

What has more outlets across Canada than Tim Hortons and has served over 20 million citizens in the past decade? What Canadian program acts as a model for community internet in many countries overseas? What federal program, after a number of years of slow suffocation, was left to wander in budget wilderness for eight weeks while federal bureaucrats contemplated who should own it?

Three questions, one right answer: Industry Canada's Community Access Program. CAP contributes to the cost of computers and internet access in places like schools, community centres, friendship centers and libraries. A

companion program, the CAP Youth Initiative (CAP-YI), provides paid work experience to youth.

Officially, CAP is costed at \$340 million over 10 years. But, through the magic of partnership and leveraging, communities have multiplied that small federal investment fivefold into a major local resource. Eighty percent of the money and resources invested in CAP sites is leveraged locally. What's more, in a new survey of community networks in Canada, administrators of 800 sites indicated that CED topped their list of objectives. Most of them think they have been pretty successful at it.

Shouldn't this be front-page news, the stuff of federal press releases? I think so. This is how just three communities are spinning small amounts of CAP funding into community economic development gold.

Sea to Sky Public Access Network

Squamish, B.C., within one hour's drive of Vancouver, is the gateway to a cornucopia of treats for the outdoor tourist. Scuba diving, hiking, ski touring, mountain biking, golfing, windsurfing, even eagle viewing are listed among the attractions this area has to offer. A midway point on the Sea to Sky Highway to Whistler, it is already getting an economic boost from the much anticipated 2010 Winter Olympics. For those who think the CAP program best suits severely isolated and/or socio-economically challenged communities, Squamish doesn't appear to fit the mould.

The Sea to Sky Public Access Network currently operates five CAP sites in the region. The main site is a community resource centre called "The Hotspot" – a partnership between the

The Good News about CAP

By Marita Moll



local Volunteer Centre, the Sea to Sky Freenet, and the Squamish Environmental Conservation Society. The Hotspot is open to the community 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. It encompasses wireless access which covers most of the main street in Squamish; a 15-computer full service public access lab; a ReUse I.T. program which refurbishes and resells computers on a sliding scale; a virtual and real volunteer centre; and a community information and referral service. From its CAP site beginnings in 1997, Sea to Sky has evolved into a viable social enterprise whose key mission is accessibility for all.

"At the core is an innovative combination of partnership and collaboration, youth and technology and an enterprising attitude which has allowed us to create a niche for ourselves in the local economy while being regarded as a resource by both businesses and other nonprofit groups," says Pam Gliatis, co-ordinator of the Sea to Sky Network.



Résumé : Les bonnes nouvelles du PAC

En dix ans, le Programme d'accès communautaire (PAC) d'Industrie Canada a fait des miracles pour l'accès à l'Internet dans les villes, villages et quartiers à travers le pays. Avec la magie de l'effet levier, des bénévoles et des organisations communautaires ont multiplié le modeste investissement du gouvernement de 340 \$ millions par cinq.

Pour quelle raison? À plusieurs des 800 sites à travers le pays, le développement économique communautaire est en bonne position sur l'ordre du jour des partenaires de sites du PAC. Dans des emplacements aussi divers que Squamish, C.-B., Toronto, Ontario et Sanikiluaq sur l'île lointaine Flaherty au Nunavut, les sites PAC permettent à des personnes de tout acabit d'avoir accès à de la formation, de la recherche et à promouvoir leur communauté. Les sites embauchent de grandes quantités de jeunes via les programmes de financement Initiative jeunesse de RHDSC et PAC, et d'autres développent aussi des voies de revenus commerciaux. Les sites agissent à titre de centres pour les partenariats entre les organisations sans but lucratif (OSBL) locales, et les organisations municipales à but lucratif.

Le programme PAC donne au gouvernement fédéral un excellent retour sur son investissement et a été un modèle pour les programmes Internet outremer. Pourquoi est-ce que son budget est doucement réduit et la distribution des fonds retardée? Pourquoi suffoquer ce qui devrait être célébré? ■

(above) The Hotspot storefront in Squamish, with Summer Career Placement Youth Interns Gurmanpreet Gill (page opposite) and Ragav Kumar (above, inset) assisting lab users. Photos courtesy of Dana-Marie Battaglia, Youth and Projects Co-ordinator.

The Hotspot provides free access to users at certain times and for certain specified purposes. Some groups, seniors for example, can come in for free all day, one day per week. Access is free after school for homework and job search; resumé and government online usage is always free. Outside of that, the standard charge is \$1 per 30 minutes use of a computer and internet connection. "We try hard to balance access with generating some revenue," says Gliatis.

