

9 December 2021
Lisa Jane de Gara

Friends from Miles Apart

Supporting Virtual, Hybrid and In-Person Service
Delivery Among and Between Rural Small Centres



Context

- ▶ Action for Healthy Communities - in Edmonton since 1995
- ▶ Small Centres - since 2019
- ▶ Distributed model:
 - ▶ 5 identified communities with very small populations (7,000 - 20,000)
 - ▶ 20+ outlying communities with even smaller populations
 - ▶ Smallest: Glendon, AB, population 493
 - ▶ Furthest: Lac La Biche, AB, approximately 150km from Cold Lake





Glendon is home to the
“world’s largest pyrogy”



In July I visited and took a bite!

Time and Distance

- ▶ Edmonton to Leduc: ~25 minutes
- ▶ Edmonton to Beaumont: ~40 minutes
- ▶ Edmonton to Camrose: ~1 hour
- ▶ Edmonton to Bonnyville: ~2.5 hours
- ▶ Edmonton to Cold Lake: ~3 hours

Winter conditions can potentially double these travel times

Most highways not twinned

Occasionally conditions will close the roads!

School Divisions Served

Camrose Region:

- ▶ Elk Island Catholic
- ▶ Battle River

Leduc/Beaumont Region

- ▶ Black Gold
- ▶ STAR Catholic

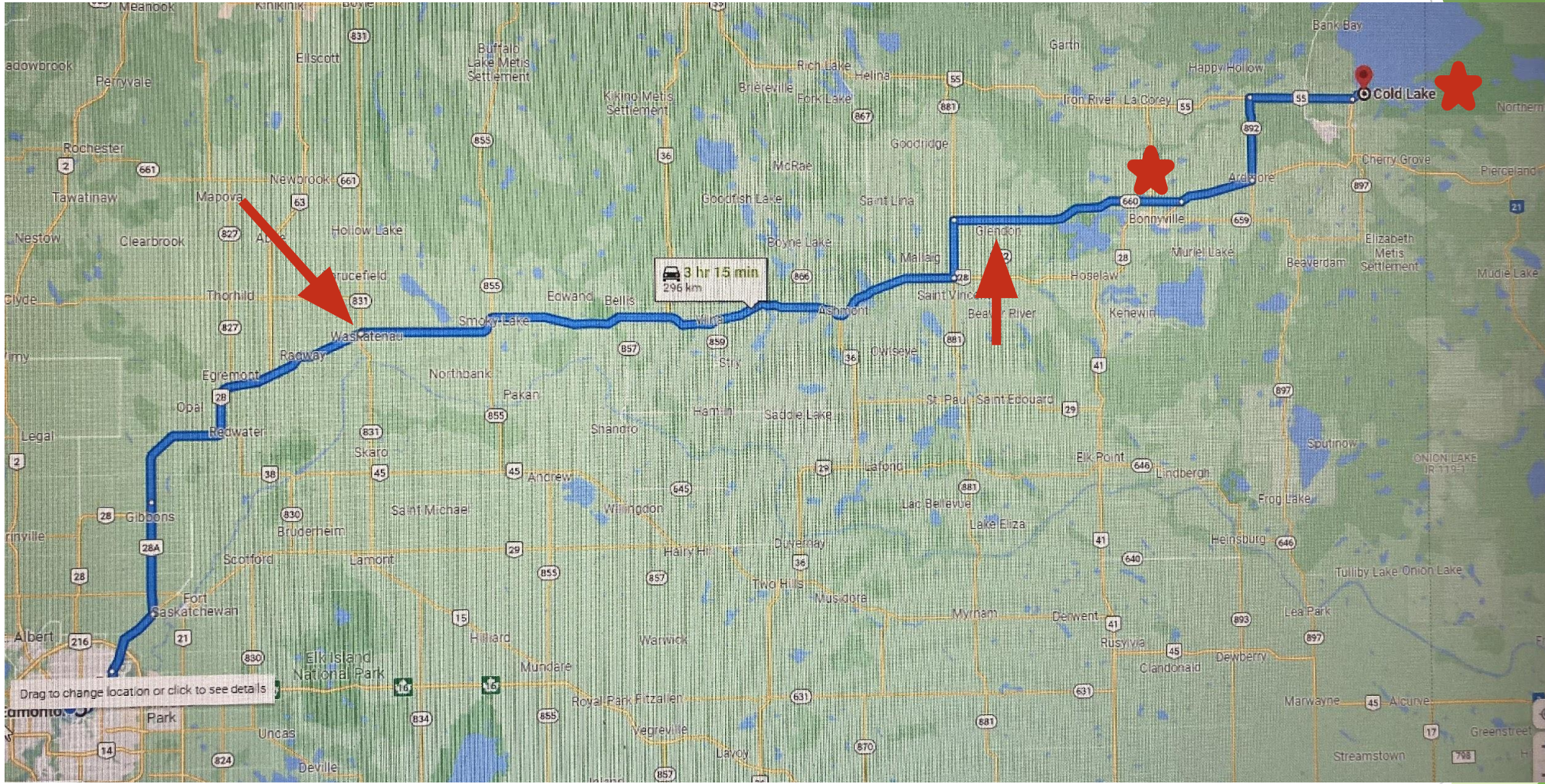
Lakeland Region (Bonnyville and Cold Lake)

