

# Bridging the Digital Divide



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- Ken Ranta, Director, Integrated Social Services, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board
- George Okurapa, Manager, Community & Labour Market, City of Toronto, Toronto Employment & Social Services
- John Erra, Project Lead, City of Toronto, Toronto Employment & Social Services

# City of Toronto Virtual Caseworker

Pilot Project

# Introduction



**George Okurapa**, Manager, Community & Labour Market, City of Toronto, Toronto Employment & Social Services

**John Erra**, Project Lead, City of Toronto, Toronto Employment & Social Services

**Project Team**, Various project leaders (34) across 8 Divisions/Units

**Pilot Teams**, Pilot leads and caseworkers (98) across 8 units

# Purpose



## Goal:

Given the current circumstances and the expansion of telework, there was an opportunity to change and modernize services. The goal of a virtual, visual interface is to increase equitable access to City services and enhance the customer service experience of residents and clients.

## Objectives:

1. Provide service users with an option to connect virtually with City of Toronto staff (i.e., Caseworker) supported by a visual interface (Webex)
2. Provide self-serve and facilitated service options
3. Equip a variety of City spaces with technology and supports so service users were able to access services virtually, focusing on vulnerable people and communities

# Equity Impact Assessment



Equity lens tool is used by the City of Toronto to ensure program, services and policies are fair, inclusive and accessible to all residents. This tool seeks to identify:

1. The communities potentially affected by the Virtual Caseworker Pilot
2. Needs, barriers and root causes to be addressed by this initiative
3. Direct and indirect impacts
4. Ways to remove known barriers, reduce negative and/or enhance positive impacts

# Participating Groups



- Technology Services
- Employment & Social Services
- Children's Services
- Social Development, Finance & Administration (Youth Development Unit and Human Service Integration)
- Shelter, Support & Housing Administration
- Toronto Public Library



# Pilot Approach



- Various approaches through 8 pilots
- Varying levels of digital literacy
- Residents with or without their own technology, accessing service either:
  - independently from their own homes with their own technology, or
  - from a City space with technology and staff support as needed



# Wide Range of Pilots



- ✓ **One-on-one** case planning and supportive contacts
- ✓ Group **workshops** and information sessions
- ✓ Youth connecting virtually from **mobile devices** with City Youth Outreach Workers
- ✓ Staff and clients each connecting independently **from home**
- ✓ Low income residents **applying for Ontario Works** via Webex at the Application & Support Centre (Program Applications)
- ✓ Virtual Caseworker Booth set-up at local **library branch** to support service access
- ✓ Virtual Caseworker Booths set-up in two **City Shelters** for clients to connect with City staff (Ontario Works supports)

# Evaluation



- Process and outcome evaluation approaches across two main themes:
  - ✓ **Project Performance:** Relevance of objectives, effectiveness, efficiency, and resources and partners
  - ✓ **Pilot Impacts:** Service access, service quality, service type/breadth, organizational effectiveness
- Methods were both standardized and tailored, as relevant

## In Scope

- Client interest in participating / potential uptake
- Client satisfaction and access
- Divisional best practices and lessons learned
- Partnerships

## Out of Scope

- Resources requirements
- Associated costs translated to outcomes
- Cost benefit analysis
- Hard costs for technology and tools

