



*Turning the TIDE  
Philadelphia, PA*

Mission: Turning the TIDE (*Technology and Information Delivered for Empowerment*) seeks to provide an opportunity for adults, seniors, teens and children of Philadelphia to gain exposure to computer technology in a comfortable and non-threatening learning environment. Their aim is to make the participant's learning experience enjoyable and informative by identifying practical uses of technology to enhance their daily lives. Their curriculum is designed to serve as a catalyst for participants to further their learning and development in computer technology. Turning the TIDE seeks to Enable, Empower and Equip the whole community to excel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by closing the digital divide.



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One of the major goals of the President's Faith-based and Community Initiative is to provide access to government programs. To that end, eleven major Departments and numerous sub-agencies routinely share information and lines of communication are opened with potential participants. As a result, a unique partnership was developed between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Through this agreement, USDA now provides information about the DOL One Stop Career Centers. The Centers are sites that offer federal, state, and local education and training services in one location. These services range from self-service to more hands-on staff-assisted services. Below is a story that highlights the success of this partnership.

*"Back then our community was self-sustaining"*

#### Full Circle

Twenty years ago, the Market Street corridor in Southwest Philadelphia was a vibrant hub of commerce where community members came together to shop at independently owned businesses. "Back then our community was self-sustaining" recalls Reverend Jonathan Ford executive director of Turning the TIDE and associate pastor of Taylor Tabernacle. "Good jobs were plentiful in a variety of industries which spurred spending and growth."

#### Economic Impact

Since that time, the landscape of West and Southwest Philadelphia has changed dramatically. Due to the economic slowdown that affected many large cities, industry relocated and the economic picture is very different now than it was in the late 1980s. This shift has had a far reaching effect on the community but none more so than the loss of viable employment opportunities. In fact, 2000 Census data shows that the unemployment rate for the area is 15% with almost 50% of households with annual income below \$25,000.00.

## Empowerment through Education

The fallout from the recession resulted in the emergence two major industries in the Philadelphia area – Health Care and Education. Employers in these industries demand special skills from its employees, including the ability to use a computer. Providing members of the community with these skills is the essence of Reverend Ford’s efforts to revitalize the community.



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*“... the goal of Turning the Tide is empowerment through education.”*

“As more jobs left the community we recognized that a different set of skills were needed to successfully compete for jobs within the existing industries”, observes Reverend Ford. “To that end, the goal of Turning the TIDE is empowerment through education.” To reach that goal TIDE, a ministry of the Taylor Tabernacle located in the heart of the Market Street and 60<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridors provides residents and community members with computer education, internet access, and instruction in a nurturing, friendly and familiar environment.

## Customer Service

Turning the TIDE’s facilities are clean, well-lit, and conveniently located. Clients are welcomed by the courtesy staff and have access to 10 desktop computers that are networked together and provide high-speed connection to the Internet. When capacity is reached, laptops are made available as all Turning the Tide facilities have a wireless network. Each staff member was selected because of his or her ability to provide excellent customer service to each visitor. “We selected our support staff from those who have the technical skills but, more importantly, the interpersonal skills and desire to work with all types of people.”

*“I had two job interviews in the first week!”*

## Jobs & Food

Another important aspect of TIDE is to provide a number of adjunct services to assist its clients as they develop their computer skills. To that end, TIDE has developed a partnership with the Pennsylvania CareerLink System. CareerLink is the state’s version of the U.S. Department of Labor’s One-Stop Career Center Initiative and is a statewide network that caters to the needs of employers and job seekers. As the first state- certified Community Outreach Center in West and Southwest Philadelphia, TIDE is able to provide a direct link to the CareerLink website. The site offers access to employment opportunities; education, training and economic development opportunities and the results are evident. Using this system, Jaron Brown, 18, has already had remarkable success. “I had two job interviews in the first week!”



*“... we can work together to educate our customers on F&N programs.”*

## Food Stamps

Recently, staff from the Food & Nutrition Service Mid-Atlantic regional office (MARO) attended an information-sharing meeting sponsored by the Veteran’s Administration. The meeting was attended by variety of federal, state and local agency representatives including Marina Barnett,

Employment Interviewer for Pennsylvania CareerLink. After learning more about Food & Nutrition Service programs, Ms. Barnett pointed out that many of her clients are unemployed or under-employed and would qualify for benefits. “Our agencies share the same mission -- to help people,” Ms. Barnett observes, “and we can work together to educate our customers on FNS programs.” As a result of that meeting, FNS learned of the efforts of Reverend Ford and his staff and scheduled a visit to the TIDE center.

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#### Technology at Work

Turning the TIDE’s director of operations, Reverend Ron Radcliff is always interested in educating his customers. And, after a meeting with regional office staff he agreed to provide information about FNS nutrition programs, especially Food Stamps. “Members of our community know about food stamps but aren’t sure if they are eligible for benefits,” states Reverend Radcliff. “Applying for benefits on-line is a service we are very interested in providing to our clients.” To facilitate this process, MARO staff installed a link to the FNS website and the Step-one prescreening tool on Turning the TIDE’s network, which is accessible to all computers and laptops.

*“After cooking all day, I welcome anything that is on-line.”*

#### Real Benefits

During a recent visit to the TIDE center, MARO staff had the opportunity to observe the pre-screening process in action. Under the watchful eye of assistant project director Norman Lyons, TIDE clients were busily entering data on the computer to find out if they were eligible to receive food stamps. Rochelle Scott visits the center once a week and likes the idea of using the computer to apply for benefits on-line. “After cooking all day, I welcome anything that is on-line.”



*“I found out that I was eligible to receive \$285.00 in food stamps”*



Other clients had results that were surprisingly immediate. “I found out that I was eligible to receive \$285.00 in food stamps,” states a surprised Bayyinah Hannibal. “Applying on-line was simple and convenient, I will definitely follow-up.” Turning the TIDE significantly improves the lives of Philadelphia residents by providing an opportunity for people of all ages and backgrounds to gain exposure to computer technology in a friendly, neighborhood environment. Through the efforts of thoughtful leadership, dedicated staff and service-oriented volunteers, Turning the TIDE continues its efforts to serve as a catalyst for community revitalization.

Clearly, Reverend Radcliff sums up the mission of Turning the TIDE when he states, “We don’t give up on people. We know it’s just a matter of time before the tide will begin to turn in their life, if they don’t give up!”