



ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY, VIVALON

Start Date: **Feb 1, 2023**

End Date: **March 31, 2024**

Outputs/ Deliverables: **50 devices, 50 learners**

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OVERVIEW



In 2023, Vivalon, the largest nonprofit serving older adults and people with disabilities in Marin County, received government funding from the California Department of Aging's Access to Technology (ATT) program. The purpose of this initiative was to reduce social isolation and help older adults (65+) and adults with disabilities (18+) become independent and confident online.

While Vivalon already offered a range of technology programs on-site in English and Spanish (including basic and intermediate digital skills courses, monthly tech workshops, and ongoing tech support with trained volunteers), the organization recognized that some folks might not be able to visit Vivalon's site in person or may need to access services in another language.

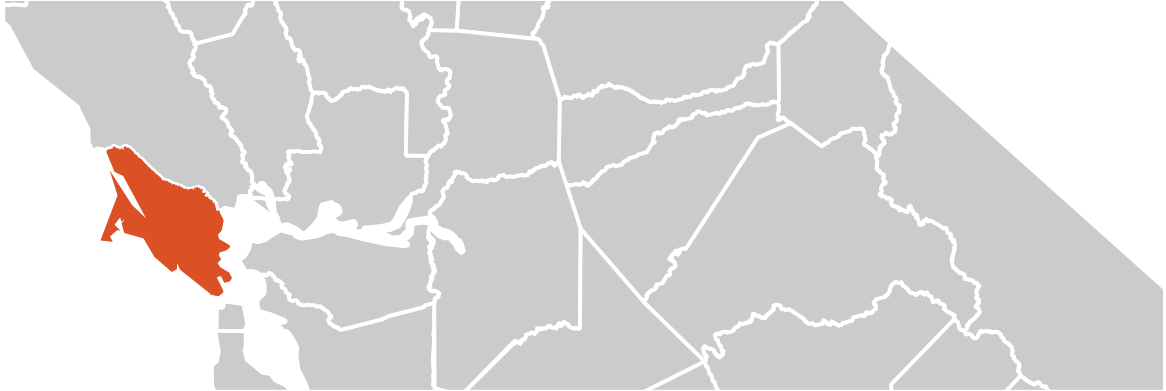
Many older adults are homebound, and since a large part of Marin County is rural, driving to a class and/or finding public transportation can be challenging and time-consuming.

Additionally, the county is home to many Vietnamese speakers, but due to Vivalon's staffing limitations, they did not have any employees who spoke the language.

Wanting to expand its services, Vivalon reached out to Community Tech Network (CTN), a national leader in digital equity. As part of Vivalon's ATT project, CTN would provide Vivalon's clients with remote digital literacy training through its Home Connect program. Best of all? It would be offered in three languages (based on Vivalon's needs): English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

According to Stephanie McNally, Vivalon's Director of Healthy Aging, "Expanding our in-home efforts, especially in multiple languages, is critical. CTN is helping reach a part of the population that we could not reach before. They're helping us fulfill our unmet needs."

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT



Today, adults over age 60 account for more than 25 percent of Marin County's population of 256,218. Among these individuals, approximately 17,000 live alone and 24,959 are over the age of 75.

A lack of social connectedness often leads to isolation and loneliness, which research indicates can worsen the risk of death and chronic conditions for older adults. Detrimental effects include an increase in falls, cognitive decline, heart attack, and stroke. Many of Marin's older adults and low-income individuals want to use technology to stay connected to their friends, families, and medical practitioners, but they lack the knowledge and tools to do so.

"I live alone... I talk [via video call] and email my sister-in-law in upstate New York, who's 85 now. It's very important to stay connected and be able to see each other while we talk. It's your next best thing to being there." - Joy, a 75-year-old Corte Madera, CA resident



75-year-old Joy and her virtual digital skills instructor, Giang (Jen) Tran

For more than 70 years, Vivalon has been the central resource hub for Marin County's older adults and people with disabilities and has helped this vulnerable population stay active, informed, supported, and nourished. Vivalon's services currently include free rides and meals, as well as numerous classes about fitness, nutrition, the arts and music, fall prevention, and more. In 2023, Vivalon opened its Healthy Aging Campus, combining wraparound healthcare services and vibrant programs with affordable housing for older adults.

