



2110 Washington Blvd. Syphax Bldg.  
3rd Floor Arlington, VA 22204  
6540 Franconia Road, Springfield, VA 22150  
Phone: 703-228-2560 | Fax: 703-228-2562  
E-mail: info@edu-futuro.org  
www.Edu-Futuro.org

## **Edu-Futuro - Case Study**

### **Virginia Digital Opportunity Case Study Pilot Program**

**September 18, 2023**

**To: Tamarah Holmes, Ph.D., Director, Office of Broadband, and  
Cole McAndrew, Policy Planner, Office of Broadband, Department of Housing and  
Community Development, Commonwealth of Virginia**

**From: Jorge E. Figueredo, Executive Director, Edu-Futuro**

As one of the largest nonprofit organizations serving immigrant and Latino families in Northern Virginia, Edu-Futuro is pleased to present the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Office of Broadband with the following Case Study. As outlined in our proposal for the Digital Opportunity Case Study Pilot Program, Edu-Futuro's Case Study will demonstrate that our **Tech for Parents** program succeeds in closing the digital divide among such vulnerable populations as English learners, individuals with low levels of literacy, and members of a racial or ethnic minority group. We will also show that **Tech for Parents** can be easily scaled to reach even more Virginians across the Commonwealth, and that Edu-Futuro should be included in the development of the Virginia Digital Opportunity Plan, qualifying the organization for future investment under the Digital Equity Act.

### **Brief Overview - Edu-Futuro & Tech for Parents**

Edu-Futuro was established in 1998 by Latino immigrants in partnership with Arlington Public Schools (APS), specifically to serve Northern Virginia's fast-growing immigrant community. Over the past 25 years, we have grown to offer a range of comprehensive, culturally competent services unmatched by any other community-based organization in the region. Each year, our free, bilingual, Two-Generation programs reach more than 4,300 individuals: providing youth with a path to becoming first-generation college students through the Emerging Leaders Program, while simultaneously training and inspiring their parents through our Parent Empowerment and Workforce Development Services. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Edu-Futuro has also become one of the largest providers of service navigation and financial assistance for immigrant families in Northern Virginia: stabilizing more than 1,500 households, and disbursing more than \$2 million for rent, food, and other basic necessities.

Edu-Futuro's Workforce Development Services (WDS) were launched in 2016 to meet the needs of underserved Latino and immigrant Northern Virginians seeking to leave low-wage service jobs and improve the economic wellbeing for their families. At the start of the COVID pandemic, we significantly expanded our digital training in order to ensure that our beneficiaries gained access to the internet, and had the skills, technology, and capacity to make full use of the quickly changing digital economy. In the most recently completed 2022-23 Fiscal Year, Edu-Futuro reached a total of 851 unduplicated individuals through our full scope of WDS programming, which includes the **Tech for Parents** computer/smartphone literacy program, resume and cover letter workshops, individual job counseling, and GED training. Based on 2022-23 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) income limits, approximately 83% of the households we serve are considered either "Low Income" or "Very Low Income," earning less than \$30,000 per year.

Introduced in 2020 to meet the urgent needs of immigrant and Latino adults who were facing massive unemployment and loss of work hours due to the pandemic, **Tech for Parents** is our flagship six-week digital literacy curriculum that serves to equip students with the fundamental knowledge and skills required to use computers and smartphones confidently and effectively in their daily lives. Participants learn the basics of computer hardware and operating systems, how to use input devices like the keyboard and mouse, how to create and manage files using apps like Google Docs, and how to use web browsers to navigate the internet, conduct online research, and communicate via email. Our staff adapts digital skills training sessions to the English level of participants, and teaches terminology in ways that are useful to adults with lower English proficiency. **Tech for Parents** also covers the basics of online safety and privacy, including how to protect personal information, recognize malicious emails, and create strong passwords. By completing the program, constituents gain the skills and confidence to: 1) Search and apply for jobs online; 2) Compose professional emails; and 3) Apply for and maintain employment.

The **Tech for Parents** curriculum can be easily scaled to reach many more Virginians across Northern Virginia and throughout the Commonwealth. All we need at Edu-Futuro are the resources to turn our knowledge and years of experience into action.

## **Edu-Futuro - Case Study - Participants**

In order to demonstrate the success of **Tech for Parents** in closing the digital divide among such vulnerable populations as English learners, individuals with low levels of literacy, and members of a racial or ethnic minority group, Edu-Futuro conducted in-depth interviews with ten adult beneficiaries who recently graduated from our **Tech for Parents** program. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, and were conducted in Spanish by a team composed of: Edu-Futuro Deputy Director, Manuel Piñeros; Communications & Programs Manager, Eduardo López; Workforce Development & IT Team Lead, Danny Díaz; and Communications & Social Media Team member, Jimmy Colorado. Each of the interviews was recorded, and detailed notes were taken during each conversation.

