

# Mount Ararat Community Activity Center - Executive Office

Student Consultant, Josh Axelrad

Community Partner, Charles Gladney and Rev. Mary Buckley

## Organization

The Mount Ararat Community Activity Center is located at 271 Paulson Avenue in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh. The community center itself is in the basement of the Mount Ararat Baptist Church. The mission of MACAC is to help people in need and at risk to become productively independent, to foster conditions for the economic stability of families, and to encourage family values. MACAC develops and administers on a charitable and educational basis a variety of spiritually based programs and activities. These community activity center programs benefit the community at large and persons at risk in surrounding neighborhoods, the East End communities in particular, and Greater Pittsburgh communities in general. Disadvantaged minority persons, unemployed and underemployed persons, and the elderly may all participate in programs regardless of the cost or their ability or inability to pay.

The major program areas include computer classes, senior services, early childhood development, after school tutorial, summer youth employment, and a cultural enrichment summer day camp. MACAC is also affiliated with the church that houses them and they use much of the free space around the church when needed. There are 20 employees at the center and it serves approximately 300 people on a budget of \$500,000. Anybody in the community is welcome to use the services that MACAC provides.

## Facilities

The Community Activity Center is located on the basement level of the church. It is a fairly large facility consisting of many offices, multi-purpose rooms, and educational areas. There is a large area where the early childhood classes are held everyday as well as large rooms used for the summer camp program and for distribution of food and clothing. They hold regular senior luncheons as well as large giveaways of food, clothing, and toys around the holidays. There is one room currently being used as a small computer lab and a multi-purpose room next to it that is being converted into a new computer lab. Rita Ferris is in charge of these computer labs. In addition to these rooms there are many offices for the staff including Charles Gladney and his assistant. Anybody entering the building has to check in at the front desk and sign-in. There is a lot of attention paid to keeping track of exactly who is in the building at all times to keep the security fairly tight. The employees of the community center use most of the space but there are also offices for the officials of the church. MACAC started receiving computers as part of donations and grants back in 1992. At that time the computers were only for the offices and were not used for much. Starting in 1999 they began implementing computers for teaching and are expanding with 10 more computers this year. They hope for a fully networked computer lab which the community can benefit from

## Program

The program activities are geared towards the less advantaged members of the community. Many of the people they serve are young people. There is a large early childhood center which operates every weekday from 6:30am to 6:00pm. The daycare offers a comprehensive educational program that focuses on the cognitive, emotional, and physical needs of children. The center also welcomes parental support and involvement through parent conferences, a parent advisory group, and various training and enhancement activities. Enrollment fees are based on the family's ability to pay and are a maximum of \$125 a week for any child. There are two computers in the early childhood center which have educational software installed. These are not used as much as the staff would like because a lack of training for staff members as well as a lack of new software to implement.

The center also offers computer classes starting every month. The classes are geared towards people who want to learn computer basics (mouse, operating systems, and word processors), or need to brush up on their skills and/or learn new programs. There is also an advanced class that will explore the Windows operating system in depth and teach the basics of Microsoft Excel. There are two sections of the beginner and advanced classes which are each taught twice a week. The computer class is currently taught in a small room of 6 computers. The hope is to expand this into the new lab with 10 brand new computers. The computers they have currently are not networked but this is also a plan for the new lab. They are purchasing a server and will have a connection to the I-Net pilot program in Pittsburgh.

## **Staff**

Most of the staff has computers in their offices. Charles Gladney has a new Dell in his office and is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the new technology. Rita Ferris is the technological director and is the main contact point for any technology issues at the center. She is the one responsible for installing any new systems and for fixing problems with old ones. They also occasionally have work study students from CMU come in to help consult on technology issues and are having somebody from computing services at CMU come to oversee the network installation and their fibre connection to the I-Net. Rita spends much of her time going from office to office upgrading and maintaining the machines. Most of the office staff has been with the center for an average of 5 years.

