



# Computers for Youth

We Bring Learning Home

## Application to Clear Fund

EIN: 13-3935309

Cause 4

Featured Program: Take IT Home NY

Contact: Janice Goldfarb, Chief Development Officer: 212-563-7300

### I. List of Programs

- CFY's **Take IT Home** program improves the home learning environment of low-income students and supports their parents as learning partners. It works directly with schools to improve the educational resources available in children's homes, improve parent-child interaction around learning and help teachers connect classroom learning with the home. More specifically, Take IT Home partners with public schools in low-income communities and offers all 6th grade families a home computer designed as a family *home learning center* with educational software, Internet access and bilingual web content. Every participating family attends an interactive, half-day training focused on strengthening students' core academic skills and improving parents' confidence in helping their children learn. After the workshop, all families receive ongoing technical support. \*
- CFY's **Teacher Training and Professional Development** trains teachers how to both better incorporate technology into their instruction and create powerful links between in-school and at-home learning.
- CFY's **Student Software Specialist Team** works with middle school students to test software for consideration in CFY's bundled educational software package that is loaded on every CFY computer. Each student spends several hours learning each assigned title, analyzes it according to CFY-supplied specifications and then rates it according to metrics supplied by the CFY Research Team. This team is also instrumental in choosing CFY's Family Learning Software of the Year for CFY's annual event.
- CFY's **Education Executives Day** is an event where education executives and students assess software titles that were nominated by CFY's own panel of nationally recognized software experts. Student teams demonstrate and discuss software titles with the executives who then assess each title in terms of its ability to improve students' academic competencies and promote family involvement in education. At the end of the day, the education executives select a handful of finalists that are then announced publicly.
- CFY's **Tech Leadership Awards** is an event CFY hosts each year in New York City to recognize social responsibility among IT executives, excellence in educational technology and innovation in digital leadership.
- CFY's **Research Program** conducts ongoing research to help us better understand the benefits that low-income families derive from our programs. Our research

instruments include intake and follow-up surveys, focus group and interview protocols. Our research department develops and administers the instruments, analyzes the data collected using statistical methods, and publishes reports. CFY's research department is currently conducting a rigorous multi-year study with our research partner, Educational Testing Service (ETS), to determine our program's impact on student academic achievement.

\* **Take IT Home will be the "Featured Program" for this grant.**

## **II. Population Served by Featured Program**

CFY serves low-income children ages 11 to 13, their families and their teachers in New York City. The children attend public middle schools that have a very high percentage of students eligible for free lunch (75% or more) and are predominantly Black and Hispanic. Constituents also include immigrants, foster care children, and those who live in homeless shelters.

### **A. Does the program serve all who ask to be served?**

CFY does not select families to serve one-by-one but rather selects public middle schools in low-income communities throughout New York City and then offers our program to all the 6<sup>th</sup> grade families in the school. Because there are far more schools interested in our program than we can accommodate, we do not serve all who would like to be served. Rather CFY uses an application (document attached) and interview process to select public schools.

Prior to FY05-06, CFY would invite schools to participate. We would identify schools with help from administrators at the central board of education and through informal nominations from our current school principals. In FY05-06, the year we piloted our application process, we had 11 schools apply for three slots (the other 11 slots were already filled by returning schools). Thus, in FY05-06, we served more than 2,000 families through a total of 14 partner schools. In FY06-07, 12 schools we had worked with in the prior year completed a renewal application and 10 were accepted into our program. Two schools were rejected because their performance during the year was below CFY standards and submitted weak renewal applications. A total of 42 schools then applied for 6 remaining slots. In FY06-07, we served more than 2,000 families through a total of 16 partner schools.

In FY07-08, 13 prior schools completed a renewal application. Based on their performance and applications all these schools are likely to be accepted into our program. Three existing partner schools were not asked to reapply. Two of these schools are being phased out by the NYC Department of Education. The third school had a low performance and a recently appointed principal who is unfamiliar with our program. A total of 23 schools applied for approximately 4 new slots. In FY07-08 we plan to work with 17 partner schools and serve 2,400 families in Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan and the Bronx.

CFY has rigorous requirements and criteria for continuing to work with prior partner schools and for selecting new partner schools. The expectations for schools served in prior years are described in great detail on our renewal application, our school memorandum of understanding and our school report card. For new partner schools, the selection criteria are described below:

- Minimum school-wide free/reduced lunch eligibility of 75%.
- Minimum principal tenure at the applying school of at least one year.
- Appropriate fit with principal's vision for connecting student learning at home and in school; increasing parental engagement and involvement; and using technology to support teaching and learning.
- The principal's full support for a partnership with Computers for Youth, including the commitment of staff time to manage the collaboration and to conduct family outreach.
- The principal's designation of a school Project Manager who has exceptional organizational/management skills and the authority to resolve problems quickly. (The Project Manager's main responsibility is family outreach and ensuring smooth operations at the Saturday Family Learning Workshops.
- Ability of the Principal, Project Manager and Tech Coordinator to attend all Saturday Family Learning Workshop sessions.
- Principal's commitment to purchasing additional professional development services to leverage the Computers for Youth program and improve teaching, learning and parental involvement.
- Strong preference is given to those schools whose physical plant meets the requirements for running successful Computers for Youth Saturday Family Learning Workshops (these requirements are described in detail in the attached application). In special circumstances, schools that *do not* meet these requirements can still participate in Take IT Home if they are located near a school that *does* meet the requirements and is also participating in the program.

