

# Herald-Citizen

## Group gives out first of 3,000 computers

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BY Megan Trotter

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From left, Betty Bright watches her daughter Kelly Bright enjoy her new computer while Michael Ramage, executive director of Connected Tennessee, looks on. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea

In Tennessee almost half of low-income families say they are not accessing the Internet because they do not have a computer at home.

To help change this, Connected Tennessee's Computers 4 Kids program recently presented 37 new Dell computers to deserving families in Putnam and Smith counties, using a grant received from the state of Tennessee. Over the next three years, they plan to award 3,000 new computers to children across the state who meet certain academic and behavioral requirements.

"To borrow a phrase coined by the State of Tennessee's chief information officer and huge supporter of C4K (Computers 4 Kids), Mark Bengel, these computers are a 'hand up, not a handout' for these families. We at Connected Tennessee feel that these computers open a world of opportunities to the recipients that might not have been easily accessible to them before," said Mandy Hale from Connected Tennessee.

The Computers 4 Kids program's goal is to positively impact the future of disadvantaged children by distributing computers to children and families facing economic challenges, children who are in the foster care system or children that struggle with behavioral disorders and other issues.

Working with the Department of Human Services, Connected Tennessee

selected 35 families from Putnam County and two from Smith County to receive these new computers.

These families are a part of the Families First Program, which assists families with children who are experiencing financial difficulties. The program emphasizes work, training and personal responsibility.

"(The children's guardians) will develop, with the assistance of a work activity contractor, an individualized career plan (ICP). This plan is based on the participant's needs and skills. The ultimate goal of the ICP is to provide a work and training guide that will result in financial independence for the family," Hale said.

The families selected for the new computers are families that are meeting their work requirements in the program.

Children ages 12-17 who receive these computers will be able to use them for a variety of tasks, including research and writing school reports.

According to a survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 94 percent of youths between 12-17 who have Internet access say they use it for school research. A report from the North Central Regional Laboratory also found evidence that technology helps students develop diverse skills from the basics to higher-order thinking.

Connected Tennessee believes the computers they are giving away will be useful not only to the children, but also to the rest of their family as well. Adults and older teenagers in the household will be able to utilize the Internet for tasks such as looking for jobs online and taking online courses to further their education.

"These computers will provide the children and their families with the resources they need to participate in unlimited opportunities that have not been offered them in the past," said Patricia Stubblefield, Putnam County Department of Human Services director for district three. "Franklin D. Roosevelt once stated, 'We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.' By providing our youth with these computers, we are not just providing them with a tool, we are saying that we have confidence in them to be successful."

For more information about Connected Tennessee or its program Computers 4 Kids, visit the Web site at [www.connectedtennessee.org](http://www.connectedtennessee.org) or call (615) 242-9508.