

The Newport Plain Talk

Connected Tennessee Presents Brand New Laptop Computers to Foster Kids in East Tennessee

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Today, Connected Tennessee presented 85 East Tennessee foster children with brand new Dell laptop computers through the Computers 4 Kids program. Connected Tennessee's Computers 4 Kids (C4K) initiative places computers into the hands of underprivileged children and their families across Tennessee. C4K is an innovative project designed to positively impact the future of disadvantaged children in Tennessee by distributing computers to children and families facing economic challenges, in the foster care system or that struggle with behavioral disorders and other issues. The recipients hail from 16 counties in East Tennessee and were targeted for inclusion in the program by the Department of Children's Services (DCS) based on specified behavioral and academic expectations.

Almost half of low-income families in Tennessee cite a lack of a computer at home as the reason they are not accessing the Internet. Since computer skills and Internet access have become essential components necessary to participate in the global economy, the need to help Tennessee's disadvantaged residents join the Information Age is apparent.

"Cocke County is thrilled to be a part of this very important initiative," said Cocke County Mayor Iloff McMahan. "The digital divide is a concern in both the urban and rural areas of East Tennessee and the Computers 4 Kids program is designed to meet both of those challenges. Thanks to Computers 4 Kids, East Tennessee youth who wouldn't otherwise have access to a computer are now going to have a world of opportunities right at their fingertips."

The distribution was held at the Lake Brook Academy in Knoxville. Lane Simpson, Program Director for the Department of Children's Services, said the impact of the computers will be felt far beyond today's event.

"DCS has been very fortunate to partner with Connected Tennessee, who shares our mission to empower youth and young adults," said Simpson. "No individual lives in a vacuum and needs the power of knowledge to propel them to greater heights. We see the Computers 4 Kids program as a springboard for opportunity. We are not just talking about a connection to the Web, but a connection to the infinite and meaningful impact that knowledge, learning and access have on the lives of us all."

Along with the computers, recipients also received educational DVDs from valued Connected Tennessee partner, the Internet Keep Safe Coalition (iKeepSafe). The DVDs are designed to teach children of all ages in a fun, age-appropriate way the basic rules

of Internet safety, ethics and the healthy use of connected technologies. iKeepSafe is a broad partnership of governors and/or first spouses, attorneys general, public health and educational professionals, law enforcement and industry leaders working together for the health and safety of youth online. C4K joined forces with iKeepSafe to ensure that children and families are well-informed about responsible ways of using technology.

Connected Tennessee is a non-profit organization that develops and implements effective strategies for technology deployment, use and literacy in Tennessee. Connected Tennessee is coordinating the Computers 4 Kids project with the State of Tennessee, the Department of Children's Services and the Department of Human Services. Through the Computers 4 Kids program, Connected Tennessee has already awarded more than 1,000 computers to children in need across Tennessee.