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People with Disabilities Targeted by CETF Grant to Cross Over Digital Divide

By Techwire posted on October 18, 2013 in Digital Divide, News

One of the most under connected groups to the Internet are people who are disabled. According to the PPIC's California Digital Divide Survey of June 2013, 56% of persons with a disability, handicap or chronic disease have broadband access, while 72% of those without a disability have broadband access. Moreover, 60% of working-age persons with disabilities are out of work or underemployed. Those without Internet access must compete for time to use public computers, which includes transportation to libraries or public computer centers, only to find that the computer may not have accessible software options or be in inaccessible locations for wheelchair bound persons.

Digital literacy for people with disabilities will be aided with a $260,000 grant by the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) to the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC). Today, in Oakland, CETF Senior Vice President Susan Walters presented a check for the grant to Teresa Favuzzi, the CFILC Executive Director.

The two organizations are forming a statewide partnership to connect people with disabilities to affordable high speed Internet at home, and to help them learn how to use the computers. The so-called "Digital Access" initiative will provide access broadband service, low cost computer devices, and digital literacy training. It will engage 40 organizations across the state to help more than 2,100 people with disabilities and their families to subscribe to broadband at home for as little as $10 a month. The AT Network will be used to provide support and follow up for individuals and organizations seeking to subscribe to broadband, purchase refurbished computers and attend digital literacy training in accessible sites, as well as online training resources.

Damary Busto, 21, of Hayward, demonstrates to the media how she uses her iPad to communicate. She says her life changed after getting an iPad and an app that allows her to communicate by typing on her tablet, and then the computer reads her message aloud. The technology has allowed her to advance her education and become more socially active with friends, in addition to becoming a disability rights leader. Photo courtesy of the California Emerging Technology Fund.

"An online connection is a link to opportunity for all Californians, and new assistive technologies are allowing Californians with disabilities to gain access to online educational employment and civic engagement opportunities," said CETF's President and CEO Sunne Wright McPeak. "CFILC . . . [is] a critical conduit in connecting people with disabilities to affordable broadband service, training and computers."

CLIFC will work with device lending libraries, to provide digital devices to people with disabilities so they may "try before they buy" to ensure the device works for their particular abilities. Broadband service and refurbished computer options will be offered as part of a digital device loan.

"The return on investment for people with disabilities is significant, ranging from live streaming video and instant text communication that liberates people who are hard of hearing from the phone, to software programs that read text and describe visual content aloud for the visually impaired," said CFILC's Director Favuzzi. "Attending classes remotely, online medical consultations and operating home Internet businesses eliminate the need for unnecessary trips or commutes. Those with certain learning disabilities can access digital teaching tools. "

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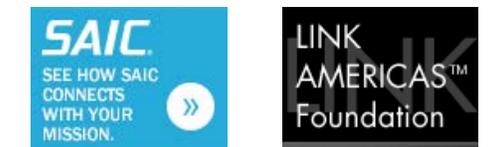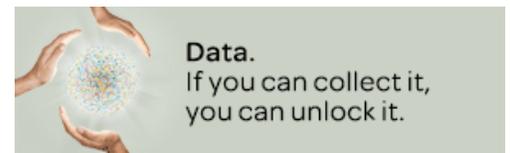
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