

# **A Model Document Access for Youth:**

## **The Dallas Computer Literacy Project**

Following is the text of an important project in Texas involving an alliance of information workers, Third Wave firms and the young people and churches of the inner city. It offers many lessons for other areas.

Our mission is to provide educational opportunities for Dallas's urban residents through the use of computer technology.

### **Program Description**

The Dallas Computer Literacy Program, Inc. (DCLP) is a nonprofit corporation sponsored by the North Texas PC Users' Group (NTPCUG) and the Apple Corps of Dallas. These are two of the largest computer user groups in North Texas with a combined membership of over 3000. The DCLP is staffed by volunteers who are concerned citizens in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area interested in the educational needs of urban residents. Our ties to the Apple Corps of Dallas and the NTPCUG provide the DCLP with a strong base of technical support. In addition, we actively seek out partnerships with community-based nonprofit and religious groups that desire to provide educational opportunities through the use of modern computer technology for people within their immediate community.

The DCLP also works with public and private schools to teach FREE computer classes at participating schools after the school day ends. With assistance from our technical and training volunteers, the DCLP is able to facilitate the transfer of computer knowledge and skills for the educational benefit of economically disadvantaged urban residents.

The DCLP is an integral part of the solution to address the vast educational needs of Dallas's disadvantaged urban residents. The DCLP provides the opportunity to develop computer job skills and knowledge in a positive, constructive environment. This offers a real alternative to the crime and drug culture that permeates some of Dallas's urban communities and also provides a real opportunity for those working to improve their lives.

This is especially true for young people growing up in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. Society repeatedly sends a message to our young people for them to "Just Say No" to the crime, drug and gang culture without giving them options to say YES! The DCLP provides such an option by establishing partnerships with local community based organizations in training adults and youth in basic computer skills; skills which build self-esteem, enhance employment opportunities and contribute to a sense of hope for the future. The DCLP participates with our partners in providing the following educational opportunities:

### **Community Computing Centers**

The DCLP works in partnership with other nonprofit and community-based organizations to establish Community Computing Centers where disadvantaged people can go to take free computer literacy and job skills classes. This allows people in disadvantaged communities the opportunity to

learn some of the skills required for employment in a modern information and service economy. A Community Computing Center becomes a focal point for integrating technology into a disadvantaged neighborhood and becomes the starting point for people in a community to increase their technical knowledge and employability.

The Community Computing Center also becomes a resource center for people living in a disadvantaged community. With volunteers assisting in teaching, administration and upkeep of the Center opportunities for relationships to be built between unemployed and employed people living in the same community are enhanced. This fosters role modeling by successful people living in a community and also provides an opportunity for the unemployed person to network with others for information on job opportunities or to receive suggestions from others about their job search.

A Community Computing Center is a neighborhood version of a community college's computer lab. It offers free education and training and is conveniently accessed by people living in a disadvantaged community who may not be comfortable in a more traditional academic environment. Here they can start the educational process they need to find employment or to upgrade their job skills. Finding success at this community level helps build self-esteem and confidence, two requirements for any successful person. Additionally, with modern telecommunications and computer-assisted education, people are no longer completely dependent on a human teacher. A Community Computing Center offers the opportunity to develop distance learning programs and modem based educational programs with the Dallas Community College District or even the Dallas Independent School District.

### **Neighborhood Computer Labs**

The DCLP helps churches, schools, YMCA's, community centers and other community-based organizations establish Neighborhood Computer Labs at their sites. The DCLP does this by placing donated computers at these locations and providing volunteer technical support to help establish and maintain these computer labs. These labs become points for disadvantaged people in a community to access modern computer technology. Use of the computer labs vary from organization to organization; however, the key point is that these labs support the local church's, YMCA's or community center's educational outreach program to their community. Additionally "open lab" hours are provided during the week for anyone with a DCLP ID card that would like to use the computers. This provides people who have taken a DCLP computer class, but who do not live near a community-computing center, the opportunity to practice with a computer at no cost. By supporting a local church's or nonprofit's educational outreach their initiative is leveraged with the knowledge of DCLP technical volunteers. Additionally as this technology rapidly develops throughout this decade a local church or nonprofit's educational program can be easily upgraded as more modern computers continue to be donated to the DCLP. The DCLP acts a technical "Salvation Army" relieving a church or nonprofit organization from having to actively and continually solicit donated computer equipment. Additionally the DCLP acts as a technical resource for local churches and nonprofits. By establishing a large network of affiliated neighborhood computer labs training efforts can be coordinated, information on educational software can be easily disseminated and innovative educational approaches can be explored with established educational institutions such as the Dallas Independent School District and the Dallas County Community College District.

