

Cyberangels preach online safety to East London teens

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ZDNet UK

January 23, 2002, 18:53 BST

High-tech crime experts are training children from an East London community how to surf responsibly and safely

Underprivileged children in the London borough of Newham are being trained to teach other

The non-profit-making organisation [Cyberangels](#), based in New York, is coordinating an intensive six-week training course for teenagers on The Carpenter's Estate in East London. The "Teenangels" project targets London's 'best-connected' borough, and aims to devise Internet safety and privacy policies for the community.

Experts in Internet crime, including Bob McLachlan, head of the Metropolitan Police's Paedophile Unit, have been training the children involved in the scheme. Representatives from other organisations such as Microsoft, the Internet Watch Foundation, the Internet Society and NetNanny, have also visited Newham to contribute to the education programme.

"We are almost abandoning teaching parents as it has all been written already. But teens and pre-teens have to be taught how to use the Internet responsibly and privately," said Parry Aftab, head of Cyberangels. "Kids are more likely to listen to another teenager before they will listen to an adult."

According to Aftab, in every known case where a child has gone to meet a stranger offline, they have gone willingly. A recent survey by Cyberangels discovered that a significant number of teenage girls who participate in chatrooms are meeting strangers they've met there offline.

"If (children) are going to meet strangers offline, it is better to teach them how to do it safely," said Aftab.

Aftab is confident that the training course will produce a community of teenage experts in Internet crime. "Once they are experts, I trust them to have an opinion. I can spot the ones that are not taking it seriously," said Aftab.

The Teenangels project forms part of the Wired Kids programme, which is supported by a global consortium of non-governmental organisations, including Cyberangels, Disney, Childnet International and Microsoft. The UK educational programme is headed up by Sharon O'Hara, a schoolteacher from Bradford.