

Laptop Ministry Annual Report

April 2023 - April 2024

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Abstract

The Laptop Ministry provides older laptops to folks in the Chicago area; laptops that are refurbished with an accessible form of Linux for the user platform. This strategy prevents e-waste while providing viable computing to the community in need. In the past year a vast array of demographics have been satisfied. The only requirement is for the person requesting a laptop to provide a statement of condition of need. In the past year the ministry worked on a one time donation of about 50 laptops. In one year the ministry has processed nearly all laptops from that one time donation. The ministry has leads on some new sources for laptops to be donated for this cause. The ministry is also working on improving the workflow and accessibility to less technical volunteers in the refurbishing and Linux installation process. It is the ministry's goal to complete this workflow improvement by the ministry's second year.

1 Brief History

In late 2021, shortly after relocating to the Edgewater neighborhood in Chicago, I was approached by a survivor of trafficking in urgent need of a laptop for Zoom meetings. The only laptop available to me at the time was somewhat outdated, but I managed to refurbish it to fulfill the individual's requirements. This experience inspired me to leverage social media for a greater cause. Consequently, I established a Facebook group aimed at gathering laptop donations from acquaintances and residents within the Edgewater community. My goal was to refurbish these devices and distribute them to those in dire need. Thanks to the overwhelming support and generosity from the community, this initiative started getting support of laptop donations from the Edgewater community. In April of 2023 I approached Grace with the idea of continuing this work as a ministry of the church. Because of the transitioning the ministry received a donation from a dissolving NFP Factor Laptops for Learning of about 50 laptops for the ministry to start with. It has been close to a year when that initial stock of laptops became low in reserve. In the last month I have gotten some leads in several sources for replenishing the laptop stock into the next year.

2 Report on who the Ministry has Served

About 38% of laptop recipients had a need based on either education or job placement while in both mental or drug recovery programs exhibited at 13%. The rest of the recipients had a need base on the following examples: starting a business for NFP, folks that are retired or on a fix income, for employment, recently out of prison, their laptop was recently stolen or destroyed by a disaster, primary education and some folks where the laptop is their first computer. Please refer to the chart titled "Stated Condition of Need" for a breakdown.

3 Report on Donations / Values

The majority of the donations (about 77%) came in the form of laptops of which 70% came from dissolving Factor Laptops for Learning NFP donation as soon as this ministry became recognized by the church in April of 2023. Other inkind and money donations included tools, laptop parts and supplies for this ministry to function. Money donations amounted to \$250 and with all material donations combined as assessed in current value a total of approximately \$3,800. Please see the chart titled "Value Donations" for a breakdown.

4 First Year Wait-list / Satisfied Requests

Our most active month for getting laptops to folks in need was September of 2023 with a total of 15 satisfied with 14 new request in the wait list at the end of the month. Please see the chart titled "Monthly Requests and Deliveries" for a review of last years progress in getting laptops to those in need from the Laptop Ministry.

5 Volunteer Hours as Tracked Since August of 2023

A new volunteer joined the ministry in August of 2023 which prompted the need to account for volunteer contributed hours. Since then a total of just under a 100 hours contributed towards the ministry's efforts, ranging from picking up laptops, delivering laptops to those with mobility issues to cleaning and training in refurbishing laptops. Our most prominent volunteer is Addy who alone has contributed about 18 hours. Please see the chart titled "Volunteer Hours..." for a more complete breakdown of volunteer hours contributed to the laptop ministry.

6 Considerations / What Has Been Learned

Since the ministry began there have been experiences where room for improvement or caution were needed.

1. One of the first considerations is in asking volunteers what they are comfortable and familiar with when it comes to making laptop deliveries with folks with mobility issues. This concern came up when a volunteer got lost after delivering a laptop to a recipient and they had to pay for an Uber home of which I reimbursed from my personal funds.
2. I decided to not provide laptops that have the storage media soldered onto the board of the laptop components. This is a common setup with netbooks / chromebooks. A recipient had exchanged a laptop given to them from our ministry where the laptop storage media failed and found no way to recover their data with the storage medium being soldered on the board. Currently to my knowledge this is a concern only with some netbooks/chromebooks and is not a concern with regular laptops.
3. An information sheet should be provided with each laptop given out. This prompted me to consider content mostly in response to a most common question: "What is my password?" in which I respond "It is just 'password'." The info sheets that have been given out is still being shaped and formed between me and Grace.
4. The ministry is currently settled on installing Pop!OS on most laptops. This is because that distribution makes it easy to install and update common used softwares from a single location / app on the laptop. Such common apps include Zoom, Office365 and Google Chrome. Other distributions require several different methods and sources of installing and updating common used softwares which can be confusing to novice computer users.
5. Workflow improvements on the refurbishing of the laptops with Linux is currently being explored. There are certain softwares that make pre-packaging a Linux installer possible. There are also options to install the same Linux on multiple laptops at the same time from a single host computer using a local area network setup. Recently I have been putting more time into finding new sources for laptops as that there is still a need. With the median time someone waits for a laptop being from one month to three months, getting laptops as been a top priority.

7 Possible Q/A

* Questions that may be asked include:

Q. Have there been issues with folks getting their laptops working?

A. Yes, the most common question is "what is the password" which I remind them is just "password" until they change it. Outside of that most prominent question, there has been one laptop replaced from a laptop provided that ended up failing and one person got a vintage laptop due to an urgent need for them to meet the bare minimums of their required needs.

Q. Why not install Windows or OS/X?

A. The reason why there is so much e-waste is that the newest Windows or OS/X operating systems artificially push the hardware requirements of computers. By providing Linux as an alternative to proprietary operating systems the laptops get a new lease of life with the user being able to access and produce modern content. Recipients also have asked about installing an anti-virus and I inform them that viruses for that platform is very rare. Not only is Linux a secure operating system it is also an operating system that is not targeted as a platform of choice for infections nor intrusions.

Q. Isn't Linux only for System Administrators and computer geeks?

A. There are many distributions of Linux to suite wide to specific needs. Many popular distributions such as Mint, Ubuntu and for very old computers Puppy Linux / Tincore Plus are designed for the end user and novice computer user. The ministry has not received a single call of someone having an issue of not knowing how to use the laptop beyond the common question "what is the password?"