

**Computer Technology Resources
Located in the Greater Bridgeport Community**

Prepared on Behalf of
The Information Technology Pilot Project
Steering Committee
Casey Family Services- Bridgeport, Connecticut
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Executive Summary

Young adults entering the workforce in the Information Age will be at a disadvantage if they are not technologically literate. Youth involved with the Child Welfare system, whether at home with birth family or in placement, may be at increased risk of falling on the wrong side of the 'digital divide.' The Bridgeport Division of Casey Family Services (CFS) is launching a pilot program to find effective strategies to support the development of technological literacy within these families. This report summarizes a community scan of available technology resources in order to inform the pilot design. Beginning with a list of knowledgeable informants, a snowball sampling procedure was used to identify additional institutional and community based program contacts. Brief telephone interviews resulted in a list of current providers of computer access and related training, as well as identification of service gaps and obstacles that interfere with greater family participation and success.

Summary of Results and Implications: Of 40 programs contacted, the majority were small, community-based organizations. Larger programs with the potential for handling far more participants existed in school, library and higher education settings. While most programs reported fulfilling their mission to provide computer education and access, they cited a number of obstacles to greater success, including both programmatic factors (e.g., insufficient funding, inadequate computer hardware, understaffing) and person-based factors (e.g., family fragility, lack of transportation, language differences). Some programs sought primarily to provide computer access and training (about 38%), while others used computer resources and training as components of larger goals (i.e., promoting job readiness, job searching, resume construction, etc). Most programs provided services for children and adults, though the adult services tended to emphasize longer-term goals such as job preparation, while the children's programs emphasized general education and computers for recreation.

We note the following implications for the pilot program from these interviews.

Efforts to address barriers to high volume programs (e.g., in schools), perhaps through joint action, may be an efficient investment and yield more family learning opportunities.

Efforts to complement smaller efforts or initiate a new community-based resource center, particularly if geared to fragile families, may fit well with local culture, and yield other benefits (e.g., promoting community development, ownership of solutions, and the foundation for other family-strengthening connections). However, this survey did not measure the level of local need.

There appears to be little cross-program exchange, although inter-organizational collaboration and resource sharing may particularly benefit the smaller programs that suffer from insufficient resources or demand to support key infrastructure (e.g., computer maintenance assistance).

The sampling method used has significant limitations, including producing an imperfect census of regional programs. Some informants appeared hesitant to express negative comment regarding their own programs. Finally, the scope of assessing school curricula and equipment went beyond the scope of the scan.

Other recommendations:

While potential partners were located, additional network development will best proceed most effectively with the coordinator in place. This individual may want to explore joint work with the local schools. The workgroup should consider formatting the program list and report summary and distributing it with a letter of appreciation to the informants who contributed their perspectives.

The Information Technology Community Resource Scan

Young adults entering the workforce in the Information Age will be at a disadvantage if they are not technologically literate. Recent surveys of U. S. households and computer users reveal that opportunities to develop such literacy are not evenly distributed among America's youth. Moreover, the youth involved in the Child Welfare system may be among those at highest risk lagging behind on the wrong side of the digital divide. While this aspect of preparing youth for independence has only recently been a focus for child welfare services, the magnitude of need and the potential cost of launching under-prepared children warrant a closer look at both the needs of these youth and the current opportunities for learning.

Casey Family Services and the Annie E. Casey Foundation are interested in connecting families with their best opportunities to build their best future. Casey Family Services has begun designing a pilot program to address the needs of families involved in Child Welfare services. Starting in the Bridgeport Division, Casey Family Services has conducted a needs assessment to identify the specific needs for computer access, education and practice among their foster families, as well as among families involved with their Support Program for HIV Affected Families.

Casey Family Services and the Annie E. Casey Foundation are committed to working with both families and other community-based institutions that are responding to America's crisis in family support. In looking to plan services that complement other efforts currently underway, the pilot project workgroup has conducted a Community Scan.

