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# Lac Qui Parle Computer Commuter Content Analysis

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*"Believing in a bright,  
prosperous future  
for small communities."*

# **LqP Computer Commuter Content Analysis**

April 15, 2013

Prepared for Lac qui Parle Economic Development Authority

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## *I. Introduction*

The Computer Commuter is a mobile computer lab operated by the Lac Qui Parle Economic Development Authority since the summer of 2010. The actual bus is a former hotel shuttle with a wheelchair ramp, seven computer workstations with Dell laptops, and broadband access. In addition to the seven workstations, there is an iPad and a Kindle available for users.

There is no structured curriculum offered, which attracts less experienced users who do not feel comfortable enough with their level of knowledge to attend a computer class. One instructor is available to drive the bus and provide help to users as needed. Users are typically interested in basic computer skills such as using the hardware, emailing, and printing photos.

The Computer Commuter operates Monday through Wednesday 8am to 5pm serving six different communities within Lac Qui Parle County. It stays for 4 hour blocks of time, leaving the hour from noon to 1pm to travel. The communities served are Bellingham, Boyd, Dawson, Madison, Marietta, and Nassau. In these communities, the Computer Commuter gives users a chance to experience using new technologies in a low-key, informal environment and ease them into becoming more proficient users of technology.

Globalization and the influx of new technology and communication innovations have created a new information highway. Although direct implications are hard to define it is generally accepted that it is positive for a nation to have as many people using the highway as possible. Broadband internet has brought about many practical uses. These uses can be seen on a national, community, and individual level. The World Summit on the Information Society (held in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005) recognized that “access to information and sharing and creation of knowledge contributes significantly to strengthening economic, social and cultural development.”

In order to promote community and national interests in broadband, we must first cater to the needs of the individual to provide incentive. The individual's willingness to pay for broadband varies on their perceived usefulness of the service. Computer Commuter is working to specifically help individuals become familiar with computers and learn how a broadband connection can improve their daily life.

## *II. Benefits of Technology*

Over the past decade, the gap in technology access has been reduced with increased internet adoption and the rise of mobile connectivity; however, some disparities amongst certain demographics still exist (Pew Internet Research Project). During a 2011 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, of the Adults interviewed (18+ years of age), 20% of the people surveyed said they did not currently use the internet. The three strongest negative predictors were age (65 and older), a lack of high school education and low household income (\$20,000 a year or less). The Computer Commuter project provides an outlet for individuals in all of the previous categories residing in the rural La Qui Parle County.

Among adults who do not use the internet, half of them reported they do not find it relevant to them; furthermore, one in five surveyed reported not knowing enough about technology to start using the internet on their own. Computer Commuter seeks to lower this divide in Lac Qui Parle County by providing those less skilled in technology with free computer training and broadband internet access. People that are generally too afraid or embarrassed of their lack of knowledge to take classes can now be provided with information on the benefits of broadband as well as learning different uses.

Broadband internet is becoming an increasingly important part of today's information highway. The reasons for wanting/needing a high speed internet connection vary between

societal and consumer goals. Societal goals are based around enhancing human capital, productivity and access to online services while consumer goals are based on convenience, access to communication, and access to entertainment. Although the goals of the consumer level are different than those at the societal level, they do correlate in that as consumer's goals are met, societal goals will follow suit. Users will find value in broadband only if it allows them to do things that are important to them.

The cycle of upgrades is one way to exemplify how consumer level goals can affect society's goals. Although the exact cause is unclear, there has been evidence to suggest that broadband developments support commercial interests and provide increased efficiency in services delivered with broadband. As consumers learn more about computers and the internet, they are able to find more uses for them (i.e. News sources, entertainment, work, etc.). As the consumer's interest in computers increases, so does the need to upgrade hardware to support the influx of software and internet applications. These can be made through actual computer upgrades or through the purchase of faster internet connections.

Because of society's substantial interest in increasing the use of broadband, it is important to create demand at the individual level. Before demand for a product can be created, the importance and relevance to the consumer must first be established. The Computer Commuter project takes people that have little knowledge of computers, and provides them with lessons on how to use them as well as teaching them about the areas of their lives that can be improved by computers (communication, entertainment, media, and e-services such as paying bills online). In providing the community with the Computer Commuter project, we are giving consumers at the individual level a chance to learn about, and find their own preferences and needs for a

broadband connection. This in turn will fuel the need for better hardware to handle the higher speeds and help start a cycle of upgrades.

The benefits of broadband vary depending on which level we look at. Although broadband can be further broken down, for simplicity we will view it from a National/State level, a local level, and a consumer/individual level. Because state interests are similarly aligned with national interests regarding broadband, they have been tied together. At the state level, there is a shared belief that broadband allows citizens to participate in the knowledge economy. The benefits of this economy are improved job training, more employment options, a better quality of life and it allows for lifelong learning.

In 2000, the Kentucky Innovation Act was passed with the goal of consulting organizations to help advance technology. In 2002, ConnectKentucky was created with the purpose of helping to incite technological innovations in the state. The result of the effort was an increase in job growth in the IT sector of Kentucky compared to the rest of the U.S. The success of the program also laid a foundation for national legislation known as the Broadband Data Improvement Act which was modeled after ConnectKentucky.

The local/consumer level goals are similar to state goals in which increased productivity and efficiency are of primary concern. Broadband benefits businesses by offering online training, the ability to work from home, and provides a fast medium for finding resources; furthermore, a 2010 study conducted by Davin Reed and Jed Kolko concluded that there is a positive correlation between broadband expansion and economic growth<sup>1</sup>

While it is important for broadband to expand in the business sector, it is equally important for the individual level because consumers provide a driving force for technology

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/r\\_110jkr.PDF](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/r_110jkr.PDF)

upgrades. Before a consumer is willing to purchase broadband, they must first find reason to use it. The Computer Commuter project provides opportunity for community members to learn about computers in a non-threatening environment. The more computer literate a community is, the more likely they will see benefits from the cycle of upgrades that follow (purchasing faster connection speeds, needing hardware to handle the speed, and the installation and upkeep processes that follow).

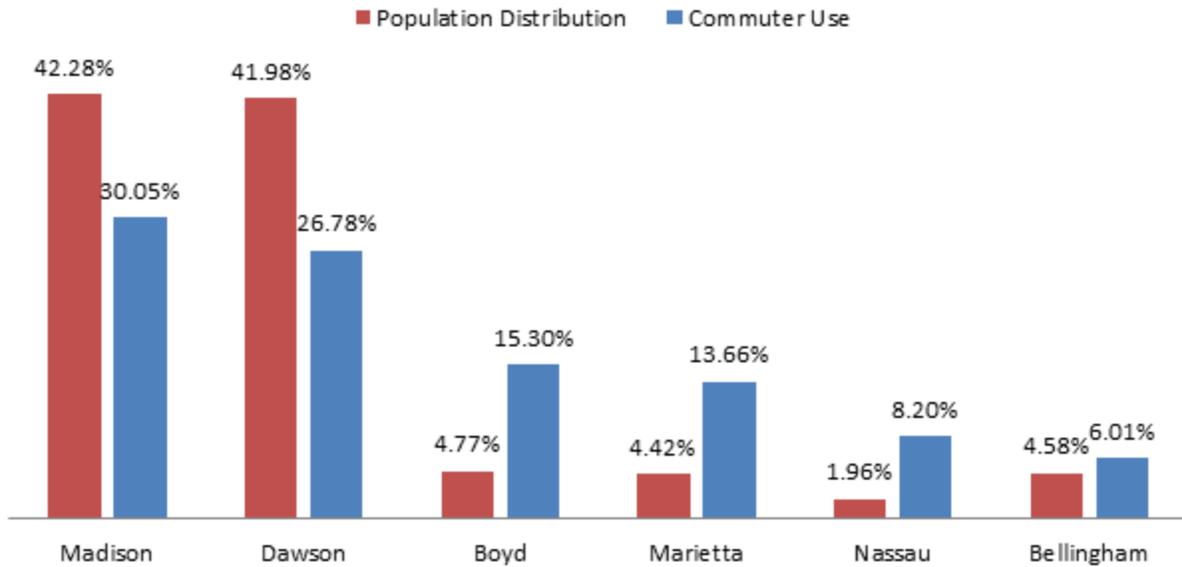
### *III. Computer Commuter Users and Nonusers*

The function of this section is to create a “user profile” of people who currently use the Computer Commuter, and more concretely establish the project’s target market. The data used in this section comes from the sign-in sheet<sup>2</sup> and new user registration forms provided by the Lac Qui Parle EDA. There are several users registered from outside of Lac Qui Parle County, however, this analysis will focus on cities within Lac Qui Parle where the Computer Commuter stops (Madison, Dawson, Boyd, Marietta, Nassau, and Bellingham).

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<sup>2</sup> Data derived from one week sample

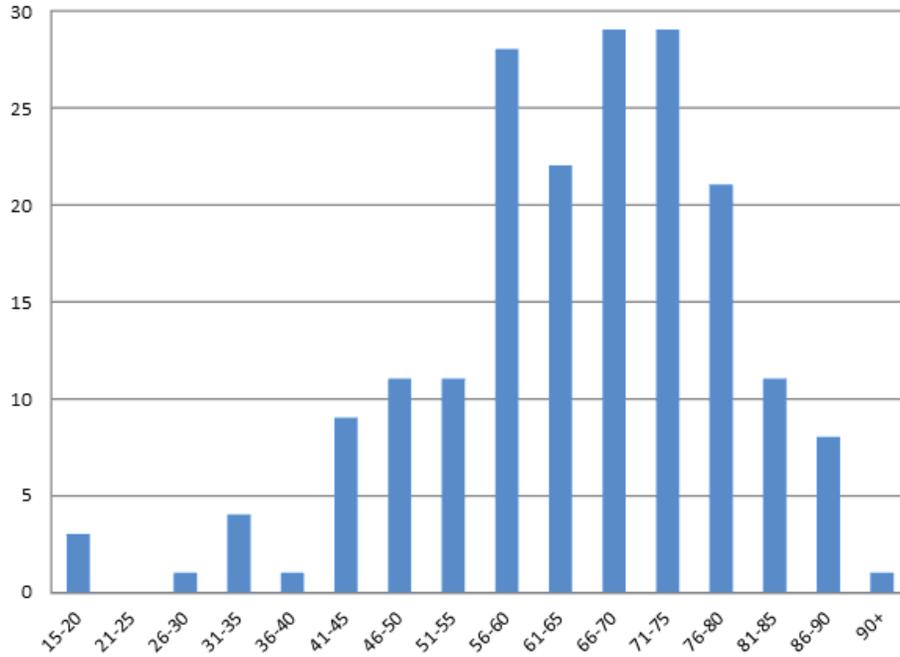
## Population vs Commuter Use



In terms of geography, the majority of users are from Madison and Dawson, the two most populous cities in the county. What is significant is the difference between the distribution of population between the cities served and the distribution of use. While Madison and Dawson contain 84% of the population of the served cities, they account for only 56% of Computer Commuter use, and 52% of registered users. The higher usage rate in the smaller communities is likely due to the mobile nature of the Computer Commuter.

