DIGITAL LITERACY PROGRAM

Final
REPORT

PREPARED BY:

Cyber-Seniors™
Connecting Generations

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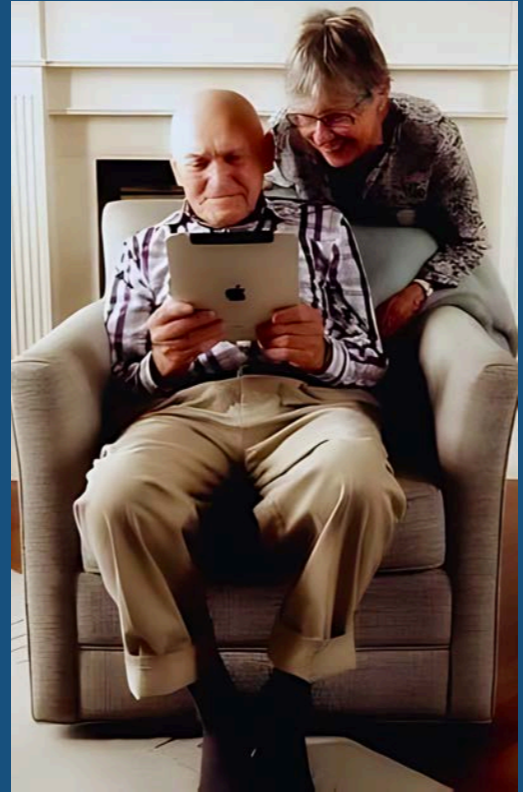
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Introduction

The digital divide can be defined as the social inequality between individuals who benefit from Internet access and those who suffer negative consequences due to a lack of access (Newhagen and Bucy, 2004). The concept of the digital divide has evolved as the knowledge base about other inequalities implicated in the divide has expanded, referring not only to differences in access (quality, quantity, autonomy of use) but also to the type or level of skills (elements related to the medium and content), motivation (attitudes and reasons for using or not using the Internet) and the ways individuals use the Internet (participating in and creating digital content) (Hargittai, 2001; Chen and Wellman, 2004; Goldfarb and Prince, 2008).

Through a valuable partnership with **Cyber-Seniors**, the California Department of Aging's Digital Literacy initiative has played a pivotal role in addressing the digital gap and diminishing social isolation among older adults across California. The program has provided comprehensive virtual training and one-on-one telephone assistance in technical and cognitive skills to older adults aged 65 and above and adults with disabilities aged 18 and older, empowering them to engage with new technologies and devices adeptly.

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About Us

Cyber-Seniors is a 501(c)3 corporation registered (and with its head office) in the State of California. This non-profit entity was founded in 2015, inspired by the award-winning documentary film Cyber-Seniors. The film chronicles the extraordinary journey of senior citizens as they discover the world of the Internet through the guidance of teenage mentors. The film has been broadcast in 40 countries, including on PBS and Netflix, and screened in over 500 communities worldwide.
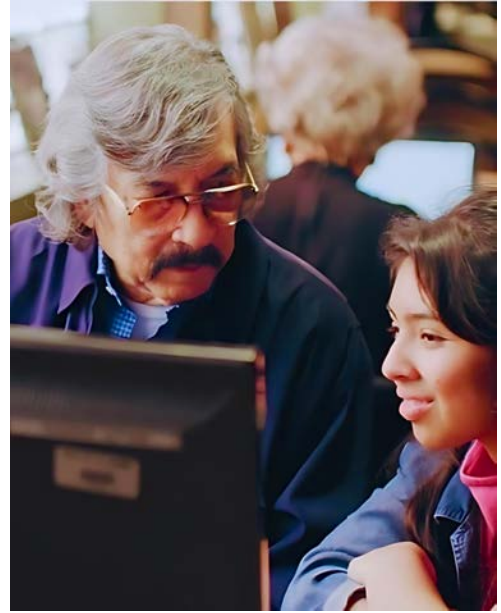
Our Mission

To bridge the digital divide and connect generations using technology. We envision a world with digital equality, where everyone has access to technology and the skills to use it.

Our Goals

1.

