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Innovation & Job News



## Digital Inclusion bridges digital job skills divide in Ypsilanti

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Eastern Michigan University is developing a new way to help bridge the digital divide in Ypsilanti's low-income communities and enhance the city's downtown retail scene.

The university's [The Business Side of Youth](#) program, also known as the the B. Side, is debuting Digital Inclusion this fall. The social enterprise teaches local at-risk youth how to repair and refurbish computers. It has opened a pop-up store in downtown Ypsilanti where the students sell their services and reconditioned electronics.

"It gives them a viable skill," says Jack Bidlack, director of The Business Side of Youth. "It's giving them unique knowledge and skills to fix computers. It also bridges the digital divide in low-income communities."

Working class communities have long struggled to keep up with technology advancements. That often means they are at a disadvantage in the job market, especially in the technology-dominant Information Age of the 21st Century.

The Business Side of Youth launched six years ago out of EMU with the idea of giving local young people born into working class communities a chance to make inroads in technology careers. The program has facilitated 137 at-risk young people over the years. Each semester is takes on about a cohort of about a dozen of them to teach them skills in both technology and entrepreneurship.

"There are plenty of people who work in automotive design because they learned how to change oil," Bidlack says.

Digital Inclusion is the latest iteration of that initiative. It is operating a pop-up store where these young people work on computers and mobile devices at competitive prices. The pop-up is located at 10 N Washington St and is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Tuesday and Thursday from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The pop-up will run through Dec. 17, and Bidlack is evaluating whether it could become a permanent part of the program.

*Source: Jack Bidlack, director of The Business Side of Youth*

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