



Southeast Tennessee: Program provides laptops to students

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BY Yolanda Putman
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Allen Green dropped out of school for three months in the sixth grade to run his household after his mother went to jail.

Eventually, he started living with teachers from week to week before enrolling in school again and going into a foster home, he said.

"I just wanted to do what I needed to do to take care of my house," he said. "The teachers took interest in me, got me refocused, and I started to think I could do something with my life."

Now 23, Mr. Green is a pre-med student working on a bachelor's degree in chemistry at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He is among 173 Southeast Tennessee students who recently received new Dell laptop computers through Connected Tennessee's Computers 4 Kids program.

"It's very convenient," Mr. Green said. "I don't have to go to campus every day and all through the night because I can use my laptop at home to do assignments there."

The computer recipients are from 11 counties in Southeast Tennessee: Franklin, Grundy, Marion, Sequatchie, Bledsoe, Rhea, Meigs, McMinn, Polk, Hamilton and Bradley.

Computers 4 Kids is designed to impact positively the future of disadvantaged children in Tennessee by distributing computers to children and families facing economic challenges, who are in the foster care system or who struggle with behavioral disorders and other issues, according to a Connected Tennessee news release.

Almost half of low-income families in Tennessee cite a lack of 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, Connected Tennessee's news release states.

Connected Tennessee is a public-private partnership intended to accelerate technology use in the state. It plans to distribute 3,000 new laptop computers to students within the next three years, officials said.

The laptops open up “a new world” for the students, said Mary Elliot, Bradley County’s Department of Children Services team leader.

“It assists them in their school work, and sometimes they use it as entertainment,” she said.

The Connected Tennessee Computer 4 Kids program has distributed 800 computers to foster care children in Tennessee this year, officials said. Six of the computers went to upcoming or recent college graduates in Hamilton County who, like Mr. Green, were in foster care or state custody, said Rosalyn Leavell-Rice, Department of Children Services program specialist.

Dozens of computers also were given to graduating high school students in the county, she said.

“It’s a way to boost self-esteem and assist kids in finding a job,” she said.

Mr. Green went from dropping out of school in the sixth grade to graduating from Hixson High School as captain of the basketball and football teams.