



COMMUNITY-CENTERED TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOPS HELP NARROW THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Housing Authority of the City of Brownsville

PREPARED BY EVERYONEON
DECEMBER 2018

INTRODUCTION

The City of Brownsville recently ranked as the second worst-connected in the nation. The Housing Authority of the City of Brownsville (HACB), which serves more than 3,000 low-income households in the southernmost tip of Texas, can attest to the reality of the digital divide affecting families who live in public housing and participate in the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8). In a survey conducted by HACB at the Buena Vida housing community, 81% of respondents reported not having internet service at home. Cost is one of the factors contributing to this deep digital inequity, as reported by the 89% of respondents who said the internet is not affordable.

For HACB, ensuring HUD-assisted households have access to affordable internet service, computers, and digital literacy training and content, aligns with their mission to link families to resources and tools that help them build self-sufficiency and eventually moving on from HUD-assisted housing. As a result, in 2017 HACB joined ConnectHomeUSA, an initiative led by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in partnership with EveryoneOn, to leverage private sector solutions and diverse partnerships in an effort to narrow the digital divide in Brownsville.

HACB's first digital inclusion project took place this August in partnership with EveryoneOn, a pilot workshop which resulted in 20 households of the Buena Vida housing development enrolling in Access from AT&T, receiving a Chromebook, and participating in a day-long digital literacy training. This case study highlights HACB's efforts to build a digitally inclusive community through community-centered technology workshops.

SNAPSHOT OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN HACB

HACB conducted a survey in the Buena Vida housing development, its first housing development of 150 units, to understand the depth of the digital divide and the needs of these households.

81% do not have high-speed internet at home

90% rely on their cell phone to access the internet

90% rely on their cell phone to access the internet

85% participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program



COMMUNITY-FOCUSED WORKSHOPS

Based on the survey results, HACB and EveryoneOn collaborated to design and implement a community-centered workshop for Buena Vista households with the goals of equipping 20 families with essential technology tools and preparing them to navigate and leverage the internet. Specifically, the one-day pilot workshop, combined the opportunity to:

1. Enroll for an affordable in-home internet service, Access from AT&T
2. Learn how to use a Chromebook
3. Explore digital K-12 educational content, such as Khan Academy

To ensure the workshop was responsive to the needs of the families, the content was presented in Spanish, parents and children together explored digital content and resources in a family-friendly environment, and families were offered hands-on assistance with enrollment in Access from AT&T. HACB and EveryoneOn leveraged ConnectHomeUSA stakeholder commitments, such as Access from AT&T, to provide 12 months of sponsored internet service, equip families with a free Chromebook, and introduce them to online resources.

This pilot workshop laid the foundation for HACB's digital inclusion strategy.

IMPACT

20 families

Participated in a digital literacy workshop that featured Khan Academy educational content

Received a free Chromebook

Enrolled in Access from AT&T



BEST PRACTICES

1. Survey the target community to assess internet connectivity and device ownership rates, and the needs of the target audience.
2. Focus outreach efforts on households with K-12 students, since there is an immediate need to connect to the internet and have a device in the home.
3. Design workshops that are responsive to the needs and goals of the community. Provide hands-on support for enrollment and activation in internet service programs during and post enrollment activities.
4. Ensure households are in-network to enroll in internet service and determine best service type for household.
5. Work with the Internet Service Provider to understand which forms of identification mixed-status families (family members with different immigration statuses) can use to apply. For example, HACB learned while helping mixed-status families enroll in Access from AT&T, that parents who may not have a Social Security Number or Temporary Identification Number may list a consular identification card number.

TESTIMONIALS

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We feel very blessed to be part of this initiative. I am very grateful and thankful to EveryoneOn, HUD, Access from AT&T , to our leadership both at the city and housing authority for trusting us to implement this program here at HACB.

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-Carla Mancha, HACB Chief Executive Officer

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Internet access means that the families will start to feel more comfortable with a computer. As an FSS Coordinator, I've learned that a lot of our heads of households do not feel comfortable around a computer to the point where they are afraid it will breakdown if they use it. I've also learned that when they have a device available to them they are very likely to start using and exploring the internet.

-Ana Trejo, HACB Family Self Sufficiency Coordinator

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We've benefited from Access from AT&T because our children now have the adequate resources to complete school homework.

-Parra Family, Buena Vida residents

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