



**Empowering Children Through Access
to Information Technology**

A Report By

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February 10, 2000

Kids 2000

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I Introduction

With the United States roaring into the twenty-first century as the strongest and wealthiest nation in the world, we must seek to include those who have been left out of the remarkable economic expansion of the 1990s. First and foremost, we must help our nation's underprivileged children, the most innocent victims of socio-economic inequality in America. This report introduces legislation that addresses two critical issues affecting the present and future livelihood of both our youth and our country: the digital divide and juvenile crime.

My legislation, Kids 2000, establishes a public-private partnership that will empower children by providing access to information technology. Over a six year period, this initiative will help create state-of-the-art computer centers in Boys & Girls Clubs nationwide. Located in largely under-served communities, Club computer centers will reach the children who need these resources the most. In collaboration with PowerUP, which is comprised of more than a dozen private corporations and non-profit organizations, it is my hope that the United States Congress will provide funds for hardware, software, and trained personnel.

A primary goal of Kids 2000 is to help close the digital divide; the large discrepancies in computer ownership and Internet access among varying sectors of society. Access to information technology is critical because computers and the Internet hold the potential to provide disadvantaged children with unprecedented opportunities. Children with access to the Internet are given keys to a new universe of information and communication in which they are challenged to be creative and curious. If properly harnessed, information technology can provide children with vital tools that will greatly improve their ability to perform and succeed in the schools of today and the workplaces of tomorrow. In addition, from a societal standpoint, it is in our utmost economic and strategic interest to ensure that our high-tech workforce is abundant and strong.

Another goal of this initiative is to reduce juvenile crime by providing children with substantive after-school programs. Such programs have proven to be effective by offering constructive, supervised activities for both potential victims and potential offenders. After-school programs also provide role-models and mentors that give at-risk juveniles a sense of community and self-respect. Giving children positive alternatives to life on the streets has consistently had a beneficial impact on the safety and strength of local communities all across America.

This report will outline the dominant characteristics of the digital divide and juvenile crime. These discussions will elucidate the remarkable potential for Kids 2000 to empower millions of children and strengthen the backbone of our nation.

II. Closing the Digital Divide

A. Defining the Digital Divide

A primary goal of Kids 2000 is to provide disenfranchised youths with access to computers and the Internet. This objective centers on the fact that information technology is playing an increasingly important role in American society. All facets of our society have integrated computers and the networks that connect them to enhance efficiency, improve quality, and create entirely new products and services. From the wonders of satellite communications to the simplicity of supermarket scanners, computer technology has become an integral component of our everyday lives.

Even while computer technology becomes increasingly pervasive in American society, certain segments of the population have been left out of this technological revolution. Though all levels of society are making absolute gains in their exposure to technology, specific socio-economic groups are buying computers and accessing the Internet at far lower rates. It is this growing gap, or digital divide, that has raised serious concerns. The digital divide is particularly troublesome among children because disparities in information technology will ultimately limit individual opportunity and only stand to reinforce those barriers that public-policy makers are constantly attempting to break down.

Computer Ownership in America

What was once restricted to the halls of the Pentagon and the high-rises of corporate America, information technology has reached all sectors of society. Throughout the latter half of the 1990s, every demographic and geographic group has seen substantial increases in computer ownership:

- In 1998, 50 million American households, accounting for over 42% of

the U.S. population, owned computers.¹ This was up from 36.6% of households with computers in 1997 and 24.1% in 1994, representing an increase of 15.0% and 74.7%, respectively.²

- Equally important is the fact that these gains were realized throughout all demographic groups. Since 1994, computer ownership substantially increased among White non Hispanics(71.9%), Black non Hispanics(125.2%), and Hispanics(107.3%).³

Internet Access in America

Like computer ownership, Internet access in America has also increased across the board. Though reliable statistics on access to the Internet only go back as far as 1997, trend-lines suggest that usage is rapidly increasing:

- Between April 1997 and July 1999, the number of adults accessing the Internet increased by an astounding 125.6%.⁴
- Similar to computer ownership, these increases have been made throughout all segments of society. Between 1997 and 1998 alone, households using the Internet increased for White non Hispanics (52.8%), Black non Hispanics(51.9%), and Hispanics(48.2%).

¹ Cyber Dialogue Research, *The American Internet User Survey*, December, 1998 as cited in The Children's Partnership, *Kids & Families Online*, September 1998, www.childrenspartnership.org.

² National Telecommunication and Information Administration, United State Department of Commerce, *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide*, July 1999 at 5, [www.http://www.ntia.doc.gov](http://www.ntia.doc.gov).

³ *Id.* at 19.

⁴ Cyber Dialogue, *The American Internet User, Quarter 2*, July 1999, www.cyberdialogue.com.

