

Maryland New Communities Project: Frederick County

2005 - 2006 Year Two Report

Prepared by Serena Galloway and Susan Walker

From Reports and Information provided by site staff

Program Description

Frederick's CYFAR project, entitled *Sagner and Hillcrest Technology After-School Centers*, is a two-site program designed to provide access to computers and technology-based learning to low-income children living in the Sagner and Hillcrest public housing units. The Police Action League (PAL) Center Technology Club located at Sagner in a police-run recreation facility is an after-school computer lab staffed by an educator who is providing guidance in educational and homework computer-based efforts. Informal instruction on software applications and educational computer games **along with activities outside of the lab such as gardening, sewing activities, and reading** are also provided.

Program Implementation

Staff

The PAL Center Technology Club is staffed by a Faculty Extension Assistant who provides informal computer instruction. Frederick City police officers staff the PAL center.

Location

The computer labs in Frederick are located at the Police Action League Center in the Sagner housing unit and the HUD Technology Lab located at Hillcrest. Transportation from the Hillcrest PAL Center to the Sagner PAL Center is now provided for teens wanting to use computers twice a month.

Facilities

The computer labs in the Sagner housing unit are located in existing recreational community centers. Multiple computers and printers are functional at both sites. Computer lab in the Sagner also has a color printer, scanner, copy machine, and digital camera. The computer lab in Hillcrest has more recently been equipped with two computers and a one printer, along with 5 additional computers provided by HUD.

Partnerships

This program is made possible with various partners:

- The Frederick City Police Department provides officers to staff both PAL centers.

- The Carroll Creek Rotary Club provides volunteers, financial support, equipment, and resources for the PAL Center Computer Lab.
- The PAL Center Board of Directors provide budgetary, overall supervision of the facility, contributed equipment, resources to sustain the computer centers, and all other aspects of the program.
- The Housing Authority owns the PAL Center Building and has contributed equipment and resources to sustain the computer centers, along with the land for the gardening projects.
- Eudora Technologies has provided internet connectivity for the program.
- JCPenney have contributed financial support for the program.

Community events/Resources

The computer labs are maintained and strengthened by the PAL Center Board of Directors and by partnerships through various community resources, such as the Carroll Creek Rotary Club and Frederick City Police Department. Also, expansion efforts were successful to surrounding communities in providing transportation from the Hillcrest PAL Center to the Sagner Pal center so that adolescents can use the computer lab. This allows teens to take advantage of the computer lab at Sagner since there are limited hours at the Hillcrest computer lab. In addition, plans to implement a youth community garden project at PAL Center to link with the technology lab along with creating a quilt at the Sagner PAL Center are underway.

About the Program

Number of children

The PAL Center Technology Club primarily serves children between the ages of 7-12 who live in the Sagner housing units where the PAL Center is located. Youth using the Hillcrest facility will be part of the existing PAL Center currently operating at the school. **On average 6-7 kids come daily.** Approximately 30 have been served so far.

Length of program

The Sagner PAL Center Computer Lab has been open for use since August, 2004. Children may drop-in when the lab is open and use the computers. The Hillcrest Computer Lab began October 2005 serving as a temporary home to the HUD Hope VI Project Computer Center and has been dedicated for youth-only usage one day per week.

Kinds of activities

Children attending the labs participate in a variety of activities using the computers. First, children used the lab to work on and complete homework assignments. They searched the Internet for information about topics they were studying and could also use word processing software. Children also used the computers for educational purposes by playing games from educational software programs. Some of the most popular activities were the following: I Spy, MathBrain, PictureEdit, and Elementary Typing. Through these activities, children worked on their comprehension of the topics

covered in the games. Additionally, they also practiced their basic computer skills, math, reading, computer graphics, sound recording, and music theory.

Activities outside of computers are underway. These activities include gardening, sewing, and reading books from the library. Children have learned from a master gardener how to plant various plants, what are good for flowers to grow, types of soil, how to maintain a garden etc. On Tuesday nights, teachers come to help with the building library, organizing books and giving kids suggestions on what to read.

Planning has begun for summer activities at the newer Hillcrest site.

Results

The Sagner PAL Center Computer Lab and the HUD technology lab at Hillcrest have become fully operational and available for use by children in the communities. The summer of 2005 program at Sagner PAL Center continued to attract larger numbers of youth than during the school year. Children have taken advantage of the computer labs by using computers for completing homework assignments and playing educational computer games. In doing so, they used the available technology towards schoolwork and learning, which was the primary outcome of this program. In addition, the labs have impacted children outside of the initial targeted area as transportation to the lab is now available for youth from an outside community.

With the youth doing activities outside of the computer lab as well, the youth have improved in the following areas:

- Multimedia – making graphics, music, sound recording
- Research – learning about history and how to conduct research
- Computer literacy
- Word processing and typing skills
- Visual arts
- Internet research skills
- Reading books at different levels, learning social studies too
- Gardening
- Sewing

As a result of the youth working together on the various projects, there have been observations that the children have not only improved their computer skills, but their attitudes with others have changed. The children have done nice gestures with their peers using the lab such as making a card on the computer for another kid or creating a screensaver on the computer saying how fun the PAL center is.

Initial findings regarding the number of children regularly using the lab indicated that more efforts needed to be taken to advertise and increase interest in and usage of the labs. These efforts were made and staff will continue to try to increase regular attendance. Also, collecting data on the children's attendance, activities, and time spent at the lab has begun and is still in progress. This has provided information on the most popular topics and ages of children most interested in the lab at this time. These initial assessments will be compared with assessments to be completed six months later in order to measure the impact of lab attendance and use on computer skills.