As part of its Access to Technology program, Vivalon:

- Continued its popular on-site "Talking Tech" classes and workshops in English and Spanish at the new Healthy Aging Center
- Expanded its "Tech for Health" digital navigator program, which works with the Dominican University nursing program to provide digital navigators who visit residents in their homes to offer tech and healthcare support
- Partnered with Community Tech Network to refer individuals to Home Connect, CTN's virtual digital skills training program. This was available for Vivalon clients who needed a device, were either homebound and/or unable to travel to Vivalon's in-person classes, or in need of training in Vietnamese.

The goals of all Vivalon's digital programs are:

- Increase community connection
- Reduce loneliness & isolation
- Improve access to healthcare information
- Cultivate self-advocacy and independence



LEARNER JOURNEY: THIEN PHAM

Thien Pham is a Vietnamese refugee who resettled in the United States with his family in 1975 following the Vietnam War. Since then, navigating English-speaking environments in the U.S. has been challenging for him. Additionally, Thien struggled to keep in touch virtually with his family back home in Vietnam, because he did not know that tablets have a Vietnamese keyboard which can be used to send email and text messages.

“Everything is now done online: news, social networking, shopping, Uber... so it’s very important to learn some online skills to function well in today’s world.” - Moc, a 63-year-old San Rafael, CA resident

Since 2008, Community Tech Network has been working to close the digital divide and envisions a world where individuals are empowered to use technology to thrive in connected and flourishing communities. CTN believes that access to the internet is a human right, and that those without the skills to use the internet are at risk of social and economic disadvantage. CTN provides services to more than 2,000 unique learners each year through a network of more than 70 partners in California, Texas, New York, and New Jersey.

Pre-COVID-19, CTN’s successful, community-based model catalyzed digital inclusion in locations where learners already participated in other community programs, such as in senior centers, housing developments, community centers and libraries. A robust, well-trained network of paid and volunteer staff (most of whom were bilingual) provided technology training and support to learners in CTN’s partner locations.



Diana Olivares, a Spanish-speaking bilingual digital literacy instructor at CTN, with members of Cafecito, Vivalon's Hispanic social group

During the pandemic, CTN expanded its programming by creating Home Connect, which offered remote, one-on-one, digital skills training to older and disabled adults. This training taught folks how to access key services (such as online grocery shopping and telehealth) without having to leave their homes, which was especially needed during COVID. Participants also received a device

and assistance in signing up for programs offering low-cost internet services and subsidies, such as the federally-funded Affordable Connectivity Program.

Although in-person classes have resumed, CTN continues to offer this remote program, and it has allowed the organization to reach many homebound and disabled learners, as well as those from rural communities.

The workflow consisted of a coordinated effort between Vivalon, CTN, KBS Mobility, and the learners to be served.

WORKFLOW

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OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

Vivalon programs serve older adults, adults with disabilities, family caregivers, and residents in long-term care facilities (including at their own facility) in Marin County, California.

After partnering with Vivalon, Community Tech Network created promotional flyers, posters, and newsletter articles in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Vivalon distributed these materials to recruit potential Home Connect program participants.

Vivalon staff were listed as the point of contact on the English and Spanish flyers. They would meet with folks who were interested in the program and then refer qualified individuals to CTN using an online referral form. Since Vivalon does not have any Vietnamese-speaking staff members, a CTN Vietnamese-bilingual instructor was listed as the point of contact on the Vietnamese promotional materials.

Vivalon also identified candidates through their existing social service programs and informed their clients directly about the opportunity to

receive free devices, technology classes, and data plans for six months through the Home Connect program. Similarly, qualified individuals would be referred to CTN via the online form.

