

**Maryland New Communities Project 2005-2006**  
*Somerset County Formative Evaluation Report*  
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**Program Description**

The Somerset county CYFAR project is located at the Computer Center at the Woodrow Wilson Community Center in Crisfield, MD. It is a computer lab accessible to the community providing Internet connectivity and educational opportunities. The purpose of the lab is to bridge the digital divide by providing computer and Internet access to a traditionally underserved community in a safe, productive learning center. “Cyber-Town at the Wilson Center” is an educational core with the focus of this project to increase reading skills in school age youth through technology. The target audience is youth and adults living in and around the Crisfield Housing Authority. A secondary audience is tourists who visit the boating marina near the housing community. The lab provides these individuals with a connection to their home.

**Program Implementation**

*Staff and Location*

The Computer Center is located in the Woodrow Wilson Community Center in Crisfield, MD, at the far southern tip of Somerset County. The Computer Center is primarily staffed by the county 4-H educator and a computer lab supervisor. There is also an Advisory Board for the Computer Center, which consists of five Crisfield resident members. The Advisory Board meets quarterly to discuss concerns and/or modifications to the Center.

*Facilities*

The computer lab is located in existing community center. Multiple computers have been installed and are functional, including Internet connectivity. In addition, the program utilizes outside facilities through field trips to achieve desired project outcomes.

*Partnerships*

This computer lab is maintained through cooperation with various organizations:

- Somerset County Health Department provides family and youth referrals to the Computer Center
- Help Our Children Foundation provides family and youth referrals
- Crisfield Police Department provides family and youth referrals.
- Somerset County Housing Authority provides the electricity, phone, security system, and cleaning maintenance for the Computer Center.
- The local school principal, Billy Curtis provides educational connection with youth participant’s teachers, makes reading level referrals, and advertises and sponsors lab programs.

### *Community events/Resources*

The computer lab is operational and open to members of the community. It serves as a resource providing access to technology and various educational programs for children. The Computer Center also runs activities outside of the lab, including two field trips for children who attend the lab. These events serve children in the community by providing enriching activities and exposing children to new experiences.

This past year, the Computer Center has further developed as a resource for adult residents to use for employment searching and has attracted older youth for a mentoring program. This mentoring program pairs youth with elderly adults and provides for positive youth and adult interactions.

In the summer, a healthy eating program was conducted for two weeks for the youth. Through the program, youth learned about the new food guide pyramid, how to build a healthy snack, nutrition, and exercise.

As part of the Satellite After-school Program, the Crisfield youth in this program participated in the Somerset and Worcester County Communications Contest on March 2, 2006 at the intermediate and junior levels. Youth earned 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> place ribbons for the Junior prepared speech, intermediate prepared, senior prepared, intermediate extemporaneous junior radio, and intermediate radio competitions!

At Winterfare 2006 in Wicomico County, Edith Hull taught creative writing. Six youth from the Cyber Town project attended the event.

### **About the Program**

#### *Number of children*

Approximately 20 children attend the lab daily and there are five children who consistently attend the lab three days per week. Also, around 30 children attended the field trip to the Maryland Science Center in Baltimore, MD. In order to be eligible to attend this trip, children had to have attended the lab at least seven times per month.

#### *Length of program*

The Computer Center has been available for use since September 2004. In January 2005, the Computer Center adopted a more formal structure for time spent in the lab after school (see activities section). This structure is currently in place at the labs Monday through Friday 2:00 to 6:30 pm. During the summer the lab is open from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday through Friday.

#### *Kinds of activities*

##### Daily Lab Operation

Children attending the labs participate in a variety of activities using the computers. When children use the lab after-school, they follow a structure lead by the computer supervisor.

1. First, children work on and complete school homework assignments.
2. Next, there are also various literacy programs. There is a reading program focused on reading comprehension as well as electronic journaling.
3. When journaling, children reflect on their feelings and daily lives while they also practice writing skills using a computer program called Creative Writer. "Word Power," which is a popular educational game focused on increasing vocabulary, is also used by attendants of the lab.
4. Additionally, there is time devoted to practicing spoken word and public speaking in order to increase children's ability to communicate clearly.
5. Finally, there is free-time in the labs, during which children can check email or search for information on topics that are personally interesting to them.

#### Special Projects:

- Joomla Project: Web software and training the kids on the software, kids designing the website for the lab
- Satellite After-School Program: After-school program in the office with Mrs. Cottman's kids. Attendance has grown from 5 to 10 kids and they are starting a club.
- Jean Project: a jean workshop with the children at the lab where they brought in their old jeans and were demonstrated ways in which the jeans could be updated
- Wedding Dresses: working with the female youth at the lab to redesign the wedding dresses to be turned into prom dresses.

#### Adult Activities:

- Entrepreneurial Program/Home Business Series: Adults interested in starting home based businesses, taught use of embroidery machine
- Adults provided lessons on typing skills
- Computer classes to learn to use Microsoft applications such as Word, Excel, Power Point, etc.

## **Results**

#### Impacts on Youth:

Findings indicate that this program has succeeded in positively impacting the youth in Crisfield.

1. Children are attending the lab and some children attend the lab after school on a very regular basis.
2. The computer lab is a safe and educational environment for after-school activities. Furthermore, there are activities for reading comprehension, vocabulary practice, and spoken communication.
  1. Reading Comprehension Assessments have been completed on all the youth who attend the lab on a regular basis this past year. Every child has been placed in a reading intervention program. This will include progress

reports established on reading software, DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time and read aloud

3. School records have indicated the positive effect that these programs have had in terms of literacy skill enhancement and homework completion. Lab users' reading scores are validated with reading tests taken at school. A strong collaboration with the school principal maintains communication and coordination between school and computer lab activities.

#### Impacts on Adults:

Findings indicate that this program has succeeded in positively impacting the adults in Crisfield by increasing the knowledge of adult learners of the possible home business use of the computer.

Staff increased adult use of the Computer Center by making it available as a resource for searching for employment. In addition, there are plans to involve older youth through a mentoring program.

Collecting information on the children's lab attendance and skill development from lab use has begun, but will continue on a more formal basis in the future. In addition, children's level of computer literacy will be assessed using an observation in which they are asked to perform tasks on the computer. This assessment will be re-administered six months and twelve months following the initial assessment. The data gathered from these assessments will be used to determine the impact of the lab on children's computer competency. This information together with school records regarding academic performance will be used to assess the impact of the Computer Center.