

## Kids & Computers

Selected Results from Colorado  
Public Libraries & the Digital Divide, 2002

***The "digital divide" is a social phenomenon created by the social obstacles that limit access to computer technology and digital resources. Providing access to this technology and these resources are important parts of public library service in the 21st century.***

In March 2002, the Library Research Service conducted a survey of users of Internet computers in Colorado public libraries. Of 1,856 responding public library Internet users from throughout the state, 164 were under age 18. We found that young people are engaged in wide and frequent use of this technology; that they often serve as teachers of technology skills to adults and peers; and that public libraries help to bridge the "digital divide" for Colorado's youth.

The increased presence of technology in the last five years affords young patrons the comfort of learning, working, communicating, and playing via computer screen and keyboard. However, many Colorado kids still have no home access to the Internet. This expands the mission for public libraries.

The library has changed from a storehouse of information, to a virtual community center. Kids' computer activities are diverse and reflect the wide-reaching effects of technology in every part of young peoples' lives.

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

Colorado library patrons under the age of 18 indicated that...

- 15% of kids who use library Internet computers report no other access to the Internet.
- Over three-quarters of these young Internet users were visiting libraries because of the access to technology.
- Colorado library Internet users over the age of 18 indicated that...
- In many instances, kids were their primary source of learning new technology skills.

### **Survey Results About Kids**

- Computers attract young patrons. More than three-quarters of Colorado library Internet users under age 18 indicated that access to technology was a reason for visiting the library that day.
- One out of seven kids reported that the library was their only access to the Internet.
- Technology skills were improved through the library at higher rates for younger patrons than for all respondents. These skills included word processing, Web searching, and Website development.
- Web development skills were improved at twice the rate of any other age group, indicating that kids are utilizing technology resources to maximize their potential.
- Almost three out of four kids reported learning technology skills independently.
- Many adult respondents noted that kids were their primary source for learning about computers and the Internet. Young people in our community show a return on the investment of tax dollars supporting our Colorado public schools.

## What Are Kids Doing on Public Library Computers?

### Education:

- 60% of young patrons use library computers to work on or complete school assignments.
- 9% were working on college level course work, indicating that kids are taking advantage of accelerated online courses.
- 29% use library computers to look for educational programs.

### Communication:

- 48% of young patrons use library computers to check e-mail.
- 37% use technology to stay in touch with someone that otherwise would not be possible.
- 28% participate in chat sessions, a developing social phenomenon.

### Recreation:

- 71% surf the web, 29% play games, and 22% listen to music. Virtual recreation adds the dimension of multimedia entertainment to the 21<sup>st</sup> century library.

### Community:

- 18% of young patrons use library computers to find jobs.
- 15% of young patrons look for health information on the Internet.
- 13% of young patrons look for volunteer opportunities, more than twice the rate of other age groups.

## Age, Income and Opportunity

### Of all Coloradans...

- 25% are under age 18.<sup>1</sup>
- An estimated 400,813 have annual incomes of less than \$15,000. Of those, 126,181 were under age 18.<sup>2</sup>
- Only 25% of those with such low incomes use the Internet from any location.<sup>3</sup>

In **A Nation Online**, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration reported that children and teenagers use computers and the Internet more than any other group. Technology is integrated into most kids' daily activities at school, interpersonal communication, entertainment, and play. As the Internet expands opportunities, it also threatens second-class citizenship for those without access. Social factors such as income influence opportunities for children to participate in the digital environment. The "digital divide" diminishes the full potential of children left behind.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2000) *State and County Quick Facts*. Accessed November 28, 2002. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/08000.html>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2001) *County Estimates for People of all ages in Poverty*. Accessed January 3, 2003. [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/stcty/a98\\_08.htm](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/stcty/a98_08.htm)

<sup>3</sup> National Telecommunications and Information Administration. (2000) *A Nation Online: How Americans are expanding their use of the Internet*. Accessed January 3, 2003. <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn>

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