Primary goals of the scan include:

- Create a list of current providers of public access to computers and the equipment available, as well as training opportunities for parents and children in the community;
- Catalog the contact information in order to prepare a resource list;
- Interview key informants familiar with community-based computer skill building efforts in order to (a) discover possible gaps in opportunities to families; (b) identify obstacles that interfere with greater family participation and success; (c) gain insight into the likely barriers and facilitators that may impact Casey's efforts;
- Identify sources of possible mentors, trainers or partners;

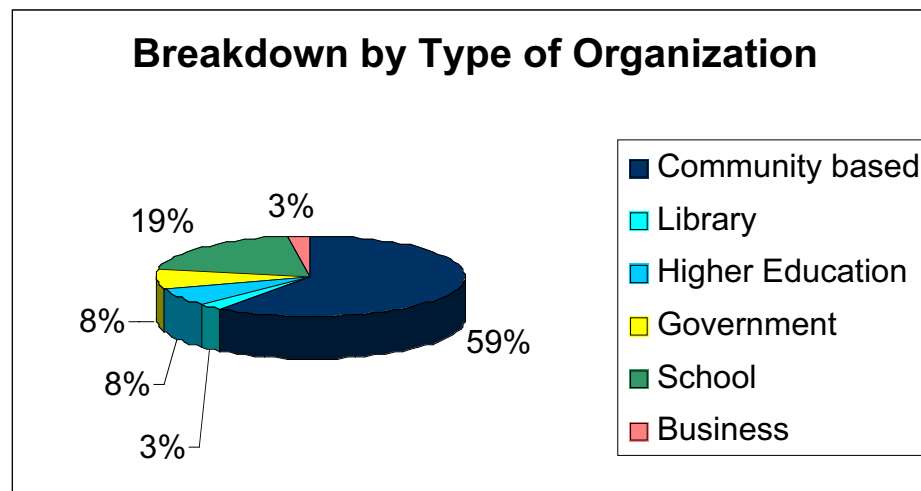
Method

Key Informants: The data were collected through speaking with knowledgeable representatives of community-based institutions in the Greater Bridgeport Area. An initial list of potential informants was developed with input from the Workgroup, the United Way's Resource Book and the Telephone Directory. This list was comprised of representatives from institutions serving children and families in the community: Informants came from (a) the schools; (b) higher education; (c) community-based social service and youth development organizations; (d) libraries; and (e) the business community.

Interview Procedure: The interviewer provided a standard introduction in order to secure informed consent over the telephone. A semi-structured telephone interview was prepared in order to ascertain information concerning the goals, size, activities, and clientele of the programs, as well as several self-reflective questions concerning barriers and facilitators of success, missing services, etc. The interviewer was trained to use the standardized questions as guideposts, eliciting additional explanation as needed. Interviews typically required approximately 10-15 minutes. One informant declined to participate, and two informants were repeatedly unavailable and were not successfully interviewed when the study period ended.

Results

We spoke with 40 programs throughout the Bridgeport area. As seen in the breakdown below, community based organizations administered the majority of the programs (59%). Additionally, eight programs were school-based,



three programs were based in institutions of higher learning, three were government agencies, one was a business and one was a library. The interview with the library was actually a series of questions with various library personnel so that an overview of the entire Bridgeport Public Library system would be included. While only one library and one public school system was interviewed, it is important to remember that both the school and library serve a greater amount of people than the other agencies. It is also important to note that in some cases the delineation between community based agency and business was unclear – so that some of the community based programs could have also been classified as business.

Reflecting the presence of some interagency collaboration, two of the programs appear to overlap. In two separate cases some of the results obtained from one interview about a specific program were also obtained from a separate source at a different agency. While their objectives and views may be different, both are important to consider. However, we must be careful in not over counting the number of computers and types of training offered.

Who is being served?

The responses to this question varied. Some respondents (4) were very general in that they said anyone in the community was eligible, while others were very specific (4) in saying that they cater only to a small population (i.e. teen moms with kids under 3). The majority of the programs, however, serve either children or adults and many of the programs offer services to both. Often these programs have after school programs for children and evening programs for adults.

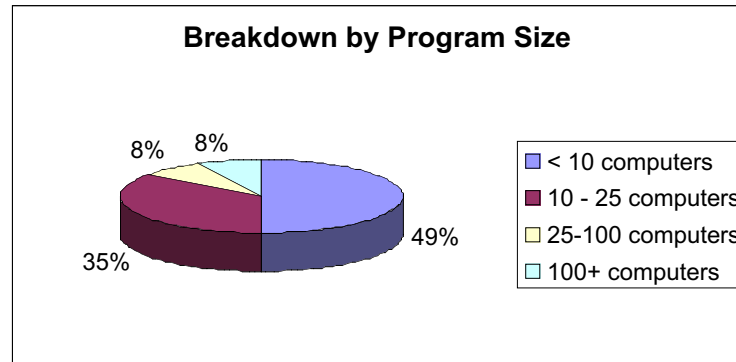
What is the program trying to accomplish?

