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Finding Chromebooks for the Community

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Loaves, Fishes & Computers

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May 16, 2019

Abstract

Too many low-income families in Monterey County do not have access to a computer in their homes. Loaves, Fishes & Computers (LFC) is a nonprofit organization that provides low cost technology system and repair to low-income families. In August of 2018, LFC received a donation of 2,000 Chromebooks from a local school district. Most of these Chromebooks have been distributed and now currently the agency is running out. The purpose of this project is to help LFC to find more Chromebooks by initiating and reaching out to IT Directors from different school districts. In the future, LFC can pass down this project to a new intern to continue and build a stronger relationship with the school district directors.

Keywords: Chromebook, low-income, IT Director, digital divide, Social media outreach

Agency Description

Loaves, Fishes & Computers (LFC) is a nonprofit organization located in Salinas, California. Their mission is to help overcome the digital and economic divides by providing low cost computer systems, technology assistance, and computer repairs. LFC serves low-income families, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, and nonprofit organizations (Loaves, Fishes & Computers, n.d.a). According to LFC, 60% of their clients served are from Salinas and 98% of the clients are low-income (Loaves, Fishes & Computers n.d.b). To qualify, clients need to provide verification of participation in at least one of CalWorks, Section 8 Housing, Social Security Disability (SSDI), Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), Medical, WIC, Financial Aid, Unemployment Benefits, or if they are a Senior.

According to Peter Katel, author of “Child Poverty”, mentioned “One in five American children lives in a household with income below the poverty line. Not only are the daily lives of poor children difficult, but experts worry that many will suffer lifelong effects from early deprivation” (2011). Those who are living in poverty would have a difficult time affording a computer system. They would have other priorities to worry about such as where to sleep or when their next hot meal is coming from. In Monterey County, 16.1% of the population are living in poverty (US Census Bureau, 2017a). At the state level, 15.8% of the population in California are living in poverty (US Census Bureau, 2017b) while 15.1% of the population in the United States are experiencing poverty (US Census Bureau, 2017c). Within the three levels, the percentage of poverty at the county level was the highest.

As a nonprofit organization, LFC gets the majority of its funding through grants. Part of the funding they receive is from donations and selling computer systems. Services that Loaves, Fishes & Computers offer include low-cost computer systems. The cheapest computer system

they offer is Chromebooks at a set price of 35 dollars. They also have laptops starting at 116 dollars and desktop starting at 89 dollars. The desktop includes the monitor, tower, mouse, mouse pad, and a keyboard. Other services that LFC offer is low-cost repairs. Repair cost 10 dollars an hour with an additional purchase for parts. On the same street as LFC, a technology repair shop offer computer repairs for 80 dollars per hour (TechGuys, n.d). At Best Buy, they offer a flat rate of \$84.95 in addition to any parts that needed to be purchased (Best Buy, n.d). Compared to other computer repair shops, LFC has the lowest rate.

LFC partners with many organizations, such as Salinas Union High School District (SUHSD) and the public library. Through this partnership, LFC was able to start a program called Digital Literacy Program. The Digital Literacy Program offers classes for parents to learn how to use a Chromebook such as, how to use Gmail or even how to use Google Documents. With parents learning how to use a Chromebook, they would be able to help their children with homework as well as find any resources that they may need. Children would also be able to gain computer skills. It would help them improve motor skills, enhanced mathematical thinking, increased creativity, higher scores on tests of critical thinking and problem solving (Douglas Clements, 2002). According to Benjamin Herold, children who have one to one laptop programs improve their academic achievement. Research shows students who participate in one on one laptop programs shows that they improve their English or Language Arts by .15 standard deviations, math by .20 standard deviations, science by .25 deviations, and writing by .20 deviations (Herold, 2016).

Problem Description

Too many low-income families in Monterey County does not have access to a computer in their homes due to a huge gap in the digital divide. LFC focusing on closing this gap by

distributing Chromebooks, however, they are currently running out. In Monterey County 14.5% of the population does not own a computer and 21.7% of households do not have access to the internet (US Census, 2017d). By not having access to a computer or to the internet, many individuals are behind in their education, having difficulties applying for a job or benefits, or not up to date in the modern technology and society.

