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OHA Awards \$200,000 to Local Groups Helping to Bridge the Digital Divide for Older Adults and Family Caregivers

Funded programs will equip grandparents, homebound elders, and caregivers in communities hard hit by COVID-19 with digital tools and training

PROVIDENCE, RI – As part of its digiAGE initiative, the [Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging \[r20.rs6.net\]](https://www.oha.ri.gov) (OHA) today announced \$200,000 in grants to ten local organizations, working to connect more older adults and their families to technology. Through grants of \$10,000 to \$30,000, funded agencies will equip residents living in areas hard hit by the pandemic with smart devices, internet services, and related training to help them better access online resources, work and study remotely, and virtually connect with family and friends.

“The internet is a basic necessity today,” said OHA Director Rosamaria Amoros Jones. “So much of how we manage our lives and connect with one another and to services is driven by technology now; yet inequities persist, with many older adults and families in lower-income neighborhoods lacking access to, or fluency in, digital tools. I am thrilled to support the work of these local agencies to get more of our neighbors connected. Kudos to all awardees. I look forward to the tremendous impact these efforts will make.”

According to the Pew Research Center, an estimated 41 percent of Rhode Island adults age 65+ are not broadband users, with the least usage among older adults living in lower-income communities. Over 25 percent of older adults in the state aren’t online. The COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacts older adults, has magnified the importance of technology to bridging physical distance and fostering social connection. At the same time, it’s reinforced a deepening strain on caregivers statewide. Grant recipients were selected based on their commitment to advancing equity and providing free, ‘best-in-class’ tech programs to older-adult caregivers that support diverse language learners.

“The ‘Grands Get Digital’ Project will provide caregiver participants with laptops, hot-spots, one-on-one IT mentoring, and interactive trainings to reconnect them to family, friends, and community”, said Magdalena Andreozzi, Founder & CEO of Grands Flourish, a local organization serving grandparents raising grandchildren. “These virtual-circles with peer-to-peer supports will enable our grand-families to feel less isolated and more connected helping them gain confidence to become empowered, engaged, and inspired to navigate the underpinnings of everyday life both virtually and successfully.”

The complete list of grant recipients:

- *Carelink* (\$20,576) – to support caregivers of adult day health center participants through investments in technology and education.
- *Cornerstone* (\$17,000) – to partner with local colleges to educate caregivers on the benefits of connectivity and to offer remote teaching and learning sessions.
- *Center for South East Asians* (\$10,000) – to help elders virtually connect to family and friends and combat social isolation through investments in devices, internet services, training, and translation services.
- *Town of Cumberland* (\$16,750) – to support digital literacy among older residents to better connect them to health information, with specific focus on pneumonia, influenza and COVID vaccine content.
- *digiAge Newport* (\$21,100) – to engage caregivers in supportive, educational and health/wellness programs, and social online opportunities through the use of smart devices and internet services.
- *Grand Flourish* (\$22,720) – to enhance digital literacy among grandparents through one-on-one telephone mentoring and other supports.
- *Higher Ground* (\$22,064) – to increase digital access and literacy among isolated elders through the purchase of smart devices and internet services – and the provision of culturally relevant, digital literacy training.
- *Tri-County CAP* (\$23,700) – to provides a virtual method for caregivers to interact with those in their care during times when face to face contact is not possible or in between routine in-person visits.
- *Village Common of RI* (\$18,260) – to strengthen Virtual Village Caregiver Support Circles in Rhode Island and support more older adult caregivers in accessing the internet.
- *YMCA of Greater Providence* (\$27,679) – to assist older residents in areas hard hit by the pandemic with accessing culturally relevant, digital tools and training.

“During the pandemic and its related uncertainty, OHA helped our organization to “pivot” and provide comfort to communities in need,” said Kobi Dennis, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion for the YMCA of Greater Providence. “Over this last year, we’ve worked together to address food insecurity and supply thousands of culturally relevant meals to local seniors and their loved ones. Through this latest partnership, we will bring that same cultural awareness and commitment to equity to expand digital literacy and access among older adults and their families in communities devastated by COVID.”

Rhode Island’s digiAGE Collaborative is comprised of a growing list of industry, government, academic, and community partners working together to bridge the digital divide for older adults through coordinated investments in smart devices, internet services, digital literacy training, and online content creation. For more information about the digiAGE Collaborative and Rhode Island’s efforts to promote digital equity, visit www.oha.ri.gov/digiAGE [r20.rs6.net].

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