



at the Youth Center Neustadt (Bremen, Germany)



Report 2001 / 2002

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1. Introduction

On a first glance it seems to be obvious that most school-aged youths have meanwhile been exposed to digital media and know how to use them for work, school, and leisure purposes. However, a closer look on the socio-demographics of young IT users reveals that youths do not utilize these media equally. Like for other population groups, family income, educational attainment and ethnic descent influence the likelihood of being a have or have-not in the digital age.

Respectively, youths with low formal educational attainment, youths living in low-income families, and migrant youths, for instance, have often been rarely exposed to the digital media. They often face difficulties finding settings which are appropriate for them to learn how to use the new media. These young people often lack the skills which are considered to be indispensable for success in the digital age.

Youth centers which have been integrating components of computer-supported youth work into their overall program can help (disenfranchised) kids to succeed in the digital age. Meanwhile an increasing number of youth centers allow kids to learn how to use computers and the internet and provide them with opportunities for gaining the necessary skills. PowerUP acknowledges these attempts and provides after-school settings with means to set-up and perform computer-supported youth work.

In Bremen, Germany, PowerUP has been generously supporting the set-up of the first international PowerUP site. The following report introduces the different elements of computer-supported youth work that have been developed and offered at the youth center since the PowerUP program has been launched in October 2001. The report provides first evidence about how the program can contribute towards a positive alteration of young people's behaviors and attitudes. To continue this important work that has just been started and can really make a difference especially for these disenfranchised young people we introduce a strategic operation plan for the project continuation.

2. The Center and its Mission

The youth center Neustadt is located in the neighborhood with the same name. The building was reopened for the public in May 2001 after most of the building was destroyed by a fire in 1996. The center is maintained by the Office for Social Services, a division of the city state's Senator for Work, Women, Health, Youth, and Social Affairs and the German Red Cross Bremen. This is a new and unique form of cooperation in Bremen which allows, among others, more flexibility in planning, accessibility to additional funding resources (e.g. sponsoring and philanthropy) and availability of more know-how.

Currently, the youth center is staffed with four (2 full and 2 part-time) pedagogues, a youth worker of Turkish descent, and an intern. The facility is one of the largest Bremian youth centers, providing young people with many possibilities to spend their leisure time. A large open space invites youth to drop in, meet friends, and hang out. A gym and a multi-purpose hall space for recreation, girls have their own room, a special relaxation room welcomes youngsters to chill. In a fully equipped kitchen lunch is prepared every day for the kids who participate in a day-home program which is hosted in the center. Because music is so important for youths, the center also has a small disco room. The large PowerUP room provides a

friendly and quiet environment that invites youths to discover and learn about the opportunities the digital world offers.

It is the principal task of the youth center to organize and offer leisure activities, educational, and social work for young people. The work of the youth center shall be oriented towards the interests and needs of the young visitors. Thereby the work is aimed at supporting self-autonomy, solid activities and to teach youth why and how to respect the opinions and rights of others. The strategies to fulfill these goals are organized around the principles of participation, integration and prevention.

Participation: Center staff tries to involve youths in as many decisions as possible concerning the development of the center. This was the case, for example, during the rebuilding phase. The so-called V-Team (V = volunteers) shall support and assist staff with running the center. The V-Team shares, for example, responsibility for opening and running the center without staff once a week for two hours in the evening. Consequently the kids are also invited to participate in the planning of PowerUP activities.

Integration: The different groups which use the center (e.g. children and youths, girls and boys, German and Non-Germans) shall find appropriate and attractive opportunities which meet their needs and interests. Programs shall be designed in a way so they can help to overcome restriction and exclusion among the different groups.

Prevention: Youth work shall not only support the mental and cognitive development of the kids but also help to prevent them from harm and aberration. This may include missing graduation, troubles with finding a job or an apprenticeship, experiences with different forms of violence, but also problems with drug abuse and addiction.

The center's mission overlaps with PowerUP's five promises. Staff establishes ongoing relationships with youths, making the center a safe place has highest priority on the center agenda, structured activities are one pillar of the center's work and sports activities provide a healthy start. The development of marketable skills through effective education can be derived from the Bremian Children, youth, and Family Support Act which asks youth centers to support scientific and technical oriented youth education and education oriented towards the entry into the workforce. Participating in the V-Team provides the kids with opportunities to serve.

Because participation in any youth center activity is voluntary, activities must meet the interests and needs of the young people. The work of the youth center is organized around two pillars: (1) open access on a drop-in basis and (2) structured activities (e.g. courses and projects). The open access is always supervised by at least one pedagogue who prevents or helps solving conflicts, and is available for individual consulting. After a set-up and orientation phase, current structured activities include a girl group, a soccer group, a group which plays network games, and a regular offer for doing crafts. Under preparation is another recreation program (workout) and a music group where the kids can learn how to play instruments. The center also just received a grant to conduct a job search and resume writing training for youths. And the V-Team provides the kids with opportunities to serve.

