

Media Release



Digital Divide Microgrants Distributed to Community Organizations

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There is a digital divide in the District of Timiskaming: a discrepancy between those who have access to information and communication technologies and the benefits they provide and those who don't. This divide can be the result of many factors, including high costs for technology and online access and limited internet connectivity in rural Northern Ontario. This digital divide leaves many without access to digitally delivered health and well-being programs, services, and information.

Thanks to funding from the District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board, United Way, Temiskaming Foundation, and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's Social Services Relief Funding, and partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association Timiskaming Health Unit and various local community partners including Telus, launched the Closing the Digital Divide pilot in October 2020 and the project will wrap up October 2022.

The Closing the Digital Divide project aimed to partially address this inequity through the provision of technology and Internet to families living with low income and individuals and seniors who experience barriers to access, as identified through our partnering agencies. This pilot project distributed devices and/or services to over 400 community members in our district. When counting for other household members who benefitted from these devices and/or services, over 750 people in total were helped by this project. One recipient said, "It's very nice to have internet now, so I can keep in touch with my daughter, and my family." And another reported "I never would have been able to pass my semester without this laptop, so I am super grateful."

"While the COVID-19 pandemic exposed many issues in our communities, it also opened the door to collaboration across organizations and across sectors. The creativity and commitment of project partners are what made this project possible." said Kerry Schubert-Mackey, Director of Strategic Services and Health Promotion at the Timiskaming Health Unit.

While the pilot project is now over, remaining dollars have been distributed to nine community organizations via microgrants to support projects that enable Timiskaming residents to access internet services and technology and develop digital literacy skills. Congratulations to the following organizations who successfully received funds for this purpose – City of Temiskaming Shores Public Library, Pavilion Women's Centre, Employment Options, Centre d'éducation des adultes de New Liskeard, Armstrong Township Public Library, Timiskaming Child Care, Canadian Mental Health Association, Englehart Public Library, and Matachewan First Nation.

Although the project is wrapping up, digital inequities persist. Long-term solutions include government policies, collaboration across sectors, and expansion of digital literacy.

To learn more about solutions as well as the impacts the Closing the Digital Divide project had on the community, including a video story and a full evaluation report, visit <https://www.timiskaminghu.com/90490/Community-Supports#DigitalDivide>

For more information

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