# Outcomes - By the Numbers



800 Residents served



390 Client surveys completed



73 Pilot Staff

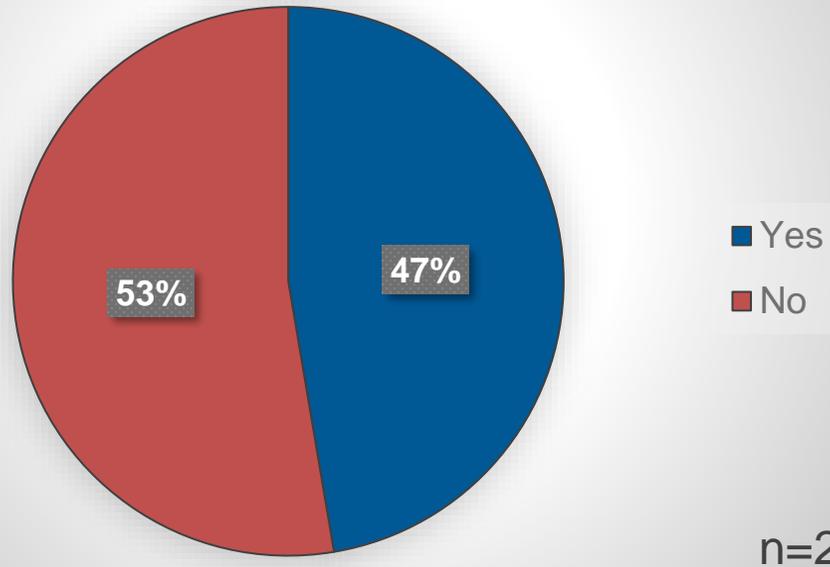


98 Staff/managers completed surveys and were consulted

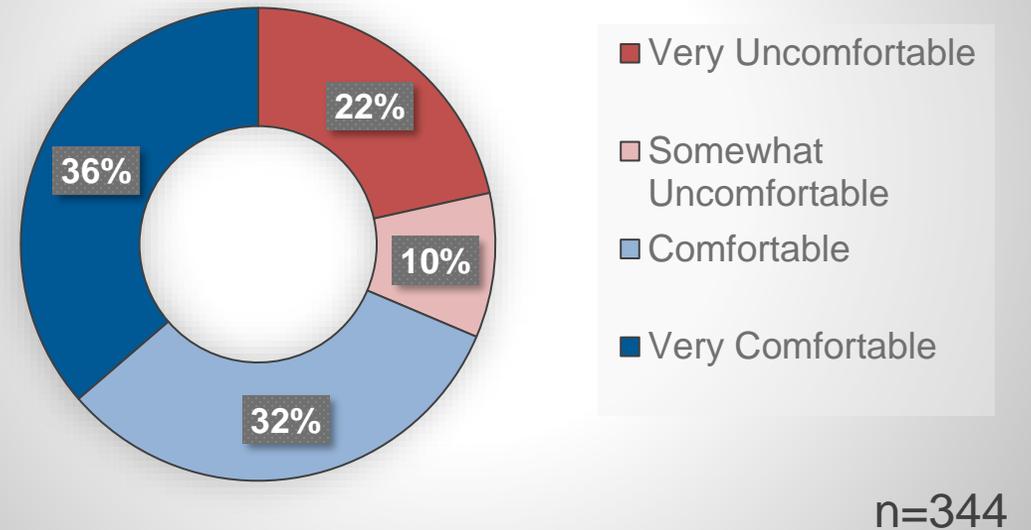
# Outcomes - Clients Tech Profile



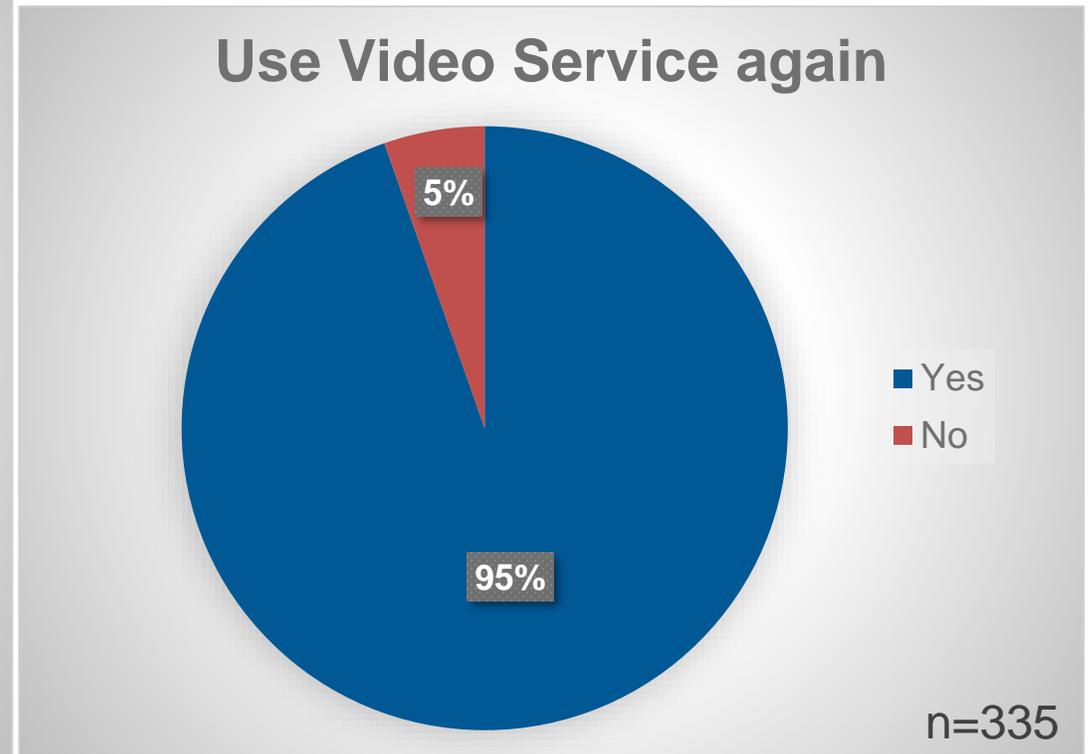
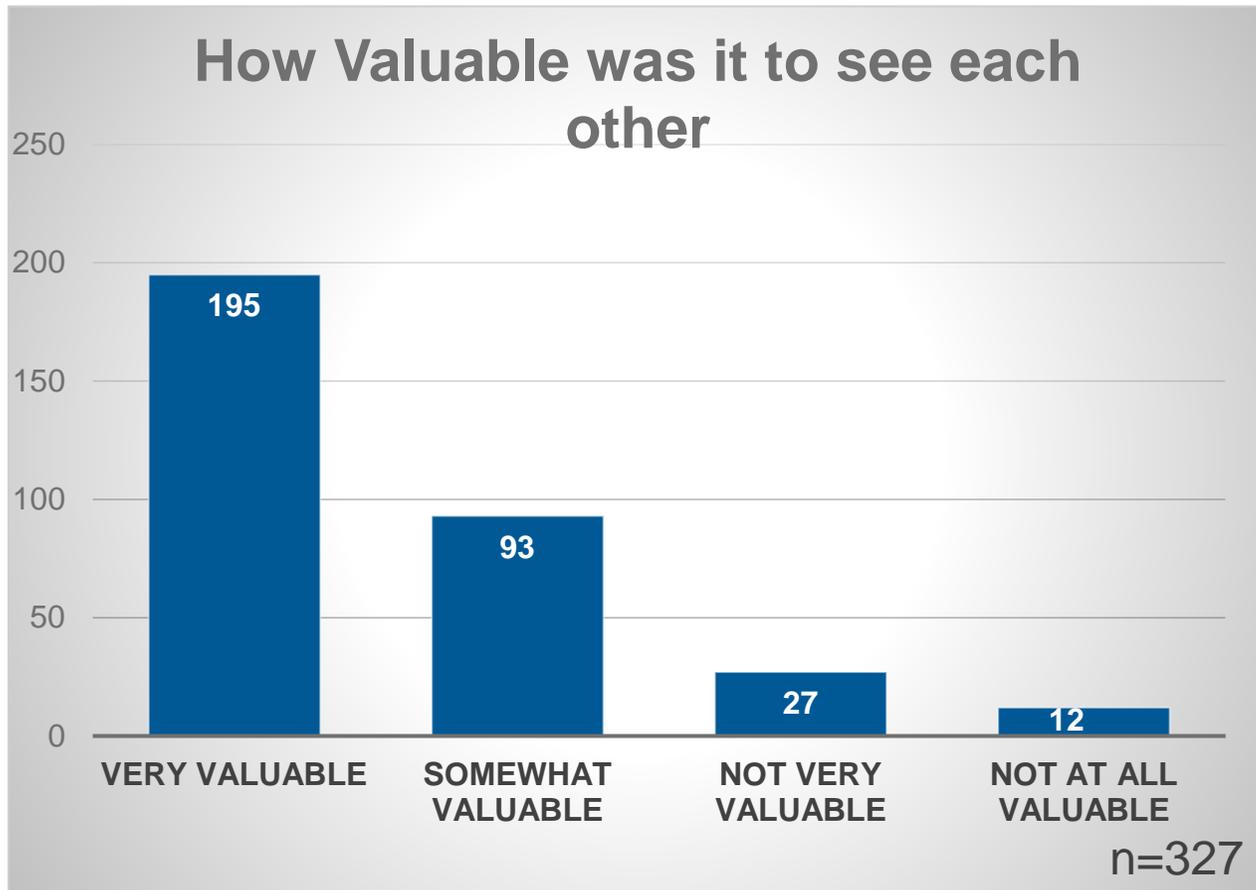
### Previous experience with Webex or similar platforms



