

GENERATION WORK SEATTLE

The Vital Role of Technology During the COVID-19 Epidemic





1. BACKGROUND

The urgent need to address the digital divide has been glaringly evident during the COVID-epidemic. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national Generation Work initiative, Port Jobs worked with King County Reconnect to Opportunity staff in fall 2020 to provide 26 Chromebooks to low-income youth and young adults, 16 to 24 years of age.

We hoped that the Chromebooks would help young adults continue their education and job search and stay connected to friends and providers. Port Jobs included computer set-up instructions with the Chromebooks, as well as information about how to access the King County Library System; Seattle Public Library; SAT/ACT Preparation; High School Completion; General Education Development (GED); Technology Certifications; Food Permits; Red Cross training; and COVID-19 resources. Port Jobs and King County staff offered additional technical assistance to Chromebook recipients who were not familiar with computers or lacked technology skills to help them get the most benefit from the Chromebooks.

2. REPORT PURPOSE AND METHODS

This brief report explores how the Chromebooks were used through recipient interviews. Multiple attempts were made to interview each of the twenty-six Chromebook recipients. Many young adults had disconnected or temporarily out of service cell phone numbers, and some had moved and not left forwarding addresses. Fourteen of the twenty-six Chromebook recipients were interviewed by phone or Zoom. All received \$50.00 gift cards for participation to honor their time and insights regarding how they and other people in their household used the Chromebooks. All were asked to identify technology challenges they encountered, and to describe, if applicable, outcomes or benefits emerging from Chromebook use. The information will underscore the role of technology distribution to young adults and low-income persons, and guide next step improvements in these efforts.

3. CHROMEBOOK RECIPIENTS AND USERS

GENDER: Fourteen young adults were interviewed, including ten females and 4 males.

RESIDENCY: All were residents of King County. Only three young adults lived alone. Six young people lived with other relatives or family members; three lived with non-related individuals, ages 18-29; and two lived in households that included relatives and non-related young adult peers.

ACCESS TO COMPUTERS:

Eleven lived in households where other family members owned a computer. Most of these computers, due to COVID-19, were being used, however by younger siblings to do online learning, and in two households adults were relying on a separate computer so they could work from home. Four young people had no access to computers in their household prior to getting their Chromebook.

COMPUTER SKILLS: Five young adults said they were very technologically skilled, and were adept in using software such as Microsoft Office, Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. Seven said they had basic computer skills and knew how to do tasks like saving and sending documents, and using email and the internet, and two young people had very limited technology skills and little to no keyboarding experience.

4. HOW WERE THE CHROMEBOOKS USED?

Main Resource Area	Type of Use	Type of Use by Young Adults Who Received Chromebooks	Type of Use by Other Family Members	Type of Use by Other Non-Related Household Members (18-29)
Employment-Related	Job Search	X	X	
	Online Job Application	X		X
	Food Permit	X		
Education-Related	GED Study	X		X
	ESL		X	
	Enroll in OSHA 10 course	X		
	Apply Financial Aid Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)	X		
	Enroll in College	X	X	
	Contact Classmates	X		
	Contact Child's Teacher			
	Contact GED or College Instructor	X		
Subsidies	Apply for Unemployment Insurance		X	
	Apply for Utility Assistance		X	
Financial Management	Online banking		X	
	Research Washington State Self-Employment Assistance Program (SEAP)		X	
Income Generation	Sell clothes on Poshmark	X		

Main Resource Area	Type of Use	Type of Use by Young Adults Who Received Chromebooks	Type of Use by Other Family Members	Type of Use by Other Non-Related Household Members (18-29)
Access Resources	Get Library Card	X	X	
	Order Food	X		X
	Coordinate food delivery from Senior Center		X	
	Bought car- found on Craigslist	X		
Social Networking	Facebook	X	X	X
	Google/Bing Search	X		
	Email Friends/relatives	X	X	X
Health-Related	Research for COVID test location	X	X	
	Conduct virtual doctor appointment	X	X	
	Order prescription		X	
	Schedule COVID vaccination	X	X	X
Self-Advocacy	Research COVID Landlord Laws		X	
	Research voter registration rules	X		X

5. WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The chart presented in the above section suggests that the Chromebooks were very useful for students and oftentimes for other members of their household. The provision of fourteen Chromebooks benefited a total of fourteen Generation Work youth; twelve non-related young people, and twenty-two other adult family members who lived in the household, for a total of forty-seven persons. On average one Chromebook was used by at least three people.

Young adult feedback demonstrates that the following personal factors and resources are important to consider in order to achieve the outcomes/benefits emerging from the above described Chromebook uses.

