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## Church Web program develops young skills

**Hopeworks turns dropouts' designs into a business.**

By Porus P. Cooper  
Inquirer Staff Writer

The clients wanted a long list of changes to their Web site, including a new font for the lettering; a way to capture visitors' e-mail addresses; software to send out a newsletter; and a new button, preferably flashing, to solicit donations.

No problem, though there would be an extra charge for some of the work, said the priest.

If he weren't a Jesuit priest with a Roman collar, the Rev. Jeff Putthoff, 40, could be mistaken for a businessman of the computer-geek variety.

On this afternoon last week, across a battered conference table that showed signs of also being a lunch table, Putthoff was trying to steer the two representatives of Covenant House away from the flashing button for their home page.

The flashing would be intrusive, he said. Sitting next to him, Web master Tiana Davis, 20, nodded.

It was just another day at Hopeworks 'N Camden, a church-based charity led by Putthoff that focused on using technology as a training tool for school dropouts and as a business that generates a significant portion of its income.

Davis is one of three production trainees, an elite group that in turn helps train newcomers.

Hopeworks interns don't always proceed to tech careers. Davis, a single mother of a 2-year-old enrolled in pre-nursing courses at Camden County College.

Davis listed what she had gained in her 15 months at Hopeworks: a workplace demeanor, leadership and the ability to multitask.

"We run two businesses," Putthoff said, "and the most important thing about our businesses is that they are run by youth."

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PETER TOBIA / Inquirer Staff

At the mouse, Tiana Davis joins the Rev. Jeff Putthoff showing clients Dan McVay and Stephanie J. P... Covenant House the changes that Hopeworks 'N Camden has made to Covenant House's Web site.

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Hopeworks charges "competitive market rates," he said. Trainees, guided by professional directors, use Web pages and use geographic information systems (GIS) to create digital maps of Camden and other areas.

A third business - office-computer networking - was recently added to the menu.

The trainees are paid. Davis gets \$7.75 an hour.

"Many Camden youth don't have the experience of being valued by people, of being looked at as being paid for their work," Putthoff said.

He calls himself self-taught. He knew little about computing or the Web when he came to Camden from Kansas City, Mo., to be associate pastor of Holy Name parish in North Camden.

The idea for Hopeworks emerged from a discussion with a pastor from Christus Lutheran Church and was inspired by the work of a similar charity in Milwaukee, Putthoff said. Grace Lutheran, a member of Holy Name and Christus in forming Hopeworks in 2000.

It charges clients between \$1,500 and \$5,000, depending on the work's complexity, said Eileen Davis, who was the Web director until leaving recently for a new job.

Her revenue target for 2005-06 Web work is \$88,000, she said, up 10 percent from \$80,000 last year.

The Web and GIS revenues, also about \$80,000, cover about 40 percent of the operating expenses, Putthoff said. The rest of Hopeworks' money comes from grants, contracts and donations.

Most clients, like Covenant House, are other nonprofits.

"They are an organization with a similar philosophy," said Dan McVay, development coordinator at Covenant House in Philadelphia. Putthoff also offers insights that might not occur to a commercial vendor.

Donors do not generally respond to general appeals; seek money for specific causes, he suggested, and Stephanie J. Peddicord, the other Covenant House representative at the meeting.

Carol Thompson, a University of Pennsylvania student working on a doctoral thesis on Hopeworks and other workforce-development organizations "focus on single aspects of youth development - apprenticeship, job or business skills, technology - rather than combining them."

Hopeworks, she said, is unusual in integrating all of these approaches.

In selling its services and creating a self-sustaining stream of revenue, Hopeworks also seems to have found the grail that still eludes many nonprofits, said Laura Otten, executive director of the Nonprofit Center at Saint Joseph's University.

Donor money ebbs and flows depending on the economy or the pull of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, Otten said.

"The message is getting out to nonprofits to think of other ways to fund their efforts," but few have actually done it, she said.

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