

Enterprise Community Partners

Transcript of Webinar

2021 ConnectHomeUSA

Community Spotlight CRHA Partners to Bridge the Digital Divide

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*Transcript by
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Caila Prendergast: Welcome everyone. I think we have a good crew and hopefully some more folks will join us as we're going through our intro. But good afternoon, good morning. My name is Caila Prendergast, and I'll be one of your hosts today, along with Dina Lehmann-Kim, the HUD ConnectHome program manager.

I just have a few housekeeping items that I want to quickly go over before we get started. If you've joined one of these webinars before, same housekeeping items. Just always want to review in case we have folks joining us for the first time. So today our speakers from the Chesapeake Redevelopment and Housing Authority and the Eastern Virginia Medical School will share their knowledge with us for the first part of the presentation. And all remaining time will be reserved for questions.

There are two ways that people typically ask questions. The first and most common way is to just simply type your question in the chat box, and I will read it out loud to the panelists, and they'll respond verbally. And then the second way is if you have a really big question with a lot of background or context, or you just want to ask it out loud, you just simply raise your hand with the hand shaped icon in the right hand navigation panel. And I'll be keeping track to see who has their hand raised, and we'll be able to unmute your line so you can ask your question verbally.

You can also if you want to ask it verbally, just send me a note in the chat and I can unmute your line that way because sometimes I will miss a raised hand. But that being said, all participants are muted upon entry. And so if you're having any technical difficulties or any audio difficulties, just let us know, send us a message in the chat, and we'll do what we can to help you out.

I'll just mention that sometimes there's a little bit of a glitch in the WebEx system and participants aren't muted when they enter. So just doublecheck for me really quick to make sure you're muted because we want to avoid any feedback during the webinar. The session is being recorded and will be available on HUD Exchange following the webinar, along with the PowerPoint slides that I'll send out to everyone who attended following the webinar.

And then lastly, immediately following the session you'll receive an invitation to complete a survey. I'll pop up in your browser. On mine it asks my permission to do the survey. So just be on the lookout for that. And we really do look at those and ask that you take a moment to complete them and share any ideas that you have with us for improving these webinars or a webinar topic idea that you think would be really helpful to you and your community.

So I think with that I'm going to pass it over to Dina to kick us off.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Thank you so much, Caila. And thank you to our participants for being with us today. Today's a really important session given where we are with COVID and just the need to continue to build partnerships in our community so that we can better serve our residents. We have two folks who have really deep experience, and I'm really honored and pleased that they are here with us today and that they've taken time out of their very busy schedules to be with us.

So let me first introduce our first speaker, Jaclyn Merrills. She is a family self-sufficiency coordinator with the Chesapeake Redevelopment and Housing Authority, where she's worked for almost three years supporting both housing choice voucher and public housing residents in helping them reach their goals for self-sufficiency. She has over 10 years of experience in partnership building through her time in AmeriCorps, as well as work in the nonprofit and public sectors.

After Jaclyn speaks, we'll hear from Matt Herman, who serves as the associate director of the M. Foscue Brock Institute for Community and Global Health, and is an instructor of pediatrics in the Division of Community Health and Research at Eastern Virginia Medical School. Matt has over 15 years' experience in public health, with focused experience collaborating with PHAs, local school systems, and community stakeholders, to improve health outcomes and address health disparities in eastern Virginia.

With that, I will pass the mic over to Jaclyn for her to start her presentation. Thank you.

Jaclyn Merrills: Hi. Good afternoon everyone. I'm Jaclyn Merrills and my role today is really just to give a little context, a little background on how our partnership with EVMS began, and also just to give a huge shout out to the amazing work that EVMS is doing, not just in our housing authority, but in many others in our area. So I'm really honored to have the opportunity to spotlight all the amazing work that they are doing.

So I'm going to give a little background, then I'm going to pass the baton on to Matthew Herman from EVMS. And he'll talk in a little more detail about the grant that he and his team have been working on. And then we'll collaboratively discuss some partnership building tips that we've learned along the way.

So Chesapeake Redevelopment Housing Authority is located in southeastern Virginia. It's in an area called Hampton Roads. You might be most familiar with the city of Norfolk which is located kind of east northeast to us. CRHA serves roughly 465 public housing units in five communities throughout the city. And we are also serving 1,400 to 1,500 housing choice voucher families.

CRHA became a ConnectHome community in 2019. And while attending our first ConnectHome annual conference, we learned that Portsmouth and Norfolk, who are neighboring communities to ours, were also serving as ConnectHome communities. So after that conference we decided to join forces and we created the first ConnectHome regional alliance, I guess you could call it, which we call the ConnectHomeUSA Hampton Roads. And we are the first group of ConnectHome communities to join forces to create a regional convening.

