Increasing Digital Inclusion for Older Adults in New York’s North Country

How a unique partnership between Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) from AARP and the Northern New York Library Network has better connected 200+ older adults

January - December 2022
In early 2022, Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) from AARP and the Northern New York Library Network (NNYLN) partnered to bring a first-rate digital literacy program specifically designed for older adults to public libraries throughout the North Country. Working with North Country Library System (NCLS) and Clinton Essex Franklin Library System (CEFLS), OATS and NNYLN provided curriculum, training, support, and technology to 16 libraries in the region, who in turn served 205 older adults throughout the year.

The project was the first large-scale use of Senior Planet from AARP’s licensing program. Designed to work with community-based organizations, the program develops local trainers, who then deliver Senior Planet’s proprietary curriculum to older adults in their area. Senior Planet curriculum is focused around five impact areas: social engagement, health & wellness, financial security, creative expression, and civic engagement & advocacy. It also includes a wealth of foundational programs to help build skills and confidence in using internet connected devices.

The project began with recruiting libraries through information sessions. Representatives from 16 committed libraries then participated in a 5-week Train the Trainer series, where they learned the ins- and-outs of delivering best-in-class technology programs to older adults. With support from ARPA, NNYLN was also able to equip any libraries in need with devices on which to deliver the Senior Planet programs. Over the course of the year, older adults in the North Country participated in Senior Planet programs at their local libraries 890 times.

This project began as a pilot and by the end, had successfully established the Senior Planet licensing program in the region. 15 of the participating libraries have indicated their commitment to continuing with the program and OATS has recently expanded the program based on this model to the Southern Adirondack Library System.
## By the Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating library systems</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating libraries</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People trained to administer and/or deliver Senior Planet programs</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People trained who are still active in the program</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Planet program sessions run</td>
<td>270</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lectures/workshops = 1 session each</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-week course = 10 sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-week course = 20 sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique older adults served</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total engagements</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OATS recognizes that the needs and wants of older adults are diverse. Therefore, a key feature of the licensing program is making the curriculum available and allowing partners to choose which programs best suit the older adults they serve.

In the NNYLN partnership, the most popular programs by number of engagements were:

- Computer Essentials - 145
- iPad Essentials - 141
- Computer Basics - 125
- Chrome Essentials - 91
- Staying Safe Online - 65

And the most popular programs by engagements per session were:

- Computer Essentials - 10.4
- Ebay & PayPal - 9
- Smartphones - 8
- Chrome Essentials - 7.6
- Online Shopping - 6.5
Lectures introduce popular tech topics and themes in a clear and concise manner. Individual lectures aim to explain the general purpose of a device or concept, its usefulness, and important tips and tricks.

Senior Planet workshops are designed to give participants the chance to practice using a website or app that has already been introduced in a lecture. Workshops are led by a trainer and offer hands-on activities.

Q: Which of the following statements describe your experience today? Please select all that apply.

- I learned about a new product or resource in this program. ........................................... 29.41%
- I learned a new skill in this program. ................................................................. 23.53%
- I’m interested in trying something new because of this program. .................. 24.26%
- I’m interested in learning more about the topic covered in this program. .... 19.85%
- I did not learn anything valuable in this program. ................................................. 2.94%

Net Promoter Score

Average Trainer Satisfaction Rating

90.7

9.77

(1 = Not at all satisfied, 10 = Very satisfied)
Senior Planet courses typically meet twice a week for either five or ten weeks. Class sessions involve a combination of discussion of new topics and hands-on, practical application of technology skills. OATS provides a detailed, printed course book for each participant to keep after the end of the course.

Impact and Survey Results

Courses

Q: How comfortable are you using [the device in your Senior Planet course]?

Values: 1 = Extremely uncomfortable, 5 = Extremely comfortable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Course Survey Average</th>
<th>Post-Course Survey Average</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>+10.97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q: In the past month, how many times have you used a computer, smartphone, tablet, or other device to:

Values: 1 = 0-1 time; 2 = 2-5 times; 3 = 6-10 times; 4 = 11+ times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Pre-Course Survey Average</th>
<th>Post-Course Survey Average</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access health resources or medical information online (for example: attend a telehealth appointment, join an exercise class, or research medical information)</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>+28.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with friends and family via a video chat platform</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>-9.94%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send or receive emails</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>+4.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay bills or bank online</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>+4.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy goods or services online</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>+7.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in civic engagement or advocacy online (for example: research a cause, register to vote, or contact an elected official)</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>+13.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look up or attend courses online</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>+24.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a social media platform like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>+2.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express yourself creatively (for example: writing, creating art or music, etc.)</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>+8.66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Why did connection using video chat decrease? Two theories could explain this atypical result. Since courses meet twice a week for 5 or 10 weeks, it is possible that participants replaced virtual connections with in-person social connections made during class time. It is also possible that the abatement of COVID throughout the year resulted in a lower overall use of video chat platforms.
"In the past I considered taking these classes but they were not in traveling distance for me. When they were offered at my local library, I was very happy to attend."

-Anonymous survey response

"I look forward to each class and seeing my new friends."

-Donna, participant at Morristown Public Library

"I learned so much and feel much better about using the computer. The instructor was very knowledgeable and made the class fun and stress free (computers stress me!) Thank you so much for the opportunity to take this course."

-Anonymous survey response
"I joined the Chrome Essentials class to become more familiar with computers. I have used computers for years but have never really felt comfortable with them. They tend to intimidate me. The class is a small one and I feel comfortable with my fellow classmates. The trainers, Art and Norma Menard, are exceptional. They are patient and very helpful. As the classes continue, I am learning more and more. Thank you so very much for offering this class.

-Marge Pombrio, participant at Mooers Free Library
Quotes and Stories
Library Trainers and Program Leads

“These classes are such a good fit for our library. I am very happy to be a part of this.”

-Bridget Whalen-Nevin, Morristown Public Library

NNYLN and OATS

“As government at all levels prioritizes increased access to high speed broadband, activating our region’s network of public libraries as sites of digital literacy training becomes a crucial activity in realizing our shared digital equity goals. The collaboration among library organizations and OATS demonstrates a sustainable means of reaching an often excluded population and narrowing the digital divide.”

-Meg Backus, Executive Director, Northern New York Library Network

“The need for tech training and support is only growing, and we realized the best way to reach communities all over America was to license our curriculum and support local entities to deliver our programs in their own neighborhoods. The local licensing partners are bringing magic to this and we can’t do it without them.”

-Tom Kamber, Executive Director, Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) from AARP
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Press and Highlights

"Aging with Attitude and Gratitude"

• Press-Republican: Local libraries helping seniors jump the digital divide
• Mountain Lake PBS: Check Out Free Senior Planet Lectures at Mooers Free Library!
• ABC50: North Country Library System launches program for senior residents
• North Country Now: Tech classes for seniors in Waddington
• seniorplanet.org: People We Love: Norma and Art Menard
Photos

Top: Graduates of a 5-week Computer Essentials course at Cape Vincent Community Library
Bottom Left: Graduates of a 10-week Computer Basics course at Carthage Free Library
Bottom Right: Students participating in a 10-week Chrome Basics course at Mooers Free Library
The establishment and growth of Senior Planet's work in the North Country is made possible through the generous and ongoing support of Assemblyman D. Billy Jones, whose unwavering commitment to our work provides the foundational resources that enable access to technology and programs for older New Yorkers who need it most.

The Northern New York Library Network with North Country Library System, Clinton Essex Franklin Library System, and OATS are supporting this program with federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds allocated to the New York State Library by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

OATS would also like to thank those at the following organizations whose time, effort, and dedication made this project possible.