## **Technical Environment**

The majority of the computers in the offices are quite old. There are some 486s and some pentiums. The computer lab I believe has 6 pentium computers running Windows 98. These computers are not networked and do not have a connection to the Internet. They all contain Microsoft office software although many office workers work in Corel WordPerfect. The new computers they received for the new lab are 500mhz Celerons with 64 megabytes of ram and 7gb of HD space. They all come pre-installed with Windows 98 Second Edition. Two of the computers come with built in zip drives and CD-R drives. All the new computers also come with 17" monitors and high speed CD-ROM drives. These computers will form the new computer lab which is being formed in one of the multi-purpose rooms. The current lab consists of computers acquired in 1999 while the new lab is computers that were acquired quite recently. They are still in the process of buying the server computer for their new network. The server will be the connection point for their hook-up to the Pittsburgh I-net as well as being the hub of their internal network.

## **Technology Management**

The director, Charles Gladney, is generally in charge of how new technology is applied to the center. Rita Ferris is the person responsible for implementing any changes to the technological environment. These responsibilities include setting up any new computers as well as maintaining, repairing, and upgrading old ones. There are old machines running Windows 95 in offices that need CD-ROM drives as well as machines that receive more RAM or larger monitors as equipment becomes available. When people have problems with their computers they go to her for assistance and she manages the jobs. If she has people there to help she will delegate some jobs to them but she is ultimately the one responsible for any computer maintenance in the center. MACAC realizes the important role that computers and the Internet are playing in society and are very eager to implement programs that allow this technology to be accessed by the community. They realize it is important that more of the staff get acquainted with the technology as they move forward.

## **Problems and Opportunities**

1. There doesn't seem to be an integrated program for upgrading the computers in the office. Most of the computer maintenance seems to be stopgap measures to solve whatever the current problem is. I think the work would be much more effective with an organized maintenance plan. I would hope that through my

work there I could guide them in forming a plan in which computers are upgraded on a regular basis to stay current with the technology.

2. Even with the new network installed much of the staff will not have the knowledge or initiative needed to fully utilize the Internet. Most of the people there will need significant training on how to use the network and how to use the software provided with the new computers. It is important that they have a good working knowledge of the Internet so that they can help pass that knowledge on to the community. Mr. Gladney realizes that he is in the need of some training. He has a brand new laptop and cellular phone which he does not use and would like some assistance on this. I hope during my time at MACAC I am able to train members of the staff to be more confident with their new technology.

3. With the expanding computer environment there will need to be more people able to do basic troubleshooting of computer problems. This is related to the last problem but has more to do with self-sufficiency than training. Currently Rita is the only person who is available to troubleshoot and fix the problems on the computer. With the proper experience and training there could be other members of MACAC who have the skills needed to troubleshoot basic problems. Rita would still need to do much of the major work, but it could help distribute the work for more minor problems. The way to achieve this is through making the troubleshooting I do during my time there visible to the employees. Through watching my thought process they will be able to do the basic troubleshooting on their own in the future.

4. Many of the staff members need to be more explorative with the computers. Mr. Gladney is an admitted total computer novice. I think that it would be good if there was an environment where there was an opportunity to work with many different software packages on the computer so that he and others could explore and decide what is comfortable for them. Right now his laptop sits around unused, but I think with the proper options it would be something he could explore and use to suit his needs.

5. Utilizing productivity software to keep much of the info on the people they serve on the computers instead of on paper. I am not sure of the current status of this but I think there is a tremendous opportunity to keep much of their data on the computers. I would like to explore different kinds of database and spreadsheet software with them to find something they are all comfortable with. I would hope that they could put all of their enrollment for their youth programs into the machines as well as any other pertinent information regarding budget, grants, and special programs.

6. Expansion of their Internet presence. The current website they have is very sparse. There is room for a lot more information to be presented on there. Maybe as a future project they could include enrollment for their classes online. For the time being, however, it would be helpful to put information on all their varied programs up on the Internet. A system for advertising the page around the community may also prove helpful.

