

# BUFFALO, NEW YORK

**“We are thrilled to provide families in the Fruitbelt neighborhood with wireless broadband Internet access.”**

- **Dr. Filippo Malandra**, Assistant Professor - Electrical Engineering Department, University at Buffalo



Partnering with faith organizations can create trust by proxy in historically underserved communities.



Tower height and line of sight are critical for signal strength in CBRS deployments.

Although an iconic part of Buffalo, the historic Fruitbelt Neighborhood has long lacked adequate Internet connectivity, making it difficult for residents to access basic digital services. One Fruitbelt resident explained that “with Internet, we can share with one another and ...have access to things that surrounding neighborhoods have had access to for years.” Through partnerships with leaders from the community, the project team tackled the digital divide plaguing the Fruitbelt Neighborhood.

Progress was difficult at first, with distrust from community members presenting a critical obstacle on the ground. Over the years, many outside groups and organizations delivered failed pilots in this community, making residents skeptical of new efforts and the group’s commitment to positive outcomes. With this awareness, the Buffalo team trained and empowered residents to engage the Fruitbelt neighbors. Digital Stewards oriented neighbors to the technology and its benefits and fostered trust. Through community connections, installations, and word of mouth, the Digital Stewards began to earn community trust as they educated neighbors on the project.

Leveraging unlicensed Citizens Broadband Radio Service (CBRS) and a new base station at Buffalo General Medical Center, the Project OVERCOME team built a private LTE network to connect previously underserved households. The network also provided free coverage for a community anchor institution at the historic Promiseland Missionary Baptist Church.

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Project partners like Mission: Ignite emphasized the importance of digital training and devices to ensure Internet adoption.

In addition to the new Internet access, and thanks to support from the John R. Oishei Foundation, the Fruitbelt clients also received a desktop computer kit that included a desktop computer, monitor, keypad, mouse, web camera, and headset. The kits were essential to ensuring Internet use given the community's early hesitancy to participate in this project. In one case, the owners of a local barbershop initially declined the free desktop computer. However, they later accepted the donation to enable their clients' children to complete homework assignments with an Internet-enabled desktop.



## GRANTEE AND PARTNERS

University at Buffalo, Mission: Ignite, Buffalo General Medical Center, John R. Oishei Foundation, Crown Castle, Kaleida Health, Community Tech NY