Empowering Older Adults Through Digital Literacy: Housing Navigation & Social Connection Initiatives in New Westminster A. Silgardo. *Gerontechnology* 25(s)

Purpose The Seniors Services Society of B.C. (SSSBC) developed two complementary digital-literacy initiatives to support older adults facing housing insecurity and social isolation. Both addressed barriers to technology use that contribute to vulnerability among low-income seniors. The first stream emerged during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when older adults in SSSBC's Temporary Housing Program faced heightened health risks and limited mobility. The second stream was a community-based group program promoting digital skills, social connection, and intergenerational engagement. Together, these initiatives aimed to enhance digital competence, promote housing stability, and foster meaningful participation. **Method - Stream 1 – Housing Navigation** During the early pandemic, SSSBC's Temporary Housing Team delivered individualized digital-literacy sessions to seniors experiencing homelessness or housing loss. Participants learned to search for housing online, complete digital forms, and communicate with landlords or agencies. Laptops and tablets were provided where required, and instruction was adapted to each person's abilities. **Stream 2 – Digital Literacy and Connection** In collaboration with the New Westminster Public Library and Century House, SSSBC conducted a 10-week group program for 30 low-income seniors. Sessions combined technology instruction (email, online government and health services, video calls) with guided peer interaction. Light snacks supported informal conversation, and a celebratory meal concluded the program. Youth volunteers from a local parish leadership group participated in both streams, providing one-to-one assistance and creating opportunities for intergenerational learning and friendship. Program evaluation included participant surveys, facilitator observations, and qualitative interviews. **Results & Discussion** Participants in both streams reported improved digital confidence and greater access to essential services. In Stream 1, many seniors successfully secured or maintained housing through online communication, reducing exposure risk during COVID-19. Stream 2 participants described reduced social isolation, stronger community ties, and a renewed sense of belonging. Youth involvement enhanced engagement and dispelled age-related technology stigma. These findings suggest that small, partnership-driven digital initiatives can substantially impact housing stability, social connection, and well-being among older adults. Integrating intergenerational volunteerism and community partnerships represents a sustainable model for inclusive gerontechnology practice.

References
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