Defining Features of the Digital Divide

Empirical evidence clearly indicates that information technology is rapidly increasing in America. Nevertheless, while all socio-economic groups are keeping pace in relative terms, there remain stark disparities in absolute levels of computer ownership and Internet access. In an effort to better understand these disparities, the Department of Commerce released *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide* in July of 1999. This report represents the most comprehensive, up-to-date analysis of the inequities in information technology among various demographic and geographic groups. The following represents some of the major findings of the report by outlining the digital divide between those of different economic, demographic, and educational backgrounds.

Income

Income is the primary indicator of computer ownership and Internet access:

- Of households making over \$75,000, 79.9% own computers and 60.3% use the Internet.
- For households making between \$35,000-\$50,000, 50.2% own computers and 29.5% use the Internet.
- Descending down income levels, these numbers continue to fall: For households making between \$10,000-\$15,000, 15.9% own a computer and 7.4% use the Internet.⁵

Race/Origin

Similar to income levels, access to information technology also differs amongst races:

⁵ *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide* at 17, 25.

- Households of Asian/Pacific Island descent have the highest levels of computer ownership and Internet access at 55.0% and 36.0%, respectively.
- White households are at similarly high rates with 46.6% with computer ownership and 29.8% with Internet access.
- Black and Hispanic households, on the other hand, are significantly less likely to own computers (23.2% and 25.5%) and access the Internet (11.2% and 12.6%).⁶

At most levels, the disparities amongst races still exist after accounting for income. For instance, for incomes between \$15,000 and \$35,000, twice as many White households access the Internet than their Black and Hispanic counterparts.⁷ Some encouraging trends do exist, however, at incomes above \$75,000 in which the disparities in computer ownership and Internet access have closed considerably in recent years.⁸

Education

Access to information technology is intimately related to education:

- Households having an occupant with a college degree own computers (68.7%) at far greater rates than those where the individuals have a high school diploma (31.2%).⁹

⁶ *Id.* at 18, 26.

⁷ *Id.* at 27.

⁸ In 1998, computer ownership and Internet access, respectively, in households with incomes above \$75,000: White: 80%, 61%; Black: 78%, 54%; Hispanic: 75%, 48%. *Id.* at 18, 27.

⁹ *Id.* at 22, 27.

- A person with a college degree is more than three times more likely to use the Internet than a high school graduate.¹⁰
- Households with a college graduate are more than four times more likely to own a computer than a household without a high school graduate.¹¹

Other Factors

In addition to income, race, and education, there are several other factors that determine a person's access to information technology. For instance, those in rural and central city areas have slightly lower rates of computer ownership and distinctly lower rates of Internet usage than those in suburban or urban areas.¹² When income is taken into account, however, disparities in computer ownership disappear.¹³ On the other hand, rural and central city households continue to have difficulty accessing the Internet as network providers bypass these less lucrative markets.

Household type is another distinguishing factor. In fact, at all income levels, households with two parents are far more likely than one-parent households to own computers and have Internet access.¹⁴ Access to information

¹⁰ *Id.* at 46.

¹¹ *Id.* at 22.

¹² *Id.* at 17, 25. For definitions of "central city," "urban," and "rural" see glossary at 106, 107.

¹³ *Id.* at 17, 25.

¹⁴ The percentage of households with children under the age of 18 with a computer and Internet access, respectively: Married couple 62%, 39%; Male householder 35%, 19%; Female householder 32%, 15%. *Id.* at 22, 28.

technology also differs among age groups.¹⁵

B. Children and the Digital Divide

The current dissemination of information technology in America has led to a scenario in which certain segments of society own computers and access the Internet at dramatically lower rates. These ‘have-nots’ of the technology revolution include those with lower incomes, minorities, and those with lower levels of education. In recent years there has been growing concern over the digital divide among our nation’s youth. After all, though households with children own computers at above-average rates, the disparities that exist among the general population clearly affect a child’s access to information technology.¹⁶

The digital divide among children is an alarming trend that deserves significant attention from all sectors of society. For under-served children, computers and the Internet are doorways to an extraordinary, if not infinite, amount of knowledge and opportunity. Failing to provide access to these vital resources will be detrimental to millions of young Americans and to the socio-economic fabric of the United States.

1. The Power of Information Technology

The development of information technology holds great potential to strengthen and invigorate American society. Computers and the Internet have created exciting opportunities for people to enhance their lives through networks

¹⁵ Adults between the ages of 35 and 55 have higher levels of access to information technology. Computer ownership and Internet access, respectively, by age bracket: under 25 years (32.3, 20.5); 25-34 years (46.0, 30.1); 35-44 years (54.9, 34.1); 45-54 years (54.7, 35.0); 55+ years (25.8, 14.6). *Id.* at 23, 28

¹⁶ For households with children between the ages of 8 and 17, 60% own computers. Turow, Joseph, “The Internet and the Family: the View from the Parents, the View from the Press,” Annenberg Public Policy Center, University of Pennsylvania, May 4, 1999 as cited in *Kids & Families Online*, October 1999 at 1.

of information and communication. At the same time, computers have become deeply integrated into all levels of the economy as businesses have begun to utilize the distinct advantages of electronic commerce. From a societal standpoint, information technology is nothing short of revolutionary.