The Hotspot has provided service to over 25 local groups over the course of the past year. It has created a pamphlet and website for the Social Planning Council and provided free space for the Downtown Neighbourhood Association's first AGM and help with planning the agenda. Hotspot staff have helped the local Arts Council apply for funding to research the use of new technologies. Special training for artists has been set up and the Hotspot hosts and moderates a listserv for the arts community that has become a vital communications tool. These services are free or at cost recovery.

Other revenue is generated by charging lab and space rental fees on a sliding scale. Royal Lepage rents the lab periodically at a market rate to train agents. An ESL teacher pays an hourly fee to rent space for tutoring. The Environmental Conservation Society and similar organizations with no budget for such services receive them gratis.

Through the CAP-YI and HRSD's

Summer Career Placement program, the Network has employed an average of 25 local youth annually for the past few years. The expertise acquired in ensuring that the needs of both the organization and the youth were met in a positive way led to the design of a comprehensive Community Youth Program for Squamish. Since 2005, in collaboration with "Communities that Care," a provincial program concerned with the positive development of young people, Hotspot youth have co-ordinated an annual family celebration that attracts 700-800 people. The local government supports the event by making a substantial contribution to the Volunteer Centre's operating costs. This in turn helps pay for the maintenance of the Hotspot site.

The Network is looking for ways to expand its services in anticipation of increased traffic in the run-up to the 2010 Olympics. One scenario being explored is the addition to the Hotspot of a café offering coffee and snacks. The Network is also collaborating with various local groups in a "green mapping" project. It would produce a collectable piece of art highlighting local First Nations communities and the natural environment. This could be a substantial fundraiser for the groups involved.

Where does CAP funding fit into this growing enterprise? Does it still matter? "The CAP funding, which is around \$20,000, enables us to keep all



five sites open and pays for much of the administrative work that keeps the partnerships running smoothly. Without it, we would have fewer services and staff would be working even longer hours with probably less pay," says Gliatis. "Our ability to manage all these services would be substantially reduced."

The Squamish example is impressive, but good examples abound in B.C. The West Coast has always been particularly well organized around community technology. CAP sites are part of a cohesive provincial movement that recognized early on that community connectivity was a key to economic development. Community networking advocates are proactive and have worked hard to keep that policy objective on the agenda of provincial, municipal, and federal officials. "Our Annual Summit is fast becoming the biggest gathering of its kind in Canada," says Bev Collins, Executive Director of the Pacific Community Networks Association. "With delegates from First Nation communities, nonprofit, SMEs and government, it's truly cross-sectoral. No matter what the political climate is, our networks and sites get together and encourage each other, strategize, share experiences and provide each other with tools and we continue that communication year-round." That's clearly an important part of the B.C. success story.

(above) South St. Jamestown's CAP site and (below) co-ordinator, Daryl Hobbs. Pictures by Mr. Gordon Oswald courtesy of the TCHC CAP Site CHU16.



South St. Jamestown Wireless Project

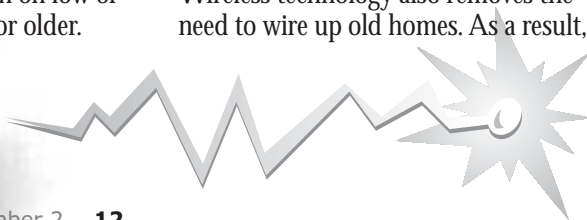
All CAP projects start with a dream by a few organizers to improve conditions for local residents. Putting a computer into the rooms of inner city rooming houses is a pretty unusual dream in the field of community computing. But that's the idea behind the South St. Jamestown Wireless Project in the northeast corner of downtown Toronto.

In the 1870s, St. Jamestown was an upper middle class neighborhood of picturesque Victorian Houses. In the 1950s almost the entire housing stock was razed to make way for Toronto's first high-rise residential apartment towers, designed to attract upwardly mobile singles and families without children. It was a spectacular failure. The middle class never did move back in. Today, it is one of Toronto's poorest neighbourhoods. With over 15,000 residents in 32.1 acres, it is one of the most densely populated areas in Canada as well as one of the most ethnically diverse.

On the edge of the high rises, South St. Jamestown was spared the bulldozers. The rather starkly named CHU 16 is a community housing unit made up of 33 Victorian houses. Once picturesque, they are now rooming houses that accommodate 300 tenants. Most are men on low or fixed incomes, 45 years of age or older.

A 4-computer CAP site provides internet access and computer training at least once a week for people who have little or no basic computer experience. But many of the tenants, for various reasons, do not integrate easily and are inhibited by the site. "Since the launch of our CAP site, it has been a dream to be able to offer computers to each one of our residents," says the CAP co-ordinator Daryl Hobbs. "It may seem illogical, but we see it as a way of getting people out of their rooms. It's a way to bring residents together for training, thereby fostering a greater sense of community and stronger linkages to support programs that exist within the community. In the long term, tenants who become involved in this project will become more employable and be able ultimately to enrich our community."