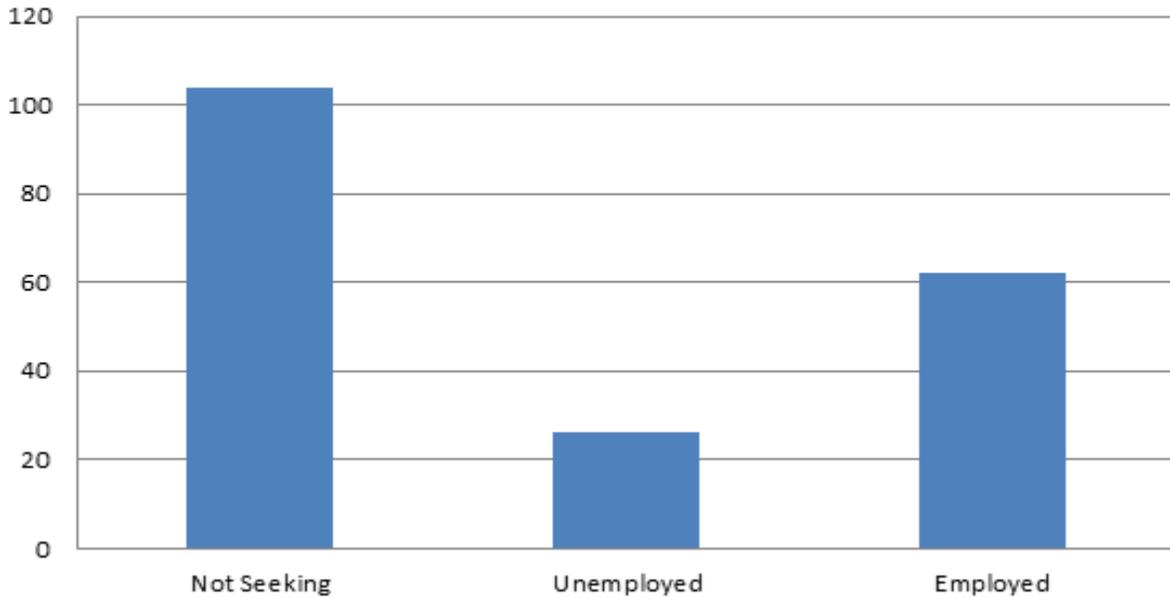
Demographic data taken from the new user registration forms show that the Computer Commuter has a very specific user group. There are exactly twice as many females, which is a trend that should be investigated. Over half of users are over 65 versus 23% of Lac Qui Parle residents, which helps to explain why 54% of users are not seeking employment.

### Users by Age

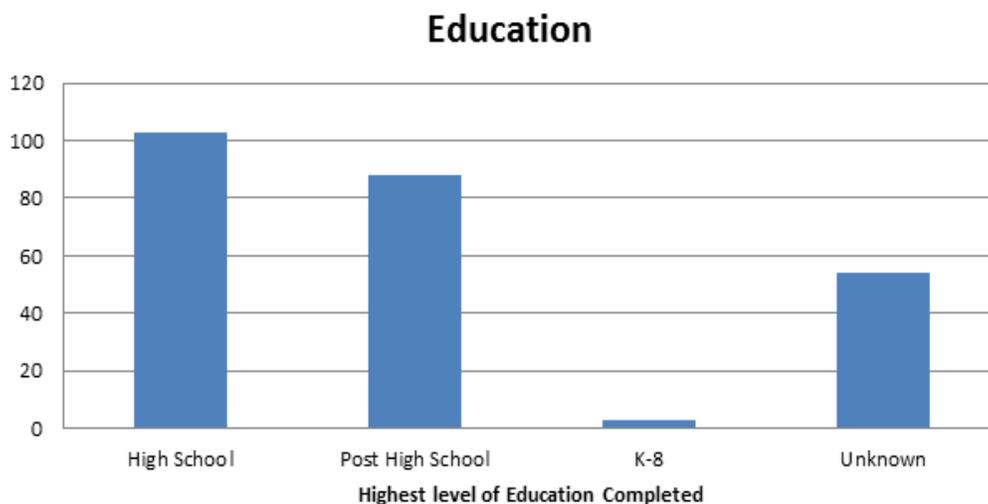


32% of users are employed, but 13.5% are unemployed, which is far greater than the 3.5-4.4% that the county’s historical unemployment rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

### User Employment Status



As both seniors and the unemployed are a part of the “digital divide,” the prevalence of these groups is encouraging. 42% of users have achieved a high school education, and 35% have had post-secondary education. Because of the different forms, it is not clear how many users have high school or post-secondary diplomas. Only 1% (3) users are in K-8 education, which is in line with the age distribution. Problematically, nearly 22% of users did not fill out their education level, which makes analysis of education levels difficult<sup>3</sup>.



Users are also overwhelmingly (98%) white, which closely mirrors the demographics of the county.

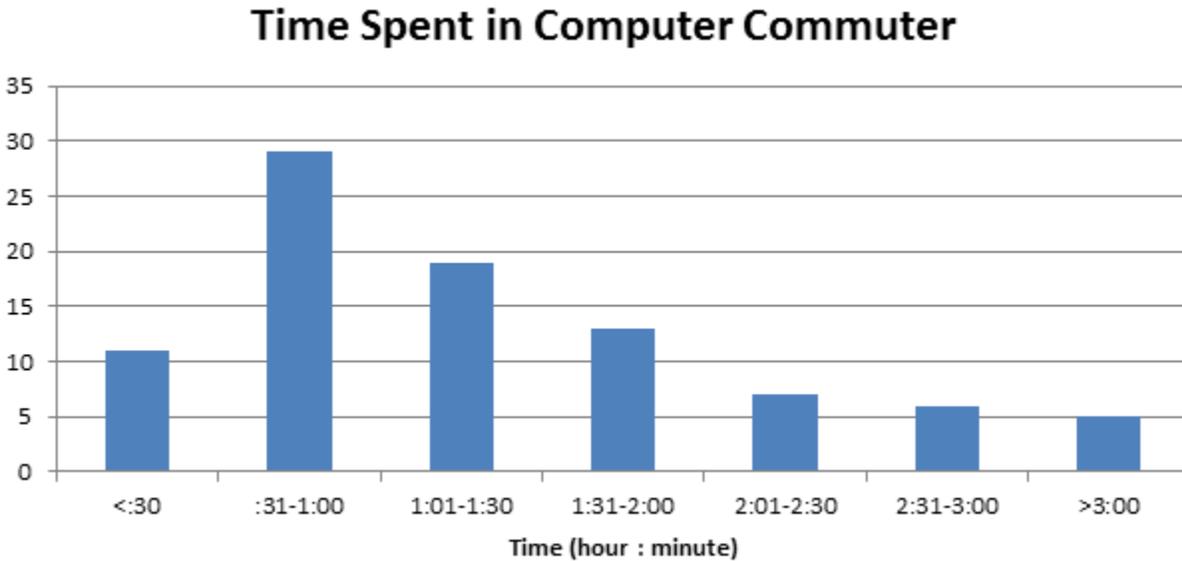
Only 11% of Computer Commuter use is by someone with their own device, which is a good indicator that providing devices is a key element of the program. Another key element is

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<sup>3</sup> Education level is gathered from three different forms, all three ask for last grade completed.

- Form 1 is broken down by: None, K-8, High School, College
- Form 2 is broken down by: None, K-8, 9, 10, 11, 12/GED, Post High School
- Form 3 is broken down by: none, grade 1-5, grade 6-8, 9-12 no diploma, HS diploma, GED, some college no degree, college/professional degree, unknown

users' ability to stay for extended sessions (lasting close to an hour and a half on average) 25% of users stay for sessions longer than two hours.

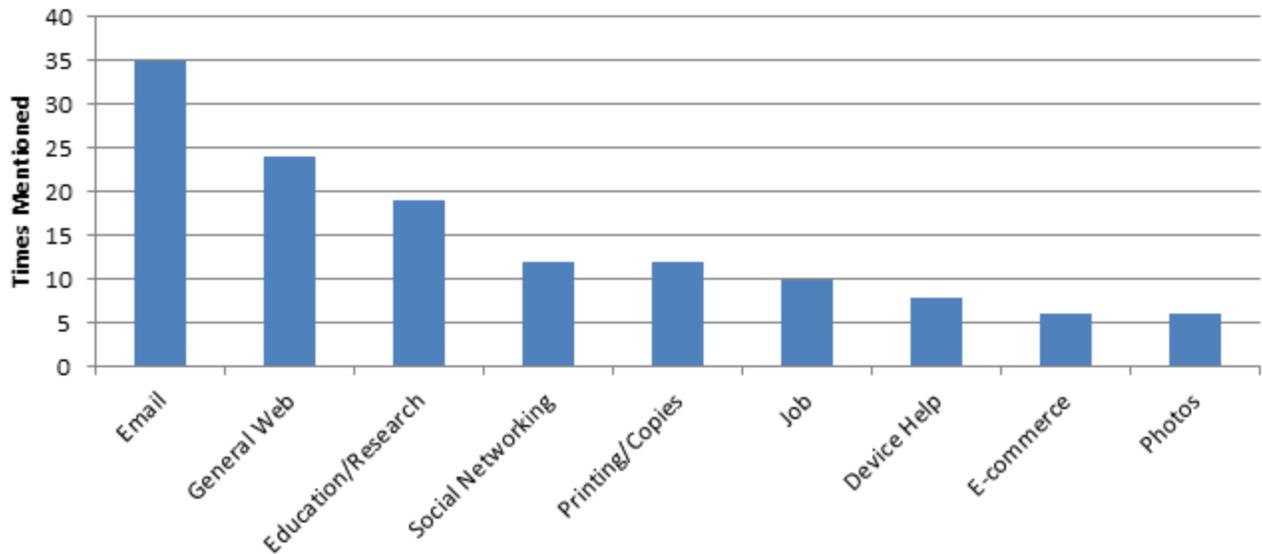


The most common activity done at the Computer Commuter is email, followed by general web use. Learning is the third most common activity, which is largely due to inexperienced computer users. While communication appears to be the top priority of Computer Commuter users, usage is still incredibly varied--making the open-ended style arguably the best method<sup>4</sup>.