### Client's comfort level using technology



# Outcomes - Video Success



# Outcomes - Client Perspective



- Addressed geographic service gaps in community, bring services to most vulnerable residents
- Provided access and supports to technology
- Service accessibility for persons with disabilities (e.g., mobility needs, visual cue needs, etc.)
- More personable connection with staff
- Socially Isolated – face-to-face contact through video calls may help reduce loneliness
- Stronger relationships
- Saves money and travel time
- Easier to fit into client's schedule than an in-person meeting
- Real time content sharing

# Outcomes - Staff Perspective



**64%**

Webex Comfort

**66%**

Client Comfort

**78%**

Increased  
Customer Service

**91%**

Value Added

- All staff feel that video conferencing should continue
- All staff were satisfied with video conferencing
- Video conferencing was not difficult for any staff, although there were various levels of comfort
- There is an opportunity to use this service to screen share/display information
- Staff found it easier to connect with clients and appreciated being able to read body language and visual cues. Video was preferred to phone for this reason
- Increased customer service experience
- More information shared than what would have been shared by phone

# Testimonials



## Client Quotes

*"It is so great to see your face. I haven't seen any other faces for weeks and I am feeling so isolated"*

*"I identify as having a neurodevelopmental disorder. The call helped by giving the opportunity to read my caseworkers lips, facial expressions, and body cues to help with understanding language, tone, and meaning. It also gave a visual component to keep me better focused on the conversation. This was VERY helpful"*

*"I prefer other platforms like Zoom"*

## Staff Quotes

*"I loved finally getting to see my clients. They were very happy and excited to see and be seen and had big smiles."*

*"As a caseworker, not being able to speak to your clients face to face for the past 11 months has been difficult. Not being able to see your clients and make that connection in their time of need or share in their triumphs or assist with a crisis has been frustrating and leaves you feeling hollow. Taking part in the VCI pilot has been encouraging; it's making me feel more connected to my clients and from the feedback we are getting, the same can be said for the clients."*

