

Steve Myrthil, Vice President of IT, Westhab

Issue and Case for Change

Steve is leading the charge on the urgent technological needs of over 10,000 shelter and affordable housing residents across New York City and Westchester. Steve is passionate about closing the digital divide and providing life-changing access to technology for underserved, low-income communities. Applying his vision at Westhab, Steve secured funding to provide free Wi-Fi to the Dayspring Campus in Downtown Yonkers, an affordable and supportive housing residence with 63 units and a full-service community center. Noticing the need extended to much of the community, Steve helped found the Y-Zone Initiative, which has provided 250 clients with home Wi-Fi and 87 digital literacy courses and Chromebooks to Yonkers residents since inception. As a child of Haitian immigrants, Steve learned firsthand the importance that education and technology can have on one's life. Steve spent over 12 years working in education and is currently a board member of The Ascenders, Inc., a nonprofit that provides guidance and mentorship to students to and through college. Steve worked in charter schools with children from similar backgrounds to his own, building systems that make technology services more accessible to students. In his time working in schools and shelters, he's learned that ready access to technology significantly impacts success, whether in school, housing searches, or the job market. Because of his experiences, Steve is dedicated to making technology and online learning easy to use and accessible to people of all ages and walks of life.

Awareness

It has become increasingly apparent in Westchester County that lower income residents do not have equal access to educational resources, telehealth appointments, and employment opportunities made possible through the Internet. With the opening of the Dayspring Campus in Southwest Yonkers, Steve saw an opportunity to combat that reality. Steve worked tirelessly and successfully to equip 63 affordable and supportive housing residences and the full-service community center with free Wi-Fi. He did not stop there. In collaboration with the Westchester County Association and the City of Yonkers, Steve spearheaded Dayspring as a home base for Project OVERCOME's Y-Zone Initiative. This initiative is a \$2.7 million effort designed to expedite the delivery of broadband services to underserved communities across the United States. The Y-Zone project at Dayspring will also provide free Wi-Fi, training, and Chromebooks to over 500 families who live in the vicinity of Dayspring. Steve not only saw the potential solutions to the barriers facing internet access in the community, but he successfully campaigned for awareness, funding, and change. Steve collaborates with program staff to identify needs and areas for improvement in tech or computer programs at sites and in the office. His team emphasizes the importance of reliable, easy-to-use tech in facilitating everything from job searches to schoolwork for Westhab's clients. Steve is involved in designing all new housing projects, working closely with Westhab's real estate team to ensure Wi-Fi connection is a design priority from the ground up.

Collaboration

In collaboration with the Westchester County Association and the City of Yonkers, Steve helped establish a home base for Project OVERCOME's Y-Zone Initiative in the new Dayspring Community Center. Project OVERCOME is a \$2.7 million effort designed to expedite the delivery of broadband services to underserved communities across the United States. The Y-Zone project is geared toward the Yonkers community and will act as a starting point for the future of digital connectivity. To create the most robust Wi-Fi network possible for Westhab's new Dayspring Campus and the entire Nodine Hill community, Westhab contributed a recently awarded \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant to the Y-Zone Initiative. Additionally, Westhab's Dayspring Campus will serve as a second Citizens Broadband Radio Service (CBRS) site and a hub for community education and empowerment, furthering the project's impact to serve 250 households. This ongoing partnership began in 2021 to address the digital divide within Westchester County amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. All the community partners have the common goal of empowering Yonkers residents to be more successful in the digital world. All community partners are committed to continuing to advance the missions and principles of digital equity that drive Steve's work. This partnership continues to allow Westhab to meet its goal of changing lives. Combatting homelessness doesn't stop at creating affordable housing opportunities. To keep seniors, veterans, young adults, and people with disabilities off the streets, they must access specific resources that are increasingly found exclusively online.

Disruptive Innovation

Steve has contributed to elevating low-income communities by developing creative solutions to help close the technological divide. During Steve's time working at Excellence Community schools, there was concern about bringing schools online. Still, Steve was able to find solutions that helped thousands of students and teachers across New York and Connecticut learn remotely during the global COVID-19 pandemic. At Westhab, Steve brought the Y-Zone technology and training right into the heart of the community. Many participants were interested, but intimidated, by new technology and might not have been comfortable seeking resources outside their neighborhood. With its community-based approach, Y-Zone gave residents a safe, easy, and rewarding way to get comfortable with life-changing technology. Westhab was lucky to have Steve to improve Westhab's ongoing response to the virtual shifts caused by COVID-19. He has made reliable Wi-Fi connections and technology for tenants and staff a Westhab standard. Steve and his team are on the ground at program sites, and our staff know they can rely on them for answers to even the smallest of tech questions. Steve's problem-solving skills are also helping determine Westhab's future. Steve has been charged with developing the strategic plan for Westhab's growth, leading ideation across teams and implementing and supporting scalable solutions that allow Westhab to serve more people. This includes designing infrastructure that provides residents with reliable access to broadband and rapid deployment of technology to establish and grow shelter programs.