2018 LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project ID	PIP-5
Title of Program	Senior Geek Squad: Library Technology Instruction Outside Library Walls
Program Category	
Submission Date	5/31/2018 9:49:09 AM
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Implementation Date	1-Aug-17
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Description of Productivity Improvement

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) communicated a need to the library for technology instruction to enhance the skills of its clients who need employment. The library now provides monthly instruction without cost to the agency.

The SCSEP provides part-time employment opportunities in community service activities for unemployed, low-income individuals ages 55 and older.

Additionally, it was known that recreation centers were meeting places for seniors. Library staff contacted Fayetteville-Cumberland Parks and Recreation center directors about providing opportunities for technology training to their senior clients. Combining resources with the recreation centers to provide instruction to this population is a partnership beneficial to the entire community.

Library programs and instruction are offered free to the community and the small classes and one-on-one instruction provide an optimal learning environment for most older adults.

Description of why this project was initiated

Over 20 percent of Cumberland County's population is age 55 or older, and many seniors know little or next to nothing about computers, the internet or social media.

Productive, happy and healthy senior citizens are effective contributors to a community's vitality. By receiving basic and accessible instruction in technology, they become more confident as volunteers in non-profits, civic boards and participants in their places of worship. One church deacon approached the library with a desire for her senior congregants to learn Bible instruction online. None of them had computer skills.

Understanding social media, a popular topic of instruction, is integral for senior citizens who desire close contact with their families, especially younger members. They, too, desire to connect with the wider world through these universal tools.

As active voters, senior citizens need to have access to the same tools that other generations are using to acquire and assess information.

Some older adults with low income still need to participate in the workforce, and a lack of computer skills severely limits employment options.

Library staff provide equipment for the students (Microsoft Surface tablets), prepare lessons geared toward older adults and set a regular schedule. Included in each lesson plan is a brief overview of library services. Many seniors had not been inside a library in quite a while and were pleasantly surprised to learn about what the library had to offer them, including additional resources and technology instruction.

Classes on a wide array of technology-based topics are offered, from an introduction to computers for the absolute beginner to social media and fun telephone apps. Staples include basic and intermediate classes on Microsoft Word and Excel, downloadable audio and e-Books. Other topics are introduction to the internet and email, introductions to various library databases and resources and a technology petting zoo.

When the library initially started these programs the information was not included in our monthly Calendar of Events. Since October 2017 these programs are featured in the Calendar. There is an expanded public awareness of the program due to program inclusion in approximately 6,000 printed calendars distributed throughout Cumberland County, as well as the online version at the library's website.

In addition to recreation centers, library staff have conducted Geek Squad sessions at public-housing meeting rooms.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service). Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

The library has incurred no extra cost by implementing Senior Geek Squad programs. Between August 1, 2017 and May 23, 2018 staff conducted 35 programs with a total attendance of 163 and average attendance of between 4 and 5 students per program. The use of Microsoft Surface tablets, which were provided through a grant from the Cumberland County Workforce Development Board, meant that there was no additional outlay necessary for equipment. The tablets are more up-to-date and less cumbersome to transport than library-owned laptops, which staff had used in the earliest version of the Geek Squad outreaches. All County recreation centers have Wi-Fi so connectivity at those locations has not been an issue.

This service is easily duplicated and highly sustainable. Library staff are skilled in the use and instruction of technology. A key role of the public library is to provide assistance to the community in navigating the constantly changing environment of technology. The organizations that serve seniors provide the space and Wi-Fi capabilities.

Other descriptive information

The following are some of the responses from participants in the instructional programs held for Senior Community Service Employment Program participants:

--"Now this computer stuff is making sense! Now when people start talking all this computer talk, I know what they're talking about!"
--"I learned more in this one session than I have EVER learned!" (his emphasis). He said family members and friends have tried to teach him and he's taken courses at other places.
--A first-time attendee remarked, "I've heard of some of these computer terms, but didn't know what any of them meant. NOW I do!" Another student chimed in, "Yeah, me too! Now these make sense, I don't feel so clueless!"
--"I always tell my friend about that website," said a returning attendee in reference to a technology-skills website that she'd learned about during a previous month's session. "I send that to my granddaughter for her homework." She went on to rave to new attendees about all the things that she's learned: "It's awesome, man. I'm telling you."
These types of reactions from seniors are common. Technology is intimidating and ever-changing. Instruction for this population is delivered at a slow and comfortable pace.