

# Testimony – City Council Education Committee

## People's Emergency Center Community Development Corporation

September 14, 2005

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Good Afternoon. I appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony to the Education Committee of City Council to discuss the important role which wireless technology plays in promoting educational opportunities for Philadelphia's youth.

My name is Gloria Guard and I represent People's Emergency Center Community Development Corporation (PECCDC). PECCDC was created in 1992 with a mission to revitalize the West Philadelphia community in which People's Emergency Center (PEC) provides a wide range of social services and housing activities for homeless families. PECCDC provides an array of neighborhood preservation, community building and commercial development programs and projects to transform our neighborhood into a *Community of Choice* - a community in which people choose to live, work and thrive. To date PECCDC has attracted over \$21 million in capital investments into our community and transformed 80 properties into 106 units of affordable housing, four social service facilities and a community playground.

In addition to our housing, social service and neighborhood building programs, PECCDC offers a wide selection of technology programs which bridge the digital divide and promote technological literacy for residents in our neighborhood. Combining access, services and technical support, PECCDC's approach to bridging the digital divide complements our central goal to comprehensively transform neighborhoods into *Communities of Choice*. Today I would like to share with the Education Committee the success of our three technology programs which illustrate the importance of promoting digital access and technology education for all of Philadelphia's youth.

### 1. Teen Technology Network

To ensure that youth have digital access and computer training, PECCDC partnered with the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania's Teaming for Technology (T4T), AchieveAbility and the Philadelphia School District to create the *Teen Technology Network (TTN)*. This ten week after-school program offers about 50 high school students the opportunity to advance their skills in the field of Computer Technology. Combined with a Kaplan reading and mathematics course, students are introduced to basic computer skills while also learning to refurbish computers, design websites and navigate the internet.

- ◆ Over one-half of these students improved their reading scores by at least one grade level.
- ◆ 51 students received computers upon completion of the program.
- ◆ As interns at PECCDC, TTN students created 15 websites for local businesses and organizations and refurbished over 65 computers.
- ◆ One of our teens, Alex, jumped three reading levels in Kaplan computer post-test. Alex's math grades improved significantly from Ds to Cs and Bs in school. With his webpage building skills, he now creates websites charging a minimal fee for friends and family members.
- ◆ Another teen, Daniel, was acting up in school and constantly getting into fights before he joined the TTN. Daniel's high interest and performance in the TTN class landed him a "Team Leader" intern position. Daniel's mother called PECCDC to congratulate us and

asked if we could continue to mentor him. His behavior continues to improve as he volunteers with us.

By providing services, training and technical support, increasing access to electronic information and distributing computers, the TTN builds self-reliance and strengthens opportunities for advancement. In fact, TTN provides a “hook” and an incentive for students to pursue further education and employment in the field of Information Technology (IT).

- ◆ For example, Linda, a TTN graduate, is now in Penn State studying computer science.
- ◆ Additionally, Charles Rainey and Aaron Brickhouse are two youths from Digital Inclusion families. Their exposure to wi-fi technology and strong interest in technology make them computer troubleshooting experts. Currently, they work for PECCDC where they provide crucial technical support for both wireless participants and staff. Aaron aspires to become a computer engineer and is applying for community college. Meanwhile, Charles is applying to Penn State to pursue his management information system career.

## **2. Digital Inclusion Program**

Together with the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania’s Teaming for Technology (T4T), Philadelphia Neighborhood Development Collaborative (PNDC), AchieveAbility, One Economy Corporation and Cisco Systems, PECCDC piloted the *Digital Inclusion Program*, a small community-based program with recycled computers, wireless access, training, support and relevant accessible content. PECCDC distributes low-cost computers and provides the hardware, training, support and pertinent online content to ensure that community residents have constant, in-home access and can succeed in a digital society. Since February 2003, PECCDC has offered the *Digital Inclusion Program* to over 130 community residents and PEC clients.

## **3. E-Assist Program**

In cooperation with the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW), People’s Emergency Center (PEC) pioneered the development of a pilot e-government system so that families who are eligible for public benefits can transact business electronically with the government. The E-Assist program enables participants to use the internet to communicate, transmit documents, transact business and resolve issues with DPW over the internet. This allows clients to meet the requirements of welfare legislation without compromising their obligations to work or family. Since July 2003, 80 clients have successfully participated in the E-Assist program.

In summary, PECCDC’s three technology programs efficiently deliver information and resources to otherwise isolated low-income youth and their families. By leveling the playing field and providing engaged and meaningful access to digital technology, PECCDC maximizes the potential of technology and bridges the digital divide for those unable to otherwise access technology.

I encourage the Education Committee of City Council to continue to promote programs and projects which **connect** all of Philadelphia’s youth and their families to quality internet access, useful content and technological skills.

Respectfully submitted,  
Gloria Guard, President, PEC  
325 North 39<sup>th</sup> Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

215-382-7522 ext. 244  
[GGuard@pec-cares.org](mailto:GGuard@pec-cares.org)  
[www.pec-cares.org](http://www.pec-cares.org)

