

In Schools, Not Landfills!

Computers for Schools Program Continues to Grow

PUBLISHED: 14 Jan 2019



Keith Grill (l) and Crawford McKee at the Computers for Schools workshop in Regina.

In 1993, SaskTel began a partnership with the Computers for Schools (CFS) program. Crawford McKee remembers it well.

“The Federal Government (Industry Canada) was looking for a volunteer group with a national scope, and the SaskTel Pioneers were a perfect fit,” said Crawford, a retired SaskTel employee, who is still a big part of CFS. “Locally, SaskTel was gracious enough to provide space and utilities to each of our locations from the very beginning and continues to do so right up to today.”

“From the beginning, there was a lot of excitement to be able to keep the equipment out of the land fill and put it in the hands of our kids in school; it was a win-win situation.”

Since the program’s inception in our province, SaskTel Pioneers have refurbished over 70,000 computers and printers. This represents a saving of approximately \$60,000,000.00 to schools and libraries in Saskatchewan.

Computers for CFS are provided by all Federal Government departments, some Federal Crowns, some Provincial Crowns, private businesses and some personal donations.

When the equipment arrives at the Computers for Schools workshop, inventory is done by CFS volunteers, who immediately do a secure wipe of information for each machine. The equipment is cleaned, tested, and repaired or recycled.

When it's ready, equipment is distributed to schools, libraries and non-profit organizations across Saskatchewan. The non-profit organizations include those providing social and community services to disabled and disadvantaged groups and individuals, and most recently, to low income families through a special federal program.

"CFS has managed to create a brand that is well recognized across the country," said Keith Grill, who is Executive Director of CFS for Saskatchewan. "In our province, we try to maintain a grassroots organization by maintaining a partnership with SaskTel and SaskTel Pioneers that really ties the three organizations together. "

"I truly believe that SaskTel gets a tremendous amount of positive recognition because of the relationship of the three organizations. Other CFS organizations across the country are no longer affiliated with either the Pioneers or communications companies like SaskTel."

CFS Saskatchewan has two workshops, one in Saskatoon and one in Regina. Workers at the Saskatoon shop are all retirees, while Regina is a mix of current SaskTel employees and retirees (like Crawford and Keith). The Regina shop also includes employees participating in a Federally Sponsored Technical Work Experience program, which provides paid work experience opportunities to students seeking a career in the IT field.

While it has been around for more than 25 years, it was not till 2018 that CFS became a permanent Federal Program.

"Up until 2018, CFS was a series of temporary projects that had to be re-applied for and re-approved every year or two," said Keith. "This new stability offers some increased potential for growth in the future and will enable us to evolve with technology and with the needs of education and society."