

Technology Empowerment for Students,  
Teachers and Low-Income Families

Best Practices in Innovation and  
Sustainability

## Computers for Youth

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**Program Name:** Computers for Youth (CFY)

**Current Deployment:** In the 2005-06 school year, CFY distributed computer-based *home learning centers* to more than 2,300 families and trained more than 4,600 students, parents and teachers from school communities in New York City and Philadelphia. Since the program's inception in 1999, CFY has served 10,000 families.

**Director/CEO:** Elisabeth Stock

**Web site:** [www.cfy.org](http://www.cfy.org)

**Mission:** Computer for Youth's mission is to improve the home learning environment of middle-school children from low-income families.

**Approach:** CFY works with schools and families to provide teacher, student and family training and to offer every student in a sixth grade class the opportunity to take a computer-based *home learning center* home. CFY's all-inclusive program supports parents as learning partners, connects classroom learning with the home, and creates educational opportunities for the entire family. The approach includes three elements:

- **Computers Designed as Home Learning Centers.** CFY partners with public schools in low-income communities to offer all sixth grade families a computer-based *home learning center* with educational software, Internet access and web content. Participating families attend a half-day training workshop on the *home learning center* that they then take home. Workshops are held at the school and are well attended. In schools that draw fewer than fifteen families to PTA meetings, CFY's Saturday workshops draw more than one hundred.

- **Parent Workshops and Teacher Training.** CFY coordinates additional workshops to help parents become better learning partners. They also enhance the home-school connection by working with teachers to increase their understanding of literacy practices in students' homes.
- **Educational Software for the Home.** CFY helps improve the quality of home-based educational software by identifying the best new products and then increasing their visibility among school districts, investors and others in the industry.

CFY's focus on the sixth grade is purposeful and powerful. The middle-school years are when children become less engaged with academics and begin to push away from their families. They are the years when parents become less involved in their children's learning because they view their children as more grown up and they feel less capable of helping with increasingly complex homework assignments. Finally, and most unfortunately, they are the years with the steepest drop in efforts to involve families. CFY's program targets sixth grade – the earliest grade in middle-school – so that they can intervene at the very time that children's disengagement from family and school begins.

**What Makes Computers for Youth Unique?** The Computers for Youth model comprehensively addresses a range of issues and opportunities for schools serving low-income populations. The model offers families one integrated package of products and services (e.g., equipment, training, software, support), and incorporates professional development for teachers to increase the alignment with curriculum and the probability that the *home learning centers* will be used and used effectively. The program structure improves the home learning environment of an entire sixth grade class – and, over time, the home learning environment of all the classes in the school community. This approach and the mandate for parental participation frequently drives higher rates of parent engagement than is typical for these schools.

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**Scaling and Expanding this Model:** CFY is now expanding its programs more broadly to underserved populations in the US by building local CFY offices in additional cities and by supporting schools or nonprofits as Affiliate Partners. Computers for Youth currently has local offices in New York City and Philadelphia with plans to be operating in five cities by 2010.

Computers for Youth is also developing an Affiliate program to enable school districts and nonprofits to implement home-learning programs in their communities. Through the Affiliate Network, CFY will provide the resources necessary for Affiliates to replicate essential components of CFY's programs. The CFY Affiliate program requires annual membership dues and fees for products and services rendered. Examples of products and services that are made available to Affiliates are:

- **Educational Software Package** – CFY has assembled an enriched bundle of software that supports home learning. This software is reviewed by “Ed Tech” executives from some of the most prominent US school districts and tested by students and their families. CFY has received approval from many of their current vendors and can now offer affiliates the privilege to replicate the CFY software image on computers that will be placed in the homes of low-income families.
- **Train-the-Trainer Package**– In the spring of 2007, CFY will begin offering affiliates a Train-the-Trainer Package for conducting Saturday Family Training Sessions – the sessions where students and parents receive training on the computer they then take home. The package will include instructional curriculum, professional development for trainers and guidelines for both setting up the training sessions in a school and recruiting families. The package will include direction on the complex logistics of deploying more than 100 home computers per day per site. CFY will also begin offering affiliates Train-the-Trainer packages for additional parent training and teacher-professional development.

**Required Local Components:** By participating in CFY's Affiliate Network, Districts can implement various elements of the CFY program according to need and affordability. For the whole program supporting a sixth-grade class, organizations need a strong school partnership, a sustainable structure that will allow ongoing training and support for progressive classes of sixth-grade students. In addition to CFY's fees, sponsoring organizations need to cover costs for PCs (new or used), software, trainers, teacher training, technical support and program administration. In each city, the estimated cost of CFY's all inclusive package decreases as the program grows to serve more and more families. In New York City, where CFY is now reaching more than 2,000 families each year, their cost per family is approximately \$400. This figure includes the cost of the CFY computer, the family workshops, logistics, technical support, research and evaluation, and overhead.

### Results:

Survey responses from students, parents, and teachers also demonstrate CFY's positive influence.

- More than **80%** of participating students indicate that having a CFY computer-based *home learning center* helped them do better in school.
- More than **90%** of participating parents indicate that the CFY program increases their confidence that they can help their children learn.
- **71%** of parents indicate that they use their CFY *home learning centers* to help their children with homework assignments.
- A majority of participating teachers report improvements in their students' research, collaboration and keyboard skills.