

WELLS FARGO RURAL CONNECT IMPACT REPORT

MARCH, 2024



In 2022, **Rural LISC & Wells Fargo** teamed up to address the digital skill & access barriers of individuals and families in rural communities. Over the two years, thousands of individuals increased skills and access that allowed them to live, work, and learn in today's digital world.

Here is a summary of the impact on clients with our lead community-based partners **Idaho Hispanic Foundation, Inc., GROW South Dakota, Wyoming Women's Business Center, and Council of Community Services.**

2,518

total clients served

4,029

of technical assistance hours provided

1,376

receiving digital skilling

\$834,336

in loans/grants secured for clients

215

small businesses served

\$370,212

leveraged for microlending products

139

women-owned

85

BIPOC-owned



IDAHO PARTNER: IDAHO HISPANIC FOUNDATION & IDAHO WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER

"The opportunity to participate in the Rural Connect program was a game changer for the rural our organization. The team had wanted to travel and host trainings in rural libraries for a few years but were unable to fund the travel and trainings. Working with libraries was a natural fit as they had space and internet and were a drivable distance from clients the staff wanted to assist.

The team was most proud of the clients, like the Magana's who drove 30 minutes to attend the classes and were willing to do the work to be successful. It is the boots-on-the-ground efforts that make multi-generational impact. The need in rural communities, especially Hispanic small business owners is great. There could not be a better time to invest in financial literacy and access to capital for the rapidly growing Hispanic business community in Idaho. We are very appreciative to Wells Fargo and Rural LISC for their trust in the Idaho WBC to facilitate programs in rural communities. The most innovative classes were held at the Paul Mitchell Beauty School. The school graduates women who become business owners, but they do not always see themselves as entrepreneurs. By teaching the basics of business plans to students was well received."



Client Success Stories

Justine

Justine Alaniz from J-Herbs and Spices 208 has fully engaged in the program and in just 4 short months, she has created a business plan that includes a marketing plan and is currently working on creating a website. She looks forward to working with her business advisor, Anita Tatge to create projections that she can insert into her business plan that can help her gain access to capital from a bank loan. In addition to working with her business advisor and leaning into other Rural Connect participants, she has fully engaged in the Verizon Wireless Digital Readiness platform, in partnership with Rural LISC, which has allowed her to learn all aspects of running a small business.

Justine has purchased a greenhouse where she currently grows culinary herbs, a wide variety of peppers, and experimental cold crops. She has secured a location with a local farmers market to begin selling as soon as June and looks forward to exploring store locations in the future. Justine has not only built a solid business foundation within the Rural Connect program but has also been able to look to and plan for the growth of her company.

The Magana's

The Magana's drove 30 minutes to attend the digital skilling classes and were willing to do the work to be successful. It is the boots-on-the-ground efforts that make multi-generational impact. The need in rural communities, especially Hispanic small business owners is great. There could not be a better time to invest in financial literacy and access to capital for the rapidly growing Hispanic business community in Idaho!



SOUTH DAKOTA PARTNER: GROW SOUTH DAKOTA

“Rural Connect has made it possible to help individuals and small businesses in our communities increase their digital literacy skills. Individuals working on the NorthStar program have had the opportunity to receive a free device. The reactions from these clients has renewed a sense of purpose around GROW SD’s digital literacy program. Devices have been received by young parents helping their children with school to grandparents connecting with their grandchildren. GROW SD was also able to leverage the Rural Connect program through a successful application to the FCC’s Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Pilot Program. Having a Digital Navigator on staff strengthened GROW SD’s application and the organization was selected as the only directly-funded agency in South Dakota to enroll households in the ACP program. South Dakota’s Broadband Director invited GROW South Dakota to the first SD Broadband conference in May 2023 to present on the Rural Connect program, and on growing the digital equity programming. For Small Businesses, the Initiate online technical assistance platform has improved business owner’s lives with many stating that they wish they could have started the program sooner. Through Rural Connect, support was provided to the Technical Assistance programming for small businesses leveraging our Microloan programming.”



Client Success Story

Hailey

Hailey, a dedicated mother of three, found herself with a burning desire to upgrade her digital skills and open new doors of opportunity. Little did she know that her journey through the Northstar program would not only transform her life but also gift her a valuable tool for her family's future. Hailey embarked on the Northstar program, an initiative designed to empower individuals with essential digital literacy skills. With a determined spirit, she diligently worked through the modules, mastering everything from basic computer use to online safety and job search skills. As she progressed, Hailey discovered a newfound confidence in navigating the digital landscape. After completing and passing 10 digital literacy courses GROW South Dakota presented her with a FREE Chromebook. The moment Hailey received the device, she felt a surge of gratitude. “The laptop will make it easier for me to go back to school and finish my degree,” Hailey said. With her enhanced digital skills and the newfound resources at her fingertips, Hailey can explore job opportunities online, go back to school, and even connect with others in her community.



WYOMING PARTNERS: WYOMING WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER & COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

WWBC: "The funding helped address urgent and emerging needs as we expand as a non-profit, such as offering more programming to meet the needs of our clients. Women are more likely to achieve their economic development goals when they have access to business education, which helps create a healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem. Through our programs, we helped small businesses have the best chance for success, which in turn creates more vital local economic ecosystems. At WWBC, we believe our clients are not just recipients of our programs. Instead, their experiences guide us toward creating a more profound impact. We are dedicated to making a difference, and our clients are the driving force behind our motivation. By prioritizing their needs and goals, we can achieve more meaningful outcomes. At WWBC, equity and inclusion are at the core of our work."



CCS: "As a program of the Council of Community Services, we maintain the homeless shelter. Many of the clients we have are coming off of the streets with very limited resources. We have been able to provide them with the ability to access by phone and internet to improve their situation. It not only gives them the ability to be in contact with potential employers and housing options it gives them more independence. Of course there are clients from other programs of the Council of Community Services that have benefited from ACP/LISC. We anticipate that we will be able to continue helping clients as long as the programs continue."

Client Success Stories

Council of Community Service Client

One of the clients we assisted in getting approved for the program is a single parent with a teenager. The parent's only income is from a part-time job and making ends meet has been challenging. Broadband appeared to be a luxury that could not be afforded. Yet, the teenager is required to complete the majority of schoolwork online. Our outreach via the school district reached the parent and teenager who came to us, still unsure that they would be approved. When we had completed the online application with the parent and further documentation was required, the parent felt hopeless. Upon explaining that we just needed to submit additional documentation and that the application had not been rejected, the parent provided the requested item and was instantly approved! The client felt a sense of relief. Later in the day the client returned with her teenager who also wanted to express appreciation for the program and assistance. They both stated without the program they were unsure of how they would have been able to get broadband and meet the requirements for education, among the other benefits of digital connectivity.

Megan

The WWBC was able to support Megan's photography business by utilizing her services two years in a row for our annual fundraiser event! Megan reconnected with the WWBC in June of 2023, seeking help with a new business start-up. She worked with our Business Education Director to get her Business Plan together, and then was referred to our Microloan Department. Since then, Megan has secured funding from our Microloan Department, engaged in a post-loan counseling session, and started her business: Sunshine Coffee Co. Wyoming's first zero waste coffee shop.