So how did CRHA partner with EVMS? This successful partnership is directly in sync to our partnership with ConnectHome Hampton Roads. ConnectHome staff at Norfolk Redevelopment Housing authority had already built a relationship with EVMS in the past from a smoke free housing study that they had done. And then they connected the rest of the ConnectHome Hampton Roads team with Matt and his team to discuss a new COVID-19 study that they were hoping to conduct.

So part of the grant would entail providing technology to our residents in order to assist with conducting the study. So we knew that this was completely in line with our goals as a ConnectHome community. And then it turns out that EVMS had also established a relationship with CRHA through the smoke free housing study in the past as well. So when this partnership was brought to our management, they were more than happy to jump in on the opportunity.

And then over the last several months we've worked collaboratively to identify residents in good standing to participate in their study. And we've participated in monthly check in meetings with them to learn how the study is going and ways that we can continue to collaborate in the future to better the lives of our clients.

And with that, I'll pass on to Matt to go into more detail about the grant.

Matt Herman: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Jaclyn. I just wanted to start off, thank you so much for having me and Jaclyn come present to you guys today to really discuss the meaningful work, and special thanks to Dina and Caila for inviting us to do this. Again we're really attempting to make some waves here in eastern Virginia in the Hampton Roads region. And I really think this partnership is really a great example of what we can really do as a medical institution, research university, working with the community, alongside the community, and collaborating with them.

So first I just wanted to give a little bit of background on Eastern Virginia Medical School. We are a small medical and health professions school nestled in Norfolk, Virginia. If you have not been to Norfolk before, please come take a visit. We'd love to have you. We are a small school, but we are mighty. We graduate a class of about 150 medical students that matriculate the first year. We have an MPH program, also an art therapy program which is hugely successful across the region.

As you can see from our vision, we really want to be connected in the most community oriented school of medicine and health professions in the US. We were built by the community, for the community, way back when. And we want to continue that and really mirror that across our region to really connect with the community, collaborative with the community, and say community over, and over, and over, so we get a better understanding of what the community needs are.

The three pillars of the medical school are education, clinical care, and research. And I do want to spotlight the Pediatrics Division of Community Health and Research. This division does a lot of meaningful work across our region. I'm a part of that. And that's how this grant came together along with a lot of my colleagues at the Eastern Virginia Medical School, Hampton University, and Norfolk State University in the Hampton Roads region. Next slide please.

So just to discuss an overarching I guess theme of what this study was on. We applied for this study [inaudible] through the NIH, National Institutes of Health. This was looking at COVID particularly on when COVID first hit and we had, like Jacklyn alluded to, some relationships

with NRHA, and PRHA, and some other housing authorities across the region, but really wanted to look deeper into COVID-19, and how it is affecting our PHA [inaudible].

Really when the testing started to ramp up, and then vaccines down the road, we really wanted to work alongside the community to get a better understanding of what they are facing on a daily basis, what the single mom of four is doing with it, and if she gets COVID what does she do. And really what are the programmatic, systematic changes that we can really help and assist with along with our community partners, of course through making meaningful efforts and change within those communities.

We collaborated right now with eight public housing authorities. Many of these housing authorities, like Jacklyn stated, we did not have a long standing relationship with. I myself have been involved with [inaudible] redevelopment and housing authority for a number of years, and have worked alongside residents doing door to door surveys, smoke free education. So a lot of things that we've built trust and relationships with that. [inaudible] NRHA and some of the others ones, we really built this collaborative from the region.

So the eight PHAs are from eight cities, including the city of Richmond, sort of in central Virginia, along with all the other big cities in our area, which include Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Suffolk, Portsmouth, Norfolk, Hampton, and Newport News. Hampton Roads is really a unique area. We do have a lot of water, so we're separated by water. So with COVID hitting, and I think many of our meetings and collaborations moving to virtual, I think that really aided in really setting up this collaboration. And not to say whenever we do come out of this pandemic, whenever that may be, we're looking forward to meeting in person to continue this collaboration with the eight public housing authorities. Next slide please.

So the main premise of the study again was to really look at COVID [inaudible] vaccine support, vaccine testing. So what we did was we wanted to provide tablets with internet access. So we worked alongside Portsmouth, and Jaclyn in Chesapeake, in Norfolk, through the ConnectHome. We worked with T-Mobile to supply the internet access. And we purchased through the grant funding Amazon Fire tablets. These are pretty inexpensive, but they are equipped to do video conferencing, telehealth which is most important, and of course we provided that internet access. We found when working with our PHA collaborative, many of the residents of course, I'm sure you guys are nodding your head yes, that we don't have the full connectivity to where we would like to be able to support our residents through especially during COVID.

