The Click Heard Round the World: My friend Mensajero, the virtual pa...
My friend Mensajero, the virtual panhandler

After reading about a homeless avatar begging in Second Life (Thanks, Hamlet Au, SL Insider, and my friend Tony) I decided to pop into SL to check it out. I tracked down the resident named "MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee" and got a TP to his location, appropriately enough, right in front of one of the NBC-sponsored Rockefeller Center sims. I found a bedraggled looking avatar sleeping in a cardboard box with a crude sign asking for donations.

I dropped ten lindens into his pocket and had a quick conversation with him in Spanish. This is a rough translation....

MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee: Thanks for your donation.
Me: No problem. It's really nothing. So how have the donations been?
MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee: The money isn't important. What is important is that people learn about Mensajeros.
Me: True.
MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee: We also put up a YouTube video that is doing quite well. Have you seen it?
Me: Looking at it right now. It's really great.
MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee: We're getting lots of attention on the web and blogs.
Me: Awesome!
Me: Why are you sleeping?
MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee: I have found that this is best position to get peoples attention.
Me: I'm suprised that the NBC people have not kicked you out.
MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee: Yeah, the police have not been here yet.
Me: This is not like the experience of the real homeless in Manhattan.
MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee: Yes, we would have been moved along immediately.
Me: Do you know of other NGOs who are active in Second Life?
MensajeroDeLaPaz Jubilee: No, we are neophytes here.
Me: Let's chat soon about how to connect your work with others doing similar projects like Techsoup and Better World Island.
Very interesting Rik...

One of the most striking characteristics of virtual worlds is that unlike other real world issues that naturally manifest themselves (such as violence, discrimination, etc...) poverty is notably absent, as for it to be present it must be intentional, such as in this case. While there is a the 'poverty' of those who are landless, this is not an issue that you can 'see' as you can see real poverty in the real world.

It's interesting to me to watch how these global issues are brought into Second Life, the techniques that various organizations use from Camp Darfur to the Poverty Death Counter. As we move forward, I'm sure we'll begin to discover a set of methodologies that work best in this space and can inform the work of advocates of all sorts.

Posted by: Rafi Santo | December 05, 2006 at 04:03 PM

Rik,

your friend has already collected enough month to pay for school and healthcare for a real child this month.

part of this is thanks to you, who blogged about it.

Posted by: Alex Luna | December 20, 2006 at 01:17 PM

Wow! that's great news! The guy is getting lots of other press. I wish I could take some credit for this, but he's really doing a great job of promoting his cause.

Posted by: rikomatic | December 20, 2006 at 06:23 PM
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http://www.rikomatic.com/blog/2006/12/my_friend_the_v.html