To recruit Vietnamese speakers to participate in the program, Vivalon turned to two Vietnamese-bilingual volunteers who help with its fall prevention program at a community center in the Canal area of Marin. These volunteers promoted the program among their Vietnamese community members and then directed potential program participants to CTN's Vietnamese-bilingual instructor for additional information. The bilingual instructor from CTN handled the online forms and intake processes for both Vivalon and CTN when enrolling Vietnamese-speaking learners in the program.

After a few months, CTN's Spanish-bilingual staff member took on a similar role, serving as the Spanish-speaking point of contact for potential participants while also completing the necessary forms to enroll individuals in the program.

PRE-TRAINING DIGITAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

After the online referral was submitted by either Vivalon or a CTN bilingual staff member, a CTN instructor contacted each learner in their preferred language to introduce the program. During this initial phone call, the instructor also conducted a pre-training assessment to gauge the learner's comfort with technology and their skill level, as well as their availability. This information was used to design a unique training plan for the learner, based on their needs and interests.

For the Vietnamese-speaking learners, the person who called them was the same person who had introduced the program to them, so they were building a trusting relationship during the intake process, before the training had even started.

"I find it crucial to meet each learner where they are at. I have learned that developing a more individual approach and determining a learner's specific goals helps form a relationship and more conducive learning opportunity." - Phil Schutt, a CTN digital literacy trainer

DEVICES

Approved participants received a Galaxy tablet with an activated SIM card, an unlimited data plan for six months, a stylus, and a case. Everything was mailed directly to their home address from KBS Mobility, Community Tech Network's equipment shipping partner. The devices were already configured in the learner's preferred language.

Participants also received a Learner's Booklet, which included basic instructions and exercises that could be used to follow along with the classes, complete assignments, and practice on their own.

These booklets were available in different languages and were designed by experienced CTN curriculum specialists to meet different cultural needs. For example, Spanish-speakers often keep in touch with their loved ones through the messaging platform WhatsApp, while Vietnamese learners are more likely to use an app called Zalo.

The package with the Learner's Booklet included a welcome letter with the instructor's name and contact information for the learner's convenience.

Each learner was offered up to five hours of one-on-one, personalized, virtual classes in the language of their choice and/or the opportunity to join drop-in, online group Q&A sessions to receive ongoing tech support.

DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING

Instructors would call the learner over the phone and guide them through the process of turning on AnyDesk, a screen-sharing technology which was pre-installed on their tablet. AnyDesk allows the trainers to see the learner's screen (without being able to control it). Video conferencing on platforms like Zoom was also an option if learners already had some basic technology skills.



LEARNER JOURNEY: THIEN PHAM

Initially, Thien refused to participate in the classes with CTN, as he insisted that he was only interested in receiving an iPad and that he was confident in his ability to use technology. However, due to the shortage of iPads, Thien was given a Samsung tablet and decided to reach out to CTN for training since he wasn't familiar

with the Android system. During the training, it was revealed that Thien still struggled with many basic functions on a smart device. He also needed help to understand how certain apps could work to support his communication and involvement within his community.

Through dedicated training efforts, Thien's communication landscape underwent a profound transformation. He discovered the versatility of Google Translate, realizing its potential not only for translating written documents from English but also for facilitating real-time conversations with Spanish-, English-, and Chinese- speaking individuals in his community using the app's microphone feature.

Additionally, Thien learned that he could use the Vietnamese keyboard to type special characters or add tones to words so that his messages could be understood better by the recipients in his home country. This was a very exciting and transformative experience for Thien as he no longer has any language barriers that can prevent him from connecting with his community and loved ones.

Many learners appreciated the remote format, as they were able to attend the classes from the comfort of their own homes. It also allowed homebound individuals and those who live in very remote, rural areas to still participate.

"[This program allows us] to reach rural clients that may live hours away from a computer lab and not otherwise have had access to such services."

-Kari Gray, CTN's Digital Equity Program Director

Stephanie McNally, Vivalon's Director of Healthy Aging, noted, *"Providing one-on-one: support [to clients] is challenging for a nonprofit, and especially if we want to reach homebound individuals and rural communities. We really appreciate that CTN is helping us round out our offerings and helping us do things that we could not do without them."*

If a learner missed a class, the CTN instructor would make up to four attempts to contact them and reschedule. After that, Vivalon provided additional support in trying to follow up with learners who were unresponsive.