CFY conducts the school application process each spring and then conducts in-person site visits throughout the spring and summer.

**B. Please specify what proportion of the population is served:**

1. Learning disabled or special-need students: 7%
2. English language learners: 18%
3. At or above grade level in reading: 34%
4. At or above grade level in math: 31%

**III. Program Activities and Budget for Featured Program**

CFY's Take IT Home program works directly with schools to:

- **Improve the educational resources available in children's homes.** CFY's computer-based *home learning centers* are designed by software experts and tested by students and education executives from around the country.
- **Improve parent-child interaction around learning at home.** CFY's workshops improve parents' confidence in helping their children learn. Our *home learning center*

supplements parents with little education themselves (the software provides the “knowledge” of, for example, algebra while the parent provides the motivation). CFY turns “family time” into “learning time.”

- **Help teachers connect classroom learning with the home.** CFY's program works with principals to set school-wide goals and trains teachers to create powerful links to at-home learning.

### Specific Activities of the Program

At the core of the Take IT Home program is providing a free computer designed as a *home learning center* to the selected middle school students. For participating families, this computer becomes theirs to keep. Not only do the students receive the computer, but they also receive engaging educational software titles in math, English, social studies and science. These titles have been identified by software experts and tested by students and education executives from school districts across the country.

Additionally, Take IT Home is able to provide students with one year of free Internet access or reduced cost Internet access through our partnerships with AOL and Express56. We also offer bilingual web content at <http://www.communitycorner.org/>.

To participate in Take IT Home, students and their parent or guardian must attend a half-day CFY Family Learning Workshop that teaches parents and children how to use their CFY computer to strengthen core academic skills. At this workshop, all participating families learn on the CFY *home learning center* that they then take home. Workshops are held on Saturdays at the school and are well attended: In schools that draw fewer than 15 families to PTA meetings, each of our Saturday workshops draws more than 100. Participants also receive technical support from CFY's bilingual help desk open 11.5 hours per day, Monday through Thursday, plus eight hours on Friday. Families can also bring their computer to a local CFY warehouse for free servicing or can choose to have a CFY-trained technician come to their home for a modest fee.

CFY Family Learning Workshops are overseen by CFY full-time staff (Program Director, Program Manager, etc.) as well as Master Teachers who are often current or retired school teachers with a great deal of experience with low-income students and their families. Master teachers receive a stipend from CFY for their work. Finally, CFY provides professional development to teachers so that they can offer additional training to families beyond the Family Learning Workshops. These additional training workshops are designed to give parents strategies for engaging in home learning activities—something that impacts student performance far more than typical school-driven parent activities (such as parent-teacher meetings)—and are usually open to families from all middle-school grades.

CFY's Take IT Home program fills a vital gap in lives of low-income school children by significantly improving their home learning environment. CFY's work is based on the belief that the *home* holds the greatest untapped potential for improving children's academic and life-long success. Compared to the classroom or the after-school center, the home has received the least attention from policy makers and educators. Children spend the greatest amount of time at home (only 13% is spent in the classroom), where they interact with the adults most interested in their success—their parents or guardians.

CFY is dedicated to unleashing this unrealized potential – our program offers children an important tool for discovery and understanding, and also draws their parents into what they are learning. Research has shown that our program improves parents’ confidence in helping their children learn, increases students engagement in school and improves their academic achievement (as measured by math test scores). In general, the New York City school system spends less than two percent of its budget on parental involvement activities or other interventions that can improve the home learning environment of their students. CFY is aware of only a handful of schools in the NYC public school system that offer their families a program similar to *Take IT Home* on their own. These schools, which are few and far between, are “laptop” schools that are actually allowing the students to take their laptops home with them.

#### Specific Anticipated Results

- CFY plans to distribute 2,400 CFY *home learning centers* to NYC families in FY07-08 (July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008.)
- In FY07-08, CFY plans to train at least 4,800 students, parents, and teachers in NYC in how to use their CFY *home learning center* to strengthen core academic skills..

B. Budget: Two versions of our Take IT Home budget are attached for your review. Please also see the note about our budgets in the “Confidentiality” section below.

## **IV. Evaluation for Featured Program**

### **A. What is your process for evaluating the effects of the featured program on students’ abilities to succeed academically?**

CFY has a robust process for evaluating the effects of Take IT Home on students’ abilities to succeed academically. CFY’s in-house research department has built a relationship with our research partner, Educational Testing Service (ETS) to look specifically at this outcome. Together we have completed an analysis of data collected in Year 1 of a three-year study, and have collected a majority of the data for Year 2.

