



FINAL

REPORT

Digital Literacy for Seniors Project

PREPARED BY

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Project Details

Name of Organization: Loch Lomond Villa Foundation

Project Title: Digital Literacy for Seniors

Project Number: 016606824

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Report Preparation

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Grant Details

Grant Amount: \$24,000.00 from New Horizons for Seniors; \$9,880.00 from LTC+ Seed Fund

Budgeted Cost of Project: \$33,880.00

Actual Cost of Project: \$28,381.61

Project Dates

Projected Start Date: 31-Mar-2020

Actual Start Date: April 3, 2020

Projected End Date: 31-Mar-2021

Actual End Date: March 31st, 2020



Project Results

The desired results of this project were achieved. During Phase I of the project, a five-week digital literacy pilot program, *Staying Connected While Apart*, was developed and delivered to a cohort of eight participants. Collectively, the senior participants received almost 40 hours of one-on-one assistance with improving their digital skills. During Phase II of the project, the pilot program was transitioned to and delivered as a full-scale program offered to apartment building residents, as well as the broader community. In total, 70 sessions between volunteers and participants occurred as part of the Digital Literacy Program. The desired outcomes of this program included promoting connection to others and decreasing social isolation by enhancing digital literacy among seniors in the community.

Many of the activities identified in the project proposal as outputs to help achieve the desired results were completed. A survey was created and distributed to 230 residents of the Loch Lomond Villa independent living apartment buildings to identify needs and narrow in the focus of the project. The survey included ten questions around self-identified digital skill levels and digital learning interests, including an additional comments section. There were 72 respondents to the survey—65 of whom were interested in participating in a digital literacy program to improve their skills. The quantitative data from these surveys was collected and analyzed using Survey Monkey and a content analysis was performed on the qualitative survey data. Findings from both methods were used to determine which specific digital tools and technologies were focused on in the program and training guide, and participants for the program were randomly selected from the group of survey respondents who indicated their interest in participating in the program.

Connections and partnerships were made with various organizations within the greater community, in the province, throughout the country, and around the world. Virtual meetings were held with the following organizations to; garner knowledge

on existing digital literacy programs and best practices; discuss potential opportunities for collaboration; and share existing resources:

- Saint John Free Public Library (Digital Literacy Program)
- Digital Nova Scotia (Tech Shy to Tech Savvy)
- Saint John Kings Adult Learning (Digital Literacy Program)
- Connected Canadians
- Media Smarts (Digital Smarts)
- PETL (Digital Literacy Training Program)
- Carleton Community Centre
- Central Valley Adult Learning Association (Digital Skills Development)
- Canadian Institute for Cybersecurity

Other organizations were communicated with via email to share resources including:

- ABC Life Literacy (Youth Teaching Adults)
- NSW Government (Tech Savvy Seniors)
- YWCA Moncton (Digital Smarts Program)

Many of these connections with organizations grew stronger during Phase II of the project including with Connected Canadians and the Carleton Community Centre, and a new partnership was formed with the Greater Saint John YMCA.

Collaboration with the Greater Saint John YMCA included sharing resources and material to assist in the development of their Digital Literacy for Older Adults Program, developing a bi-organizational agreement to share volunteers to be able to expand access to the program, and cross-promoting the programs through posters and social media. In partnership with the Carleton Community Centre, a webinar on Staying Connected Through Zoom & Virtual Gatherings was developed, delivered, and recorded. The recording was shared as part of a Intro to Digital Literacy Series. Collaboration with Connected Canadians continued during Phase II, as well, through more training and the sharing of resources to aid in virtual session delivery, such as introduction to the TeamViewer application.

For the development of the program content, a graduate of the Master of Adult Education program at UNB, with a specialization in Instructional Design, was contracted. The student, with the collaboration of the Research Assistant, created a training manual that was used during the program to help participants get more comfortable with digital tools. The training manual includes step-by-step instructions with pictures on a variety of digital activities including: Getting Started with ZOOM; Navigating Your Device; Using the Internet; Using Email; and Getting Connected with Facebook. The guide also includes a section on additional local resources available online, as well as resources specific to seniors in the community. This guide is now available for free on the Research Page of the Loch Lomond Villa website for anyone to access to help improve their digital literacy.

Volunteer mentors were recruited for the program through the existing Loch Lomond Villa volunteer database with the help of the Volunteer Coordinator during Phase I. Ten existing Loch Lomond Villa volunteers were interested—five of whom completed the training required to become a volunteer mentor. Three hours of training were provided to the volunteers by the national organization, Connected Canadians. These training sessions provided training on being a tech mentor and how best to work with senior participants, as well as training on cybersecurity. Mentor matches were made based on learning interests of participants and technological abilities of volunteers. Throughout the five weeks of the program, participants and volunteers met remotely for one hour a week through a combination of phone calls and video calls through the video conferencing platform Zoom. During Phase II of the program, five more volunteers were recruited and trained through the Connected Canadians training modules.

