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Closing the Digital Divide

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Author Note

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Abstract

The Family Resource Collective is a program under Community Bridges. Serving approximately 5,800 clients per year, the FRC helps the senior community of Santa Cruz County access resources.

There is a huge digital divide within the senior community. The Capstone Project titled ‘Closing the Digital Divide’ will directly address the issue that is now a national crisis. This project will focus on creating several pieces of educational material to aid older individuals in their journey to becoming more technologically savvy. The project teams expect to be able to have materials readily available for all those in need.

In the future, the best steps to take to address this problem would be better tracking of those in need of technology assistance. Following up with clients that expressed concern with using technology will aid the team in making sure clients are getting the help they need.

Keywords: Seniors, technology, digital divide, education, email

Agency Information

Community Bridges is an important aspect of the community in Santa Cruz County. Their mission is “to deliver essential services, provide equitable access to resources, and advocate for health and dignity across every stage of life”.

This agency runs 10 vital programs across 20 different sites (Community Bridges, 2022). Many of these sites offer services for free or at a very low cost. They serve clients ranging anywhere from infancy through late adulthood.

Throughout the many programs that Community Bridges has under its umbrella, they provide services such as access to “transportation, healthy food, health care, and senior adult day health care” (Community Bridges, 2022). Other services include “crises support, case management services, early education, grade school tutoring, as well as classes in breastfeeding, nutrition, parenting, and literacy”.

Community Bridges holds themselves to a very high standard. They maintain a high quality of services by following their six main core values. These values include commitment, community, compassion, integrity, respect, and support. By going through the workdays with these values in mind it allows employees to offer the best support possible to those in need of assistance.

Problem Statement

Even for the most seasoned technology users, technology can be very complicated at times. Too many seniors don't understand technology. This has caused a serious “digital divide”. Sicard (2022) pointed out that the world we live in became digital very fast. This left many people behind. Many were already struggling to keep up with technology, adding the rapid change to the equation only widened the gap. This

holds especially true for older people who most of the time do not have anybody to ask for help. They were left to fend for themselves when it came to the fast-changing technological world.

In early years, the world did not rely on technology as much as we do today. In the Spring of 2020, we were reminded how much technology really means to our everyday lives. The people who were not up to speed until this point suffered the most. Bono (2021), noted that especially during the pandemic, many areas required its citizens to “book appointments online, but tension emerged as some elderly Americans don’t know how to use a computer or have access to one”. It is easy to see how much of a problem this could be, especially for the medically fragile who depend on the medical community to keep them alive.

Contributing Factors

During the pandemic, many doctors’ appointments were held online. This left many people with no way to maintain their healthcare. This new process of receiving services was even difficult to people who grew up with technology. This holds especially true for those who depended on local businesses for internet access.

Figueiredo (2020) brought up an issue that many completely look over at first. He stated that many seniors experience a digital divide because they are often made to feel like a burden when asking for help. The unwillingness to help often comes from their own children. Their children become angry or frustrated when asked to teach them about a new technological device or program. This causes the person needing help to

be much less likely to ask for help again. This then results on the technology being left unlearned.

The Older Adults Technology Services (2021) noted that the digital divide within the older community is a national crisis. Their research shows that approximately 22 million American seniors do not have internet access within their homes. This is 22 million people who are out of touch with their friends, family, caregivers, and medical staff. 22 million people who do not have the ability to hop on social media to see what is going on in the world. Most importantly, this is 22 million people without access to do activities/tasks that have become an essential part of living in the modern technological world.

Consequences

Not having even basic knowledge of technology results in various negative outcomes. This includes vulnerability to cybercrime, loneliness from being cut off from friends and family, and the inability to connect with medical professionals.

Head (2022), states that cybercrime has dramatically increased since the start of the pandemic. Older adults are heavily impacted by this type of crime at an alarming rate. Scrolling through social media, a person is bound to come across a story of fraud or pyramid schemes. These stories often talk about a vulnerable person being scammed out of a lot of money. However, these stories also serve as a warning of what you should look out for. Seniors that don't know how to use social media, or a reliable news outlet, might be getting fraudulent emails and be completely unaware that it is a scam.

