eWIRED: AN ELDER EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

Alliance for Aging, Inc.
Answers on Aging.

Serving Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties in South Florida
I love my computer because my family and friends are inside.

Josefina Lopez, Computer Student
Age 93
THIS SESSION WILL ADDRESS

- The digital divide among elders

- How one area agency for aging (AAA) empowers older adults through:
  - Access to broadband
  - Computer learning
  - Value-added services

- Lessons learned and challenges overcome
WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

Workshop attendees will:

- Think about implications of the “Grey Gap” digital divide
- Learn about a low-cost project to “eWIRE” and connect elders to broadband internet service
- Explore how to leverage resources and partnerships
WHAT IS BROADBAND, ANYWAY?

- High-speed internet service delivered through DSL, fiber-optic cable, satellite, wireless or mobile, and cable

- To be included on national broadband map, it must:
  - Provide two-way data transmission to & from the internet
  - Have advertised speeds of at least 768 kbps downstream & 200 kbps upstream to end users

Broadband: “A high-speed, always-on internet connection”
THE DIGITAL DIVIDE FOR ELDERS

- Broadband adoption increased to 68% in U.S. by 2011, but ...

- Explosive growth of older people, the great recession and inability of BTOP to cover 100% of U.S. with broadband services ...

- ...has left 30 million older people with no computers or internet service
  - Mostly low-income, minority
  - Limited by geography, finances, housing, literacy, fear and anxiety about computers

The Digital Divide among elders is called the “Grey Gap”
THE GREY GAP

Grey gap is getting wider due to the expansion of the “Boomers”

In Miami-Dade County:
• ¼ of population (24.9%) are Boomers
• Over half (61.95%) are Hispanic
• 12.9% (78,517) are low-income
• 67% “feel isolated”

“Silver Tsunami”:
In U.S., 10,000 people turn 65 years old every day!
EFFECTS OF THE GREY GAP

- Government services now only online
  - Food stamps (S.N.A.P.)
  - Applications for Medicare & Social Security

- Without internet, a large subset of U.S. population is being left behind, unable to fully participate in government and public life

**eDemocracy:**
Digital inclusion for all people – including older Americans.
HOW INTERNET BENEFITS ELDERS

- Increases sense of independence & self-efficacy
- Reduces loneliness, depression
- Increases social relationships
- Reduces expenses (e.g., Skype)
- Use computers for:
  - Lifelong learning and social connectivity
  - Cognitive-function & memory-stimulation (Cognifit, games)
  - Health & support information
  - Information and resources for caregivers

Internet access can empower older adults.
WHO IS WIRED …

THE “WIRED”:

- Younger, well-to-do, educated, White & employed
- Live in suburbs or urban areas
- Use computers and cell phones; watch TV
- Are “socially content”: do not feel isolated and “believe that others are generally fair”
- Have a “positive and outward orientation towards the world”
- Report that “yes, they do, indeed,” have control over their lives
... AND WHO IS NOT WIRED

THE “UN-WIRED”:

- Persons age 65+
- Functionally illiterate; cannot read keyboard or screen
- May be Limited English Proficient (L.E.P.)
- Unfamiliar or fearful about digital devices
- May have age-related changes or disabilities
  - Physical: vision, arthritis, mobility
  - Cognitive: learning, thinking, memory & reasoning

Physical disabilities can interfere with using a computer.
THE UN-WIRED

- **Age:** Only 8% of people age 65+ subscribe to home broadband

- **Income:** Only 35% of people earning less than $20k go online

- **Education:** Only 30% of people with less than a high school education are wired

- **Minorities:** 73% of Whites, but only 8% of Blacks and 13% of Hispanics have broadband services at home
WHY ARE THEY NOT ONLINE?