Sometimes, program participants would ignore initial calls because they were unfamiliar with CTN. This is what happened in the case of five women from Cafecito, Vivalon's Hispanic social group.

Vivalon identified the women as candidates for Home Connect since none of them owned a smartphone or computer and therefore did not attend any of Vivalon's on-site technology training. After being referred to Community Tech Network, none of them responded to the CTN instructor's attempts to contact them and could not receive their devices.

In an attempt to quite literally *"meet the learners where they were,"* Vivalon invited CTN to offer the women an intake session and three group technology classes during their weekly Cafecito gatherings. This highlights the two organizations' ability to adapt to circumstances as needed.

"When the learners learned how to use Google Lens to translate, it was mind-blowing. They always get flyers and now they know what the flyers say."

- Diana Olivares, a CTN Spanish-bilingual digital literacy instructor

"[Technology] helps sharpen my brain."

- Joy, a 75-year-old Corte Madera, CA resident

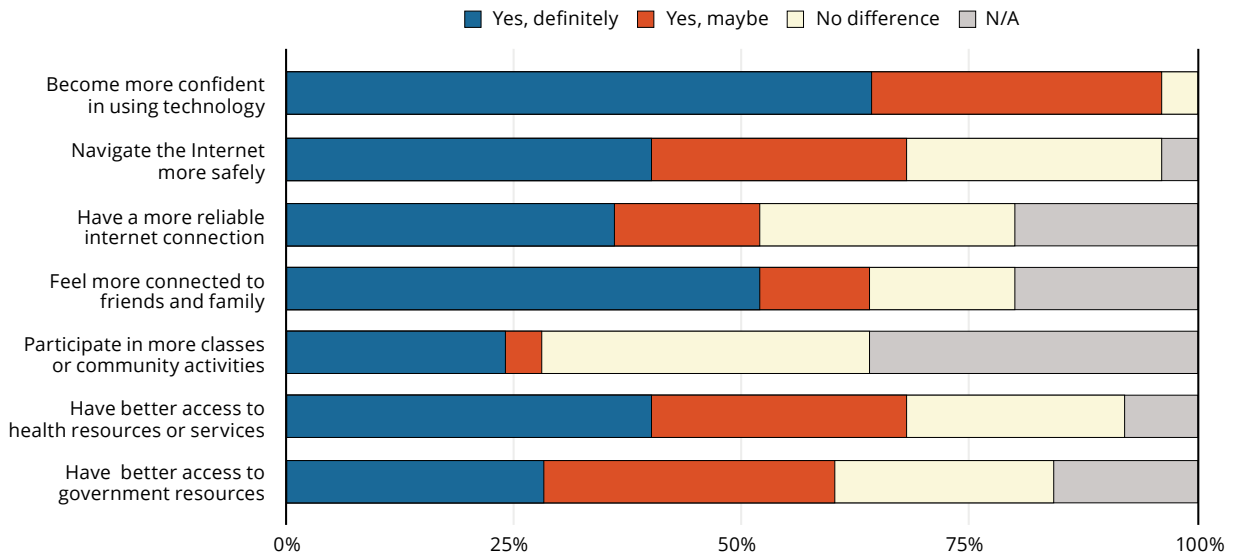
SERVICE COMPLETION AND ONGOING SUPPORT

"Learning to use technology definitely will open other opportunities for me."

- Lauren, a 65-year-old Novato, CA resident

Learners could end their training after any number of lessons. At the last lesson, instructors assessed the learner's digital skills on a final "Activity Form."

Has the program enabled you to... ?



Customer satisfaction and program evaluation surveys were also conducted. Because CTN staff were Vietnamese-speaking, Vivalon could get feedback from their Vietnamese-speaking clients for the first time.

“Now I can see my appointments and messages from my doctor online. I can also find my medical history and prescriptions easier.”

