Opening doors for New Zealand families
From the living room to the classroom: Tala's journey

Tala Nua and her family in her Porirua home

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Children are everything to Tala Nua. She has six of her own and has always dreamed of being a qualified early childhood teacher. But being Samoan and living in a Samoan community in Porirua, Tala spoke little English and had never even turned a computer on, let alone gained any qualifications. That was before Tala enrolled in *Computers in Homes* in 2001.

With six children to feed, buying a computer was out of the question, so when the Principal of Cannons Creek School asked if she'd be interested in the *Computers in Homes* programme, Tala jumped at the chance. She had a passion for learning and wanted the best for her children. Little did she appreciate the significance of the step she was about to take.

"I thought it'd explode when I touched it," Tala says of her first encounter with a computer. On the first night, while her husband was at home minding the children, Tala was feeling "shaky, ashamed, confused". Two months later, she was confidently doing everything from searching the Internet and sending emails, to typing letters and manipulating digital photos.

On graduation night, Tala and her family were among the 25 graduates who each received a computer complete with 6 months internet access. Life at the Nua's place would never be the same again.

From that night on, instead of just watching TV, Tala's children took turns using the computer. They used it for their spelling and maths homework, which they often emailed to their teacher to save on printing costs, as well as for checking out websites and exchanging photos and messages with their friends on Bebo.

Tala supervised her children's Internet use and helped them with their homework. She also began emailing her relatives in Samoa – including some she tracked down via the Internet – and using email as a way of communicating with others within her community. When one of her children was sick, for instance, she'd simply email the school to let them know.

But for Tala this was just the beginning. In 2003, she completed a *Computers in Homes* adult literacy follow-up, involving one-on-one home tutoring. As well as developing her language skills, she learnt how to fill in forms and create a CV.

Tala says that one of the best things about having all of these skills is being able to help her family and community. When a Samoan friend recently needed to write a letter to Housing New Zealand, for example, Tala was able to put both her knowledge of computers and grasp of English to valuable use. Tala also uses her skills to help out the school, translating communications, such as an advertisement for the school fair, into Samoan. She types up the minutes of church meetings, and helps her church treasurer with the finances. She even uses the computer to manage the family budget, helping her husband in the running of their household.

In 2006, Tala took the next big step towards achieving her dream. She embarked on a Diploma of Early Childhood, a course that has since evolved into a Bachelor of Education. Her studies, however, are on hold while she cares for her 15-year-old daughter Kamalita.

After battling with scarlet fever in 2007, Kamalita was left almost blind and in need of surgery, a situation which could've been much worse had Tala not developed her language skills through *Computers in Homes*. Tala says that she always makes sure that the doctors explain everything to her. And if there are any medical terms she's not clear about, she just looks them up on the Internet.

Kamalita is currently being schooled at home. Her poor eyesight means that she relies on Tala to read to her and type up her assignments (and check her Bebo page!). From when she was a little girl, Kamalita dreamt of becoming a lawyer and helping people in her community. One of the reasons Tala enrolled in *Computers in Homes* was to help her daughter realise this dream.

Six years have passed since Tala attended her first *Computers in Homes* session, and each of her children now boasts excellent computer skills, with the eldest, Lise, enjoying a career as a travel agent and hoping to become a flight attendant. Tala's children always come first and she is happy to wait until Kamalita is well before resuming her own studies. She is, however, looking forward to the day she can extend her love to other children in her role as an Early Childhood teacher.

Getting connected with Computers in Homes

Computers in Homes, *Rorohiko I roto nga Kainga*, has helped to create opportunities for more than 4,000 families since the programme's launch eight years ago.

While it began as a programme designed to help parents support their children's learning, Computers in Homes has achieved much more. Now, armed with computer equipment and the skills to use it, these 4,000 families are enjoying the everyday things that many people take for granted – finding information online, banking online, booking cheap flights and typing up CVs. They're staying in closer touch with family and friends via email, and they're applying for jobs that were previously out of reach. Better still, some of them, including Tala, are accomplishing things they'd never have thought possible.

Their children are thriving too. In today's society computers are an essential part of a child's education. With computer and internet access as well as the encouragement and support of their parents, these children are now more connected with their school and community.

But there are many more New Zealand families who could benefit. The 2006 Census shows that 37% of households with school-aged children are without internet access in Tala's region of Porirua. This compares with just 13% of households with school-aged children in North Shore City who don't have access.

We want to address this inequity and help a further 100,000 or so families to realise their potential. And the best way to do this is by securing government and corporate funding to turn Computers in Homes into a nationwide programme.

Computers in Homes families receive:

• 20 hours computer and internet training (parents)

• refurbished computer to take home

• internet access for 6 months

• technical support for one year

• ongoing mentoring through school.

Those involved find that Computers in Homes:

• strengthen links between families and schools

• directly contributes to positive education outcomes for both parents and children

• increases student education attainment levels through improved numeracy and literacy

• reduces inequity between children with access to online learning resources at home and those who don't

• empowers parents to engage and be more involved in their children's learning.