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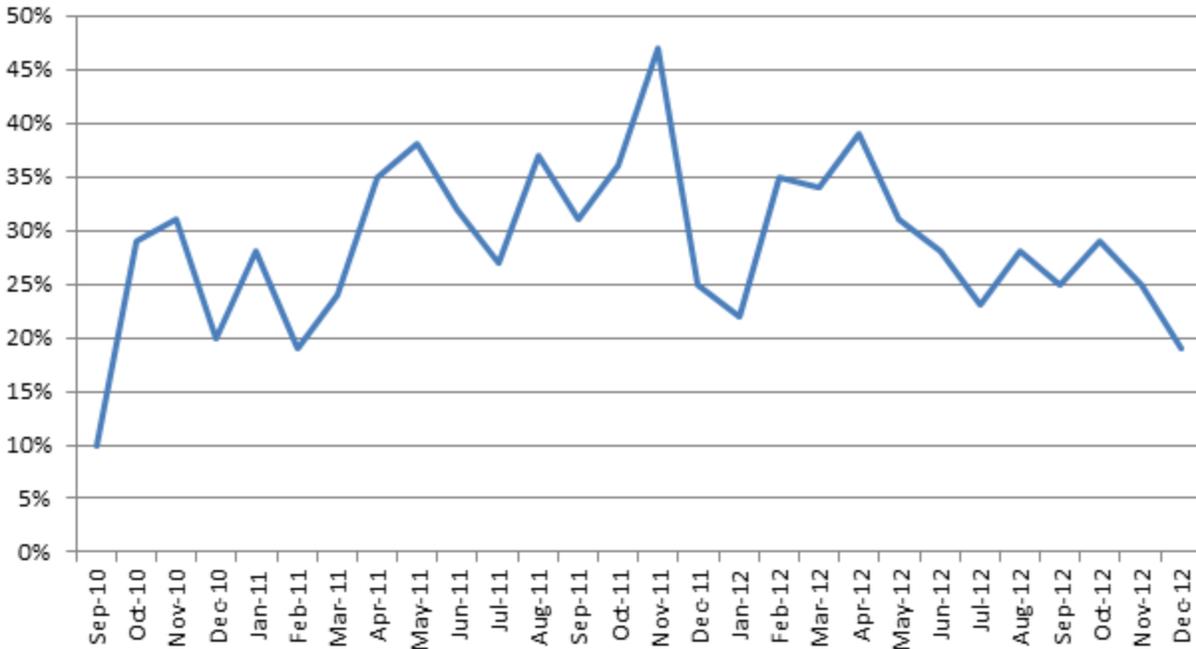
<sup>4</sup> Users self-report what they are using the Computer Commuter for on the sign-in sheet

## Uses



The data from The TDF Foundation on the percent of time that workstations are active highlights an issue for the Computer Commuter: there is no growth. The average time a workstation is in use hovers around 30% with a great deal of fluctuation, but no significant trend up or down.

## Monthly Active Use



This metric is not the best way to evaluate a mobile lab, however. Because the lab has to drive to where it is needed, it will be unusable for a good portion of the day no matter how many users there are. With that said, a way to increase active use of the Computer Commuter would be to expand the days and hours it operates. Whether that is possible in terms of cost and interest should be considered before taking this action.

One group that is mentioned as part of the digital divide is the low-income population, which is a group mentioned on previous grant applications. As of this writing, there is no way to determine if the Computer Commuter has been successful at serving this group because users are not asked about income. While a vague sense can be extrapolated from employment status, it would be a question worth asking new users in the future.

With all of this in mind, we can create an image of the “typical” Computer Commuter user. The typical user is female, white, over 65 and retired. They have earned a high school diploma, and may have attended some college as well. Generally, the typical user either does not

own a computer, or feels more comfortable using the computers provided. Communication—either via email or social networking—is a top priority of the typical user, though recreational web browsing and learning are also priorities. The typical user will use the Computer Commuter between a half hour and two hours. They most likely discovered the Computer Commuter from advertising on the TV, radio or newspaper and not from other users, which would indicate that the typical user does not recruit others to join them.

In addition to a current user profile it is also helpful to create a potential user profile of Lac Qui Parle residents. In 2012 there was a survey done on technology in Lac Qui Parle<sup>5</sup> and found that 60% of respondents own a computer, and of those 82% have internet access. Of the people that don't own a computer, half stated that they do not need one and 25% do not know how to use one<sup>6</sup>. With this in mind, the Computer Commuter should be more focused on convincing county residents of the value of a computer in general and less on the value of the internet for current computer owners, because a large majority of computer users have internet access. With this in mind, promotions for the Computer Commuter in the future should be focused on convincing users that there is a use for technology in their lives, as well as an emphasis on the open-ended and low pressure environment for learning that is offered. It would be helpful for the EDA to canvass communities and determine more specifically which people are not using the Computer Commuter and why. Further analysis of area broadband and technology usage is available from the University of Minnesota-Crookston.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Survey performed by the University of Minnesota-Crookston on behalf of the Blandin Foundation, data obtained from University of Minnesota-Morris professor Engin Sungur

<sup>6</sup>Data gathered from the 47 responses of 536 contacted

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.edacenter.org/downloads/MIRC-Full-Final-Report.pdf>

#### *IV. Interview Findings*

The computer commuter project plays a prominent role in the lives of older aged residents living in Lac qui Parle County. For purposes of this narrative we will assign pseudonyms (user 1-8) to maintain anonymity. We interviewed 8 people (4 males, 4 females) and all but one were over age 65.

Our interviews indicate a digital divide for older residents of the community. One recurring theme (and possible explanation) we encountered was the inability of low-income residents to afford computers or high-speed internet. User 2 stated, "If we want to use the internet at all, the only cost effective way to do it is to come up here on Tuesday on Computer Commuter and use the Computer for four hours." Another user (1) also concurred, "I still need a lot of help with doing certain things on the computer and the availability of the internet [on the Computer Commuter] is good for my community because we have a lot of people that are low income and cannot afford it." Our 4th user stated that while they could afford the internet, their lack of interest in social networking and e-mail makes it not worth the money.

Another key factor affecting older generations is the concept of fear. Many of the community members grew up without computers or with very little use of them. Lack of knowledge is a large contributor to uncomfortable feelings when trying to learn in a classroom setting as pointed out by User 1, "These classroom things, they show the whole group and everyone is at a different place so half of the things you don't understand what they are doing." User 4 also voiced this same concern, "Sometimes you feel like you want to ask something but are afraid everyone will laugh so you don't ask." User 6 commented, "As adults we think that we don't want to show our ignorance."

The Computer Commuter bus provides a safe and non-threatening learning environment for people who share these concerns as expressed by User 7, “when you come it’s not intimidating. And if you do make a mistake she can help...or get you out of it.” User 4 also agreed with this assessment and commented on how helpful Mary is, “There is an interchange between you and Mary, the teacher, which you would not necessarily have in a classroom setting....” The users all expressed their gratitude in Mary’s knowledge and ability to work with them. User 4 went as far as to say, “She gives me the confidence to keep trying and learning more stuff.” For these users, the ability to learn in a non-threatening environment and have one-on-one time with an instructor is paramount to their ability to use and learn about computers.

A recurring theme amongst Computer Commuter users is that the program has helped them with organization and productivity. The most obvious example is using it for jobs. User 1 says, “I’ve watched the want ads, you’ve got to know how to do those program-Excel, Word and other Microsoft programs or you need not apply.” In fact, user 3 “had to learn how to run a computer to look for jobs, that’s why [he] came to the bus.” User 3 appears to have been the only one looking for a job, the rest of the interviewees were retired. They still found that their productivity and organization had been impacted in other ways, though. Most of the interviewees stated that they use the internet for banking, shopping or both. User 1 says, “I have ordered things online. I didn’t think I would ever do that, but I do, and I use it alot when I’m shopping for things. Every day I check my bank online, I love that!” User 6 claims that “We communicate more on our computer than we do on our phone for business and stuff” and that “...people my age, if they haven’t discovered [the internet] yet they need to...There’s too much banking that has to be done. Social Security checks are automatically put in the bank now.” User

2 even goes as far as to say “The internet is like lifeblood now. This is how we do business, this is a necessity. People think it’s a luxury. It’s not.”

Just as the data section noted, a priority for Computer Commuter users is communication. Nearly every user talked about staying in touch with friends and relatives, either via Facebook or email. User 6 says that the computer is her primary method of communication, “I communicate back-and-forth on it. I don’t pick up the phone and call.” In fact, many users feel that they would not hear from younger relatives outside of email or social networks. As User 7 puts it, “If I didn’t do the Facebook, my nieces and nephews, I’d never hear from them. They’re not going to talk...even though I can send them something and say, ‘it’s paid, just call me’ they don’t do it. Or they don’t write letters, but they email and they’re on Facebook.” User 2 uses it to stay in touch with her son, “My son travels all over the world and if I want to know what he is doing I have to look [online].” User 5 uses the Computer Commuter for communication because of the instruction, saying, “The last computer I had, I had to learn how to use Skype. Well, my granddaughter comes over and says, ‘there’s nothing to it.’ After she left I couldn’t remember what to do.” The communication aspect is important for the users, as User 7 puts it, “A lot of the older people come in because their grandchildren...aren’t going to send them letters, but if they get that email they read it and its immediate. That part is really essential for these communities.” Even something as simple as having access to a computer can help with the generational gap and make older users feel more connected to their younger relatives, and the world in general. User 9, when asked what motivated her to learn more said, “Just because that’s all you hear about these days. Every one of my children, grandchildren use [computers] and I’d kind of like to see what they’re doing.”