We found with COVID that the seniors were really lacking in connectivity if they didn't have a cell phone. Many of our residents that we worked with were still using flip phones, or Trac phones, or whatever the case may be, that they weren't able to make their telehealth appointments. So this again was another opportunity to better connect them. But of course using this connectivity with them, we were able to talk to the residents that we, for lack of a better term, recruited into the study, to really get a better idea of what's going on surrounding COVID.

Just to talk a little bit about our regional community advisory board, and I apologize if I'm talking too fast [!], I drank way too much caffeine. So our community advisory board, this was a premise that had been going on for a number of years that started with Norfolk. And with this

study [inaudible], we expanded this to become a regional community advisory board. This community advisory board that we started with and now expanded, are residents from each of the different public housing communities.

We had a core base of around 68 from Norfolk. And we've expanded to have representation from each of the different eight different housing authorities across our region. We meet with them on a regular basis weekly every Thursday. We sit down, meet via Zoom, with the tablets that we provided to the community advisory board members. And we just have different topics that we sit and discuss, mainly surrounding COVID, sticking to our COVID study. But we talk about many other different things, really just what's going on, and try to get the pulse of what's going on within their community. Again with representation, we have a better understanding as the research team and the public housing team that we work with, better understanding of what's going on within the community.

Not only do we work with the leadership, but we know it's super important to really work alongside the residents to get a better understanding. This really includes streamlined education and case management of what's going on. If there was something that came up within one of the community advisory boards or one of our PHA collaborative meetings, we can be responsive, connect them with a community partner, or provide resources, or provide suggestions for programmatic stuff. Of course with the funding that we have, it's very limited in what we can. But we are always looking at continued funding to support not only the PHAs at the organization, but also the residents.

And that goes into the next point of really building trust. These two methods and these two approaches to working with the PHAs and then of course the residents [inaudible] community advisory board, and the recruitment into the study, is really trying and attempting to build trust. Trust is earned. And we understand that as a medical institution. Everyone on the team has a lot of experience in public health and community engagement. And we understand that this is super important. We don't want an outside entity coming and say, hey, we're going to give you a tablet and we just need to know all of your business. It's really trying to [inaudible] understand and work with them. If they need something, what can we do to support them. Or what can we do to connect them.

We understand that this internet access is extremely helpful. And so they do have us for two years after either the community advisory board members, I did want to mention this, or the residents who are enrolled, that they get to keep the tablet. Unfortunately with limited funding, we can't extend the internet access. But we're setting up a sustainable option for them to connect directly with the provider, as in T-Mobile, to continue that internet service for a very low fee. And that's been an ongoing discussion with all of our PHA partners.

Again, one more thing on the trust building is working with PHAs, and we'll get into this, is it's really important to have that network. As you can see, Jaclyn, my colleague from Chesapeake, has been instrumental in trying to get this through her public housing authority. Each public housing authority in our area are way different sizes. NRHA is huge. Chesapeake's somewhere in the middle. Suffolk is more rural and small. So it's more a limited capacity. So everyone has different number of staff members where they can really commit.

So I did want to say that we're continuing to build those opportunities with the PHAs. So again we can create that sustainable foundation and model as we work towards the future. So as you can see from the planned future opportunities, we're always thinking of different programs for funding and engagement. We just applied for a mental health grant through NIH that we're hoping to hear back about, to support the mental health in COVID recovery. We all know that the residents of public housing authorities in under resourced areas in our hometowns really needed help yesterday, as we all due in light of COVID. And then who knows what's going to happen in the fall.

So we really want to look at addressing mental health. The need came out of one of our recent meetings about nutrition education, in light of COVID, that it was a lot of obesity problems. So it's a lot of non-exercising people. We're stuck inside. So what can we do to be able to support the residents and organizations. Again it's that two prong approach of trying to address the needs of both the organization and of course the residents.

Lastly, it's really just sustainability of the resident CABs. We also in addition to our adult CABs, our regional adult CABs, we do have a youth advisory board along with NRHA. And we are looking to expand that to make a regional youth advisory board to really get the pulse of what's going on with the youth in eastern Virginia. And again of course sustain and continue to collaborate with our PHAs. That is the most important part, to build that trust in really trying to better understand the needs of the PHAs so they can in turn alongside us better serve the residents. Next slide please.

So that was a quick summary of the COVID grant that we're working on with all our PHAs. So Jaclyn and I really wanted to spend some time on tips for building these partnerships. I will go ahead -- and Jaclyn, please jump in at any time -- Jaclyn did allude to that this partnership between us and the other PHAs came out of the ConnectHome. We're very thankful that ConnectHome was ahead of the curve, especially right before COVID hit, that we got word that our public housing authorities that we've worked with now were already working on building in bridging that digital gap for the residents in our region.

So just to outline some of the stuff, if you're looking at building partnerships, and to take a word from Jaclyn, it's thinking outside the box, you really need that shared vision for change. To better understand the needs of the residents, we need to listen to the residents and the organizations. For example, with bridging the digital divide, really if they don't have technology, are we able to provide technology. Are we able to set up kiosks or computer labs within their housing units. We need to have sort of that shared vision so we can work together.