Cybercrime will not only make a person feel more vulnerable, but it can also make them feel isolated and unaware of where to go for help. Having that education of what to look out for can be a life saver in many instances. Mubarak (2022) brought to light many consequences of the digital divide in seniors. It is stated that social exclusion is the result of the divide, because older people are not able to connect with family or peers. Being able to connect is a major part of our lives. Everything is done online now. From reading news articles to keeping up to date on the lives of loved ones. Being unable to connect leads to isolation, depression, and the lack of drive to maintain basic needs.

Capstone Project Proposal and Justification

The chosen capstone project will address the contributing factor “lack of knowledge”. This is the largest contributing factor which can also be caused by a lack of resources, unwillingness to ask family for help, and a lack of technological materials. Improving the knowledge in one of our most vulnerable populations can drastically change their lives as well as the lives of those who care for them.

This project will meet best practice standards for a few different reasons. The first one being that the intern will keep in constant communication with the staff mentor. This will be achieved by participating in weekly team meetings and being diligent in responding to emails in a timely manner. This project will also be following a detailed project plan, as well as asking for and following up with feedback from the team.

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Lack of knowledge	Too many seniors don't understand technology. There is a “digital divide”.	Inability to connect with people
Lack of access		Loneliness/Isolation
Literacy issues		Vulnerable to cyber crime

Project Description/Implementation Process

The Capstone Project titled ‘Closing the Digital Divide’ will directly address the digital divide that has now become a national crisis. This project will focus on creating several pieces of educational material to aid older individuals in their journey to becoming more technologically competent.

The main purpose of this project is to help individuals adapt to the fast-changing world of technology. There are many people that need services for various reasons. However, the daunting task of dealing with emails or the internet in general is enough to get these people to avoid getting the services that they need.

Community Bridges expects to make the process of applying for services easier for individuals who are not technologically savvy. This agency provides services to over 17,000 people within Santa Cruz County. Although technology is everywhere we turn, many people still struggle with tasks that others find simple. These include creating an email; accessing email; changing an email password; and creating a bank account. Creating easy to follow learning material will allow people in the community to have more independence when applying for much needed services.

The capstone project ‘Closing the Digital Divide’ will have many benefits. It will help clients feel more in control and independent of the process to receive services. Clients will also be able to close the digital divide that is keeping them from seeking services, communicating with loved ones, and isolating them from the outside world.

Project Results

This project had a few expected outcomes. The first being, making the process of applying for services easier for individuals who struggle with technology. The educational flyers were also expected to give this community more independence when applying for much needed services. Flyers are readily available for all who need them. Case workers also have access to the material for whenever the need may arise.

The intern as well as her mentor were very aware that this project did not have much time to be developed, implemented, and measured. This project would be considered a success if even just one client reporting that they were able to successfully use the material in the way that was intended.

The intern was able to interview two clients who utilized the flyers. Client #1 stated “I was frustrated at first, but once I actually read the directions and not jump ahead, I was able to make an email”. They did express some concern with how small the letters were, but they were ultimately able to complete all steps.

Client #2 also mentioned the small lettering. They also stated “Creating a password was a challenge, I had to reread the directions a few times. Maybe make that a little easier to follow”. Overall, this project would be considered a success. Both clients were able to complete setting up a Gmail account and were able to move on to the next step in their process to receive services.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The contributing factor “lack of knowledge” was addressed in this project. Improving the knowledge of technology can drastically change the lives of those in need. This factor is still very much an issue and will continue to be an issue for years to come. However, the educational flyers created for this project will help to remedy this issue.

From this point forward, Community Bridges will find more success by keeping the flyers updated with suggested edits as well as any changes to the process. Tracking of the flyers was a key component missing in the current project. Creating some sort of tracking system is suggested. Keeping count of how many flyers go out and creating a feedback form will also help to keep this project thriving.