Reasons elders give for *not* using the internet:

- Not relevant to their interests (44%)
- Not available to them (26%)
- Too expensive (27%)
- Too difficult to use (59%)

*Note:* Availability of internet does not necessarily mean older people will use it.
UN-WIRED IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

- Cultural mores, language and ethnic differences
- Low-literacy + low income levels
- Local economy hit hard
  - Gone are once-common “internet cafes”
  - Governments budget cuts have
    - Closed public libraries with public internet access
    - Cut programs to provide computers, training and internet access

Unique diversity, economics and demographics compound our Grey Gap, “El Abismo Gris.”
The Alliance for Aging recognized the need to close the grey gap in its service area (Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties). Board of Directors endorsed access to broadband for elders as a “Strategic Initiative.” The Alliance created a demonstration project to empower low-income, minority elders to learn how to use computers and the internet.
eWIRED: THE BROADBAND PROJECT

- July 2009: Invitation to Negotiate (I.T.N.) for a computer education & training program for older adults
  - At senior centers
  - In their homes

- $100,000 using O.A.A. Title III-B funds for “supportive services & senior center programs”

Older Americans Act (OAA)
Title III-B
eWIRED: PROJECT GOALS

1. To increase mental & physical health of elders via internet access to
   • Reliable health information
   • Government benefits & services
   • Mental stimulation

2. Reduce isolation of elders
   • Find new friends, connect with friends & family members
   • Social networking (Facebook, Twitter)
   • Email, share photos

3. Reduce out-of-pocket costs
   • Skype, online shopping

“The internet gave us more friends and better health – with less money!”
**eWIRED: PROJECT INNOVATION**

1. Use of refurbished, donated or low-cost hardware and software appropriate for
   - Literacy levels
   - Language
   - Age

2. Provide one-year of free service & tech support
   - Recruit volunteer trainers
   - Circumvent low-literacy by using color pictorials to supplement bilingual curriculum
   - Leverage resources via partnerships

Value-added approach maximizes limited resources.
eWIRED: YEAR ONE

Year 1: Contracts with three providers

1. One provided computers, internet connections and training to frail elders at home

2. Another provided at-home and group training sessions in two senior centers

3. The third provided group instruction in their own senior centers

Group computer training at a senior center.
**eWIRED: YEAR 1 RESULTS**

- 81 elders ages 63-85 trained in groups at senior center computer labs
- Multicultural integration of Asian, Hispanic and Haitian students
  - Instruction provided “in student’s language of choice”
- Graduation rate of 80%
- Participant satisfaction was extraordinarily high for “independence and control”

Participants in groups were eager to learn.
eWIRED: YEAR 1 RESULTS, CONT.

- 77 frail elders trained in their homes … *along* with their caregivers

- Provided with
  - Personal computers
  - Home broadband service
  - Tech support

- Included mental stimulation
  - Cognifit program to assess and improve “brain fitness”

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*I am grateful for having received the computer. I try to use it everyday so I can get better at it. I can communicate more often with my grandkids and am enjoying the CogniFit program. It’s fun!*

A. Leal
eWIRED: YEAR TWO

- New I.T.N. with $200,000 in O.A.A. 2010 rollover funds

- Four providers selected
  - Three for training in senior centers
  - One for training in senior centers and in elders’ homes
    - In-home training included a research component for technology education among people with Alzheimer’s and their caregivers

By Year 2, twice as many elders were learning how to use a computer to access the internet.
**eWIRED: YEAR TWO RESULTS**

- By the end of Year Two, 430 elders *formally* trained in senior centers and in their homes
  - Many more elders *informally* trained via self-paced learning with on-site tech support
  - Long waits in computer labs
- 100+ total hours of computer training delivered
- 200+ hours of volunteer support services provided

100% of older computer students liked eBay, Twitter … and Facebook!
eWIRED: AND NOW, YEAR THREE

• Recently selected two providers using $154,152 in O.A.A. funds
• For group training only (no in-home training)
• Includes Monroe county
• Will build on previous efforts and
  • Include 100 clients from waiting lists
  • Train 200 new clients
  • Provide value-added services
  • Offer more individualized online instruction with tech support
Providers will:

- Develop training plans and curricula in each student’s language of choice
- Accept & prioritize referrals from Alliance’s “Elder Helpline”
- Upgrade and maintain both the software and hardware
- Provide tech support for duration of the project
- Include value-added services
Providers will:

- Include more age- and language-relevant software and training
- Place greater emphasis on health & wellness benefits
- Leverage partnerships strategically
- Develop plans to sustain the program

“\[\text{The Broadband Project is a wonderful investment in the lives of older adults.}\]"
eWIRED: PROVIDER FEEDBACK

- Training groups were easy to organize, operate and execute
- The curricula needed changes
  - More sessions for beginners
  - Use of color pictorials in Spanish & English circumvented literacy and language barriers
- Observations
  - *Group training*: noted increase in client socialization at senior centers
  - *In-home training*: provided socialization for isolated elders and caregivers (if present)
  - *Caregivers* who learned computer skills received online support and help at home
Negotiated with local broadband provider to install broadband services
• Set up individual internet vendor accounts in homes
• Resolved credit accounts & payment issues

“Please keep the computers open for us when the funding stops.”
Some elders show high frustration levels and get upset when they cannot navigate or complete a process, either online or within the operating system.
- “Takes too long, is too complicated”
- Get tired easily; have short attention spans

“Silver Surfers” were very concerned for their privacy and safety.
- Wary of sharing information for programmatic purposes (e.g., simple log-ins, passwords)
- Difficulty dealing with spam, banners & ads, pop-ups
eWIRED: PROVIDERS SUGGEST ...

- Target community outreach to communicate the importance of computer skills and internet usage for elders
- Increase provision of on-site group-based training for older adults, using one-to-one multi-language format
- Provide on-going support for peer-to-peer learning to nurture self-paced learning at home
- Involve more community partners and family in support of this effort
eWIRED: LESSONS LEARNED

- Understand NEEDS OF L.E.P., low-income, low-literacy elders
  - “Right fit” for age, language and culture
    - Software
    - Trainers
    - Use color pictorials

- Overcome tech-anxiety; avoid techno-jargon

- What do older users want from technology?
  - Information (health, transportation, maps, access to services)
  - Gaming, shopping, email, skype
  - Social networking

Lesson #1: Know your audience.
Select computer sites carefully
  • Choose places where elders congregate for group training
  • Recruit elders who want to learn computers & internet
  • Assure adequate face-to-face support, if needed
  • Ensure locale/site has infrastructure for high-speed DSL broadband

Lesson #2: Good planning is important.
**eWIRED: LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.**

- **Keep up with technology**
  - Boomers adopt smart phones more than any other age group
  - 30% now own a smart phone

- **Careful with donated or refurbished hardware & software**
  - Issues of obsolescence
  - Maintenance & replacement
  - Ongoing tech support
  - Software upgrades
  - Age- and language-appropriate software

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*Lesson #3: Changing technology can be a slippery slope!*
Know your area’s broadband carriers
• High-speed internet vs. dial-up
• Competitive rates
• Tech support services

Understand your partners
• Select & nurture partnerships
• Clarify roles & responsibilities
• Assess willingness to
  • Coordinate & leverage resources
• Pursue funding options to help sustain the project

Lesson #4: Know capacities & capabilities of stakeholders.
eWIRED: SUMMARY – A GREAT DEAL!

- 730 elders formally trained in computer use and internet access in two South Florida counties
  - Total number may be higher due to self-learning and informal tech support
- Total three-year project costs: $454,152 (O.A.A. funds)
- Cost per elder = $622
  - Including computers, software, licenses, training and service connection fees
  - A great deal!
A computer program to empower elders should:

- Consider the needs and wants of its elder audience
- Balance innovation v.s. obsolescence
- Leverage funds & resources
- Understand the capacities & capabilities of all stakeholders
- Develop strategic partnerships
- Plan for sustainability

Any AAA or Title VI program can replicate The Broadband Project using OAA funds.
eWired: THE BROADBAND PROJECT

Questions?
**eWIRED:**
AN ELDER EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

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