- Moc, a 63-year-old San Rafael, CA resident

Once a learner completed the amount of one-on-one classes that they requested, they were invited to continue their training in-person with Vivalon at the Health Living site or by attending CTN’s virtual Q&A sessions for ongoing tech support. Weekly (Cantonese and Mandarin), biweekly (Spanish), and monthly (English) sessions are provided by CTN instructors and volunteers. Q&A sessions in Vietnamese will be offered in the future.

CONNECTIVITY

Securing affordable internet access for its community members was one of Vivalon’s primary goals. Asking clients about their home internet access helped identify candidates for the program and added another opportunity for engagement.

“If people have Medicare, then they should have internet access.” - Michele Levine, Vivalon’s Healthy Aging Program Manager

CTN provided six months of complimentary data plans for Vivalon learners while also assisting participants in finding affordable home internet services, ensuring continued access to their devices beyond the initial period.

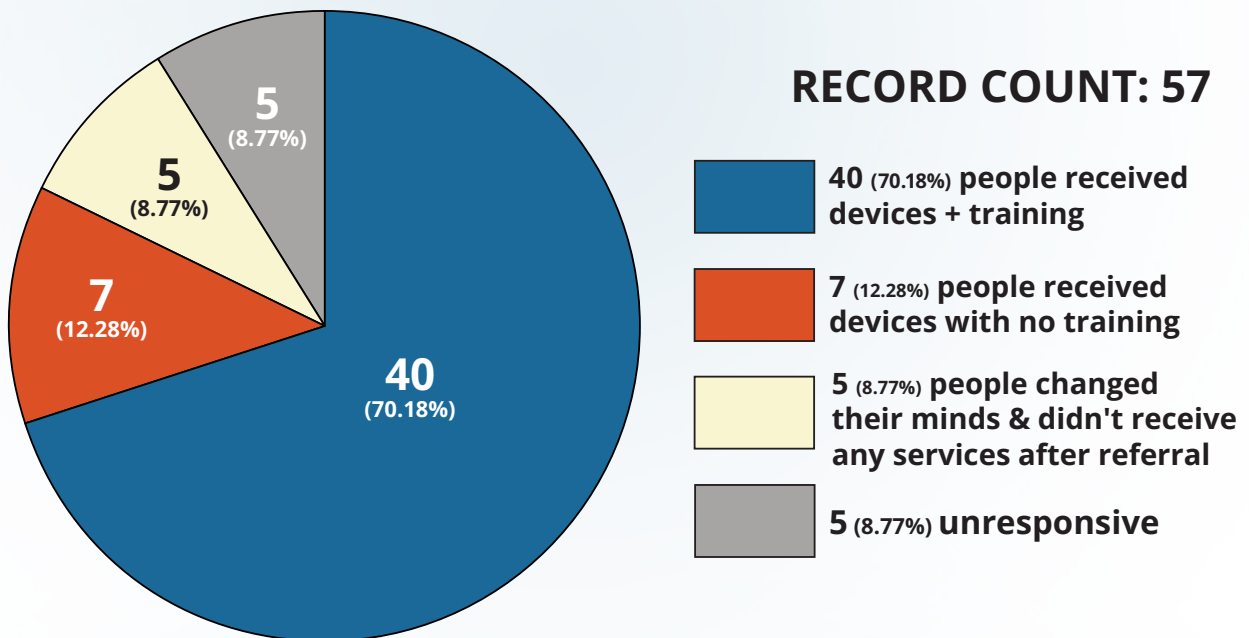
Until the program was discontinued, CTN instructors informed learners of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which was a federally-funded program that offered eligible, low-income households discounts on their monthly internet bills. The instructors were available to guide participants through the ACP application process or to assist them in exploring alternative low-cost internet options.

RESULTS AND OUTPUTS

Over the course of this program, Vivalon referred a total of 57 learners to Home Connect.

CTN distributed devices to 47 of these individuals, 40 of whom opted to complete digital skills training. Seven learners received devices but declined training or services.

Additionally, five learners withdrew from the program and five were unresponsive.



In total, CTN provided 235 hours of digital skills training during the course of 133 class sessions.

