

Plugged In *Making
Connections*



Spend a little time at **Plugged In**, and you see pretty quickly

that the place really isn't about technology. It's about people. There's a seventeen-year-old artist honing his creative talents, a young mom learning English with her baby asleep at her side, two girls using the Internet to complete their science report. That's Plugged In—a place where people get plugged in to their goals, where people connect to their dreams and with one another.

Located in low-income East Palo Alto, California, just miles from the heart of Silicon Valley, Plugged In is a unique community center. It's an after-school program for kids, a teen-run web design business, a technology access center for teens and adults, and more. Computers and the Internet figure big in all of this, but it's really about the positive connections the technology engenders. It's about a community of people connecting to the information age and making their lives better. To show you what we mean, we'd like to introduce you to a few of the regulars at Plugged In.



Plugged In 



"Look people
in the eyes,"
Soni advises.
"It shows them
you're really
paying attention."



Soni Conley

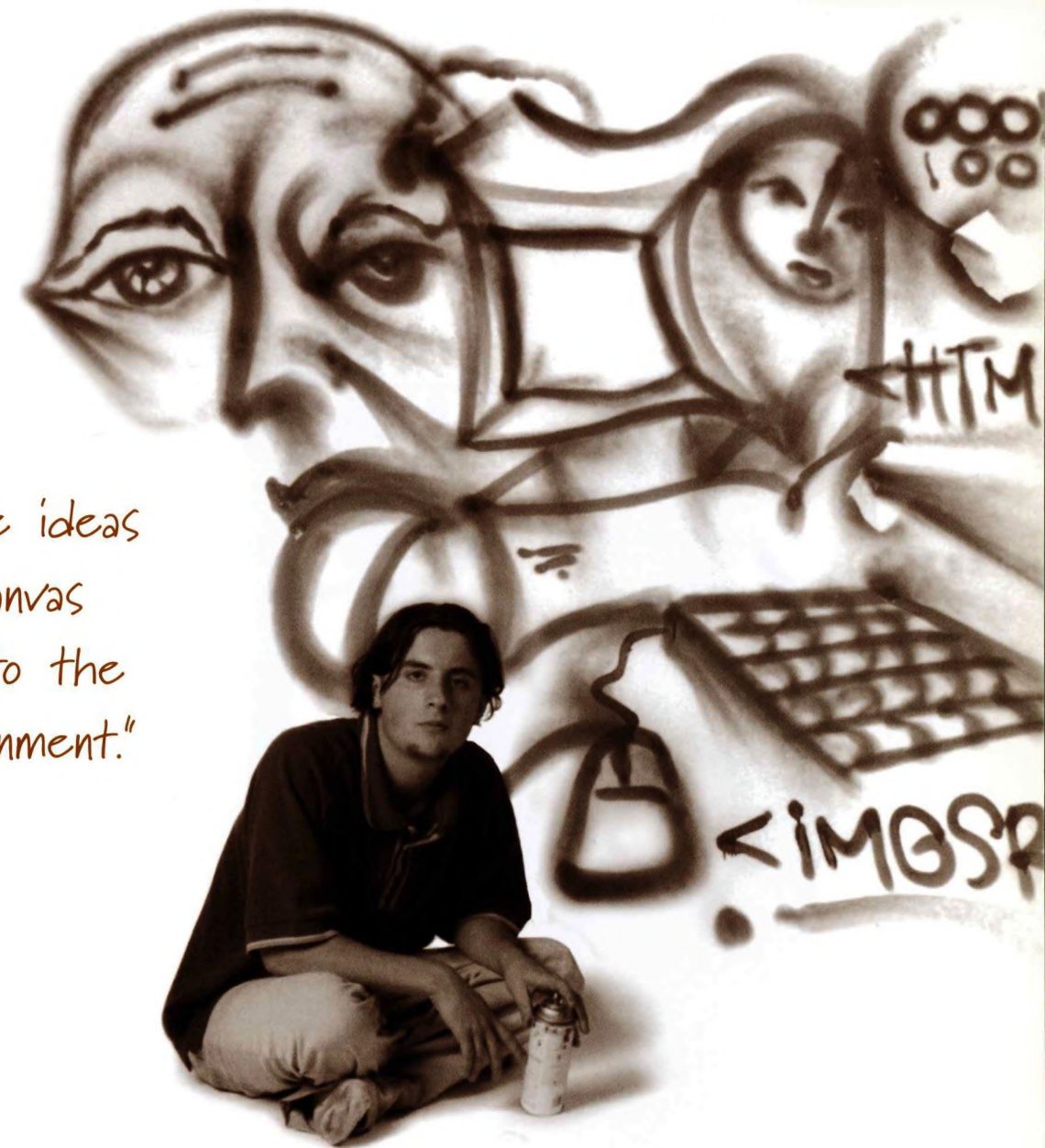
On any afternoon, it's not unusual to find Soni zooming to Plugged In on her bicycle, so she can zoom around the Internet, getting the latest scoop on the music world, finding out all about her favorite girl singers like Mya and Alliyah. Soni wants to be a singer too, and she'd like to be a journalist. It all seems possible for this talented ten-year-old. Right now, she's polishing her investigative and writing talents as a reporter for *Diamonds in the Rough*, a magazine written by the middle-school students at Plugged In. In fact, she's just combined two of her interests by writing an article about her role model Mya. Soni not only writes her stories, she illustrates them, using image editing software. She also seems to have a knack for interviewing.