3. The Clientele of the Youth Center

Most of the young visitors come from the surrounding low-income neighborhood. Besides the German people who live there, many immigrants also made the Neustadt their home. The

largest migrant population is of Turkish descent. Besides the youth center there are not many opportunities for kids to spend their leisure time in a structured and safe environment.

On a daily basis, between 30 and 50 young people in the age between 12 and 18 years come to the youth center. Interestingly they not only come from the surrounding neighborhood but also from other places all over Bremen. Most youths (approx. 90%) have other ethnic backgrounds than German while the majority (approx. 80%) is Turkish. There are much more boys (ca. 80%) than girls (ca. 20%) who use the center. Staff indicates that most of the kids live in low-income families. Formal school attainment is normally poor. About one half performs on a rather low level at the nearby secondary modern school whereas most of the remaining youths attend special school. A significant number of the kids show ostentatious behavior, some may even be characterized as behaviorally disturbed. This is an extra challenge for the staff.

Many of the youths show feelings of discrimination and alienation within the German society. This became especially clear after the tragic events of September 11th. Since then many kids have been expressing a diffuse reference to their Muslim cultural background going along with sympathy for 'anti-western' activities. Disintegrating tendencies are also reinforced by legal status problems. The deportation of some kids (and their families) with no legal status caused unrest to some of the youths, especially those who may face the same destiny. Lacking a future perspective increases anti-social behavior, expressed, for instance, in theft and property damage at the center. Gang activity of a group of young Arabic youths, responsible for theft, sexual harassment, intimidation of other kids, and damage to property adds to the problem. The situation escalated so much around the end of last year that all activities were closed down except structured activities with pre-enrollment.

However, most of the other kids have been realizing that tolerating such gang groups is limiting their possibilities at the center and is creating an atmosphere they do not feel comfortable in. Thus they expressed the wish for more staff intervention and more structured activities. They have also been asking for more support to develop their careers. Support is especially needed to succeed in the school system and to choose and find an apprenticeship or other employment opportunities, because they face additional difficulties in entering the labor market due to their low formal educational attainment.

Besides increasing kids' cultural capital it is also necessary to help them building more social capital. Many of the young people already committed legal offences ranging from using public transportation without paying to violent offences against other kids in combination with theft. Consequently theft has also been a problem inside the center. Many kids wear their jackets permanently inside the building because they are afraid of theft.

The PowerUP program at the youth center is aimed at supporting the overall goals of the center and to meet PowerUP's five promises. Thereby a special focus is on helping the kids with adequate means to gain the skills which are indispensable to survive and succeed in the digital age.

4. PowerUP at the Youth Center Neustadt

In early 2001 the Telecommunications Research Group started cooperating with the Youth Center Neustadt to prepare an application to PowerUP so that the center could become a PowerUP site. After the application got approved, Mr. Maik Klockgeter was hired to work at the site. He is a pedagogue with a focus on media pedagogy. The room for PowerUP got equipped with ten new networked computers, printers, and scanners. A collection of up-to-

date software (office applications, graphic and web page design, music production) was installed on all computers. Eventually the PowerUP Site was taken into service in October 2001. Due to technical problems it took until December before the Internet connection was set up via a Digital Subscriber Line. ISP service for all ten computers is provided by AOL Germany free of charge to the center.

The program of the site is a mixture of open-access elements and structured activities. Currently the PowerUP room is open 23 hours a week (see chapter 10). The goal is to expand the opening hours up to 30 hours weekly by the second half of 2002. The following part introduces the activities that are already conducted as well as those which are under preparation or in planning.

4.1 Computer and Internet Drivers License

Every kid at the youth center must pass a so-called drivers test before he or she can use the computers or the Internet. The computer drivers license is based on a 45-minute long lesson about the basics needed to start, run, and close down the computer. The Internet drivers license course is separated into two parts with four hours each. The first part introduces the kids to the rules of the PowerUP room, teaches them some basics about the history of the Internet, explains them important terms like WWW, http, or HTML. They also learn how a browser works, what bookmarks are good for, and how search engines work. An Internet rally closes the first part and provides the kids with an opportunity to consolidate their new knowledge.

The second part teaches the kids about the function of e-mail, how to set-up an individual e-mail account and how to use it. The youngsters not only learn how to use different chats but are also pointed to the potential risks and dangers in a chat room, and how to avoid them. The written test contains 15 questions. Kids receive extra credit for good participation during the course and can pass the test with their credits even if they made too many mistakes. Everyone who passes the test receives a printed license. This facilitates control about who is eligible to use the Internet. More important, the license is a strong incentive to take the course, because the kids are keen and proud to receive a license.



