

Seaside Nonprofit Closes The Digital Gap



Photo: Kelli Ulcail

Christian Mendelsohn (in baseball cap) started the nonprofit Loaves, Fishes & Computers to repair and sell computers at a low cost to needy families in Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties. LFC is based in Seaside.

You can't do much without a computer these days," says Christian Mendelsohn. "Any problem can be solved if one learns how to Google."

In fact, Mendelsohn frequently turned to Google—and to some tech-savvy acquaintances—as he taught himself to repair computers. After testing his skills on a broken machine supplied by a neighbor, Mendelsohn gave the refurbished system to a friend's son. That effort inspired the launch of Loaves, Fishes & Computers (LFC), a Seaside-based nonprofit that repairs and sells computers to low-income recipients in Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties. In just three years, Mendelsohn's organization has repurposed more than 600 desktop and laptop computers, while also teaching nearly 300 students and volunteers how to overhaul equipment.

"We are not only providing computers for people who can't afford a new one, but also training people on computer repair: We're opening up their minds to the idea that they can do anything that they really want to," Mendelsohn says.

Participants in LFC's refurbishment training program range from college

students and working parents to retired professionals and homeless individuals. That volunteer support is vital to the organization, which operates with just one full-time staff position and seven volunteer board members. Also essential are the organizations, schools and businesses that donate decommissioned equipment. Once computers are repaired, qualifying recipients can purchase them starting at \$99 per machine.

This winter, LFC looks to extend its impact through the new Tech Angel sponsorship program. For just \$200, donors can purchase a complete computer system for the low-income individual or family of their choice, or provide funding that allows their favorite nonprofit to distribute a computer to a family in need. The goal, explains Mendelsohn, is to bridge the digital divide and, ultimately, move families forward.

"We love to do good," he says. "We feel that providing computers can open up a world of possibilities."

To donate, volunteer or learn about Loaves, Fishes & Computers' training programs, visit www.loavesfishescomputers.org or call 831/393-9260.

—Renee Brincks