Tech Tutors Sought to Close the Digital Divide

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The Mayor's Commission on Literacy is recruiting new, special types of volunteers to be part of an innovative service opportunity called **"Tech Tutors."** Tech Tutors are tech-savvy individuals who work with adult learners to develop their literacy skills through the use of technology, such as, computers, tablets, and literacy software.

Nearly one in two Philadelphians lack the basic education required to secure family-sustaining jobs. Further, as many as 65% of working adults do not possess the basic technology skills expected of today's workforce. Without access, or the ability to search and apply for jobs, Philadelphia's adult learners are unable to remain competitive in today's current job market.

Tech Tutors is the perfect opportunity for techies to give back to their local communities by demonstrating ways technology can be used as a learning tool to support our city's adult learners. Whether working one-on-one or in a small cohort environment, Tech Tutors address learners' educational goals using a variety of digital platforms.

"Computer literacy is now a basic literacy for everyone," said **Dr. Judith Rényi,** Executive Director of the Mayor's Commission on Literacy. *"This project will help us leverage volunteers to achieve a critically important goal, which is to make sure that all adult literacy and English language learners get to practice their digital skills so they can function as adults in our society, get jobs, and succeed. I can't imagine anything more important to do for the people of this City."*

Tech Tutors are required to enroll in the Commission's Basic Tutor Training to equip them with strategies to effectively impact adult learners. Once they've received training, Tech Tutors will be matched with an adult learner at one of five, community-based non-profit partner sites around the city. The participating literacy agencies are: Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Philadelphia FIGHT, Mercy Neighborhood Ministries, People's Emergency Center, and Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs.

James Quick, an adult learner from Ready, Willing, & Able, a non-profit organization working to break the cycles of homelessness, addiction, and criminal recidivism, testifies to the impact learning technology from a tutor has had on his life.

"Without my tutor I couldn't have furthered my education. I need my G.E.D. and computer skills to move forward and get a job. It has cleared my judgment and opened me up to new opportunities," said James.

Tech Tutors is a collaboration between the Mayor's Commission on Literacy, the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service, and the Freedom Rings Partnership, with additional funding and in-kind support from Drexel University. Tech Tutors is primarily funded by the Cities of Service grant awarded to the City of Philadelphia to implement service initiatives designed to address poverty. Philadelphia is one of 18 U.S. cities awarded grants to support mayors who are harnessing the power of volunteers in a strategic way to address priority problems.

Individuals who want to get involved can contact Tech Tutors program coordinator Ms. Yuri Seung at 215-686-5252 or e-mail seungy@freelibrary.org, or visit the Commission's website at www.philaliteracy.org.