So when you're thinking of possible partners within your area, it's really good to recognize someone who sort of aligns, that wants to work with you, who wants to engage with you on a continued basis for that sustainable outcome for your residents. Of course you always want to look at credibility and legitimacy of partners. There's lots of community partners out there, myself in Eastern Virginia Medical School, along with my role as the associate director for the Brock Institute, we do so much community engagement and work with so many wonderful people doing great things to really address health disparities and equity more importantly.

But there are many partners that might not be able to have the staffing capacity or the commitment to whatever project we're collaborating on. So make sure that you have those genuine partners that will really come through with you and are in for the long haul. As we know, stuff like this doesn't come on overnight. It really takes a long time to build this capacity. I've been working with Jaclyn, and CRHA, and the other partners since last year. And we're continuing to build a profitable future for all of us as we're looking at more sustainable funding. Again, that goes into the commitment and investment in the partnership.

You definitely need someone as a point person within that organization that you might have in your head of who you want to work with, to be able to communicate on a daily basis, on a weekly basis. Again we meet with the public housing authority together as a larger group, and then also singular as just the housing authority, to really better understand and give updates. But we really need to be able to have that open line of communication back and forth.

Lastly, you really want that core leadership in management with resources. As I mentioned earlier, all the housing authorities are different in every single way, with different resources, different funding streams. So really what can we leverage as the outside organizations to work alongside the PHA or insert your organization that you want to work with, to what they have and what we can do to bolster that. We understand and we know that public housing authorities wish they could probably provide tablets to everyone.

So with this funding we know that we can provide better connectivity, along with that internet resources, to be able to provide not only connection with the research team, but also to use it for internet surfing, watch Netflix, connect with telehealth and clinical. So we all know those things are part of it in boosting that mental health capacity. We're finding at the beginning of the study is many people were missing their medical appointments due to COVID. Even though with all the restrictions and through over a year, they were still missing them.

So we found that giving the tablets and putting them in the hands, mainly in the seniors that we are working with, they were able to connect via the tablet that we provided to their medical home, and have their doctor's appointments. As we know, that's so, so important. So long story short, I'll try to sum this up. Once you sort of look at all those different elements of this mathematical equation, you're really ready for that partnership development. And Jaclyn will speak a little bit more to this. But it's really you need to look all over your region and in your area to really look.

We're a small medical school and we have very limited research capacity, limited clinical. But we're looking to expand that and really address really the health disparities within our community. And that goes into the maximizing that collaboration. You really come up -- the ConnectHome for us and connectivity in light of COVID, that was our reason to initiate the action and really reach out and form the PHA collaborations for eastern Virginia. Again, we're really working on how we can work together and collaborate from the organization level and from the resident level, getting their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about everything, on how we can have sustainable not only outcomes, but direct impact for them.

We really want to continue to work towards that on a long term goal. Again, this project that we're doing here today, I'm so thankful for all the PHAs involved and Jacklyn for what she does with CRHA. It's really building that foundation -- sorry for the cliché, but really to build the foundation so we can have this long term partnership to continue to build and address those health disparities, address mental health, address connectivity, address COVID-27 whenever that comes out. It's one of those things that we want to continue to work alongside each other, just to make for better health.

Jacklyn Merrills: If you go to the next slide. And then just to kind of piggyback on what Matt has been saying, some of our biggest takeaways. Definitely think outside of the box. CRHA, ConnectHome Hampton Roads, we were looking for partners who were going to help us bridge the digital divide, whether that be providing devices, helping with providing connectivity, and also digital learning. And I don't think we would have necessarily thought, well let's get a medical school involved in doing that. And it turned out that this grant with EVMS has actually provided devices, and connectivity, and assisting with the digital learning piece as well. So they're helping us reach our goals in ConnectHome when we might not have necessarily thought of them for that.

So definitely think outside the box. Definitely collaborate with other housing authorities in your region. I know that the ConnectHome Hampton Roads community has been invaluable for us as we think about who we want to partner with, what our goals are, and who in the community could be assisting us with that. And a lot of nonprofits, schools, and different organizations are regional. So you need to think a little bit more regionally when collaborating with partners, sharing those resources, sharing ideas, having that -- at ConnectHome Hampton Roads we had a regional convening. And so all of those partners were able to be in the same room at the same time. And I think that was really helpful for us.

Medical centers, educational institutions, nonprofits. One of our local colleges here has a computer club program. And they were able to provide CRHA with very, very affordable refurbished computers through the ConnectHome program. So that was just something that we collaborated with our ConnectHome Hampton Roads team to find. Involve community leaders, public health officials, hospital executives, voluntary health, chronic disease group leaders, presidents of local businesses, executives of chambers of commerce, community advocates, activists, neighborhood association leaders.