To sum up,

Major Themes:

- Helping users with organization and productivity
- Helping users communicate with friends and relatives
- Providing access to better/any equipment
- Allows users to overcome fear

Minor Themes:

- Users enjoy convenient access
- Instructor patience helps users feel comfortable
- Libraries and community ed do not provide exactly what the users are looking for

#### *V. Ideas for the Future*

For the Computer Commuter to continue to be a valuable resource to Lac Qui Parle residents, it would be beneficial for it to expand. The first and foremost goal of these expansion possibilities is that the regular Computer Commuter program continues to be free and open to the public on a regular basis. The following ideas will allow the Computer Commuter options for both expanded funding and an expanded user base.

These ideas were gathered via phone interviews and email exchanges with other mobile computer lab models. Using the contact information on the systems' websites they were interviewed on how their models operate in an attempt to gain ideas for the Computer Commuter. As none of the systems contacted operate in Minnesota, the systems contacted are not in competition with the Computer Commuter and thus were more able to share information.

#### **Partnerships**

## School District

The Plano Independent School District from Plano, Texas, operate a bus called the Mobile Learning Lab as part of the district's community education program. Because the bus was purchased and funded with Federal Title 1 grants, it is currently only available to Title 1 eligible schools. The bus is being used to provide computer lessons to parents of elementary school students in Title 1 schools. Because of the wide range of skills, the classes on the bus are open-ended with instructor help. In addition to standard beginner classes, they also offer classes in Parent Portal (the district online services), and Rosetta Stone language software. As of this writing they are two years into a three year evaluation process, but there are marked increases in student attendance, grades and parent involvement in participating schools. Additionally, there are several mobile career centers that partner with high schools to help with college fairs and assist students in filling out college applications.

If Lac Qui Parle Valley Independent School District is in need of a similar service, there is an opportunity for the Computer Commuter to receive funding from educational grants. This would also provide a new source of users to ensure the bus is used as much as possible. Because it was not purchased with education funding, it may not be pinned to schools and therefore still be able to continue normal operations. Another--more limited--use for the Computer Commuter is to make it available to the high school for a college fair and/or a class on filling out online applications. To follow up on this opportunity, contact the school district.

## Libraries

There are several mobile computer labs across the country owned by library systems and operated as extensions of the bookmobile program. The systems who have adopted this approach are primarily rural libraries with a high level of interest in their computer

classes. Much like the Computer Commuter, these programs target individuals who feel uncomfortable in a large class setting and often feel either ashamed at their lack of knowledge, or worried that their lack of knowledge would slow a class down. A library partnership would also open up additional resources for the bus, such as e-book and online database access.

One idea from the W.O.W. (Web on Wheels) Bus from Missoula, Montana is to deliver reserved library materials on the bus. The W.O.W. Bus is a part of the Missoula County Library and can deliver reserved books to the communities they stop in, as well as pick up materials that are due. In addition, they plan on using shelving in the bus to house library books that would be available for checkout. The approach is useful for rural communities where library access is much lower than in a more populous area. For Lac Qui Parle, this model could provide users in the smaller communities convenient access to the collections from the Madison and Dawson libraries. Books could be picked up and dropped off while the bus is in a city with a library. Additionally, the bus could be used to promote more specific computer classes at the libraries, which could increase attendance while keeping the Computer Commuter free for open-ended computer time.

On the funding side, a library partnership could open up an additional funding channel. There are funds available in Minnesota from the Legacy Amendment that are required to go towards libraries, as well as state and Federal education funding. To follow up on this idea, contact the Madison and Dawson libraries, as well as the Pioneerland library system (both Madison and Dawson libraries are members).

### Businesses

There are several routes a business partnership can take, the key will be to talk with business owners to gauge the feasibility of each. The first and easiest partnership idea is to see

which businesses would be willing to donate services or time. The Computer Commuter is already partnered with the two Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Lac Qui Parle, which has been fruitful. Generally, most small businesses do not have large cash reserves and are much more poised to offer non-monetary support. Along with this idea, the Computer Commuter could display a list of business partners, which would allow the businesses inexpensive publicity. The primary benefit of this idea is that it cuts down on overhead costs; additionally, it establishes connections with the business community which will be helpful in implementing further plans that involve local businesses.

An innovative idea for the Computer Commuter to try would be a partnership with electronics stores. Users could be given a card that is marked every time they use the Computer Commuter (modeled after other business' loyalty cards), after a certain number of uses they receive a discount on a computer or accessories. In addition to encouraging repeat users and providing the store with new customers, it can also help kickstart the cycle of upgrades and get more people using technology on a regular basis. The Computer Commuter can also be used to help users with the technology they purchase, which further encourages usage.

### Senior Centers

Since the population of users is primarily over 65, it may be worth finding senior centers to partner with. Going directly to senior centers would allow the less-mobile residents to learn about computers, especially the communication aspect. As the current user base is primarily focused on email and social networking, it would not require much of a change in program. In addition to providing opportunities for residents to communicate with friends and relatives, the Computer Commuter can also be used for e-services, such taxes. The W.O.W. Bus partnered with a senior center for online tax filing, which gives residents access to their returns faster than

if done by mail. For legal reasons, the Computer Commuter cannot help users with the actual forms, however, if the forms are filled out correctly before entering the bus, users can be given assistance filing them electronically. Because so many government benefits are being done electronically through direct deposit (most notably Social Security), advertising help in that area would likely seed interest.

### Workforce Center

Lac Qui Parle County currently has no Workforce Center, although one is available in Montevideo. This leaves the county very underserved in terms of job training, which provides an opportunity for the Computer Commuter. There are plenty of rural workforce training agencies that use mobile computer labs now, and have been shown to be both popular and effective. The Computer Commuter could be used Thursday through Sunday to host training sessions. Rather than pay for an EDA employee to get trained to give classes, the training sessions could be taught by a Workforce center employee, as is the case for the North Central Texas Mobile Workforce Unit. The Mobile Workforce Unit also does “rapid response” visits, where they go to businesses undergoing layoffs and provide assistance to the employees that are let go. Training is done on filing for unemployment benefits as well as searching for a job. To follow up on this opportunity, contact Minnesota Workforce Service Area 6.

### **Additional Classes**

#### Rural Entrepreneurship Classes

A possibility for the Computer Commuter is to offer classes more geared towards entrepreneurs. Classes could be offered to both current and prospective business owners, teaching them how to use technology with a specific focus on business. Classes can include

elements such as using Microsoft Office and email, as well as marketing using social networks. Classes on finding employees through social networks such as LinkedIn could also be helpful. Rural entrepreneurship funding is available through the US Department of Agriculture. Congressman Collin Peterson, the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee, and his staff would be worth contacting. Classes are also offered through the University of Minnesota Extension.

### Evening Classes

One way to expand the user base to younger people, especially ones with jobs or school, would be to offer evening classes. The Plano, TX Mobile Learning Lab has seen tremendous success with evening classes, and the Missoula, MT W.O.W. Bus has seen a great deal of interest in them (they are not being done due to the liability associated with driving in rural Montana at night). Because they take place outside of the standard workday, evening classes would be able to target business owners and employees, tying in with the rural entrepreneurship idea mentioned above. Interviewing local business owners, employees and other people who do not currently use the Computer Commuter would be the first step in determining the feasibility of this idea.

### New Device Help

One observation provided by the W.O.W. bus is that there is a large group of people after Christmas who need help with new devices (a dedicated post-Christmas event may also be worth trying). The Computer Commuter already has an iPad and a Kindle for teaching, so expanding further into new devices is very plausible. In order to promote the program, signs should be put up prominently in the areas the Computer Commuter stops to let people know that the Computer Commuter can help with their new devices. Another way to advertise help is to ask retailers if

they would give out information on the Computer Commuter with new device purchases-- especially if they are being purchased as gifts. To ensure that users are given the best help possible, it may be worth asking local businesses if the Computer Commuter staff could try display models of popular items. This way, users are much more likely to receive quality help. To follow up on this idea, contact local electronics stores, and possibly a printing company for the publicity materials.

### **Renting**

Any rentals should not interfere with the existing schedule, which still leaves Thursday through Sunday free for additional stops. Fees can also be charged to renters, which could provide a source of revenue.

### **Surrounding Communities**

Because the bus is operated by the Lac Qui Parle EDA, any trips outside of the county should be funded by the host. The primary use for these trips would be to let other communities see the Computer Commuter and decide if it is an idea worth trying, and to provide guidance to communities that decide to take up the idea. Because staffing is the largest expense associated with the Computer Commuter, having interested communities provide staff (and gas) if they wish to run a program would help keep costs low. Due to the risks involved, a liability fee would have to be charged. To follow up on this idea, talk to local governments outside Lac Qui Parle to gauge interest and determine a fair pricing structure.

## Businesses and Nonprofits

As of this writing, there are no computer training classes offered anywhere near Lac Qui Parle, so any business interested in training its employees would need to pay for an instructor to drive out or send employees to a classroom out of county. The primary function of the training would be to get employees (and volunteers) trained with technology that increases productivity. Additionally, time can be spent teaching businesses how to establish a web presence, at the very least on social networks. The Computer Commuter can also serve as limited IT for businesses they help train, which could make them more comfortable with implementing technology. In order for the idea to take off, business owners should first be made aware of the benefits of technology. An outreach effort should definitely be the first step in implementing this idea.

## **Additional Services**

### On-Bus Notary

The idea was presented by the W.O.W. Bus. Having a notary on the bus would make it much more appealing for users looking to fill out official documents. The bus could then be billed as a “one stop shop” for e-services, which could increase patronage. To follow up on this step, the Minnesota Secretary of State website has an official notary application.

### Passports

The equipment to implement this idea is very inexpensive, and it would provide another draw for people who otherwise would not use the Computer Commuter. If any schools, businesses or nonprofits have trips abroad, allowing them to book the Computer Commuter

would provide publicity and offer a valuable service. A fee may be levied for taking the photos. A guide to passport photos is available at the State Department website.