It turned out that many of the kids are regularly swamped with the requirements of the computer and Internet drivers license. They rather need one-to-one tutoring, which is limited by the availability of staff. In the future a peer-to-peer tutoring model may help to reduce these problems.

4.2 The Open Lab

Four times a week the open lab allows the kids to use the computers for whatever they want in accordance with the PowerUP rules. Mr. Klockgeter supervises the lab, helps kids, and enforces the PowerUP rules. Popular applications during open lab are chat and games. Some kids also come with special requests like certain information needs they try to meet by using the Internet.



In a power game the youngsters regularly challenge these rules by displaying, for example, web pages with violent or offensive contents. Computer also often crash because the kids are very impatient in using them. It is Mr. Klockgeter's responsibility to restart the computers. In the future the open lab shall become a place where the kids like to come and continue work they have been starting in courses and projects.

4.3 Introduction Courses into Office Applications

Many of the kids did not know how to use basic office applications prior to taking a course at the PowerUP site even if many claimed that they did. A course takes three hours and does not include any testing. Introduction courses have been offered in Word and in Power Point. The courses have workshop character without a strict curriculum. This limits pressure to succeed and allows the kids discover the programs at their own pace. Courses may be enlarged in the future for disseminating more knowledge. But this must be done carefully to assure that all kids find it possible to participate in such courses.



One of the most interesting observations during courses has been that even those young people who annoyed other kids with permanent violent behavior became very peaceful and highly concentrated when they engaged with the computer. Thus working with the computers may have the potential for reducing destructive behavior.

4.4 MP 3 Workshop and Hard Disc Recording

Music plays a major role in almost every youngsters life. Thus it was obvious to offer some activities at the PowerUP site with a focus on music. The kids can already use EJay, a program that enables them to produce their own music on the computer. Involving the disco activities in combination with introducing the kids to MP3 turned out to be a good project idea. The kids learned how to download and produce MP3 files and were introduced into legal aspects of copyright law. Then a computer was set up in the disco and the kids learned how to use the network for uploading MP3 files to the disco computer and playing them there.



In December the youth center presented a concert with a saaz player from Kurdistan. This attracted many people (almost all non-German) of all ages to the center. Mr. Klockgeter

recorded the concert, edited it and put it on a CD. He tried to involve youths into the whole process. Despite strong overall curiosity only a few kids participated into the project. Mr. Klockgeter thinks that many kids felt that this was too much for them. However, Mr. Klockgeter will work on the issue and will try to take the next opportunity to repeat the project.

4.5 Computer Garage

Once a week, Mr. Klockgeter offers the computer garage which has a focus on hardware issues. During the garage kids can come and bring their own computers for fixing or receive advice to solve problems they have with the computers available at their homes. Interested kids also get introduced into general technical aspects of computing. Sometimes an old computer will be taken apart to introduce the kids to the technology. Kids can also learn, for instance, how to format a hard disc or the necessary procedure for installing an operating system. The basic goal of the computer garage is to provide interested kids with a better understanding about the technical aspects of the computer.

4.6 Computer Consultation

Once a week Mr. Klockgeter offers two hours of computer consultation. During consultation kids can drop in and get help with computer problems of any kind (e.g. help to set-up an e-mail account or how to use a word processor for writing a resume). Kids who come with a certain problem during other times are also often asked to come to the Computer Consultation. It turned out that especially kids with ostentatious behavior face certain difficulties to pick up knowledge during courses or projects. It is also difficult to integrate these kids into courses and projects because they often refract and disturb the other kids with their behavior. To succeed with learning these kids rather need one-to-one training and support.

The computer consultation also functions as a gateway to general social consulting. Some kids plead a computer problem to receive general advice for problems they have. Topics range from strategies for coping with unemployment to dealing with teenage pregnancy.

4.7 Staff Workshops at the PowerUP Site

The Telecommunications Research Group is involved with another project that is aimed at, among others, increasing the qualifications of professionals (pedagogues, teachers, social worker,...). needed to conduct computer-supported youth work. Therefore the research group already conducted two respective workshops at the PowerUP site (one workshop was co-tutored by Mr. Klockgeter). The research group will continue offering such workshops.

5. Lessons Learned

The experiences that have been made during the first months of operation of the PowerUP can be summarized in the following way:

- *Limited self-confidence is a serious burden to learning success.* Many kids apparently have a very poor learning experience, shaped by the attitude that they are too stupid anyway. When the kids learned that the Internet drivers licence requires a small test, for example, many of them asked Mr. Klockgeter, whether they will pass the test.
- *Different kids learn at individual paces.* Especially for the kids with very limited education even seemingly easy tasks can be too difficult to be performed successfully.

These kids who often reveal ostentatious behavior need special attention and support to become successfully involved with the digital media.

