

DIGITAL ACCESS FOR ALL: DEVICE DRIVE REPORT



In celebration of Suncoast Digital Month in October 2024, the Digital Access for All (DA4A) team hosted a Device Drive in our four-county area to collect unused devices and put them to new use, with the help of the Sarasota Technology Users Group (STUG).

ABOUT DIGITAL ACCESS FOR ALL

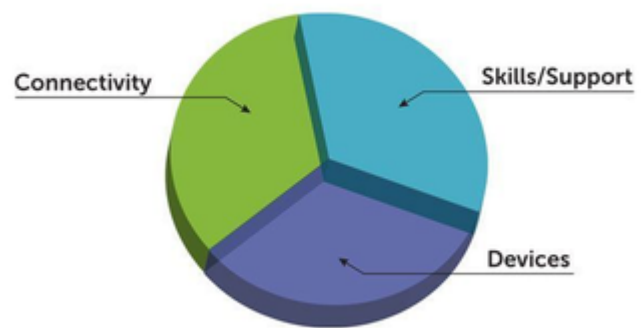
In June 2020, The Patterson Foundation (TPF) created its Digital Access for All initiative (DA4A) to explore the efforts of multiple sectors working to enhance access to technology that connects people in ways that foster inclusion and well-being.

TPF's initiatives have emphasized embracing technology and optimizing its benefits to strengthen its work. When the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) hit in spring 2020, TPF paused for a moment to understand how individuals, organizations, and communities were moving through the three distinct phases of disaster recovery: cope, adapt, and innovate.

Digital access emerged as a basic necessity to connect to various services that have increasingly shifted to an online environment. These include services related to education, health, employment, and other vital needs. Unfortunately, many **ALICE** (asset-limited, income-constrained, employed) families, older adults, and communities struggle to acquire internet access, computer devices, and training to succeed in this new, technology-driven world.

Three essential elements or three “legs of the stool” emerged as critically important through The Patterson Foundation’s in-depth research and interviews with national thought-leaders in the digital access arena. Those three essential elements are:

- **Connectivity:** The ability to connect to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet
- **Devices:** Possessing the right device for one’s needs
- **Skills/Support:** Having access to the necessary training and support to use devices and programs effectively while solving technical issues when they arise



THE 2024-2025 DEVICE DRIVE

All three essential elements need to be present and work together for digital access for all to be achieved. For the purpose of this report, we will focus on the second essential element.



What were the initial aspirations of the Device Drive?

- To increase awareness of STUG in our community as one of few organizations that collect, refurbish, and distribute devices to low-income households.
- To increase STUG's supply of devices to support the number of available devices for asset-limited income-constrained employed (ALICE) households.
- Create opportunities for Gap clients to receive a refurbished device

ASPIRATIONS

In last year's Device Drive, 119 devices were donated to STUG. Thanks to this year's Device Drive team, **led by Marla Smith and consisting of Aileen Peña, Beth Duda, Cheri Coryea, Cinthia Pena, Kiarra Louis, and Melissa Hirstein (Nancy Henry's design skills, and Stacy Sternberg's digital support)**, we were able to exceed last year's donations with 190 donations.

While the official Device Drive ended on November 30, 2024, the momentum continued well past the deadline as individuals in the community kept donating their devices, even at the Suncoast Connect Symposium on March 11th and March 12th.