During the interviews, the ten participants were asked a variety of questions, all intended to gauge the impact of the **Tech for Parents** program on their ability to use a computer or smartphone, navigate the internet, conduct online research, and communicate via email. Some of the questions asked them to measure their abilities, “Before and After,” their **Tech for Parents** experience, other questions were, “Yes or No,” and a series of questions required our interviewees to provide open-ended answers. Additionally, we asked participants about their awareness of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), and the main barriers that they believed kept family and friends from connecting to the internet at home. Here is a brief overview of each interview participant, and why they decided to take the **Tech for Parents** course.

**1) Mamly Ochoa - 39 years of age**

Mamly participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in April 2023. Before taking the classes, she worked cleaning restaurants, and she is currently employed as a hotel housekeeper. The reason she gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

“I wanted to learn how to use the ParentVUE\* application of the school system so that I could help improve the education of my three children.”

\* Note: ParentVUE is the online system utilized by Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) to provide parents with up-to-date information on school grades, attendance, and teacher comments.

**2) Maclovio Beto Angulo - 49 years of age**

Maclovio participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in July 2022. Before taking the classes, he worked as a landscape worker, but he is currently a Landscape Manager, in charge of a mowing team. The reason he gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

“I decided to take the course because I needed to keep on learning, and to make sure that I could use the technology being used today. I also wanted to have a better idea of what my daughter was seeing online. I have four children -- 26, 22, 18 and my daughter, who is 13.”

**3) Fabiola Ramos - 23 years of age**

Fabiola participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in February 2023. Before taking the classes, she worked in construction, and part-time as a waitress for special events. Currently, she still holds the same jobs. Fabiola was extremely thoughtful in her response to this question, and the reasons she gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** were:

“I wanted to continue my education. As immigrants, very often we feel like we need to work all the time, and we don’t take the time to study and learn new things. Also, my mother attended the classes, and I wanted to spend more time with her... When I started

Tech for Parents, I did not have a specific goal in mind, but the instructor helped us to not only learn about the technology, but to think about our future. Immigrants are very focused on working and sending money back home to help our families, that's all... Once I was in the program, however, I made a goal for myself, which is something I did not have before. Now, I want to create a webpage where I can sell Latin American products online."

"All of us want something like a new iPhone, but we don't really know how to use this phone. As a young person, for me, the phone was for Facebook or Instagram, or to watch funny videos. When I started to take the classes, I had a drastic change. I said to myself - 'You are wasting your time on things that don't really matter.' So, I stopped using the phone in the way that I used to use it, and erased all my social media accounts. I decided that I needed to use the technology of the phone in a productive way to reach my goals, and that is what I have been doing ever since."

#### **4) Maribelquis Vargas - 48 years of age**

Maribelquis participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in December 2022. Before taking the classes, she worked at a restaurant. Currently, she works as administrative assistant at a home health care agency. The reason she gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

"I was indirectly invited to take the Tech for Parents classes. I have a daughter who is in high school, and the Parent Liaison at her school told me about the course. At the beginning, I was not interested because I thought that the classes were just about learning how to use the computer, or how to send an email. So, I sent the information about the course to a friend who really did need to learn these things. She told me that she was a little afraid to go, so to motivate her, I told her that I would go to the classes with her. That's how I ended up at Tech for Parents."

#### **5) Rebeca Juárez - 24 years of age**

Rebeca participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in April 2023. Before taking the classes, she worked cleaning homes. Currently, she takes care of an elderly gentleman during the week, and continues to clean homes on a part-time basis during the weekends. The reason she gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

"I didn't know very much about technology and I wanted to learn how to communicate better with my child's teacher. So, I saw a flyer in the school and I decided to take the class. Before the workshops, I could not use the computer, but now, I can use the internet to help my son. He has a lot more confidence in me. For example, now he asks me to register him online for his cooking classes."

#### **6) Bryan Galindo - 49 years of age**

Bryan participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in June 2023. Before taking the classes, he worked as a janitor in an apartment building. He still holds the same position. The reason he gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

“I took the class for the opportunity to learn how to use email, how to look for work online, and how to connect with the school that my children attend. I wanted to be more involved in their education, and to know how to see their grades online. I really wanted to know more about a lot of things. For example, I learned how to put my resume online.”

