



## Maryland New Communities Project: Frederick County 2006-2007 Year Three Report

*Prepared by Jennifer Fairbourn 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 first site, the Police Action League Center Technology Club (PAL), is located at Sagner in a police-run recreation facility. This 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, and reading clubs are also provided. The second site, the HUD Technology Lab, was originally located in Hillcrest and has since been moved to the Hope VI development. Starting in mid March of 2007 and continuing through the end of the school year, instructor led web design weekly classes were launched in the new computer lab at Hope VI as part of the Leadership Academy program. As part of the Leadership Academy, classes are offered everyday on different topics of interest such as music, public speaking, and computer graphics.

### **Program Implementation**

#### ***Staff***

The PAL Center is staffed by a Faculty Extension Assistant who visits the lab once a week and provides informal computer instruction. Frederick City police officers staff the PAL Center. Volunteers help with gardening (Master Gardener) and reading activities. At the Hillcrest and Hope VI computer labs a technician and general staff, provided by the Housing Authority office, are available during after-school hours to help.

#### ***Location***

The main computer lab in Frederick is located at the Police Action League Center in the Sagner housing unit. The HUD Technology Lab located at Hillcrest was open and operational until February 2007. Upon the closure of that site, a new computer lab was started at the Hope VI development. The Hope VI computer lab is within walking distance from Sagner, not far from the fairground.

#### ***Facilities***

The computer lab in the Sagner housing unit is located in an existing recreational community center. The Hillcrest site was housed in a trailer house at Hillcrest Elementary School. The Hope VI lab is located in an existing building owned and operated by the Housing Authority. Both the Sagner and Hope VI computer labs include the following equipment:

multiple computers, color printer, black and white laser printer, scanner, copy machine, overhead projector and digital camera.

### ***Partners***

This program is made possible with contributions from various partners:

- The *Frederick City Police Department* provides officers to staff the 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* provides budgetary, overall supervision of the facility, and has contributed equipment and resources to sustain the computer centers and all other aspects of the program.
- The *City of Frederick Housing Authority* owns the PAL Center Building and has contributed equipment and resources to sustain the computer centers, along with providing the land for the gardening projects.
- *Eudora Technologies* has provided internet connectivity for the program.
- *JCPenney* has contributed financial support for the program.

### ***Community Events***

The youth participate in different activities throughout the year that involve the community and create opportunities for increased interaction with different groups in the area. Several of the youth participated in and helped inform the community of different activities associated with the annual Lights On Afterschool event. Other activities included a youth community garden project and the creation of a quilt at the Sagner PAL Center. Additionally, six of the youth who regularly participate at the center were entered in the Great Frederick Fair and each won blue ribbons for their contributions.

### ***Participants***

The PAL Center Technology Club primarily serves children between the ages of 7-14 years 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 6-8 youth use the facilities on a daily basis. Approximately 60 youth have been served in 2006-2007 and over 100 children and youth have benefited from this program since its inception in 2004.

## **Activities**

### **PAL Center**

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. Children attending the labs participate in a variety of computer-related activities. 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 included the following software programs: I Spy, MathBrain.com, PictureEdit, and Typing Instructor for Kids. Through these activities, children increased their

knowledge of the different topics covered in the games. Additionally, they also practiced basic computer skills, math, reading, computer graphics, photo editing, sound recording, and music theory. Youth also participated in instructor led informal classes which used computer based curricula like 4H Computer Mystery and Techno Kids to improve their basic computer skills.

Activities not directly tied to computer technologies are also underway. These activities include gardening, keeping garden journals and attendance sheets; designing quilt blocks and sewing; and literacy activities such as reading out loud in groups, writing journals, and researching book related subjects. Children have learned from a Master Gardener and their own internet research about how to plant various plants, what is needed for flowers to grow, types of soil, how to maintain a garden, water conservation, and other topics.

#### Hillcrest sites: HUD Technology Lab and HOPE VI Lab

Starting in mid March, a web design class was introduced at the new lab for youth from grades 6-9. Twelve youth participated in the program. The class used hands-on website examination and development to provide students with a strong foundation of knowledge in web design, including general design techniques and concepts. The skills acquired in this course will help students compete in the expanding computer and internet-based job arena, as well as foster an interest in computer technology, programming and graphic design. Students will have an opportunity at the end of the course to develop their own websites, which may be used as samples on career and college applications.

Some of the different activities offered at the two sites provided opportunities for youth to increase their competencies in the following areas:

#### Computers

- Web design— basic html coding, graphic design techniques and concepts
- Computer literacy, internet research skills, word processing and typing skills

#### Arts and Literature

- Digital photography and photo editing
- Use of multimedia—graphic design, editing music, and sound recordings
- Reading books at different levels
- Increased interest in reading and literacy

#### Life Skills

- Nutrition, healthy cooking and table etiquette
- Knowledge about life science, history, family and social interactions
- Public speaking skills
- Higher self-esteem and self-confidence levels
- Understanding of 4-H ideals
- Gardening
- Sewing

## 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 2006 program at Sagner PAL Center continued to attract larger numbers of youth than activities offered during the school year. Children have taken advantage of the computer labs by using computers for completing homework assignments, playing educational computer games, and participating in informal instructor led classes. In doing so, the participants used the available technology to do their schoolwork and enhance their own learning, which was the primary outcome of this program.

Though no formal evaluations were done, the staff and police officers at the PAL center observed that as a result of working together on the various projects the youth improved their computer skills and had better attitudes towards working with others. The children have made several nice gestures with their peers using the lab such as making a card on the computer for another youth or creating a screensaver on the computer saying how fun it is to be at the PAL center.

Initial findings regarding the number of children regularly using the lab indicated that more efforts were needed 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 of computer skills.

**Comment [MSOffice1]:** This is old. Do we not have data to report on the results of this this year?

**Comment [JF2]:** I asked Cindy about this and she said: "I am sorry to say that we didn't do much evaluation last year. We created a feedback form completed by police officers some time ago. We don't have new data to report this year."