

Connected Canadians



Connecting older adults with technology, training and support



Bay Ward Councillor Theresa Kavanagh & Ottawa Community Housing CEO Stephane Giguere (back left) address a workshop conducted by Connected Canadians, an Ottawa-based organization that provides technical support services free of charge to older adults in the National Capital Region and across the country.

by Stuart Fraser, District 27

“We believe digital literacy is a human right.”

Founded in January of 2018, Connected Canadians (CC for short) is a federally incorporated, nonprofit organization whose philosophy is simple: “We believe digital literacy is a human right. Our mandate is to reduce isolation and loneliness

amongst older adults by promoting digital literacy skills and providing technology training and support.”

Connected Canadians’ long-term goal is no less ambitious: “By 2030, we want all Canadian seniors to have access to free technology training and support.”

Headquartered in Ottawa, Connected Canadians is funded

by donations, sponsorships and, occasionally, by grants.

Earlier this year, CC was awarded an Economic Development Grant from the City of Ottawa to train and temporarily hire hospitality sector workers laid off due to COVID-19. Individuals in this program are trained to provide online virtual assistance to seniors.

Helping Ottawa seniors connect via technology

"You're never too old to learn. I'm a good example. I'm learning all the time." Bay Ward Councillor Theresa Kavanagh was addressing a group of Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) seniors enrolled in a workshop designed to help them improve their digital literacy skills. That was in February of 2020, just before the pandemic hit.

Led by a cadre of Connected Canadians volunteers, workshops like this provided seniors

with the skills needed to connect with friends and loved ones, and to improve their quality of life. As the largest social housing provider in Ottawa, OCH seniors, along with those of other Ottawa communities such as Bruyère Village, Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre, and Westwood Retirement Living, were frequent recipients of face-to-face training.

When Ottawa Community Housing CEO Stephane Giguere told workshop participants that "Connected Canadians brings something special to break isolation for residents," he couldn't have known at the time

what was coming. The workshop date was just one month shy of the COVID-19 lockdown, which changed everything. Elderly Canadians suddenly found themselves more isolated, lonely and physically cut off from others than ever before. Their needs became more urgent.

It was the advent of COVID-19 that resulted in the need for a sudden and significant shift in how Connected Canadian volunteers deliver services. Going forward, all interactions between CC and its senior clients would have to be virtual, with all mentorship done online.

(See "Restructuring" next page)

Connected Canadians relies upon a network of skilled volunteers. Could you be one?

In its ongoing quest for qualified volunteers, CC is hoping to tap into the vast wellspring of talent and resources to be found among retired education professionals.

Canadians coming from technology backgrounds, and who, collectively, speak 12 languages.

Currently, volunteers also include active and retired specialists from the tech sector, former government workers and a few retired teachers and post-secondary educators.

Volunteers with a high comfort level in technology are paired with senior clients. Working by phone and online using a host of digital tools, they tackle clients' various technology challenges.

One-on-one remote sessions are normally 60 to 90 minutes in length. Examples of topics covered are: setting up and using email; video chatting (FaceTime, Skype and Zoom); texting on a smartphone;

Facebook and YouTube basics; Internet safety; troubleshooting common computer problems, etc. >>

Are you a retired educator who is interested in volunteering with Connected Canadians? Please sign up using our volunteer form:

<https://www.connectedcanadians.ca/volunteer>.

You may also use this form if you would like to learn more about how you can contribute in some other way.

Connected Canadians is primarily driven by volunteers, many of whom are highly skilled new

➤ **COVID-19 caused a significant restructuring of Connected Canadians service delivery**



Co-founders Tas Damen & Emily Jones Joannis

Since its inception, and prior to the COVID-19 shutdown, CC assisted more than 300 Ottawa area seniors with in-person technology training workshops. No longer being able to conduct physical face-to-face meetings, however, presented a massive challenge to co-founders Emily Jones

Joannis and Tas Damen (CEO and CIO respectively).

“As we serve a vulnerable population, we suspended in-person programming indefinitely to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our senior clients and team,” Tas, a Software Architect by vocation, explained.

In addition to their regular free technical support offerings, CC has established several programs in direct response to COVID-19.

“Senior isolation is an ever-present issue that needs an equally sustained response,” says Emily, who previous to CC worked in Information Technology for over 15 years. “Some of the ways we are addressing this need are through programs such as remote social gaming for seniors, support for families of hospital patients, to name a few.”

Tas and Emily emphasize how important it is during this challenging time to offer free remote support.

“We are committed to helping our clients stay connected with friends and loved ones, and so we are pleased to offer free remote support over the phone or online,” the co-founders agree. ■

Visit the Connected Canadians website: <https://www.connectedcanadians.ca/>

Connected Canadians offers free technical training and support for seniors and older adults. If you need help with Zoom, FaceTime or other video conferencing tools, or want to learn more about how to use technology to connect to online support groups, learning events, and social programs, you can contact us in several ways:

- In Ottawa, call 613-699-7896
- Outside of the Ottawa area, call 1-877-304-5813 (toll free)
- Or sign up for help at: <https://www.connectedcanadians.ca/programs>

Make a donation to Connected Canadians: <https://www.connectedcanadians.ca/donate>