#### **7) Evelyn Lemus - 42 years of age**

Evelyn participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in March 2023. Before taking the classes, she worked in home daycare, but is currently seeking new employment because the course showed her that she could find a much better job. The reason she gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

“The truth is that the classes helped a lot with the education of my children. The course also allowed me to learn and improve myself. For example, I didn’t know anything about using a computer, and thanks to the classes, I was able to write a new resume and a cover letter for work. I am very grateful to Edu-Futuro, and to my instructor, because I had no idea how to do any of these things before... Whenever I received an email, I would read it on the telephone because I didn’t know how to use a computer. Today, I feel motivated to work on the computer. I can read and answer my emails, I can go into the internet, and I don’t need help anymore. I can do it on my own.”

#### **8) Dara Angulo - 22 years of age**

Dara participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in September 2022. Before taking the classes, she worked as a waitress, nanny, and part-time cleaning homes. Now, is recovering from a recent surgery and only works as a nanny. The reason she gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

“I wanted to take Tech for Parents so that I could improve my resume and maybe find a better job. I am still in school, so I also wanted to learn how to make better use of my computer. For example, I had no idea how to send emails, and I had never looked for work opportunities using the internet. Thanks to what I learned in the class, I was able to really improve my resume, and I found a good job as a nanny.”

#### **9) Juana Ramos - 48 years of age**

Juana participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in March 2023. Before taking the classes, she worked cleaning restaurants. She is currently unemployed. The reason she gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

“I didn’t know anything about computers. Like they say, I started from zero, but I learned a lot. I had never turned on a computer, but thank God, they explained everything really well and I learned how to do even simple things, like writing capital letters and using the buttons on the keyboard. Now, I feel a lot more confident because, before, I didn’t want to touch the computer. I was always afraid that I would hit a wrong button and maybe erase something or damage the machine.”

### **10) Fabiola Torres - 48 years of age**

Fabiola participated in the **Tech for Parents** program in September 2022. Before taking the classes, she worked as a waitress, and part-time cleaning homes. Now, she is the owner of a micro business, in charge of a team that cleans homes. The reason she gave for registering for **Tech for Parents** was:

“I really wanted to communicate better with my children’s school. In my home country, you go to the school and talk to the teachers, but here, everything is digital, and all the information is sent through emails. I was having a lot of problems, so I decided to take the class.”

### **Edu-Futuro - Case Study - “Before and After” Results**

As mentioned earlier, we asked our interview participants a series of questions that required them to measure their abilities, “Before and After” their **Tech for Parents** experience. We are very gratified to note that our workshops succeeded in making a significant difference in the computer and internet abilities of our participants. Even though months had passed since they took the course, the impact of the experience was crystal clear. We are particularly pleased that some of the best scores were reported in areas critical to closing the digital divide, such as General Knowledge of the Computer, Ability to Navigate the Internet, Ability to Search for Specific Information, and Ability to Submit Employment Applications Through Web Portals.

Here are the “Before and After” questions we asked, along with the average score for each response. One (1) represents a poor level of knowledge, while five (5) represents an excellent level of knowledge.

#### **- General knowledge -- Smartphone**

- Before Tech for Parents -- 2.4
- After Tech for Parents -- 4.7

#### **- General Knowledge -- Computer**

- Before Tech for Parents -- 1.7

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.5

- General Knowledge -- Internet

- Before Tech for Parents -- 2.0

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.6

- Ability to use the keyboard and mouse

- Before Tech for Parents -- 1.8

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.6

- Ability to use applications, like Google Suite

- Before Tech for Parents -- 1.7

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.7

- Ability to navigate the internet

- Before Tech for Parents -- 1.8

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.7

- Ability to communicate through email

- Before Tech for Parents -- 1.9

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.8

- Ability to protect information, like creating effective passwords

- Before Tech for Parents -- 2.1

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.8

- Ability to connect to the web and create an email account

- Before Tech for Parents -- 2.4

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.9

- Ability to search for specific information on the web, like employment opportunities

- Before Tech for Parents -- 1.4

- After Tech for Parents -- 4.8

- Ability to submit employment applications through web portals

- Before Tech for Parents -- 1.2
- After Tech for Parents -- 4.5

## **Edu-Futuro - Case Study - Answers to Open-Ended Questions**

As members of an organization dedicated to improving the lives of immigrant and Latino families, we felt that the most important elements of our Case Study would be the series of open-ended questions we asked our interview participants. This series of questions gave participants the opportunity to tell us if their participation in **Tech for Parents** had -- or had not -- impacted their daily lives in any significant way. We are extremely pleased to present a sampling of the responses we received from our beneficiaries.

