“Help is really necessary”: Case study of a technology distribution program for low-income job seekers

Stacey Wedlake, Research Scientist
Technology and Social Change Group (TASCHA) at the University of Washington Information School
Collaborators

> Kathleen Carson, Seattle Jobs Initiative
> Yvette Iribe Ramirez, University of Washington Information School
> Elodie Marlet, Seattle Jobs Initiative
> David Keyes, City of Seattle Department of Information Technology
> Matthew Houghton, (formerly City of Seattle Office of Economic Development)
Digital Bridge Program

- Distributed 197 refurbished laptops and 174 internet hotspots to low-income job seekers receiving employment case management services from SJI or partner organizations.
Research goals

> To understand what supports participants need to use their new technology

> To understand what resources organizations need to support participants with their technology
Study design

SJI

> Demographic surveys (n=180)
> Participant Northstar Digital Literacy Assessments (n=49)

UW

> Participant audio diaries & interviews (n=15)
> Case manager audio diaries & focus group (n=4)
Participants

- Range 18 - 64 years old
- 73% Black
- 54% immigrants, refugees, or asylees
- 34% homeless
- Familiarity with using smartphones but new to laptop ownership
Case managers

> Worked for SJI or one of five community-based organizations (CBOs)
> Two organizations focus on working with refugee and immigrant populations
Findings

- Both participants and case managers needed tailored digital literacy support and training built into the structure of the program
Support resources NOT used

- Refurbisher technical support line
- Pre-loaded resources
- Self-paced online digital literacy lessons

Support resources used

- Case managers
- Family
- Friends
- Self
Participant needs

Yes, if a virtual computer class was available, I would most definitely take it...[M]ore tech help would be great...help is really necessary. - Trina, interview
Case manager needs

> Case managers did not have the adequate tools, skills, or time to provide the technical support their clients needed
Implications

> Device and internet distribution programs aimed at less experienced technology users need built in personal support
Thank you

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Contact: staceyaw@uw.edu;
@staceyawe