*"I see pros and cons using video conferencing for youth appointments. Some youth have been adaptable with either downloading the app or trying to call into the meeting. But in general they do not go on screen/ video."*

# Lessons Learned



## Constraints and or challenges:

- Some preferred in-person service
- Uncomfortable using video with Caseworker
- Clients have limited financial resources and access to technology (Wi-Fi, laptops, computers, phones)
- Limited digital skills
- Unsuitable personal circumstances for video sessions
- Perception that it will take too long
- Stay at home” order prevented referrals out into the community to access technology

# Lessons Learned



## Solutions:

- Although some preferred in person service, video service was a good alternative service option
- Where pilots provided a) **funds for technology** or b) **digital supports**, uptake was higher
  - a) Series of Workshops for Internationally trained professionals – 100% attendance
  - b) Private space and onsite support at Shelters – 75% uptake
- Identify if supports/accommodations are required prior to the video meeting
- In the event of a service disruption, ensure staff and clients share an alternative contact method (i.e. phone number)
- Opportunity for client to learn a new platform
- Improved interdivisional Collaboration
- Reference guide developed for staff (Privacy, Webex supports, Staff scripts)

# Next Steps

## **Evaluation**

Continue to gather survey results including client and staff feedback, lessons learned, outcomes and impacts

## **Exploration**

Consultation with internal and external groups to identify opportunities to expand within:

- Participating divisions (pilots)
- Other City divisions (including space)
- Community partners

## **Expansion**

Develop City-wide Virtual Services Toolkit to support service expansion in key service areas

End



# Bridging the Digital Divide

## TBDSSAB Mobile Devices Program

OMSSA Exchange Virtual Conference | **May 11, 2021**

Presented by: Ken Ranta, Director Integrated Social Services



**THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD**

# Presentation Overview

- Introduction to TBDSSAB
- Identifying Communication Needs
- COVID Impact
- Program Details
- Impact and Outcomes

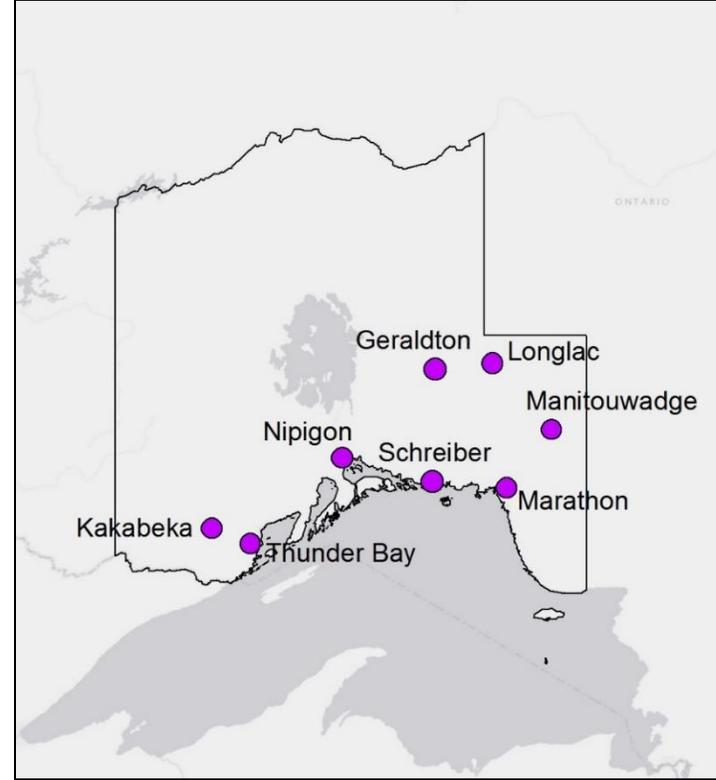


# What is TBDSSAB?

- DSSABs were created by Ontario in 1999 under the DSSAB Act
- TBDSSAB is the service system manager for Child Care, Social and Affordable Housing, and Ontario Works for the District of Thunder Bay, represent 15 municipalities and Territory Without Municipal Organization
- Approximately 150,000 population in service area



# TBDSSAB Service Area and Office Locations



- Area: 103,719.51 km<sup>2</sup>
- A 6 hour drive from the Eastern to Western border of the District