Reach out to organizations that you've worked with in the past, maybe even in other capacities, people that you've already established relationships with. I think in our relationship with EVMS that did make -- it did allow us to get started with ease because management already knew EVMS, we had worked with them in the past. Like Matt had talked about, building that trust, we already had trust with this organization.

Discuss ConnectHome -- if you are a ConnectHome community, I know not everyone on the call is, but if you are, discuss ConnectHome and your goals for ConnectHome with partners who might not seem necessarily to be a direct correlation with technology. Like as you can see with EVMS, that's definitely been the case. I am a family self-sufficiency coordinator, so I'm kind of looking from that lens. If you're also a family self-sufficiency coordinator, work with your

program coordinating committee. Tell them about ConnectHome and what your goals are in your community for bridging the digital divide.

A lot of partners have shared ideas that I didn't know or wouldn't have thought of, such as some Medicaid providers provide computers for students. There's also rewards with specific Medicaid programs that will reward children with gift cards to things for honor roll, and things like that, that when we bring up the need, our community partners come through with great ideas. And so that's all I have. I'm really interested in hearing any questions that everyone might have.

Caila Prendergast: Thanks Jaclyn and Matt for those great presentations. Dina, I don't know if you want to start us off with a question or if you want me to just dive in.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: If there are questions, let's dive in. If not, I have one or two lined up. But yeah, let's dive in, see if there's questions from the audience.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. Yeah. We had one come in. So yeah, just a reminder to folks, you can either type them in the chat or raise your hand and ask verbally. So I'm going to unmute participant Maggie Wells, who has a hand raised. Maggie, did you have a question you wanted to ask? We can't hear you, Maggie. Okay. I'm just going to assume that was an accidental hand raise. We also had a few questions come in about the recording and slides. So this session is being recorded and will be posted on HUD Exchange in the next few weeks. And I will send around the slides to everyone who participated, tomorrow.

Maggie, I see you sent me a note saying you have no audio. No problem. Just go ahead and send your question in the chat. But the one question that did come in is, Jaclyn, can you share some additional partner ideas that you work with in your area? I know they might be different in our area, but we're always looking to see what other housing authorities are working with.

Jaclyn Merrills: Sure. So of course EVMS has been the biggest one. And then we have worked with a local college that provided computers for us, with their computer club. And it was at a very, very low price for us. We've also worked with a computer based group called Girls Computing League. I'm going to look that up and make sure I'm saying it right. And that's not a local resource. Actually that's a countrywide resource when they were providing digital literacy classes online for students. And so that was just a matter of getting the fires out, assisting people with signing up, and picking the classes that they wanted. And then that organization was taking it from there.

We used the computers that we took from -- that we purchased from the local college. We created a computer loaning program. And this was at the very beginning of COVID. That's even before the schools really had a good system with renting out their Chromebooks and things like that. So it was a huge need. And so we were able to get computers in families' homes pretty quickly with that program. And we worked with our IT team to get them set up in their homes, make sure that they felt comfortable using them. So as far as ConnectHome goes, those have been the biggest partners that we've worked with.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. Thanks. Another question for Jaclyn on the ConnectHome side. This is really good info, but how have you managed with limited staff, capacity, and time? With a full workload, how much time are you dedicating to ConnectHome activities? That's been our biggest obstacle so far.

Jaclyn Merrills: And that's an obstacle for me as well. Like I said, I am a family self-sufficiency coordinator. For those of you on the call that are in that role, or work in resident services, or really any role within the housing authority, you know that your roles are stretched, your time is stretched. So it's definitely a balancing act. For me it's been just about communicating well with management about what the expectations are, about what monies are when I need assistance.

I have been kind of the go to person for ConnectHome for CRHA. And it does entail -- I'm trying to think of how many hours a week or month I would say I contribute to ConnectHome specifically. But it's the reporting, it's the community building, it's partnership building, things like that. But a lot of that is also what I'm doing with family self-sufficiency programming anyway, building those partnerships. So I'm at the PCC meetings for FSS, but I'm also talking about ConnectHome at that meeting. I'm talking about that at any other meetings with other partners that we have that are related to resident services, things like that. I'm talking about the initiatives for bridging the digital divide in our communities. So it kind of overlaps.

But yeah, talking to management about what the expectations are, what your needs are, when you need help, asking for it. And it's not ideal all the time with the extra roles that we're given. But I don't have a perfect answer for that. But just know you're not alone in feeling that way.

Caila Prendergast: Thank you for sharing, Jaclyn. So next, oh this is just a comment, I guess another person jumping in to add an agency idea that they've worked with. The area agency on aging. So that's an idea for the person that asked that question. The next question looks like it is for both Jaclyn and Matt. So when working with the community members and residents of the area, what do you believe your biggest challenge was when introducing yourself as a partner or as ConnectHome to the community? For example, getting the community to trust what you're doing was going to actually benefit them without pushing them away from the area.

