

Geeks connect with needy kids



MICHAEL STUPARYK/TORONTO STAR

Mohammad Ahmed, right, with Little Geek volunteer Christopher Cates, distributes computers at St. Andrew's United Church on June 12, 2008. Area children benefit from foundation that fixes old computers and gives them away

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Nick Kyonka
STAFF REPORTER

Javon Bonsu has never surfed the web before, but all that is about to change.

The 7-year-old was just one of about 60 needy kids who showed up yesterday at a church at Yonge and Bloor Sts. to receive a free computer from the non-profit group, Little Geeks. The group is also providing the kids with a free dial-up Internet connection.

"I'm so excited," exclaimed a soft-spoken Javon, who said his new tools would help with his second-grade math class. "I can use them for looking up times tables."

Little Geeks was founded a little over a year ago by tech guru Andy Walker and friend Lisa Shishis to provide Toronto's underprivileged kids with a reliable computer and free access to the web.

The idea was borne out of a computer Walker was given by his parents more than 20 years earlier as he was heading into his first year at university. "That was a huge deal for me," he said. Without it, he said, his time at university would have been drastically different, and much more difficult to complete.

Powered by corporate and private donations – and the work of a handful of dedicated volunteers – the group has teamed up with Reboot Canada to help refurbish donated used computers for school-aged kids. After dishing out about 50 last year, the group is looking to give out another 150 computers by the end of this month.

"I'm delighted the vision is finally being realized," said an exuberant Walker yesterday. "It makes me feel like I have a purpose on this planet."

The biggest obstacle the team has encountered is finding companies to provide free Internet access for the kids' homes.

"Without Internet, the computer is almost useless," noted Shishis. "We haven't had anyone step up to give us high-speed connections, and we would absolutely love it."

To many of the recipient kids yesterday, even the dial-up connection will be an improvement and will have an immediate impact on their academic lives.

"I'm so glad about it," exclaimed a smiling Alah Amsdr, a Grade 10 student at R.H. King Academy. The 15-year-old said yesterday she had struggled to maintain her 90-plus average at school after her old computer broke down about a month ago. With her single mother receiving only \$1,100 a month in disability insurance, she didn't know when they could afford a new one.

"It's nice to know that there are people there to help you," she said. "Especially now that exams are coming."

While the big geeks have enough computers to get through the end of the month, Walker said, they are always looking for more donations because there will always be more kids to help.

"Our board's mission is to provide an Internet connection to every child on the planet who wants one," he said. "That's a huge mandate."

To make a donation contact the group at www.littlegeeks.org.