
E-LITERACY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOES NATIONAL AT EWB

If you are looking for news on EWB's ICT-based projects or ideas for beginning a Local Initiative Project (LIP) of your own, you've come to the right virtual space.

Accurately described as an Information and Communication for Development project, Engineers Without Borders 'Computer in Homes', 'PC's for Refugees' or 'Connectivity For Refugees' projects as it is variously termed has well and truly launched. With Perth WA and University of Melbourne chapters taking the lead, enthusiasm for the project is spreading, as I write this there are chapters in QLD, SA and NSW planning how to get involved.

The fundamental theme that underpins all these projects is that enhancing the e-literacy of selected individuals from within the refugee community improves their transition to further education, sourcing employment opportunities, or simply just getting in touch with their community networks. The e-literacy skills that the projects focus on are the skills and knowledge relating to the computer and its software as a communication tool and the Internet as an information resource.

While there are some variations in all of these programs, the program is built around a partnership of concerned entities. Your standard program would involve firstly an EWB chapter, which conceives of the project, initiates partner organizations, recruits volunteer trainers and tech support personnel, sources and installs computer systems and sets up Internet access. With regards to partners, important players are the organizations that work with the refugee community such as AMES, ASRC and ARA with these groups acting as liaison to interested students. Finally another essential partner is the computer system refurbisher such as GreenPC or Computerbank Victoria who provide the necessary hardware and software for training at discounted rates.

It is noteworthy that this program's introduction to EWB Australia has

international roots - the CLT (Computer Literacy Training) program that runs out the Calgary chapter of EWB Canada has been running since 2003 and has been an important source of inspiration for our own efforts. By their own reckoning, they have they have provided computer training to over 200 students from over 30 different countries.

While this partnership-based model remains a constant in all of these programs, there are variations in training method, choice of computer software, pricing of computer systems, and sources of EWB trainers. Training models vary from a 1 on 1 model (where a student and trainer pair selectively for the entirety of the 6 month course and generally train at the student's home) to a group-based model where multiple trainers and students train together in a classroom environment. Computer systems come populated either with the Linux or Windows operating system and are provided to students either free of charges or at a small nominal rate. From the human resources perspective, trainers and support staff can be drawn from either student and professional networks or both,

While it is still too early in these existing programs to have measured their impact, students will surely have an enhanced understanding of the computer and the Internet as the immeasurably useful tools that they are. Equally importantly, EWB members have worked together towards effective community development. As all these examples prove, this article is a replicable model that only requires a committed group of EWB members to provide that necessary spark.

To send us your ideas, offers of support, or to enquire for further information on any of these programs, please write to us at EWB National at i4d@ewb.org.au. Please also visit the 'Contact Us' page which you will find on the homepage of the CFR website, one of the programs referenced in this article, at www.uluruproject.info/cfr . Proceed to fill in the short form on the page indicating how you will be able to contribute to CFR indicating clearly which activity/s you would like to be part of. You will also find relevant resources and material in the 'FAQ', 'Resources' and 'Admin' section of this website.