The primary cause of digital divide is individuals who are low-income status, lack of knowledge, and lack of adequate infrastructure. Those who are low-income status have a difficult time affording a computer system. They have other priorities to worry about such as paying the rent, bills, and food. Even if a computer is affordable, some may see it as something extra and that it isn't needed. Lack of knowledge is one of the barriers of digital divide that limit individuals from accessing technology. Some people do not know how to use a computer and think that it is not important to learn. While others know that having access to technology is important but does not know where to get information on different computer systems or even different providers that provide internet services. The gap between the information rich and the information poor is also due to the lack of adequate infrastructure. There are some parts in the United States where infrastructure have not fully developed, especially in a low-income area or in rural communities. Lack of adequate infrastructure slows the availability of technology access such as the internet.

If this problem is not addressed, some consequences are education disparities for students as well as difficulties in applying for jobs and benefits for adults. From primary school to college, students need to use a computer to do their homework, research, or even expanding their knowledge through different educational websites. Without a computer, students can struggle academically making them behind their peers and having difficulties to reach higher education.

Besides students, lack of having a computer affects adults by making it difficult for them to apply for a job. Through the advance of technology, many people post job openings online. In order for individuals to apply, they would need to have access to a computer to apply for a job, create and send their resume, and also to communicate with their potential employer. With a computer, an individual can also use it to find information on benefits that they need such as health insurance, subsidized housing, food benefits, or any financial assistance.

Project Description and Implementation Process

The title for this project is Finding Chromebooks for the Community. My capstone project is to outreach to school districts to see if they would like to partner with Loaves, Fishes & Computers to donate their decommissioned Chromebooks and develop a social media campaign. For reaching out to school districts, I will be responsible for contacting IT Directors from different districts to set an appointment and meet with them. Other than reaching out to IT Directors, I developed a social media campaign to spread awareness about digital divide and how the community can help LFC to close the gap. The last part of this project was to put together a guide of what I have been doing so that the agency can continue this project once I leave. This is the first time this task has been assigned at LFC. The first partnership with a school district was when Christian Mendelsohn, Executive Director at LFC, reached out to Salinas Union High School District (SUHSD) to make the partnership possible. Since October of 2017, SUHSD had donated 2,100 of decommissioned Chromebooks to the organization. SUHSD is currently the only school district who is partnering with LFC and donated their Chromebooks. In order to accomplish the agency's goal, which is to help low-income families to overcome digital and economic divides, LFC would need as many Chromebooks and computer systems as they can get.

Each year, school districts would pile up many decommissioned Chromebooks in storage rooms. Some districts would either keep their computer systems in the storage room for many years, auction them, or even recycle or throw them away. The purpose of this project is to help school districts clear out their storage while being able to give the Chromebook a second life and give opportunities for families to have access to an affordable computer system. By implementing the project, Loaves, Fishes & Computers expect to be able to partner with school districts in Monterey County so that they can build a connection to be able to help their target population. The issue that this project is addressing is how low-income families do not have access to a computer system because they cannot afford it.

The benefits from the result of this project would help the agency to be able to continue to help their clients to have access to a computer system. By gaining more donated Chromebooks and computer systems, LFC's volunteers would have more opportunities to learn how to refurbish a Chromebook. This gives the volunteers an opportunity to expand their knowledge of technology and how to take computers apart. Besides expanding knowledge, it also helps the volunteers to give their time to help out the community and gain community service hours. This project would also benefit LFC's clients by offering them low-cost computer systems. According to Toni Downes, "Parents considered being able to operate a computer essential for children's future functioning as adults, particularly as workers. Children also linked the importance of computers to the future and to employment" (Downes, 1999). By offering low-cost computers, clients would be able to use them as a resource to find a job, use it for education, or even apply what they know from using computers to their workplaces.