- *Incentives are very important to motivate the kids.* Various incentives turned out to be very useful for supporting learning motivation. Even small incentives (e.g. written credits during a course or a printed drivers licence) can have strong effects. A hall of fame is under preparation where every kid gets a place for every activity he or she has been taking part in.
- *Rules must be permanently enforced.* Even though the rules for the PowerUp site were developed together with the kids they must be enforced permanently. This can be very stressful and time consuming because some kids apparently do not love anything more than challenging the rules.

6. Future Plans

The work of the PowerUP site just started and the Telecommunications Research Group together with the youth center would like to continue and develop it. The projects, courses, and cooperation we think are adequate for the project are outlined below. The second paragraph illustrates how the experiences made at the PowerUP site can be processed and disseminated.

6.1 Projects, Courses, and Cooperation

The following courses shall be offered on a regular basis through the next twelve months:

- Computer and Internet driving license for kids who are new to the youth center
- Regular courses to teach kids about basic software applications that can be considered to be indispensable especially for entering the workforce (word processing, spreadsheet, presentation software,...)

Projects will remain the most important part of the computer-supported youth work. The fact that the interests of kids often change quickly limits planning. Planned are the following projects:

- *Designing and building a center web page:* Staff and youths felt that it is important for the youth center to have its own web page. Mr. Klockgeter already found a number of kids who like to participate in such a project. Together with them he will design and build a page. Because a web page needs to be maintained and updated the project will probably exceed the estimated time. The web page could also be used to present the results of other projects such as the Photo Love Story.
- *Job search and resume writing training:* This training is made possible through an extra grant. Mr. Klockgeter will cooperate with the tutor of the training and will contribute the PowerUP resources to the training for making it a success.
- *Photo Love Story:* With this project, kids shall learn how to tell, visualize, and publish a story. Through the story they get a chance to process events which concern them by putting them together into a story. Moreover, they can earn skills through such a project useful also in other circumstances.
- *Story Telling with Flash.* Flash animated movies are very popular among youths. Borrowing from the idea with the Photo-Love-Story the Flash software shall be used to produce small movies which can be embedded into the center's web page.
- *Small Business Activities Project:* The project builds on the assumption that suitable incentives are very important for the learning success of the kids. Through the project

youths shall get the opportunity to fulfill small orders for institutions in the neighborhood (e.g. designing and producing leaflets). Such work would not only provide youths with some extra money, but would also introduce them into the ruling circumstances of the labor market and would be therefore a good opportunity for gaining first-hand-experience about the worklife.

Meanwhile, several institutions have expressed an interest in using the PowerUP facility. As far as inquiries for using the space do not collide with the PowerUP program, the youth center is happy to rent out the space which also provides additional revenues. Other cooperation even involves PowerUp more deeply:

- The senior center next door would like to introduce its senior visitors to the Internet. Kids who are capable shall be trained so they can assist the seniors with learning how to use the Internet.
- In March Mr. Klockgeter will teach a '*Publisher*' class to volunteers of the Youth Red Cross Bremen.
- A nearby day home for school children would like to use the PowerUP site once a week
- The Bremer Hilfe, a social service agency that works with young people who committed criminal offences would like to use the PowerUP site once a week.

6.2 Processing and Dissemination of the PowerUP Experiences.

With the PowerUP program the Telecommunications Research Group gains first-hand experience about organizing and performing computer-supported youth work especially aimed at disenfranchised kids. This experience shall be processed through continuing evaluation and research.

Part of the youths and the center staff will participate in a current research project conducted by the Telecommunications Research Group. The basic aim of the research project is to learn more about the effects of computer-supported youth work on young people. Thus this research will also allow to draw conclusions on how the PowerUP program affects youths.

Through another Bremian project that is aimed at setting up a networked learning region a structure will be available to disseminate the experience made with developing and running computer-supported programs for youths throughout the youth sector.

The web page of the *Digital Opportunities Foundation* which is affiliated with the Telecommunications Research Group provides another channel to disseminate the PowerUP experiences.

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7. Project Plan 2002 / 2003

March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May
Courses				H	Courses									
Open Lab				O	Open Lab									
Homepage Development				L	Small Business Activities Project									
	Cooperation with the Senior Center			I	Cooperation with the Senior Center									
		Foto-Love-Story		D	Story Telling with Flash									
Publisher				A	Music Project									
	Job Search and Resume Writing Training			Y										

8. Week Plan February 2002

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
10 – 11					
11 – 12					
12 – 13					
13 – 14					
14 – 15					
15 – 16	Project Work			Project Work	Computer Consultation
16 – 17	Project Work		Course Work	Project Work	Computer Consultation
17 – 18	Project Work		Course Work	Project Work	Open Lab
18 – 19	Open Lab	Computer Garage	Course Work	Open Lab	Open Lab
19 – 20	Open Lab	Computer Garage	Open Lab	Open Lab (until 10 pm)	Open Lab