## **Problems and Opportunities**

---

*Nobody, including Charles Gladney, in MACAC utilizes the Internet on a daily basis:*

In order for an organization to remain strong and grow in today's society it has to take advantage of online resources. There is no way for people to be in constant daily contact with many of the employees of MACAC. Some of them do not have email, and others such as my community partner Mr. Gladney rarely use it. All interoffice communication also must be done by either phone or memo because of this lack of connectivity. This has served them well enough up to this point but as time marches on it is becoming

clear that they need to move onto the Internet. Many of the resources they need to be connected to are starting to become only available online.

Being connected to online resources could prove very helpful to furthering the mission of MACAC. In order to continue to help people in the community who are unable to pay for their services they need to continue to acquire money from outside sources. This usually is through applying for grants. The only way that Mr. Gladney and others can find these grants currently is by going through old records of grants. They recently installed software called Grantscape which shows lists of organizations that have given grants in the past. This is helpful to a degree but it does not contain the most up to date information. If he had consistent Internet access he could acquire up to date information from people all around the world who give money to non-profit organizations. He could also communicate with other organizations who have gone through the same process. Through this exchange of information MACAC could greatly increase their chances of obtaining more money to further their programs.

The impact of the change would be significant to the organization. MACAC would be able to reach out on a daily basis and communicate with other organizations that are similar to it. In addition, with better access to the Internet they could put together a better web site than the one they have currently. This new web site could include online ways of signing up for the classes and programs offered at MACAC. Therefore not only would MACAC be able to reach out more efficiently through use of the Internet but they would also be more accessible for others to access them.

This definitely could be completed in the time frame we have set. Even if the full networking of the office is not completed, it would definitely be possible to acquire some Internet connection if even just a dial-up. Starting a culture at MACAC where people check their email regularly and utilize online resources would be a big first step.

***Mr. Gladney does not use the technology available to him as much as he would like to:***

Most of the information that Mr. Gladney uses on a daily basis is kept in his appointment book and on other papers that he has around his office. He owns a laptop which he rarely uses and has a brand new computer in his office which he also rarely uses. He could become much more efficient in his daily operations by using the tools available to him. If he put most of his appointments into his laptop or a PDA he could hold much more information along with them. He could maintain lists of all the various contacts he has to deal with relating to MACAC. Instead of having to check in with his office all the time he could spend more time out exploring other areas of the community and still have all the information he needs at his fingertips.

This would help continue the mission of MACAC because it would allow Mr. Gladney to be more in touch with the people the center helps. He could have contact information for many of them on him at all times. In addition, the added degree of organization would leave him more open to expanding into new programs for the center to offer. If everything is kept organized and somewhat automated then they can devote their time to developing new projects. It is important for the center to expand their scope as we move into a more technological age.

The impact on the general technical environment of MACAC would be great. It would allow Mr. Gladney to be a resource for technical knowledge. He would still turn to Rita to resolve many of the technical problems but he would be able to handle a lot of the day to day issues himself. Just his use of technology on a daily basis would provide an important base of knowledge for the rest of the center.

This is definitely feasible if Mr. Gladney remains committed. He is very busy and it is hard for him to spend time learning new things. However, to get him to a level of competency should not take too long

and is definitely feasible in this time frame. Just working for an hour or so a day on trying to use technology more would be plenty.

***There is not a diverse enough offering of computer related resources to the community:***

Although MACAC has been very proactive in offering technology to the community, it could go much further. Right now they offer a beginner and advanced computer class which both deal in fairly introductory level computer skills. In addition, the only person they have who can teach these class or fix the computers is Rita Farris. Individuals who come in to the center to use the computers have no Internet access and they have no training on the Internet. When they come into classes they still only deal with static applications on the machines in the lab. They get no training or experience using the Internet.

There are also computers in the day care center. These computers remain covered with a sheet much of the time. Many of the kids who come to the center have experience with computers to some degree at home and would be able to expand their knowledge by using the computers in the center. The main problem is that the people who work in the day care have very limited computer knowledge and are protective of the computers. They are concerned that they stay up and running and want to be sure that the kids will not be harmful to them. If these people could be trained to use the computers more effectively they could begin to offer them as a resource to the children in the community. This would also lighten the work load of the day care workers because it would expand the activities the children could participate in.