LESSONS LEARNED



All programs need the same level of attention from CTN.

Often, CTN works on county- or state-wide initiatives that serve 500+ learners. However, programs such as Vivalon's that have fewer participants require the same level of attention to detail, careful planning, and customer service as those with more learners and activities.

Emerging program team leaders can learn a lot from working on smaller, limited programs

CTN processes may remain the same for similar program delivery models (i.e. virtual, one-on-one classes vs. in-person, group training), regardless of the program size. When staff become comfortable and proficient with the remote program service delivery design, they can apply that knowledge to confidently lead similar initiatives in the future.

Allow time to adjust workflow.

After the program began, CTN revised its workflow to better accommodate new Vietnamese- and Spanish-speaking clients at Vivalon. This involved creating new outreach materials, setting up dedicated phone lines for each language to connect with bilingual instructors, integrating Vivalon's survey data into CTN's survey, and communicating the new procedures with instructors responsible for handling public inquiries. However, these updates led to delays in program delivery.

Clear and consistent communication is important for a successful partnership.

Weekly check-ins and consistent reporting helped Vivalon and CTN identify learners who needed more attention. Because there were regular updates on learner progress, Vivalon and CTN were, for

example, able to pivot to an in-person group class when needed to meet the training deliverables by the end of the contract.

Relationship-building is much more important than a flyer when recruiting participants.

At the beginning of the program, Vivalon tried to recruit Vietnamese participants by distributing flyers at their food bank and at the Canal Alliance community center, where Vietnamese-speaking volunteers led fall prevention classes.

However, there was initially some hesitancy among Vietnamese folks in signing up for the program. In particular, Vivalon observed that many individuals within the Vietnamese community were confused about virtual training and didn't understand that learning could occur remotely, outside of a traditional classroom setting.

Additionally, because both Vietnamese volunteers from the fall prevention program were over 70-years-old themselves, they didn't use the internet in their everyday lives and didn't know what is possible with digital skills. Thus, they couldn't fully explain the benefits of being online to potential Home Connect program participants until after they had received devices and training themselves.

As a result, Vivalon initially did not get the response that it had hoped for when promoting Home Connect. However, by the end of the program, word-of-mouth promotion in the Vietnamese community from learners who had participated in the training had a much greater impact than flyers.

In general, outreach by a trusted community member is typically the most effective for recruiting program participation in communities that aren't very familiar with CTN.

Robust Digital Needs Assessments are incredibly important at the beginning of any program.

If CTN had conducted a more robust Digital Needs Assessment (DNA) with Vivalon before the program started, strategies for more effective outreach to potential program participants could have been identified.

CTN's DNA tool measures a partner organization's preparedness and evaluates their capacity to deliver digital literacy services, enabling CTN to tailor its offerings accordingly. For instance, a DNA assessment would have revealed that Vivalon's Spanish-speaking staff lacked the capacity to serve as points of contact for Spanish-speaking learners, which would have prompted CTN to suggest utilizing its own staff for this purpose from the beginning of the project.

A robust DNA process would have also engaged partner staff and built trust, along with a shared understanding of the issues.

Detailed procedure documents help new staff onboard more quickly

Detailed procedure documents help new staff onboard more quickly. Both CTN and Vivalon experienced numerous staff transitions during this initiative (see section below). When either organization's staff changed, services were delayed as new team members had to familiarize themselves with the program.

If clients are geographically remote, data plans may not serve their home location.

Marin County includes many rural areas which are not currently served by home internet service providers (ISPs) and/or cellular data providers. Without wifi or cellular data plans available in their communities, several learners had to use the Vivalon site itself to access the internet after receiving their devices. The intake interview was then updated to ask whether internet service is available at the learner's home.

English-speaking learners were much more comfortable and had more experience using the devices.

Beyond just the "Basics" Learner Workbook, a "Beyond the Basics" curriculum or "Useful Apps and Sites" document would be useful for learners who have some digital skills and simply need support to become more comfortable and independent online.

Ongoing support guarantees continuing learning.

