

## Bridging Digital Divide

### AIM

By 2015, life in Singapore will be greatly powered by Infocomm. And the Government is striving to build an all-inclusive digital society where Infocomm is used as a powerful enabler for everyone, including the elderly, needy students and people with disabilities.

But even as prices have fallen for items like computers, broadband access and handphones, they remain out of reach of some pockets of society. To most of us, these are not even considered luxury items - they have become necessities in this Digital Age. But 14 per cent of households with school going children still have no computers at home.

The Government will build "Infocomm bridges", so that no student will be denied computer and Internet access due to financial destitution; people with disabilities can receive Infocomm training, improve employability and integrate with mainstream society; and the less tech-savvy elderly can be at ease with technology and get connected in the Digital Age.

Three of such "Infocomm bridges" are being built to help these groups of people cross the Digital Divide.

- Equipping the Needy - NEU PC Plus
- Empowering the Disabled - Infocomm Accessibility Centre
- Engaging the Elderly - Silver Infocomm Initiative

### KEY HIGHLIGHTS

#### Equipping the Needy - NEU PC Plus

The NEU PC Plus will help to build an all-inclusive digital society where needy students can have equal access to Infocomm, through highly-subsidised computer ownership and Internet access. Some 10,000 low-income households with school-going children or disabled family members can benefit from this programme, enhanced from the current NEU PC programme. For a start, IDA, Microsoft Singapore, SingTel and Trend Micro are prepared to contribute \$31 million to help them.

Since NEU PC's inception in 1999, more than 20,000 needy families have received assistance. The longer term vision, as mapped out in the iN2015 Masterplan, is to ensure that there is 100 per cent computer ownership in homes with school-going children by 2015.

#### *What's New in NEU PC Plus*

- a. Better Connectivity - Needy families get to enjoy broadband Internet access, an upgrade from the existing dial-up access. Given today's bandwidth-intensive web applications, having home broadband access is in line with increased technology sophistication. The Plus is thus a subsidised computer package for under \$300, that comes with three years of SingNet broadband access. That's just under 30 cents a day to get plugged into the Digital Age. In addition to the better connectivity, the package comes bundled with a Microsoft Office Standard Edition, a Trend Micro anti-

virus subscription (PC-cillin Internet Security), and up to five years of service warranty.

- b. Wider Reach - While the NEU PC programme catered to low-income households, the Plus now extends Infocomm to children homes, orphanages and other Voluntary Welfare Organisations serving youths.
- c. Targeted Approach - The big Plus is that IDA and MOE will work together to help students from low-income families own a computer at home, through proactively identifying the needy from among the student population.
- d. Easier Access - For some, \$300 is still a princely sum to pay for a computer. That is why additional avenues are available to help the needy students co-pay for their new computer. The Plus comes in three forms:
  - i. Through the **iNSPIRE fund**, students in financial hardship will be able to do some form of work in the spirit of "paying it forward". The fund aims to, through **iNfocomm**, "**SPark an Inspiring and Rewarding Experience**."
  - ii. Schools can tap on the Ministry of Education's **Opportunity Fund** to help needy Singaporean students own computers so as to widen their learning, and provide more opportunities to use Infocomm in their school work.
  - iii. **Self-Help Groups** such as the Chinese Development Assistance Council and Singapore Indian Development Association offer financial assistance for needy students to co-pay the "top-up" amount for the computer package.

### **Empowering the Disabled - Infocomm Accessibility (IA) Centre**

The centre will help people with disabilities realise their potential and enrich their lives in the Digital Age, through providing Infocomm training and employment opportunities. Technology has literally opened new worlds to people with disabilities, permitting them to achieve greater autonomy and independence. The centre, co-funded by IDA and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), is expected to be operational from the first quarter 2007. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports will study the proposal further and consider funding the apprenticeship component of the programme.

#### **IA Centre Key Offerings:**

- a. Customised Courseware - For a start, IDA and Society for the Physically Disabled will work with Microsoft Singapore, Temasek Polytechnic and commercial training providers like COMAT on a structured Infocomm training curriculum for the disabled community. There will be three levels of training - elementary, intermediate and advanced - that will lead to industry certification.
- b. Training For All Disability Groups - The IA Centre will be equipped with a range of Assistive Technology (AT) tools like sip-and-puff mouse and voice-recognition software for the physically-disabled, screen reader and magnifier for the visually-handicapped and sound amplifiers for the hearing-impaired. These tools will aid trainees with different disabilities as they learn and interact together.
- c. Apprenticeship & Employment Opportunities - Trainees can enrol in the Infocomm industry-relevant apprenticeship programme, e.g. Web design, database

administration. The IA Centre will provide hands-on work experience through a sheltered workshop, conduct vocational assessments and facilitate job placements to enhance the employability of Singaporeans with disabilities and create new employment opportunities for them. This idea will be looked at in greater detail under MCYS' Enabling Masterplan which charts the development of national programmes and services in the disability sector for the coming five years.

- d. Infocomm AT Library - The centre will also house an Infocomm AT Library that will showcase a variety of AT tools, and make them available for loan and trial by people with disabilities, so that they can assess its suitability prior to purchase.

### **Engaging the Elderly - Silver Infocomm Initiative**

Singapore is a fast-greying society. This initiative aims to help the elderly get connected in the Digital Age, and lead more fulfilling and enriched lives.

#### ***What's Coming Up:***

- a. Experiencing Infocomm - Senior-friendly Infocomm workshops will be conducted to help the senior citizens embrace the use of mobile devices and web-based applications (e.g. SMS, Skype, Instant Messaging) in their daily lives, and forge closer ties with their loved ones.
- b. Hobbies, The Digital Version - The initiative will promote a digital lifestyle to the seniors by enhancing their personal interests and recreational activities using Infocomm (e.g. playing online chess with global friends, taking up digital art or digital photography).
- c. Learning & Sharing - Seniors who are tech-savvy can contribute actively as Silver Ambassadors and help other senior citizens acquire Infocomm skills, at their preferred pace and language.

### **PARTNERS TO BRIDGE THE DIVIDE**

The three initiatives are only possible through the concerted efforts of partners from the industry and society.

#### **NEU PC Plus Partners:**

- Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP)
- Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC)
- Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA)
- Society for the Physically Disabled (SPD)
- Yayasan Mendaki
- Ministry of Education (MOE)
- National Volunteers & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC)
- Microsoft Singapore
- SingTel
- Trend Micro
- Singapore Infocomm Technology Federation (SiTF)
- Maybank

Infocomm Accessibility Centre Partners:

- Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports
- Society for the Physically Disabled
- Singapore Association for the Deaf
- Microsoft Singapore
- Temasek Polytechnic
- COMAT Training Services
- WBL Corporation Limited ("Wearnes")

Silver Infocomm Initiative Partners:

This initiative is a collaboration being conceived and created by IDA and other civic organisations, e.g. Retired & Senior Volunteers Programme (RSVP).

**For More Details**

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