The responses to this question varied. Goals mentioned fall into two main categories: *primary computer use* and *secondary computer use*. Primary computer use refers to those programs whose goals were to teach basic computer skills, advanced computer skills, and provide access to computers. Secondary computer use refers to programs where other goals were the focus and computers were a tool to help reach this goal. An example of this would be a program that prepares individuals for the GED exam and uses the computer, with tutorials, as a means to help prepare for the exam. The programs for the children were primarily for education and entertainment, while the programs for the adults were primarily teaching computer skills or using the computer for gaining better employment.

Types of Computer Technology

This section is broken down into three different areas: types of hardware, types of software and types of training.

Hardware: The following pie chart shows the number of computers by organization. Eighty-four percent of the organizations have less than 25 computers. The organizations with the most computers are typically the schools and the private businesses.



Software: Most every organization has Microsoft Office software. Seventeen of the programs have Internet access, with three more stating that they will soon have Internet access. In addition many of the after school programs have games and educational software for the children, while adult programs typically provide GED tutorial, job search, and job preparation software. Only a few (3) of the organizations offer email to their participants.

Training: Skill building opportunities can be broken down into two types of services: programs that have formal classes and programs that offer open lab with access to computers. Six of the organizations offer only open lab, which means they have no formal classes but offer access to the computers. Usually an instructor/supervisor is available during the open lab to help with problems. The types of classes offered range from basic typing and maneuvering around a keyboard to web design and computer repair. The majority of the programs offer basic introductory computer classes focusing mainly on Microsoft Office software. There appear to be very few advanced or specialized courses offered.

While most programs involve program-based practice opportunities only, two of the organizations operate differently than the rest. These two organizations receive old donated computers, which they refurbish and install new software on. These computers are given or sold at a minimal price to a participant in their program. In addition to providing them with a computer they also teach them how to use it.

Perceptions of how things are working

When asked how they felt the program was doing all the respondents said that their programs were meeting their goals. A few of the respondents did admit that there were areas that needed improvement, but as a whole the respondents were very pleased with how their programs were working. Based on the phone calls it is hard to determine if the respondents are really pleased with their results or perhaps they were being guarded and cautious with an “outsider”. It would be interesting to see if the participants of the programs were as pleased. Perhaps a study of the participants would give us a clearer understanding as to the actual success of the programs.

What facilitates program success?

When asked who or what has helped your organization achieve their goals the respondents’ statements varied. Seven of the respondents replied that various grants made their services possible. Fifteen respondents replied that other agencies, either through providing volunteers or through some type of collaboration, helped to contribute to their success. The remaining eighteen respondents did not name any additional sources of support.

What interferes with success?

Two broad types of obstacles were noted. *Program obstacles* interfered with the running of the program. Examples include a lack of available computers and scheduling of classes. The second type of obstacle was a *people obstacle*. These obstacles involved problems getting the person to the program. Examples of these obstacles include; child care, transportation and language barriers. A number of informants described the fragile connections parents struggle to maintain with their services. Due to the competing demands on their often-limited financial and social supports, even a small, unexpected stressor can result in ‘derailment’. Then, when one or two sessions are missed, the parent can become discouraged as they fall behind, or distracted as they struggle to cope with other demands. Consequently, many struggling families who need services most withdraw from the programs. Twelve of the respondents cited *people obstacles*, seventeen respondents cited *program obstacles*, and the remaining eleven respondents did not report any obstacles.

Implications and Recommendations

As previously stated the majority of the organizations feel that their program is successful and is meeting the needs of the participants. The main problems that may reflect gaps in services and/or misfit between service availability and service need include insufficient numbers of working computers, not enough space and a lack of instructors. Some of these needs may be addressed by making more financial resources available to each of these individual centers. However, there was not a widespread request for more funds.

A forum to convene other interested parties to facilitate pooling and sharing technical assets may represent a more promising strategy. Similarly, greater coordination among these programs may help reduce barriers to service (e.g., through referral to opportunities located closest to residents) and expanding resources (e.g., through reduction in redundancy, more diverse services may be affordable.

