

Gifts put newcomers on the web

Youth group, computer firm distribute donated computers to Burmese refugees

Jamie Lee, The Ottawa Citizen

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They immigrated to Canada with almost nothing. But getting a computer will help.

That was the message yesterday when 50 Burmese families each received a refurbished computer from an Ottawa business-charity partnership.

The event was organized by the Sky's the Limit youth organization and CompuCorps Mentoring in Ottawa.



Wayne Cuddington, The Ottawa Citizen

Lum Bawi, a recent Burmese refugee who had previously received a donated computer through a program run by CompuCorps Mentoring and the Sky's the Limit Youth Organization helps distribute 50 more machines to Burmese families yesterday.

Sky's the Limit, which helps youth gain access to computers and the Internet, has donated 100 computers to Burmese families in the last few months.

Yesterday's recipients have immigrated to Canada in the last couple of weeks, said Lara Tavares, executive director of Sky's the Limit.

"They're already at a disadvantage" when they arrive, said Ms. Tavares.

Giving these families computers helps them start their new life, by allowing them to connect with their community and with the larger world, organizers said. The computers, donated by the Ottawa police, are high-speed Internet-ready. Recipients must still pay for an Internet connection.

Ms. Tavares says providing them with the equipment gives them a push. Valued at \$199 each, the computers have Pentium 3 processors and Windows software, and come with monitors.

CNC Global, an information technology staffing agency that is the project's corporate sponsor, donated \$30,000 for the computers and technical support.

CompuCorps Mentoring, a charity that enlists computer specialists to help non-profit groups with their computers or the Internet, trains the families to use the computers.

Some of the previous recipients helped refurbish the computers distributed yesterday.

Bill Marvel, executive director of CompuCorps, estimates about 600 people have come to Ottawa from Burma, which is controlled by an authoritarian military regime.

Lum Bawi already received a computer through the program. Speaking through a translator, he explained that it not only allows him to communicate with family, but lets him keep up-to-date about Burma news through YouTube videos.

Tha Zul, a Burmese community leader in Ottawa, said he is grateful for the computers. The immigrants now don't need to buy phone cards to talk to relatives, he explained.

It is "impossible to live without this modern device," added Mr. Zul.