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Appendix A

Project Implementation Plan

Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/ Services Needed	Completed Product
Choose Capstone Project	By August 15, 2022	Student & Mentor	Zoom.com	Educational Material
Develop "How to Create a Google Account"	By August 31, 2022	Student	Canva.com, Google Drive. laptop	Educational Material
Update "How to Create a Google Account" with suggested edits	By September 12, 2022	Mentor, student, other team members	Canva.com, Google Drive, Zoom, laptop	Updated educational material
Translate "How to Create a Google Account" to Spanish	By September 20, 2022	Mentor, student	Canva.com, Google Drive, Zoom, laptop	Educational Material
Begin working on email recovery tutorial	By September 27, 2022	Student	Canva.com, Google Drive, laptop	Educational Material
Complete "email recovery" tutorial	By October 4, 2022	Student	Canva.com, Google Drive, laptop	Educational Material
Update "Email recovery" tutorial with suggested edits	By October 9, 2022	Mentor, student, other team members	Canva.com, Google Drive, Zoom, laptop	Educational Material
Begin work on "How to open a bank account"	By October 11, 2022	Student	Canva.com, Google Drive, laptop	Educational Material
Update "How to open a bank account" with suggested edits	By October 23, 2022	Mentor, student, other team members, bank staff	Canva.com, Google Drive, Zoom, laptop	Educational Material
Submit material for distribution by mentor	By November 22, 2022	Mentor, Student,	Zoom, Canva, Laptop	Educational Material

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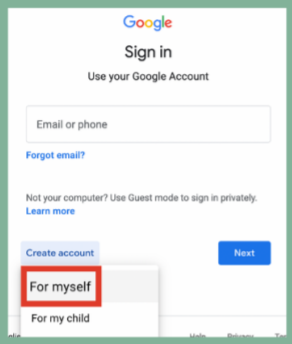
PUENTES DE LA COMUNIDAD

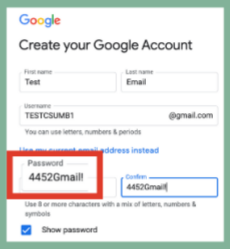
Setting up a Google email account:

#1

#2



#3



Creating a password:

--Select 4 digits that are significant to you. '4452' is used above.

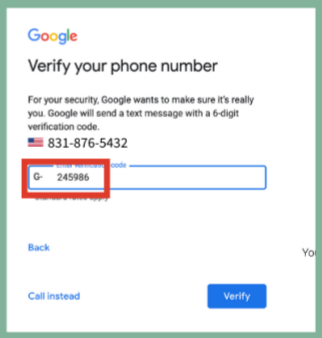
DO NOT USE A PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE NUMBER!

--Now, you will input the name of the site you are using (Capitalize the first letter). 'Gmail' was used above.

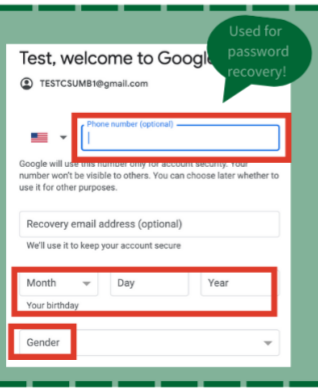
--Add a special character to the end of the site. '!' was used above.

#4

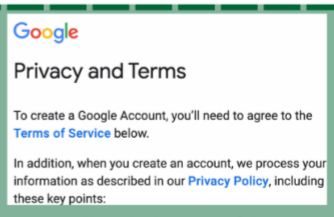
#5



#6



#7



Scroll to the bottom of the "Privacy and Terms", click Agree.

Your new Gmail account is now ready to go!