For instance, many sites decry a lack of technical assistance. Most of the smaller organizations do not have computer technical staff. When something goes wrong with a computer it can take a long time to find someone to fix it. Similarly, program participants who have computers or who receive one as part of the program may demonstrate a need for ongoing technical support to keep their machines working. While these smaller programs may not have the resources or the need to invest in a costly TA contract on their own, they might be able to share a TA contract. Alternatively, Casey may organize a volunteer or "low cost technical assistance team" to respond to these issues. Casey may consider training program participants to provide this TA.

The input from many of the sites also highlighted the need to support fragile families. As noted, person-based factors (e.g., acute family crisis) and other obstacles to participation (e.g., transportation) often interfere with participation. Several of the respondents described the potential helpfulness of additional case management and outreach services to help families cope with the unexpected stressors and obstacles to success. Further exploration of the need and opportunities to help the respondents' develop this capacity is warranted.

Appendix

The following table lists all the organizations contacted and the type of computer service they offer and who they serve.

Name, Address and Phone Number	Who is served by the organization	Computer Technology			Goals
		Hardware	Software	Training	
ABCD Inner City Children's Center 1070 Park Ave Bridgeport, CT06604 203-366-8241	Kids 3-5 and parents	25-100 computers	Educational, internet	Literacy, basic computer	Computer access, skills and literacy
Aspira 1600 State Street Bridgeport, CT 06605 203-336-5752	The community	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, educational programs	Basic computer classes	Teach computer
BAYM 916 Connecticut Ave Bridgeport, CT 06607 203-368-4291	Kids age 14-19	None in house, use donated computers that are given to kids when course is over	Microsoft office	Basic computer and computer repair	Job skills
Bridge House 880 Fairfield Ave Bridgeport CT 203-335-5339	Adults with mental illness	10 -25 computers	Microsoft office, Nevus typing, GED	Open lab learning center	Job skills, passing GED, computer literacy
Bridgeport Library 2705 Fairfield Ave Bridgeport CT 06605 203-576-7413	community	10-25 computers	Word processing, internet	internet	Job search

Casey Family Services
Strengthening Families & Communities

Name, Address and Phone Number	Who is served by the organization	Computer Technology			Goals
		Hardware	Software	Training	
Bridgeport Dept. of Ed Tech Department 203-576-7325	Teachers, school system	100+ computers	Educational, Microsoft office	Train teachers to teach kids	education
Bridgeport Dept. of Ed. Parent Center 203-330-5947	parents	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, internet and email	6 week program – Microsoft office and job search	Aid in job search, computer literacy
Bridgeport Dept. of Ed. Adult Ed 203-576-7374	adults	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, GED, ESL software, internet	Basic computer skills, internet	Computer literacy, aid in GED and ESL
Bridgeport Dept. of Social Service 752 East Main Street Bridgeport CT 203-576-7408	Single adults without kids	0 computers	none	none	Education, refer out to other agencies for computer technology
Bridgeport Dept of Technical Services 203-576-7259	Other government agencies	0 computers	none	none	Do not offer computer services to the public
Bridgeport Dept of Youth Services 203-576-7252	youth	0 computers	none	none	Not involved in computer technology
Bullard Haven Tech	High school kids	25-100	Microsoft	Basic	Education, job

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		Hardware	Software	Training	
203-579-6333	and adults	computers	office, internet	computer skills, computer repair	skills
Burroughs Community Center 2470 Fairfield Ave Bridgeport CT 06605 203-334-0293	Middle school kids	< 10 computers	Microsoft office, educational and games	Instructor with open lab	Access to computers, entertainment
Cardinal Sheehan Center 1494 Main Street Bridgeport CT 06604 203-336-4468	Kids age 6-15, adults	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, internet	Open lab with instructor for kids, basic computer classes for adults	Skill teaching and computer access
Career Resources 350 Fairfield Ave Bridgeport, CT 06604 203-334-5627	Age 14 to adults	25-100 computers	Microsoft office, internet	Open lab and classes on basics, web design, computer repair	Computer literacy, job preparation
Career Team 3800 Main Street Bridgeport, CT 06606 203-338-0676	State assisted adults	< 10 computers	Microsoft office	Open lab with educational CD ROM's	Gaining employment
Carolyn House 203-334-0640	Non-English speaking women	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, ESL program	Data entry, ESL	Teach English, job skills