## **Other Ideas**

### County Funding

In order to ensure the long-term survival of the Computer Commuter, it may be necessary to hold a referendum on funding the Computer Commuter. Before proposing a referendum, it is important to make people aware of the program's existence and gain widespread support. Grant funding options should be exhausted before this option is tried.

### Permanent Signage

In order to get the attention of as many people as possible, ask the places where the bus parks if a permanent sign can be placed where the bus parks with a brief description of what is offered and when it is parked there. There may be a business willing to do the signs for free or at a reduced rate, which would make this a much more attractive option. Each sign should have a phone number, a note that it is free and that computers are provided.

### Mobile Lab Expo

A mobile lab expo is easily the most ambitious project idea; however it does have great potential. Most systems contacted prior to this writing were unaware of how many mobile labs there are and how varied the models are. Many of these labs sprang up around 2010 using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (stimulus) funds from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program. As such, the majority of models are roughly the same age as the Computer Commuter and are likely in the same position. Gathering systems together in one

place could establish lines of communication between various models, which can act as a support network. A tangential benefit would be to raise the profile of mobile labs, and the increased visibility may make more funding opportunities available. The expo can also target both public and private organizations who are considering starting a mobile lab and provide guidance.

The largest problem with an expo is gathering all of the different systems in one place. Since they can serve a large area, mobile labs tend to be widely dispersed—there may only be one or two per state. Because of this dispersion, finding a central location would be extremely problematic, especially one that could house all of the buses. A more feasible option may be a teleconference, since most of the labs are set up for them. While this is not a perfect substitute for a conference, it would still allow for other systems to see what is out there and gain ideas.

For a mobile expo to work it should be hosted by an organization with enough clout to attract as many models as possible, and the resources to make it happen. The TDF Foundation would be a good place to start, even if they decide not to follow up on the idea they may know of other organizations that might be willing. This is a very ambitious and long-term idea, but there is interest in networking from mobile labs across the country.

## *VI. Conclusion*

Increasing the number of citizens using broadband internet speed is beneficial to a country's information highway. The World Summit on the Information Society has recognized the importance of an information highway and the ability to share knowledge and participate as a factor in a country's economic prosperity. Broadband provides a wide range of benefits ranging from an institutional level to the consumer level. It also allows for people to shop, communicate and learn from the convenience of home; furthermore, as fiber optics are continually developed the speed at which this can be done will increase.

The Computer Commuter bus provides opportunity for underprivileged or those with lesser computer knowledge to join the information highway and become part of the broadband community. Many people who are stuck in the digital divide benefit from the ability to learn at their own pace and in a non-hostile environment. To increase demand for high-speed internet options consumers must be able to recognize personal benefits. Increasing computer literacy skills as well as providing examples of how broadband can make life more convenient are what the Computer Commuter project aims to do. By increasing computer literacy at the consumer/individual level, we hope to help start the chain of events that leads to a cycle of upgrades and improved economic efficiency in the Lac Qui Parle County.

User 1:

**Zak: What is your experience with computer commuter and computers like?**

User 1: “What I like about computer commuter. It comes to my town every Monday afternoon, I had a computer at work, I was a postmaster but there, all the programs were already on there... you really didn’t do real life stuff that you’re gonna use every day. I’ve had a computer for about 2 years so I still have a lot of questions when I do something and its nice when I go down and ask the question and do the project and then go home and know that if you didn’t get the whole thing or it didn’t work out for you, next Monday afternoon she’ll be back and help me again because there are many things I didn’t know how to do... she showed me how to use my SD card for pictures...”

User 1: “When you’re in a classroom with 20 other people it’s helpful but it’s not the same as getting one on one on something that’s important to you.”

User 1: “These classroom things, they show the whole group and everyone is at a different place so half of the things you don’t understand what they are doing.”

**Zak: What brings you to the Computer Commuter?**

User 1: “The internet is much faster on the computer bus so that if you want to watch something it keeps going where at my house I could spend more money but it isn’t reasonable for me to put higher speed in. Some people in my community don’t have internet because it is expensive and so those people that come down to the computer lab are coming to use the internet to apply for jobs or do some school work or submit forms. If you’re applying for anything you have to use a computer these days. I’m a city clerk so have to send in financial to the state. All the things I have learned have come from the local bus.”

User 1: “There is a real need for help with computers, especially for older people because they haven’t had the opportunity in the workplace to learn somewhat to not be afraid of it because you can lose a lot of information if you do the wrong thing or delete the wrong thing. They are scared of it, they don’t want to ruin something and with the help some of the people have been given they have the confidence to ask questions.”

User 1: “With older people getting to know how to do Facebook and stuff its given them something to do every day... especially if they love alone, it keeps them in contact. They wouldn’t even have a computer without exposure and help from the computer commuter; I hope it keeps coming for a while because I still have some questions.”

**Zak: What was knowledge of pcs before CC?**

User 1: “Basically it was programs that were already on the computer... You were too busy to do certain things and you weren’t really supposed to go off of their stuff.”

User 1: “I learned more just going one on one. I had taken quite a few community ed classes on computers... that was helpful but its more helpful to have one on one. I have my own computer at home now... when I have a question I can go down there and do it there when she is there that

afternoon and she is good about saying okay now you do it, show me how you did this. Then I'll go home and if I didn't grasp it all, then I go back and that is helpful because when someone is by, you can ask questions and you think you know what you're doing. But then when you're doing it at home all alone, its different. She gives me the confidence to keep trying and learning more stuff."

User 1: "If she wouldn't know something when you ask a question, she will get it by next week, and she can show us on your cell phone, the iPhone or pad, I've taken my digital camera there. It helps me because that's the technology everything is coming out in and a lot of people can't do anything with it, they have a hard time using their cell phone. I was there before, I didn't know how to do anything, I am really thrilled I've had this opportunity. I talked to people who don't have it in their community and this is just a Godsend. You can go to the library and use their computers but you can't interrupt the librarian all the time... I don't feel I should ask the librarian for a lot of help because she's got other people and she's supposed to be checking out books and stuff and not teaching me."

**Zak: Most frustrating thing about learning computers**

User 1: "I guess finding certain things. How to get to certain websites, sometimes I think I become impatient but it's gotten much better. Sometimes you get to a screen and you don't know where to click or how to get it going. That individual help is wonderful because otherwise you're just sitting at home trying to say I wonder why this doesn't work. [this way] you can write down questions and bring them. One time people couldn't send me stuff, they called and said your mailbox is full but I deleted everything... but I didn't take the trash and purge it... nobody had ever told me, I was frustrated because I deleted everything and you can't send me anything."

**Zak: What motivated you to learn?**

User 1: "When my grandkids came and they were doing everything on it. They could do anything and I thought I can't just sit here and watch them while they say, "grandma, don't you know how to do anything?" I'm still that one on some of their stuff."

User 1: "You can't do anything these days unless you know how to respond by computer or a form of it."

User 1: "People are finding out they want to know how to use this stuff because they bought it but can't do anything with it."

User 1: "When you work someplace I've watched the want ads, you've got to know how to do those programs, excel, word and other Microsoft programs or you need not apply."

**Zak: Have you purchased any more electronics after CC?**

User 1: "I did purchase a different phone and I did by my grandchildren things."

**Zak: Has the bus affected how you communicate with family and friends?**

User 1: "I use email and Facebook. That's a beautiful thing for older people... people today put their pictures and everything on there, like I saw my friends pictures from Easter and they wouldn't normally have sent me a picture. You get to see families and what events are in their life and you feel a part of it because if someone has a wedding, you can see their pictures, somebody has a new baby, you see that. And for the older person who has time to watch and

aren't involved... I can see someone 85 they want to know how to use a computer too because that's important and they can learn some of those simple things, they aren't going to maybe do big things but it gives them the confidence to go on and do this kind of stuff."

**Zak: Are there things you do online that you didn't before?**

User 1: I have ordered things online... I didn't think I would ever do that but I do and I use it alot when I'm shopping for things. Every day I check my bank online. I love that! It's just the most awesome thing, you can tell how long it takes for your payments to clear the bank and that's a wonderful thing.

**Zak: Any closing comments?**

User 1: "For me, I still need a lot of help with doing certain things on the computer and the availability of the internet is good for my community because we have a lot of people that are low income and cannot afford it. A lot of people in the town have computers at home but not the internet. One of the guys this winter bought something that didn't come with a manual. He had to look it up on the internet and he would come over and look up things all the time. Some others don't have internet at home and come there to do genealogy."

User 1: "This gives me a place to go locally for 4 hours to use the computer, for a rural area this is a Godsend."

User 1: "I know there are still people out there who haven't built the courage to come in yet. I have gotten a few [friends] to come."

User 1: "I like learning it the way I'm learning it: slowly. [Mary] gives me confidence because I can write down [questions] and go back when it doesn't set in."

User 2:

User 2: "First let me tell you a prime need that you have, we are from a town where you can get internet for 20 bucks a month. It is 50 bucks a month out here. Dish is 25 bucks."

User 2: "So for some of us if we want to use the internet at all, the only cost effective way to do it is to come up here on Tuesday on computer commuter and use the computer for four hours because the library lets us use it for an hour, up in the cities, its two hours. Most of us people have children in other states or other parts of the state that we don't see all the time and one of the main things we do is go on Facebook to keep in touch with our kids."

User 2: "The internet is like life blood now ... this is how we do business, this is a necessity. People think it is a luxury, it's not."

User 2: "Because of the location where we live, the internet is not easily accessible to everyone."

User 2: "The internet can change a person... we're so isolated here geographically..."

User 2: "Without the internet, we are cut off from civilization."

**Zak: What was your knowledge of computers before CC?**

User 2: “I had a regular, normal, marginal amount of hands on computer experience but I didn’t have the expertise.”

User 2: “I was paying people that had secretarial skills to put everything in computer format [from typewriter].”

User 2: “I am a regular bus user.”

**Zak: What do you find most frustrating in regards to computers?**

User 2: “Almost all libraries have time limits of one to two hours.”

**Zak: How has computer commuter changed how you use computers and internet**

User 2: “Its forced me to realize it’s a necessity... it took my narrow band of life and just blew it out. Networking is essential. Eventually I will have to get a lap top I have to get the internet.”

**Zak: What have motivated you the most to learn about computer skills?**

User 2: “My son travels all over the world and if I want to know what he is doing I have to look [online].“

**Zak: Have you purchased any electronics?**

User 2: “I have purchased a cell phone with the mobile web on it now.”