Deliver multi–lingual tech training and support to senior citizens so they can remain socially connected and self–sufficient while aging in place.

2.

Provide meaningful volunteer work for young people, shaping their future and preparing them for the jobs of the future.

3.

Support the growth and development of intergenerational solid relationships and communities to support the United States' aging population.

Our Impact

IN SURVEYS CONDUCTED IN 2021

Ninety-eight percent of senior participants confirmed that the provided instruction fully met their needs. Additionally, 86% emphasized the significance of personalized mentoring sessions with young volunteers as an integral training component. These findings highlight the substantial positive influence of the intergenerational collaboration approach employed by Cyber-Seniors.

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS

We have provided technical training to over 25,000 elderly individuals, an accomplishment that has not just enhanced but significantly improved their quality of life. This impact is a testament to the effectiveness of our program.

245,000
Attendees have been accommodated by Cyber-Seniors in virtual tech training sessions.

4,200
Volunteers have been trained to work as tech mentors.

4,000
Free tablets distributed to low-income seniors using technology for the first time with the involvement of Cyber-Seniors.

Thanks to the unwavering *support* From individuals, organizations, and institutions like the **California Department of Aging**, who share our dedication and make us feel connected and part of a larger cause, we have been able to carry out our mission and achieve significant milestones that we could not have reached otherwise.

Cyber-Seniors has received direct funding for its programs from prominent organizations such as the Best Buy Foundation, AARP, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Consumer Technology Association Foundation, Retirement Research Foundation, Charter Communications, AT&T, CVS Health, DC Department of Aging and Community Living, New York City Department for the Aging, and the City of LA Department of Aging. Additionally, it has established partnerships with numerous organizations to deliver programming funded by Americorps Seniors, Area Agencies on Aging, Senior Community Service Employment Grants, and various other Community Grants. Collaboration with multiple high schools, colleges, and universities has also been key to Cyber-Seniors' operations.

IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL LITERACY

In today's fast-paced world, being digitally literate entails much more than simply using technology. It encompasses effectively accessing, analyzing, creating, and communicating in an increasingly digital environment. Digital literacy covers many skills, including understanding basic hardware and software, navigating the internet, and using online platforms adequately. It is a vital skill set for individuals across various stages of life, from learners to professionals, requiring ongoing cultivation rather than being a one-time achievement.

As the digital landscape continues to evolve, maintaining digital literacy is crucial for participating in the global economy and effectively engaging with a broader community in a secure, safe, and productive manner.

Digital literacy is of great importance for older adults in today's society. The widespread use of internet-based services requires a proficient understanding of digital tools. Digital proficiency enhances cognitive abilities, introduces new interests and pastimes, and fosters personal development among elderly citizens. Furthermore, digital literacy facilitates access to pertinent community information and helps maintain meaningful connections with family and friends. This not only alleviates feelings of isolation in an increasingly digitized world but also fosters a sense of community, making the audience feel more connected and engaged.

Cyber-Seniors Digital Literacy Program Workflow

Cyber-Seniors was responsible for collaborating with over 15 entities to provide digital literacy services, promote remote interactions, and offer virtual tech instructions to qualified individuals throughout California. These include Planning and Service Area II Area Agency on Aging, Area Agency on Aging Northern California, Area 4 Agency on Aging, SJC Aging & Community Services and San Joaquin Department of Aging, Area 12 Agency on Aging, Seniors Council Area Agency on Aging of Santa Cruz & San Benito Counties, Kings/Tulare Area Agency on Aging, Ventura County Area Agency on Aging, Los Angeles County Aging & Disabilities Department, County of San Bernardino Aging & Adult Services, OC Community Services, Aging & Independence Services County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, City of Los Angeles Department of Aging, Stanislaus County Department of Aging and Veterans Services, and Merced County Area Agency on Aging.

Our team provided the CDA and AAAs with a package of digital documents in English and Spanish that included:

- A flyer explaining Cyber-Seniors's services: one-on-one telephone support and group virtual sessions on Zoom.
- A welcome to Cyber-Seniors training.
- Instructions to join virtual training on Zoom.
- iPad basic instructions.
- A list of the applications installed on the iPads and what was their function.