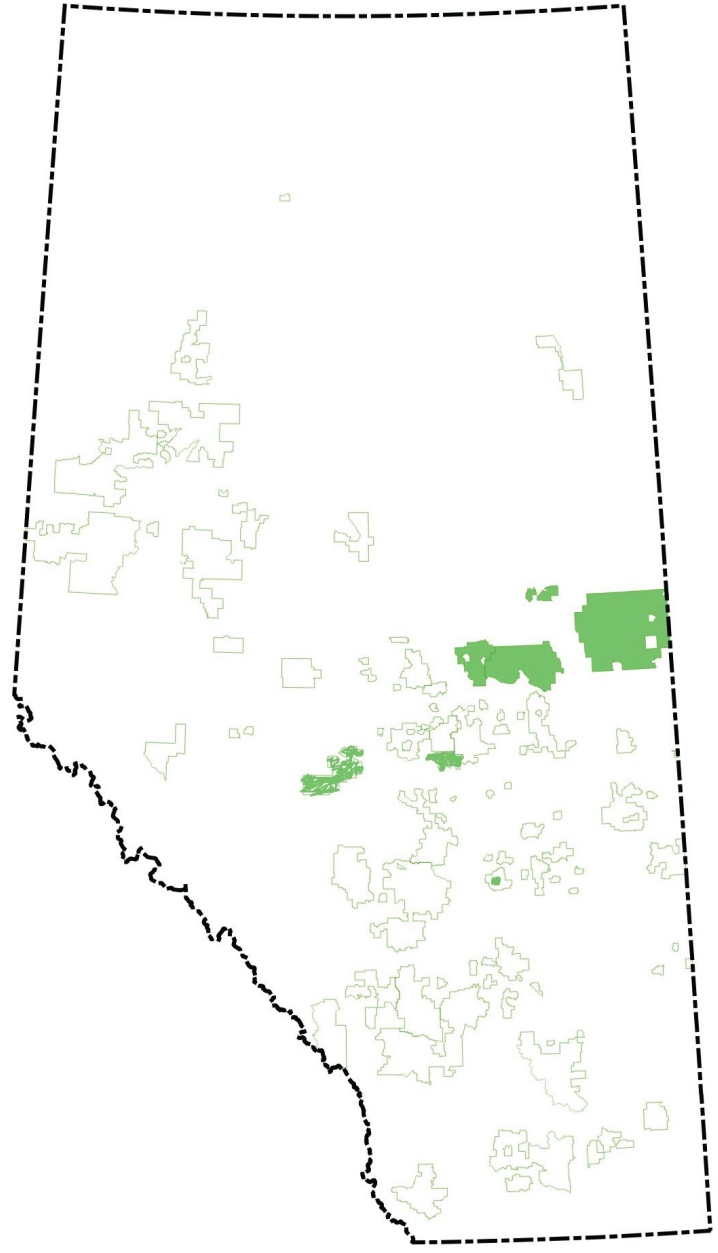
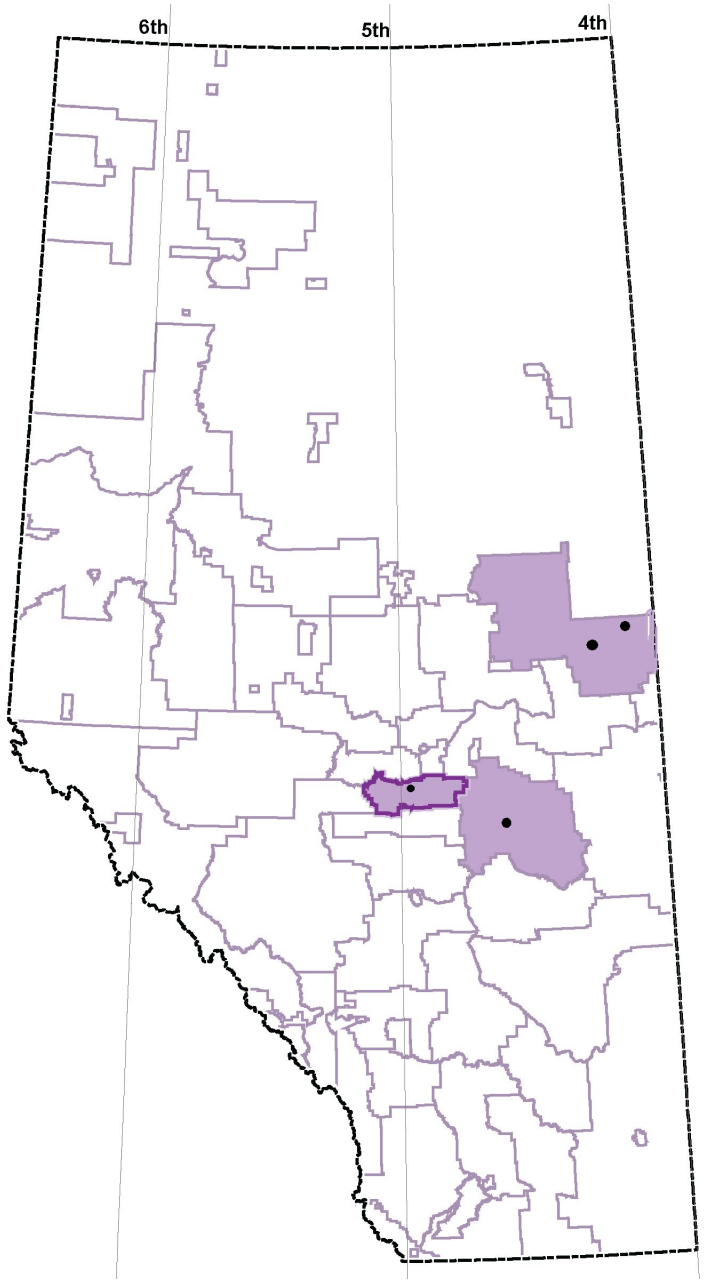
- ▶ Northern Lights
- ▶ Lakeland Catholic