Yet, as the wonders of computers are increasingly evident and celebrated, certain segments of society still lack access to these resources. We must therefore focus our efforts on providing access to information technology to under-served communities who stand to gain a great deal from exposure to computers and the Internet.

It would be difficult to overstate the remarkable potential for information technology to improve and transform the lives of under-served children. Traditionally left with few resources, information technology can provide these youths with a limitless forum in which they can explore the reaches of knowledge and communication. The Internet can be used as a youth development tool in the empowerment and education of disadvantaged children. More specifically, the Internet can provide essential information on any number of topics – such as nutrition, higher education, the arts, drug and alcohol prevention, and career opportunities – that will vastly improve the lives of children. In a recent survey of those with frequent access to this breadth of information, 77% of users said that the Internet had improved their lives and 44% considered the Internet an ‘essential part’ of their lives.¹⁷ There is no reason to believe that providing disenfranchised children with well-guided Internet access would not yield similar results.

The interactive nature of computers and the Internet is another component of information technology that is undeniably beneficial. By inviting them to be

¹⁷ Roper Starch Worldwide, “Survey Confirms User Trends,” 12/17/1998, www.roper.com.

pro-active at the keyboard, the Internet challenges children to be creative and curious. Youths with access to information technology have the opportunity to explore the world. Whether in search of dinosaurs or distant planets, a young child can pursue their personal interests and undoubtedly discover new ones in the process. Meanwhile, with the advantage of being more stimulating than television or traditional textbooks, the Internet makes learning more enjoyable while simultaneously teaching skills in problem solving and cooperation. The ultimate result is a child who is inspired to learn and, equally significant, is equipped with the resources to do so.

In addition to expanding the curiosity and motivation of children, information technology provides important resources that facilitate learning and improve academic achievement. Children who have access to computer word processing, for example, have significant advantages over those who do not. Word processing programs allow students to have better control over their texts and to revise and reorganize their thoughts. Students also have immediate access to grammar and spelling corrections that often go unnoticed when corrected and returned by the teacher several days later. In addition, practice with desktop programs such as word processing, spreadsheets, and graphics programs helps children develop valuable tools that have become essential in higher education and beyond.

Like word processing and other desktop programs, access to the Internet also teaches skills and provides opportunities that were simply not available only a decade ago. With the Internet continually expanding, students are increasingly able to find more information at faster rates. Tasks that once took hours of searching through card catalogues and magazine indexes can now be completed almost instantaneously from a computer. In addition, many parts of the Internet are constantly updated so that users have access to the latest news and

information. In a recent survey, 84% of students who use the Internet for schoolwork said that they find the information they are looking for on the Internet “always” or “most of the time.”¹⁸ The wealth of resources on the Internet is perhaps most important because it is not dependent on local socio-economic factors. With access to the Internet, children from communities with limited libraries and out-dated textbooks can still tap into the near-infinite number of educational resources on the Internet.

The educational benefits of access to information technology are becoming increasingly evident as computer usage among young people continues to rise. In fact, in a recent survey, 69% of teachers, 69% of students, and 68% of parents said they had personally witnessed grades improve as a result of the Internet.¹⁹ Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that students who have access to information technology are integrating this technology into their academic lives at very high rates. Recent studies have shown that nearly two-thirds of students with a computer at home use it for schoolwork, and, of those two-thirds, 85% access the Internet while doing their homework.²⁰ Between word processing and the Internet, students with computers at home spend an average of one hour doing homework on the family computer every day.²¹ These figures suggest that not only is information technology an excellent educational tool in theory, but that students who have access to these resources are successfully using them at high

¹⁸ NPD Group Press Release, “NPD Online Research Reports Student Mining the Net for Homework,” Port Washington, New York, 8/17/99, www.npd.com.

¹⁹ AT&T Press Release, “Net Improves Grades,” 9/8/99 as cited in Nua Internet Surveys, www.nua.ie/surveys.

²⁰ NPD Group Online Research, “Children Use the Net for Homework,” 9/18/99, www.npd.com.

²¹ *Id.*

rates.

Children who frequently use computers develop skills that are likely to improve their motivation, curiosity, academic performance and, with some guidance, their overall lives. While this fact is exciting for those who are able to integrate computer technology into the lives of their children, it is extremely troublesome for under-served communities who do not have access to these resources. The distinct disparities that exist in computer ownership and Internet access directly affect the very real potential for information technology to empower disadvantaged youths. The exciting corollary of this is that providing information technology to underprivileged children presents a remarkable opportunity to strengthen thousands of communities across America.