Project Implementation

To implement this project, a pitch was created and presented to IT Directors during the meetup. Next, an attempt to reach out to the IT Director to set an appointment to meet through phone call and email was made. After being able to communicate with the IT Director, I would schedule a date to go to the school district and meet with the Directors. I tried to reach out to 9 school districts and was able to meet with three IT Directors each from different school districts and only 1 agreed to partner with LFC. Due to the lack of response from the IT Directors through email, phone calls, and attempting to meet up the next plan was to work with a high school club in Pacific Grove Unified School District (PGUSD). I presented to a high school club at PGUSD and explained to them what LFC does. The students at PGUSD decided to organize an equipment drive for LFC and I had to come to the school to pick up the donated equipment. After working with the club at PGUSD, I attempt to reach out to the Chief Technology Officer to see if LFC can present at the IT Directors bi-monthly meeting. After a few weeks, they responded back and said that they will no longer be accepting any other organization to present at their meeting. After collaborating with the PGUSD high school club, I developed a social media campaign. Through this campaign, we would communicate with the community members by asking LFC's clients and volunteers to share their stories on how having a Chromebooks have helped them. With this digital campaign, we were hoping to share the voices of the community to IT Directors so that they would see how there is a high demand for Chromebooks at LFC. Finally, at the end of this project, a manual was made so that staff or LFC's future interns would be able to continue this project and continue to build relationships with other school districts.

Some resources needed to implement this project would be my mentor's support. With his support, it would help me have a better understanding of what I need to and to feel more

comfortable knowing that when I am trying to reach out to IT Directors that I have the agency's support. While implementing this project, I would need to travel to different school districts in Monterey County. With all of these traveling, I would need a car and money to pay for gas. Another resource I would need for this project is time. It takes lots of time to try to reach out to IT Directors through phone and email to driving to the school district.

There are a few potential challenges that might require me to make an adjustment to implementing my project such as when IT Director does not answer my calls or reply to my emails. For this project, I have to travel around Monterey County to meet up with IT Directors. There would be some school districts that are located far from the agency. Some would be an hour drive from the site. Due to the distance, it is important to be able to communicate and contact IT Directors via phone call or email first and to be able to set a date to meet up. However, with all the emails that were sent out and phone calls that were made, I have not received any responses. Just by sending out communications with IT directors in Salinas was difficult. It might be even more difficult to reach out to school districts further from Salinas.

Project Assessment Process

The outcome of this project is to have a better way to reach out to the IT Director and increase the number of donated decommissioned Chromebooks for Loaves, Fishes and Computers. Some measurements that will be used to assess the project's progress is by monitoring the posts that community member shared on social media. This would help the agency to see how far the digital campaign will go and hopefully the IT Directors would be able to see it. Another way to measure the success of this project by looking at the end result of the new procedure. Part of this project is to put everything I learned and all the steps I took to reach

out to IT Directors and put them in a manual so that the project will pass down to the next intern or staff. The manual itself will measure my success for this project.

Findings and Results of Assessment Process

The project did not achieve the expected outcome within the available timeframe. The original goal was to help LFC more Chromebooks so that the agency can continue to help their clients. However, due to the lack of response from the IT Director, it made communicating with them difficult and the goal must be changed to finding ways to improve communication with IT Directors as well with the community. Overall from this project, I succeeded in Through this project, I succeeded in initiating to reach out for possible partnerships which were never assigned to a staff before. Through this task, I was able to try which steps worked and which didn't. After trying to communicate with many IT Directors, only one gave a response. Their response was that there will be a possibility for the school district to donate 100 Chromebooks towards the end of the school year. Through the collaboration with the high school club from PGUSD, LFC was able to obtain donated computers and equipment from the equipment drive. There were monitors, mouse, keyboards, towers, and a few laptops. From the social media campaign, LFC was able to increase their social media presence and outreach to their clients and is spreading awareness about digital divide. Lastly, through this project, a manual was created that has all the information about this project from what worked and what didn't. Hopefully, through this manual, it would help future staff to continue this project.

