



Bradley County: Computers connect with foster children

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BY Yolanda Putman
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Youths in foster homes in Bradley County and across the state are getting new Dell laptop computers through Connected Tennessee's Computers 4 Kids program.

"(The computer) opens up a whole new world for them," said Mary Elliot, Bradley County's Department of Children's Services team leader.

Students who once had to visit libraries or schools to do research now have access to the World Wide Web in their homes, officials said.

"It assists them in their school work and sometimes they use it as entertainment," Ms. Elliot said.

Connected Tennessee has distributed 173 computers in the Southeast Tennessee counties of Bledsoe, Bradley, Franklin, Grundy, Hamilton, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Polk, Rhea and Sequatchie this year.

Sequatchie County curriculum instruction supervisor Dr. Gwen Hobbs said having the computers gives teachers more opportunity to help students with their work.

The school has textbooks on a CD with a reading feature. Teachers will be able to send that home with the student when there is not an adult to help them, Dr. Hobbs said.

Computers 4 Kids gives computers to children and families facing economic challenges, who are in the foster care system or who have behavioral disorders and other issues, according to a Connected Tennessee news release.

Case managers determine which children get computers based on academic and behavioral expectations, according to the news release.

Almost half of low-income families in Tennessee say they don't use the Internet because there's not a computer in their homes. Since computer skills and Internet access are essential to participate in the global economy, Tennessee's disadvantaged residents should be helped to join the information age, officials said.

Connected Tennessee is a public-private partnership to accelerate access to technology in the state. It plans to distribute 3,000 new Dell laptop computers to students within the next three years, officials said.