2. Information Technology in the Workplace

The digital divide is also becoming an increasingly important issue because of the extent to which computers have become integrated into the American economy. The expansion of information technology has provided businesses with unprecedented opportunities to increase their production and improve their efficiency. Through computer networks, e-mail, and electronic commerce, companies are paving a new commercial landscape in which distance and time are becoming less restricting factors. The new digital economy, however, cannot run on computers alone. As technology becomes ever more pervasive in American businesses, so too is there an increasing demand at all levels for workers with computer know-how and Internet literacy. It is this growing job market that will provide today's youths with extraordinary opportunities in the future. Those who are not competent with the tools of information technology will undoubtedly be left behind.

Each year, the percentage of jobs requiring computer literacy is expanding

rapidly. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the fastest growing occupations between 1996 and 2006 will all be computer intensive, including database administrators, computer support specialists, and computer engineers.²² For instance, while there will be an estimated 14% employment increase for all occupations during these ten years, the number of systems analysts is expected to grow by 103%.²³ It is estimated that by the year 2000, 60% of jobs will require technological skills.²⁴

Technology oriented jobs are not only becoming increasingly commonplace, they are also paying significantly higher salaries. In fact, those who use computers on the job are earning 43% more than other workers.²⁵ What these statistics ultimately tell us is that those who learn computer skills before they enter the workforce are far more likely to find a job in the first place and will almost certainly be better-paid than their computer-illiterate counterparts. This is important in that high-tech jobs may help to ameliorate or exacerbate income disparities in America. While mega-mergers and rising stock prices have come to characterize the current economic expansion, recent studies suggest that “those at the bottom of the economic ladder are not benefitting much from the boom and, by some measures, are falling even farther behind.”²⁶ It is in this sense that the digital divide reinforces negative social structures in which children

²² Office of Technology Policy, U.S. Department of Commerce, *Update – America’s New Deficit*, January, 1998 at 1, www.ta.doc.gov/otpolicy/.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Benton Foundation, *Losing Ground Bit by Bit: Low Income Communities in the Information Age*, June 1998 at 4.

²⁵ The Children’s Partnership, *Kids & Families Online*, October 1999 at 1.

²⁶ Richard W. Stevenson, “In a Time of Plenty, the Poor are Still Poor,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 2000, at WK 3.

from low-income families do not gain access to information technology and are therefore unable to compete for high-tech jobs which pay significantly more.

In addition to individual employment, the digital divide is also significant when looking at the economy as a whole. The development and deployment of technology is arguably the single most important factor in generating long-term economic growth. From 1995 through 1998, information technology producers, defined as producers of computer and communications hardware, software, and services, contributed an average of 35% to the nation's real economic growth.²⁷

It is extremely troubling, however, that even as technology industries continue to prosper, our high-tech workforce is not keeping up with the ever-growing demand. In Silicon Valley, for example, there is a need for approximately 160,000 additional technology workers as an astonishing one-third of the area's high-tech labor-demand is not being met by the region's workforce.²⁸ As a result of this inability to meet high-technology needs, the United States Congress has nearly doubled the annual number of visas available to high-skilled workers in the coming years from 65,000 to 115,000.²⁹ Quite literally, this increase accounts for 50,000 high-tech jobs per year that are not being filled by American citizens because our workforce has not been adequately trained. This problem may only intensify: The Department of Commerce estimates that over the next seven years, more than one million new jobs will be created in the United

²⁷ United States Department of Commerce, *The Emerging Digital Economy II*, Executive Summary, June 1999, www.ntis.gov.

²⁸ A.T. Kearney Press Release, *New Study Analyzes Challenges to Silicon Valley's Internet Industry Leadership*, July 21, 1999 as cited in Nua Internet Surveys.

²⁹ The American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act of 1998 as contained in Public Law 105-277 (10/21/98). *The Emerging Digital Economy II* at 43.

States in computer-related fields alone.³⁰ To make matters worse, competition for foreign workers is likely to intensify as European nations experience similar shortages of high-tech labor. In fact, it is estimated that Europe will lack 1.3 million information-technology professionals in the year 2000.³¹ Closing the digital divide, especially among children, will help boost the number of American workers who are able to fill these high-paying jobs in the future.

The economic arguments for addressing the digital divide are rather straight forward. For one, those who do not gain access to information technology will be unable to participate in the rapidly growing digital economy. With more opportunities and higher salaries, these jobs have the potential to either ameliorate or exacerbate the existing socio-economic divisions in America. In addition, closing the digital divide will strengthen the high-tech workforce in the United States and will increase economic growth by fulfilling the demand for high-skilled labor.

³⁰ Larry Irving, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information, "The Ed Tech Challenge: Training Our Youth for the 21st Century," Mississippi Educational Technology Luncheon, Jackson, Mississippi, January 27, 1999 as cited in *Kids & Families Online*, October 1999 at 2.

³¹ Jack Ewing and Heidi Dawley, *Business Week*, "The Missing Worker: Across Europe, Good Jobs Go Begging," December 27, 1999.

