



Connected Canadians
Canadiens Branchés

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget

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Recommendation

That the Canadian government provide funding in the amount of \$33 million over 5 years to scale and support Connected Canadians' Service Industry Employment Program to retrain Service Industry workers who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, while providing technology support for isolated Canadian seniors, including those in Long Term Care facilities.

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Background


Connected Canadians is a federally incorporated non-profit organization established in early 2018 to help connect older adults with free technology training and support. Our mandate is to reduce isolation and loneliness while increasing communication, social interactions and digital skills. We currently serve seniors in 6+ languages all over Canada via our remote technology support and training programs. While initially boot-strapped by its co-founders, two women with backgrounds in technology, Connected Canadians has since been funded by all three levels of government. Connected Canadians is also supported by many corporate partners including Adobe Canada, Qlik, Facebook, and charitable partners and supporters such as Bruyère Foundation, Ottawa Community Housing Foundation, the United Way, and HelpAge Canada.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Connected Canadians served seniors mainly via in-person sessions delivered by a large volunteer base of highly-skilled technology workers, many of whom are new Canadians. Very early on into our programming, we saw that volunteers benefitted from the cultural awareness and conversational practice opportunities that came from their interaction with senior clients, while clients felt a sense of pride and connection in helping to welcome newcomers into the community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all Canadians to varying degrees, but two populations were particularly afflicted during this time: Namely the senior population and also service industry workers, many of whom lost employment completely as their restaurants, bars and other in-person places of business shut down or laid off a large percentage of their workforce.


In March 2020 Connected Canadians moved quickly to recognize this new reality, and created a program to retrain service workers in delivering remote support to isolated seniors. The organization saw early success with this approach and was awarded an Economic Development Grant from the City of Ottawa in April 2020, which is scheduled to run until November 2020. With this funding, Connected Canadians developed a program to retrain three cohorts of food and beverage industry workers affected by the coronavirus pandemic as paid technology mentors to support Canadian seniors remotely.

These mentors are trained on remote support best practices and tools to improve communication and online troubleshooting to use with senior clients, while also

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allowing them to leverage their past experiences and customer-facing skills from the hospitality industry in their technology mentorship roles. Mentors graduate from the program equipped with a variety of new digital skills and an ability to work remotely in a digital environment, which is key in a post-pandemic world. Connected Canadians created a remote mentor curriculum, multiple training manuals and additional evaluation frameworks to make the program replicable and scalable.

Opportunity

"Since I started with Connected Canadians I'm a completely different person I would say, as dramatic as that sounds. My confidence as well and my own capabilities... you know just giving myself those tools and the confidence to learn technology."

Tania, Restaurant Server/Bartender for 20+ years prior to COVID, Ottawa ON.

"I had no technology before Connected Canadians... they got me into the Internet, the Zoom, the YouTube, and the messages ...no matter how slow I had to go, they were patient, to keep up with my speed."

Robert, 67, Connected Canadians Client, London ON.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, communities all over Canada have been reaching out to Connected Canadians to increase digital literacy skills amongst seniors in their populations, flooding the Connected Canadians team with requests to help Canadian seniors remotely in a variety of different ways. From the National Gallery of Canada, to multiple Dementia Societies in different regions, to the City of Calgary, and healthcare facilities around the country, the demand for the unique and proven services provided by Connected Candians is rapidly increasing and senior-focused individuals from all layers of management are communicating this need to us.

The City of Ottawa Economic Development grant has validated our approach and provided us with a staff of paid technology mentors. We are able to respond to nearly all incoming senior client requests, including how to use video conferencing software like Zoom and Skype, how to use various social media platforms, while also training them on how to protect their personal information and stay safe online. However this funding will expire at the end of November 2020, and given the



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interest in our services, it's clear that this is a tiny fraction of the capacity required to sustain an ongoing response to the great need that COVID-19 has revealed and intensified. Federal Government support is requested as the need goes beyond Ottawa; the model proposed can be implemented across Canada.

In a future where in-person communication has been drastically reduced, the need for a scalable solution which helps seniors increase their digital literacy skills is key. While our near-term focus has been on retraining service industry mentors to enable them to provide technical support to seniors, we have also concurrently been working on a modular "train-the-trainer" program to upskill existing senior community volunteers and staff as remote technology mentors for other organizations. Fully developing this program would allow Connected Canadians to provide other forms of employment to our existing technology mentors, while training additional Canadian volunteers to support more Canadian seniors.

"Prior to COVID a lot of folks... didn't probably have any need to have this kind of digital awareness but this has given us a perfect example of why it's very important everything from online banking to... just communicating with loved ones, there's only a few people that are currently in the Loch Lomond Villa that help with residents in that regard and so that I think is one area where more of their staff were set up and trained to do this that would help."

Joe, Volunteer at Loch Lomond Villa, St. John New Brunswick

Impact

There are multiple ways in which this program would stimulate the Canadian economy while also improving our nation's wellbeing in general:

- Create additional jobs for service industry workers who are unemployed/underemployed due to the economical impacts of COVID-19
- Equip those previously employed in the service industry with vital digital and remote-work skills, providing them with a gateway to many more opportunities for employment in a post-pandemic world
- Equip Canadian seniors with digital skills, allowing them to communicate with friends and loved ones, reducing isolation and loneliness - factors contributing



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to mental health.

- Enabling more Canadian seniors to participate in e-commerce activities and while also allowing them to access vital services like telemedicine, online government services, etc

The long term impact of a \$33 million contribution over five years would be:

Item	Number
Total new jobs created by CC directly	1000
Total hours of digital skills training for underemployed service workers	37,116
Total seniors reached by CC directly	510,948
Total seniors reached by CC indirectly	2,554,740

The impact per year would be as follows:

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Jobs created at CC	100	150	200	300	400
Digital skills training hours for underemployed service workers	3,600	5,292	7,056	10,584	10,584
Seniors reached by Program					
<i>One-on-ones</i>	4,860	7,290	8,568	10,710	17,136
<i>Workshops</i>	4,160	6,240	8,320	10,400	12,480
<i>Virtual gaming</i>	4,160	6,240	8,320	10,400	12,480
<i>Virtual art experiences</i>	416	624	832	1,248	1,664
<i>Train the Trainer</i>	39,000	54,600	78,000	93,600	109,200
Seniors reached directly by CC programming	52,596	74,994	104,040	126,358	152,960
Seniors affected by CC efforts	262,980	374,970	520,200	631,790	764,800



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Financial Breakdown

The funds would be used to fund training costs, staffing costs, and infrastructure to hire, train, manage and support a large remote team supporting Canadian seniors. The breakdown over 5 years would be as follows:

2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
\$3,356,440	\$4,777,309	\$6,355,305	\$8,073,198	\$10,437,749	\$33,000,000

Conclusion

Connected Canadians has been serving Canadians seniors for more than two and a half years, but given the global pandemic the need for our services has grown dramatically. With our grass-roots, self-funded approach we have done a great deal with few resources, and we believe that with a contribution like this from the government we could quite literally change the world for many Canadians, seniors and service-industry workers alike. The additional beneficiaries of such a program should also be noted, as families of previously disconnected seniors and underemployed service industry workers will also benefit from this initiative. Once developed, this program could easily be used as a model for other countries to use as well, given that many other regions will be experiencing similar challenges amongst both affected demographics.

In a world where hope for the future is more needed than ever, Connected Canadians is here to deliver innovative, effective solutions where the need is greatest, helping Canada lead the way.