

# Digital Equity means working with Community Partners

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Although the COVID-19 pandemic was the impetus for the [Community Health Centres of Northumberland](#) (CHCN) starting up their virtual programming, that was not the reason this remarkable work kept going. Recently, the Alliance for Healthier Communities sat down with Amanda McConkey, Community Health Worker, and Sara Wodnisky, Digital Equity Project Coordinator, to talk about the work their Community Health Centre (CHC) is doing to address digital equity in their community.

Like most CHCs, community health programming did not stop for CHCN during the pandemic. They understood the importance of continuing to provide care for clients and quickly implemented steps to move programming like their book club and exercise club to a virtual online space. However another challenge bubbled to the surface as they sought to engage virtually with their clients. The message started coming back to them loud and clear. People, especially among their senior population, were either unable to access virtual programming because they did not have a device, were not comfortable using a device if they had one or were hesitant to use certain software.

This promoted the centre to formalize their approach within a digital equity framework. Applying for a Trillium Foundation Resilient grant, they hired a project coordinator and purchased devices. Next they did an inventory of what they needed to provide to help clients fully participate and engage in the digital space.

With the human resource and technology considerations met, the centre now turned their attention to the initial challenge of digital hesitancy. Much of the senior population were very hesitant about their ability to learn about



Community Health Centres of Northumberland  
Amanda McConkey  
Community Health Worker



Community Health Centres of Northumberland  
Sara Wodnisky  
Digital Equity Project Coordinator

and use technology. To start to address this challenge, the centre created step-by-step user guides and provided personal assistance to

clients that needed it. These became key success factors to alleviating concerns and improve comfort levels.

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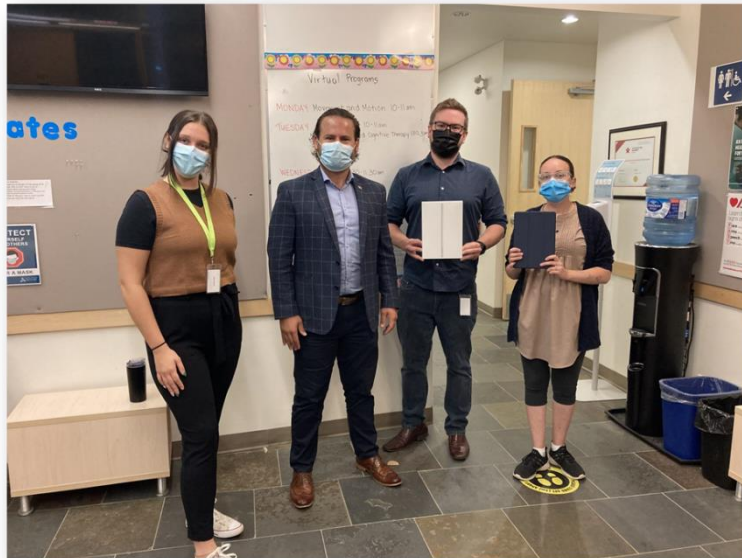
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To help build technology and infrastructure capacity, the centre reached out to their community. They found [Tech101 and owner Gary Nercessian](#) who was very happy to work in partnership with the centre to meet the digital and technology needs of the community.

As public health begins to loosen gathering restrictions and CHCN looks to the future Amanda and Sara still see a need to continue working on digital equity. They recognize that the ability to participate in the digital world is

important, even after pandemic restrictions are lifted. They also see this program as eventually not only being available to clients of the centre, but to everyone in the community who needs it. In a time when access to digital tools have become

essential to participating in society, the Community Centres of Northumberland continues to advocate for health equity and digital equity.



Community Health Centres of Northumberland  
Meeting with MPP David Piccini to speak about Digital Equity

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## Digital Equity Program Client Testimonials

*"I've really enjoying the experience with the tablet loaning program as it's allowed me to continue to stay active while at home, it's kept me connected with others from the fun and fitness program. I've had great luck with the fitness portion as I am losing weight and some toning on my body. This keeps me happy and healthy. Thank you for giving this opportunity."*

- Brenda

*"I would like to say that I have enjoyed this program. I have learned more about the zoom application that I did not know for example how to use this program more thoroughly. Also the other application that can be used on the iPad. I would recommend and have recommended this program to all my friends. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Sarah Wodnisky. She has been very helpful to me. She has the answers to my questions or will go to great lengths to get the answers I need. She has been very friendly and professional in her dealing with me. Sarah would be a great asset to this and any program she is running. I would not hesitate to take any other course she was offering. I think this will be a great course to offer to the community and it would be greatly welcome informative course to offer to others."*

- Sincerely Susanne

*"I was fortunate enough to receive tutorial lessons for about five hours from Sara Wodnisky at the Health Centre regarding my Apple I-Pad. I actually had owned my tablet for over a year and did not know how to use it properly when the pandemic happened. I also knew you do not rely on neighbours and friends to so-called teach you because they do not often know what they are doing either. I could read the names of the icons but had little idea what their function was, or even how to access them properly, it was frustrating.*

*After connecting with Sara I learned the meanings of icons that I personally would use and how to access them, and more importantly, the capacity of what they could do. Consequently, I could connect to photos and emails and edit and delete. I learned about search engines and SIRI, and because of that use my tablet DAILY!!!!*

*Sara's teaching style is patient and positive, encouraging any question, no matter how inconsequential, she lets you figure it out, and come to the realization, she does not do it for you. She provided easy to understand instructions to follow at home and to review, because naturally, seniors forget. I gained so much confidence and used my "machine", after all I am smarter than it, right??? Sara's pleasant personality made going to class a wonderful learning experience. I now can take my tablet to my elderly mother's Long Term Care Home and share snippets of news, music, photos, jokes, emails, etc. with her, rather than take my computer. I now can check the weather and access information on Safari and find current music that people are talking about. I do not feel so out of touch!!! I feel connected. I would say the whole experience benefitted me in such a positive manner and I truly would sign up to do it all over*

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*again!!!! And while five hours will not teach me all my I-pad is capable of doing, I feel I have the confidence and a good foundation of skills to keep on exploring."*

- Yours Truly, Shana

*"The Tablet Lending Program has been a great way for me to learn more about using my tablet. Sara you are an amazing teacher. You have lots of patience. I have learned how to setup a Zoom meeting. I have also learned how to use my tablet to do exercises from my home, such as Movement and Motion and Active Fit and Fun. It is a wonderful program for seniors. I can now keep in touch with my family. Thanks again for offering this program."*

- Lorraine