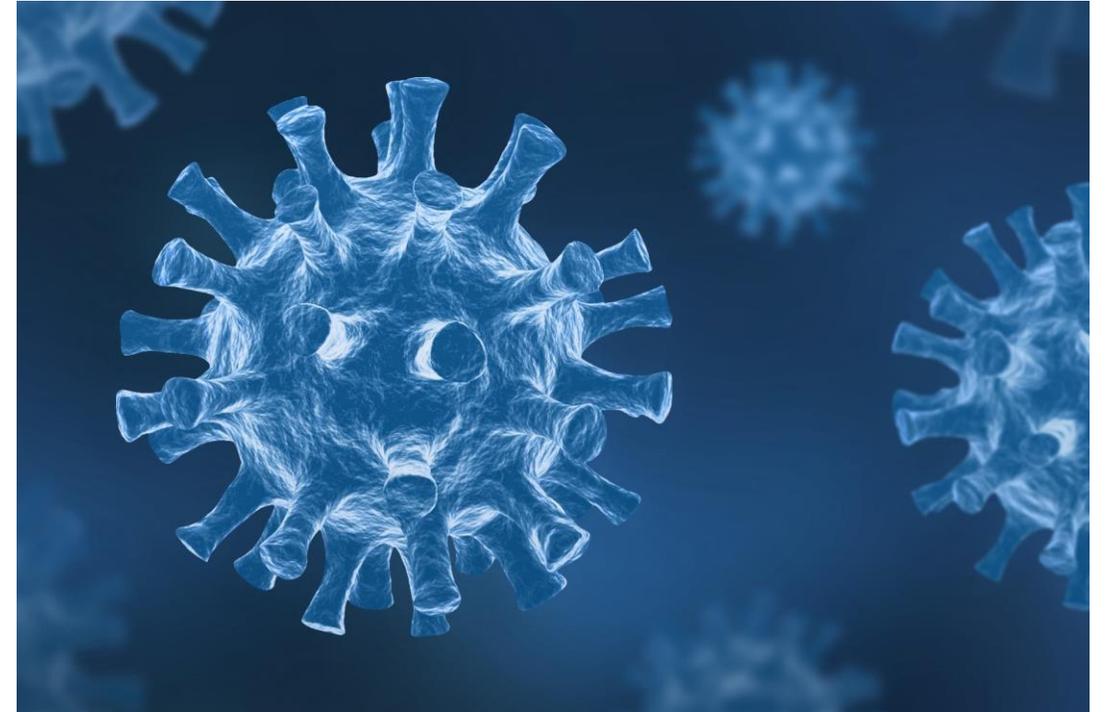
# Communication Needs

- Identified connectivity issues in the North to Minister Todd Smith MCCSS at 2020 AMO conference
- Lack of internet access impacts vulnerable individuals more than anyone
- More programs and services are moving to electronic access
- Even with access to internet service, costs for plans and devices is prohibitive



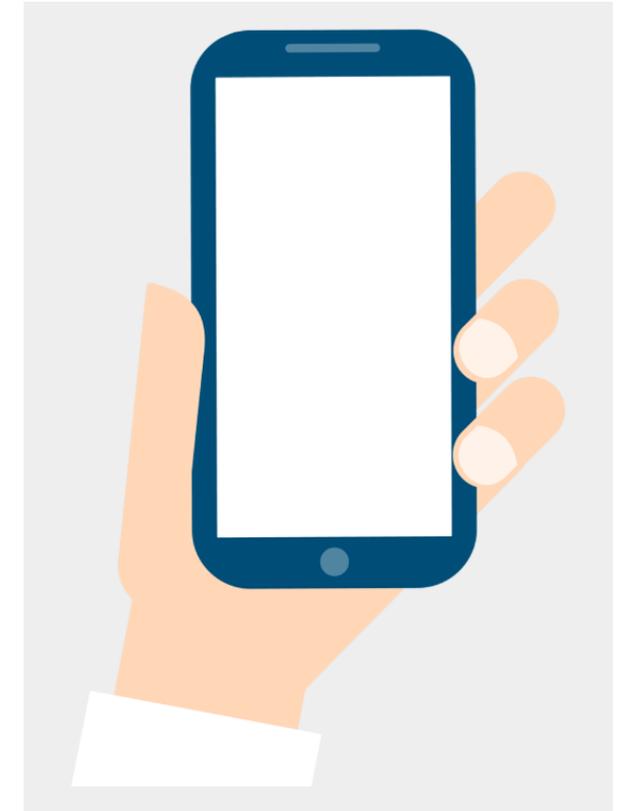
# COVID-19 Impact

- Reduction in services available for in-person access
- Promotion of online services
- Closure of public accessible internet and phones
- Higher need for mental health supports
- Home-based schooling



# Program Details

- Provide smart phones and data packages to those in need
- 66 devices distributed in summer 2020
- 200 additional devices distributed in February/March 2021
- 1 year data plan with unlimited calling
- Referral from Caseworkers, Tenant Support Workers, Intake Team and community agencies
- Sign agreement to safeguard the phone and participate in feedback
- 15 laptops available for loan