COMMUNITY BRIDGES
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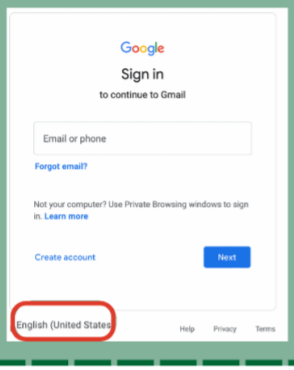
Configuración de la cuenta de correo electrónico de Google:

#1

#2



#3

Creando una contraseña:

--Seleccione 4 dígitos que sean significativos para usted. '4452' se usa arriba.

¡NO UTILICE UN NÚMERO DE IDENTIFICACIÓN PERSONAL!

--Ahora, ingresará el nombre del sitio que está utilizando (en mayúscula la primera letra). 'Gmail' se utilizó anteriormente.

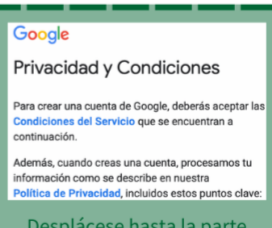
--Agregue un carácter especial al final del sitio. '!' se usó arriba.

#4

#5

#6

#7



Desplácese hasta la parte inferior de "Privacidad y términos", haga clic en Aceptar.

¡Tu nueva cuenta de Gmail ya está lista!

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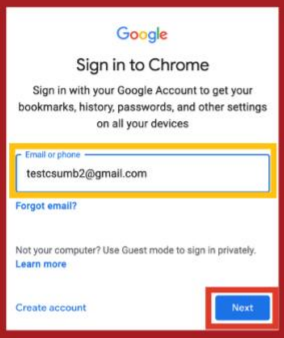
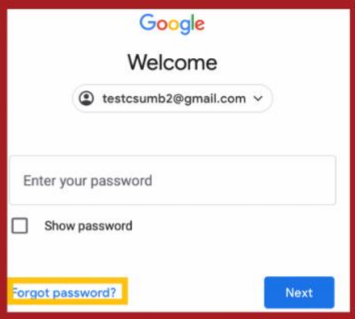
Recovering a Google Account

#1

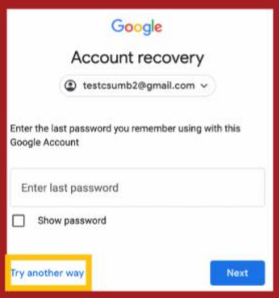
#2



#3



#4

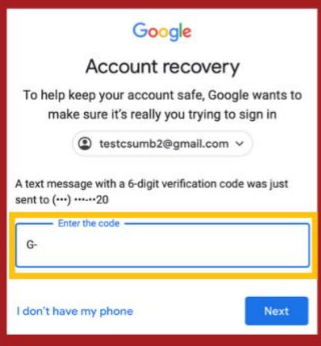


If you cannot remember a previous password, click "Try another way"

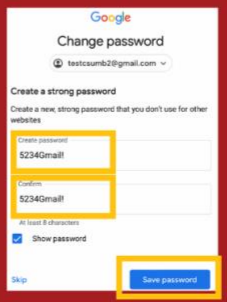
#5

Choose either option

#6



#7



<u>Creating a password:</u>

--Select 4 digits that are significant to you. '4452' is used above.
DO NOT USE A PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE NUMBER!

--Now, you will input the name of the site you are using (Capitalize the first letter). 'Gmail' was used above.

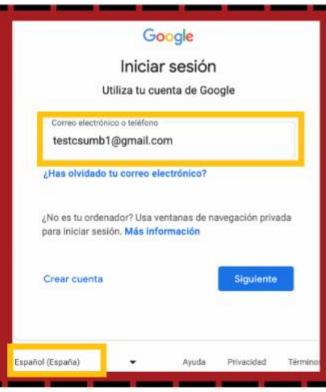
--Add a special character to the end of the site. '!' was used above.

