Internet Access for Older Adults

The initial focus of this project was to get computers in the hands of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic so they could participate in the virtual programs we developed. Many older adults were feeling extremely isolated and it was affecting their physical and mental health.

NewBridge Madison received a two-year grant from UW-Credit Union to provide computers to older adults with a special focus on BIPOC communities in Dane County. We reached out to EPIC, who agreed to provide us with laptop computers as long as they had some available. Then we contacted Dane Net, who agreed to install software in all the computers. NewBridge diversity and inclusion staff, case managers and nutrition site and program staff called our clients and participants to sign up those interested. A significant number of older adults were hesitant to try a computer or wanted nothing at all to do with them. Some older adults eventually changed their mind after talking to peers who were raving about how much they enjoyed their computer. Within a couple of months, we were delivering computers to older adult's homes and helping them get acquainted with their laptop. Staff spent a great deal of time helping those struggling to figure out their computer.

As we began taking requests for computers we realized that many older adults could not afford the cost of internet services. Fortunately, we were able to identify a couple providers offering discounted rates during the pandemic so that low-income families could have access. But there was a catch to the discounted offer. Once those offers expired, the family was committed to paying the normal rate for a period of time. This dissuaded many older adults from getting a computer. We desperately need to expand the program and find additional financial resources, to combine with the remaining grant money from UW Credit Union. Covering monthly provider fees will allow us to increase the number of low-income older adults who computer and internet access in their home.