JUDITH SPEIGHT

Digital Literacy Transforms Lives and Empowers Communities

New Zealand ICT programs yield employment opportunities for ethnically diverse populations

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One person at a time, digital literacy is changing communities, providing the skills people need for employment and transforming lives in New Zealand.

And, for more than a decade, Judith Speight has been at the center of digital literacy activity as a strategist, advisor, negotiator and lobbyist to government and business in New Zealand and internationally.

"Digital literacy is a key to work and a key to participation in the knowledge economy," Speight said. "Every job is a knowledge job. We must learn how to use the tools around us— the stuff of knowledge work—and digital literacy is a critical tool. As knowledge workers we, the people of New Zealand, are able to overcome the tyranny of distance and work 'side by side' with neighbors in other nations. The physical distance between us no longer matters."

As director of ITT WRKZ, an information and communications technology (ICT) consulting company, Speight works with the private sector and central and local government to deliver digital literacy initiatives. "Along with the people of New Zealand, our government has developed a Digital Strategy to deliver a pathway to understand the importance of digital literacy and provide the resources needed to deliver this plan," she said. "The New Zealand Digital Strategy is a framework and mindset focused on these outcomes. Digital literacy is an absolute priority."

One central-government and industry-sponsored project, Fluency in IT New Zealand (FIT NZ), was established to produce a computing curriculum for year 12 and 13 students in New Zealand. Speight led the team that catalyzed the action and established the public and private partnerships necessary to build momentum to drive FIT NZ.

In another project, Accelerating Auckland, New Zealand's central government has provided $1 million in funding to bridge the ICT skills gap across Auckland and nationally. "We have an opportunity to establish a talent pipeline for ICT skills in Auckland, a region that requires these skills to build its economic capability," Speight explained. The program is working to align skill needs between industry and tertiary organizations, interest students in ICT careers, establish relationships between industry and tertiary organizations and engage the often-underrepresented indigenous people of the Pacific and the Māori population in ICT.

Māori and Pacific participation in the program is especially significant. The Māori people are expected to comprise more than 25 percent of New Zealand's workforce by 2021. "We must ensure we engage this critical demographic in digital literacy," Speight said.

In response to this imperative, the CLIMB@Manukau initiative was designed to improve ICT skills for people in Manukau, the third-most populated city in New Zealand. A new business park development in Manukau is bringing 15,000 new jobs to the area over the next five years. To respond to this significant employment opportunity, Speight's organization is partnering with local education providers to introduce courses tailored to the needs of the businesses in the development. "We are working on both the supply and demand side of employment with this subproject," she said. "We hope it will bring a cascading beneficial effect for the people in the local community."

Speight is working with local Certiport representatives to review opportunities for CLIMB@Manukau, using Certiport Internet & Computing Benchmark™, Certiport Internet & Computing Mentor™ and Certiport Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC³®) as conduits to the project's goals. "I can see these tools potentially identify, measure and

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facilitate a minimum level of computing skill and will ensure New Zealand has the technology skills needed to create a modern and vibrant economy and country," she said.

Speight considers the critical evaluation of computing skills essential. "Without it, we have no measure of an individual's skill set and everything is merely aspirational," she said. "IC³ may potentially provide a baseline."

Speight anticipates digital literacy will promote transformational change in New Zealand. "We are creating a climate of self-responsibility," she said. "Sustaining an ongoing climate of digital literacy requires individuals to be committed. When you do for yourself, you see your potential and have the power to change your life and the spirit of a community. Our project is extending a hand up—but not a handout—of support for individuals who are willing to be part of the transformational change."

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