

Report on the
redesign and
development of
the Sunderland
Disabled Children
Website



Sunderland Disabled Children website rebuild - Evaluation report.

October 2009

Background

The existing Sunderland Disabled Children website www.sncwd.org.uk was designed and launched in approximately 2003. In the 6 years it had been operational it had become clogged with content and unmanageable. General user opinion was that information was difficult to find and navigation around the site was not easy. Discussion took place about the amount of work needed to update the site and it was agreed that as technologies had move on since the original site was built there was a clear need for a completely new website to be built. It was also agreed to obtain a more user friendly domain name www.sundc.org.uk.

As the target audience of the site were parents/carers of disabled children in Sunderland the initial part of the process was to arrange consultation sessions to gather their views about what they were looking for from the site. Seven sessions were organised across various parts of the city to try to encourage as many people as possible to attend.

An electronic voting system was used to anonymously gather thoughts and opinions about what was important to people individually. These sessions were kept completely separate from the professional session in order to gain an honest view from parents and to avoid any undue influences.

Further details of the consultation process can be found in Appendix 1.

The rebuild

Using information gathered from the consultation sessions discussions were held with the Aiming High for Disabled Children team and a select number of parents in order to prepare the basic navigation menu for the new site.

During the initial consultation session parents/carers stated that they wanted somewhere that the young people were able to visit on the internet that would give them access to good quality, relevant, **safe** content. A 'Kids' section was therefore included in the menu, however this was a completely separate part of the site and content for this section is pulled from other web based sources.

Once the technical work around the actual build of the site had been completed content from the old site was assessed and either updated and included or completely discarded. The new website has been designed to be much more of a 'signposting portal' rather than trying to hold all of the information itself.

Evaluation of the main site

In October 2009 all of the parents who had attended the initial consultation were invited to a testing session in order to ensure all of their comments and ideas had been captured.

The parents who attended offered the comments below:

- Much more user friendly
- Looks great!
- Everything I searched for I was able to find
- There seems to be a good choice of information already included

Suggestions for further improvement/other information to be included:

- Details of the Young Carers Card to be included
- More information about the Max card
- Information about health services in other authorities (although some people live within the Sunderland boundary – they receive services from across the Local Authority border)

Evaluation of the Kids Zone

The evaluation of the Kids Zone took place at Hendon Young People's Project on Wednesday 7th October 2009 and was attended by 10 young people aged between 10 – 16 years:

- 3 young people aged 14 – 16 who had attended a number of activities arranged through Aiming High for Disabled Children
- 7 young people aged 10 who were attending a youth club session at HYPP

5 youth workers from HYPP also looked at the site with a view to using it with young people as part of their activity sessions.

The young people were advised of how and why the new site had been developed and simply asked to go onto the site and offer their opinions, what worked/didn't work, what could be improved and if they thought anything had been omitted.

The comments below are just a selection received from the young people:

- Very good
- Very bright and colourful
- There is nothing to be changed on this website – it is great and enjoyable
- I think the website is good for young children – it helps them to listen and to learn, how to read and to draw
- It helps with homework
- It has more education on this site than others I have been on
- You can learn a lot of good things
- The website is cool
- Would like some more games
- There should be football for boys and dressing up games for girls
- The games are more educational games than fun games
- I think that the painting section is exciting and fun
- Should be some pictures for older people

- Fun to read and lots of different books to look at
- I think that the reading section is fun and educational
- If you are interested in animals and sea creatures this is a great way of looking at them up close
- The homework section can help you when you are stuck with your home work

Following the testing session the 3 older young people took part in a discussion about their thoughts and ideas. Overall they all liked the site but they also had some ideas for further possible developments or things that could be included:

- Include some pages specifically targeted at the 'older' age group
- Have an advice section where young people could go for advice around bullying, relationships, family matters, stop smoking or drugs
- Links to leisure services (linking to the Letsgosunderland website was discussed)
- Advice routes for young people to ask for help for themselves without having to go through an adult i.e. parent/carer

Comments and feedback

Comments and feedback received from parents/carers and young people at the testing sessions were used to make a few final changes to the site which then officially went live on Wednesday 14th October 2009. The new site was promoted at the Annual Parent Carer Forum on Thursday 15th October and further active promotion of the new site will continue for the near future. The initial feedback received has been very positive and encouraging.

Initial feedback received from professionals is also very positive, including a comment: "Well done it is an excellent resource!"

It is worth noting that one important customer service improvement has been made as a result of research for information to be included on the site:

- Enquiries were made around where a disabled toilet key could be obtained from within the city. Currently there were only two places in the city offering this service: Crowtree Leisure Centre and South Hylton House.

After pointing out that these two centres were not always easily accessible by parents/carers of disabled children living further afield, enquiries were made and 4 other centres have now agreed to offer the keys for sale. This is a small step in making this service much more accessible to all, but is a positive improvement.

Next steps

While maintenance of the website will be a constant ongoing process, parents/carers are actively being encouraged to use the online feedback form to point out any gaps or to request specific information that they feel is relevant but not currently included.

Permissions are also being sought from parents/carers to use images of Sunderland children in the site in order to give it a genuine local flavour.

Appendix 1

Introduction

www.sncwd.org.uk has been operational online for close to 6 years and serves the Sunderland area. The site is “owned” by the Sunderland Disabled Children Network, a loose collection of parents, carers and siblings. Input is also given by some key professionals as and when needed. In this sense the site is not considered “council” but is considered a community-of-interest.