**Zak: Most beneficial thing now learned**

User 2: “One of the things I enjoy the most is making pictures.”

**Zak: Most difficult thing to learn**

User 2: Secretarial things because they change and just when you learn how to do things they change. (paraphrase)

**Zak: How effective is the bus setting as opposed to classroom?**

User 2: “In a small town it’s hard to get a lot of people. This is nice because you can ask her as it comes up.”

User 2: “I do recommend this to people... 9 times out of ten [Mary} does know more than I do.”

**Zak: Are there any closing remarks you would like to make?**

User 2: “I am a self-employed disabled person living in the middle of nowhere, and it's not just for family networking... this is a lifeline, for me to not be able to afford the 50 dollars a month but then not only to not have access, but I don’t have the skills. It is a lifeline of network support. There is another guy in there using it for job hunting. It would really be hurting a lot of us if the bus was no more.”

User 3:

**What was your knowledge of computers before this program?**

User 3: “Never used one before.”

### **What do you use the computer for?**

User 3: "Finding Jobs"

User 3: "I had to learn how to run a computer to look for jobs that's why I come to the bus."

User 3: "I don't have a computer at home so this is the only one I use."

User 3: "The thing is Mary helps you quite a bit."

### **How effective is Mary?**

User 3: "She'll help out anyone who comes in there."

### **What would you tell the people who fund this?**

User 3: "Keep it going, there's a lot of educational stuff in there, people who don't have computers come in and check their email. If you do have a computer at home, you come in and Mary can figure it out for you."

User 4:

### **What was your knowledge of computers before CC?**

User 4: "zero, I didn't even know as much as my Great Grandchildren did. I was 86 years old so its difficult sometimes to learn."

User 4: "computation, at other times it didn't do what I wanted it to do, really it was very frustrating."

### **Do you prefer structured or unstructured open class offered by CC?**

User 4: "I would much prefer the setting we have with the bus, actually there has been a limited number whenever I've been on there. There is an interchange between you and Mary, the teacher, which you would not necessarily have in a classroom setting.... Sometimes you feel like you want to ask something but are afraid everyone will laugh so you don't ask."

### **How has your use of computers changed since CC?**

User 4: "My main thrust is in two places, one is the use of spreadsheets which I find helpful in investments, interest rates and so forth with the changing in the financial scene. since I've been retired now since 1984, so prior to the computer I used a typewriter which meant I would messed up the sheet completely I would have to retype the whole thing so the ability to add and subtract are invaluable. It was part of my income. The other one that is great for me is writing letters, 'cuz I still believe in letters I like to give letters, thank you notes and so forth, and so in writing letters it is easier to use a computer and a printer than a typewriter."

User 4: "I use e-mail when I have to, basically, I have to check for email here because I was on the internet and not particularly fond of either email or Facebook so I didn't think the return on investment which was running about 50 to 55 dollars a month was worth the service i was getting. I can still come check email either at the library or the bus which there again, the bus in really invaluable. I can also get on Facebook and see if there's a bunch of nonsense going on there. so I don't have to pay the 55 dollars."

**Have you made any electronic purchases after using the CC bus?**

User 4: “Yes, I purchased a new printer, a good quality printer, which wasn't cheap and i probably if i hadn't learned the information i got from the bus I would've really questioned whether i needed a new printer. the old one was pretty bad but this one ya know where you can print posters or change the font size on the thing and it prints up a nice poster in addition to letters and everything else, so the two of them together, I doubt like I say that I woulda bought the printer if i didn't have to bus to teach me how to use the computer.”

**What's the most beneficial part of CC.**

User 4: “I would say spreadsheets, yes, because my medications, my assets, my investments, all of those are on the spreadsheets.”

User 4 ”What was the most difficult thing to learn on the computer?

User 4: “The most difficult thing... well i really have a hard time answering because there were so many... if i picked out one it would probably be the use of calculations. I know for example, i've never used it but i know there is a calculator on the computer that you can call up but i never use it. Or another example. If you do a spreadsheet and have a series of CDs for example, you have different interest rates depending on when they were purchased and different amounts that you bought. Now if you want to figure out your average interest rate, on the computer you can set the thing up so it does it automatically. It took me awhile to get on to that. I don't need it that bad but it is a tremendous feature (regarding excel).”

User 5

**Why do you use the CC bus?**

User 5: “I use it mostly for email and internet and whatever I can't figure out Mary does it for me I don't have a computer and I come over here. I had a computer a couple times but now it is a waste of time because all you're doing after getting the information you need is playing solitaire.”

**What do you find most beneficial on the CC bus?**

User 5: “It's amazing to me what you can do with it, my grandchildren send me pictures. The last computer I had I had to learn how to use Skype... well my granddaughter come over and says, wilt, there's nothing to it. After she left I couldn't remember what to do.”

**How effectiveness is the CC staff?**

User 5: “I am impressed by her knowledge of computers; you can't faze her with a question.”

**What was your experience with computers before CC?**

User 5: “My grandchildren showed me pictures.”

**How has the CC affected you personally?**

User 5: “Well I get access to the internet. Today I am thinking about getting a DVR and I can come over here and look up a user manual so you know what you're getting before you buy it.”

User 6:

**Michael: So can you tell me what your knowledge and experience was with computers before the Computer Commuter?**

User 6: "Before I started? I had a little bit of knowledge. I guess I-back in the 1980s-I took a class at college, but at that time you were programming your own things. I mean, it was very different. You know what I mean. So then I've taken some at community ed., but the thing there is you get it all at once and you don't retain it. So I knew what computers could do, and we have them at home, but I just needed this one-on-one or to learn a few things each week. That's what's been so helpful."

**Michael: So then how often did you use it before this, if at all?**

User 6: "I've used it almost weekly-the Computer Commuter."

**Michael: Sorry, I mean before you came to the Computer Commuter, did you use computers at all?**

User 6: "Oh, computer at home? A little bit, but mainly I just didn't know too much about it."

**Michael: Did anyone else in your house use it?**

User 6: "Oh yeah, my husband is very proficient at it, so if I needed something done he could do it. I could send an email or something like that."

**Michael: What was the most frustrating or difficult thing you had to learn about computers?**

User 6: "What's the most difficult thing? When those boxes pop up and you don't know if you dare touch them or not, you know what I mean? And if you ex them you lose everything maybe. That's probably the scariest part of it is losing everything."

**Michael: Yes. How has the Computer Commuter changed how you use the internet and computers?**

User 6: "A lot. I tell you, I was just starting to work on genealogy and then the Computer Commuter came, and so at first I had learned how to do columns and things like that because that's how I wanted to set up my family thing. Well, then they got ancestry.com for a year, a subscription. So every week I would come and work almost the whole time on looking up things, my genealogy. And then I would go home and then I could put it in my own thing on my own computer, my own files. And that just progressed. As I needed help with, making files. That is very difficult for me, is moving files around yet. Because again, I'm afraid I'm going to lose them or do something with them. So that's kind of how I've progressed. I can do address labels. Right now that's what I'm doing is putting some new addresses and stuff in my thing. I've got over 150 I think in there now and it's so nice. I mean, you have an address book, but this is so much easier. I've just done such a variety of things, and right now when we don't have ancestry.com I come with a list of "this is what I would like to look up or do, or whatever." Things come up during the week and at home-I'm retired-so I'm doing so many things and it's much easier for me to just take it there and concentrate on it, no distractions."

**Michael: Makes sense. What motivated you to learn more about computers?**

User 6: “Well, I have two daughters and they kind of got started. I mean, the oldest one’s 40 so it was just starting in high school for them. They would email and say “why don’t you do this?” or I needed to make a document for something and I wanted to do a good job, you know what I mean? Things like that. Emailing, of course, I’m not into Facebook, but emailing, that’s good communication. We communicate more on our computer than we do on our phone for business and stuff.”

**Michael: Are there any services you do electronically now that you’d otherwise do face-to-face or over the phone?**

User 6: “Well, I guess that I just said that we-at our house-do more on it, because we check it continually. And I communicate back-and forth on it. I don’t pick up the phone and call. Now I know how to do attachments and that kind of stuff. And I can send an idea off to my friend, whereas before you had to stick it in the mail or get it copied. I’m not proficient at all, but like I said, I keep building on it.”

**Michael: Would you recommend the Computer Commuter to a friend?**

User 6: “I have, I have. And I’m disappointed when some of them don’t because they maybe have a grandchild or somebody at home so, what do they do? Well, I need this done, and then they do it, but what happens when they leave? That’s what happened to me. Sometimes I [would] call my daughter and say “walk me through this” before, now I can know that I’ll be here weekly. Otherwise I’d call my daughter and say “how do I do this?” or “how do I get this?” Now I’m starting on photos, being able to take a photo and work with it a little bit, put a text box on it. There’s so much, you know?”

**Michael: What was the most difficult thing for you to learn?**

User 6: “Most difficult? Transferring files. That is just...you know, they give you these options and It’s like “do I copy this? Do I move it too?” then it says that you’ve got more than one of these so what do you do? I don’t want to lose it. Yes. Files are still, I’m not real comfortable with that, moving stuff around.”

**Michael: So how effective do you think the staff at the Computer Commuter are at helping?**

User 6: “Mary?”

**Michael: Yeah**

User 6: “...gets an A+++++, I mean, she is the Computer Commuter. Without somebody like that, no. She is so patient, so-taking everybody right where they are-, and socially friendly. I can’t say enough about her. I call her Saint Mary, because if you’d see some of the people...you would understand. I mean, you get all levels, but it’s been fun watching some of the people share it at the same time I do come in there. From the beginning they didn’t know how to turn it on. Everybody’s scared of it, I mean it’s something to be scared of. And to see how they’ve progressed three years later or two years later. It’s amazing.”

**Michael: Do you feel the project should continue, and if so why?**

User 6: “Yeah, definitely it should continue. I happen to be on the advisory board, or I don’t know what it’s called, anyway. The numbers keep growing. It’s new people for different reasons.