Upon distributing devices equipped with integrated data plans, the CDA began sending Cyber-Seniors emails containing each referral and device's names, contact information, and relevant information twice to thrice weekly. Subsequently, these participants were included in the Cyber-Seniors' outreach schedule.

Referrals Processing and Organization

Cyber-Seniors believed it would be best to create a designated folder for each agency and organize referrals by the date the CDA sent them to us. We established a general training form to gather all referrals in a single file. As a result, our scheduling and supervising team had access to each referral and the PSA they were associated with. They could input up-to-date information such as the outcome of intake calls, booked sessions, successful or failed one-on-one sessions, or any additional actions needed to assist the referrals.

Upon the beginning of outreach efforts, both AAAs and the CDA were apprised of updates as well as concerns that fell outside the scope of Cyber-Senior's responsibilities. Commonly encountered issues were:

1. Misplacement of login information required to set up the iPad for initial use.
2. After the referral attempted to reset the device to its default settings, it was locked and required unique authentication from the CDA.
3. Complaints of receiving the device without a charger and inability or unwillingness to procure a replacement.
4. Reports of faulty, broken, stolen, or misallocated devices.
5. Requests for device modifications or repairs with third-party technicians, with the expectation that the AAA or CDA would cover costs, as referrals did not have full ownership of the device in the early stages of the program.

Amid the program, Cyber-Seniors instituted an enhanced system to optimize the process of receiving referrals, following the endorsement of the CDA and with the acknowledgment of AAAs. The primary objective was to minimize the workload for all involved parties, prevent the accumulation of duplicate files from the same AAA, avoid redundant referrals, and ensure that AAAs were kept informed of the participants' progress with Cyber-Seniors.

Then, we implemented a cloud-based shared Google spreadsheet for each organization and agency to streamline the referring process. This allowed us to input details of referrals and distributed devices. Initially, supervisors identified in Cyber-Seniors' records as directly responsible for assigning devices to referrals were given editor privileges. If new members required editor access to the document, the appointed leader of each AAA would email Cyber-Seniors to request this permission. The request would include the name and email of the new person needing access.

When adding new referrals to the list, AAAs (Area Agency on Aging) were directed to report Cyber-Seniors through Google Sheets notifications. In addition, AAAs received instructions during a virtual live meeting and were provided with a comprehensive, step-by-step guide for successfully executing this task via email. The Cyber-Seniors team conducted weekly reviews of the Google Sheets to ensure that any overlooked reports from AAAs were adequately addressed. This systematic approach fostered a sense of security and control over the process.

Under the CDA guidelines, we approached the outreach phase of the program with the understanding that training was not something we had to force upon the referrals; instead, we had to ensure they had the support they needed after receiving their devices. This depended on their availability and readiness to start or engage in training.

A Cyber-Seniors staff member conducted telephone pre-training assessments to determine the learner's comfort with technology and electronic devices, skill level, and openness to receiving individual telephone or group virtual assistance.

Referrals Outreach and Training

During our referral-contacting process, we quickly realized the importance of considering the referrals' needs and current situations. Our team often heard from referrals who were in the midst of managing multiple doctor's appointments, dealing with an ongoing illness, recovering from a medical procedure, grieving, taking care of their loved ones, or securing shelter and food. We recognized the importance of humanizing our interactions and determining where the learner's focus was. This allowed us to prioritize referrals who wanted immediate assistance, those whom we should reassess later, and those who were not open to anything beyond their personal and living goals.

Progress was reported to AAAs based on the outcome of each call. They were commonly labeled as follows:
- Denied training
- Doesn't need training
- Needs a follow-up or not ready for training
- Language couldn't be accommodated by Cyber-Seniors
- Trained
- Unsuccessful contact (unresponsive after three call attempts, wrong number, or block on the number)

The Cyber-Seniors team made three attempts to contact unresponsive participants on different days. If the referrals couldn't be reached by phone, we contacted them using the email addresses in the AAA referral forms. Additionally, we conducted monthly check-ins with participants facing challenges or needing more time to start their training. We stayed in touch with participants who had requested and were open to receiving extra support. Likewise, we stayed committed to assisting the referrals we received, even if they didn't always take part in the training options we offered.

