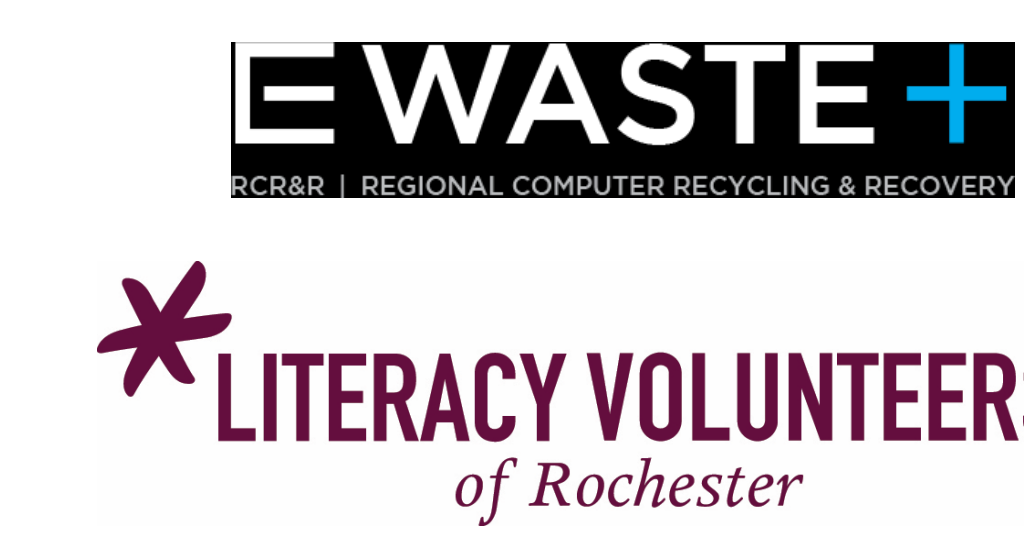


Bridging the Language Gap: the Role of Electronics



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Project Summary

This project was originally designed as an effort to improve English proficiency in refugees by adding computers with English language learning software such as Rosetta Stone to the education curriculum at a local refugee center. With high turnover in teachers and leadership at the site, the utilization of the computers decreased, and they were ultimately shifted to a tutoring center at Literacy Volunteers of Rochester, whose focus is improving literacy of adults in Monroe County.

Background

Based on data collected by the United States Census Bureau from 2009-2013 in the American Community Survey (ACS), over 60 million US residents age 5 years and older speak a language other than English at home, and 25 million (~40%) of those speak English less than “very well.” Those with decreased English proficiency are less likely to be employed, and when they find a job, their earnings are lower. While continued use of one’s native language should be encouraged, as it enriches American diversity and respects others’ cultures, it is also important to provide appropriate language-learning resources for those who wish to improve their English speaking ability as a means of bridging the language barrier.

One such resource is Rosetta Stone, a digital language-learning program. Several studies have shown that combining electronic software like Rosetta Stone with didactic teaching, especially in the dedicated student, may be more beneficial for learning a foreign language than didactic teaching alone. In addition, the use of computers, which is an integral part of this process, may serve to improve digital literacy.

Goals

- Improve English language proficiency in the Rochester community by combining English language learning software (Rosetta Stone) with didactic teaching
- Enhance digital literacy in those participating in the Rosetta Stone program
- Improve professional and economic outcomes in those living in the United States who have limited English language proficiency by narrowing the language gap



Pictured: Senator Joseph Robach with Hoekelman Center's Community Liaison, Kelly McDermott at the ribbon cutting ceremony of the Literacy Volunteers of Rochester's new tutoring center

Methods

1. Funding obtained:
 - Partners for Childrens Grants through the Hoekelman Center
 - Private donations (www.wordsthatunite.com)
2. Resources purchased from EWASTE:
 - 4 computers with Rosetta Stone on each
 - headsets
 - computer cases
3. Study initially piloted at a local refugee center, where computer utilization slowly decreased
4. Computers transitioned to the Literacy Volunteers of Rochester
5. In November, the center held a grand opening of a new tutoring center, including these 4 computers

Future Directions

- Obtain data on program utilization at the Literacy Volunteers of Rochester
- Design a pre and post program assessment to determine efficacy
- If software proves effective, promote fundraising and apply for further grants to obtain more laptops, software, and headset units
- Develop a laptop renting service where motivated learners can rent computers for home use



Pictured: Literacy Volunteers of Rochester Executive Director Robert Mahar

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