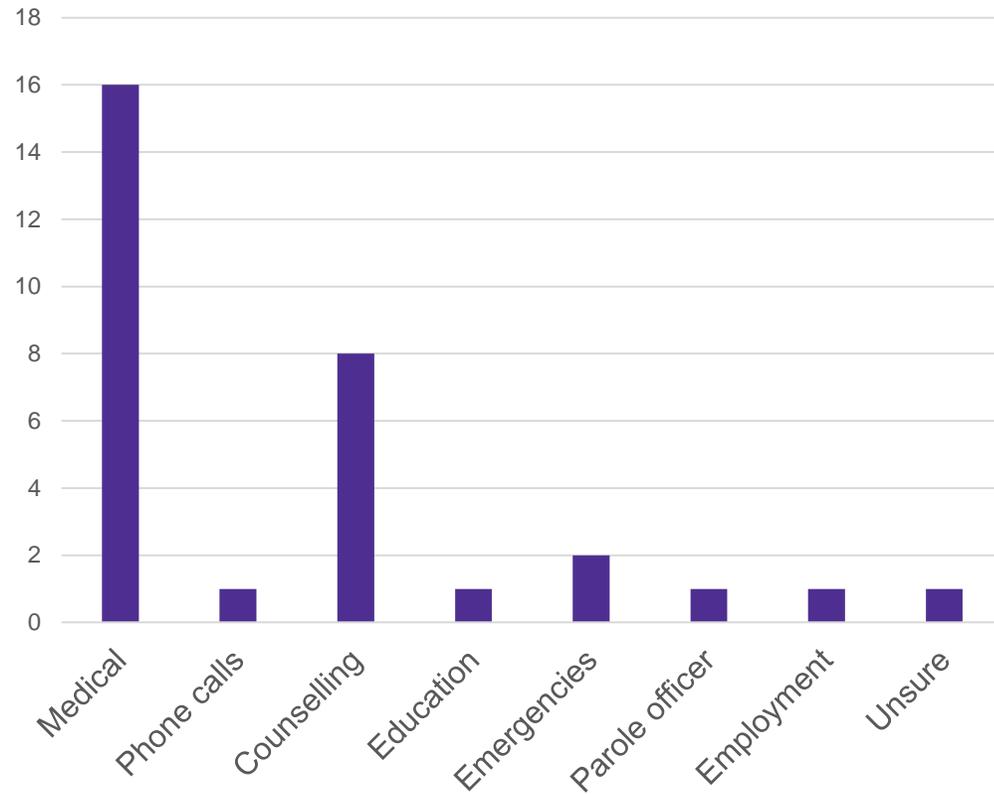
# Impact and Outcomes

- Follow up calls to determine immediate impact
- 6 month survey to delve deeper
- Full survey by year-end to evaluate the program
- Advocacy for improved access and service

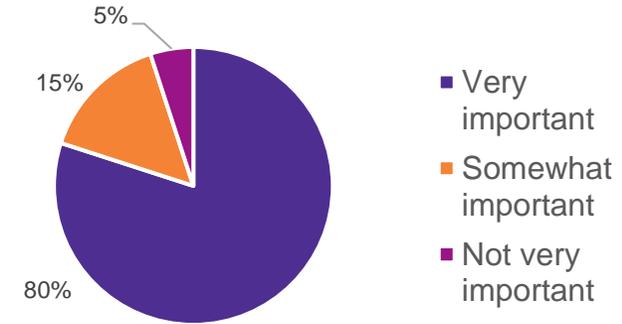


# Impact and Outcomes

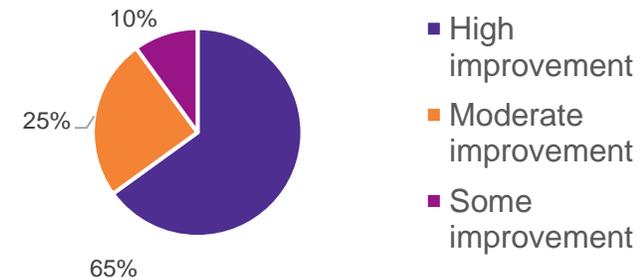
## Primary Use of Phone



## Importance of Phone/Internet



## Quality of Life Improvement



# Impact and Outcomes

- One gentleman was absolutely ecstatic about getting the cell phone stating it helped him land a good job. He was very appreciative and excited about how this had helped him in trying times and that the extent DSSAB and staff took in helping him was greatly appreciated
- A client was coming into the office actively looking for work and spending 1-3 hours following up with employment services. He received a phone, and shortly after he received a job offer as he came to print and fax information to the employers.



# Impact and Outcomes

- An 18 year old dependant of a tenant with TBDSSAB housing, required help to leave a unhealthy and unsafe living environment. Her family had addiction issues and she needed to leave for her safety and reached out to a TBDSSAB Tenant Support Coordinator. She was given a phone under the program.
- With the help of several community organizations, she was able to secure safe accommodations and apply for Ontario Works on her own. She secured employment through the summer allowing her to build on skills and confidence. She is now back to school online and thriving . To her, that phone was a lifeline that would not been accessible otherwise.



# Impact and Outcomes

- One individual to attend his virtual weekly cultural teachings appointments
- An elderly person who requires more at-home supports now has access to the additional supports since he has a contact number
- Another individual can call his 3 workers at least once a week for brief check ins and which helps him “to stay on track”
- People seeking housing have been able to look at places online independently and able to provide a call back number to potential landlords.



