

# Digital Inclusion

Educational and employment success is now tied to computer and internet use. Increasingly, governments and other public bodies are providing information and services on-line. This reality requires that people have 1) access to computers and the internet and 2) the skills to use and keep abreast of continually changing technology. However, not everyone does.

Community organizations and social agencies need to sustain technical infrastructures and maintain a web presence. This may challenge limited budgets and could result in a mission drift.

During the early 2000's, the federal government supported the Community Access Program (CAP) to establish public internet and computer networks. The purpose was to create a consistent standard of free public access across the country. However, it has not been possible to sustain a consistent standard of access since 2010 when funding for the CAP program was cut.

Computers provided through the local network, ConnectKW, are used over 40,000 times each year and usage is not decreasing. ConnectKW users tend to be those with limited finances. In addition, older adults and immigrants/refugees are the most frequent participants in entry level training for computer and internet skills.

## We've still got a way to go ...

- There is no longer a national standard for community public internet access.
- Digital inclusion continues to be an issue with technology out of reach for many.
- Not being able to participate can limit opportunities and lead to isolation.
- There are challenges with keeping up with changes in hardware and software.
- Not everyone has the confidence, skill or capacity to learn and re-learn changing software and this can limit opportunities and lead to demoralization.

## Things to talk about:

- What are the benefits of having public bodies such as governments and school boards providing more services on-line?
- Who benefits from having this on-line access and who does not?
- Who has a role to ensure barriers and challenges to access are reduced or removed?
- How can public officials work with community organizations and networks (such as ConnectKW) to ensure our community is digitally inclusive?