COMMUNITY BRIDGES
PUENTES DE LA COMUNIDAD

Recuperar una cuenta de Google

#1

#2



#3

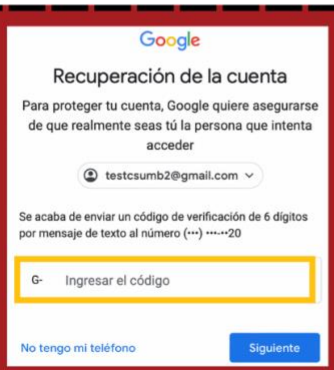
#4

Si no puede recordar una contraseña anterior, haga clic en "Probar de otra manera"

#5

Seleccione una opción.

#6



#7

<u>Creando una contraseña:</u>

--Seleccione 4 dígitos que sean significativos para usted. '4452' se usa arriba.

¡NO UTILICE UN NÚMERO DE IDENTIFICACIÓN PERSONAL!

--Ahora, ingresará el nombre del sitio que está utilizando (en mayúscula la primera letra). 'Gmail' se utilizó anteriormente.

--Agregue un carácter especial al final del sitio. '!' se usó arriba.

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SEARCHING WITHIN GMAIL

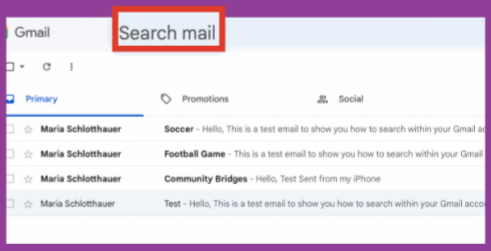
#1

Go to Google.com. Sign in like normal.

#2

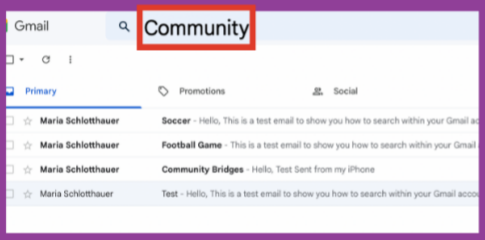
Click on "Gmail" at the top right hand corner.

#3



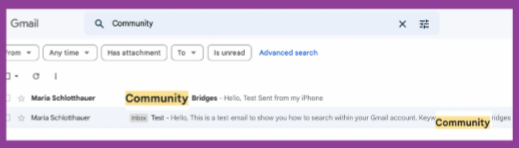
Click on the search bar above.

#4



Type in a keyword for what you are looking for.

#5



All emails containing the keyword will be shown.

COMMUNITY BRIDGES
PUENTES DE LA COMUNIDAD

BUSCANDO EN GMAIL

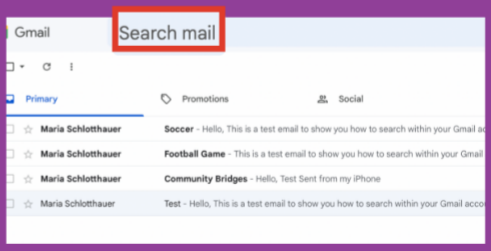
#1

Vaya a Google.com. Inicie sesión como de costumbre.

#2

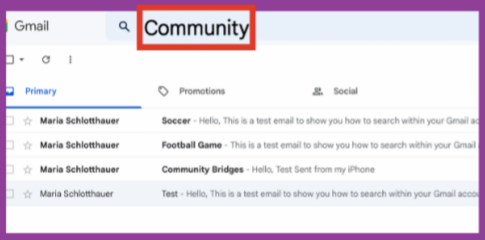
Haga clic en "Gmail" en la esquina superior derecha.

#3



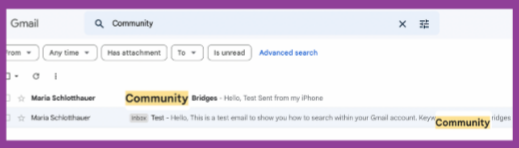
Haga clic en la barra de búsqueda..

#4



Escriba una palabra clave para lo que está buscando.

#5



Se mostrarán todos los correos electrónicos que contengan la palabra clave.