# Participant Comments

Can now join NA / AA meetings virtually because of the cell phones

Able to access Talk in Counselling and various agencies in the community



# Participant Comments

So thankful - it's a lifeline  
and a sense of security

Very thankful - haven't  
missed appointments since  
having phone





THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

# Questions?

# Thank you

Ken Ranta, Director Integrated Social  
Services

[Ken.Ranta@tbdssab.ca](mailto:Ken.Ranta@tbdssab.ca)



# Background on Senior Technology Program

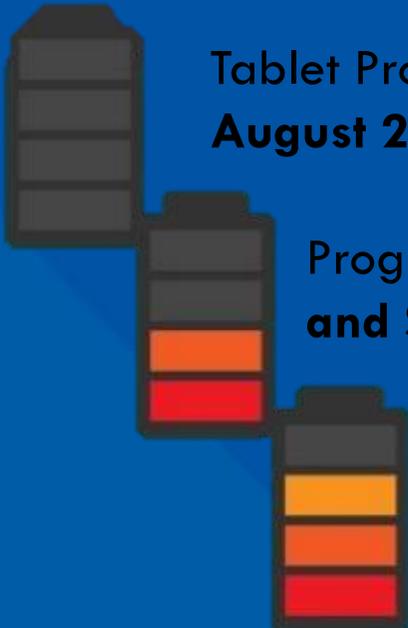


# Background on Seniors' Technology Program

- Suspension of in-person programming and services due to COVID-19
- Individuals experiencing many variations of loneliness and stress
- Socially isolated residents faced further difficulties
- Technology provided an option that could help individuals reduce social isolation by staying connected with friends, family, and community supports
- Supportive to seniors- allowing increasing comfort with technology and appropriate space for learning



# Project Elements



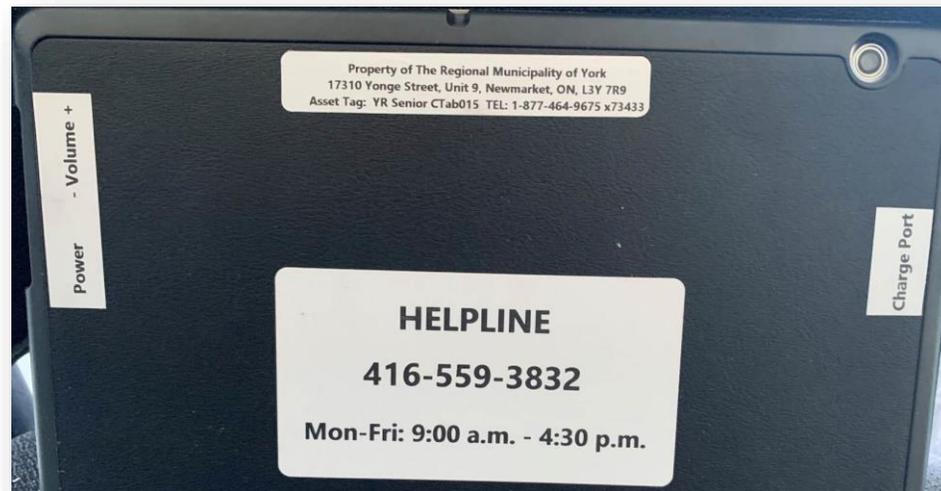
Tablet Program Start:  
**August 2020**

Program Reaching out to: **Community Intervention  
and Support Services, and YR Housing Tenants**

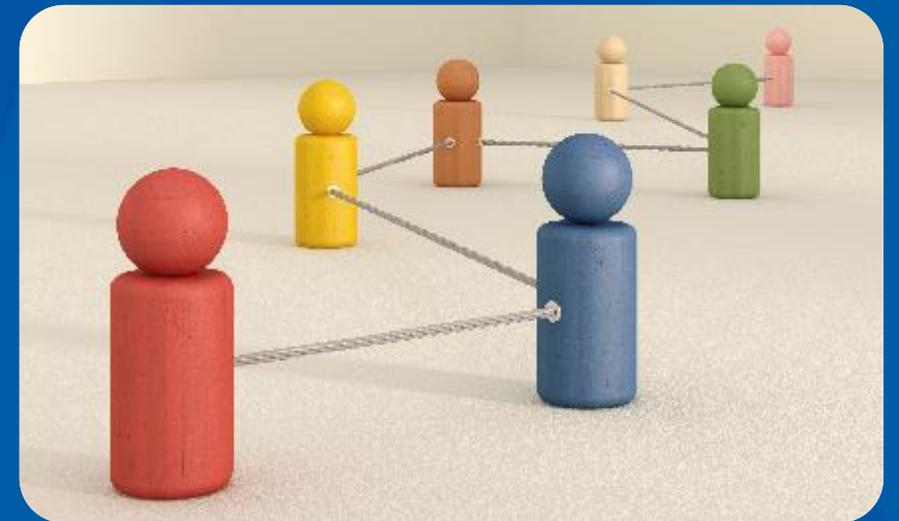
Program Expanded to: **Housing Stability Programs,  
Ontario Works and Integrated Support Programs**

# Project Elements

- Procuring tablets with internet access and technical support
  - WIFI and Cellular tablets
- Partnership with Human Endeavour to provide technical support and security to ensure tablets remain safe and easy to use
- Eligibility Criteria - people who had zero access to technology or devices
- Linking participants to Technology Support Team to provide initial telephone support call



