

# New computer education program is designed to help 'problem' kids

'Bridging the chasm' for problem children is important, says the founder of a pioneer Computers for Kids program.

Computer education can be a great help to children who are learning disabled or economically deprived, Bob Sharen told a Burlington forum recently.

"If you reach out to problem children, they'll reach back," he said. "But it takes a little while."

The speaker outlined his group's experiences at two forums sponsored by the Community

Partnership Prevention Network. The Halton group is hoping to organize its own Computers for Kids program.

Sharen's group is based in Grand Bend (Lambton County) but has helped families from Toronto to Windsor to Walkerton. He said they've placed more than 300 computers either at youth and adult centres or at homes.

Besides donations of equipment, obtaining trainers for the program is also important, he noted.

Sharen cited mentoring by off-duty police officers as a particularly successful part of the program.

"Usually these children only saw officers coming over to say someone had died or to make an arrest, and the cops had come to view the kids as punks," he said. "But here, they could see them as ordinary kids with problems that can be helped."

High school students can do instruction for their community service credit, Sharen suggested.

Besides helping the learning dis-

abled, the computer program also helps alleviate social problems, he said. Sharen cited statistics which showed many youths in prison or reform institutions, or living in poverty, are learning disabled.

"They look like anyone else but the learning disabled get all sorts of labels, like stupid and ugly," he said. "It's very frustrating and debilitating. Often, they know what to do but can't get it out."

But some children who don't do well in regular school can succeed with computers, where hand-eye

control is required, he added.

Sharen cited a variety of potential sources for donations of money, equipment and expertise. His suggestions included service clubs, the local hospital, police, funeral directors, churches and even liquor and wine stores.

Donors and sponsors are currently being sought for the Halton Computers for Kids programs. Anyone interested in helping out is advised to call Deb Bechard at (905) 632-6531, ext. 30.

—By Dennis Smith, special

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