

## Local churches helping immigrants learn the computer

Written by Nora Steele

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Refugee students attending English as a Second Language classes at the Church of Peace in Rock Island are now learning computer skills....thanks to a cooperation among local churches

(Rock Island, IL) The Rock Island County Regional Office of Education and the 21st CCLC grant funds the "Lights ON For Learning" program at the Church of Peace which focuses on teaching English and basic life skills. But according to the Church's Director of Operations, Nora Steele, the students cannot even apply for a job without knowledge of a computer and she was determined to create a computer lab for them.

Steele approached the Council of Church of Peace and asked the members if a room could be refigured as a computer lab. They agreed. Then she wrote to a neighboring church, Edwards Congregational Church in Davenport, to help fund this. It agreed to help. So, with \$2,500 six Gateway computers and printers were purchased, and a wall was put up in an existing room to create the lab for the students at the Church of Peace. Steele says the lab is helping the students learn so much. "When all 6 computers have someone sitting at them, it is so much fun to watch the students' faces. They are usually working on Starfall.com website, and they are learning letters and numbers both. They enjoy being able to teach themselves, and find so much joy in using the mouse!"

Steele says the students work every day on their computer skills with the help of Black Hawk teachers Brenda Kirby and Marilyn Nesbitt, and volunteer computer teacher Bill Coopman.

\*\*\*The media is invited to see the computer classes in action on Tuesday, February 26th at 10:00 am at the Church of Peace (address). Steele, the teachers and students will be available for interviews\*\*\*

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Church of Peace's site coordinator, Lisa Viaene, says computers were something many of the refugees have never heard of let alone had the opportunity to use before this grant funded lab came about. "Most of the students have never had any education in their own country and struggle with writing their names, addresses, etc. For some holding a pencil correctly is a challenge, but navigating a computer mouse seems to be an easier task for them. Being able to offer time to work with the computer on simply literacy programs has had such a positive impact on all the students. It also allows them to learn at their own pace and with headphones they can hear the words more clearly than in a large classroom."

Viaene says many students do not want to leave the lab each day. She says some students are working on their US Citizenship while others are doing basic literacy work. She anticipates the teachers will see improved test scores by the end of the school year.

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