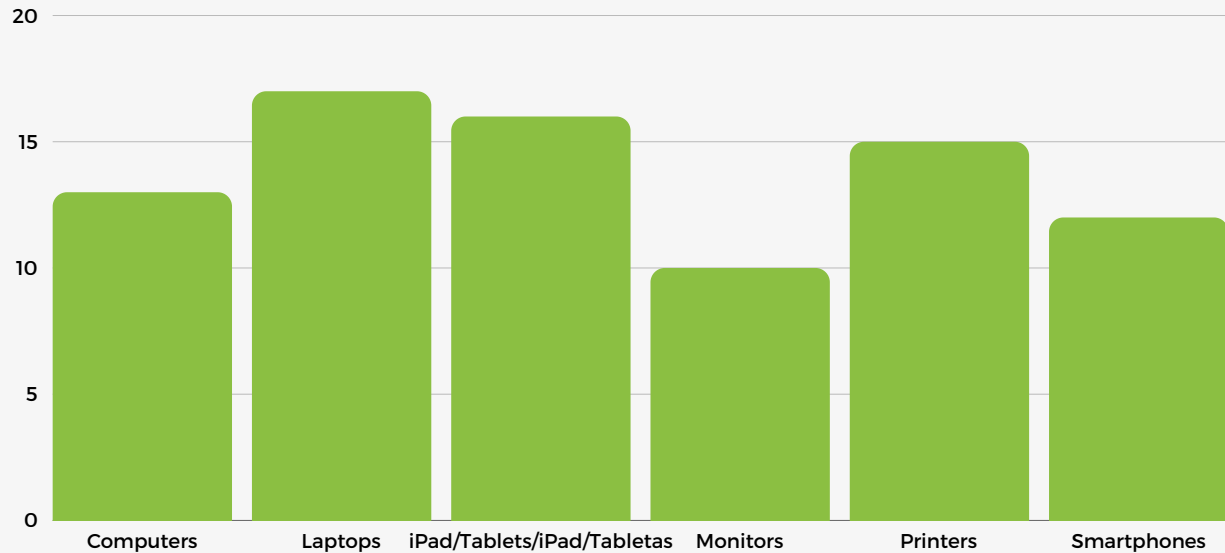
To date, 421 devices have been donated.

About STUG

Founded in 1982, STUG is organized exclusively for educational and technological purposes. This includes the distribution of hardware, software, and educational materials to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations. STUG's Refurb Project began renovating computers in February 2004. Since its inception, over 20,000 computers have been donated to our community. Recipients are a diverse population. They include disadvantaged school children, low-income adults/seniors, individuals in recovery programs, and others trying to emerge from homelessness or other problems. **Learn more [here](#).**



TYPES OF DEVICE DONATIONS



WHY DEVICE DONATIONS ARE IMPORTANT?

To Support the Local Community: By donating unused devices, people help bridge the digital divide in the Suncoast region. Access to technology is essential for education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Donating devices directly supports individuals and families in need, ensuring they have the tools to thrive.

To Promote Sustainability: Donating old devices helps reduce electronic waste by giving technology a second life. Instead of discarding old devices, we all can contribute to sustainability efforts by ensuring devices are refurbished and reused, reducing environmental impact.

OVERVIEW

To simplify the process, collection bins with the DA4A logo and instruction labels were located at each distribution site. Anyone wanting to donate a device could visit one of the locations, such as the Women's Resource Center, The Patterson Foundation, or even the DeSoto County Library, and find one of the collections bins. After depositing the device in the bin, they could scan the QR code to record their device. Within a week or so, one of the Device Drive transporters would stop by to pick it up and bring it to STUG to be refurbished.

EVOLVING THE DEVICE DRIVE

To foster widespread participation and encourage people, organizations, and communications to donate a device at various distribution sites, we implemented the following changes:

- Securing eight locations throughout the four-county region to serve as device distribution sites compared to the (4) last year.
- Increasing engagement with local organizations to spread the word and encourage participation
- Creating a digital and print flyer in English and Spanish to help spread the word
- Sharing the flyer with various TPF newsletters
- Embedding the Drive into TPF events such as The Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's Suncoast Remake Learning Day Friendsgiving Event. Although the plan was to include the Device Drive in the Suncoast Connect Symposium in October and the DeSoto County Ahead Community update in November, we had to pivot due to the series of hurricanes.
- Collaborating with the Manatee and DeSoto School Districts to have flyers shared on Peachjar, a software used to send digital flyers to parents



OPPORTUNITIES THAT EMERGED

The Device Drive Team's efforts to foster participation in this year's initiative sparked meaningful collaborations with local organizations, expanding the reach and impact of the program. Among the many conversations was an enlightening exchange with Goodwill Manasota, revealing their robust device donation stream.

Through this dialogue, the team discovered that Goodwill Manasota receives numerous device donations. While the Sarasota Technology User Group (STUG) and Goodwill Manasota have collaborated in the past, the Device Drive Team facilitated a deeper connection. Now, STUG can visit Goodwill Manasota to sort through incoming device donations and selecting items suitable for refurbishing. These devices are then transformed into fully functional tools to empower individuals in need.

Devices that don't fit refurbishing criteria will still find purpose, as Goodwill Manasota can resell them, ensuring every item contributes to community betterment.

This strengthened partnership exemplifies how fostering connections and leveraging community resources can create meaningful change. Together, we are building a future where digital access and opportunity are within everyone's reach.