**Did the Tech for Parents workshops improve your ability to connect to, and use the internet? If so, what has been the most important benefit from the program?**

**Maribelquis Vargas** -- “In a very positive way, Tech for Parents was extremely impactful in my life. I already knew how to use the computer, how to navigate the internet, and how to send emails. However, as the class went on, I discovered that I was learning about many things that I did not know before. I thought that the course was wonderful -- the chemistry that our group had with the instructor, and the energy in the class was great. I wanted to keep on learning, and in the end, I thought that the course ended way too soon. I think that we could have covered more topics, but the course helped me immensely. Those weeks changed my life... What I learned in this course helped me to find a brand-new path for myself, and to enter a whole new field of work. Ever since I arrived in the United States, I had worked in restaurants. Now, I have a better job, working as an administrative assistant. After I wrote my new resume, I realized that I had good qualities, and enough experience to change -- so I took the plunge... Tech for Parents also helped to connect me to my community, and after the course, I was motivated to begin volunteering at my local school. Giving back has been extremely satisfying for me.”

**Fabiola Ramos** -- “Yes, the classes not only helped me to learn the technology, but to think about my life. The instructor gave us structure -- why do we need to know how to use our phones and computers? What are the advantages of using these tools well? What are the disadvantages of using them poorly? He was a real guide. He was very sincere, dynamic, and he listened to all of us. I felt included, and felt free to ask questions. Thanks to the classes, I realized that the telephone was not enough, and I bought a computer.”

**Evelyn Lemus** -- “The classes have helped me a lot. Honestly, the course helped me to open my eyes, and to realize that I have many more opportunities than I thought I did before the class. As immigrants, we can continue learning, and our children can also advance and make progress through education. Now, I know that my daughter can not only graduate from high school, but that she can continue on to college... I was stuck in a



job I didn't like at all, but I used to think that, as an immigrant, I had to continue there because I didn't have any choice. I thought this is all I can do, and there are really no other opportunities for me. But after going to the classes, my mind changed completely and that's when I decided that I couldn't continue suffering at work. I realized that I have many other opportunities, and I quit my job because I know that I am going to find something much better. Now, I see things from a completely different perspective. It's not like before, when I thought that my only option was to stay in a situation that was not good for me or for my family. I'll never forget. In one of the classes, the instructor told us that water had a different value, depending on where it was sold. In a desert, it costs this much, in a plane this much, in a supermarket this much. So, your value depends on where you are, and I realized I was in the wrong place. At work, they didn't value my abilities, and Edu-Futuro opened my eyes. Now, I know that my children are not the only ones who can make progress, I can advance as well. Thanks to Edu-Futuro, I am now taking GED classes, and I know that this will help me to get a much better paying job. If I hadn't taken Tech for Parents, I never would have known about the GED classes, and this is something that will help my future and the future of my children."

**Fabiola Torres** -- "First, the classes helped me to communicate much better with the school. What I learned also helped me to improve my work and to start my own cleaning business. The course was especially important for me because I learned how to advertise and promote my services through social media... I am very grateful for the Tech for Parents program. Very sincerely, I want to tell you that you have helped me to open new doors for my children. I was completely lost in the universe of this country because I didn't know how to communicate with the school. Now, thanks to Edu-Futuro, I see that the doors are opening for me, as well as for my children. I am taking your GED classes, and I am very hopeful that I can continue to grow and to learn a lot more. Thank you for the work you do with our young people, and with persons like me, who didn't know a lot, but wanted to learn. Thank you."

**Would you recommend Tech for Parents to a friend or family member? If so, why?**

**Fabiola Ramos** -- "When I talk to my family and my friends, I don't just recommend the classes, I demand that they take the course. I tell them, 'the classes are free! They even give us food.' My mother already took the course, and now, I am going to be taking my sister... I wear my Edu-Futuro shirt at work, and people are always asking me about the organization. I tell them about Tech for Parents, and how the classes can help them learn and educate themselves."

**Maclovio Beto Angulo** -- "Yes, the classes helped us to learn about new technologies, and to work towards reaching a better standard of living. The information I learned in the workshops gave me confidence, and encouraged me to keep on trying, so that you don't just stay stuck in the same place."

**Rebeca Juárez** -- “I always recommend the class. Whenever I see a flyer for the course at school, I tell my friends and family members that they should take the classes. They have really helped to improve our community here in Culmore and Bailey’s Crossroads. As Latinos, sometimes we focus only on work, and we don’t take the time to study and learn a little more. In my case, I used to always be busy with work, but thanks to the classes, I am now able to save a lot of time. For example, I used to have to go to the school to ask about different things about my son. Today, I can communicate with the school through email, and I don’t have to take time off from work.”

