

Edtech startup World is a Village partners with charity to connect pupils around the world

The events of the past 12 months have created unwanted distance and separation for most. School trips and overseas homestays have inevitably been hit, creating a missed opportunity for children to experience new cultures.

To remedy this, edtech startup World is a Village has partnered with Founders4Schools, a charity that connects educators with a network of inspirational business leaders, to improve the employment chances of young people.

The startup helps children across the world connect to discover new cultures, make new friends and improve their language skills via its Digital Journey platform.

Founded by French entrepreneur Camille Huyghues Despointes, World is a Village was originally launched as a homestay platform to connect families around the world to organise cross-border language and culture exchange trips for their teens.

The new Digital Journey – built in response to overseas homestay and school

trips being cancelled due to COVID-19 – is an online educational programme aimed at fostering conversation between teenagers in different countries and boosting their confidence in foreign languages.

Founders4Schools' mission is to bridge the gap between education and the world of work. Through this partnership, they aim to help pupils build an international network and develop their knowledge of the world around them. Their belief is that making kids more open-minded and more connected will prepare them for the rapidly changing world we live in.

This comes at a time when teens' exchanges are affected not only by COVID-19 but also by Brexit, with the UK leaving Erasmus and its school twinning programme eTwinning in January. Since 2005, 217,438 schools have benefitted from the European school twinning programme.

Camille Huyghues Despointes, founder, World is a Village, said: "We have found that secondary schools are particularly receptive to this idea as a replacement or complement for their physical programmes. This is also an innovative and affordable solution for those schools that don't have an international exchange programme; teachers and students alike want to use technology to keep borders open and avoid being a less insular world."

The Digital Journey

The World is a Village Digital Journey experience is complementary to what children are taught in school language lessons. It focuses on boosting the student's confidence by increasing the frequency of their practice in a fun and relaxed environment with students from across the world.

The gamified platform brings teenagers together to practice a foreign language via games, quizzes and missions but also – just as importantly – opens them up to new cultures and ways of life at a time when global travel is on hold. These digital friendships will then translate into trip opportunities when borders reopen, whether they are organised by schools or by the families individually.

The Digital Journey is open to families and schools, who can use it as an extracurricular activity for their pupils or create twinned communities with partner schools abroad.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Modern Languages estimated that the UK was losing out on £4.8bn every year as a result of its lack of language skills. British Council's Language Trend Report 2020 suggested that Brexit would have a negative impact on language learning in schools, with a shift in attitudes and an increasing number of pupils and their parents feeling that European language skills will be of limited use following the UK's exit from the

EU.

Sherry Coutu, founder and chair of trustees, Founders4Schools, added:

“As employers are recruiting more and more internationally, the borders blur and cultural awareness and language skills become increasingly important.

“The UK is not regarded as a leader when it comes to training our young people to communicate in foreign languages. Brexit and the end of the Erasmus programme don’t help; they amplify the issue.

“Partnering with World is a Village, which brings cultural connections and the possibility to communicate with young people abroad, is an outstanding opportunity for us to help young people and students build these skills and become better prepared for the future World of Work, which is at the heart of Founders4Schools.”

The World is a Village Digital Journey programme costs £22 per month per student, with special pricing for schools.

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