III. Preventing Juvenile Crime

A. Current Trends in Juvenile Crime

Current trends in juvenile crime, those committed by individuals under the age of 18, offer encouraging signs that the children of America are growing up in a safer environment with each passing year. Statistics indicate that following a rapid rise beginning in the late 1980s, juvenile crime levels have declined steadily and significantly since peaking in 1994.³² Nonetheless, though there has been relative success in reducing juvenile crime in recent years, overall rates remain far too high:

- The juvenile violent crime arrest rate, which surged by 62% between 1988 and 1994, has fallen to its lowest level in 1990s. In 1997, however, the rate was still 25% above that of 1988.³³
- After remaining stable throughout the 1980s, the juvenile murder arrest rate more than doubled between 1987 and 1993. By 1997, nearly all of that increase was erased as the rate fell below its 1988 level.³⁴
- In 1997, the juvenile arrest rate for forcible rape was at its lowest level in more than a decade and was comparable to that of 1983.³⁵
- Between 1980 and 1994, the percentage of total crimes that involved

³² Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs, United States Department of Justice, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report* at 120, <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>.

³³ Based on violent crime arrests per 100,000 juveniles ages 10-17: 1988: 320; 1994: 520; 1997: 400. *Id.* at 120.

³⁴ Based on murder arrests per 100,000 juveniles ages 10-17: 1987: 7; 1993: 14; 1997: 8. *Id.* at 122.

³⁵ Based on forcible rape arrests per 100,000 juveniles ages 10-17: 1983: 17; 1991: 23, 1997: 17. *Id.* at 122.

a juvenile rose from 21% to 33%. By 1997 the rate had fallen to 25%.³⁶

When Crime Occurs

Unlike adult violent crime, which occurs predominantly in the nighttime hours, a significant portion of juvenile crime is committed in the hours immediately following the end of school. These statistics have extraordinary importance in devising strategies to reduce juvenile crime:

- The majority of juvenile crimes occur between the hours of 12 P.M. and 6 P.M.: 51% of all juvenile robberies, 49% of all aggravated assaults, and 59% of all simple assaults occur during these hours.
- Serious violent juvenile crime peaks dramatically between the hours of 1 P.M. and 4 P.M. Juveniles are also at the highest risk of being the victims of a violent crime the 4 hours following the end of school.
- 57% of all juvenile crime occurs on school days and an astounding 19% of all juvenile crime occurs between 3 P.M. and 7 P.M. on school days.³⁷

Not surprisingly, these statistics indicate that juvenile crime tends to occur when children are left without structured and supervised activities.

Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders

Criminologists have determined that a small but dangerous population of youths account for a disproportionately high percentage of juvenile crime. These children have been termed serious and violent juvenile offenders:

³⁶ *Id.* at 53, 20.

³⁷ *Id.* at 34, 64, 65.

- It is estimated that serious and violent juvenile offenders account for only 5% of the youth who pass through the criminal justice system in America. The vast majority of children involved in juvenile crime are neither violent nor career criminals.³⁸
- The majority of serious and violent juvenile offenders begin committing criminal acts at a very young age. On average, those in the juvenile criminal-justice system at age 14 began having minor problems at the age of 7 and were committing serious delinquencies by the age of 12.³⁹
- Serious and violent juveniles tend to share similar backgrounds and characteristics. These offenders are often victims of abuse and neglect, sometimes suffer from mental health issues, and commonly feel unconnected to their schools, communities, and families.

Juvenile Gangs

Juvenile gangs are often responsible for much of the youth violence that occurs in America:

- Juvenile gangs have grown to play a prominent role in communities of all sizes and in all regions of the United States. In 1996, there were an estimated 846,000 juvenile gang members comprising 31,000 gangs in 4,800 cities nationwide.⁴⁰

³⁸ Children's Defense Fund, *The State of America's Children: 1999 Yearbook* at 110, www.childrensdefense.org.

³⁹ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs, United States Department of Justice, *OJJDP Research: Making a Difference for Juveniles*, July 1999 at 5, <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>.

⁴⁰ *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report* at 77.

- It is estimated that gang members commit between half to two-thirds of all juvenile delinquent acts. In addition, studies have found that juveniles in gangs were three to five times more likely to commit violent offenses.⁴¹
- As with serious and violent juveniles, gang members begin at a young age and show a clear progression in which they commit increasingly violent acts. On average, members begin to associate with gangs at age 13, join at age 14, and commit their first violent crime within two years.⁴²

B. The Role of After-School Programs

The preceding sections outlined three prominent characteristics of juvenile crime in America:

- A substantial portion of juvenile crime is committed in the hours immediately following the end of the school day;
- A small population of serious and violent offenders commit a disproportionate percentage of juvenile crime; and
- When compared to non-members, members of gangs are far more likely to commit delinquent and violent criminal acts.

