution, detention, torture and sexual violence in their

“Life in exile can be lonely and uncertain.”



homeland, only to find their new lives blighted by feelings of alienation and social exclusion. This can be caused by cultural, social and religious differences in addition to the language barrier. The problem is exacerbated by a policy of dispersal, resulting in refugees being relocated to parts of the UK where there are no other people from their ethnic group.

In September 2009, Community Network invited representatives from the refugee community and other agencies to a consultative workshop to look at ways of tackling this problem.

Since the workshop, two telephone self-help groups have been set up for members of the Ethiopian community in London with Community Network training one member from each group to act as group facilitator. Similar projects are planned for members of the Somali and Eritrean communities living in Islington where the groups will have the option of holding discussions in their own language.

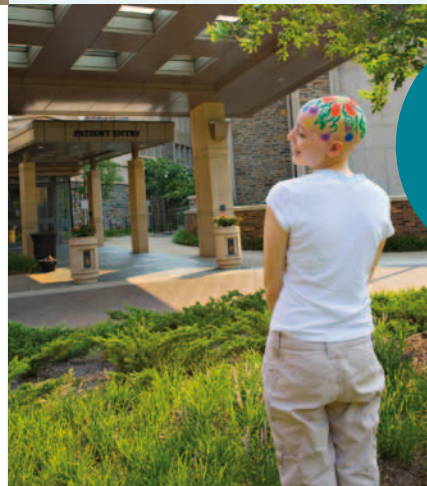
Furthermore, the NAZ Project, the charity supporting refugees living with HIV/Aids, and Praxis, the organisation working with displaced people, are exploring the possibility of establishing telephone self-help groups for their vulnerable clients. Community Network is also working with the Helen Bamber Foundation on a joint project to provide help for refugees who have been victims of torture and now suffer from anxiety and depression.

## Group telephony in Ireland

Sponsored by BT, Community Network has brought the benefits of social telephony to several organisations in Ireland. Headway – the brain injury charity – wanted to extend their services, so Community Network facilitated two telephone support groups for carers in Dublin and Cork.

“We were asking ourselves: ‘Can people use this medium to make meaningful contact?’ And the answer is: Yes they can,” said Richard Stables, Headway’s Information and Support Manager. “We have a number of people from West Cork where transport links are poor and travelling to group meetings would prove difficult. The ability to bypass transport barriers is one of the main advantages of group telephony.”

Telephone social groups have also been received enthusiastically by CanTeen Ireland, the charity for



“Everyone gelled very quickly.”

young people diagnosed with cancer. Teenagers from all over Ireland link up to talk about their illness or other topics. The informality of the groups even helps to overcome shyness as Evelyn Griffith, the charity’s Group Co-ordinator, remarks: “People who you think might be quiet are often the most chatty.”

The Post Polio Support Group (PPSG) helps hundreds of people across Ireland and uses social telephony to reach people who are housebound or living in remote rural locations. These groups provide a social and emotional connection for those who might otherwise be alone.

“Everyone gelled very quickly, and what was a support session became more of a chat,” said Paula Lahiff, Company Secretary for the PPSG. “They send each other birthday cards and if a group member has to go into hospital, everybody offers support.”

# Social enterprise

## Teleconferencing – the modern way to do business

Community Network is a social enterprise providing low cost conference calls to the not-for-profit sector. Telephone conferencing can help organisations operate more efficiently by providing the following benefits:



- **Eliminates the “dead” time travelling to a meeting**
- **Reduces your carbon footprint**
- **Cuts the cost of hiring a room and buying refreshments**
- **Conferences can be arranged at very short notice**
- **Suitable for both small and large groups**

Our long list of customers includes Macmillan Cancer Support, Christian Aid, the Open University, Samaritans, Citizens Advice, the London Borough of Hackney, the Disaster Emergency Committee – which co-ordinates charity responses to emergencies such as the Haitian earthquake – and BOND, organisers of the worldwide campaign, Make Poverty History.

Using the latest digital audio conferencing equipment we provide a professional, competitively priced service to all our customers. But as a social enterprise, what distinguishes us from other teleconferencing providers is that all surplus profits are used to set up and run self-help telephone groups working to tackle social exclusion.

In 2009 Community Network was awarded The Social Enterprise Mark, an instantly recognisable label to identify social enterprises. The Mark indicates to customers that by supporting a social enterprise they are helping to create benefits for people and the planet, rather than generating profits for owners or shareholders. As well as being only one of 51 recipients in the UK, Community Network is the first organisation in London to be awarded the Mark.



# Staff

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Chief Executive



Wendy Oliver  
Head of Finance



## Trustees

Hugh Smith  
David Griffiths  
Colin Coulson Thomas  
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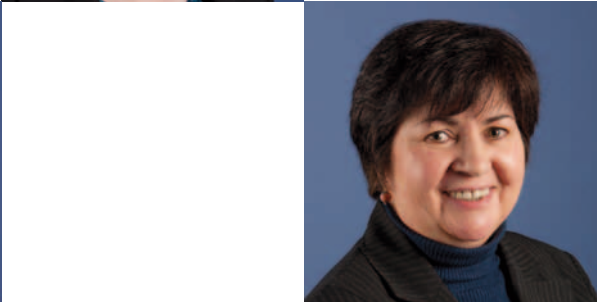
## Conference Call Operators

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# Thanks

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Once you  
finish your  
conference  
call, our  
charity work  
begins



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The power of speech