It needs to, because people my age, if they haven't discovered it already they need to. It's just going to have to be. There's too much banking that has to be done, Social Security checks are automatically put in the bank now. If you want to look you can't go traipsing...you know. I live rurally, out in the country, so I'm not going to drive in every time I want to know if something came in or out, that's 12 miles so that I can check. So I think there's a definite need in these rural areas. Because like I say, I can go take a community ed, which is fine. Wonderful. There are good teachers there, but when you learn it all in a couple weeks or a couple hours you just don't master it. At least I don't. And that's not how kids are learning it either, they're learning it in preschool and they're not afraid of it like you are when you're an adult."

**Michael: Do you have any other comments, things I should know about the Computer Commuter? Things you want other people to know?**

User 6: "Don't be afraid. I think a lot of them are afraid. As adults we think that we don't want to show our ignorance. So what? I mean, hey! We weren't taught this. Our kids probably don't know their math facts as well as we do, because they're not mandatory, but they learn this. You see the change? It's just a different content of material. And so I would say "don't be afraid to come in", especially with Mary. I mean, she's so helpful and patient and she certainly doesn't think you're dumb. She just really admires you for coming in. I guess that's what I would say."

User 7:

**Michael: To start off can you tell me what your experience was with computers before using the Computer Commuter?**

User 7: "Before using the Computer Commuter I basically emailed (very little), even though I was a teacher. You know, you put your grades on, everything had to be there. Other than that Mary's helped organize me."

**Michael: So how often do you use it?**

User 7: "What's handy about it is-I live in Madison-if I can't make it on the Tuesday morning I can come here on Wednesday morning, or I've been in Marietta. So that's an afternoon. It's a very wide variety."

**Michael: Did you use the computer outside of school before the Computer Commuter?**

User 7: "No. I basically had to use it at school. I retired, and once I retired I became the district governor for Lions so now I have all this paperwork, and it's all online. The paperwork, I can do it, but then Mary helps to make sure it gets sent where it's supposed to go, and then I push the right button. Otherwise sometimes it doesn't go where it's supposed to go. Which really helps when I'm doing reports for 56 cities. And then I could send it and do the webmaster pages. I did a webinar with India, so it really helped knowing what to do."

**Michael: What did you find most frustrating or difficult about using a computer before you came here?**

User 7: "The hardest part for me was the wait. Because here it's faster than what I have at home. So here you go in and it just goes, where at home I'd have to wait and then I'd do something wrong and I didn't know how to undo it. So then it'd be gone. The younger people, they just do

it, and they're not afraid of if it's gone it's gone. Now me I'd type all this up and then it'd disappear somewhere or go off where it's not supposed to go."

**Michael: How has the Computer Commuter changed the way you use computers and the internet?**

User 7: "Well right now I actually use Facebook. I have some pictures on there that I'm going to start working with, and they help you tag them and do whatever you're supposed to do with it. Otherwise I really didn't know how to get it off my camera. I mean, I have all this stuff. I was in South Korea and a bunch of different countries and I wanted the pictures, and I didn't want to just leave them there, so it's helped that way. I feel much more comfortable."

**Michael: What motivated you to come and start learning?**

User 7: "Fear of failure. I'm doing all this for other people, service organizations, that's the Lions Club. I didn't want them to look dumb (well I didn't want to look dumb either), but it's one thing if I am, but if I'm getting those other people out there I want to make sure I'm doing it right."

**Michael: How has it affected the way you communicate?**

User 7: "Right now I do emails, probably 20-30 a day, I'm on Facebook. I don't Twitter or all that junk, I don't need it. But if I didn't do the Facebook, my nieces and nephews, I'd never hear from them. They're not going to talk."

**Michael: Not going to pick up the phone and call?**

User 7: "No, even though they get these paid things. Even though I can send them something and say, "it's paid, just call me" they don't do it. Or they don't write letters, but the email and they're on Facebook."

**Michael: Are there any services you do over the internet that you used to do in person or over the phone?**

User 7: "No, because when it comes time to pay the bills I write a check. I don't feel comfortable with that yet."

**Michael: Have you purchased any electronics since using the Computer Commuter or because of it?**

User 7: "No, we're thinking about it. We did get a scanner; because I use that quite a bit, but I still come here to make sure it gets done right and gets shipped to the right place. I'll do some things at home, and then I'll just email it to myself so that when I come here I can make sure it's sent to the right place. Even though by now I should know how to do it, but when you're going internationally you want to do it right."

**Michael: Would you recommend the Computer Commuter to a friend?**

User 7: "Oh definitely. My husband, he's not going to do it, but he did come. He's been to Dawson before and to Madison. There are a few other people that they've never used a computer before at all. They're afraid to even turn it on. But now a couple of them do come so that's good. And one other thing, here you can run some things off if you want to, and it's comfortable"

because when you come it's not intimidating. And if you do make a mistake she can help...or get you out of it."

**Michael: What's been the biggest challenge you've faced while using the Computer Commuter?**

User 7: "The biggest challenge for me was knowing what I needed to do, and sometimes I actually knew what I was supposed to do, but how do you go about doing it? Because all these forms would come in. Ok, you type all the stuff on it, then it doesn't save a lot of the things that I do. So then you've got to copy and do all this kind of stuff and then scan it or ship it. Basically I learned how to do that. Which sounds simple, but..."

**Michael: How effective do you think the staff-so Mary and any helpers-how effective do you think they are?**

User 7: "Oh, very. The service learning student too has really helped a lot with tagging pictures and keeping you on track. So you feel comfortable trying something different."

**Michael: How do you feel about the open-ended style at the Computer Commuter as opposed to, say, a focused classroom?**

User 7: "I've tried the focused classroom before. And that's fine and dandy except everybody there knows more than I did and they were going at the faster pace. So then you're held behind this way and if you have a question it's right now. Here you come in for a certain purpose she's there to help you. That chocolate kiss is nice too."

**Michael: Why, if you do, do you think the Computer Commuter should continue?**

User 7: "Oh definitely I think it should. A lot of these places don't have a library. A lot of the places she goes that is one of their main means of communication, and a lot of the people in the communities, they don't have money for a computer. A lot of them don't have money for a telephone, and if they can get on and use the email service and look some things up...I mean some come in for social reasons, some come in to look up recipes, or show their neighbor how good they are, or some just download pictures for their grandchildren. A lot of the older people come in because their grandchildren, like I said, aren't going to send them letters, but if they get that email they read it, and it's immediate. That part is really essential for these communities."

**Michael: If you could sum up, what impact has it had on you?**

User 7: "For me I feel like a better leader. More effective in communicating and getting things done, and I feel success, because, I did it right! The other cities that I work with, with Lions, they are successful because I got their stuff they send me in correctly. When they're doing good, I do good."

**Michael: Do you have any final comments or anything you'd like other people to know about the Computer Commuter?**

User 7: "Just that it's very worthwhile. The communities need it for the opportunities that people have. It's an experience that some people would never have had otherwise."

User 8:

**Michael: Can you tell me what your knowledge and experience was with computers before using the Computer Commuter?**

User 8: “We had a computer at home until it slowed down, then we used the library one up until now”.

**Michael: How often did you use the computer?**

User 8: “Probably twice a month.”

**Michael: Were you comfortable with it?**

User 8: “Yeah, sure.”

**Michael: What did you use it for?**

User 8: “Just bringing up information, emails, and I always have some printing to do.”

**Michael: What did you find most frustrating about computers before coming here?**

User 8: “On our particular one it was the speed of it.”

**Michael: Has the Computer Commuter changed the way you use the computers?**

User 8: “I don’t think it’s changed anything, but it’s helped me learn a few shortcuts.”

**Michael: What have you learned?**

User 8: “How to move around on it. Starting up folders, stuff like that.”

**Michael: Would you recommend the Computer Commuter to friends or relatives?**

User 8: “Certainly.”

**Michael: What would you tell them about it?**

User 8: “Well, if you want training this is a good place to come.”

**Michael: Is there anything that’s been difficult for you to learn?**

User 8: “No, not really.”

**Michael: How effective do you think the Computer Commuter staff has been?**

User 8: “It’s been real effective. Just about every time we come there’s been two or three people ahead of us.”

**Michael: Do you like the open ended style of it as opposed to, say, a classroom?**

User 8: “Yeah, for a portable unit it’s really nice.”

**Michael: What impact has it had on you?**

User 8: “Oh, no impact. It’s just nice and available, because at the library there is no instruction.”

**Michael: So the instruction is really what brings you back?**

User 8: “Yeah”.

**Michael: Do you have any final comments?**

User 8: “It’s just a really good thing; I think it’s really good for the county to have this.”

User 9:

**Michael: What did you know about computers, the internet, etc. before coming?**

User 9: “All I know is my son-in-law works for Intel, he’s worked for Apple. I’ve heard about computers a lot, but I’ve never had one of my own. My youngest son who used to live with me had his own computer, but he didn’t want me to touch it because I might foul it up. I took a class here at the school for computing, but then when you don’t follow up with your own computer you don’t retain the knowledge.”

**Michael: Were you comfortable using a computer after the class?**

User 9: “No. No, I still needed someone to...I’m 86 years old. It isn’t as easy to learn when you’re 86 than when you’re younger, I’m finding that out.”

**Michael: What did you find most frustrating about learning to use a computer?**

User 9: “Just logging on and looking for the right place to go from there on. And when you don’t practice at home then you don’t retain the knowledge that you did learn, but I don’t go every week, and I should be more ambitious. I go mostly to use Facebook to see what my nieces and nephews on the east coast are doing.”

**Michael: So you use it to communicate, stay in touch with family...?**

User 9: “Yeah.”

**Michael: How has the Computer Commuter changed the way you use computers?**

User 9: “Well, it’s available. That’s the main thing. I used to live on a farm near Boyd, moved last Thanksgiving to town and there’s one that goes to Boyd on Wednesday. That’s where I usually see User 6, because she lives near Boyd.”

**Michael: What motivated you to learn more?**

User 9: “Just because, that’s all you hear about these days. Every one of my children, grandchildren use them and I’d kind of like to see what they’re doing.”

**Michael: Would you recommend the Computer Commuter to a friend?**

User 9: “Oh certainly, certainly.”

**Michael: What do you think has been the most beneficial thing you’ve learned?**

User 9: “Mostly communication with these relatives. I have sometimes tried to play games on it, which is fun. I know I have a daughter in law that loves to play games on her computer. And curiosity, because my daughter and son in law both were in computer classes at Moorhead State, and he started way back when he was in high school and he’s worked his way up. He’s a software engineer, so therefore I figured I should know something about what they’re talking about. That’s about it.”

