

## **Kids get new hope online**

By NICHOLAS DAVIS

Try to imagine a world without computers or the Internet. Most people can't.

Almost everyone in this country uses computers on a daily basis -- at work, school or play.

For young people without computers in their homes, the chances of doing well in school or finding a good job when they graduate are greatly reduced.

This was something Lara Tavares wanted to change for children living in Regent Park.

"In a first world country like Canada, there is this assumption that everyone has a computer," says Tavares. "But that wasn't the case for a lot of the kids in Regent Park."

To help young people in Regent Park get computers, Tavares started a non-profit organization called Sky's The Limit.

The organization's mission is to provide students with access to the tools and resources they need to pursue the infinite possibilities available to them online.

"My goal when I started doing this was to get 10,000 computers for 10,000 kids," says Tavares, who grew up with a computer in her home.

"But after three years I've seen first-hand the positive impact having a computer has had on the 200 kids we have already given computers. I now want to keep doing this as long as students in Regent Park need computers."

Tavares has seen the impact because not only does she get the students computers, which she delivers to them through Regent Park's Pathways To Education Program, she also tutors three nights a week with the Pathways program.

She teaches the students how to use the computers, how to maintain them and how to use various software applications.

"We had this one student show up who is mildly intellectually delayed," remembers Tavares.

"He got a computer from us and showed up every day at the tutorial sessions to learn how to use it properly. Some of the software was a bit beyond his comprehension, but we found this program online that helped him build a map of Canada.

## A MAP OF THE U.S.

"After that, he built a map of the United States. It took him a long time but when he finished he was so happy.

"By then he was so comfortable with the technology that we set up an e-mail account for him and I was there the first time he sent his sister an e-mail. It was a very moving day for me.

"I fire off 200 e-mails a day. It's something I take for granted. So to see the joy on his face after his sister e-mailed him back was very moving."

Sky's The Limit fundraises and solicits donations from people and corporations to help pay for the refurbished computers they get for students. "For \$200 we can get a computer into a kid's home," says Tavares who has 10 volunteers on her staff.

"We put them in the home so that the student's family and friends can also benefit from using the computer. Raising the money hasn't been that tough because since we've been working with Pathways our organization has been running like a well-oiled machine."

With the climate of guns and violence now in Toronto, Tavares feels it's very important that students have more choices and options that give them hope of being successful.

She strongly believes a computer is a good start, but acknowledges more is needed to keep young people in school.

"For those kids dropping out of school, they need to know that an education can open many doors," says Tavares.

"Having a computer in their homes will help students maximize their education. And once they have a good education, the sky is the limit."

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To find out more about Sky's The Limit or to make a donation visit their website at [stlonline.org](http://stlonline.org).