

Basic Computer Training Program - A Project and Partnership with Adult Basic Education, Minnesota State Universities and WorkForce Centers Dakota Scott Workforce Development Area

Overview describing the innovative practice

Summary: Individuals looking for work or hoping to enroll in college classes, but lacking basic computer skills, led to the development of this program. As a result of this newly-developed digital literacy class, 23 individuals now have a Northstar Digital Literacy Basic Computer Skills Certificate.

Background: Staff assisting job seekers in the Burnsville WorkForce Center's Resource Room and the South of the River Education Center, who help students enrolling in college classes, noted that more individuals looking for employment and/or enrolling in courses didn't know how to use a computer. The South of the River Education Center (SOTR), co-located in the same building as the WorkForce Center (WFC), includes Dakota County Technical College, Inver Hills Community College and Metropolitan State University. Classes from the three higher education centers are offered at this site.

Noting this fundamental need, WFC and SOTR staff discussed options. They soon brought in Tammi Bernard, the Independent School District (ISD) 191 Adult Basic Education (ABE) Coordinator to discuss the challenge and need. Bernard was familiar with the Basic Computer curriculum created by St. Paul Public Libraries. She adapted it to help these job seekers and students not proficient in basic computer skills. The curriculum was reduced from a 4 day, 3 hours per day delivery format to a 3 day, 2 hours per day class schedule to make the class more available to job seekers and students. These instructional materials were adapted to prepare students for the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment.

Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)

Computer literacy skills are needed more and more to navigate through the rapidly increasing digital world. For job seekers, having basic digital literacy skills are necessary to search and apply for jobs and are often also needed once on the job. The benefits for those taking the class included developing and improving computer skills and the opportunity to earn a credential if they passed the exam on the third day. The credential is the Northstar Digital Literacy Basic Computer Skills Certificate. See <https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/> for more information on the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards and assessments. Over the 6 hrs. of course work, participants learned about 20 basic computer skills including:

1. Distinguish between desktop and laptop computers.
2. Identify specific computer hardware: a system unit, monitor, printer, keyboard, mouse or touchpad, USB port
3. Turn computer and monitor on and off
4. Log on to computer
5. Demonstrate knowledge of function and placement of keys on keyboard: Enter, Shift, Control, Backspace, Delete, Arrow Keys, Tab, Caps Lock, Number Lock
6. Identify types of mice: mouse and touchpad
7. Identify mouse pointer shapes and match them to the correct context of use: typing arrow (text), arrow (basic clicking), hand pointer (clickable links)
8. Demonstrate appropriate use and ability to right-click and left-click
9. Double click and right click
10. Drag and drop
11. Use mouse to select check boxes, use drop-down menus and scroll
12. Adjust volume and mute audio
13. Plug in headphones correctly and use when appropriate
14. Identify icons on desktop (Internet Browser, Control Panel, Recycle Bin, Skype)
15. Demonstrate the ability to use the recycle bin correctly for trashing and retrieving items
16. Demonstrate understanding that it is possible to customize a computer for increased accessibility
17. Demonstrate understanding that mice can be customized for left-handed people and that the speed of clicking can also be customized
18. Demonstrate understanding that screen resolution can be changed
19. Demonstrate understanding that software programs are upgraded periodically and that different versions may be installed on different computers
20. Identify storage media: USB/Flash drives (external) and hard drive (external and internal)

This course has been offered three times in 2016 with classes held at the Burnsville WFC. There are typically 12-15 individuals who attend each class. Of the 33 students who have taken the assessment, 23 were awarded the Northstar Basic Computer Skills Certificate. Students who did not pass the test received a certificate of participation which lists the organizations that collaborated on the course: ISD 191 School for Adults, Burnsville (Dakota Scott) WFC, and Inver Hills SOTR Education Center. Survey responses showed that students were from all age-ranges with heavier representation of those ages 50 and older. Of the 33 who took the assessment test: 10 were English language learners; 23 were women; and one man was hearing impaired. For the 23 students who received the certificate, they now have a powerful educational achievement to add to their resumes. Finally, for some of the students, it was their first classroom experience since high school and the positive experience and success could open the gateway for them to get additional education.

Employer/Community impact (i.e.: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)

The employer and community impact will be significant as having basic digital literacy skills is often identified as a core competency within a job and thus a building block for overall economic success. For employers, equipping these job seekers with digital literacy skills provides them with more and better-qualified applicants. Having the Northstar Digital Literacy Basic Computer Skills Certificate is an asset for applicants and will help them once they have the job. The benefits for post-secondary education will be the preparation of students for higher level computer classes. The benefits for ABE programs are that adult learners learn about their programs and the classes they offer. The community benefits by having residents with higher levels of computer skills which in turn helps them personally and professionally. One example is that having the basic digital literacy skill set gives parents and grandparents the ability to help children with their homework and to communicate electronically with children's teachers.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

Those involved included a variety of people including the staff working with job seekers and students who identified the need. Individuals who took these insights to heart and met to develop solutions included: Mike Yanda (DEED), Burnsville WFC Manager; Virginia Becker (DEED), Workforce Development Specialist; Stephanie Atkinson, SOTR Education Center Coordinator; Stephen Hunt (ABE Instructor for ISD 191); Tammi Bernard, ABE Coordinator, ISD 191 School for Adults; and Dakota Scott Workforce Services staff. WFC, SOTR and ABE staff comprise of the on-going planning team and setting up/tearing down the class team. SOTR provided the classroom spaces for the courses. Once the logistics and curriculum were established, the next key component was promoting this course. SOTR was instrumental in creating documentation to promote this course and dispersing this through a variety of avenues (print, social media, digital display, email correspondence to community members and colleagues, etc.). The information SOTR created was used by WFC and Dakota Scott Workforce Services as they spread the word through an extensive network of individuals and organizations who work with job seekers.

Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

Key external resources included: the structured curriculum from St. Paul public libraries which Bernard adapted for the local needs; ABE's qualified instructor(s) to facilitate the class; DEED's Unemployment Insurance (UI) division as they allowed staff to use their on-site laptops; and area non-profits, churches and others who relayed information to the individuals they work with who could benefit from the class.

Ideas for replication/lessons learned

This project is very replicable with the right mix of partnerships, collaboration and resources. It also re-affirms that impactful, value-add activities can be developed when local partners sit together to discuss community problem and challenges. Replication of this program is already in progress locally, as this program is going to be expanded to serve adults in ten other locations. This will be done by replicating the instructional materials developed for use in ISD 191 to other ABE sites, WorkForce Centers, and Libraries. This growth will be aided by a \$5,000 grant awarded to Adult Basic Education TriDistrict (SSD 6, ISD 197, ISD 199), ISD 191, ISD 196, and Farmington ABE through Adult Education Transitions Regions (Better Together: 2016 Libraries, Adult Literacy and Workforce Collaborative Activities). The grant application was developed in partnership with School Districts, Libraries and WorkForce Centers and was based on the success and model of this initial program.