**Juana Ramos** -- “Yes, because the course teaches you to be independent and that you can do things on your own without having other people tell you what to do. To get ahead you have to be independent.”

**According to your experience, what would you say is the biggest reason, or the greatest barrier, that prevents families from having access to the internet?**

**Mamly Ochoa** -- “The biggest reason is the cost. I am a single mother, and you have no choice but to prioritize one thing over another. Today, there is so much important information that you can only get through the internet, that you really don’t have a choice. You have to be connected, regardless of the cost... Just imagine, the monthly cost of the connection is \$65, and at the beginning, you need a telephone that, maybe, costs around \$130. And that is a cheap phone like the one I have. Right there, that’s almost \$200 plus taxes, which is the same as two weeks of food for the family.”

**Rebeca Juárez** -- “I see that many of my neighbors don’t have access to the internet because the companies ask you for a social security number. You can use your ITIN number, but a lot of people don’t know that. They also don’t realize that the schools are offering lower cost internet for families with children who need to be connected for classes. We need to have a lot more information... In my community of Culmore, there are many mothers from Guatemala who can’t speak Spanish because they speak Mam\*, like me. Very often, they don’t know what an email is or how to use a computer. Thanks to what I learned in Tech for Parents, I have been able to help other mothers to communicate with the school through email. I teach them about passwords and other things so that they can talk to the teachers... I also volunteer at the school to serve as a Mam interpreter so that the teacher can tell the mothers what is happening with their children, and the mothers can ask questions from the teacher. I help children from Guatemala get into school because the mothers don’t understand how the system works, and they don’t know which documents they need to bring. Sometimes, I even accompany mothers to the clinic so that they can communicate with the doctor.”

\* Note: Mam is an indigenous Mayan language spoken by some immigrants from Guatemala, southeastern Mexico, and elsewhere in Central America.

**Dara Angulo** -- “The biggest reason is the cost, but also because many people don’t see the internet connection as something necessary. As a Latino immigrant, I have also found that some of us feel embarrassed because we can’t communicate very well with people who speak English, and generally, we are reluctant to ask questions about how to get different services, like the internet. This is what happened to our family when we first came to the U.S. We had a terrible experience because we couldn’t communicate, and the people who spoke only English didn’t seem to want to help us. In many situations, like when we wanted to sign up for internet service, we ended up leaving without getting any help because it was embarrassing and very frustrating.”

**Evelyn Lemus** -- “I think that the cost is the biggest barrier. For example, a friend of mine was paying \$160 a month for her internet connection because she didn’t know that there were other options available. I told her that I only pay \$10 for my internet because that is one of the benefits that comes with the free lunch program for my child at school... I remember that, before I took Tech for Parents, I had to read emails on the telephone, but the screen was so small that there were many times that I accidentally lost the message. When that happened, I would just get stuck because I was afraid to use a computer. I would wait for my daughter to get home, and I would ask her to help me and do everything for me. Now, I just open the laptop and I know what to do. I’m not afraid anymore.”

## **Edu-Futuro - Case Study - Home Connectivity & Awareness of ACP**

During our interviews with the ten former **Tech for Parents** participants, we also asked questions about home connectivity and their awareness of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). First, we found that all ten beneficiaries pay for internet access both through their telephone and through an internet provider in their homes. Eight of our participants owned a computer or laptop, in addition to the laptops provided to children by local school systems. Only one of the ten participants paid for cable television.

In terms of internet service providers, six of our beneficiaries used Verizon, three used Cox Communications, and one was not certain. The average monthly charge paid by the participants for their internet service was \$55, with the highest rate being \$75. When asked, not one of our beneficiaries had heard of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Not surprisingly, all ten were interested in receiving additional information about the program.

## **Conclusions**

As our interviews with past participants of Edu-Futuro’s **Tech for Parents** program have demonstrated, the workshops not only succeeded in closing the digital divide by teaching critical computer and internet skills to students from vulnerable populations, but quite often, the

experience also had a profound impact on the lives of the beneficiaries. As Fabiola Ramos shared with us --

“The classes not only helped me to learn the technology, but to think about my life. The instructor gave us structure -- why do we need to know how to use our phones and computers? What are the advantages of using these tools well? What are the disadvantages of using them poorly? He was a real guide. He was very sincere, dynamic, and he listened to all of us. I felt included, and felt free to ask questions. Thanks to the classes, I realized that the telephone was not enough, and I bought a computer.”

\* Note: Every interview with our ten participants was recorded, and extensive notes were taken at the time of the conversation. If needed, additional information may be provided to DHCD about the interviews and the results of this case study.