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Kids eager learners at Computer Clubhouse

Intel program brings technology to new audience

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CNN Sci-Tech

(CNN) --When Cedric Cody's little sister Sylvia first took him to the neighborhood computer clubhouse, his interest was lukewarm. But since he's learned how to create music, he never wants to leave the place.

"It's my sanctuary in this little room right here. I just feel so comfortable," said the 17-year old high school senior.

The Intel Computer Clubhouse the Codys belong to is one of three in the Atlanta area, and among 63 around the world. The first club opened in Boston, as a way to bring computers and other technology to youngsters who don't have much access at school or at home.

Elena Stevens, a graphic artist who is clubhouse coordinator at Atlanta's Whitefoord Community Center, says the music software and studio were like an awakening for Cedric Cody, whose other love is football.

"I went to training in Boston and learned a bit about the music room to get it started," said Stevens. "Once I taught Cedric the fundamentals, he was like, 'Whoa, wait, we can do *this* in the clubhouse?' Now he's in here before I even get to work and will be here till we close," said Stevens.

Cody has created CD's of some of his compositions.

"When I play my music in somebody's car and they like it, it makes me feel good about myself, makes me want to do it even more," he said. He hopes to major in computer graphics at college, and perhaps someday work as a music producer.

Also working at Whitefoord is 13-year-old Ashley Ferrell, who is quite the whiz on Adobe Photoshop, one of the most widely used software programs for graphics and photography. She's putting together a book of her drawings and writings.

"I didn't know how to use the computers when I came here. Miss Elena taught me how to do different things. It took some time to learn it, but I know how to do it now and it's very easy," she said, as she changed the colors of a waterfall on her screen.

'Wow, we did that'

A few miles north of the Whitefoord location, a couple of dozen young people are creating artwork with Photoshop and music on ACID software. Others are working on 3-D programs or flight simulators.

Four young men spend most afternoons in the small music studio at the clubhouse located inside Sci-Trek, an Atlanta science and technology center for young people.

Antonio Zachery, Herschel Carter, Jason Hill, and Marcus Boyette have written dozens of songs, and created a short documentary on their lives and music, called "ghetto children."

"When we first came down here, we didn't know equipment, we didn't know how to use it. We just came in the studio, started tampering with stuff, this guy Jeff (Jeff Arthur, a regional coordinator for Intel) told us a little bit about how to work the machines and stuff, the basics," said Hill. "So after that, it took us 20 minutes to put together a beat, and I think it was the best beat ever. I went home and (thought) wow, we did that! When we come here, we just let our mind wander, just let the computer take us wherever we want to go."

While he has dreams of a recording contract, Hill, who is 17, has some more down to earth hopes, too. "I want to get out of high school, so I can go to college. That's my main goal on my mind right now."

There's a sense of teamwork in some of the clubs, with teens often looking out for younger members.

"I think I can help myself by helping them," said Marcus Boyette, who's 14.

The clubs use techniques developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab and the Computer Museum, (now part of the Museum of Science in Boston) in the early 1990's.

"There is no curriculum, there is no syllabus, it's a very informal learning model," said Roma Arellano, manager of Intel community education. "But like many things that are unstructured in appearance, there's a lot of thought that's gone into it. That's what MIT Media Lab did. So there's a structure behind the chaos, the informal approach," she said.

The chip company expects to have 100 clubs in operation by 2005. Arellano says while the projects differ from city to city and country to country, there are some universal themes: "Music, art, and self-expression, things that hook kids to the joys of learning," she said.

Clubs are free for youngsters aged eight to 18.

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