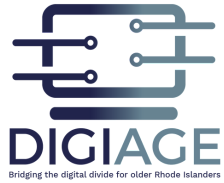


**University of Rhode Island (URI)
Engaging Generations (eGen) Cyber-Seniors Program
digiAGE iPad Project**

What is the URI eGen Cyber-Seniors Program?

It is an intergenerational technology program that brings together university students and older adults at community sites for mutual benefits. The program began in 2016. Students gain professional and leadership skills, and older adults gain technological skills and confidence.

In partnership with the Rhode Island (RI) Office of Healthy Aging (OHA), a team from the URI led by Dr. Skye Leedahll developed and implemented the digiAGE iPad Project as part of the URI eGen Cyber-Seniors Program from 2021-2024.



Project Highlights



- **542** older individuals received iPads, and 157 received hotspots that provided free Internet connection for a year.
- Each participant received technology mentorship from university-trained students or peer mentors along with a binder of helpful resources.

Community Partnerships

To implement the program, 14 community sites (mostly senior centers) across Rhode Island helped to recruit and support participants from 29 different RI communities.

Student Mentors

284 university students served as technology mentors, providing about 16,000 hours of time to the program and related research over the 3.5 year period.



Research Methods

Each participant completed a survey in which they spoke with a research assistant over the phone before the program started and after it ended (pre/post survey design). The surveys included questions about technology use and social well-being.

Digital Competence and Tablet Use



Participants improved significantly in their tablet use and ability to confidently use technology in various aspects of life, including emailing, video calling, using social media, and searching for information.

Social Well-Being



Participants experienced enhanced social well-being following the program, including reduced social isolation, decreased loneliness, and improved quality of life.

Population Demographics



The 2021-2024 participant population consisted of individuals between 54-100 years of age (average of 74). About 65% had lower income, 11% spoke Spanish as their primary language, and about 1/3 were people of color.

digiAGE iPad Project Details

URI Stakeholders

- Four interdisciplinary university faculty members and one staff member were involved with the program.
- The 284 university students involved with the program from January 2021 - May 2024 completed service learning hours and internships.
- 7 graduate students and 13 undergraduate students took advantage of employment opportunities during the grant period.

Mentor Training

All mentors went through training in-person and through the Cyber-Seniors website on topics of communication, data safety, and best practices in working with older adults.



Peer Mentoring

Starting in 2023, 14 older volunteers, most of whom were former program participants, mentored other older adult participants with the help of student mentors.

Binder Contents

Older adult participants received a binder with their iPad and a stylus. The binder contained a checklist of learning goals, instructions on how to connect to online resources, a list of defined technology terms, details about their iPad that was preloaded with selected apps, and note paper.



Checklist of Learning Goals

This included learning iPad basics-- volume, charging, home button, Wifi, email and Apple ID setup. Participants also learned how to use apps for life enrichment-- Zoom, email, messaging, camera, social media, music, library, Rhode Island resources, and accessibility options.

Funding

The majority of the funding in support of the digiAGE iPad Project and related research came from the RI OHA due to Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. Other sources of funding included: Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island, RI Housing, van Beuren Charitable Foundation, and the City of Providence. The total amount of funding received was around \$800,000.