These facets of juvenile crime have changed the ways in which we have sought to reduce such violence. As a supplement to more traditional punitive measures, several community leaders and policy-makers have begun to emphasize comprehensive initiatives involving prevention and intervention. In many instances, these techniques have proven to be remarkably effective.

⁴¹ *OJJDP Research: Making a Difference for Juveniles* at 11.

⁴² *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report* at 79.

By one estimate, allowing a single youth to drop out of high school and enter a life of drug abuse and crime costs society between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million.⁴³ In comparison, the initiative discussed in this report would cost the government only \$40 per child.⁴⁴ Crime prevention, therefore, is rightly considered an extremely worthwhile investment. The theory behind prevention and intervention is rather simple: If possible, stop violent and criminal behavior before it starts. Or, once it has begun, attempt to address it before it escalates. Therefore, if we know what types of youths are most susceptible to criminal behavior and we know when they are most likely to commit it, certainly we can provide positive activities that will prevent some juveniles from participating in criminal activities. One such form of intervention and prevention is the establishment of after-school programs.

Consistent with our understanding of the major characteristics of juvenile crime, increasing participation in after-school activities has proven to be a highly effective form of intervention and prevention. In fact, in a recent survey of police chiefs nationwide, 86% said that expanding after-school programs “would greatly reduce youth crime and violence,” and 69% considered after-school programs a more effective crime-prevention measure than both “prosecuting more juveniles as adults” and “hiring more police officers to investigate juvenile crimes.”⁴⁵

Perhaps most directly, after-school programs provide physical havens for would-be victims. Children who cannot or wish not return home for any number of

⁴³ *Id.* at 82.

⁴⁴ This figure is derived by dividing the \$120 million authorization by the 3 million members of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

⁴⁵ Conducted by Stephen D. Mastrofski, Director of the Administration of Justice Program, and Scott Keeter, Chair of the Department of Public and International Affairs, George Mason University, for the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids organization. October 14-27, 1999, www.fightcrime.org.

reasons are often left on the streets during after-school hours. Organized activities give them a safe place to spend their afternoons before returning home at night.

After-school activities also provide a haven for would-be offenders. As indicated, the vast majority of young offenders are not serious and violent juveniles. Instead, they are often well-intentioned children who are led astray by the multitude of pressures young people face on a daily basis. This is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that the majority of juvenile crimes are committed in groups. While only 21% of adult crimes involve more than one offender, more than half of all juvenile violent crimes are committed in groups of two or more.⁴⁶ In this sense, after-school programs reduce crime by providing positive alternatives and keeping potentially mischievous children away from the negative influences of their peers.

In addition to providing safe havens for both potential victims and offenders, after-school programs establish arenas in which troubled youths can be rescued from dangerous and destructive behavior. As one commentator recently put it, “when it comes to crime, getting kids off to the right start makes a huge difference.”⁴⁷ We know that gang members and violent juveniles most often progress from minor delinquencies to moderate offenses to violent criminal activities. After-school programs intervene at an early stage and offer alternatives for youths who begin committing minor offenses early in their lives. Equally important, these programs supply the types of role models and mentors that are often lacking from the lives of juvenile offenders. After-school programs help children gain a sense of community and self-respect that will ultimately lead

⁴⁶ *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report* at 63.

⁴⁷ Geneva Overholser, “Be Tough on Crime: Care for Kids,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2000 at A17.

to a more productive, less destructive, childhood.

Finally, after-school programs are an effective law enforcement tool for recognizing potentially dangerous youths. In many instances, children are reluctant to report crimes to the police and instead rely on alternative authority figures. For instance, a comprehensive national crime-victimization study conducted in 1995 and 1996 showed that in some cases, juveniles are three to five times more likely to report crimes to authorities other than the police.⁴⁸ Mentors and authority figures in after-school programs can therefore provide an ear for children who are hesitant to go to the police with valuable information.

After-school programs ultimately serve a variegated number of functions in juvenile crime reduction. They provide physical havens and positive alternatives for potential victims and offenders, and provide positive role models and outlets for children who show signs of becoming hardened violent criminals.

Case Study: The Boys & Girls Clubs of America

The role of after-school programs as a means of reducing juvenile crime is supported by an abundance of empirical evidence. When legitimate, substantive after-school programs are instituted in troubled areas, juvenile crime almost always declines. This has occurred on multiple occasions in my home state of Delaware. For instance, since the Boys & Girls Club was built in the town of East Dover, crime has fallen by 30% and school attendance has risen by 28%.⁴⁹ Similarly, in the town of Seaford, Delaware, juvenile complaints dropped by 151% the year in which the new Western Sussex County Boys & Girls Club was

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 37.