In cases where a participant has indicated a reliance on the support of family, friends, or their local community for training and learning, such as a library or senior center, and has expressed a preference for this, we provided them with information on how, when, and where to contact us in the event of a change of mind or a need for further assistance.

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While some older adults were eager to learn the basics of their newly acquired devices, others sought specific assistance to simplify their lives. This assistance included creating a budget or simply streaming free shows or movies. We offered participants unlimited personalized one-on-one telephone assistance sessions tailored to their schedules and preferences. If a session went differently than planned or was missed by them, we did what we could to follow up, understand the underlying cause, and reschedule the session at a convenient time.

After completing a couple of individual sessions or as soon as referrals felt at ease, we encouraged them to join the Zoom group tech sessions and continue their learning journey with fellow program participants. Cyber-Seniors held these virtual classes twice a week exclusively for the CDA Digital Literacy Program. Weekly email reminders for the Zoom classes were sent to the email addresses of the referrals Cyber-Seniors had on file.
The sessions had different formats and used various training methods. These included slideshows to explain concepts, live demonstrations of how to operate apps and functions, cognitive and memory games to recognize icons and buttons, and interactive Q&A sessions to test the participants' tech knowledge, making them feel involved and valued.

We made every effort to keep track of participants who contacted us by phone or joined and identified themselves in virtual meetings. We checked their names against our referral lists to ensure the accuracy of the data reported to the CDA. However, there were instances in which we couldn't locate the individual in our files, or they chose to remain anonymous in Zoom.

Our team made available an unlisted YouTube playlist associated with the Cyber-Seniors channel. This playlist houses recorded Zoom training sessions, enabling referred individuals to review them conveniently. We also curated a Google Drive folder containing how-to guides and digital resources to complement the video recordings. These resources were routinely emailed to participants.

Cyber-Seniors Digital Literacy Program Data

In the Cyber-Seniors Digital Literacy Program, we reached out to over 2,296 participants. Recognizing the language diversity among our referrals, we proactively prioritized catering to English and Spanish speakers while trying to facilitate communication for Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, and Mandarin speakers by leveraging suitable tech mentors.

2.371 Number of referrals received by Cyber-Seniors Seniors.

1.606 Number of referrals served by Cyber-Seniors Seniors.
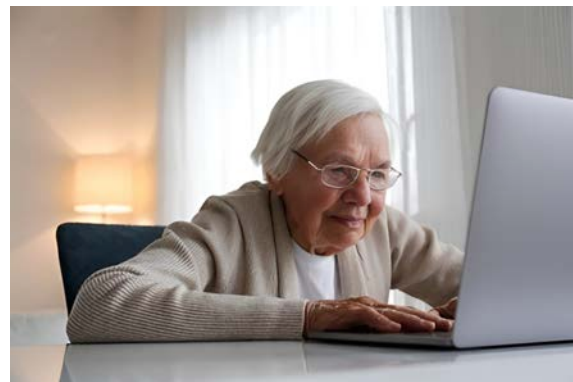
The number of referrals served by Cyber-Seniors does not include the following:

1. Referrals we could not interact with or whose contact information did not match the referral listed in our records.

2. Referrals for whom we were unable to accommodate their preferred language.

3. Referrals who chose to opt out and communicated this decision to the AAA or directly to Cyber-Seniors.

4. Referrals who declined assistance from Cyber-Seniors.

TThe success rate of interactions between referrals and Cyber-Seniors was **68%**
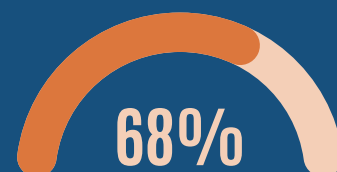
In terms of how Cyber-Seniors served referrals for the Digital Literacy Program, we offer multiple options for participants' learning pathways.