THE SPIRIT BEHIND THE GIVING

“I was inspired to donate to the Device Drive due to the enthusiasm and willingness of Marla Smith and Melissa Hirstein.” - Beth Duda, The Patterson Foundation

“While the items I donated were sourced by sharing information about the drive, my experience of not having a device or internet when I needed it helped me empathize more with those facing this challenge daily. Even though my situation was temporary, it was still frustrating and made it difficult to perform at my best. I wish it had not taken my own experience to relate on a deeper level, but perhaps that is human. I love that DA4A is taking this initiative for our community, and I can't wait to learn how many people it has helped. I hope we get the opportunity to share the outcomes and stories about how this effort improves lives by helping people stay connected.” - Stacy Sternberg, The Patterson Foundation

“I am grateful to have the opportunity to share a device that I don't use anymore and know I am helping another family that doesn't have the means to acquire their own.” - Elsie Merrill, The Patterson Foundation

“I will tell you when it came to donating, the reasons were multiple. At the Friendsgiving Day event you held last week, you asked us to write on the little leaves things we were thankful for. I'm thankful for the many blessings I have had in my life. One was sharing my life with my husband who had passed away two years ago. The donated items were his. Another good reason to donate, Beth Duda. I've known Beth for some time now, and she always makes me smile. Her work always inspires me in my work, arts and education. Lastly, now that I'm working with the Johnson-Singer Arts Education Fund, I'm hoping to further develop areas where we can collaborate. I know many may feel somewhat concerned about technology, where it is going, how it's been used to spread disinformation, how it's being used to hack. It is my sincere hope that we can train others to use these wonderful tools for a common good. That would be the greatest blessing bestowed upon the gifts.” - Andrew Salgado, Representative, The Johnson Singer Arts Education Fund

“We strongly believe in the importance of providing resources to those in need. By donating devices to support programs like ‘Digital Access for All’, we help ensure individuals and families have the tools necessary to access critical services efficiently. The impact of this contribution is profound—bridging gaps, increasing accessibility, and empowering people to take steps toward stability. The ability to give efficiently to a worthy cause is everything. It’s not just about the act of donating but about the transformative difference these devices can make in someone's life.” – Stephanie Lucy, United Way of Charlotte County

“This program provides a win-win for both the giver and receiver. Almost every household in our community has an unused or needed device of some kind. To be able to securely donate devices and know they will be used to meet a need, is a gift in itself.” – Victoria Finley, The Patterson Foundation

“I donated my 2 devices because I wanted to help bridge the digital divide. Every little bit helps provide opportunities to those who might not be able to afford electronic devices. I also wanted to help protect Mother Earth by reducing electronic waste in our local landfills. This helps avoid water and air pollution which is very important for future generations.” – Tina Duvall, The Patterson Foundation

“I want all voices to be part of the forward motion of our community. When someone lacks access to the necessary technology needed to stay connected, their voice often gets left out of important conversations. Sometimes we can have a big desire to donate or contribute to a cause but may feel it's not currently within our means. What I love about this technology drive is that it gave me a reminder about a really useful tool I had sitting in a drawer that I was no longer using. Instead of it wasting space and collecting dust, I could ensure it got to someone who could benefit from it. I didn't need big money to make a difference, I just needed to take action with something I already had.” – Leah Verier-Dunn, The Patterson Foundation



Computer Donations Make the Load Lighter By Sandra Vega-Picchiatti

I was truly moved by a recent encounter I had with a woman at one of our Pop-Up Laundry events. She had overcome many adversities, including addictions and homelessness, and was now pursuing a college degree in social work. This meant that a computer was essential to her academic success. However, she did not have one of her own and was having to rent a school computer. This made money tighter than usual. To see her determination and her focus on a future where she could one day provide hope and resources to others like she had received made the choice to donate computers an easy one.

She had fought through her hardships, found a path forward, and was intent on helping others. And, because she was willing to share her story with me, fill out an intake, and be contacted by a Digital Navigator who will request a refurbished computer from the Sarasota Technology Users Group (STUG), she will be able to save money by not having to rent a computer to complete her school assignments. A donated device can open up a world to those who have been closed off from it.

**We are thankful to these organizations for
allowing us to use their space to collect
devices within the community.**

Charlotte County United Way

DeSoto County Library

Women's Resource Center (WRC) Manatee

The POINT

WRC Sarasota

WRC Venice

STUG