



IMPACT STORY: Gary, Indiana USA

Clubhouse Youth Discover Cisco IT

CLUBHOUSE SPOTLIGHT

At the **John Will Anderson Boys & Girls Club** in Gary, Indiana, which is part of The Clubhouse Network, coordinator Wendell Mosby has been working with youth to introduce STEM topics for exploration. Youth members at the club come from underserved areas where they may not have been exposed to Information Technology (IT) and the career pathways it can provide. Technology topics in general need more socializing with parents and myth busting with young people.

"I recommend that other Clubhouse Coordinators start out with inspiring info about jobs and salaries, and how many of these do not require a college degree. Mention the certifications that are available, from entry-level to intermediate to advanced. These are career pathways youth may not know about, and this can make all the difference in their motivation to explore IT."

Computer Network Support Specialists in the U.S.

- Network Diagnostic Support Specialist
- Network Support Technician
- Network Technician
 - Work experience required: none
 - Certification or AA degree: preferred
 - On-the-job training provided: moderate
 - Median salary today: **\$71,530 year** (\$34.39/hour)
 - Job growth expected through 2032 (faster than average for all jobs): **12.5%**

Source: [Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024](#)

Wendell has been using the Cisco Networking Academy ([NetAcad](#)) learning material for some time. One nice feature of the Cisco courses is that they follow an easy step-by-step flow and offer ready-to-use tools (online or printed out) for lessons and quizzes. This makes it easier for a Clubhouse facilitator with little to no technology background.

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

When Jahlil first joined the Boys & Girls Club at age 14, he mentioned an interest in computers. Wendell enrolled him in a Cisco course, which Jahlil worked through his own. Next, Wendell connected him with other youth members, and introduced the many different career pathways available in this broad field.

"Jahlil had access to material he would never otherwise have been able to get. Not one bit. He's one of those kids who is very smart and needs a rigorous challenge to keep him engaged." -Wendell Mosby, Coordinator

Because Jahlil wanted to tackle higher level computer programming, he needed stronger math skills. As he enrolled in more Cisco courses, Wendell got him a math mentor, a doctoral student from Purdue Northwest.



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Wendell suggests using the Cisco course called [Internet of Things \(IoT\)](#) as a scaffold for the most basic material, which will instantly convey to young people how IT is relied upon literally in every part of life today (not just social media).

They prefer getting new information in snack-sized pieces, and this entry-level course has 15-30 small exercises to play with. He delivers the first one to break the ice for his youth members.

IOT is a great place to start because it will cover basics like internet safety. And how technology runs on computer languages, and how those interact and function to synchronize phones and tablets, and customize their lives. Coordinators may want to begin this way, and then see which youth members have an increased interest.

After the IoT course, the next step is *Networking Basics*, which prepares learners to take the [Cisco Certified Support Technician \(CCST\)](#) certification.

Clubhouses will benefit from finding an adult facilitator who understands the material already, but it is not necessary. For example, there are a few simple steps to set up a Cisco course online just for your Clubhouse, but there are video resources to help make that easy. And while you can enroll kids in a class, they are still teenagers who will need some guidance along the way. Not all your youth members will be motivated enough to pursue a self-paced through completion on their own.

The Boys & Girls Club in Gary has over 60 youth members coming in daily. Implementing one Cisco IT course requires having someone (a coordinator, mentor, or retired instructor) who can sit and mentor youth through it, hopefully in a collaborative fashion to lean in to the Clubhouse community Learning Model. Extra funding may be helpful to bring in a paid instructor. Once these challenges are addressed, there is currently a 9-month time limit to complete each course.

Jahlil also participated in the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) program at the Clubhouse, which helped him get a laptop robust enough to do high-end computer programming.

Now aged 16, Jahlil is about to get his GED diploma, and will enroll in Cisco classes at Purdue Northwest to continue his journey of acquiring IT knowledge and skills. He plans to earn Cisco certifications to validate those capabilities.

He has also come up with a business idea involving VR, AR, and Robotics, which he continues to develop.

"I believe Jahlil is on the precipice of starting a major tech company. I need to continue to surround him with the ecosystem of people who get it. He'll need a provisional patent, and we will help him protect his intellectual property."



"It's worth it to see the growing interest and excitement among youth members. Get even one course done and feel the win!" says Wendell.

There are so many teaching deficits for inner city kids as they go through school, particularly in math and critical thinking. Some are dabbling in STEM topics, but they may not be getting the breadth of knowledge and skills offered in the Clubhouse. Igniting even one interested youth member is good, because other members will see their success first hand.

The demand for IT skills is continuously growing, worldwide. If Clubhouse youth explore IT and begin to develop a belief in their ability to enter a related career, the sooner this happens in their learning pathway, the better their chances of success. They will benefit from early exposure, to understand the back end of a network system, and that it goes way beyond wi-fi, to include routers, switches, connections, packets, IP addresses, firewalls, and more.

"I call it a self-determination learning model: (1) competency, (2) autonomy, (3) relatedness, which means finding a mentor and a tribe to share those 'Aha' moments with."

Another tip: reach out to invite mentors from nearby high schools, community colleges, grad students, and others who are just waiting to come and help by leveraging their own tech knowledge. Some are currently teaching (or learning) the very same Cisco material, and are often passionate about sharing their passion for this evolving, creative field. They tell us that engagement with Clubhouse youth increases their self-value.

Wendell also sees great value in TCN's [DISCVR Chats for Career Pathways](#) (password required). These are held monthly and bring youth members together online to hear from professionals in a variety of tech fields, particularly VR and AR careers). TCN now has an impressive library of recordings for on-demand and group viewing.

"I have not seen a better fit or learning model for African-American youth than the Clubhouse. These young people can be very busy, wanting to move, explore things hands-on. They love to be doing, and are motivated by cultural context wherever it can be aligned. And they celebrate each step forward. Once they build their confidence and trust, you can teach them more."



For more information about the John Will Anderson Boys & Girls Club, visit <https://theclubhousenetwork.org/locations/johnwillanderson/>