- **We hosted approximately eight dynamic Zoom webinars and workshops monthly,** consistently drawing a dedicated group of *fifteen regular participants each week.*

- Our initiative to allow referrals to book as many one-on-one classes as needed proved effective. **Two referrals who took individual training as a couple completed an impressive total of seventy-two classes, and to the date of this report, at least a dozen participants are still paired with mentors** who contact them each week to go over different tech topics. This ongoing success showcases the adaptability of our program to meet individual learning needs.

- **We produced, edited, and uploaded over seventy-two personalized video recordings online**. These serve as valuable complements to the instructions given to participants during group or individual classes, thus demonstrating our unwavering commitment to the referrals learning journey.

- **A diverse set of digital learning resources was created, including over forty-five slideshows and nineteen how-to guides/interactive game formats.** This wide range was designed to cater to the diverse learning preferences of our referrals, ensuring that they can learn and understand concepts at their own pace and in their preferred format.
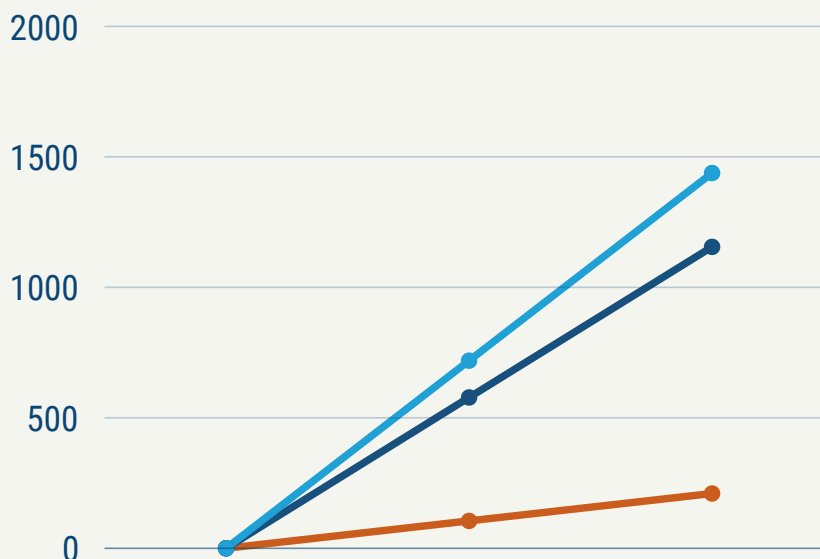
1,440
one-on-ones booked

1,155
views of video recording instructions

210
webinars presented

POPULAR
TOPICS AND CLASSES
AMONGST LEARNERS

At the start of the program, we established a four-lesson curriculum:

1. How to interact successfully in Zoom meetings as this was the platform of choice for conducting our virtual training sessions, and participants didn't need to set up an account to enter the classes.
2. Touchscreen navigation and gestures.
3. Best practices for using the Internet.
4. Getting to know pre-installed or native apps of the device operating system.

As we delved into the interests of the individuals referred to us, it became clear that a one-size-fits-all approach wouldn't be effective. Our ability to be adaptable and flexible in engaging the program participants was crucial. Assessing the older adults' comfort level with technology and electronic devices and identifying their specific concerns and needs allowed us to customize our training and find solutions that make the sessions practical and impactful.

To serve the participants of the Digital Literacy Program better, Cyber-Seniors accommodate various technology subjects and electronic devices. These ranged from setting up a universal TV remote control to accessing online practice tests required for United States citizenship. The broad scope of instructions generated genuine interest among older adults. As a result, the most requested topics among the individuals we assisted were:

- Downloading Apps 101
- Cybersecurity 101
- Email from basics to advanced features
- Device accessibility and personalization tools
- **Education, Gaming, and Entertainment Apps:** Duolingo, Solitaire, Wordle, Streaming Services.
- Guide to Search Engines and Internet Browsing
- How to use touchscreen devices and their gestures successfully
- The "Settings" App 101
- Understanding Apple IDs and how to set them up

LEARNERS FEEDBACK

"

Earlier this year, around March, I started joining the Cyber-Seniors sessions.

The classes have been very informative. It was easy to follow instructions, and I got my questions answered when I needed the most.

