An Intergenerational Community computer Tutoring Program: Keeping Seniors Connected

Abstract

Since there has been an upsurge in computer and internet use, people have become more dependent on technology as a primary way of communication and staying connected with their communities (Shapira, 2007). Social isolation or loneliness can lead to a feeling of "powerlessness," which in turn is associated with overall lack of well-being among the aging population (Shapira, Barak, & Gal, 2007). This paper describes an intergenerational tutoring computer program implemented at the Central YM & YWHA, which is geared towards increasing computer literacy among the elderly. The participants of the program are seniors from the community center and student volunteers from the local high school, who teach the elderly basic computer skills, such as understanding terminologies, opening an email account, and exploring various social media websites. In turn, the student will receive community service credits. Additionally, the program is geared toward promoting a meaningful intergenerational connection between the high school student volunteers and the elderly population at the community center. Preliminary anecdotal data of the efficacy of the program will be presented along with a proposal for a systematic study that will test the following hypothesis: the more frequently the elderly participate in a computer tutoring program, the more frequently they will use computers to connect with their community.

Literature Review

The interest has introduced a world of opportunities including:
- Online therapies and counseling
- Support groups, blogs and other health information

The use of the internet can "enhance the quality of life" because internet-based communication with other people is convenient and affordable, thus enabling social needs to be met more easily and directly (Shapira, Barak, & Gal, 2007). Saunders (2007) supports this in saying:

- computer use reduces isolation
- Positive correlation with self-esteem and computer use
- community-based computer programming has a positive outcome on the elderly population

Mellor, Firth, and Moore (2004), discusses one of the concerns that could cause a hindrance in the following study, that is the individual's cognitive abilities. As pointed out by Mellor, Firth, and Moore (2004), the use of computers requires certain skills that could be effective due to the aging process, such as:

- Memory
- Reasoning
- Attention
- Learning
- Problem-solving

Shapira, Barak, and Gal (2007), studied an interventional computer program similar to the computer program that will be examined within this intergenerational study. As a result of the computer program the elderly displayed signs of less depression and loneliness (Shapira, Barak, & Gal, 2007).

Senior Adult Center

The Senior department of the Central Queens YM aims to offer fresh, innovative and engaging programs for our members. The Center offers a full range of social, recreational and educational activities that have been skillfully designed to address the specific needs of older adults. Activities and Programs include a variety of day and evening offerings such as the computer tutoring program.

Collaborative Partners:
- Senior Department Social Work Intern (maled)
- Central Queens YM Senior Department Social Work Director
- Agency Technical Department
- Senior community at the Central Queens YM
- Forest Hills High School Liaison
- Student volunteers

Participants:
The participants consist of senior members of the Central Queens YM and students from Forest Hills High School.

Senior Computer Tutoring Program

Goals:
To enhance and empower seniors by providing basic computing education, allowing them to stay connected with their community.

Program Description:
At the Central YM & YWHA, the seniors that attend the agency have the opportunity to participate in a computer tutoring program. Intended to bridge the technological gap of the aging population the program focuses on the needs of senior community, such as:

- Beginning with familiarizing them with the basic parts of a computer
- Understanding computer jargon/terminologies
- Icon recognition
- Setting up an email accounts/ing to check and compose emails.
- Online searches/exploring various social and news media websites

Anecdotal Data

Preliminary anecdotal data illustrates positive reactions to the program. Furthermore, the data reveals that there is positive socialization and connection between the seniors and student volunteers that occur.

Student Volunteers

"I really like it and I have learned a lot from the person I tutor." The student has also mentioned that there is a mutual respect and understanding that has developed over the time and she would love to do the program again.

"It actually found the program to be more fun and insightful than I thought it initially would be. I have definitely been able to build a friendship with my senior client. Not only did I learn her, but in some ways she taught me about the one she grew up on. The senior I was paired with had a bubbly personality and believes it or not. I actually found we have some things in common. It’s had more free time on my hands, I would join this program again.

"I have only had one session with my senior, but it seemed to go very well. I was able to teach my senior some things she didn’t know before, and we seemed to get along. Even though I’m only done once, I am enjoying the program so far. I look forward to continuing with this program in the future, and I have plans to meet with my senior again this week.

Implications For Future Study

Rationale for Study:
Anecdotal data shows satisfaction with the program. A future study should focus on investigating the relationship between the frequency of seniors participating in a computer program and the frequency with which they use the computer to stay connected with their community.

Hypothesis:
The more frequently the elderly participate in a computer tutoring program, the more frequently they will use computers to connect with their community.

Anticipated Results

It is expected that the hypothesis will be supported. When the frequency of attending the computer program and the frequency of using the computer to connect with the community. The researcher anticipates that this hypothesis will be supported.

References