In summary, the Chromebooks were used for many different purposes. The top five Chromebook uses for *young adults who directly received Chromebooks* were job search, attending GED and college classes, Facebook and filling out job applications. The top five Chromebook uses for *other adult family members* were: job search, online banking, emailing friends/relatives, COVID-19 research and COVID-19 vaccine scheduling. The top five Chromebook uses for *non-related household members*, ages 18-29 were: GED study, online job applications, emailing friends, scheduling COVID vaccinations (as they were living in multi-generation households), and registering to vote.



GENERATION WORK DIGITAL DIVIDE

Personal Factors	Resources	Outcomes/Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Technology skills - Number of household members who need to use the computer -Access to internet -Time constraints determining when computer may be in use -Type of technology needs to complete coursework, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Access to working, dependable technology -Access to technical support (teacher, case manager, and friends who understand computers) -Easy to follow technical guidance -Education and career plans or advice that embeds up-to-date web links and, as needed, technology skill-building courses -Access to software that is set up for cyber security and privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Economic -Education -Financial -Social -Health -Civic

According to Port Jobs staff and young adults positive aspects of the Chromebooks included the price, weight, battery life, security, speed and stability of the operating system, and cloud based storage. Both groups said the disadvantages of the system included the limited storage space, and difficulty using the Chromebooks for gaming, graphics, or installation of install Adobe suite. In addition, Port Jobs staff noted that the Chromebooks do not have powerful processors and generally have low resolution displays, making them difficult to use for graphic design and video editing. They noted, that they were researching different types of laptops to use in the future.

Young adults also identified other factors that influenced their successful use of Chromebooks. These included access to staff who were skilled at technology, and links to resources that were relevant, easy to navigate and accurate. Also, because other household members were often using the Chromebooks one young person noted that security issues were important. This young woman said when her mother was searching for information about her home country she had clicked on some questionable links that might not be secure. For this reason she was glad that the Chromebooks had virus protection. Internet access was not a challenge for any of the young adults, though two were going to be moving soon to areas of King County where they thought Internet access would be less reliable.

The interviews also showed that the provision of a working computer to one individual benefits the whole household. As one young person said, “When my mother applied for utility assistance my family was able to have a little more money for other things we needed.” A review of the reasons and ways people used the Chromebooks reveals the power that technology has in keeping people connected to each other, to resources, and to the community. One young adult who took steps to register to vote, said that she now felt more responsible for her community. At the same time the interviews show that having a working computer in a household is not a guarantee that a young adult will have sufficient access to technology. Other personal factors

need to be considered, including the circumstances that determine computer availability, and their own technical skills. These interviews indicate that staff in workforce development organizations and schools also need to be technologically savvy in order to communicate effectively with their clients, and have the skills to integrate technology into the education and career plans of the people they are serving.

6. NEXT STEPS

Eliminating disparities caused by inequitable access to technology is essential. The interviews underscore how technological access, products and preparedness are critical features of young adult education and workforce career navigation plans and systems. The effective use of technology is vital for young adults to fully harness the resources that they, and as applicable, other members of their households need to individually and collectively thrive. Moving forward, the Generation Work partnership in Seattle will continue to share what they are learning about the role of technology in the lives of young adults, pre, during and post COVID-19 in their programs. This will include identifying improved and emerging strategies for promoting the digital skills and usage of technology necessary to advance the education and career success of young people.

Prepared by:

Business Government Community Connections



Port Jobs is supporting local efforts which connect young adults to good jobs and career pathways in King County. Port Jobs is the local lead for the Seattle Generation Work partnership. The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched Generation Work in 2016 to explore new ways of connecting young Americans with the knowledge and experience they need to succeed in the job market. The initiative includes partnerships in Cleveland, Hartford, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Seattle. All are dedicated to weaving together best practices from the adult education and training field. The particular focus is on demand-driven workforce development strategies which integrate and are driven by positive youth development practices, such as mentoring and work-based learning, to better prepare young people ages 18-29 for work.

Port Jobs regularly convenes Seattle Generation Work partners to share what they are learning and brainstorm ways to align, coordinate and leverage resources. In support of these efforts, Port Jobs engaged Business Government Community Connections (BGCC) to interview young adults served by Seattle Generation Work partners. The interviews garner young adult feedback about their experiences prior, during and after receiving services into Generation Work learning community meetings and planning. Results are shared to ensure young adult voice informs the work of all partners.

Port Jobs would like to thank the young adults who shared their experiences and offered their feedback. Your valuable input will help our partnerships and programs more effectively support the career and educational goals of young people living in the King County region.

For more information about Generation Work Seattle please visit <http://portjobs.org/index.php>