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		Hardware	Software	Training	
Charles D. Smith Foundation 755 Central Ave Bridgeport, CT 06607	Kids 5-18, adults	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, internet	Kids – open lab, internet searching Adults – basic computer classes	education
Computer 4 Kids 150 East Aurora Street Waterbury, CT 06708 203-591-1714	Low income families	Refurbish donated computers and sell them to families after course	Microsoft office, games	Basic computer	Computer access and education
Dunbar Family Resource 203-332-5658	Kids grade k-8 th and parents	< 10 computers	Microsoft office, internet, email, educational	Academic for the kids and basic classes for adults	Computer literacy and access
Even Start 203-366-5167	Teen mothers with kids under 3	none	none	none	GED prep for moms, enrichment for kids
Family Resource Center 203-335-9016	families	< 10 computers	Word processing, internet	Open lab	Computer access
Fairfield University 1073 N. Benson Rd Fairfield, CT 06430 203-254-4000x2233	Head start parents, kids and teachers	25-100 computers	Educational, internet	Literacy, basic computer	Computer access, skills and literacy
H.O.S.T.S	Homeless youth	< 10	Word	Open lab	Develop life skills,

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Name, Address and Phone Number	Who is served by the organization	Computer Technology			Goals
		Hardware	Software	Training	
200 George Street New Haven, CT 06511 203-777-8445	age 10-23	computers	processing, GED tutorial		job skills
Housatonic College 203-332-5000	adults	100 + computers	Microsoft office, internet	Basic computer, Mac classes, web design	Training for better jobs
LEAP/Bridgeport 203-335-6514	Kids 7-18	10-25 computers (Macs)	Microsoft office, photo shop, internet, email	Classes to learn hardware and software	Create computer consciousness
McGivney Community Center 338 Stillman Street Bridgeport, CT 06610 203-333-2789	Elementary school kids	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, internet	Basic classes	education
Mercy Learning Center 637 Park Ave Bridgeport, CT 06604 203-334-6699	Low income women with low literacy	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, educational, internet, email	Open lab and classes for basic computer	Literacy, independence, GED, employment
New Horizons Learning Center 35 Nutmeg Dr Trumbull, CT 06611 203-375-3370	adults	100+ computers	Microsoft office, any type of software you need	All types from basic to certificate classes	Learn new skills
OIC	adults	10-15 computers	Microsoft office	Open lab with instructor	Computer access and computer skills

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Name, Address and Phone Number	Who is served by the organization	Computer Technology			Goals
		Hardware	Software	Training	
203-335-0577					
Ralphola Community Center 872 Park Ave Bridgeport, CT 06604 203-576-7430	Kids age 5-19, adults	< 10 computers	Microsoft office	Basic computer classes	Computer access and computer literacy
Roosevelt Family Resource 203-330-8181	community	< 10 computers	Microsoft office, internet	Summer and vacation classes for kids, evening classes for adults	Family support, help parents help kids succeed in school
Southend Community Center 650 Park Ave Bridgeport, CT 06604 203-331-0200	Kids 5-19, adults	10-25 computers	Microsoft word, internet	Basic computer classes, internet classes	Computer skills, job skills
Sterling House Community Center 2283 Main Street Stratford, CT 06615 203-378-2606	community	none	none	none	support
Wakeman Boys and Girls Club 385 Center Street Southport, CT 06490 203-259-4805	Kids 8-18	10-25 computers	Microsoft office, educational, games, internet	Open lab with instructor, some basic classes	Create safe positive environment
Wakeman Boys and	Kids grades 5-8	< 10	Microsoft	Open with	Create safe

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		Hardware	Software	Training	
Girls Club Extension 2470 Fairfield Ave Bridgeport, CT 06605 203-334-0293		computers	office, educational, games	instructor	environment, keep kids of the streets
Waltersville Family Resource 203-384-2067	parents	< 10 computers	Microsoft office	Intro to computer	Computer literacy, computer exposure
Woodfield Family Services 475 Clinton Ave Bridgeport, CT 06605 203-368-4291	families	none	none	none	
Workplace Inc/Joblink 350 Fairfield Ave Bridgeport, CT 06604 203-333-5129	Dislocated workers age 14+	< 10 computers	Microsoft office	Seminars on job search, internet	Help find jobs
YMCA Bridgeport 872 Park Ave Bridgeport, CT 06604 203-334-5551	Youth and families	none	none	none	Safe place for kids to go