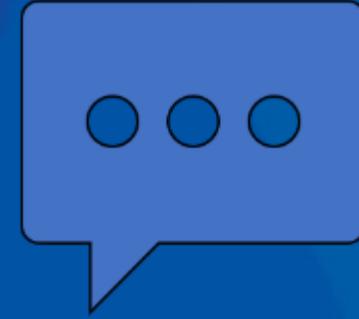
# Phase 2 — Wellness and Socialization Program



# Phase 2 – Wellness and Socialization Program

- 2 Hour Programming that occurs every Wednesday afternoon
- Hour 1 is dedicated to gentle exercise led by a Yoga Instructor
- Hour 2 is dedicated to socialization. This period is free flow conversations to get to know each other, personal stories, culture sharing, and sharing stories of isolation, struggles, loss, joy and celebrating their unique past and experiences.
- Sessions provide opportunity for participants to practice using technology, access virtual conversations, and virtual meetings





# Participant Feedback/Testimonials

# Participant Feedback/Testimonials

"I was a little bit nervous to be honest with you because I am not good at this technology stuff but I am pleasantly surprised at how useful it has been."

"This is the first time I have ever done yoga, never in my life before. It's really good and makes me move my body. Thank you, Thank you"

"There are some icons on here that I do not know how to use but I think that is an opportunity to learn how to work with all this tech stuff."

"I practice the zoom (with students and Human Endeavour team), so now soon, I can see my family from back home on the tablet to talk to them"



# Successes, Challenges & Lessons Learned

# Challenges/Lessons Learned

- **Findings**

- Increase social connections
- Decrease in loneliness
- Increase in health and well-being
- Increase in autonomy and self-worth
- Gap in digital equity among senior and vulnerable individuals



- **Challenges/Lessons Learned**

- Due to COVID-19 restrictions, technology support teams are unable to sit down with Seniors to give an overview of how to use the device
- Fears of technology serving as a barrier
- Own Tablet rather than “Access to Tablet”

# Next Steps



# Next Steps

- How do we sustain the program for the future?
- How do we support participants in becoming self-sufficient when utilizing a tablet?
- Partnership with Vaughan Community Health Centre in creating mentorship program and peer support groups
- To continue to promote digital literacy
- To provide and promote volunteerism to technology savvy Seniors to mentor other Seniors who are struggling with technology



THANK YOU





# Bridging the Digital Divide

- **Innovation**
- **Economic Development**
- **Social Inclusion**





# Connecting Families



- 2017 Canada ranked 29th globally for broadband access (US 15th, UK 6th)
- 2 million Canadians cannot access a reliable Internet connection
- 13% of rural households with Internet can't access 5 Mbps download speeds

A dark blue rectangular banner with a stylized, light blue map of Canada in the background. The map is centered and features a prominent central peak and two smaller peaks on either side, representing the Canadian landmass.

**HIGH-SPEED ACCESS FOR ALL:**  
CANADA'S CONNECTIVITY STRATEGY

# Universal Broadband Fund



- The Universal Broadband Fund was announced in Budget 2019.
- Part of a series of federal investments made to improve access to high-speed Internet, which are expected to connect nearly 400,000 additional households by the end of 2023.
- Allocation of \$50 million of its total budget for mobile Internet projects that primarily benefit Indigenous peoples.

# Universal Broadband Fund



- Goal is to connect all Canadians to high-speed Internet by 2030, by supporting projects and programs that will connect 1.2 million Canadian households over the next few years.
- At least 50 megabits per second download speeds and 10 megabits per second upload speeds, no matter where people are in the country.

DOWNLOAD INTERNET SPEEDS	BENEFITS
<b>1 Mbps</b>	Insufficient speed to meaningfully participate online. Allows for browsing and email services.
<b>5 Mbps</b>	Adequate for single users and basic Internet activities, such as accessing government services, social media and basic streaming videos.
<b>50 Mbps</b>	Speed identified by the CRTC for Canadians to take advantage of cloud-based software applications, multiple government services (e.g., telehealth services, business support) online learning resources and high-definition streaming videos. Can support use by multiple simultaneous users.

MOBILITY WIRELESS & IOT

# Rogers expands eligibility for low-cost internet program



TOM LI MARCH 10, 2021

1384

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# Connected for Success: Rogers



- OW
- ODSP
- GIS



500 x 334

In 2018, people around the world lost just over \$800 million to online scams. [1]



Internet scamming is on the rise. [2]  
The number of reports has increased each of the past three years.



Phishing is the most common [5]  
type of online scam, but romance and investment scams steal more money.



The majority of scam [3]  
victims are those who are 45 or older.



Your email and your phone [4]  
are the two most common places for scammers to try and get you.

# Remote Employment



# Remote Employment

Transcription

Website Development

Customer Service

Graphic Design

Administrative Assistance

Bookkeeping

DIY



# Create Learning Opportunities



For starters, entrepreneurs, or small and medium businesses

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thank you