

Community groups come together to provide digital literacy education during pandemic

Douglas College's I-CARE Adult Literacy program and New Westminster literacy groups had been discussing the need for a digital literacy program and what it might look like. The various organizations had started to plan out a potential program when the pandemic hit, shutting down the entire country and pushing everything online. As a result, their program was able to receive immediate funding, fast-tracking it to get off the ground in record time.

Entitled the Digital Inclusion Project, the concept aims to get devices into the hands of those in need and train them on how to use those devices. With the need for resources to support this program, Douglas College's I-CARE Faculty Coordinator, Chris-Anne Stumpf, contacted ABC Life Literacy Canada for support.

Free digital literacy programming

Through ABC Life Literacy Canada's *Youth Teaching Adults* program, they were provided with free downloadable lesson plans on various digital topics, such as how to use Zoom, setting up a Gmail account, and using messenger tools such as WhatsApp or iMessage.

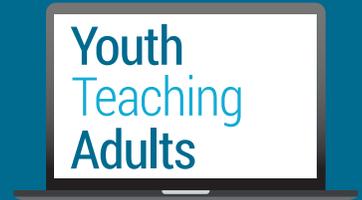
"We used the original lesson plans as well as adapted versions for lower literacy level learners to create a binder of helpful digital literacy resources," said Stumpf. "The binder also included a variety of free resources from other literacy organizations and was a great resource for practitioners as well."

Stumpf's colleague Nancy Walker, I-CARE Coordinator, also had the idea to adapt the lesson plans to fit onto postcard-sized cue cards that were laminated and put on carabiners.

"This was a great way for learners, specifically those who are homeless, to take the information with them and refer back to it if they needed to," said Walker.

Fellow Digital Inclusion Project organizer Sydney Andrews, Community Action Team Project Coordinator at The Purpose Society, says the *Youth Teaching Adults* resources have been a great hit with her clientele. Since 1983, the organization has been providing a variety of programs to children, youth and families in need.

"The pandemic really showed us how important it was for people to have access to the Internet, especially for filling out their CERB applications," says Andrews. "Through the program, we've been able to provide electronic devices to people in need and also leverage the materials from *Youth Teaching Adults* to show people how to do various tasks on the Internet."



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Community Action Team
Project Coordinator,
The Purpose Society*

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Andrews says the most popular lesson plan has been how to conduct a Google Search.

“People don’t realize that you can pretty much Google anything and get an answer for it. Once they know that, then they have the knowledge that the resource exists, and can use it in the future for essentially anything they need to know. It’s a powerful tool.”

Digital literacy training

The digital literacy training offered through Purpose Society has been one-on-one, and learners can book an appointment each week and come in with any questions they might have. They are then able to take home their laminated lesson plans on carabiners to refer back to in case they can’t remember what they learned.

Since the Digital Inclusion Project launch in March 2020, over 60 devices have been given out to those in need thanks to the generosity of companies and individuals who have donated gently used electronics.

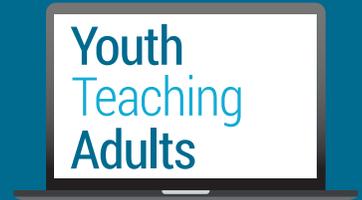
While getting devices into the hands of those in need is important, it’s only half the battle. Many adults already have their own devices but simply need help using them.

Century House, a senior’s centre run by the City of New Westminster, actively runs programs and services for seniors, but when the pandemic shut them down, they had to pivot to offer their services in a new way. As a popular destination that relied on foot traffic, they quickly worked to bring their programs online.

“Prior to the pandemic we had started to work more with seniors and getting them to embrace technology, but we were still a ways away from them being fully comfortable with it,” says Shelly Schnee, Seniors Program Coordinator at Century House. “The pandemic sped up a lot of our work and we determined that many of our seniors had a device and an internet connection, but they didn’t know what to do. The binder of *Youth Teaching Adults* lesson plans came in handy as resources for our senior learners.”

Shelley loved the fact that the resources were readily available and easy to follow, meaning they didn’t have to create their own materials from scratch. The digital literacy training that they offered was rolled out through Zoom, which was also something they had to teach seniors how to use. Using one-on-one training, they were able to effectively get seniors comfortable using Zoom and as a result were able to roll out their full suite of programs online. In the last year, they have reached 575 seniors with their online programming.

While Shelley says it’s been relatively easy to reach seniors who were already equipped with a device and the Internet, the real challenge will be reaching those who don’t yet have access. The hope is that through the Digital Literacy Inclusion program, more people will be able to access devices and get the tools they need to feel fully confident using technology.



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To learn more about *Youth Teaching Adults* or to sign up to host a free workshop, visit YouthTeachingAdults.ca

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