

## THE MISSISSAUGA NEWS

### Project provides technology to less privileged

Volunteers refurbish computers

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Low-income families and individuals often must do without the technological tools that have become essential for school work or job searching.

Now, a project by the Community Environment Alliance of Peel (CEA) aims to bridge the digital divide between the rich and the poor by providing the less privileged with access to IT equipment and skills.

Called Share-IT, the program's volunteers recycle computers, printers, scanners and cell phones and distribute them from a workshop in Mississauga. The program was recently recognized with an award by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

According to a Environment Canada study, more than three million personal computers will be obsolete in this country by this year. Electronic equipment are considered 'obsolete' when they no longer meet the changing needs of the owner. In most cases, however, the equipment can be reused.

"Many underprivileged families in our community are in dire need of a computer to help improve their lives, but unfortunately cannot afford one," said Ranjana Mitra, CEA's executive director and co-founder.

Maria Assimonti is one such instance. The 41-year-old mother, her husband and three young daughters immigrated from Montevideo, Uruguay, two years ago and settled in Mississauga. All they brought with them were three suitcases.

"We didn't have too much money, and what little we had was used to buy important things like food and clothes. Certainly, we couldn't afford to buy a computer," she said. Maria works at a Dollarama store. Her husband is a house painter.

A year later, Maria heard about Share-IT. The Assimontis were given a Samsung computer, a monitor and a printer. The equipment has made a world of difference to their lives.

"My two older daughters, who are 9 and 12, use the computer and the internet all the time for their homework. My husband and I use the e-mail to keep in touch with relatives back home and to look up words for our ESL classes. Even the 5-year-old uses it. She plays games like 'My Little Pony,'" said Maria.

In addition to making technology available to people such as the Assimontis, an additional benefit of Share-IT is the program reduces the amount of hazardous electronic waste going to landfills. Obsolete equipment that cannot be reused must be properly recycled or disposed because they often contain toxic material such as lead, mercury, arsenic and cadmium. When these products are thrown into the trash with other household garbage, the toxic material they contain could contaminate ground water and the food chain.

Since the beginning of the program two years ago, 10 tonnes of what would have been e-waste have been diverted, said Mitra.

"Our volunteers have been able to refurbish up to 90 per cent of equipment for reuse and our aim is to place 1,500 PCs in community homes within the next year. But our biggest motivation and accomplishment is seeing the smile on a child's face when he or she receives a computer," she said.

"If you have used a computer, printer, scanner or cell phone that you no longer need, please consider donating it to the Share-IT program."

For more information about Share-IT or to donate or receive equipment call 905-290-0531.