COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A community effort helps equip Northern students with access to virtual learning

Transforming education into a virtual experience in a matter of days is a significant feat.

It is far more challenging, however, when your students are based in the remote regions of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut and lack the basic technology such as a reliable internet connection or even laptops.

In an effort to remove the impediments to virtual learning, a Northern technology company, Global Storm IT Corporation, started a "Notebooks for the North" challenge.

When BLG's Vancouver office found out about it, they decided to help.

Northern remote learning

As soon as our public health authorities advised us to stay home and schools were closed down, teachers across Canada had to quickly shift to connect with their students remotely.

As most scrambled to learn new communications tools—and debated between using Zoom, Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams—remote communities in Canada's Northern regions were faced with a different issue: Most of their students lacked computers.

To help address the problem, Global Storm IT Corporation (in partnership with Indigenous governments) developed a Northern Remote Learning Plan. The plan aims to improve internet access to these students' homes (as step one), and provide them with laptops (as step two).

The company is able to tackle step one on their own. They do need help, however, collecting the hundreds of laptops required in remote areas.

"Notebooks for the North" challenge

That is why Kirby Marshall, CEO/President of Global Storm IT Corporation and head of the Remote Learning Plan, started a "Notebooks for the North" challenge.

He reached out to various organizations, including members of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut Chamber of Mines, asking for laptop donations.

Geeta Krishnan, Vancouver Business Development Lead and BLG Team North member, was part of that list. When she read about the issue, Geeta could not pass up the opportunity to help.

"When you think about these added challenges—of not being able to continue your education—it is heartbreaking," she said.

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The Vancouver office knew they had to respond to the request and donate their used BLG laptops to the cause.

Impact in remote locations

Members of BLG's Team North know all too well the accessibility issues that exist in these remote locations. As does Kirby Marshall.

Born and raised in the north, he is exceptionally familiar with the hurdles faced by remote communities from the extremely high cost of housing and power, to the limited or non-existent infrastructure.

"When the pandemic hit, I saw that this will have a significant, negative impact on our youth and our communities," he said over the phone.

When asked how he felt about BLG's laptop donation, he replied: "It's phenomenal."

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Kirby wanted to relay a message to us.

When he told the principal at the Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School in Fort Providence in the Northwest Territories of the Remote Learning Plan, she replied: "it's life-changing."