But until recently, hardware was too expensive, rewiring the old buildings was too expensive, software was too expensive, and most importantly too difficult to maintain. Now, thin client technology (software and files are resident on the central server; local stations do not have hard drives) enables the effective use of older equipment and solves much of the maintenance problem. The user has no access to the operating system or application software installations. Wireless technology also removes the need to wire up old homes. As a result,



the project is now feasible. As an outreach from the CAP site, it has gone through its initial test phases and is ready to connect 130 residents from their rooms. There's no problem finding candidates. "In fact, we have a line-up of people who are interested," says Hobbs.

The South St. Jamestown Wireless Project was made possible through a year long Social Investment Fund Grant provided by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. Other partners in the project include Computers for Schools and reBOOT Canada (hardware), Social Tek Brewing (wireless), Learning Enrichment Foundation (help desk support), and the tenant volunteers of CHU 16 (installation and training). The CAP funding provides a springboard from which this project could change the dynamics in the houses and the lives of its residents.

"The final goal of computers in as many tenants' addresses as possible has not been realized yet because of the sustainability factor," says Hobbs. But organizers are already planning to invite local businesses to advertise on the servers and may open a used computer store in the vicinity to generate revenue. It is a unique project in a unique area that has caught the attention of community leaders from across the country. "It has the distinct possibility of informing radical changes in the way we close the digital divide," says Peter Frampton, Executive Director of the Learning Enrichment Foundation.

North to Nunavut

Sanikiluaq is on Flaherty Island in the southeastern corner of Hudson's Bay, the most southerly community in Nunavut. In this community of 800 people, 98% are Inuit. The government is the main employer. Soapstone carving and other Inuit arts and crafts are a local economic mainstay but marketing them is a challenge.

In this isolated village, homes are more likely to have Cable TV than telephones and, increasingly, more likely to have computers than Cable TV or telephones. Located in the school and the daycare centre, the CAP site offers an interface by

maintaining a local cable TV channel. In addition to local cultural and educational programming, it serves as a local shopping channel, moving needed items around a community where you can't just drive down to Canadian Tire to replace a snowmobile part. Locals bring their wares to the CAP site, have them photographed and put on Powerpoint® slides which are then broadcast on the channel. In an unusual version of the "moccasin telegraph", Channel 3 also serves as a way for the school to contact parents who don't have a phone: a message is broadcast from the CAP site and, if the parents don't see it, a friend or neighbour most certainly will.

Supported by grants from Canadian Heritage but using the CAP resources, students have made and sold videos of



local knowledge about making the famous fishskin dolls unique to Sanikiluaq and about Inuit methods of fire-starting. The CAP site has also helped market the dolls as well as the unique local baskets to international customers, bringing much-needed revenue into the community.

It is not just about buying and selling, but also about making outside training programs available locally. Through their school and the CAP site, local youth have been able to participate in an internet-based competition aimed at Aboriginal students in Grades 10-13 across the country. The goal of the Business Development Bank of Canada's E-spirit Aboriginal Youth Business Plan Competition is to expose Aboriginal youth to the potential of entrepreneurship and the internet.

Clearly, as with other examples, the

CAP program is not the only player in these successes. The \$5,000 CAP contribution funds the high-speed line on which many applications depend, however, and CAP/YI pays the local student who provides technical support. Says John Jamieson, principal of Nuiyak school and a CAP co-ordinator, "I hate to think what our community would like be without CAP." Would they survive without it? "We'd have to find another funding source," he responds. "It's crucial. There's no waste in the system around here."

One consistent fact about CAP/CAP-YI sites is that there is no consistency. Every site across the country responds to different challenges. Yet as a return on investment, the feds would be hard-pressed to find a better example. The initiative is nothing less than a poster child for successful federal programs. A major 2001 study of rural B.C. sites concluded that CAP sites provide a return on investment much greater than anyone had anticipated – \$9.5 million annually in volunteer hours alone. This should fit solidly inside Industry Canada's mandate.

But support from Industry Canada has been dwindling over the last few years, from \$25 million in 2005 to \$8.8 million in 2006. Extraordinary delays in funding announcements have been setting off alarm bells throughout CAP network. Why is CAP operating under the radar of most Canadians and their elected representatives? "CAP is CED in the information age" says Frampton, "cheap, powerful, engaging, and inclusive."

CAP is generating great press for Industry Canada and for Canada as a whole. Front page news. Why consign it to the obits?



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To learn more, visit the following sites:

- Sea to Sky - www.sea-to-sky.net/s2s/
- Sanikiluaq - www.najuqsivik.com
- Pacific Community Networks Association - www.pcna.ca
- Telecommunities Canada - www.tc.ca

(Photo) Sanikiluaq's daycare centre and CAP site location. Courtesy of Ron Elliott.