The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization name:
SmartRiverside

Organization URL:
www.smartriverside.org

Project Name:
SmartRiverside Digital Inclusion Program

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

SmartRiverside's Digital Inclusion Program provides 8 hours of free PC training for low-income families, with incomes under $45,000, who at completion of the class are given a free refurbished personal computer with Microsoft Office 2007 and a Uniquiti Modem (customer premises equipment), which gains access to the city's free Wi-Fi network (86 square miles) where residents can get broadband at no cost up to 1Mbps/1Mbps. The program has been in place since October 2006, and in October 2011, recognized the 5,000th graduate of the system with a new PC from Dell. In August of 2011, SmartRiverside contracted with Cal State San Bernardino's Applied Research Institute to survey 500 families (graduates) of the program to determine the success and impacts of having a free refurbished PC and free Internet in the household. Over 84% indicated that it had a positive impact on their income, job status or student grades. The goal of SmartRiverside is to bridge the digital divide in our community and ensure that all students in K-12 have a computer at home to complete their school work. Another goal was to use the Wi-Fi network as an economic development tool to attract new companies to Riverside and to retain those already here. With a large Hispanic population in Riverside, it is important to ensure that all residents in our community have equal access to programs and benefits, and certainly the Digital Inclusion program enables these families to be inclusive.

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.

SmartRiverside manages the City Wi-Fi network, which spans 86 square miles. It consists of 6 broadband aggregation points (BAP) on 80-foot-high flag poles that are fed by a 1Gb Internet connection from Time Warner. From each of the BAPs, Proxim point-to-point wireless connects provide 50Mb service to over 100 Bel Air gateways throughout the city. Each of the gateways serves a mesh network of Bel Air access points, where over 1,600 cover the city with both 2.4 public access and 4.9 encrypted public safety access for fire and police vehicles. The SSID, SmartRiverside, requires a citizen to authenticate with an e-mail address and accept terms and conditions for use. The Digital Inclusion Program employs 4 youth who are part of a program known as Project Bridge. This is a gang intervention program, whereby youth are given one opportunity to be employed, learn PC refurbishment, and be mentored by senior IT executives in dress and behavior. They must continue with their education to remain in the program. Two of the 4 youth now run the program and are full-time, benefited employees through Affiliated Computer Services, a Xerox Company. Since SmartRiverside is a non-profit corporation, the Digital Inclusion Program qualifies to be a Microsoft Authorized Refurbisher. New operating systems and office products are acquired through Tech Soup for this program for $6 per copy. How the program is self-sustained is through the collection of e-waste. Some working systems are donated; however, recycled e-waste donations generate enough revenue to meet all salary, operating costs and working used systems from various suppliers.

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

It was estimated that about 30% of our population (about 93,000) were without access to a computer or Internet. This represents about 27,000 households. So far our program has impacted 5,000 households, and we expand the program each month by 200. While our libraries and community centers have shared PCs for these families to use, the hours aren't always suitable for everyone and many do not have the transportation to drive back and forth. Getting the technology into a household helps every person in that family. About 50% of our classes are now in Spanish to reach a population that is underserved in our community. The goal of ensuring that no child is left behind in our K-12 is now being realized through the efforts of SmartRiverside. Our seniors are able to take specialized training at our Salvation Army since many require more one-on-one time to learn basic skills. Seniors are finding that in order to stay connected with family members, having access to e-mail and social networks is very important to quality of life.

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.

From the survey that the Institute of Applied Research conducted, the following key benefits were realized: 1) Respondents with children in the household who use the computer were asked, "Have the children's grades gone up since they started using the computer?" Over one-half (54.6%) said that they have. 2) Only 27.2% of respondents said that they are currently employed. Of those that are not currently employed, 37.3% said they are currently looking for a job, and 59.9% of those respondents said they are using the Internet to help them find a job. In response to, "The Internet helped me find a job," 31.0% said this is "true" and 17.0% said "somewhat true." 3) When asked, "The Internet improved the quality of my life," over one-half (54.4%) of respondents said this was true and 22.7% said it was somewhat true.