

### **In Toronto, the Digital Divide Just Got Smaller**

Some computer literacy programs aim to help children, others seniors, and still others the unemployed. But a distinctive Shape the Future program in Toronto is reaching out simultaneously to all these groups and more. Its public sector partner praises the “exceptional response” it’s receiving from first-time computer users. And what Microsoft and its partners have learned during the first year of the *Connected for Success* initiative might help Shape the Future programs elsewhere.

*Connected for Success* is sponsored by Microsoft Canada, Rogers Communications, and Compugen, in cooperation with Toronto Community Housing, which serves about 58,500 low and moderate-income households and is North America’s second-largest social housing provider. Toronto Community Housing’s residents include singles, families, refugees, recent immigrants, special needs populations, and others. They’re diverse in many ways, but many of them have this in common: they’ve never before owned a PC and can’t afford one, let alone afford the Internet connectivity that is integral to computer use today.

That’s where *Connected for Success* steps in. The initiative offers Toronto Community Housing residents a completely refurbished desktop computer from Compugen, a Microsoft Authorized Refurbisher, for \$150 (plus tax), or a Compugen refurbished laptop for \$199 (plus tax). The computers come with Microsoft software installed, including Windows 7, Microsoft Office 2010, and Microsoft Learning suite. As part of the initiative, Rogers offers high-speed Internet access (10Mbps download speed) and storage (30GB) for \$9.99 per month (plus tax).

“We wanted to bring computers and computer literacy to people who couldn’t afford \$400 or \$500 for a low-cost new PC,” says Ahmed El Komy of Microsoft Canada. “That’s why Compugen, as a Microsoft Authorized Refurbisher, is an ideal co-sponsor in this initiative. Thanks to Compugen, the initiative offers like-new, warrantied, high-quality PCs at tremendous discounts from new PCs.”

The initiative is open to all Toronto Community Housing households that are eligible for public housing subsidies, making it easy for Compugen, which administers the computer part of the program, to qualify applicants. A standard configuration is offered for the desktops and laptops, to simplify the purchase process. Compugen ships the computers to the Toronto Community Housing residents via courier service, and includes clear, comprehensive instructions to make set-up and use easy for first-time computer users. The company—which otherwise serves enterprise customers, not consumers—also established a toll-free call center dedicated to assisting participants in the initiative.

“For most people in the program, this is their first time buying a computer,” says Simone Perreira, Program Manager at Compugen. “They don’t have technology backgrounds, so the support we offer them through the call center is essential.”

The corporate partners have marketed the program in various ways. What works best, they’ve found, is working with the existing community leaders in each neighborhood. Those residents are invited to

meetings in which the initiative is explained, and they're invited to help publicize it to their neighbors during lobby events. The sponsors have also opened small computer labs in Toronto Community Housing buildings, where residents can try the computers and get comfortable enough to consider purchasing them. The initiative includes on-site computer training for community leaders, which Microsoft provides in 26 languages to meet the diverse needs of the Toronto Community Housing community.

"The way we market the program is a big contributor to its success," says El Komy. "In person, face to face, meeting tenants has been very helpful. Resident leaders are the ambassadors of the program. Their neighbors know and trust them, and will listen to what they have to say."

*Connected for Success* is consistent with what Toronto Community Housing does, according to Lenna Bradburn, the company's Vice President, Resident and Community Services.

"*Connected for Success* is a great example of how when we all work together – residents, the private sector, community leaders, and Toronto Community Housing staff – we can provide residents of our communities with the tools they need to succeed," she says. "We look forward to continuing our partnership with Rogers, Compugen and Microsoft Canada to help Toronto Community Housing residents access a more connected, successful future."

Microsoft Canada and Compugen are now considering ways to expand the program to other parts of the country.



A child and her mother step across the digital divide at the launch of the *Connected for Success* initiative.