For evaluation purposes during Phase I, an intake and exit survey were completed by program participants to collect quantitative data on how effective the program was in improving the digital literacy of participants, among other key indicators of success including increased comfortability with technology; increased feelings of

connection; increased ability to virtually connect with friends and family; and decreased feelings of loneliness. Results from the participant feedback forms showed that these key indicators of success were achieved, with 80% of participants indicating that they felt better able to stay in contact with friends and family through technology after participating and that they felt this program helped to prevent loneliness. Furthermore, 100% of participants indicated that they felt more connected to others and felt more comfortable with technology after participating in this program.

During Phase II, a small qualitative research project was undertaken to better understand program participants' experience in the program. This included recruiting five program participants to take part in the research, receiving informed consent from all five participants, and conducting semi-structured interviews with research participants ranging from 20 minutes to 45 minutes in length. The interview questions were developed through collaboration between the Research & Quality Coordinator, the Research Assistant, and a volunteer undergraduate student. The interviews consisted of eight pre-determined questions around experience in the program, benefits received from the program, and unexpected outcomes associated with program participation, however, participants were encouraged to take the lead on guiding the discussion to what they thought was most important to discuss regarding the program. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and data analysis was performed on the transcripts using NVivo software. This analysis produced three main broad themes from the data including Program Delivery, Program Outcomes, and Volunteer Qualities (see Appendix for visual display of themes).

Within the Program Delivery category, four sub-themes emerged including the value of in-person sessions, the surprising effectiveness of virtual/remote sessions, the importance of consistency regarding volunteers, and the desire for the program to continue. When discussing the difference between remote and in-person sessions, many participants indicated that although they were doubtful at the

beginning about their ability to learn through remote tools, they were pleasantly surprised at the fact that were actually able to benefit from the sessions and connect with their volunteers virtually. This category is best characterized by the participant quote of “the words ‘fat chance’ popped up like a balloon in my head because I didn't think it was possible but actually it was”. Although it was agreed upon that virtual sessions proved effective, many noted the special and hard to articulate quality of in-person sessions that virtual ones were lacking. One participant summed it up nicely with “but there's nothing like one-on-one (in-person)”.

In the Program Outcomes category, three sub-themes were identified including increased connection with others, diminished fear of technology, and improved digital literacy. A main focus of the discussions around how the program had helped to improve the digital literacy of participants was the idea that seniors did not want to be left behind—and the knowledge and skills garnered from this program ensured that they would not be. This exact idea came up frequently and among all participants with statements such as “we really don't want to be left behind” and “as a generation, you don't want to be left behind” and “I think that it's important for seniors to feel they're part of today” and “it's a scary thing to get left behind but if somebody doesn't have computer skills that's exactly what's going to happen”. Conversation around connection with others was perhaps the most frequent thing discussed around program outcomes during the interviews. Participants identified that not only did they benefit from an increased ability to connect with their family and friends, but also developed connections with the volunteers as well. One participant noted that “I have more contact with my family who are living in other parts of Canada”. Another participant noted, when discussing the connection she had made with her volunteer, “we started telling each other a little bit about ourselves and I found out that her grandmother lives in my hometown”! Furthermore, the importance of this connection in mitigating loneliness experienced by participants was integral piece of the discussion.

The final broad theme of identifying volunteer traits consisted of three main qualities that program volunteers possessed including compassion, patience, and friendliness. One participant described his volunteer with the analogy that “he was like a little bridge to where all this information was”, while another said that their volunteer was more patient than anyone else they had ever known. Other participants focused on the friendship they had built with their volunteer, an idea that ties into both the importance of consistency and the increased connection themes identified above. This idea is characterized by the participant quote “I've enjoyed her company for sure—it's like a personal friendship now”. When describing volunteers, many similar statements were used such as “you didn't make us feel that we don't understand” and “everybody was so considerate and careful and patient with me” and “[volunteer name] is really patient and understanding and very helpful”. Overall, participants were very grateful for the volunteers and how helpful they were and impressed with their kindness, patience, and friendly-manner—which they noted, made learning easy.

In conclusion, this program was developed by tapping into existing resources, gathering knowledge from a variety of community organizations, working with subject matter experts, and providing opportunities for volunteers to share their knowledge and skills in mentorship roles. It is clear from the feedback of participants that having a consistent volunteer is an importance piece in facilitating both comfortability and connection, and that effective virtual sessions are indeed possible. An important finding from the research was how important this program was in helping to ensure that seniors did not feel left behind, with all participants indicating the need for a program like this to remain in place and expand its access. It is clear that this program has proved to be not only effective in improving digital literacy among senior participants, but an integral service for those more susceptible to social isolation and loneliness as the world becomes increasingly digital.



Appendix

Figure 1: Themes emerging from qualitative data analysis.