**...with a total of 4 full-time
and 2 part-time staff!**

Lac La Biche





Small Centres and School Divisions: Geography and Distance

	EICS	BRSD	BG	STAR	LC	NLSD
Number of Schools Served to Date	2	4	3	4	5	3
Furthest Distance Out of Small Centre Community	0km	86km Sedgwick	37km Thorsby	105km Drayton Valley	150km Lac La Biche	40km Glendon

Newcomer Context in the “Super-Small Centres”

- ▶ Approximately 2/3 of newcomers are from the Philippines
 - ▶ Often supporting family reunification
 - ▶ Parents work in Canada, children live with aunts or grandparents
 - ▶ Difficult emotions: joy but also guilt, trauma of resettlement, shift in family dynamics
- ▶ Remaining 1/3 from the rest of the world
 - ▶ Latin America
 - ▶ Modest cohort of people from Ethiopia and Eritrea
 - ▶ Elsewhere in Asia: Vietnam, South Korea
- ▶ Heavily homogenous towns, even from a multi-generational immigration perspective

Institutional Context

- ▶ Limited context for immigration in the towns □ Very little social, political, institutional buy-in
 - ▶ May have had substantial immigration in the turn of the 20th century (mostly German, British, Ukrainian)
 - ▶ May have had some incidental immigration in the late 20th century
 - ▶ Agricultural regions often have TFWs who are kept very separate from the community
- ▶ Immigration patterns have changed dramatically beginning in about 2015.
- ▶ Not uncommon to experience substantial xenophobia and racism
 - ▶ Challenges in healthcare, food bank, housing, social services, etc.
 - ▶ Some intentional, some unconscious

Consequences for Newcomers

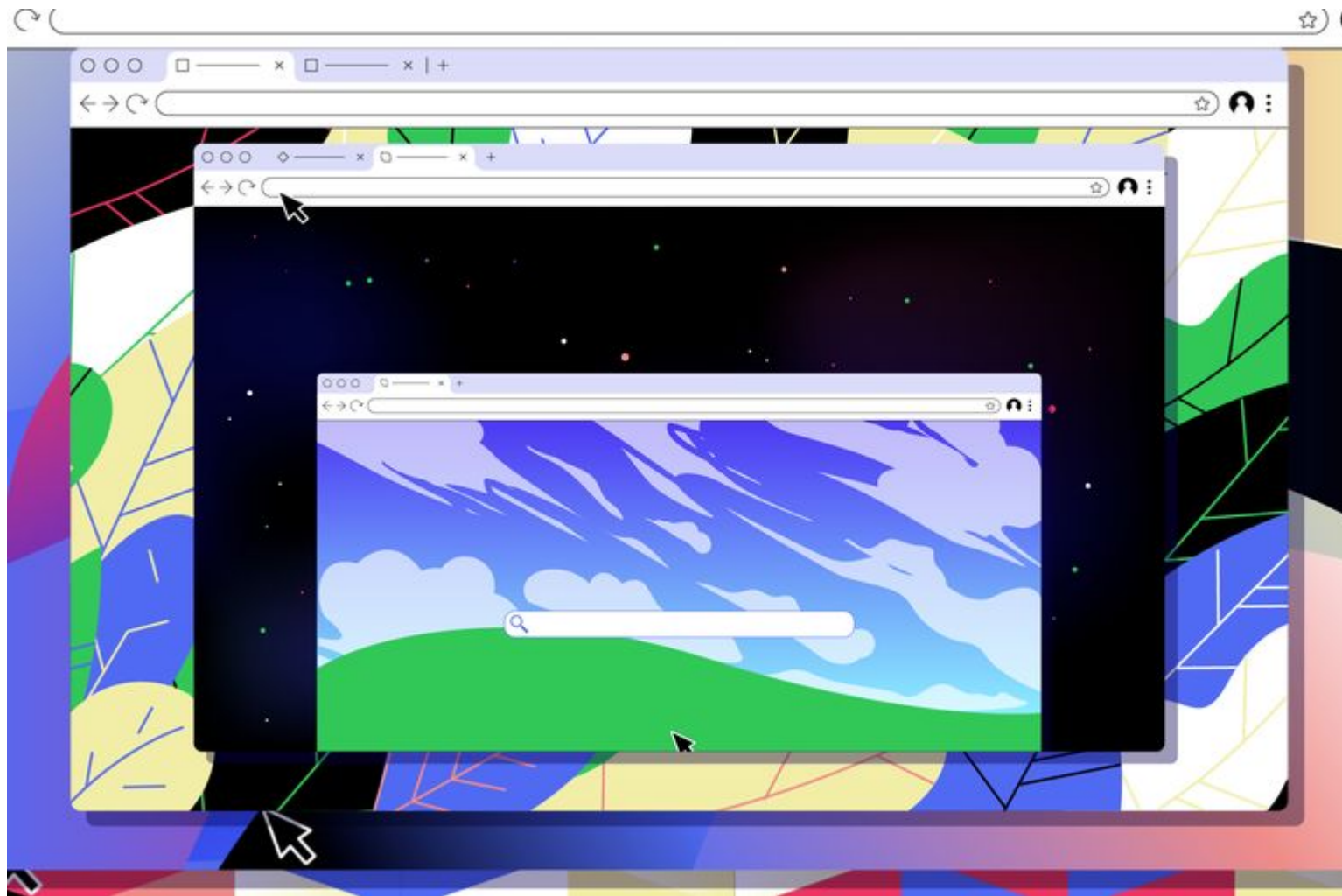
- ▶ Physical isolation
- ▶ Feeling of isolation (social, cultural)
- ▶ Difficulty in language acquisition
- ▶ Difficulty in seeking meaningful employment
- ▶ Regret and feeling that coming to Canada was a bad decision
- ▶ Loneliness

