The WTA Pledges to End the Digital Divide in DC by 2025

Access to a computer and the Internet are not a luxury, they are a necessity. 90% of people look for jobs on the Internet and 97% of students require a computer to complete their homework. During the COVID-19 pandemic, access to technology is essential for social distancing and those demographics who cannot afford a computer at home are also showing much higher fatality rates. In Washington DC, 25% of households lack access to broadband internet, and 17% do not have a computer at home. This "Digital Divide" is the worst in Wards 5, 7 and 8, the same Wards with the largest African American populations and the highest death rates from COVID-19. It cuts the deepest in the homeless community in every ward, where almost nobody owns a computer nor knows how to use one. Since 1996, the WTA has been mending the Digital Divide in major USA cities, so we know a lot about the problem.   That is why we are launching a bold new initiative to provide every low-income Washington DC resident who does not own a computer with a high quality free or affordable refurbished laptop computer, along with free technology support, free Broadband Internet and free training.   Put simply: We will end the Digital Divide in Washington DC by 2025 *– and we need your help!*

The WTA has been providing computers and training to DC's most disadvantaged communities since 2005.   In 2019 we piloted a program to provide low-cost, high quality refurbished computers by partnering with schools to host distribution events for their students who do not have a computer at home. This included $29 desktops and $59 laptops. These "cost recovery fees" paid for parts, software, delivery, warranty and more. They also helped to subsidize free laptop computers and training for the homeless of DC, and free laptops for the families of children killed by gun violence in Washington DC.   The program was a huge success, creating blueprint to sustain and scale.

The WTA is now planning a major expansion in 2020, delivering the technology access, training and support needed for 1000+ disadvantaged DC residents to join the 21st century economy. Together with our partners we will provide:

- 900+ laptops to students in DC schools who do not have a computer at home, with priority to Wards 5, 7 & 8. This includes securing partnerships with 20+ schools and non-profits to host distribution events for their students.
- 100+ free laptops to homeless residents of three major DC shelters, including five free sessions of required training.
- In partnership with the DC City Council, provide a free laptop computer to every family in Ward 5, 7 and 8 who lost a child (age 0 to 24) in 2020 due to gun violence. The goal is to provide a small amount of hope and possibly new beginnings for parents and siblings trying to cope with the worst tragedy they probably will ever face in their lives.
- In partnership with the District of Columbia Government Office of the Chief Technology Officer, we will connect residents to low-cost internet offers and free digital literacy training in underserved communities in Wards 5, 7, 8.
- Establish a free technology support help-line for low-income DC residents staffed by technology volunteers and trained homeless people engaged in work-based learning, thereby gaining experience needed for employment.
- Build relationships with corporations and government agencies to secure their surplus technology, including providing free pickups, free data wiping and free R2 certified ecological disposal of any unusable items.

We are already making solid progress. We currently have nearly 1000 laptop computers in stock. The Archdiocese of Washington Schools, Byte Back, CC-Prep Academy, McKinley Technical High School and the University of the District of Columbia have all agreed to host distribution events for their students. Using proceeds from cost recovery fees, grants and donations, we expect to more than double our impact every year through 2025 – ending the digital divide in DC. To do this, the WTA urgently needs surplus computer donations from generous companies and government agencies. We also seek donations to offset our costs to expand the program, which is designed to self-sustain once fully implemented.

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