The impact on the organization would be great in that it would expand the mission. Right now the main impact on the community in terms of computers is the classes Rita teaches. There are no specific programs geared towards children nor are there programs geared towards learning the Internet. Internet access for the community would allow many people to catch up with the technology they have not had a chance to use. Many people have heard of the world wide web and email but have never actually had a chance to explore them. By starting their exploration of these tools at MACAC they could try to move on to using it in their own daily lives at home. Even the low income members of the community could either get free Internet access or could use the expanding resources of MACAC for their own personal net access.

It will be tough to accomplish because it would split my time from Mr. Gladney. I want to focus on training him. In order to expand the programs offered to the community I would have to train many other people besides Mr. Gladney. Hopefully I could spend my time with Mr. Gladney and give him a basis with which to move forward and expand MACAC's programs. We could also setup a clear work plan for him to move forward and offer Internet access to the community.

***Rev. Buckley is knowledgeable about computing but is frustrated by the lack of continuity between the church network and the new MACAC network:***

MACAC shares a building with the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. The church had an existing Novell network that was in place before the community center decided to put together a network. The Novell network is rather inconsistent and they are currently considering replacing it with a Windows NT/2000 based network. Not only is the current Novell architecture inconsistent and hard to use, but it is not available to any of the offices in the MACAC side of the building. This splits off the communications between the staff members in the church and the community center. Although they are separate organizations there are often situations which necessitate this communication.

Rev. Buckley splits time right now between the church side of the building and the activity center. It would make her life significantly easier if she were able to access all of her information from either side of the building.

## **Outcomes and Recommendations:**

---

### ***Charles Gladney has increased confidence and ability in his use of technology:***

After spending many days working with Mr. Gladney on his laptop he was able to move forward and install software on his own. He now sees how he can use the laptop to help organize and keep track of his work when he is away from the office. In the future this will allow him to install new software to further the mission of MACAC or wherever he happens to be working.

His increased use of technology helps the organization in a couple ways. In the most direct way it allows him to be more efficient in the work he does. He can be doing work for the center from wherever he is because he has his laptop with him. In addition, it allows him to use tools such as Grantscape which were not utilized previously. By using Grantscape to find grants he can help MACAC grow.

Mr. Gladney's use of technology also has helped foster a more technological culture at MACAC. If the executive director is using technology on a daily basis then it encourages the rest of the center to also. In addition, if he puts files up on the network for others to access it forces the rest of the office to use the technology.

### ***Mr. Gladney and Rev. Buckley are able to utilize the network installed at MACAC:***

The added knowledge I was able to share with Mr. Gladney and Rev. Buckley allows them to take advantage of the networked environment at MACAC. Files can now be shared among staff members instead of relying on memos and hard copies. The new computer lab and all the offices are networked and able to share files. This allows for instant, efficient communication between all staff members of MACAC. It also allows for an expansion in the classes they are able to offer to the community.

Part of the mission of MACAC is to offer educational services to the surrounding community. With a fully networked computer lab they will be able to further this more than in the past. They can offer classes that utilize the Internet and windows networking. This can help members of the community learn skills that are important in getting better jobs in the present and future.

The resources I have included at the end of this document will also hopefully help Rev. Buckley remain up to date on the technology and expand MACAC's use of networking as it continues to grow.

### ***Gave Rev. Buckley the necessary information to be able to hook up to the Church network from her office:***

The new network in the community center allows for connectivity among all the computers that are part of MACAC, however, this is not the same as the existing church network. Rev. Buckley had been using the church network before she assumed the job as interim director of the community activity center. She was interested in a way to hook up to the church network as well as the new network but there was no outlet for the church network in her new office. I was able to guide her to the equipment she needs in order to run a cable from the nearest church outlet to her office. With the purchase of a hub this will also allow others to have the same option.

This allows MACAC to expand its affiliation with the church. The more freely information is able to flow between the two parts of the building, the more each half can benefit. There could be coordination of schedules between the church and the community center and the ability or organize joint events. In

addition, information that used to be available from only certain offices can now be accessible throughout the building.