⁴⁹ Testimony of Former Dover Police Chief Rick Smith, Dover Boys & Girls Club, Simons Circle Public Housing Complex, August 23, 1995.

opened.⁵⁰

Comparable positive results have occurred throughout the nation. A three-year study conducted by researchers at Columbia University demonstrated that, when compared to those without, public housing sites with a Boys & Girls Club experienced dramatic changes. On average, there was 13% less juvenile crime, 22% less drug activity, lower percentages of school academic failures, and more involvement by parents in their children's lives.⁵¹ While one can never be sure of the exact combination of influences that produced these changes, Boys & Girls Clubs clearly provide a safe and constructive environment for children.

⁵⁰ *In Sites: A quarterly report to the friends of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Delaware*, Summer 1998.

⁵¹ Steven Schinke, Kristin Cole, and Mario Orlandi, *The Effects of Boys & Girls Clubs on Alcohol and Other Drug Use and Related Problems in Public Housing*, Columbia University Press, March 1991.

IV. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America

The results in Delaware are not surprising because for decades the Boys & Girls Clubs of America have provided young people all across the United States with the support and inspiration they need to realize their full potential and pursue their dreams. As one of the premier youth organizations in the country, the Boys & Girls Clubs have improved the lives of countless children. The organization has over 2,300 established centers and growing, over 3 million members and a proven record of effectiveness and fiscal responsibility. From one-on-one mentoring to dozens of nationally administered programs, the Clubs offer guidance and support in areas such as education, health, the arts, gang prevention, the environment, career counseling, alcohol and drug prevention, leadership development, and athletics. Perhaps most importantly, these clubs traditionally serve underprivileged communities that have a great need for positive assistance and sustained support. The Boys & Girls Clubs provide a perfect focal point for Kids 2000 in that they already possess the vital assets of physical infrastructure, trained personnel, and positive community relations in precisely those neighborhoods our initiative seeks to target. The following are some of the principal characteristics of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America that will ensure that Kids 2000 reaches the children who are in most need of these resources.:

Membership

The Boys & Girls Clubs presently serve over 3 million young Americans nationwide:

- Club members come from largely disadvantaged groups with 71% from central-city areas, 59% from minority families, 53% from single-parent families, and 42% from families with annual incomes below

\$22,000.⁵²

- Members of the Clubs are similarly diverse in terms of their ages with 20% under the age of 7, 32% between the ages of 8 and 10, 28% between 11 and 13, and 20% between 14 and 18.

Infrastructure

The Boys & Girls Clubs have established an extensive infrastructure all across the country. Located throughout all 50 states, the number of clubs is expected to rise from 2,300 to 3,000 over the next five years. Furthermore, as evidenced by the diversity of their membership, Boys & Girls Clubs are located in a wide range of locations, targeting those who need the resources the most. The Boys & Girls clubs also have a substantial workforce of 9,500 full-time trained workers, 27,200 part-time staffers, and 207,000 volunteers. These dedicated workers provide hope and leadership to the millions of young men and women who pass through their doors every day.

Funding and Expenditures

The Boys & Girls Clubs of America are funded by a myriad of sources including public grants, corporations, foundations, and individual donations. It is due to the remarkable generosity of so many different people that makes it possible for club members to pay annual dues of only \$5 to \$10, and, in return, receive an average of \$200 in services.

With a relatively large budget of \$560 million, the Boys & Girls Clubs have been recognized as one of the most efficient and well-run non-profit organizations in the world. A vast majority of the budget is spent on direct assistance to the

⁵² Unless otherwise noted, all information was obtained from the Boys & Girls Clubs of America Website, www.bcga.org.

clubs and their members. Of the total 1998 budget, 48.5% was spent on the upkeep of member clubs and the establishment of new clubs, and 34.1% was spent on leadership training and youth programs for club members. This is compared to an astoundingly low 5.4% spent on fund raising. This efficient and effective use of funds has received much praise from the non-profit community. For instance, out of 100 leading charities, *Smart Money* magazine listed the Boys & Girls Clubs as the most efficiently-run youth organization in America.⁵³ Likewise, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* placed the Clubs in the top-ten of their 'Philanthropy 400' and rated them first among all youth organizations for the fifth consecutive year.⁵⁴

In essence, the Boys & Girls Clubs of America have proven themselves as a first rate youth organization. They have precisely the combination of physical infrastructure, human capital, and fiscal responsibility to successfully administer Kids 2000.

⁵³ David Stires, *Smart Money*, December 1998 at 100.

⁵⁴ *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, November 5, 1998.

VI. PowerUP: Bridging the Digital Divide

PowerUP is a collaborative effort between several non-profit organizations, major corporations and federal agencies to help close the digital divide. Established by an initial \$10 million grant from the Case Foundation, PowerUP has received generous commitments from a number of organizations including America Online, the National Urban League, Gateway Computers, the Corporation for National Service, the Family Education Network, and Sun Microsystems. The goal of this multimillion dollar initiative is “to help ensure that America's under-served young people acquire the skills, experiences and resources they need to succeed in the digital age.”⁵⁵ Computer centers around the country will be designated PowerUP sites and contributions from the conjoining partners will be used to fund the centers.