Over time the site has become clogged with content, information is not properly edited for the web and it has become cumbersome for the website authors to effectively manage. Also, since the site went live some years ago a great deal more is now known about technical aspect of web design and online user behavior. Though still functioning well it was felt the site was no longer fit for purpose.

Some key considerations must be adhered to;

- Involved end users both parents and professionals
- separate consultations – parents to be consulted separately from professional to ensure no undue influence
- The site must still be updated using existing methods – same people authoring with the same tools
- Not heavily council branded – the site is not to be seen as ‘council property’ by the users but as an independent source of high quality information from both statutory, private and voluntary organisations serving the parents and carers of Sunderland

What was done?

An interactive anonymous voting tool was used to gather and collate the responses to a set number of key questions aimed at discovering user needs.

Along with this another session was then delivered which encouraged open group discussion on the needs of parents and carers.

No complex technology questions were asked but how and why users needed and interacted with information sources online were informally discussed.



To aid this discussion a series of images were shown of other websites. The sites were chosen for two reasons. Firstly, they were aimed at the same users groups and secondly they each represented a typical example of the main web design styles currently in use. A demonstration of the tool can be viewed on.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rDYcLkm2fg&feature=player_embedded#t=126

Sites used in the discussion

<http://www.nas.org.uk/>

This site was chosen for its similarity to the existing snwd site.

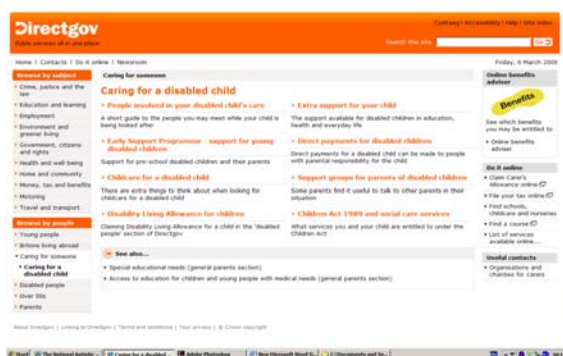
Found to be “old fashioned” but with an easy to understand layout.



<http://www.direct.gov.uk>

Chosen as a comparison to a large portal type site was needed.

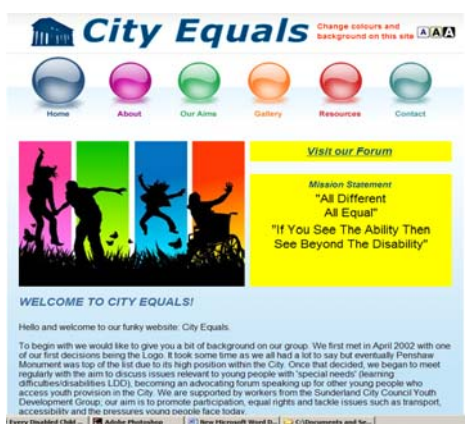
Thought to be large cumbersome and confusing.

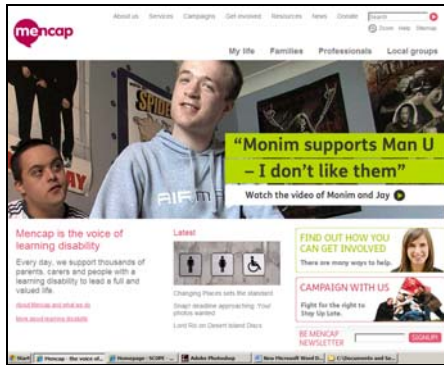


<http://www.cityequals.co.uk/>

Chosen as an example of over simplicity.

Colours were well liked but navigation not obvious.





<http://www.mencap.org.uk/>

Chosen as an example of current modern design.

As with the Down's Syndrome Association's site this site also produced strong positive emotional responses.



<http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk/>

This site produced the strongest emotional response through the good use of very strong and relevant imagery.

The site was complimented for its ease of navigation



<http://www.scope.org.uk/>

This site was chosen as an example of the all up front design technique.

This site was universally disliked for its complexity.

Basic Conclusions

Taking note of the specific responses from the website discussions and collating these together with known user behavior and results from the interactive quiz the following requirements which the new site must fulfill were arrived at;

- **Strong use of relevant images** – image to complement the webpage content, i.e. image of autistic people on pages covering autistic issues
- **Clear navigation** – simplify menu with plain english terms, reduce overall number of pages
- **Better search options** – replace old search tool with dedicated Google search
- **Relevant information gathered together** – develop sections dedicated to the top line conditions
- **Local news first** – content from Sunderland to be given priority
- **More accessibility tools and information** – dedicated information on accessibility tools and guidance, site to have accessibility inbuilt and not to offer a “click here for text version” which offers a second class citizen feeling in users.
- **Safe content for young people** – produce an interactive section containing safe to use and educational content from trusted sources

Final Page design

The final design for the new site discreetly incorporates the requirements gained through consulting with this unique set of parents, carers and professionals.

It also includes many aspect of contemporary web design which have been learnt through previous work done with other groups in the general population.

A key need is for the site to be easily updates using existing methods and techniques which would not be too much of a drain on those currently responsible for managing content updates.



A – primary main navigation to be found on every page

B – top image area, to changes as needed

C – secondary navigation with links to other pages in that section only

D – main content area

E – related links area

F – news snippets area

