



Bridging the Digital Divide in Adult Literacy Education

Situation

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wisconsin Literacy, a nonprofit coalition supporting adult literacy agencies across Wisconsin, faced significant challenges. The pandemic disrupted traditional in-person tutoring, revealing a critical gap in digital skills among volunteer tutors, who are often retired professionals. It has become essential to equip tutors with the necessary digital literacy to continue their work effectively.

Response

To address this issue, Wisconsin Literacy created a new position, the Tutor Training and Digital Literacy Project Manager, funded by a grant from the Department of Administration. A three-pronged approach was implemented to meet the program's goals:

- **Digital Literacy Trainings:** Development of comprehensive digital literacy training programs for tutors.
- **Resource Provision:** Offered subscriptions to NorthStar Digital Literacy Assessment for skill-building curriculum.
- **Tech Support:** Providing devices, tech equipment, and hotspots to member agencies.

Outcomes

The initiative led to significant engagement and progress:

- **26 member agencies** signed up for NorthStar Digital Literacy.
- **700 unique users** engaged with NorthStar, including tutors and adult learners.
- **3,517 digital literacy assessments** were completed.
- **2,041 hours (about 3 months) of** digital literacy learning were logged.

The digital literacy tutor training series and foundational tutor training series were made available via Zoom and video, integrating digital literacy seamlessly into traditional tutoring methods. The foundational series subtly incorporated digital literacy into teaching English as a second language, ensuring tutors learned necessary digital skills without feeling overwhelmed.

Lessons Learned

Several key lessons emerged from this initiative:

- **Multiple Formats for Training:** Providing digital skill-building opportunities in various formats (video, Zoom, in-person) is crucial to meet the diverse needs of tutors. Some tutors preferred video tutorials, others engaged via Zoom, and some required in-person training.
- **Assumption of Skill Levels:** Avoid assuming a specific level of digital skill among tutors. Detailed, step-by-step instructions are necessary to ensure all participants can follow along. For example, Jamie and some tutors struggled with basic tasks like navigating between Zoom and other documents.

- **Integration of Digital Skills:** Digital skills should be integrated into all aspects of tutoring, even if students do not explicitly request them. This ensures learners are prepared for the digital demands of modern jobs. Tutors need to understand that digital literacy is essential for students aiming to improve their job prospects.

This case study highlights the importance of adaptability and comprehensive support in bridging the digital divide.

Learn More

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