

CCSE Online Hackathon for Social Good 2022

Kennesaw State students use technology to connect young adults with mentors - March 31, 2022

Students at Kennesaw State University recently used their computing skills to help match young adults without families to volunteers who want to mentor them. The effort was part of the 2022 Hackathon for Social Good.

The [College of Computing and Software Engineering](#) (CCSE) hosts two Hackathons a year in which businesses create a real-world, technology challenge for students to solve. The focus of the spring event is to use technology for social service and is open to students outside of CCSE.

“The Hackathon for Social Good allows students to hone their skills and use their knowledge to make a difference outside the classroom for people in need,” Dawn Tatum, director of CCSE’s partnerships and engagements, said.

In the recent Hackathon, HPCC Systems from LexisNexis Risk Solutions, an open-source technology platform for big data insights, sponsored the event and partnered with the nonprofit Connections Homes to create an engaging challenge for students. Data collected by Connections Homes shows that each year there are around 85,000 young adults around the country without a mentoring family or designated guardian. Many of these young men and women are homeless or in dangerous situations because they have nowhere to turn.



Before the weeklong event began, students only knew its theme: “Using Technology to Create Families.” When they arrived for check-in, students were told that Connections Homes uses a manual process to match young adults, ages 18-24, who have aged out of foster care, with a mentoring family. The procedure is time-consuming and prone to errors. Students were asked to computerize and improve the system using factors like proximity, common interests, and religion to match the young adults to mentoring families.

“Having this kind of matching technology will make sure we’re giving our clients the best chance to be matched with the best family,” said Davida Allen, relationship manager with Connections Homes. “Human connection is so important to thrive in life. We want to connect these young adults with mentoring families who will be there to celebrate birthdays, holidays and other important life moments.”

Spencer Starks, sophomore [computer science](#) student, said his first Hackathon event was a challenge, but one that has taught him new skills and allowed him to collaborate with his teammates.

“The Hackathon for Social Good has allowed me to get out of my comfort zone as I work with new people on a unique challenge,” Starks said. “I hope this will be a launchpad for me to become more engaged in the technology community and to network with more students and professionals.”

In addition to the Hackathon for Social Good challenge, students had the opportunity to network throughout the week with representatives from Assurant, State Farm and Genuine Parts Company.

“Companies who are hiring know the cream-of-the-crop students are the ones who participate in events like these,” Tatum said. “Hackathon serves as an incredible networking opportunity for our students in CCSE and beyond.”

Half of the proceeds raised by the Hackathon for Social Good will be donated to KSU’s [Campus Awareness, Resource and Empowerment \(CARE\) Services](#), which provides students with access to food, temporary housing and other supportive services.

After a week of working on solutions to this challenge, students presented their work to a group of judges. The following teams were recognized for their work:

1st – Team BJW, Brian Bessemer, Darren Jones and Eric Weese

2nd – The CS Knights, Keyshawn Billups and Trevor Fouce

3rd – Team HPCC 8, Malik Naik Mohammed, Zameer Shaik and Gayathri Vellanki

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