



Congreso: Nonprofit Teaches Digital Literacy to Latino Community

By Lana Neuman | July 18, 2013

At Congreso, a North Philadelphia nonprofit that serves the Hispanic community, digital literacy is part of every adult education course, whether students are learning how to use Google Maps or to use the SEPTA website or to study for the GED online.

The lines between digital literacy and adult education are blurring.

Today at **Congreso**, the well-regarded North Philadelphia nonprofit that has served its Latino community for 35 years, digital literacy is part of just about every adult education course. Whether students are learning how to use Google Maps or to use the SEPTA website or to study for the GED online, since technology touches nearly every part of daily life, it can't be separated from learning, said **Michael Thompson**, adult education coordinator at Congreso.

"It's not just about teaching the technology," Thompson said. "It's about learning how to use the technology to support other learning goals."

Congreso is one of nearly 100 local organizations that offer adult literacy courses that are supported by the **Mayor's Commission on Literacy**, said Commission spokeswoman **Deana Gamble**. Founded in 1983, the Mayor's Commission on Literacy serves the estimated 550,000 Philadelphians — about a third of the city's population — "who are functioning below basic education levels." The Commission offers tutor trainings, student referrals and funding to its partner organizations, like Congreso, Gamble said.

As part of the city's digital divide initiative, the Commission will work to get more adults into the city's 19 public computing centers, which recently received \$624,000 in city funding, Technical.ly Philly reported. Those city centers are part of the broader KEYSPOt network of digital literacy locations in Philadelphia.

Congreso, which runs three KEYSPOt public computing centers, including one at its headquarters near 2nd and Lehigh, teaches seven adult education courses, including multiple levels of ESL classes and GED classes in both English and Spanish. Classes range in length from a few weeks to a whole year, depending on student needs, funding and type of class. Technology has become part of what Congreso teaches and is incorporated into all the classes it offers.

"Digital literacy is something that a lot of learning facilities are moving toward," Thompson said. "It's a relatively new feature in learning skills. It's something that is recognized now as being very, very important and indispensable."

Thompson incorporates technology into his classrooms in various ways: he uses a website to teach his ESL students vocabulary, he devoted one class to Google Maps, teaching students how to use street view and see their homes and he taught his ESL students how to use the SEPTA website.

"If they have a job interview, and they need to get to a place they've never been before, they need to know how to navigate that site," Thompson said. Thompson said that Congreso has no trouble filling its classes and sees them fill up, though students sometimes drop out, since most of them have full-time responsibilities like jobs and families.

"We were starting with full classes," said Thompson. "There is quite a large waiting list."

Each class has about 15 students, said **Brendan Conlin**, Congreso's director of adult learning. Adult literacy classes served about 160 students since July 2012, Conlin said.

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