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Tiburon teen Natty Gove, seen at his home May 4, is trying to raise funds to purchase laptops for 30 students in the Sausalito-Marin City School District.
LEO LEUNG / FOR THE ARK

Tiburon teen's nonprofit aims to raise money for student tech

By EMILY LAVIN

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A Tiburon teen has launched a fundraising effort to ensure all students in the Sausalito-Marin City School District have access to a home computer.

Natty Gove launched the nonprofit Tech4Youth Foundation in February and is aiming to raise \$11,000 to purchase laptops for 30 students in need.

The Redwood High School sophomore notes about 90% of his homework requires a computer, making him realize how much more difficult it would be to succeed in school if he didn't have his own at home.

"I just realized basically that in an ever more digitized world, access to this technology is not so much of a luxury as it was pre-COVID, it's more of a necessity," says Natty, 15, adding that students who don't have computers at home can easily fall behind through no fault of their own.

Natty first became acquainted with the Sausalito-Marin City district while doing a volunteer project with the Marin branch of Boys Team Charity. The school district serves about 280 students in grades TK-8 at its Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Academy in Sausalito. Natty's volunteer service in January involved helping one of the garden coordinators at the campus; as part of the garden program, students plant and harvest fruit and vegetables while learning about nutrition and sustainability.

He says through the work, he learned about the district, which has faced some budget challenges in the past several years, and the diverse student population it serves. Some 30% of the district's students are white, while about 26% are Black and 25.5% are Hispanic, according to the California School Dashboard. Some 53% of students in the district are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Natty says it was clear the district "cares so much about its students but doesn't really have all the resources to keep up with what their goals are."

"I was just thinking, 'How can I help the community, how can I help the school,' Natty says. "I just came upon the idea of providing computers for digital access."

He says he first contacted the school's superintendent, LaResha Huffman; Huffman did not respond to a request for comment on Natty's efforts by The Ark's press deadline. Through that conversation, he says, he connected with the district's IT department and learned that a school survey done at the start of the year showed that 30 students within the district didn't have access to a personal laptop at home.

"That's what kind of started the whole fundraising effort," he says.

He says he decided to create a formal nonprofit organization — he received the official certification in February — because that would enable donations to be tax-deductible, adding he thought that would boost his chances of raising the money needed.

"That's a lot more enticing to people because they're helping out a good cause while also saving money on taxes," he says.

He's been reaching out to different publications and some popular local Instagram accounts to get the word out about his efforts. In addition, he says, he's been applying for grants and has even done some door knocking in Tiburon to try to solicit donations.

"It's definitely been a learning experience, going through it and getting better at pitching people on the mission and why I think it's a good cause for the community," he says of fundraising.

Natty says he's raised about \$500 so far but hopes to ramp up his efforts between now and the end of the school year. He noted it's especially critical to ensure students have the support they need as many districts are grappling with the loss of one-time COVID funding they received

during the pandemic and with other potential funding shortfalls as the result of the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle the federal Department of Education.

He notes that if the local fundraiser is successful, he would like to expand his efforts.

"I want to be able to help as many people as I can, scale this up to schools around California or around the country and just be able to be there and provide assistance to whatever school-related organization or school that needs digital access," he says.

He says it's important that he and others in advantageous positions recognize their privilege.

"Living in Tiburon, having consistent access to technology and educational resources, I'm so lucky to have that," he says. "I'm so blessed to have that, and I feel like a lot of people, especially in Marin, take stuff like that for granted because they're surrounded by it and they focus on that percentage of the community they're living in, that little bubble."

He encouraged people to step outside of that bubble and support student success in the larger Marin community.

"I know Tiburon is full of successful people that have access to large amounts of money," he says. "I want them to know that this is a great mission they'd be putting their money toward, a great way to help the community and help out with youth education."

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