

Information Technology students gain hands-on experience through the Technical Work Experience Program (TWEPE).

Photos by Darcy Finley



COMPUTERS FOR SCHOOLS

Smart Option for Recycling

COMPUTERS FOR SCHOOLS MULTIPLIES BENEFITS

By Pat St. Germain
For the Free Press

One good turn deserves another at Computers for Schools. When you donate used electronic equipment to the not-for-profit organization, there's a beneficial snowball effect.

A national initiative co-founded in 1993 by Industry Canada and the TelecomPioneers and supported by the Province of Manitoba, Computers for Schools (CFS) has positive impact on three fronts:

- It refurbishes computers, peripheral equipment and other electronics so they can be used in schools, libraries, First Nations communities and many more non-profit educational settings.
- It provides hands-on, practical work experience for information technology (IT) students at its on-site workshop. CFS is a Microsoft authorized refurbisher.
- It ensures safe, secure and environmentally responsible recycling of computers and other electronics as an e-waste collection site for the Electronic Products Recycling Association (EPRA) in Manitoba.

CFS Manitoba CEO Karen Kerr says on average 10,000 computers are collected each year at the organization's Winnipeg headquarters at 75 Terracon Place. "We can take your computer and either reuse it or recycle it. Either way we keep it out of the landfill and extend the life of it if it's reused," Kerr says.

SAFETY FIRST FOR SECOND-LIFE COMPUTERS

Most computers come from government departments or businesses that replace computer equipment on a regular basis, but many individuals donate computers as well.

"Donors decide if they want the equipment to be recycled or reused," Kerr says. "We have criteria up on our website that states the minimum requirements of computers that we use. If it falls within that category then we will reuse it."

Privacy protection is the No. 1 priority at the warehouse and workshop. CFS guarantees that all information is wiped from each and every computer hard drive.

"As soon as the computer comes through that back door for donation the hard drive is removed from the computer and it's wiped so that there's no information. Even if the client tells us that it has been previously wiped, we do it anyway as a safeguard."

After hard drives are reinstalled, everything from the motherboard to the RAM and operating system is tested to ensure computers are in good working order when they're passed on to new users who apply for equipment.

"We have lots of different clients; schools, libraries, non-profits, post-secondary students, First Nations communities, home schools — that list goes on and on," Kerr says. "We've started working with the immigration community as well. As long as it's for educational purposes we consider it."

Refurbished equipment runs the gamut from desktop computers to laptops, mice, cables, desktop laser printers and large multi-function printers.

Wait times depend on availability. Someone who needs a desktop computer might receive one within a few days, while the wait for a laptop might be a week or more.

"Normally we would only give laptops to schools. We have some criteria depending on what kind of client you are, on what you can get, but we have opened that up now to one laptop per non-profit and per home school and the reason is because we're starting to see more of them now," Kerr says.

"In past years, probably you'd be waiting a good four to six months for a laptop and just schools were getting them. But now we've got a nice supply of them because people are actually turning them over quicker."



ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

CFS'S Technical Work Experience Program (TWEPE) prepares students for careers in the IT industry, providing paid positions for recent graduates of technical colleges and universities.

Kerr says funding for the Manitoba program provides about 28 weeks of work experience for a maximum of 20 students at one time, but due to space limitations, the average number at any one time is 14.

Students gain supervised, hands-on experience with erasing, formatting, installing and testing hard drives and software, using diagnostic tools and software, safely dismantling computers for salvageable parts, preparing e-waste for shipping to certified recyclers, document management and other marketable technical skills. They also develop practical workplace skills such as teamwork, project work and time management, and Kerr says there's also a non-paid co-op option for high school and post-secondary students who work less than four weeks to complete work-experience components of college or university courses.

RESPONSIBLE RECYCLING

Computers for Schools (CFS) is one of 59 Electronic Products Recycling Association (EPRA) Manitoba collection sites across the province.

It prepares two to three semi-trailer loads of about 26 pallets of scrap each month, and will properly recycle functioning and/or non-functioning computer and computer-related equipment as well as some home electronics, such as TV sets, countertop microwave ovens, radios and DVD or VCR player/recorders.

Since space is at a premium, if you're dropping off more than 20 items, CFS asks that you make an appointment.

Visit the EPRA website at www.recyclemyelectronics.ca/mb to find a collection site near you, along with a complete list of items accepted for recycling

For more information about Computers for Schools, visit www.cfs.mb.ca

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU THROW . . .

- 80% of Canadians have at least one end-of-life electronic device at home = more than 28 million devices destined for landfills*
- Electronics in landfills may leach chemicals like lead, mercury, arsenic and cadmium into the ground
- Precious metals like gold, copper, and platinum can be reclaimed from many electronic products, reducing the need to mine raw materials for new products
- Computers and their peripherals often have lots of life left when businesses and governments refresh their computer equipment
- Schools, non-profits, and libraries can use refurbished computers to provide technology to those who cannot access it

WHERE TO GO BEFORE YOU THROW . . . COMPUTERS FOR SCHOOLS

- We are a Microsoft Authorized Refurbisher
- One of the largest registered EPRA depots in Manitoba
- In business for over 20 years
- 5000 computers distributed on average per year
- Over 70,000 computers sent to schools, non-profits and libraries since 1994
- Almost 500,000 pounds of e-waste and scrap metal kept from the landfill last year
- Over 5 million pounds of e-waste recycled since 2005
- More than 700 youth received work experience in TWEPE and Co-op programs since 1998

See EPRA MB's website for a list of electronics you can recycle:

recyclemyelectronics.ca/mb/

See Computers for School's website for how to donate electronics or apply for a computer:

www.cfs.mb.ca

* Based on <http://recyclemyelectronics.ca/mb/> - Where Does It Go video and Stats Canada's estimation that Canada's population was 35.5 million in 2014



Computers for Schools MB gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions from these organizations:



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Computers for Schools is also proudly supported by: The MTS Volunteers • MPI • MB Hydro • CIBC • MERLIN • CN Rail • Function Four

Connecting community and the environment through technology and education

We connect school, non-profit, library and First Nations communities to free and affordable technology and keep e-waste from our landfill by providing a safe way to recycle and reuse unwanted electronics and computers.



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Computers for Schools

Helping learning organizations give Canadians a head start in the digital workplace



Ordinateurs pour les écoles

À l'ère du numérique, aidons les organismes d'apprentissage à donner une longueur d'avance aux Canadiens

"Computers for Schools, co-founded in 1993 by Industry Canada and the Telecom Pioneers, refurbishes computers and related equipment donated by governments and businesses. These computers are distributed across Canada to schools, libraries, registered not-for-profit learning organizations, and Aboriginal communities."