The first year of our study demonstrated that students actively and regularly use their CFY computer and the Internet for learning and that the CFY program is having an impact on students’ academic success (as measured by test scores). Data analyzed this first year included student pre-surveys and standardized math test score data from New York State. Using regression analysis, we found the following variables to be positive and significant predictors of students’ math scores: (1) their prior year’s math test score, (2) their frequency of home Internet use, (3) their engagement with school, and (4) their use of computers for self-regulated learning. Together, all factors explained 48% of the variance in math test scores. Students’ engagement and home computer use (particularly their home Internet use and computer use for self-regulated learning) explained 14% of the variance. We are thrilled by these outcomes given the external limitations on our research (New York State considerably changed the standardized tests that students completed before and after participating in Take IT Home, thereby limiting the power of our analysis).

Our investigation of data collected in Year 2 of our study (FY06-07) should reveal a much stronger story. We were able to collect much more information in this second year, including student pre-survey and interview data, and we were able to add a control group. In the next few months, we should be receiving standardized test score data. Because these test scores will be comparable to prior years, we should be able to do much more powerful statistical analyses than we did in Year 1.

**B. Attached Reports: Five documents (with EIN and CAUSE 4 in header) are attached to this email:**

**(1) CFY's Test Score Study:** This is a report on Year 1 of our study with Educational Testing Service (ETS) examining the impact of home computing (specifically, the CFY program) on students' test scores. This report is referenced above.

**(2) CFY's Comparison Study:** This study, conducted in spring 2004, shows that students participating in CFY's program increased their class effort (as measured by teachers) compared with non-participating students. This study also shows that students participating in CFY's program had a smaller decrease in writing performance (as measured by teachers) compared with non-participating students.

**(3) CFY Parent Impact Research Report:** This report describes the results of an analysis of parents' responses on CFY's post-workshop surveys. Parents tell us about the anticipated impact of the Take IT Home program on the connection between home and school learning and parental involvement, and interest in continued involvement with CFY programs.

**(4) Transcript of a mother and daughter** using software provided by CFY (Real Lives).

**(5) CFY 2007-08 NYC School Application:** schools complete this in order to be considered as a Take IT Home NY partner-school.

**V. Optional: Other support for featured activities:**

As a nation, we have long recognized the importance of the home learning environment for young children. Each year, millions of dollars are invested by private foundations and government to help low-income families compensate for shortfalls caused by poverty and lack of parental education. This funding supports cognitively stimulating resources for the home (such as books and television programming) and training in parenting skills. Yet as children proceed through school, our nation's attention to the home learning environment dissipates. The drop-off is steepest just as children enter their pre-adolescent years and advance from primary to middle school.

Children's pre-adolescent years are not only associated with reduced attention on the home learning environment, they are also the years during which academic achievement drops. In New

York State, for example, the share of students who are performing at grade level falls significantly between the fifth and sixth grades and continues to decline through middle school.<sup>i</sup> This is no surprise—the middle school years put considerable strain on the relationships among students, parents and teachers. Children begin to withdraw from academics and demand more autonomy from their families. Parents begin reducing their involvement in their children’s learning because they view their children as more grown up and they feel less capable of helping with increasingly complex homework assignments.

Decreased investment in the home learning environment damages middle-school children, particularly those in low-income families. Research has shown that parenting practices can account for as much as 25% of the achievement differences between higher- and lower-performing students.<sup>ii</sup> Yet school systems spend less than two percent of their budgets on parental involvement activities or other interventions that can improve the home learning environment of their students.<sup>iii</sup> Just as a vaccination requires a booster to ensure its efficacy, our nation’s investment in the home learning environment in children’s early years requires a booster in their middle school years to help them reach their full potential.

VI. **Confidentiality:** We have provided you with two budgets. The budget that only provides a total of personnel costs may be made public. We request that the budget that details personnel costs remain private to protect our staff’s confidentiality around salaries.

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\* The Children’s Partnership, 2005, “Quick Facts: The Technology Gap Low-Income Youth Face and Why It Matters.”

<sup>i</sup> The New York Times reported that test scores have dropped between fifth and sixth grade for two years in a row. See Herszenhorn, The New York Times, *English Scores Drop Sharply In 6th Grade*, 9/22/06 and Fessenden, The New York Times, *Eighth Graders Show Big Gain in Statewide Reading Test*, 5/23/07.

<sup>ii</sup> Rosenzweig, C. (2001). *A meta-analysis of parenting and school success: The role of parents in promoting students’ academic performance*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Seattle, WA: April, 2001.

<sup>iii</sup> The New York City Department of Education school budget 2003-04 shows 0.9% of expenditures were for textbooks and 0.5% of expenditures were for parental involvement activities. [www.nycenet.edu/offices/d\\_chanc\\_oper/budget/exp01/y2003\\_2004/function.asp](http://www.nycenet.edu/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/exp01/y2003_2004/function.asp).