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OASIS Connections Effectiveness Study Executive Summary

Prepared For: The OASIS Institute

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Background

The number of older people in the United States is dramatically increasing. By 2050, people aged 65+ years will represent 20.6% of the population and there will be almost 44.5 million people over the age of 75. While the population is aging, information technology is becoming ubiquitous. Computers and the Internet have become an integral component of work, education, communication, entertainment and healthcare. Thus it is important that current and future generations of older adults learn to use these technologies to function independently. Unfortunately, older adults use computers and the Internet less frequently than other age groups, which places them at a disadvantage in today's technology driven world.

Project Objectives

In order to reap the benefits of computers and the Internet, older adults must have the requisite skills to interact with this technology. The objectives of this project were to:

- 1) Evaluate the effectiveness of community-based basic computer and Internet training courses, designed specifically for seniors by The OASIS Institute, among a diverse sample of older adults;
- 2) Provide recommendations for refinements for both courses; and
- 3) Gather preliminary information on the sustainability of the program.

Study Sample

The sample included 196 individuals from four cities across the United States: Los Angeles; Miami; Pittsburgh; and St. Louis. The participants ranged in age from 40 to 90 years with an average age of 70.5. Most of the participants were female and White/Caucasian or Black/African American. The majority of participants were unemployed, had less than a college degree and some prior computer and Internet experience.

Study Protocol

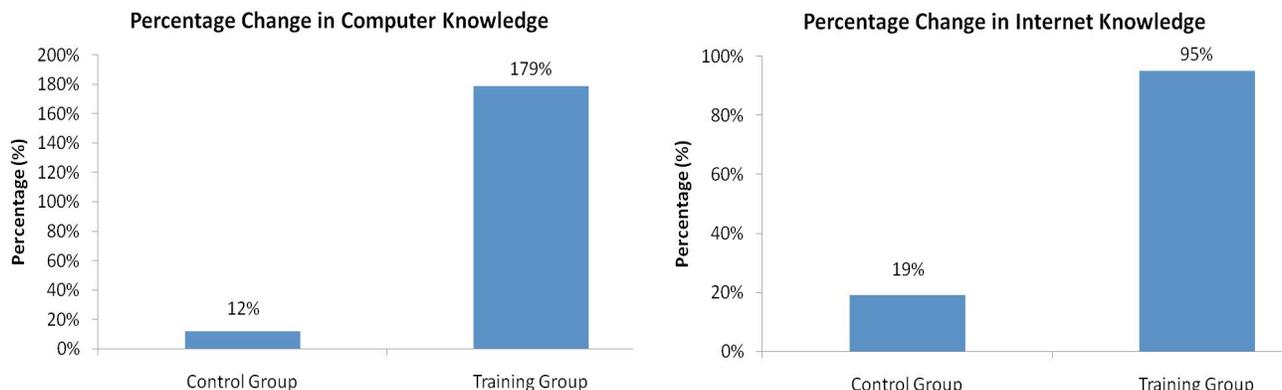
The training took place at 11 community sites in four cities that reach a diverse socio-economic and ethnic population. The study was a two group (training and wait list control group) repeated measures design with three measurement points: baseline, immediate post training, and three months post training. There were 104 participants assigned to the training group and 92 in the control group. The training group completed two courses: Introduction to Computers and Introduction to the Internet. Each of the courses included six two-hour sessions; these were combined to provide 12 two-hour sessions over six weeks, meeting twice per week. The curriculum was developed by the OASIS Institute and delivered by instructors who were trained by OASIS personnel.

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, computer attitude questionnaire, technology/computer/Internet experience questionnaire, and a measure of general self-efficacy. The computer attitude questionnaire assessed three components of attitudes: comfort with computers, computer self-efficacy, and interest in computers. They were also asked to report the reasons for taking the courses. Finally, they completed two short paper and pencil tests that evaluated computer and Internet knowledge. The computer attitude and computer and Internet knowledge tests were re-administered to both groups after the training group completed the six-week program. The training group also completed performance assessment tasks and course evaluation questionnaires.

Results and Conclusions

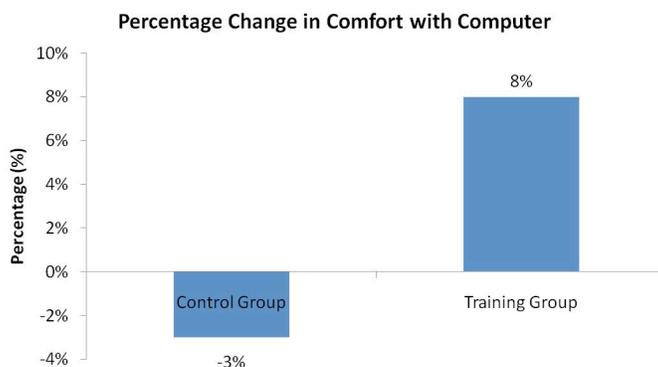
The course participants indicated that their primary reasons for taking the classes were to better communicate with family and friends and to access health information. In addition, they reported that they wanted to learn something new and that everything seemed to be “online.” Others needed to develop skills for their jobs or to find a job.

The training group demonstrated a significant increase in both computer and Internet knowledge, including an understanding of basic concepts, icons and terminology. On average, the scores on the basic computer knowledge test increased by 179% and 95% on the Internet knowledge test from baseline to the post training assessment for those who received training. In comparison, the control group scores increased by just 12% and 19%, respectively.



In addition, on average, those who received the training achieved a score of 93% on the post training basic computer task and 76% on the Internet task. They demonstrated skills needed to open, edit, save and print documents, use email and find information on the Internet. Those who completed the course also reported a significant increase in both computer and Internet use three months post training; 55% of the training group reported that their use of computers increased compared to 24% of the control group.

The training group also reported an increase of 8% in comfort with computers, compared to a decrease of 3% in the control group's comfort level. The increase in comfort was maintained for the training group at the three-month telephone follow-up assessment.



The majority of class participants reported that they enjoyed both courses and that both courses were beneficial. They also provided some suggestions for improving the courses such as increasing the number of training sessions, practice time and class exercises and better matching of the class participants with respect to their initial skill levels.

Overall, the results provide evidence that the Connections basic computer and Internet courses are effective in increasing the knowledge, skills, comfort and use of computers by older adults.