

Open Access Connections Annual Report 2016

Mission

Open Access Connections facilitates communication services to encourage self-determination and stronger community connections for people in need. We are the leader in finding innovative ways to use communications technologies to provide opportunities for people in need to forge new connections to the community and to one another. These connections enhance dignity and independence and contribute to success.

Summary of Programs and Achievements

Open Access Connections primary service is our **Community Voice Mail** program. This service provides homeless and low-income Minnesotans lacking reliable phone access a consistent phone number to receive messages. Homeless and low-income Minnesotans are able to submit job applications, complete housing applications, and achieve other self-sufficiency goals. In 2016 we partnered with 327 nonprofit and local government programs to distribute 2,817 Community Voice Mail numbers to people in need across the state of Minnesota. 96% of our voice mail users were unemployed 72% were homeless. 61% of our voice mail users looking for work were able to find a job and 64% of our voice mail users looking for housing were able to find a home. 26% of our voice mail users were low-income families. 12% of our voice mail users are disabled and 8% are veterans.

We also provided the following programs and services:

Grassroots Outreach: We trained 6 Grassroots Outreach workers, all of whom possess a history of homelessness and long term unemployment, to distribute our free voice mail services at Twin Cities nonprofit locations. This program distributed 264 voice mail numbers, strengthened relationships with our partner agencies, and provided relevant job experiences for our outreach workers. Through a partnership with enTouch Wireless we were also able to distribute 1,900 **Lifeline supported cell phones**, providing an additional communication tool for people in crisis.

Generation 50+ Group: The Generation 50+ Group provides a forum for older people with history of homelessness to discuss issues affecting their community, and work towards building solutions. We held 12 Generation 50+ meetings with an average attendance of 31 members. Generation 50+ members worked on issues affordable housing and voting engagement.

Non-partisan Voter Engagement: Open Access Connections participated in a non-partisan voter engagement coalition led by Minnesota Voice. By mobilizing members of our Grassroots Outreach team and Generation 50+ Group, we were able to register 817 homeless and low-income people to vote for the 2016 Election. 25 volunteers were able to complete 267 shifts of voter engagement, facilitating more than 5,600 conversations.