John Mireles

is deeply immersed in the world of art. He began as a graffiti artist covering freeway walls but quickly expanded to more constructive venues—including painting on canvas and revitalizing old refrigerators by covering them with his own surrealistic images. These days, John transfers his highly-charged images into digital form, pushing the medium to its outermost limits. At seventeen, John is the main designer for Plugged In's web design business, handling web site projects for a number of corporate clients. John, who lives in San Jose, takes the train to Palo Alto three days a week, and then walks the half hour from the train station to Plugged In. Since he first started coming here, John's developed a career plan for himself that will let him earn a good living and still leave him plenty of time for his own art.

"A lot of the ideas I do on canvas cross over to the digital environment."





While searching the Internet for new scientific findings, Elisa found out about a big, red spot on Jupiter.

Elisa Romero likes to think of herself

as being able to handle just about anything. At thirteen, she looks out for three younger siblings and seven cousins, is an assistant in Plugged In's kids' program, and a budding astronomer. One of Elisa's favorite activities is visiting web sites that clue her in on the latest findings about space. In fact, she's just finished writing an essay—from information she found online—about Jupiter's great red spot. "At first it seemed to be some kind of hurricane," reports Elisa, "but its diameter is three times the size of Earth's, and since Jupiter's atmosphere is mostly hydrogen and helium, comparing it to a hurricane is kind of misleading." A tough girl by nature, Elisa was tempted by local gangs before she started coming to Plugged In. Now Elisa thinks there's a lot of things kids can do to solve their problems besides joining gangs.



Lovell Williams

"Like they say, I

was sick and tired of being tired. One night I was getting high and saw I was doing the same things over and over. I was ready to see if there really was another way." At forty-two, Lovell has clearly found it. When Lovell was involved in a local recovery program, he learned to use a computer at Plugged In. As chairman of the recovery program's alumni association, he started coming in regularly to make flyers for events. He taught himself how to make spreadsheets and to write letters for the association. And when Lovell began looking for jobs, he found much better leads online than he did anywhere else. He used a computer to put together his resume. Now, he's got a job he loves, operating a computerized saw at a shop that makes custom-designed cabinets. And even more important, he's got a life he loves and a family he's actively connected to.

As much as he wanted to have a good job, Lovell wanted his grand-daughter to be a part of his life. He's made both things happen.





"I can't wait to go to high school and finish and then go on to college and graduate school." Whether her future lies in sports or high-tech—Ivy's planning on success.

Ivy Songgoimoli is always on the

move—and this girl's going places. She plays basketball at school and also participates in the East Palo Alto Golf Program. But sports are just a small piece of this hardworking, thirteen-year-old's life. Ivy, whose family is from Tonga, is president of her eighth-grade class and is a frequent face at Plugged In's Technology Access Center. One of the first things Ivy does when she's here is to scroll through the Tonga Times so she can give her family a full report—something that meant a lot to them when the South Pacific Island was hard hit by a tornado. The open access center gives creative kids like Ivy a rich set of resources with which they can explore their own interests. Ivy takes full advantage of all the center has to offer.



Susana Velasquez

With two-year-old Alexander by her side in his stroller, Susana, a mother of two, works on a Plugged In computer in the Technology Access Center while her little one naps and Arimis, who's five, attends the kids' program. In other words, this twenty-nine-year-old mom comes whenever she can. Susana's using the computer to teach herself English, but what really keeps her coming in so faithfully is e-mail. A lot of Susana's family and friends still live in Mexico, including her younger sister, Haydee. Instead of making expensive phone calls once a month, Susana uses e-mail a few times a week. Haydee rents time on a local computer in Veracruz where she lives, and the two sisters stay in close touch. Susana says they mostly "talk" about family things, but when big news happens in the world, they talk about that too.

Susana loves e-mail. She recently sent her family an attachment with a picture of her sons. "You just can't do that over the phone."



"At the end of the race, I just ran into the bales of hay. Everyone was cheering." Dominic was the winner.

Dominic Bannister

The first time Dominic crashed the family computer, he had no idea what to do. The second time, he picked up the manual and got it up and running all by himself. He was hooked. These days, the sixteen-year-old's doing programming for some of Plugged In's best clients—like Hewlett-Packard and Pacific Bell—using Java, Perl scripts, and HTML. Dominic's very hands-on, so he's always sampling new programs and checking out new sites online. He heads right to the ones where the web professionals go. Dominic really focuses in on detail. He's the kind of person who gets completely involved in the moment—no matter what he's doing. Like when he drove for Plugged In in a local soapbox race. He concentrated so hard on driving well that he drove right through the finish line—crashing into the bales of hay—not even realizing that he'd won.



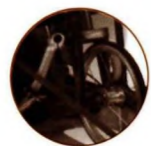
There are many more stories we could tell you, but you've

got the idea—Plugged In is making a difference in East Palo Alto by helping low-income kids and their families connect to new goals and new directions. We feel that's something well worth supporting, and worth expanding, as there are many more who aren't connected. We hope you agree and welcome your financial support and your volunteer help.

But even if you can give us neither time nor money, you can still help by spreading the word about what we're doing and how a place like Plugged In could make a difference for other low-income communities —maybe yours.

Get involved. Get invested. Tell people about us. Tell them to check out our web site at www.pluggedin.org. Tell them to give us a call at **650.322.1134**.

We want to connect.



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