## **Free Computer Classes**

In conjunction with our community partners, the DCLP assists in offering free computer classes at established Community Computing Centers and some Neighborhood Computer Labs. Unfortunately demand for volunteer teachers far exceeds the supply; however, the DCLP refers volunteer instructors to affiliated organizations as they become available.

Volunteer instructors with the DCLP are currently teaching free computer classes at three locations: the Dallas County Community Action's Computer Training Center, Daniel "Chappie" James Learning Center and at Colonial Learning Center. Colonial and Daniel "Chappie" James Learning Centers are two DISD grade schools with modern computer labs. They have allowed DCLP instructors to teach FREE computer classes at their schools after the school day ends 3 days a week to teachers and local residents. The DCLP has been working with the Dallas County Community Action Committee for one year now collaborating to bring free computer literacy training to residents of South Dallas. Almost 1000 people have received training through this joint program.

## **North Texas Free-Net**

The North Texas Free-Net (NTFN) is establishing a large, public digital library with a variety of community, educational, health and cultural information available to all citizens. The DCLP makes this information available through its network of Community Computing Centers and Neighborhood Computer Labs to those citizens unable to afford a computer or the training to use one. The DCLP and NTFN collaborate closely on their many complementary activities. These two organizations are helping to build the public computing infrastructure for North Texas.

## **Community Partners**

Conceptually speaking, the DCLP can best be described as a nonprofit "enhancer". The mission of DCLP is maximized when we partner with other nonprofits and churches to provide enhanced educational opportunities through technology. Local supporters of our mission include the North Texas Free-Net, North Texas PC Users Group, Apple Corp. of Dallas, Daniel "Chappie" James Learning Center, Colonial Learning Center, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Dallas County Community Action Committee, St. Philip's Episcopal School, Trinity River Mission, Episcopal Diocese of Dallas, Park South YMCA, Holmes Street Adolescent Center, Maple Avenue Development Corporation, Oaklawn United Methodist Church, Oak Cliff United Methodist Church, the Wesley Rankin Center, the Trinity River Mission, the Denton Literacy Program and others.

## **Significant Accomplishments**

- Since its inception in September of 1992, the DCLP and its community partners have produced the following accomplishments:
- Almost 1000 students have taken FREE computer classes at DCLP affiliated sites.

- The DCLP has helped establish over 20 neighborhood computer labs in Dallas and its surrounding communities. These affiliated neighborhood computer labs are providing over 1000 hours of free computer lab time per month to both youth and adults living in disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- The DCLP is currently working with over 30 community-based organizations and churches to provide computer training and access for disadvantaged people.
- DCLP volunteers are teaching FREE computer literacy classes three days a week at two DISD learning centers in the Fair Park area of South Dallas and at the DCCAC Computer Training Center.
- The DCLP is working with individuals in Arlington, Ft. Worth and Denton to develop computer literacy programs there.
- Recipient of the 1993 REACH Award - a \$15,000 award given by the computer industry Recognizing Exceptional Achievement in Community Help. The DCLP was recognized for its outstanding contribution to the Dallas community through education and training. The REACH award sponsors included Apple Computer, Microsoft Corporation, Panasonic Communications and Ziff-Davis Publishing.

## **FUTURE GOALS**

Our next goals are to expand the number of neighborhood computer labs to thirty, to establish a computer repair facility, to establish a second community computing center at the Maple Avenue Community Center, in conjunction with our community partners to teach an additional 1000 people basic computer literacy classes and to continue building our partnerships with community-based organizations and churches in Dallas, Ft. Worth, Denton, Arlington and their surrounding communities.