Jaclyn Merrills: That's a good question. I'll start with that. I'll let Matt add on anything that I'm missing. But I know that one of the main avenues for signing up for the study was through CRHA staff, through resident services. So we have staff in all of our communities for resident services. So we have established relationships with a lot of our clients. And we know them, we are working with them in other capacities such as the family self-sufficiency program, and things like that.

So we started out just specifically calling people that we thought would be a good fit or who we thought would be interested. There was no pressure. It was just explaining what the program was, having them call us back if they're interested. So in that way we already kind of have a relationship with those residents and that trust piece there. And then I'll let Matt speak to once they are signed on.

Matt Herman: Yeah. No. Great question. And Jaclyn really hit it, was when we started working with the organizations, we were building that trust and that relationship with them, and they were able to reach out. And once they're enrolled into the program, we started working with them directly. Of course incentives always help out and assist. Of course with the tablet and the two years of internet service, I mean it's a good option to just participate in some meetings, that we have monthly meetings for them. And the time commitment is not too much -- not too big for the residents.

So I think really outlining everything that you are hoping to collaborate with them on up front, so they understand the scope of the project. Someone like Jaclyn, or any other public housing authorities, they are really framing it when they're engaging the residents. But really once we connect with them directly or doing any recruitment, which we have done at community events across the housing authorities, to bring more individuals and residents into our program, is really trying to get them to [inaudible] not only up front, but of course the long term outcomes and impact of what they're doing to help with this particular project.

And that goes back into I think the partnerships, is really trying to better understand the needs of your residents. So if it's surrounding nutrition, who in your area has nutrition experience, or who does education in nutrition. I think with the ConnectHome project and bridging that divide, it's really important that we're aligning with carriers, we're aligning with our partners to really provide better education for those residents.

Caila Prendergast: Awesome. Thank you. So we got a few more suggestions as to potential partners. So CDFIs, or community development financial institutions. And then PCs for People and Goodwill are some other partner organizations that other communities have shared in the chat with me. So thanks to all of you.

Next question, could you expand more on the process of distributing the tablets and onboarding residents?

Matt Herman: Yes, ma'am. That's a great question. So what we did is when we got the grant funding, we were very excited. And what we sort of did based on the size of the public housing authority in the communities, that's really where we were able to allocate a certain number of tablets and a certain number of residents [inaudible]. So we were able to hire a bunch of research associates from the area, and working with our community advisory boards, to be able to distribute and pass those out.

And a big part of passing the tablets out was you don't want to just [inaudible] tablet. You really want to engage them and get them better understand what this is, if they're not familiar with it, if they're a seasoned veteran [inaudible], really that case management and that literacy, that digital literacy, was hugely important as we were working with the residents and getting them, quote unquote, enrolled in the program. It's pretty seamless with our staff and in coordinating with the individuals once we connect with them via the housing authority.

To that point, we have a large number of tablets that we had to give out, over 200 some. So it did take time. But we have really met all of our numbers thus far, just under a year of the project of engagement of the residents and the community advisory board.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. Great. So two questions about the grant. So can you outline the timeframe for the NIH grant funding. And then another question about if it would be possible to get a copy of the grant that was written by the hospital.

Matt Herman: So yes, great two questions. First and foremost, the timeline, it's a two year grant that we're looking to collaborate with the housing authorities. Again, Jaclyn and myself, we talked about sustainability. We're always looking to continue what we're doing here, especially in light of all the focus groups we're doing, all the resident feedback, community advisory board feedback, that we need to continue this conversation. And of course we need funding to do that. So we're looking at different mechanisms to apply and get funding, as I discussed with the mental health piece [inaudible] everything that we're doing with this project.

Definitely I can give you a summary of what we applied for. Usually in applying for the grant, I'm sure most of you know, we hold that pretty close to the chest of what the details about it. And we can definitely provide some high level stuff, and the goals and expected outcomes, and sort of the structure and timeline of that. More than happy to connect with that person offline.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. Great. Thanks. So I'll just take note of that name. And [inaudible] after the session. Next question is for Jaclyn. Does CRHA do any additional outreach to partners in the community? And if so, what does that outreach look like?

Jaclyn Merrills: Yeah. We have several different partners that we work with. Specifically during COVID times, we have been working with our regional food distribution, food banks for food distribution. We do those monthly at all of our sites now. And we also started trying to just be a little more creative with finding ways to meet the needs of our clients. For example, we shut down our computer lab in our building. So then we collaborated with the local library, and they have digital library vans where they come, and they have printers, and laptops. And they do notary and can scan things for people.

