

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important internet access is for families and communities to be connected to the world and receive the services they require to survive and thrive. The town of Dover, NJ was greatly affected when the world shut down and all access to services went remote as a majority of their population is made up of low-income immigrant families whose primary language is not English. The United States Census Bureau reported the estimated population of Dover in 2021 was 18, 427 with 67.5% representing as Hispanic or Latino for a town that is reported as 2.68 square miles of land. (United States Government). Additionally, the Census Reporter presented by the U.S. Census Bureau reports the median household income for the residents of Dover as \$64,039 which is \$21,206 less than the median household income for the state of New Jersey of \$85,245. (U.S. Census Bureau).

Through the 2022 Homework Gap Grant, and in partnership with Kajeet, Inc. and the Dover school district, the Dover Public Library proposes the program *Wi-Fi for Dover's Youth*, where we would use the grant funds to purchase approximately 1,600 Wi-Fi hotspots for the Dover school district to distribute to their students in the middle and high schools. When students enter seventh grade, they are assigned a Chromebook laptop to be used in and out of school for their textbook access, classwork, and homework assignments throughout the remainder of their time in each respective school. These devices are great in allowing students to complete their assignments outside of class on a computer they may not have access to in their home; however, the devices do not provide students access to the internet where they can find necessary information for their schoolwork and for their families.

Our goal is to provide each student who is assigned a Chromebook, a Wi-Fi hotspot to provide equal access to information to as many families living in the town of Dover as possible. This will come with a large campaign and a great deal of marketing provided by the Dover Public Library as to the initiative of putting information in the hands of children, the FREE services the library has to

offer families, and how life changing having access to resources can be. It is estimated that we will need approximately 1,600 hotspots from Kajeet, Inc. as the NJ School Performance Report from the 2020 – 2021 school year for the Dover Public School District reported they served 557 middle school students and 1,024 high school students. (New Jersey Government). Through the partnership with the Dover Public School District, more accurate numbers can be established for the school year in which this grant takes place.

The town of Dover and its entities, especially the library, are successful in making information available to its community members both in English and Spanish as they realize the primary language of their townspeople is not English. By assisting in the endeavor to provide Wi-Fi to students in their homes, you are further providing families with access to language resources that could help them be successful. The United States Census Bureau’s Census Reporter found that the primary language in the homes of Dover citizens for children ages 5 – 17 was 73% Spanish and adults ages 18+ with Spanish being the primary language at home at 64%. (U.S. Census Reporter). Other family members in the home are able to use the Wi-Fi connection as well for a variety of information including social services, government links, and just the most basic need of communication with family members in other countries. The Census Reporter presented by the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 44.3% of documented citizens in Dover were foreign-born, which was almost double the rate of New Jersey at 22.7%. Additionally, of that 44.3%, 92% of citizens reported being born in Latin American countries. (U.S. Census Bureau). This represents only a fraction of the actual population of the town of Dover as more and more citizens are coming to the United States undocumented, and this statistic does not account for all those individuals who are currently working toward citizenship, or those who did not have access to the technology to report for the U.S. Census Bureau.

The language barrier between English and Spanish speakers has been creating a large gap between families and the library as, “it is frequently pointed out that the English word *library* resembles

the Spanish word *librería*, which means ‘bookstore,’ so people may not immediately recognize they are not expected to pay for services.” (Larson, 21). Moreover, many Hispanic or Latino families may find themselves fearful of attending libraries due to potential fines that can accrue or the fear of being labeled as “illegal immigrant”. By going through the schools, not only are we able to access the greatest number of families, but we are also working with an entity the families are already familiar with to hopefully ensure a more positive transaction.

Kajeet Inc., “provides optimized wireless connectivity, software, and hardware solutions that deliver safe, reliable, and controlled Internet connectivity to students, communities, and businesses. Nearly 3,000 K-12 school districts, higher education institutions, businesses, libraries, nonprofit organizations, and municipalities rely on Kajeet to ensure equitable access to the digital world.” (Kajeet Inc.). Their partnership with the Dover Public Library with this grant opportunity is beneficial as their position on libraries is, “through serving as public Wi-Fi zones, centers of knowledge and learning, and hubs for community engagement and support, public libraries are impactful forces for digital inclusion in their communities.” (Kajeet Inc.). Although we will only be providing the devices to students in 7th - 12th grade, the same time they receive their Chromebooks, we hope that the families will have students in that age range or neighbors/extended families who may be. We will do a presentation in the schools and a marketing campaign about how the services provided in the library and for the devices is free of service to Dover townspeople. Therefore, in meeting the mission statement of Kajeet Inc. we also, “believe that Internet access is a basic human right. But, for the 19 million people in the U.S. who still lack home broadband access, the world of online opportunities remains out of reach. Let’s work together to create a more digitally inclusive communities – especially for those who are disproportionately affected by the digital divide.” (Kajeet Inc.).

During the COVID shutdown, schools reported that even though the students had Chromebooks at home, they were not logging on during school hours or completing their assignments

because Wi-Fi in the homes was roughly non-existent. This grant will hopefully eliminate that digital divide and provide information access to as many families in the town of Dover as possible. The Census Reporter presented by the U.S. Census Bureau reports that 12% of children (under the age of 18) living in Dover are below the poverty line. (U.S. Census Bureau). Additionally, the educational attainment of the residents of Dover in 2021 was that 74.5% of documented citizens held a high school diploma or higher, which is 15.8% less than the rate of New Jersey. (U.S. Census Bureau). In utilizing the grant funds and devices provided by Kajeet Inc., we will be setting up Dover's future leaders today for a better tomorrow, and perhaps closing the digital divide in middle and high school. Ultimately, students will be more inspired and better prepared to go onto further education which will correlate to a reduction in poverty rates in the town of Dover, NJ.

Kajeet Inc. also requires that the receiving entity have a means to support the project after the grant funds have been received. Recently, the Dover Public Library just received a large sum of money to renovate their building and for future purchases. This money will be set aside to further the program once the initial funding is depleted per the entity's requirements, and then used to maintain all devices and subscriptions so that the townspeople of Dover will continue to receive equal access to internet resources.

Measurement for the success of our program *Wi-Fi for Dover's Youth* will be through the partnership with Kajeet Inc. as their platform *Sentinel* provides statistics on usage patterns, data management, and reporting tools to determine the success or failure of the program. If the students are using the Wi-Fi hotspots outside of school, then the program goal is achieved; however, if no students or very few use the devices at home to connect to the internet, then we know the mission was not successful. An informal approach to determining the success of the program will also be to have ongoing communications with the Dover school district to see if students are succeeding more in the classroom.

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