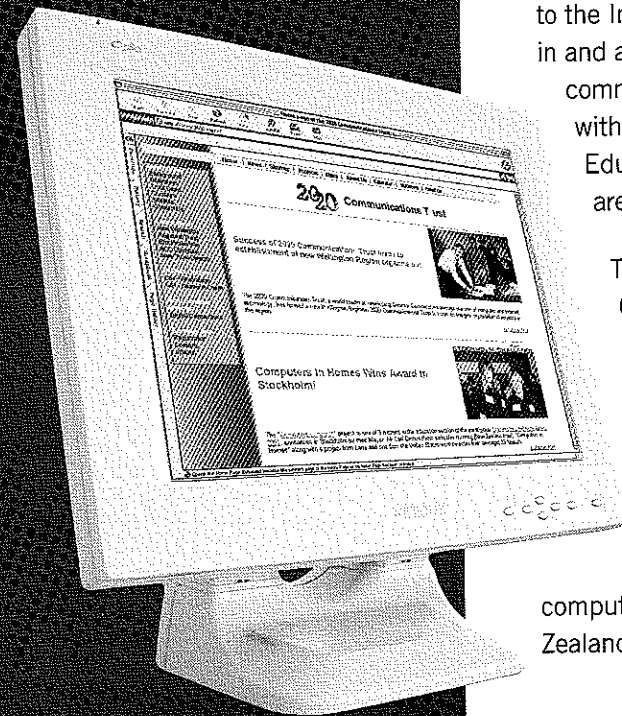


Computers in Homes

An internationally-recognised initiative to overcome the digital divide - it is the only NZ finalist in the 2001 Stockholm Challenge Award for pioneering IT projects benefiting people and society.

Computers in Homes aims to place a computer into every home of every child currently without access to a computer. It currently focuses on getting computers, support and training into every home of every child over 8 attending a decile 1A school (decile 1A indicates it is a community in greatest need socially, economically and health wise). Launched in Porirua, near Wellington and Panmure Bridge in Auckland in mid-2000, the pilot scheme has supplied 50 families with recycled Pentium computer hardware, suitable software, a phone line if the family lacks a connection, technical support and six months free access to the Internet. Computers have also been placed in homes in and around Kutarere, a small predominantly Maori community in the eastern Bay of Plenty, in partnership with Tuhoē Education Authority and the Ministry of Education as the next stage of the project. The pilots are being extensively evaluated by Victoria University

The project is part of the work of the 2020 Communications Trust, which "is committed to raising awareness of and access to, the benefits of information and communications technology networks, especially the Internet." The Trust sponsors research on use of technology and its social, economic and political implications; offers seminars on the Internet; runs forums and special events such as NetDay; promotes computer recycling through the Computer Access New Zealand Trust; and encourages communities to record and



**A pilot project of the 2020
Communications Trust**

Website www.2020.org.nz

Contact Alistair Fraser

Phone 04 479 8636

Email director@2020.org.nz

share their life through the Living Heritage programme. With the support of Wellington City Council, the Trust runs Wellington Community Net (WCN) a community network that offers electronic access, content, training and support to the citizens of Wellington

Each family is offered training through NZQA-approved curriculum guidelines, including information about Internet safety. Tutors speaking Samoan, Tongan and Lao have made it possible for families where these are first languages to be involved. Each family signs an agreement that includes a clause that they will teach one other person the skills they have learnt through the scheme. Families are encouraged to work together on homework and projects, to set family usage schedules and Internet safety practices, (and to pass on their skills to wider family and community members). There is a nominal charge of \$50 per family to take part, and this can be paid in installments. Contact with the school must continue for the duration of the project, and the computer is returned if the family shifts from the area.

The school website at Cannons Creek in Porirua has been integrated into the project, with children's artwork and stories on display. Families can also read the Board of Trustees minutes, school newsletters and notices from the principal. More than half of the families used this site, and its links into the community site, for events information, access to the library and for gathering information for homework assignments.

There are a host of good-news stories: a family being able to access a website about their parents' home in Samoa; organising sports trips through email; emailing families overseas; finding teaching resources such as spell-checks, encyclopaedias, on-line information; sending an absence note via e-mail; house-bound parents able to join chat-rooms; parents being able to write professional-looking CVs and job applications and gain employment; family members gaining touch-typing and computer skills and getting jobs as a result. One noted how little use the TV was getting.

Issues emerging from the evaluations by Victoria University include:

- Concerns about the impact on family life - setting time limits on individual usage, dealing with 'spam' and junk mail.
- Unauthorised use by family visitors or children's friends. Password protection has helped manage access.
- Cost of the electricity used in running the computer
- Some technical difficulties with Internet connections, crowding the hard drive through downloading too much data, and accidental deletion of key files.

The cost per family – covering computer, training, technician support, software, Internet access, telephone connection and project management – is \$3000. The chief source of funding for the Computers In Homes project has been from the Ministry of Education.

Key success factors:

- Each school selected the 25 families using its own processes.
- Integration with the school means good interaction between classroom and home, and questions emerging (such as "what is a university?") can be constructively followed up.
- Availability of technical and educational support means obstacles can be overcome and enthusiasm builds rather than waning.
- Working with the family to set their own usage rules and access guidelines fosters parent/child cooperation.

"The kids catch letters overseas and it helps their spelling and they get photographs that would otherwise take so long to get."