And so those come out to our communities, each of our communities a couple times a month now, so that it's outside, they're sitting there setting the tables up with the van, so that it's more COVID safe for our families to have that access to basically a mobile computer lab. Who else have we been working with? We did a COVID resource fair last year. We've been working with the health department to have COVID testing and vaccinations right on our premises in our community centers. And that has been expanding. I know that we're going to be doing those every week through the end of September here in my community specifically. So those are some of the other community partners we've been working with.

And back on the question that you had asked earlier about with other regional partners, I was thinking kind of locally, but naturally we've worked with PCs for People before. I know you just mentioned them. They're great. We are now working with T-Mobile with the EBB, the emergency broadband benefit. We're working with them now to get some more tablets through

that program. Our main provider for internet connection is Cox Cable. So we've definitely advertised in the past for their connect to compete program as well for our residents.

Caila Prendergast: Okay. I just want to take that one step further. And some of those partners that you just outlined, how did those partnerships sort of come to be? Was it sort of like the partnership with EVMS that just over time happened? Or was there like intentional outreach on one of the partnership's side?

Jaclyn Merrills: Well we definitely learned about a lot of programs and organizations through our relationship with being a ConnectHome family, and then working with ConnectHome Hampton Roads, and collaborating together as a region. For example, we met specifically with Cox to see what specific things could possibly be done for our residents to get them into the connect to compete program. There are a few limitations setting that up, such as that repayment and things like that.

So we work as a team to kind of -- there were any solutions that had come up for that. We definitely invited all of those partners to our regional convening. So I would say a lot of those connections came specifically from ConnectHome, the ones that were mentioned like PCs for People, T-Mobile, Cox.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: This is Dina. I did want to underscore -- thank you, sorry, Caila -- the point you made about the convening. I think it's a really great vehicle. And I think you've sort of highlighted that for communities to reach beyond -- reach their existing partners, but then use those partners potentially as a way to reach other organizations that could work with them, and that have the same interests or mutual interests in serving the same population and in helping to bridge the digital divide. So I just wanted to highlight that point. Thank you.

Jaclyn Merrills: And I will say that at our convening, we had some people come in and talk about the Hampton Roads regional broadband strategy. And this is stuff that I had just no idea about. And apparently it's expanding here in our region specifically. And we were able to learn a lot about that. And then I, through that, was able to be connected to IT people with the city of Chesapeake, who were talking about how specifically the broadband expansion is going to happen in our community.

So it's planting seeds for the future. It's not something that's going to be getting connectivity to our residents tomorrow. But it is something that's planting that seed and learning more about what is to come. So that's been really helpful too.

Caila Prendergast: Great. Well that is the last question. Let me scroll to make sure nobody's hand is up.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Now I do have a question. And that is about the training, Jaclyn, that you and Matt and your team did for the residents who participated. Can you talk a little bit more about how you trained them on the tablet? Was it remote? Was it in person? Was there a curriculum that you used? That kind of thing.

Matt Herman: Yes, ma'am. That's a great question. And really when we were scoping this project, we understood that many of the residents might not have used a tablet before, or an iPhone type phone. So what we really did, we're not using any evidence based curriculum. It's really just trying to problem solve with them. And we have simple notes that the research assistant teams, when they contact the resident, that once we drop off the tablet, we can sort of walk through some things. But they set up a time to talk over the phone due to COVID and sort of the restrictions that our institution has with community engagement.

So it's really just sitting down and talking with the resident one on one, with a research assistant, to really walk them through getting set up Zoom, simple navigation, or if they wanted to add their email on there, how to get to the internet, etc. So it's really just spending time with the resident [inaudible] to work with them, and really problem solve. As we're seeing, that time spent has really come to fruition when all of the residents, the community advisory boards, are connecting up. Many of our community advisory board members again are using [inaudible]. And it's been wonderful to see their growth over the past under a year.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: That was great. Thank you, Matt.

Caila Prendergast: Yeah. Thank you. So Dina, I'm not seeing any other questions come in. Not sure if you had anything else you want to --

Dina Lehmann-Kim: I do have one more. And that is about COVID. This experience has helped you -- both of your organizations understand what residents are feeling about COVID, and even getting the vaccine for example. Has it shed any light on that?

Matt Herman: Yeah. No. That's a wonderful question. And it's a good question to sort of sum up. And Jaclyn, please jump in. I know I talk too much. Yeah, what we're hearing from the residents when we connect with them and through the community advisory board, there is so much hesitancy still out there. I'm sure everyone has seen that. And rightfully so, among these minority populations. Many of the public housing authorities that we work with, they are majority African American, a small subset of Hispanic and white. Of course but there's hesitancy.

