

## **Tech Horizons**

We are dedicated to assisting vulnerable adults within the Southeastern Michigan community in developing skills in, and gaining access to, the tools of technology. By providing technology to individuals that normally would not have the option to explore these skills, we offer our clientele an opportunity to free themselves from isolation and to gain practical assets to present to the community at large. Physical and/or mental disabilities may lead to fewer opportunities to socialize, decreased social acceptance from the community, economic difficulties, decreased mobility, increased dependence on others, in addition to normal separation from family, these deficits can lead to crippling isolation and loneliness. In addition, the ever growing field of technology, computer repair, software use and graphic design are highly sought after skill sets, if not largely required for today's employment. By utilizing the opportunities that TECH Horizons can offer, individuals with limitations have an easily accessible way to interact with their community and support system and gain a foothold in an employment market that they previously may not have had access to.

Computers are increasingly conditioning the society we live in. While the total number of Americans buying computers and getting online increases each day, there are still large segments of our population that are completely unacquainted with the Information Age or its technology. Talk of the Digital Divide draws some attention to, but does not fully capture the degree to which computer illiterate individuals will be unable to access opportunities, participate in social advances or compete for employment. The advent of email and digital photographs has revolutionized the ability for families to remain in contact at a fraction of the time of postal mail. Websites with chat rooms, instant messaging and weblogs enable people to reach out and connect with people over long distances and form entire communities of friendships online. Educational institutions are entirely reliant on computer technology, not only in terms of class participation but also in the application and registration processes. Product instruction manuals have become obsolete and references to websites are the only way to access information about newly purchased products. Many employers accept applications or resumes through only electronic means which require applicants to be computer literate, even if not a requirement of the job for which they are applying. People struggling with the disadvantages of poverty and/or disability are the primary victims of the Digital Divide. By providing equitable and meaningful access to technology we can ensure that all citizens step into the 21st century together.

The increasing large aging population find themselves with varied issues including deteriorating physical and/or mental condition, growing loneliness and dependency, and lots of spare time. Some are living alone but able to care for themselves, others stay within a family whose members often are absent. Some suffer from motion-related disability or handicaps, others from chronic diseases. Some have been discharged from hospital after medical treatment but still need to be looked after at home or in a closed care institution for further recovery, others are suffering from major diseases and in need of so-called terminal care.<sup>1</sup> The loss of social status, disintegration of support systems, unemployment and social isolation are ubiquitous parts of the "process" of becoming disabled.<sup>2</sup> TECH Horizons is able to provide elderly clients with computer technology that is affordable, easy to use and adapted to their needs. Screens with large print and speaker systems are just an example of ways that TECH Horizons can adapt a



system for a senior. Additionally, training programs and one-on-one time can be spent to help seniors become comfortable with basic computer use, as well as more advanced functions as requested. It is of utmost priority of the TECH Horizons to help the elderly population access the internet to immediately begin impacting the devastating effects of isolation, which is a primary warning sign of both depression and elder abuse. Through the internet, families can email, instant message and send pictures to their elderly loved ones quickly and easily. Additionally, seniors can find local community resources, maintain a connection to the world around them if they are homebound and explore chat rooms for online companionship.

TECH Horizons works with adults handicapped not only by illness but by all things that lead to stigmatization and isolation. Many program participants live solely on Social Security and have as little as \$50 per month spending money after housing and food costs. Living with absolutely no day-to-day luxuries, it would still take nearly two years to save enough money for a mid-priced computer system. TECH Horizons helps fight the effects of poverty by providing clients their own computers which, in conjunction with many of the county's free wireless internet access initiatives, enables clients internet availability and access to job postings, employment applications and educational opportunities.

TECH Horizons fosters the idea that the acquisition of practical skills is the cornerstone of rehabilitation. It demonstrates that people with psychiatric and physical limitations can return to meaningful and productive work. In the past, disabled and elderly individuals have been stigmatized by the unenlightened as unemployable or even unintelligent. TECH Horizons can help individuals and society see what can be accomplished with adequate support, a little technology and training based on individual skills and interests. Computer proficiency is a highly valued skill. People with disabilities are often relegated to the kind of jobs that no one else really wants: repetitive work and unskilled labor without regard to their intellectual ability or career aspirations. In fact, having a career aspiration, something most of us take for granted, is rarely encouraged if not actively discouraged as unrealistic, for disabled persons. TECH Horizons strives to help them regain some of the goals, opportunities and self-respect that the illness and stigma may have cost them.

TECH Horizons provides computers and individualized technological training. By taking in cash donations, donated computers and computer parts, TECH Horizons reconditions computers and places them in the homes of disabled and elderly adults. In-home training and continued technical support are provided as needed. TECH Horizons is a program run by [Synod Residential Services](#), a not for profit corporation and local charity. SRS has provided psychosocial rehabilitation services for over 30 years.

TECH Horizons looks to the community for help in its effort to provide quality education and equipment to its participants. Because of our association with [Synod Residential Services](#) we are able to offer a receipt of donation to any organization or individual that is able to make qualifying contributions to our efforts.

In addition to monetary contributions, TECH Horizons accepts any form of computer related donation. Some examples of what it takes to make our program work are listed below.



We will accept any donation from this list in any quantity or condition. Both new and used equipment are welcome and appreciated. We will even come to you or your place of business in Southeast Michigan to pick up your contributions.

- Computers: Desktops/ Laptops
- Monitors
- Keyboards
- Mice/ Pointing Devices
- Software/ Instruction Manuals & Guides
- Printers/ Printing Supplies-Paper, Ink, Cartridges, Print Heads
- Peripherals: Scanners/ Digital Cameras/ Drawing Tablets/ External Storage Devices
- Drives: Hard Drives/ Floppy Drives/ CD-ROM/ CD-R/ CD-RW/ DVD/ Zip
- Projectors: LCD/ Overhead
- Components: RAM/ Power Supplies/ ISA & PCI Cards (Sound, Video or Other)

When TECH Horizons receives your donation, it will then go through a testing process to determine if all components are in working order or in need of repair, upgrade or routine maintenance. Our TECH Horizons technician reformats all hard drives to wipe them clean of all old information and installs all of our own software. All donations are then refurbished and prepared for use by our clientele.

### **Success Story**

*With no means of keeping in touch with friends and relatives out of state, a Synod consumer requested a computer to use for email. Though the consumer had no previous computer experience, he was able to utilize the training and support offered to him, to quickly learn how to send and receive email messages, keeping him in touch with those close to him at little or no cost. As this consumer began to explore his skills in utilizing the computer, he discovered the world that was available to him through the internet. When a household item was needed for his community residence, a comparative online price search was initiated by the consumer, who located the item at a substantial discount, and was able to help the entire house achieve a savings on the purchase. His skill base continues to increase and he can often remedy common computer troubleshooting issues with no additional outside assistance.*

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<sup>1</sup> Versweyveld, Leslie. "RISE Project to Rescue Elderly from Isolation with Quality of Life Enhancing IT". Virtual Medical Worlds. 2006. Genias Benelux. 26 August 1998. < <http://www.hoise.com/vmw/articles/LV-VM-10-98-8.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> Cleigh, Carol W. "Attempted Suicide, Completed". Ragged Edge Online. 2001. Advocado Press. Issue 2 2001. < <http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/0301/0301ft4.htm>>.