

The goal of the program is to make sure that digital opportunities extend to all young people and their communities, particularly those who are low income and underserved.

BACKGROUND

- From 1996 until 2000, The Children's Partnership had been working to help accelerate the diffusion of technology into low-income neighborhoods, through a 4-year, \$6 million project called [Computers in Our Future](#) , funded by [The California Wellness Foundation](#) . The goal was to work at a very local level to help close the Digital Divide between those that have access to computers and those who do not. The project was designed to provide computers, the Internet, and quality instruction, and to help communities define how best to deploy them for the health and benefit of their residents. More than 25,000 young people participated over 4 years.

PROBLEM TO SOLVE

The Computers in our Future project included 11 community technology centers located in neighborhoods throughout California, ranging from an Indian reservation on the Oregon border to a city on the Mexican border. As the project developed, bringing computers, Internet connections, and quality training to low-income residents, we began to hear of a new aspect of the Digital Divide--even when community members were able to use the Internet, **they couldn't find the online information or applications they needed.**

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Since we discovered this "content gap," our first step was to undertake the research to understand the extent of this gap and describe what content was needed.

The Children's Partnership invested nine months of research including focus groups with low-income Internet users across the country, interviews with community technology leaders, an independent analysis of more than 1,000 Web sites, and a review of relevant research and literature.

The research was released in [Online Content for Low-income and Underserved Americans, The Digital Divide's New Frontier](#) , in March of 2000. It is a Strategic Audit, an analytic tool developed by The Children's Partnership to survey and analyze a broad field undergoing significant changes. The Audit is designed to look at emerging issues in order to understand the nature of the problem and to identify recommendations for action that can enable policy-makers, community practitioners, and private-sector developers to become part of the solution.

Findings included: At least 50 million Americans--roughly 20%--face one or more content-related barriers that stand between them and the benefits offered by the Internet.

Barriers include:

- Lack of relevant, practical, highly local information such as neighborhood-level job, housing, child care, and transportation items;
- Lack of information written at a basic literacy level;
- Lack of information for non-English or limited English-speaking Internet users; and
- Lack of information that was created in a culturally relevant manner.

After the release of this report (with coverage in The New York Times, USA Today, and many other print, online, and radio publications), The Children's Partnership followed-up with:

1. The launch of Contentbank.org, an online clearinghouse and resource for online content for underserved communities;
2. [Online Content for Low-Income and Underserved Communities](#) , an issue update published in 2002;
3. [The Search for High-Quality Online Content for Low-Income and Underserved Communities: Evaluating and Producing What's Needed](#) (October 2003), a report which included Guidelines for evaluating online content; and
4. Contentbank Newsblast, a weekly online news service that tracks news and information about online content that impacts low-income communities, launched in 2002.

In addition, we conducted a broad outreach program online, in print, in the media, and through speaking engagements.