

**Summary:** Technology & Life-Skills

**Title:** “Building Skills-Building Futures: Providing Information Technology to Foster Families”

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**Reference:** Finn, J., Kerman, B., & LeComec, J. (April, 2004). Building skills-building futures: Providing information technology to foster families. *Families in Society*. 2, 165.

**Problem:** This quantitative study addressed the “digital divide” among foster children. Those without Internet access and computer skills set are at a disadvantage because they miss out on various social connections and resources that are available. Foster youth are considered at-risk for falling behind in technology skills yet there are other downfalls for closing the digital divide for foster youth. Since this population is considered a vulnerable in many aspects there needs to be intervention and support to go along with technology training. Some of the vulnerabilities included being subject to Internet identity fraud and other problems that normally occur to those who have no natural support while gaining computer skills.

**Context:** There were a diverse group of 58 children from 32 foster families were used for this study including 43 foster children and 15 biological children. Ages of children were 6-18 years old from Bridgeport Casey Family Services (CFS). Children for this study were mixed with foster care and biological children of the foster parents. This pilot program was done in Bridgeport, CT. Foster parents were mainly middle class with 75% African-American, Latino & Asian decent.

The children and parents were given various questionnaires and tests that measured their self-confidence in technology and level of knowledge. This test was used to design the Building Skills-Building Futures (BSBF) technology pilot program. The purpose of this program was to “integrate[s] foster child[ren] and family access to information technology resources with ongoing service activities of long-term foster care workers.” (p. 4)

**Findings:** Surprisingly almost 45% of foster children said they never or rarely used computers yet 86% expressed the importance of learning computer skills. When taken the Internet Confidence Scale test (ICS), 48% expressed low confidence in using technology while only 7.3% indicated high confidence in this skill. Computer Confidence Scale (CCS) was used and resulted in similar outcomes. Children were also asked questions about Internet safety. Most indicated they did not feel a lack of safety yet did not know the basics of preventing undesirable content and a safe experience using the Internet. In terms of social support and network, about 12.5% indicated they had made friends off of the Internet.

The digital divide was noted among foster parents as well. 94.3% indicated the importance of their children learning computer skills and the Internet. Surprisingly, 30% indicated they used computers only once or twice a year or never. Tests were given to measure self-confidence of technology. 40% of the parents indicated that they had little to no experience. 42% indicated little to no confidence in using the Internet.

Due to these results, the BSBF program adjusted their design in intake and timing of workshops.

**Recommendations:** Researchers recommended a study done on outcomes of the BSBF pilot program. Outcomes should coincided with how computer skills connected with the children’s success in connecting to resources. Another study could be taken on education and how the new literacy skill learned has transferred to their learning. How has this training enhanced other skills at school?