The Virtual Context

COVID and the Virtual Community



The Power of Digital



Timing

- ▶ Began our entry into SC in fall 2019
 - ▶ Only in Camrose, with staff in community and working in schools
 - ▶ Virtual? No, just telephone
- ▶ COVID arrives...
 - ▶ Isolation, fear, sickness
 - ▶ But: a rise of accelerated digital adoption

Acceleration

- ▶ Through mid-2020, challenges of technology:
 - ▶ Children needing computer access
 - ▶ Internet support?
 - ▶ Digital Literacy?
- ▶ School divisions are now offering computers to students without
- ▶ Newcomer families may have computers for the first time in their homes
- ▶ Internet supports are being offered to low-income families

Digital Literacy

- ▶ Big misconception about our relationship to the internet
 - ▶ Younger \neq more capable with technology
 - ▶ Being able to use user-focused platforms (Facebook, YouTube) \neq being technologically capable and digitally literate
- ▶ Conception among organizations and schools that the digital context no longer needs to be taught, leading to gaps in capacity.

Digital Adoption and Expectation Shifting

- ▶ Internet goes from being a luxury to being a necessity
- ▶ Now:
 - ▶ Internet more widely available in small communities, especially post fall 2020
 - ▶ Most families have either been given a device from school, a settlement agency, or have budgeted to acquire one since it is a priority
 - ▶ Understanding that social connection requires internet, especially during Lockdown 1.0
 - ▶ Video conferencing technology is simpler, more effective, and less cumbersome
 - ▶ ...remember Skype? Yikes!

...and Digital Lag

- ▶ Newcomer families receiving devices through schools (good!) but given very little/no education about how to use them
- ▶ Children absent from “Zoom School” because of a lack of intervention by schools to support newcomer families
- ▶ Sense of frustration within settlement:
 - ▶ How do we connect with these families?
 - ▶ Where are we going wrong/being misunderstood?
 - ▶ Do they want to participate but don't know how?

Digital Literacy as Programming

- ▶ Summer 2021, offered **Digital Literacy**
 - ▶ Based on a program we learned about from Boys and Girls Club
 - ▶ Intended for newcomer adults (who had not been participating in virtual school) but presented as a family event, so children could participate too
- ▶ Six Weeks Long
- ▶ All participants are loaned a Chromebook - and during the programming, they will learn how to use it.
- ▶ If they complete all six weeks, they get to keep the Chromebook.
- ▶ Importantly- not regionally bound.
 - ▶ Bonnyville, Camrose, Leduc clients can all join simultaneously
 - ▶ It's the internet! Why not!

Digital Literacy as Programming

- ▶ Important advantages
 - ▶ Ensures families have a device, especially over summer when they might need to return the school's Chromebook
 - ▶ Allows staff to flag and identify communications/technology challenges in the class format- no judgement and can spend time working to correct it
 - ▶ Introduced virtual programming in a low-stress setting, allowing participants to return the format later for more “serious” material (rights, citizenship, finances, health, etc.)

Benefits of Multi-Centre Programming

- ▶ Efficiency of resources
- ▶ Clients can connect- this person may not be in your town, but you are **not** alone. Maybe only one client in Sedgwick but they can chat to Wastenau
- ▶ Clients can participate if they have unpredictable work schedules or are far from settlement offices:
 - ▶ 45 minutes drive for kids' club? No
 - ▶ Log in from the living room? yes
- ▶ Resource-sharing (by staff but also by clients)
- ▶ Building a virtual community

Sample Slides

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the slide, creating a modern, layered effect. The text 'Sample Slides' is positioned on the left side of the slide in a clean, sans-serif font.

We will...