Beyond simply providing children with access to information technology, PowerUP will help young people obtain important skills they can utilize throughout childhood and beyond. To this end, PowerUP has sought to include several components to strengthen the mission of positive youth development. For instance, PowerUP sites will provide safe and structured activities during after-school hours. Young people will also have the opportunity to communicate with other Internet users and develop meaningful relationships with PowerUP mentors and personnel.

PowerUP will also teach children the vital academic and workplace skills they need to succeed in the digital age. This will be coupled with education about issues relating to health care and nutrition. Finally, PowerUP will focus on encouraging young people to become involved in their communities and participate in community service.

⁵⁵ The PowerUP website, www.powerup.org.

VI. Kids 2000: A Public-Private Initiative

My legislation, Kids 2000, establishes a comprehensive initiative that seeks to empower children by offering a supportive environment for youth development. By establishing computer centers in Boys & Girls Clubs nationwide, Kids 2000 will serve to close the digital divide and prevent juvenile crime. This public-private partnership will pool the resources of the Federal government, the private sector, and non-profit organizations to create properly-designed and well-run computer centers.

Working with PowerUP, Kids 2000 will establish computer centers with all the necessary components to ensure that children are provided with positive and constructive access to information technology. For starters, by partnering with the Boys & Girls Clubs, Kids 2000 will reach millions of children in those underserved communities where help is most needed. The Clubs also bring infrastructure, personnel, and unparalleled community relations that will draw innumerable children into Kids 2000. Once the sites for these computers centers have been determined, Kids 2000 will help provide the necessary hardware, software, and remaining infrastructure to get the centers up and running. It is my hope that PowerUP will partner with the Federal government to purchase and provide components such as computers and Internet accounts.

Experience in recent years has taught us that constructive access to information technology requires far more than wires and computers. In fact, blindly placing a child in front of a computer will do very little to unearth the valuable benefits of the Internet. All too often, computers remain unused or misused by children because they lack much needed instruction and guidance. Kids 2000, therefore, will require full-time personnel who are familiar with information technology and who have been trained to work with children. Youths who come to Club computer centers will be taught the skills they need to have a truly worthwhile experience at their computers. Supervisors at the clubs will

monitor and guide young users as they travel down the information superhighway.

The infinitesimal depth of the Internet is both its strength and its weakness. Young children who log onto the Internet without clear direction are unlikely to find the information and resources that will benefit them the most. Therefore, in addition to providing trained personnel, Kids 2000 will seek to incorporate content-based programs that ensure constructive and positive Internet usage. In addition, it cannot be emphasized enough that children must be steered away from the violence and pornography that is available on the Internet. To this end, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is now working in conjunction with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America to protect children from the negative aspects of the Internet. This work will play an extremely important role by providing a safe virtual environment in all club computer centers.

Furthermore, it is my hope that adults in the community will be able to take advantage of these resources when children are at school. The Internet can be an extremely important tool for adults as they search for jobs, gather vital health information or pursue higher learning. Even though children are the focus of this initiative, the digital divide and the benefits of information technology are no less significant among adults.

The computer centers in Boys & Girls Clubs that are established by Kids 2000 will be well equipped to provide children with access to information technology and all the wonders that are associated with this new medium. The centers, based in communities who desperately need these resources, will have state-of-the-art computers with Internet connections. In addition, trained personnel will be there to guide children while content-based programs will help focus their efforts. The result will be computer centers that bring the best of information technology to communities across America.

VII. Conclusion

Well-designed and properly equipped computer centers in Boys & Girls Clubs will be an important step in helping close the digital divide. The millions of under-served children who pass through the doors of the Clubs every day will soon have access to all the remarkable benefits of information technology. Equally important, these centers will be run by trained personnel who will ensure that the children reap the true benefits of the Internet. The product of these efforts will be the empowerment of thousands and thousands of disadvantaged youths who will be equipped to thrive and succeed in the twenty-first century.

At the same time, Kids 2000 will serve to prevent juvenile crime by establishing thousands of after-school programs that offer safe and exciting opportunities for children of all ages. These children will be introduced to a supportive and caring environment that is free from the dangers of the streets. Trained staff will work closely with the youths and use the extensive resources of the Clubs to give them a strong sense of purpose and community. If past experience is any indicator, the establishment of computer centers in Boys & Girls Clubs will provide substantive after-school programs, thereby reducing juvenile crime in thousands of under-served neighborhoods across America. The end result will be positive and uplifting intervention in the lives of underprivileged children who will no longer be subjected to the multitude of ills that result from juvenile crime.

Kids 2000 is a comprehensive public-private partnership that will invigorate millions of young Americans. By closing the digital divide and reducing juvenile crime, previously disenfranchised children will have the opportunity to become active participants in the social, cultural, and economic landscape of the United States. The lasting result will be a stronger and healthier America.