

Frances Russell



The Affordable Connectivity Program doesn't just provide discounts toward internet service for eligible households. In an age when people depend on technology for their health and wellbeing, the ACP can change lives.

When their children were grown, Frances Russell and her husband moved from an apartment in the Bronx to the Isaacs Houses, a NYCHA development in the Manhattan neighborhood of Yorkville. In her mid-70s, Russell found it hard to integrate herself into a new community. She struggled with technology, making her feelings of isolation more acute; she didn't own a computer or a tablet and could barely afford the wireless plan for her phone.

"I was a caregiver to my husband, and outside of Sundays and days I went to church meetings there was little to do. I had to get to know a community all over again and find out where to buy food."

After her husband passed away Russell began taking knitting and jewelry classes at a community center and started to meet people. But when the pandemic hit and classes and church activities were shuttered she found herself even more isolated and alone.

Russell first heard about the ACP while taking free technology classes provided by Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) from AARP, a partner in Connected NYCHA, a multiparty effort to distribute 10,000 free tablet computers, free connectivity, training, and support for older adults living in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) apartments. "We were told that ACP was available and those that didn't have internet at home or had a problem paying for it could get a discount."

With OATS's support applying for ACP was easy--something Russell appreciated after her experiences applying for other government benefit programs. By mid-2022 she was receiving the benefit, and soon was talking on Zoom with family and friends, many of whom she hadn't seen for over a year. She started taking more online classes, learning new technology skills.

Crucially, the ACP broadband benefit meant more savings to improve her life in other areas. Russell relies on ride services for medical appointments and social visits; now she visits more frequently with family and friends. She also travels outside the neighborhood to shop for a wider variety of healthy food options.

Russell is comfortable using technology these days. The tablet has replaced her phone; she can't imagine life without it and takes it everywhere she goes. It's her gateway to the world, and she's grateful for ACP for helping to make it possible.

"Having a little more money for car fare makes a great deal of differences. A lot of people my age have lost a lot of friends, people moved about, and as you get older it's not as easy to visit as you would like. I have extra money to visit a little more, go to lunch, and go to the library. I am in my mid-70s, and the savings really helps."