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IT Heroes: Social networking enters the hospital

An initiative supported by Telus aims to make future stays for young patients less traumatic. It enables young patients to connect with those going through similar experiences, as well as their friends, families and teachers

By: ComputerWorld Canada staff

ComputerWorld Canada (10 Jun 2008)

In the weeks ahead, ITWorldCanada will be using this space to applaud individuals and corporations who are using information technology to significantly improve the lives of Canadians by profiling nominees for the upcoming Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC) IT Hero Awards presented by Intel. Winners in both corporate and community categories will be announced at the ITAC Chairs' Dinner in Toronto on June 26.

Name: Upopolis-Telus

Location: Toronto

When two young friends each had lengthy stays in the hospital, they felt the loneliness and frustration that accompanies such experiences. An initiative supported by Telus aims to make future stays for young patients less traumatic by bringing social networking to the hospital room. Upopolis is an online social network designed exclusively for hospitalized kids.

The site was created by the Kids Health Links Foundation (KHLF) using technology services donated by Telus. It enables young patients to connect with those going through similar experiences, as well as their friends, families and teachers. The Facebook-like online community helps reduce the isolation that children and youth often feel when faced with a hospital stay. Because such technology is so prevalent in young peoples' lives, this communications continuity can go a long way in boosting their spirits and positively impacting their health.

McMaster Children's Hospital rolled out the program in December 2007, with other children's hospitals across Canada slated to launch in partnership with KHLF.

Upopolis provides a personal profile, secure mail, instant chat, discussion boards, personal blogs and links to child-friendly games. The site has unique features such as a homework application to help kids stay up to date with their schoolwork, links to child-friendly general health information, and specific information about the tests and procedures that they may have in the hospital. The child friendly medical content was developed by KHLF in partnership with McMaster Children's Hospital.

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