Recommendations

After many methods, the social media campaign is the most effective way to communicate with the community and IT Directors. LFC can continue communicating with clients and IT Director through the stories of clients. With this method, there would be a possibility to get the

IT Director's attention and someday they might be interested in partnering with LFC and donate their decommissioned Chromebooks. Through the results, I recommend LFC to explain to their staffs and interns on what the agency has tried in the past. After 18 months of interning at LFC, I was not aware that LFC had a website dedicated to donating Chromebooks. It explains the agency's mission, what is the Chromebook Project is about, why Chromebooks are important to LFC, and what happens to the Chromebook that is donated to LFC. If I knew about this website when I first started my project, I would be able to use it effectively when reaching out to IT Directors. Instead of creating a pitch, I would send the link to the IT Directors so that they would have a better understanding of what LFC does with the CB. Next, I would recommend LFC to continue this project by creating a unique way to capture IT Director's attention. One example that I shared with the agency was to create a short film. This short film would tell a story on what LFC does to donated CB as well as how the CB helps the clients. This film can be shared onto LFC's social media, website, or even send the video to the IT Directors.

Conclusion and Personal Reflection

While interning at LFC, I learned more about Professional Development and improved my Professional Communication. When contacting IT Directors, I had to send a professional email and to speak with them in a professional matter during our meetings. I also gained experience and build my collaboration skills. I learned to collaborate with my colleagues at LFC and with representatives from different school districts in Monterey County. I was able to work on Information Management by giving a presentation to school clubs and informing them what LFC does and the population we serve. The most important lesson that I learned from this project is that not everything will go as planned. The main goal that was set at the beginning was to help LFC obtain more Chromebooks, however, it was difficult to keep in touch with the IT Directors

and the goal slowly to shift towards finding better ways to communicate and build a relationship with them. At a personal level, I noticed while interning at LFC, it helped me to be more open towards my colleagues and peers. I am participating more, and I am more confident in my work and actions at my internship site. When I first started, I was nervous and was not sure if I would be able to accomplish the tasks. Now I do these tasks with confidence.

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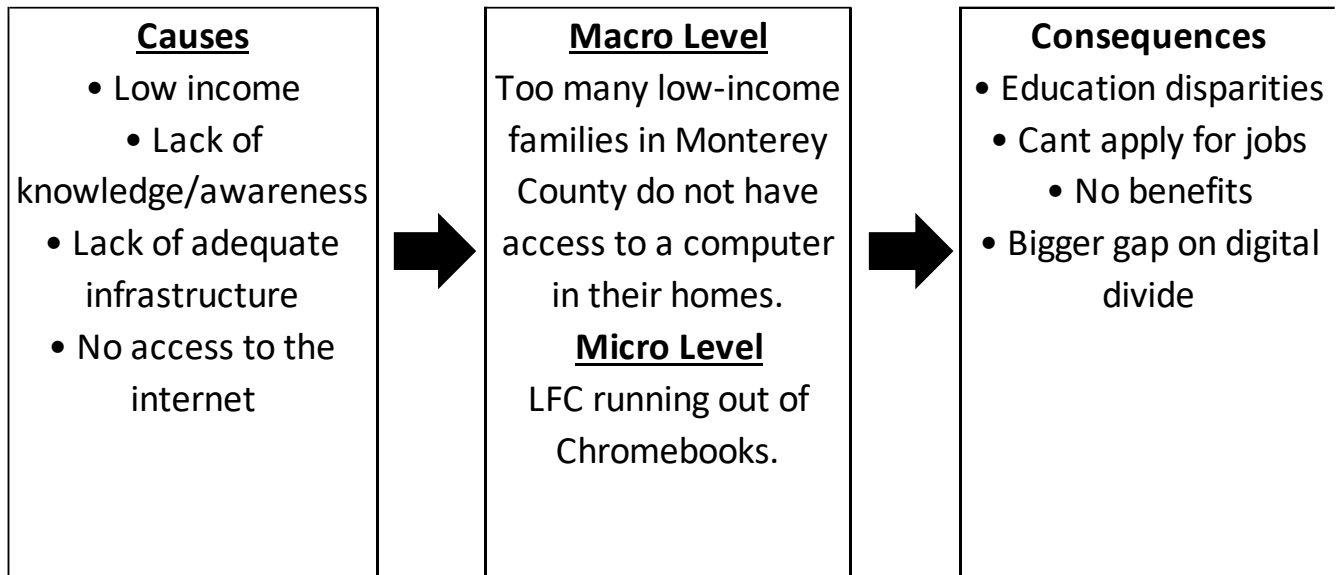
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Appendix

