What's the overlap between the rise in digital non-connectedness in Philly and joblessness?

Hannah Sassaman of the Media Mobilizing Project recently asked us to answer this question via reporting collective Broke in Philly.

It's an important consideration for Philadelphia, especially, which has the second-lowest rate of broadband access of the nation's 25 largest cities at 71.6%, according to a 2018 Philadelphia Inquirer analysis of census data. It was also the only large city to record a decrease in internet access between 2016 and 2017.

Per Sassaman's colleague Devren Washington, lack of digital literacy impacts a person's unemployment from the very beginning of their job search in the city.

“People who struggle with digital literacy are less likely to own a computer or know how to use it as a tool in their job search,” he wrote in an email to Technical.ly. “This puts them at a disadvantage in comparison to other candidates. If they manage to navigate sites like Indeed or Monster, which requires a certain level of digital competency, application sorting algorithms reduce the chances of their application being seen.”
And the disadvantages go on. These candidates are less likely to even find jobs to apply for and will submit fewer applications than others, Washington added. But there are resources available to help increase people’s broadband access and power their job hunts in Philadelphia. Here’s a list of a few:

KEYSPOTS

The KEYSPOTS program has offered people unrestricted access to the internet on computers across the city since 2010. There are more than 50 locations in public, private and nonprofit organizations, including rec centers and Free Library of Philadelphia branches.

Between 2011 and 2016, these locations were visited more than 672,310 times for job searches and education, according to KEYSPOT’s 2016-2019 strategic plan.

The program also offers digital literacy training that range from teaching basic computer skills to resume help, said Farrah Parkes, the director of myPLACE and digital initiatives for the city’s Office of Adult Education. Her office manages the KEYSPOT program, which has only grown since the beginning — and necessarily so, she added.

“[Digital literacy] is pretty crucial for any job now,” Parkes said.

Philadelphia FIGHT

This nonprofit is known for its outreach to people with HIV and those who are high risk. In addition to community health centers, it has a Critical Path Learning Center that offers adult education classes on topics like digital literacy and employment. This center houses one of the city’s KEYSPOT labs with Wi-Fi access, desktop computers, laptops, iPads and charging stations, said Juliet Fink Yates, the chief education officer at FIGHT.

The Institute for Community Justice (ICJ) within FIGHT focuses on formerly incarcerated citizens returning to society with its Reentry Center. The Reentry Center is also a KEYSPOT computer lab, and ICJ has a workforce development program.

FIGHT received a $20,000 grant from the Digital Literacy Alliance (DLA) in 2018 for its work that pairs health management and digital literacy, according to Andrew Buss, the deputy CIO for innovation management for the Office of Innovative Technology.

SEAMAAC and United Communities 

In 2018, DLA awarded these immigration-focused nonprofits a joint grant of $10,000 for their digital literacy program, including an open computer lab, for immigrants learning to speak English and searching for jobs.

This was a follow-up to a $25,000 grant the DLA gave to the two organizations for its digital literacy classes, which reached about 70 community members by the end of 2017.

Lutheran Settlement House (LSH)

Every third Wednesday of the month, this nonprofit holds an information session at 1340 Frankford Ave, about its free individual or small group tutoring sessions, according to its website. Volunteer tutors will help participants with GED preparation, digital literacy skills and career development. Its six-week Customer Service Training Program will also train people interested in working in retail.

DLA also awarded this org for its digital literacy and job education work in 2018 with a $10,000 grant. LSH started teaching people transitioning out of homelessness these skills at the Jane Addams Place shelter on 43rd and Ludlow streets in 2017.
Pan-African Studies Community Education Program (PASCEP)

This 40-year-old program at Temple University offers low-cost courses that are catered to the North Philadelphia community, but available to anyone in the city. It has three technology-centered, 10-week courses in the fall and spring semesters, none of which costs more than $40. They are:

- Introduction to Personal Computers Intermediate
- Creating Professional Spreadsheets: Microsoft Excel
- Developing Dynamic Databases: Microsoft Access (this class does require an administrator desktop or notebook PC account and a full installation of Microsoft Office 2010)

PASCEP is also a KEYSOTP location and has free internet access Monday through Thursday from 1 to 5 p.m.

Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships

- This community services hub at Drexel University has a series of technology classes or open computer lab hours:
  - Every Tuesday from 1 to 3:30 p.m., a Drexel human resources employee can assist visitors with resume or job search in the Beachell Family Learning Center at 3509 Spring Garden St.
  - The Dornsife Center offers basic computer training every Wednesday from noon to 1 p.m. and will hold Microsoft Publisher trainings on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5 to 7 p.m. through May 30.
  - The computer lab in the Beachell Family Learning Center is open every weekday with varying hours. Find its opening hours for the month of May on its calendar here.

Have your own question about the job market or unemployment in Philly as they relate to tech? Ask below, and we’ll investigate as part of Broke in Philly.

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