

Broadband Adoption Program Opens New Doors

As part of the broadband stimulus program, the NTIA awarded grants to organizations for sustainable adoption efforts. Toledo Telephone's successful program brought the benefits of broadband to many who had never used it before.

Toledo Telephone Company, a small incumbent carrier in Toledo, Wash., received a BTOP grant in 2010 to promote broadband adoption. Under the grant, the company provided free training, equipment and broadband service to its telephone customers who hadn't yet subscribed to broadband. The Cowlitz Indian Tribe, many of whose members live in Toledo's service area, partnered with the telco to provide publicity and classroom space, and Centralia Community College provided the instruction. Local newspapers helped generate excitement about the opportunity. The program was a great success: The percentage of ToledoTel customers who used broadband rose from about 40 percent to 87 percent, and most program participants switched to paid services once the program was finished.

The training program made a difference in many participants' work lives. For example, one participant, who previously had hand written her column for a local Toledo newspaper, now composes articles using her laptop and submits them by email. Toledo Telephone staff members were especially gratified by the following letter that the company's marketing manager received:

Dear Sheila Richardson,

I'm glad you emailed me. I've been trying to figure out the easiest way to thank you and Toledo Telephone.

Since I started the BTOP program, I have been on an incredible journey. Four months after the program began, in September, I enrolled in Centralia College, taking a full load of credits. I am working toward my associate degree in applied science. I am now in my third quarter and am holding a 3.6 GPA. After I reach this goal, I will enroll for my bachelor's degree in applied science in management. The BASM degree is new at Centralia College this year.

Since all of the homework is on the computer, through ANGEL Learning, MathXL and Dragon NaturallySpeaking voice recognition system, without a basic knowledge of the use of a computer it would be

impossible for me to study. Therefore, I would still be on permanent Social Security disability.

However, within the next year, I should be able to secure employment in the energy industry. The starting wage for the positions I will apply for is \$60,000 gross annually. So you see how important it is, and it's all because of Toledo Telephone and the BTOP program.

As part of my disability, typing is not only painful but is very hard to do, considering I cannot feel the keys on my fingertips. Using the Dragon speech recognition system, I can now type upward of 120 words per minute, and soon I will have close to 98 percent accuracy. In my opinion, that is incredible. That will surely look good on any résumé.

Also, my back cannot stand the pressures of working in the jobs that I have previously been trained to do. At my age, this could be devastating. However, with these new tools (computer, Dragon and education), I now have a new lease on life. Further, I will not have to sit on my keister and watch my wife work her tail off trying to make ends meet. Not that she is having troubles, but it should not be necessary, as I have a good brain and I can use it instead of my body to help us live comfortably.

I have been invited to join the honor roll at the college, and I will be able to use that to my advantage. From what I've been told, being on the honor roll will open more doors for me – employment, scholarships, etc. – and will look good on a résumé as well.

So you see, what you and this program have done for me is more than I could ever hope for, and I am eternally grateful. If there is anything that you folks need, if it is within my means, all you have to do is ask.

Sincerely, Robert Smith

P.S. I used Dragon speech recognition for this entire email message. ❖

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