

CASE STUDY: Alaska Statewide Program



Alaska State Library

The genesis of Alaska's statewide Live Homework Help program was quite simple. A group of librarians representing a range of public libraries in the state approached the Alaska Library Network (ALN) statewide databases committee with a request for help starting an after school program. The challenge they faced was responding to students' need for homework assistance. In some cases, reference librarians didn't have the time to help. In other cases, they didn't have the expertise to assist students with higher level math and science assignments.

According to Steve Rollins, Dean of Library Services, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage and chair of the Alaska Library Network Statewide Databases Coordinating Committee, the Juneau Public Library was already using Tutor.com and was highly satisfied with the service. This led the databases committee to secure a statewide license for Live Homework Help, funded by an annual LSTA grant from the state library.

Rollins says the growth of the state program since its inception in 2004 has been phenomenal, with a 40% increase in usage in FY10-11 and an increase of more than 47% in FY11-12. Additional funding sources, including the University of Alaska Anchorage and federal stimulus grant money, now supplement the state LSTA funds.

Rollins attributes this growth in part to a year-long marketing campaign undertaken with a federal grant to promote programs that help students and adults succeed. Brochures and stickers were sent to libraries and schools to distribute and ads were placed on Facebook and on Anchorage buses. "We know the ads worked because Tutor.com does such a great job collecting student comments," says Rollins. He cited this quote received from a student:

"I saw the advertisement on the city bus #3. And although the school offers free tutoring it's not easy to be there when one is available and even if you can be there you don't get this kind of one on one attention which is what most people need. Most of the time I only need a simple question answered. Thank you for providing the service."

The post-session surveys set Tutor.com apart, says Rollins. "The surveys are incredible in demonstrating where the value is. We consistently see satisfaction rates in the 97-98% range and we get around 100 verbatim comments a

Program Details

Statewide Program:	Live Homework Help
Partner Since:	2004
Population:	722,718
# of Sites:	Program available statewide
Tutor.com Service:	Learning Suite
Contact:	Steve Rollins, Dean of Library Services, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage and chair of the Alaska Library Network Statewide Databases Coordinating Committee

Online Tutoring a Success for Alaska Students*

98%

are glad Alaska offers this service

98%

would recommend this service to a friend

96%

say Tutor.com helps them complete their homework assignments

95%

say Tutor.com helps them improve their grades

96%

say Tutor.com helps them be more confident about their school work



What Alaska State Library Patrons Are Saying About Tutor.com*

"I am so glad I found this site. It is very helpful for me in Algebra. I have been studying for finals and the things I just could not understand in my class I now understand because of this website. Thank you tutor.com!"

- 9th grade Alaska student

"Barbara S. was very helpful and said things in plain english so that I could understand the math problem better and what it was asking me to do."

- College Alaska student

"I liked how my tutor was able to show me an example to help me gain an understanding. I learned a lot and was able to understand what he was teaching me."

- 11th grade Alaska student

"I am soooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo happy that the Alaska Library offers this! It has helped me improve my grades and helps me with my homework all the time! It's very important to me to do well in school and this site helps me do that! :)"

-8th grade Alaska student

"I am a college student who has been having a hard time getting through required math courses and I am very excited and pleased with the Alaskan governmental bodies that this service exists!"

- College Alaska student

month from students telling us how valuable Live Homework Help is to them. This is the type of assessment we need when we apply for funding for the service. No other vendor delivers this level of assessment detail like Tutor.com does."

Rollins also attributes Alaska's success with Live Homework Help to the work they did to get teachers and librarians on board with the program. Ten training sessions were held around the state as well as in Juneau at the Alaska Library Association conference. These training sessions were paid for as part of ALN's mini-grant program to fund good PR ideas from librarians.

Although the marketing campaign was funded to run for just a year, Rollins doesn't anticipate a decline in usage following the campaign's conclusion. The statistics show that the number of repeat users is very high - each September the usage is higher than the September before and almost every month in FY11 saw higher usage than the corresponding month the previous year. He attributes part of the growth to usage by college students who need help with writing as well as math, including algebra and calculus. Rollins estimates about 15% of the usage now comes from students on college campuses. Universities are interested in developmental programs to help new students who are unprepared for college-level work, he says, and it's gratifying to see the program is working when they receive comments such as this:

"I am a student at the University and I use this service to assist with my essay. It assists with my writing skills and is beneficial. The tutors are always polite and knowledgeable."

Rollins sums up the benefits of the Alaska statewide Live Homework Help program this way:

- Equalizes service across the state. There's a resource divide in Alaska that a statewide program addresses.
- Economy of scale. A statewide program is more cost-effective than libraries buying their own licenses. If the program is funded through a state grant, individual libraries can use their local funds for other programs.
- Focused outreach for the service. There is one consistent message and the public goes to one place to get access.
- High visibility. A statewide program creates greater visibility for libraries than a program offered at a limited number of libraries.

Rollins gives Tutor.com high marks for being responsive and innovative, illustrated by how they helped Alaska solve a user authentication challenge with a creative solution that eliminates a lot of work for the state library and doesn't require patrons to use passwords. "Tutor.com has allowed Alaska to offer a very high quality service as demonstrated by the assessment surveys. This has been a phenomenally successful program for us."