**Michael: What was the hardest thing for you to learn?**

User 9: “It’s all hard. I guess to remember what my password is, to remember things that I have done before. That’s why I would not get one of my own unless I had someone over my shoulder showing me how to use it.”

**Michael: How effective do you think the staff has been?**

User 9: “Oh they’re very nice. Mary Quick is such a good help, she’s so patient, and that’s the main thing with a teacher is to be patient. I have two daughters that are teachers and I don’t know if I could have had that much patience in my life. My husband, he used a computer way back before he died 11 years ago. He had a friend that lived in a small town around here that helped him use it. He used it, but they never encouraged me to try. It was a man thing, I guess.”

**Michael: How do you feel about the style of learning: open ended versus computer class?**

User 9: “Well, they both have their strong points I think. I forget who taught me at the school here, but that was interesting and I got a booklet to read. This is more hands on.”

Brooke (Service Learning volunteer)

**Michael: So can you tell me what your knowledge and experience with computers was like before using the Computer Commuter?**

Brooke: “I usually used it just for Facebook and homework assignments and just goofing around on them, so pretty simple knowledge”

**Michael: Pretty basic, so how often did you use it?**

Brooke: “Every day, I use the computer I guess”

**Michael: So you were pretty comfortable, yeah?**

Brooke: “Yeah, I was comfortable.”

**Michael: So have you learned anything about computers from the Computer Commuter project?**

Brooke: “Yeah, sometimes people will come in and I won’t know it at first, but after playing around a bit I’ve learned a couple new things.”

**Michael: Like what?**

Brooke: “Well, I’ve learned to do some new things on Microsoft, like different ways to copy and paste things. Just simple things.”

**Michael: So it has changed the way you use computers?**

Brooke: “It has a little, not really just for me, but I know it’s helped the people who I’ve worked with.”

**Michael: So what exactly are you doing with service learning?**

Brooke: “I come here every Wednesday for a half an hour, and I’m just there to help on the days it’s busy or it’s nice I’m there and then people ask me questions and I try to help. Just for another helping hand in there I guess.”

**Michael: Makes sense. So is there anything you’ve noticed about the people that use it?**

Brooke: “I know there are some people who’ve come in week after week and I can tell they’ve gotten a lot more comfortable with computers, so that’s fun.”

**Michael: What do you normally help people with?**

Brooke: “Well, right now there’s been a girl coming in, in her eighties I’d say, and she’s been working on pictures and downloading and emailing them. So I’ve been helping her a lot with pictures. Otherwise a lot of people just emailing different things, and how to save their contacts.”

**Michael: Makes sense, so would you recommend this to people?**

Brooke: “Yeah. It’s nice because they can talk to other people while they’re working, and it’s nice to work with someone else when you’re doing a new thing.”

**Michael: So what do you think the draw is for people who come back week to week?**

Brooke: “I think-I don’t know-I think they probably just like the social aspect of it, and being able to get someone else’s opinion, and maybe if they don’t know what to do then they’ll know. It’s free, I mean it’s a free way to get knowledge.”

**Michael: What do you think are the positives and negatives of the open-ended learning style?**

Brooke: “Well the positives are you can just come back week after week and there’s not a time period for how long it’ll take you to learn it. Some of the negatives are that we aren’t computer people who really studied it so we might not know some of the answers.”

**Michael: Finally, why do you think the Computer Commuter project should continue (if you think it should continue)?**

Brooke: “I think it definitely should, there’s enough people who use it and you can tell it helps them, and you can see the progress every week when they come back. And I just think it’s a great thing.”

**Michael: Awesome, that’s all. Do you have anything else you think I should know about the project?**

Brooke: “Not that I can think of off the top of my head.”

Mary Quick

**Michael: First off, what has been your impression of the users of the Computer Commuter?**

Mary: “My impression has been, and it continues, that they want to learn something. Either they want to learn basics or they have a good general operating skill level, but they want to improve on it or they want to learn something new. You have the people who don’t know how to turn it on that need to learn and then you have the people who know just enough to know that there’s so much more they can do with computers and the internet so they want to learn.”

**Michael: So you’ve seen a broad range of skills?**

Mary: “Right. What you could see today. There are some people who are able to come in and get on the internet, and they’re researching things, or they’re just staying in contact with family and friends, but then you also have people who don’t know how to turn it on, they don’t have the eye-hand coordination. If their job didn’t require them to learn computer skills then they have to revisit the old manual typing and remember the keyboard and working the mouse with the eye contact.”

**Michael: What do you think is the typical Computer Commuter user?**

Mary: “Most everyone is retired, although with the milk plant that closed we’re getting more people who are searching for work, creating resumes and having an email account, and so that’s a new thing in the past six months.”

**Michael: When did that close?**

Mary: “I think it closed at the end of the year, so December, January. And so picking up several new people who may have some computer skills or they don’t have any, but they go to

Minnesota Works in Montevideo and they have to get an email account and they have to create a resume and then they have to do online job searches. So just being able to maneuver around those websites, many people don't have that ability."

**Michael: Have you done any work with Minnesota Works?**

Mary: "Just kind of round-about, because I'm an ABE (Adult Basic Education) provider and so sometimes our paths overlap, but I haven't. We do provide a service because we actually go to the different communities and people can just walk right on. Whereas to go to Montevideo, some people don't have that access."

**Michael: Would you like to see more of a structured environment or do you like the open-ended nature?**

Mary: "I enjoy the open-ended. You never know what's going to happen or who's going to walk on or what they want. I would not be opposed to offering some classes. We did that in the past for some businesses. I think we had six night classes for business owners on how to get a web presence, and I think on my schedule some people might be at work, but they do need to gain computer skills so I could see the need for something after 5:00 in the evening. It's time and it's money, but it might be plausible."

**Michael: Have you seen any changes in usership since it started?**

Mary: "We're finishing our third year, and it's pretty much been retired people wanting to learn skills. Now some of those people have basic skills, some people have their own computer and they bring their own computer on board, but it's still the same. It's those retired people that their kids are too busy to show them how to run it all the time. I still call my son and my daughter if I have a problem because you guys grew up with it, you know it's so easy, but the kids are wanting mom and dad or grandma and grandpa to be on Facebook, to have an email account so they can share pictures and videos, but people are just afraid of it or they're intimidated. So I truly believe that the bus does offer that friendly atmosphere and no matter what your level is we can help increase it. Plus, we come to your community. We only have the two libraries in the county and if you live in Bellingham or Nassau or some of those remote areas it's hard to get there. And sometimes if you live in a community, you go to the library where they have a great facility, but the librarians are busy, they don't have time to help you learn to use a computer. So we're a good bridge to get people there."

**Michael: Why do you think the usership has been mostly retired people?**

Mary: "It might be the time that I go, so I'm basically 8-5 and I understand that it's the normal workday schedule. When we started I sent out a survey or there was a survey available to all of the county "fill out when would be a good time for the bus to come to your community," and so based on those survey results that's how I set up my schedule. Very few people said in the evening. And then, come to find out it was the retired people who filled out the surveys and sent them back in and they wanted it during the day. So based on that is how I came up with my schedule, and so that probably works for people who are retired rather than those who are already working, but a lot of the people who are already working already have computer skills, I think; or they have kids living in the house who can show them how to do whatever. That's my opinion, but that's what I see on the bus."

**Michael: How is the physical facility in the bus?**

Mary: “It works really well. If I were to do it again, instead of having the seats butt up against each other I would maybe have people facing forward, because when there’s two people sitting back-to-back it’s hard-and I’m not a big person-to go from the back of the bus to the front, you get stuck in one place. As people come in I try to stagger them, but then if people continue to come in then....it would have been hard to know. I don’t know if we would have placed the tables differently if we would have lost one or two seats. Overall it works very well, just having seven stations, we’ve got a digital computer, we’ve got a scanner, we’ve got a printer, Kindle, iPad. There’s lots of things for people to get their hands on and play around with if they’re in the market to buy something or just to learn the basics.”

**Michael: Have the Kindle and iPad been well used?**

Mary: “They have been some. Every once and awhile a library will host “how do you check out ebooks” and so people will come in and they just want to know how to do it themselves and you’ll go through how it works. And then before Christmas people like grandkids were wanting one or maybe the grandparent was going to get one and they wanted to know which one, because there’s quite a price difference, which one works better for you. There are several people who purchased one, an iPad or a Kindle instead of a laptop, which I thought was interesting that they were going smaller.”

**Michael: Do you have any final things you’d like other people to know?**

Mary: “I feel like this is a group of people that we are addressing their needs. The people who are retired, that didn’t get computer training at work or in their schooling, and they’re getting left behind. The younger generation wants them to be involved, wants them to be informed, but if you’re intimidated or you don’t have the funds to buy a computer or to get internet at your home you get isolated. There’s so much information out there that I think it greatly benefits people and their whole wellbeing just being connected. And then there’s those who are searching for work that definitely don’t have the funds, that if you don’t know how to apply for unemployment benefits, that’s pretty tough. It might be embarrassing to some people, but we have people coming on board doing that, and you try to keep it low key, but you want to help those people get those tests as well. I really enjoy it. I’m very proud of it.”

Appendix C: Contacts

<b>System</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Contact Person</b>	<b>Email</b>	<b>Phone #</b>
Jefferson Express	New York	Whitney Snyder	<a href="mailto:wsnyder@sunyjefferson.edu">wsnyder@sunyjefferson.edu</a>	
Mobile Learning Lab	Texas	Robin Garcia	<a href="mailto:robin.garcia@pisd.edu">robin.garcia@pisd.edu</a>	469-752-3780
W.O.W. Bus	Montana	Jodi Christophe	<a href="mailto:jodic@missoula.lib.mt.us">jodic@missoula.lib.mt.us</a>	406-721-2665
Mobile Technology Training Center	Ohio	Jamie Price	<a href="mailto:wprice@library.ohio.gov">wprice@library.ohio.gov</a>	740-783-5705
W.E.E. Bus	Missouri	Katherine Barton	<a href="mailto:kbarton@bssd.net">kbarton@bssd.net</a>	816-564-8287

**University of Minnesota, Morris Center for Small Towns**

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