

Nonprofit uses mobile hotspots to boost child literacy

- **Business needs** - A cost-effective way to enable reading lessons for primary school students
- **Networking solution** - AT&T mobile hotspots provide robust connectivity to support student learning.
- **Business value** - Increased student literacy, improved ability to succeed in school, elevated self-confidence
- **Industry focus** - Non-profit foundation
- **Size** - Hundreds of students and tutors

About the Help Us Grow (H.U.G.) Foundation

The H.U.G. Foundation works to enrich communities by helping young students develop reading skills, character, and self-confidence. The foundation pairs students with volunteer tutors who help them achieve grade-level reading by the time they finish third grade.

The situation

When COVID-19 struck, many schools closed their doors to outsiders, including H.U.G. Foundation tutors. Foundation officials needed to find a way for its tutors to continue their essential work.

Solution

AT&T Business provided connectivity with Netgear Nighthawk® LTE Mobile Hotspot Routers to connect H.U.G. tutors with students who need their assistance. The reliable devices connect to schools' wireless networks to deliver connectivity to students' tablet computers, enabling important literacy and life lessons.

Building literacy and confidence

Half of all American adults read at only a sixth-grade level.¹ About 75 percent of adults in prison are illiterate, but studies show that improving their ability to read can help prevent recidivism.²

The H.U.G. Foundation helps struggling elementary school students become confident grade-level readers. Janine Broussard started the organization to address America's low literacy rate. "Our country is going to continue to slide backwards unless we make education a primary goal," she said.

Broussard is a nurse who supervised operating rooms and cardiac floors for two decades. She founded H.U.G. in 2015 to help students in Louisville, Kentucky, where she was living at the time. Since then, the H.U.G. founder and CEO has begun working in other Kentucky counties and expanded into Florida. H.U.G. provides a free and engaging reading intervention, character development, and leadership program that helps students grow into self-sustaining learners.

The organization also focuses on building confidence to improve students' lives now and in the future. It promotes social and educational equality, encouraging children to BE THE DIFFERENCE™ in their communities.



"We couldn't do the work that we do, nor provide the needed educational mentoring we foster, without AT&T."

Janine Broussard
founder and CEO, the H.U.G. Foundation

A community collaboration

The H.U.G. volunteer reading instructors work to help students grow into resilient, successful adults by building their social skills and nurturing their ability to learn independently. College students and retirees make up a significant number of the tutors. In addition to the satisfaction of helping others, college students gain hours of field experience, and retired seniors can continue to feel valued.

"The H.U.G. Foundation is a community collaboration to help improve American literacy," Broussard said. "We solicited college students, retirees, and corporations to really make an impact in first, second, and third grade education."

¹ "130 million adults in the U.S. lack proficiency in literacy," Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, 2019. <https://map.barbarabush.org/>

² Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles, Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013). https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html

The organization's success is impressive. H.U.G. metrics indicate a 50% improvement in boosting students' reading skills. As a result, Broussard's work has attracted attention from educators and the business community.

Most recently, she was profiled in Donato Tramuto's book, "The Double Bottom Line: How Compassionate Leaders Captivate Hearts and Deliver Results." Broussard and other visionary leaders discussed the ways that a caring management style can contribute to the success of businesses and philanthropic organizations and build a better culture for the country.



“Our work with AT&T has enabled the H.U.G. Reading Program to expand to nine schools across two states, and we plan to expand into a third and fourth state next year.”

Janine Broussard
founder and CEO, the H.U.G. Foundation

Introducing an online approach

When COVID-19 began spreading across the country, Broussard recognized that it would create serious problems for students. “Before the pandemic, one in 10 children had a learning deficit, but since then, it’s one in five,” she said. “We knew we were behind the eight ball, so we set out to deliver a seamless, easy, structured program that a non-professional could use to make a big difference for students.”

The organization had to find a way to continue to help students during COVID. “Because of the pandemic, the school principals didn’t want 10 tutors coming into their environment. We had to pivot on a dime,” Broussard said.

“Thankfully, we had enough talent and a great, easy, seamless virtual product that could really make an impact,” she said. “We decided to build the program online, and we started providing training sessions for our tutors,” she said. School officials agreed to permit one or two H.U.G. specialists to enter the schools to assist with the tutoring sessions.

“The specialists provide the tablets to the children, get them logged on, get their little headsets connected, and then link them to the rest of the tutors online. It’s still a one-to-one tutor-to-student ratio, but there are two supervising adults in the room should any difficulties arise.”

Inconsistent internet access

Students quickly became adept at using the computers, but erratic connectivity created challenges. Most schools had a blocked system that required logging into the school’s website to access the Wi-Fi® network.

“So, you must get a guest pass for access. And then sometimes the school’s Wi-Fi did not work because we had 20 kids and tutors logging on at the same time,” Broussard said. “And many times, we were dropped from the network. It was very frustrating.”

The H.U.G. Foundation needed a reliable way to deliver vital, life-changing tutoring sessions to students.

Fast, reliable AT&T connectivity

Broussard turned to AT&T Business to find a way to keep students connected with their tutors. “We’ve been an AT&T family ever since we got cell phones,” she said. “I just love AT&T, so I didn’t look at other vendors at all.”

AT&T Business recommended its mobile hotspots to provide fast and reliable connectivity for students’ tablets. Thanks to the solution, tutors can now easily videoconference with their students by using the custom H.U.G. app that tailors the curriculum to each student.

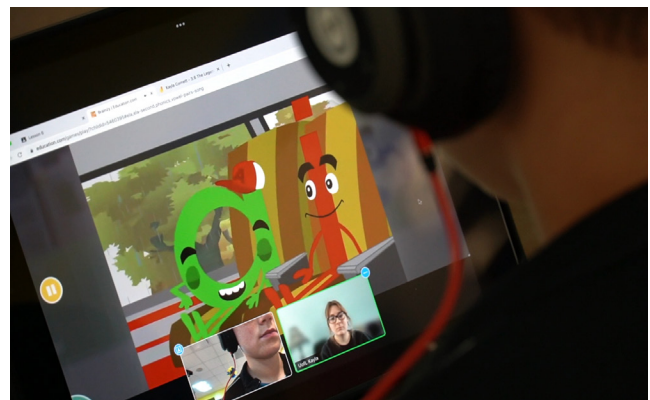
The hotspots are small enough that it’s easy to mail them to schools, and powerful enough to seamlessly connect dozens of devices spread out in a large school cafeteria. Each week, hundreds of students, tutors, and H.U.G. staff rely on the AT&T hotspots to provide fast and reliable internet connectivity. “They’re really helpful, especially out in the rural areas,” Broussard said.

Reading, learning, and growing

Broussard is grateful for the customer support she receives from AT&T Business. “It’s stellar—10 out of 10. Our account reps are always available. It’s wonderful,” she said.

She also appreciates the dependability of AT&T connectivity. “Our students and tutors alike had experienced internet instability. The reliability of the AT&T hotspots has been a boon for keeping our students connected, reading, learning, and benefiting from having a mentor.”

Broussard believes the foundation’s relationship with AT&T Business will enable H.U.G. to help many more children. “We couldn’t do the work that we do, nor provide the needed educational mentoring we foster, without AT&T. Our work with AT&T has enabled the H.U.G. Reading Program to expand to nine schools across two states, and we plan to expand into a third and fourth state next year,” she said. Ultimately, Broussard would like to have programs in every state.



“The reliability of the AT&T hotspots has been a boon for keeping our students connected, reading, learning, and benefiting from having a mentor.”

Janine Broussard
founder and CEO, the H.U.G. Foundation