Scope of Work and Timeline

Scope of Work and Timeline			
Title: Outreaching School Districts for CB			
Project description: Reach out to school districts in Monterey County			
Goal: Goal: Increase the rate of families obtaining a computer system in Monterey County			
Primary objective of the project: Reach out to school districts in Monterey County			
Activities		Deliverables	Timeline/deadlines
1	Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor	Final capstone project idea approved	Aug - Sep 2018
2	Research on school districts in Monterey County	Final research on school districts	Sept - Oct
3	Create a Pitch	Final Pitch Reviewed	Sept 20 2018
4	Create an Email Draft	Final Email reviewed	Sept 27 2018
5	Send out communications to IT Directors	Final Communication with IT Directors	Oct – December
6	Meet with IT Directors	Final Meeting with IT Directors	Oct – December
7	Present to the Interact Club	Presented at PGUSD	Oct 29, 2018
8	Coordinate Donations	Coordinating donations with schools	February 2019
9	Put Together Project for future Intern	Final Manual for future Intern	Dec – TBD
10	Contact with Bi-Monthly Meeting	Date of Meeting Confirm	January - TBD
11	Digital Campaign	Final Campaign	January - TBD
12	Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	May 3, 2019
13	Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	Present at Dress Rehearsal for grading (posters submitted)	May 8-10, 2018
14	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final presentation at Capstone Festival!!	May 15 or 16, 2019 (TBD)

Problem Model



Pitch

LFC is a nonprofit organization located in Salinas. Our mission is to help people in Monterey County to have access to affordable computer systems and repairs. We also offer classes for parents to learn how to use computers in order for them to help their children with homework, as well as to be able to use them to find resources they may need.

We serve low income families, veterans, people with disabilities, and nonprofit organizations.

As a nonprofit organization, we would like to give opportunities to families to have access to computers in their home. By giving back computers to the community, we will be able to accomplish our goal, which is to help low income families to overcome digital and economic divides.

I remember when I was younger, I had to follow my older brother to the public library everyday so that he could work on his homework because we didn't have a computer at home. This helped me realized how important it was for my brother to have access to a computer. Without it, he wouldn't be able to work on his homework. Through that experience and helping clients at LFC, I was able to understand and connect with the clients on how it is like not having a computer at home.

The reason why I am here today is because I was wondering if you would be interested to donate your decommission Chromebooks to LFC. Through this partnership, we would give families an opportunity to have access to Chromebooks in their home.

Email Draft

Hello,

My name is Angel Tran and I'm a student at California State Monterey Bay, majoring in Collaborative Health and Human Services. I am also currently interning at Loaves, Fishes & Computers, a 501(c.)3 non-profit located in Salinas.

Our mission is to provide low-cost computer systems, repairs, and assistance to low-income families, veterans, people with disabilities, and non-profit organizations.

Not only do we sell computers, we also offer different workshops for our community. We are currently partnering with the Monterey County Free Libraries to offer a set of 18-hour Digital Literacy Chromebook classes. The goal of this program is to share with our community the basic knowledge on how to use a Chromebook and to be able to use them to find resources that they may need.

In August of 2018, we received a donation of 2,000 Chromebooks from SUHSD. Since then our Chromebook Project has been improving and we were able to give back to our community refurbished Chromebooks. At our current pace, we are sure to run out of Chromebooks within a 4 month. This is the reason why we are requesting donations of decommissioned Chromebooks from our local school districts. We would like to continue to give our community an opportunity to have access to Chromebooks at home.

We would love to hear back from you if you think that your district could partner with us. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Angel

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