▶ Learn about how to:

- ▶ Use the Chromebook
- ▶ Use basic programs (writing, presenting, calculating)
- ▶ Stay safe on the internet
- ▶ Find useful information

▶ Learn about what we can do with computers:

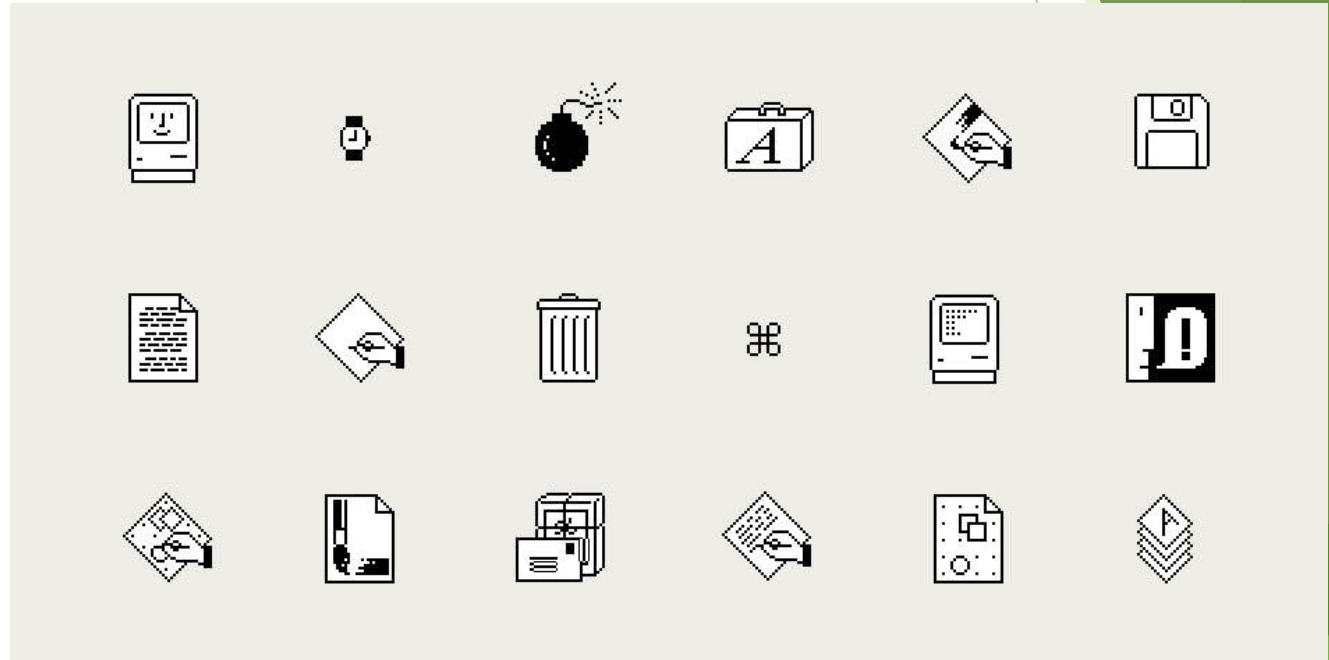
- ▶ Apply for jobs
- ▶ Shop
- ▶ Help with school/kids
- ▶ Share our ideas

What do we want to learn about together?

- ▶ Everyone say one thing that they would like to learn in digital literacy:
 - ▶ Example: “I would like to learn how to send an application on a job website.”
 - ▶ Example: “I would like to feel more confident when I use the computer.”
- ▶ Now it is your turn!

These are the first icons.

What do you think these different icons mean? Do you recognize any of these icons?



Hybrid Context

Entering a Post-COVID World?



Don't Lose Ground

- ▶ As we begin to offer programming in person again, do not lose sight of the advantages of digital
- ▶ May have 10 clients in one town, 1 in another - can confer the offering to all the interested participants
- ▶ Using language capacity in different contexts

Don't Lose Ground pt. 2

- ▶ Can an in-person be simulcast? What does that look like?
- ▶ Can an in-person offering be offered online at a later date?
- ▶ How can we adapt resources so digital is never second rate?

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Think with your 2021 hat:

We can do the impossible!