The sessions with the Cyber-seniors team were very informative and impacted me because, despite my 80 years of age, I learned and applied so much of my knowledge. The instructions were set in motion for me to comprehend, practice, and carry them in other aspects.

I am open to in-person classes given by Cyber-Seniors. Thus far, I think it is essential to consider different tech skills and to have various instructors to assist levels from beginners to more advanced for these training sessions to work out best.

I avidly use online banking, but learning more about the security elements of this system would be great. I am also interested in distinguishing local, reliable online shopping markets from bad ones and best practices for house renting: what to do and what not. I experienced firsthand a scamming attempt when a family member was asked for uncommon upfront payments via Zelle or Xoom, which our population tends to be easily targeted for.

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"*I started accessing Cyber-Seniors in February 2023.*
The classes have been so positive and are a platform for people to have their questions answered. Everybody keeps coming back because every time we join a session, there is something new to be learned.
The training has been very broad and has gotten us to practice the skills instructed
on the spot, repeating topics as often as possible. You see the added value when you start connecting the dots after the instructions, so we have become more intuitive to practice things despite our age.
The most significant impact the classes instructed by Cyber-Seniors have had in my life is developing new habits, especially when learning a new language. Now, I can speak some Spanish words using the Duolingo app.
I would like to learn more about resources and services in my community, such as water conservation, gardening, where to go if you want to get rid of things like magazines, and where to exchange food in the community.
I am so glad initiatives like this one from the California Department of Aging and Cyber-Seniors exist".

"I have learned so much since I've been taking the classes with Cyber-Seniors. I would like to continue to take the class because I've enjoyed it very much. The instructor has been a marvelous teacher."

"Thank you so much for your brilliant instruction, patience, and commitment to our learning the Zoom class Cyber-Seniors, support, and training for older adults.

This is a tough job for everyone, especially the teacher, because each senior student comes in at a different level of knowledge of the internet, and you handled the challenges with grace and great humor—endless thanks for the humanity you brought to be our teacher.

The class was a fantastic experience; I was hesitant at first; I thought I knew "enough," and I quickly realized that it was a great opportunity to learn more. I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge on how to use my iPad and maneuver on the internet using my iPad. I was always looking forward to the next class and seeing the friendly faces of my classmates.

You were always ready to answer questions, and I dare to say repeat and repeat for the slower learners.

I appreciated your teaching skills and was mesmerized by your art of teaching and explaining concepts, and you kept me motivated to come back for the next class for more learning.

Thank you for being a wonderful teacher; you have improved our world.

I would very much like to continue the program and participate in training sessions offered at Cyber-Seniors in the future.

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Challenges

Though initially limiting, the adversities listed below shaped our collective capacity to navigate and overcome difficulties, ultimately reinforcing our capabilities.

01 Developing effective strategies for acquiring, documenting, and prioritizing referrals for outreach initiatives proved a significant challenge for our team. Throughout the program, we faced difficulties in streamlining this process due to variations in the timing of referrals. Referrals ranged from those who had recently acquired their tablets to those who had obtained the devices a year earlier and no longer required guidance. Additionally, some individuals were advised to contact Cyber-Seniors after receiving a tablet device in California without being directly referred by an AAA. This made it complicated to verify where they belong in our list of program participants.

02 Since referrals were not required to participate in Cyber-Seniors training to maintain ownership of the device, some individuals may not have perceived significant value in interacting with our organization. It is possible that they assumed they could rely on a family member to provide instruction on iPad usage or believed they could independently acquire the necessary skills, particularly if they already possessed a foundational level of digital literacy.

03 Delineating distinct responsibilities among the CDA, AAAs, Data service provider (AT&T), and Cyber-Seniors. When interacting with participants, communicating our role in the project was often necessary, clarifying that we were not responsible for device distribution or qualifying referrals, providing detailed information about cellular data billing cycles, and explaining that we could not immediately offer usernames when devices were blocked.

04 Acquainting ourselves with the program adjustments. We continually had to cross-reference modifications, regulations, and policies, even those tangential to our responsibilities, to address inquiries from referrals. Our workflow demanded real-time adaptation to offer referrals with the most current information.

