Alexis, a 13-year-old member of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County

In Madison, we learned how digital skills training is preparing young people for the workforce.

The Smartphone Generation Needs Computer Help

Young people may be expert social media and smartphone users, but many lack the digital skills they need for today's jobs. How can we set them up for success?

The vast majority of young Americans have access to a smartphone, and nearly half say they are online "almost constantly." But reports of hyper-connectivity mask a deeper paucity of digital skills. This often-overlooked phenomenon is limiting some young people's ability to succeed in school and the workplace, where digital skills are increasingly required to collaborate effectively and complete everyday tasks.

Schools and youth development programs are finding ways to bring digital skills learning opportunities to young people. Take the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County in Madison, Wisconsin, which recently launched a pilot program with Grow with Google. Staff at the Club use Grow with Google's free Applied Digital Skills online curriculum, which includes lessons on how to build a digital resume, make an interactive presentation, and create a budget using a spreadsheet. For kids who are often glued to their smartphones, these types of digital tasks, surprisingly, can be new experiences. "They love technology, but not necessarily the parts of it that will be most helpful for them," says Kenneth Cole, a program assistant at the Dane County Club. Digital skills programming changes that by equipping young people with the foundational knowledge they need to succeed, both in work and in life.

What We Learned

Young people need digital skills training to succeed in the workforce. Here's why.

Digital skills demand is growing.

From 2002 to 2016, the necessity of digital skills in fields such as nursing and human resources increased by at least 50 percent.

Employers face a digital talent gap.

Fifty-nine percent of U.S. organizations report a lack of qualified employees with "soft digital skills," such as collaborating online and making data-driven decisions, and 70 percent say that the digital talent gap is widening.

Students want more skills training.

More classrooms are incorporating technology, but only 44 percent of young people globally believe schools are teaching them the skills they need to enter the job market.

New tools empower educators.

Free resources give teachers and youth development leaders the support they need to expand their digital skills programming. More than 100,000 people have used Google's Applied Digital Skills curriculum.