

Community SecondNets Update - Beatrice, NE 12/11/2020

What started as a somewhat normal year really took a turn for the crazy. ESU 5, the Beatrice Public Library, and the Gage County EMA joined forces to plan for internet connectivity at the County Fairgrounds using the existing Homework Hotspot foundation that was funded in the Beyond the Walls Award. The Gage County EMA utilizes this space at the Fairgrounds as a Family reunification location in emergency situations. Covid-19 brought this project to a standstill as staff and resources were shuffled around and refocused on constantly changing needs.

When we think of a disaster or emergency situation in Nebraska we often are dealing with weather. This year changed things entirely where Internet connectivity became even more of an asset than it already was. Remote meetings, training, school work and so on were required and so was a reliable Internet connection. Having infrastructure in place beforehand really helped us in this situation but also showed us that the need is still so high. Utilizing TVWS equipment we were able to utilize existing homework hotspots that were in place across town but

hardware issues and challenges with the TVWS radios prevented us from expanding the network to our off-grid battery powered units. Wind, lightning and various other issues all came into play bringing down multiple TVWS radios that were crucial in our network. We continue to work through these issues as staff is available to allocate resources to them and hope to have things repaired to a fully functioning system again soon.

We are currently in the process of installing a more reliable connection to the Fairgrounds Reunification Space, as this is now being used for drive through Covid-19 testing where 70-100 people are tested for Covid-19 daily. This Test Nebraska site is provided through the Beatrice Community Hospital to reduce the load on local offices and streamline the process. We are working with the Gage County EMA to adapt our original plans and expand connectivity to reach outside the building where the testing tent is set up. Though we have run into issues with hardware, staff availability, and changing needs, we have been able to adapt our plans and still get connectivity to locations that have never had a reliable connection. With the need for better, reliable connectivity, ESU 5 has partnered with the Public Library to help provide erate

services for Category 1 and 2. We are in the process of going out to bid for fiber connectivity to the Library into Network Nebraska through Category 1 and revamping the entire Library network and wireless through Category 2.