05 Assertively navigating prevailing preconceptions regarding older adults' ageism, tech, and cognitive capabilities. This entailed addressing and dispelling biases regarding what the program participants should or should not have accomplished or known about technology and the use of electronic devices in relation to their age.

06 Allocating opportunities to integrate the Cyber-Seniors train-the-trainer model effectively to provide comprehensive guidance to counties interested in establishing and managing digital literacy programs and better serve their older adult communities interested in in-person services to confidently and proficiently utilize technology and electronic devices.

Lessons Learned

Prior to commencing a digital equity initiative. It is imperative to delineate and communicate the workflow to all pertinent stakeholders. This requires a comprehensive distinction of all procedural steps, processes, and communications linked to the initiative to guarantee transparency and comprehension among the involved parties.

Engaging trainees and sparking their interest is crucial in the early stages of digital training programs. It starts with gathering information about the learners' availability and digital proficiency to optimize the initial contact. It is also relevant to consider issues such as participants' hesitance to answer calls from unfamiliar numbers or specific health conditions that may affect their learning journey, such as language, hearing, visual, or mobility impairments.

Referring agencies are essential in facilitating connections between program participants and training services. They can bridge the gap between the services and those who can benefit from the training offered.

When engaging with older adults it's important to recognize and acknowledge their current life circumstances and priorities, especially if they are managing multiple health issues and appointments. They have limited motivation to learn or feel apprehensive about acquiring new digital skills due to their age.

Regular data collection is essential for gaining insight into participant needs and making well-informed decisions to ensure the success of digital training programs. In the context of Cyber-Senior's Digital Literacy, it was crucial to document all interactions with participants, including rejections and the content covered in both individual and group sessions. This approach enabled us to assess the program's effectiveness, identify relevant topics for participants, and ensure that referrals weren't unintentionally overlooked during the initial outreach process.

Keeping regular tabs and holding progress meetings with the stakeholders in a digital literacy program goes beyond a standard duty. Staying updated on the initiative's status and developments is crucial. Regular interactions are essential to ensure all parties have access to and understand comprehensive and up-to-date information.

Recommendations

1. To promote digital equity, it is essential to ensure that the participants of future initiatives are well-informed about the roles and responsibilities of each organization involved. This includes providing clear information about the device providers, internet services, training agencies, the part they play, and contact details.

2. In the early stages of digital equity programs, it's crucial to ensure that participants are held accountable and take on the responsibility of engaging in the provided training. This is especially important for those new to using digital devices and technology. By fostering active involvement and ensuring that recipients effectively utilize the technology, we can prevent devices from being unused or distributed to individuals who do not see value in having them.

3. When providing electronic devices to individuals with limited access to internet services or those who cannot afford subscriptions, it is crucial to consider long-term solutions and alternatives for referrals. By doing so, we can ensure continuous engagement and participation, ultimately making a meaningful and lasting impact.

4. Creating and sharing a comprehensive directory of local services and facilities among the training organizations involved in digital equity initiatives can significantly benefit participants. Including resources such as libraries, senior centers, and settlement organizations can ensure that participants are connected with the support services they need for a successful digital learning experience.

Conclusion

We are deeply thankful for the opportunity to participate in the Digital Literacy Program as partners with the California Department of Aging. Our experience has been invaluable, and we eagerly anticipate future collaborations. Throughout our involvement, we have engaged with seniors in underserved areas and from different walks of life, sharing essential digital skills crucial to participating in today's society. We have seen firsthand the positive impact of bridging the digital divide for older adults.

We look forward to participating in projects that continue to empower and equip older adults with the digital literacy skills they need to thrive in an increasingly connected world. Our commitment to narrowing the digital gap in California remains ongoing, as we consistently receive inquiries from individuals seeking answers to their technological concerns and assistance with their electronic devices.

Likewise, the Cyber-Senior team is devoted to enhancing the train-the-trainer model and facilitating the seamless integration of the Cyber-Seniors program through collaboration with institutions and agencies in various communities so they can provide in-person support to older adults and ensure the successful adoption of new and existing technologies and electronic devices.