Many of the housing authorities are approaching maybe 20, 30 percent of full vaccination, compared with their particular city, which is up around maybe 50 to 60 depending on the locale. So really just discussing the purposeful meaningful ways of why they should get a vaccine. And it's for the greater good of not only the community, but their family most importantly. Family is important, so we really want to push those, and of course provide facts, and really again continuing to build that trust surrounding COVID.

We really highlighted some common themes that have come out of all of our communication with them. Of course they need education and support. They don't need the misinformation. And no knock against any social media channels, video or education that pops up on there, that's a huge discussion at all of our community advisory board meetings about if this is true or it's not true. So really providing meaningful education to them, videos, resources, and education links that they can really peruse on their own, along with themselves and their families.

And this is also geared towards the PHAs we work with. We try to communicate with them and provide meaningful resources from the city and state. But again, just to touch on this common theme, again we're looking for sustainability as we want to look at mental health. That's become a huge issue, just general support for housing and transportation. When the shutdown happened, it was a lot of mobilization among all these different stakeholders and community organizations to address the food deserts in our areas and stuff like that. But it's starting to drop off as we're sort of coming out of COVID. So we want to make sure that we're continuing to support these individuals on a long term basis.

And again, based on their needs, and their needs is we need mental health help, we need this help, we need that help. So we're trying to streamline that and get funding to be able to support them from our institutional side. And of course do what we can do to support the public housing, and continue really I think a lot of the support for all the digital devices that we have given out thus far, to really stay connected with the residents to provide help.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Thank you, Matt.

Jaclyn Merrills: And I have not been a part of the meetings. But I have been part of conversations with my clients who are in the CABs. And they have all just spoken about how much they really enjoy going to the meetings, how they're getting a lot out of it, how they feel really heard. And I think that's really important that the clients are feeling really listened to, which is really nice. And I really think that that's just great that they -- I haven't heard a single negative thing about it. They all want to be there. They all are enjoying it. And I think that's a huge plus.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Yeah. For sure. That's a huge part of building trust, is having people feel heard. So that's great.

Jaclyn Merrills: Exactly.

Caila Prendergast: Yeah. I had another question come in. I just want to make sure we get to it. So I wonder if the residents would have the ability to buy the laptop once the two years are up.

Matt Herman: We actually as part of enrolling in the program, if you're part of the CAB or the resident cohort, we actually give them the tablet. It is theirs to keep. Outside of the service, of course we can only pay for the connectivity service as far as the internet service via LTE or 5G for two years. But the tablet is theirs to keep no matter what. And that was a huge incentive for helping with recruitment, etc. And of course we want to be able to provide some meaningful items to the residents at all housing authorities across our region.

Caila Prendergast: That's great. We had two more questions come in. I think they have time. So this one [inaudible]. It's just a clarifying question for you, Jaclyn. You mentioned the computer club, girls something [inaudible] to clarify.

Jaclyn Merrills: It is called the Girls Computing League. It's a nonprofit led by Harvard students, who just started it I believe this year. So I can maybe find the contact info to give or maybe just Google Girls Computing League. They advertise for all ages, but [inaudible] experience of trying to sign the families up, a lot of the courses were kind of geared towards the older kids. So I would definitely keep that in mind.

Caila Prendergast: Great. And so Jaclyn, you mentioned that residents are sort of enjoying and feeling heard during the meetings. We had a person ask if you could provide sort of what in the meetings you think is leading to this feedback. He said, it isn't exactly a normal feeling about a meeting, to feel enjoyment or to feel heard. So [inaudible] do you think?

Jaclyn Merrills: Yeah. I don't know because I'm not in the meetings. But from what I'm hearing, they're being listened. There's definitely been an establishment of a relationship with the staff at EVMS and our clients. And I think there's just been a level of patience in the teaching them about how to use the digital -- the devices in the first place. So even before they started, they had this relationship with the EVMS staff that helped get them set up.

And so they're gaining the confidence of that independence of being able to use these devices that they didn't feel comfortable using before, and then building these relationships with the people at EVMS. And just being given the opportunity to be a part of something where their opinions and their thoughts are being heard. And so I think all of those things together kind of contribute to that.

Caila Prendergast: Great. Well I think that is our last question. And so I'll pass it over to Dina for some closing remarks.

Dina Lehmann-Kim: Thank you, Caila. And thank you, Jaclyn and Matt. And thanks to our audience too for all the great questions and interaction. This was a really great session. I'm really appreciative for everyone being on today. And if you have additional questions, let us know. We can get them answered for you. And thanks for all the great work you continue to do in these really challenging times.

So with that, one last reminder, we're going to have another webinar in September, TBD, it's being developed now. And then please mark your calendars for October 4th, 5th, and 6th. We will be having our annual virtual ConnectHomeUSA summit. So lots of good stuff coming your way soon. Thanks everyone.

Caila Prendergast: Thanks everyone. And don't forget to fill out the survey.

Jaclyn Merrills: Thank you.

(END)