

Last modified Sat., June 24, 2006 - 12:41 AM

Originally created Saturday, June 24, 2006

http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/062406/neR_22170382.shtml

Refugees get online in America

Students, professor help set up computers

By **CHRISTY WHITEHEAD**, Correspondent

Refugees from all over the world come to Northeast Florida to set up new homes.



Heather Compton (from left), Christa Fry and Rebecca Reams of UNF put together a computer for a refugee family from Liberia as part of an honors class.

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Now students from the University of North Florida are setting up free computers for them, too.

Arlington resident Mamie Jenyen and her two small children fled from Liberia when fighting broke out, forcing them to run for their lives. They escaped to a refugee camp, but the rest of the family thought Jenyen was dead.

Three UNF students and their professor recently brought a computer to Jenyen in hopes it would help her and her two daughters adjust to life in the United States a little better.

"The good news is the families can use the computers together to learn the language and for work and for functioning in their community," said UNF professor Catherine Cavanaugh.

The Technology for Learning class had 13 students, mostly education majors in the Honors program, who learned how to do things like set up a computer, design Web sites and install programs.



UNF students Christa Fry (from left), Rebecca Reams and Heather Compton watch over Mamie Jenyen (foreground), a refugee from Liberia, as she attempts to use a computer for the first time.

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Cavanaugh came up with the idea to donate computers that UNF no longer needed to the refugees, whose children were being tutored by some of Cavanaugh's students.

Lutheran Social Services chose eight families, all who had children in school, to receive the computers.

The UNF students found out what types of programs each family wanted as well as what programs they might need and scoured the Web looking for free programs because they had no budget to buy any. The students found educational games, e-books and programs that could help them learn English.

"I'm looking forward to hopefully seeing some excitement [on their faces]," UNF student Sarah Patton, 20, of the Beaches said before going to one family's home to help set up the computer. "I'm glad I got to be a part of this project; it will be really beneficial to the families."

Jenyen, who lives in Regency, was excited to receive a computer, even if she didn't know how to use it. Three students came to her home to set it up and help her get started using it. Christa Fry of the Westside helped Jenyen figure out how to use the mouse and select programs.

Jenyen's daughters, Sandre, 7, and Charlesetta, 4, use computers at their school, and Jenyen thinks they will be excited to have one at home.

Cavanaugh said many of the children are introduced to computers at school, so by the time they get home they will know how to turn it on and help their parents learn how to use it as well.

Jenyen said she is grateful for the computer and happy to be in Jacksonville. She says she doesn't ever want to go back to Liberia. She recalls fleeing the country and said when she was finally able to contact her family, no one believed she was alive; they had all heard she was dead. Her father, uncle and aunt all died in the fighting. She hopes to one day be able to bring the rest of her family here.

Some families the UNF students worked with still fear the countries they fled. One, from Afghanistan, is living in Arlington but still feared repercussions and did not want their names printed.

"We are so happy to come to America," the family's 14-year-old daughter said. "America is good."

The girl learned how to use a computer at school and was excited to have one of her own. Patton set the family's computer up and showed the girl some of the programs she installed on it. The



The students who set up computers were sometimes thanked with a meal, such as this one, by a family from Afghanistan.
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teen was happy to be able to play her music CDs on it and tried playing an Indian CD on the computer before putting in a CD by the American artist Usher.

As the student and teacher from UNF showed the teen the computer, her mother rolled out dough and made an Afghan lunch in honor of the students and staff at UNF.

Cavanaugh said many families were so grateful and showered them with food and drink from their native countries. She said she hopes to be able to continue doing the class and donating computers to families. But she said it all depends on the availability of computers and the continued interest of Lutheran Social Services.

As for the recipients, they were grateful to receive the computers and hope it will help with their schoolwork and maybe help them learn more English. The teen from Afghanistan smiled from ear to ear at receiving a computer, but did not know how to express her excitement.

"I can't explain in English," she said.



UNF professor Catherine Cavanaugh and student Sarah Patton plug in a computer for a refugee family from Afghanistan living in Arlington.
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