Several learners reached out to their instructor for additional support after their initial training. Although CTN could respond to additional requests for support and offered virtual Q&A sessions, it was really useful that Vivalon offers ongoing in-person classes and one-on-one tutoring as well.

Staffing

Both CTN and Vivalon underwent major staff transitions during this program. While such turnover created new opportunities to review the project's

workflow, deliverables, and goals, it also caused delays and complications.

Community Tech Network's Program Manager (who launched the initiative) as well as two lead instructors (one Vietnamese-speaking and one Spanish-speaking) all left CTN while this project was still ongoing.

In particular, since it was critical to have a point of contact and bilingual instructor for the Vietnamese-speaking public, CTN had to recruit a replacement as soon as possible. Meanwhile, after the Spanish-speaking instructor left, several other Spanish-bilingual staffers had to share the responsibility of managing the Spanish phone line that potential program participants called with inquiries. An instructor from a different project had to take over the actual digital skills training.

On the Vivalon side, the director who initially contacted CTN to develop the program left halfway through its completion. Additionally, due to high staff turnover among Vivalon's program managers and coordinators, the lead point of contact with CTN from Vivalon changed three times.

As a result, CTN had to re-introduce the program to new Vivalon staff several times as the initiative progressed. Vivalon staff were less familiar with the concept of a remote service delivery model and each new staff member had a lot of questions about CTN's processes.

However, both CTN and Vivalon staff were able to handle the onboarding and transitions by regularly updating the workflow and sharing documentation across teams. Such collaboration can allow projects to continue to run smoothly

in the midst of major staff transitions. During this program, CTN explored its role in an established ecosystem of digital skills training. It did so by offering remote classes to learners who lacked access to in-person options. While Vivalon was committed to serving its off-site learners, it faced challenges in effectively engaging them due to limited systems and resources.

This initiative demonstrated CTN's ability to provide valuable remote learning

opportunities not only to Vivalon but also to other partners that exclusively serve their clients on-site or may not have the language capacity on their staff to support all of their potential learners.

With its experienced, bilingual staff, tailored curriculum, and support services, Community Tech Network can effectively serve both learners and the agencies supporting them.



LEARNER STORIES: PATRICIA AKROOSH

Patricia, a former Pan Am flight attendant, real estate agent, and radio DJ, has been a resident of Marin County for over 50 years. While not a total beginner to technology, Patricia had become overwhelmed, frustrated, and confused by all her different devices and accounts. She admits that she took the training, “more out of necessity than joy. I want to become more

comfortable with the technology world and the internet.” She was often resetting passwords and forgetting them, so she was only able to use each of her devices for a limited time.

Patricia and her instructor spent a lot of time syncing all of her devices together and resetting her passwords across devices. She bought a new notebook, and all of her passwords are now written down in one place.

She now is “feeling more comfortable and safe online.”

It was also important for Patricia to feel safe at home: one of her goals was to set up a new fall alert system. With the assistance of her CTN instructor, Patricia purchased and set up Alexa Bluetooth speakers. Thanks to Alexa Emergency Assist, she now has a simple yet effective emergency fall alert system, which is saving her a lot of money compared with her previous system.

Patricia really enjoyed working with her “very patient and available for questions” instructor and is more confident using technology after her training. She particularly enjoys being “able to have regular Zoom and Facetime visits with my family. It helps me feel more connected.”

SUMMARY



During this program, CTN explored its role in an established ecosystem of digital skills training. It did so by offering remote classes to learners who lacked access to in-person options. While Vivalon was committed to serving its off-site learners, it faced challenges in effectively engaging them due to limited systems and resources.

This initiative demonstrated CTN's ability to provide valuable remote learning opportunities not only to Vivalon but also to other partners that exclusively serve their clients on-site or may not have the language capacity on their staff to support all of their potential learners.

With its experienced, bilingual staff, tailored curriculum, and support services, Community Tech Network can effectively serve both learners and the agencies supporting them.

"It's nice to learn something new and it is so vital to the world today." - Patricia, an 84-year-old Novato, CA resident