The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
OneCommunity

Organization URL:
www.onecommuity.org

Project Name:
Connect Your Community (CYC)

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

Broadband is a key asset that enables job growth, academic achievement and social progress. But Census data still shows a persistent digital divide in U.S. broadband adoption: "Broadband Internet adoption, as well as computer use, varied across demographic and geographic groups. Lower income families, people with less education, those with disabilities, Blacks, Hispanics, and rural residents generally lagged the national average in both broadband adoption and computer use." (U.S. Commerce Dept., Exploring the Digital Nation, Nov. 2011.) The CYC Project was designed to significantly narrow this digital divide in eight economically challenged communities, and empower thousands of low-income, elderly, unemployed and otherwise vulnerable Americans to reap the social and economic benefits of being digitally connected. The project launched in September 2010. By June 2012, CYC's local nonprofit partners will have taught basic computer skills to at least 34,000 disadvantaged individuals, and helped at least 26,000 of them to make sustainable broadband connections. The metrics of success for CYC include: providing free digital literacy training to at least 34,000 individuals; instructing each CYC participant in basic computing skills, as well as a specific application or that are relevant to their personal and/or professional pursuits; equipping each program participant with a new or refurbished computer, upon "graduation" from the program; creating a broadband sustainability plan, in which all program participants will continue to utilize high-speed Internet in a meaningful way, either at home or at a nearby community computing center; hiring CYC instructors from within each community, who are committed to meeting program participants "where they are" in their pursuit of digital literacy, greater employability and academic achievement through broadband training.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

OneCommunity has between one and six nonprofit partners in each CYC region which host the basic computer and Internet use trainings (20-25 hours per student). The training is provided using desktop computers, equipped with Windows operating systems, standard business software products, and access to broadband. The training includes 10 to 15 hours of computer and digital literacy "basics," an overview of Office Suite, and web safety and security. Participants then receive an additional 10 to 15 hours of "meaningful use" training. CYC staff customize this portion of the training based on the individuals who make up each class; this could be application or Web training focused on education, safety, financial aid and school services for parents; media sharing, online banking or price checking for seniors; job search, resume construction and social networking for the unemployed; and accessible technologies and online health services for persons who have challenging physical conditions. Reaching the targeted demographic requires a comprehensive approach. CYC has a strong national core that promotes and shares resources, with deep local roots to connect with communities. CYC's local partners conduct neighbor-to-neighbor outreach to engage, train, equip and support new broadband users, with a focus on digital basics and on applications that create interest and drive sustainable adoption. OneCommunity provides core curriculum and staffing requirements, hosts training content, secures evaluation and measurement methods, offers administrative management tools, facilitates webinars and annual events, and handles direct reporting to the United States Department of Commerce. One of the most pressing challenges to the program has been securing broadband access for CYC program participants at a rate they can afford to sustain. OneCommunity also helps each regional lead agency negotiate with local for-profit Internet providers to secure discounted service for CYC participants.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

The CYC project has significantly enhanced the ability of program participants to secure employment and job training opportunities, gain access to vital health and wellness information, seek guidance in educational pursuits and deepen their connections with family, friends and colleagues with whom they do not interact on a regular basis. In October of 2011, CYC staff conducted a telephone survey of program participants in the Greater Cleveland area. Survey results concluded that CYC is helping participants improve their job prospects and their ability to research health and education information online. A total of 624 CYC participants in the Cleveland, OH, region completed the survey. Ninety-one percent of all respondents now regularly access the Internet, a vitally important factor given that more than sixty percent of Fortune 500 companies only accept job applications online. Among those who said they undertook the training mainly for employment reasons, forty-three percent have since found new or better jobs, received a promotion, entered work training programs, or started their own businesses. Seventy-four percent of these "job-oriented" respondents also said that looking up health information online was "personally significant" to them, and they identified the ability to help their children or grandchildren with homework as an important personal outcome of their CYC training.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

CYC has touched the lives of its program participants in ways that OneCommunity cannot necessarily document with metrics. Several CYC graduates have experienced life-changing, personal and professional development that will carry them into the next stage of their lives with

confidence in their skills and ability to connect and compete in the global, digital society. Here are a few direct quotes from program participants. "My skills that I've learned from your class did help me land a Maintenance job. I [was] with this company for the past five months. Before I knew very little, now I know the basics of operating a computer. I was wondering if you are still teaching. Are you teaching advance computer classes? If so, can you email me any information on these classes? Thanks again!" - Ernie. "The Connect Your Community Program has been great for me. It has really helped me with my new job. The job I have now requires me to use the computer daily. I can't tell you how much the training you provided me has helped. Having you as a teacher, with your exceptional computer skills, has been so helpful to me. Your instruction was the kick-in-the-pants I needed to get myself motivated to even start using a computer." - Bill. "I have learned from the Class how to use a computer correctly. I have learned to reach high school classmates I haven't been in touch with since graduation in 1968. I was able to connect to the secretary of the class, who got my email address from my sister. We had a get together at Applebee's on July 2 for [our] forty-third year since graduation. There were about fifty people for this gathering. I now pay my bills online. I keep track of my medical records and appointments. I video conference with my niece at Kent State. I keep up with cousins, Aunts and Uncle, and my sisters and brother. This has changed my life enormously. Thank you again for this wonderful opportunity that I had with Connect Your Community." - Linda.