***The culture of MACAC has become more technologically based:***

The staff members are excited about being connected to the Internet. They want to be able to utilize the resources online such as email and the web from their offices. The center is also able now to accept more people for computer classes with the addition of the second computer lab. The classes that are taught in this lab now have the ability to use the Internet and the internal network of the community center.

MACAC can reach many more people through their expanded use of technology. With access to the Internet and email they can advertise for their programs and classes online and accept responses via email. In the future they could expand this to allow them to have people sign up for their computer classes over an online web form. The use of the Internet allows people who would have never known about the center to read about it and learn if it is someplace that would be of help to them.

***Rev. Buckley is clearer on the opportunities for upgrading the church network:***

I read over a proposal to switch the network from the current Novell based network to a Windows based network. I believe that this is going to be the best path for them to take. Not only will this improve the reliability and ease of maintenance for the church network, but it will allow it to be more compatible with the new community center network. This will allow for easier communication between the two sides of the building and allow for people to work from either side without losing connectivity.

Specifically, this will allow Rev. Buckley to fully perform her job from her office on the MACAC side of the building. She was unable to access the church information without crossing over into another office. This made it difficult for her to complete all of her work in an efficient way.

**Recommendations:**

***Evaluate each staff members utilization/need for use of the network:***

One of the only ways to evaluate the success of a new technological environment is to evaluate how it is changing each workers daily routine. A system by which on a monthly basis there is a form sent to each of the staff members asking questions about their use of technology on a daily basis would be quite helpful. This would allow Rev. Buckley to understand how well the new equipment is being utilized as well as pinpoint trouble spots that need improvement.

It is quite possible that MACAC might benefit from another technical consultant, or another computer teacher such as Rite. It is unclear how dire the need is for these positions is at the moment, but through an evaluation system they could discover the extent of this need. This would also be an opportunity for each staff member to comment on what would make the transition to the new technology easier for them.

***Switch the church network over to a Windows based system:***

The proposal to switch the church network from a Novell based system to a Windows based system is a good plan. This will allow for much greater compatibility across the organization as well as with the rest of the world. I suggest that this be undertaken as soon as possible. I would also encourage Rev. Buckley to see if the people who would convert it for them could possibly come up with ways to hook the MACAC and church network together to a degree.

The more broadly connected the building it is, the better for the expansion of the use in technology in the future. With a coherent building network that everybody uses it allows for there to be a massive amount of input on what the current problems and remedies are. The conversion on the church side of the network will also allow for higher efficiency of work for members of the church because of the more stable platform.

***Organize a system by which staff members can take computing classes to become more up to speed on technology:***

There are many places which offer classes ranging from simple Windows skills to more advanced networking and applications topics. An organized system for signing up for classes would be helpful for fostering an environment where people are encouraged to become more technologically competent. These classes could either be online based learning courses or locally available classes. I have included a link to the CompUSA training site. They offer many courses which could benefit the members of MACAC.

***Allow for fully automated sign-up for classes and services:***

With a fully networked office and a connection to the Internet it makes sense for MACAC to begin to allow people to contact them through this medium. The web page that the center currently has is in need of an update. This update could include email contact information as well as a possible web form for signing up for classes. Allowing for online signup for classes and services would not only allow MACAC to reach more people but would allow them to work more efficiently internally as well. It is much easier to keep information organized that comes in electronically.

**Resources:**

<http://www.compusa.com/training/> - This is the training portion of CompUSA's site. They offer various classes that could help the members of MACAC. Hopefully with the new Internet connection at MACAC people can investigate these classes from their offices.

<http://support.microsoft.com/directory/> - The general support page of Microsoft. Can be of a lot of assistance in troubleshooting various networking and application problems. With a windows based network and the use of many windows based machines this page can be invaluable.

<http://www.outpost.com/> - A reliable site for buying computing supplies. They offer free shipping on most items. This is a site where Rev. Buckley can buy such things as hubs and ethernet cables.

<http://www.buy.com/> - This site is similar to outpost.com. Often their prices are slightly cheaper but the availability is questionable.