SOCIAL ENVELOPE – YEAR TWO POVERTY CHALLENGE – BLOG #3

Back in 2014 our organization began exploring the state of the digital divide in Memphis, and in that research, we came across a book called Beyond Technology's Promise, by Joseph Giacquinta. This book used a term called The Social Envelope which describes the social set of expectations that surround a child and a computer. The book discusses the lack of or incorrect social expectations surrounding our youth and the use of technology. It provides solutions in terms of an approach to changing these expectations to better enable youth to use technology to build their lives socially, educationally, and professionally.

The Social Envelope is a metaphor that allows us to grasp the relationship between new technology and the setting into which it is introduced. In many ways, introducing a new technology is just like placing a letter in an envelope. A letter or card must be shaped or folded in ways that allow it to enter the shape of the envelope, or a new envelope must be provided. The metaphor aptly conveys what usually happens to a technology when it is introduced into a social setting. It either fits or something must give-either the letter (the technological use) or the envelope (the social expectations and relations of the setting). What we saw was that far too often we were folding away the student and what they could be doing with technology; in stead of expanding the envelope or expectations needed for youth to accel.

The Social Envelope outlined three core areas; Creating Environments Conducive to Adoption & Learning, Instilling Skills Needed to Maximize the Use of Technology, and the Surrounding Youth with the People & Organizations Forming a Village of Support. Although we were working to introduce technology in underserved communities; this idea of the Social Envelope, we began applying to many other social impact areas. For example, it has helped us think through better ways to build ecosystems for supporting entrepreneurship, workforce, education, and areas of the criminal justice system.

What would be The Social Envelope needed for introducing new Jewish Poverty solutions; better yet, is your agency currently working within a strong envelope system or is the envelope it sits within weak and haphazard leaving to many of the outcomes to chance?

We spent a tremendous amount of time thinking through how to organize the Social Envelope so that youth would adopt technology and digital skills as their natural way of doing things. We saw so many times high recidivism rates and, in some instances, communities ended up right back where they started.

Many Jewish agencies are going through this process, whether they call it The Social Envelope is besides the point; the key is to start asking the right questions while in design phase. What is the right mix of services; in what order should services and programs be deployed; how long do you provide the envelope before having confidence clients are truly on the path to stability; and others include frequency, number of needed touchpoints, gaps to be filled, intensity, and the client's receptiveness to this overall direction.

There could be a Social Envelope created for moving clients to stable lives, and there may be common denominators of how to formulate it that can be used across the network. Considering the current environment, we are in, it may be a good time to stop folding away clients and how they use our solutions, and start expanding the social expectations for them to work towards. An agency alone

cannot do this, it must be done through partner re-alignment, data and technology, new skills, honest dialogue and introspection, and the creation of a system that brings it all together.

*for more information on how we are applying the social envelope: www.zerogravitycommunity.com