



## Teen Connect: A New Twist on an Old Idea to Bridge Generations

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### Article Details

Article Type: Case Report

Received date: 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2018

Accepted date: 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2018

Published date: 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

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**Citation:** Nancy Kelley (2019) Teen Connect: A New Twist on an Old Idea to Bridge Generations. J Pub Health Issue Pract 3: 135. <https://doi.org/10.33790/jphip1100135>.

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** An effort to bridge generations to help address the increasing public health concerns of older adults is discussed in this paper. Presented here are lessons learned from the first two years of implementation of Teen Connect between a community-based social service organization assisting older adults and a preparatory high school. As originally designed, Teen Connect is a telephone reassurance project that uses an intergenerational community service model to bridge the gaps between generations. Modifications to this design may boost the strengths of both youth and technology to meet the needs of older adults by adding to other digital efforts being made through smart technology in healthcare and human service realms that improve and enhance the well-being and quality of life of our aging population.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This paper describes how Teen Connect was implemented in one locale, including the development of a community partnership and the successes and challenges experienced in this case example that might be useful for others interested in replicating this service model. Opportunities to incorporate social media are also introduced as ways to update the original design of the project. Additionally, a review is provided of specific findings related to Teen Connect excerpted from a larger program evaluation previously conducted that included seven youth volunteers and 17 older adult participants. This was a cross-sectional study design that drew from a purposive sample to ask opinions of older adults and volunteers about their experiences with Teen Connect. Findings from that study are used to supplement the anecdotal experiences of the Teen Connect reported in this paper.

**Findings:** Twenty-six successful matches were made between youth volunteers and older adults. Expressed levels of satisfaction from Teen Connect volunteers and older participants were mixed. Challenges centered on developing longevity and continuity of relationships due to communication, scheduling, and monitoring issues. Opportunities exist to incorporate social media into Teen Connect, which would likely address some of these challenges.

**Research Limitations:** Lessons learned are based on anecdotal experiences of the initial stages of project development over the first two years of implementation. The number of participants in the project is fairly small and creates challenges to generalizing experiences. The review of the excerpted information from the larger program evaluation previously conducted and published includes a very

small subset to analyze; however, it was a beginning effort to assess the experience of the first two years of implementation of a newly developed service project and offers insights as to levels of success and opportunities for improvement, including the use of now mainstream digital technologies.

**Practical implications:** Teen Connect is a promising practice that may help improve the quality of life of community-residing older adults while instilling the values of volunteerism and community service in today's youth.

**Social implications:** Teen Connect provides opportunities for both youth and older adults to make contributions to their communities and build better interactions across generations.

**Originality/value:** Lessons learned highlight the importance of community partnerships between different sectors of society (education and aging systems, youth and elderly) to meet intergenerational community needs. In so doing, less public resources may be used to address the needs of older adults, including depression and anxiety as well as loneliness and isolation, indicative of public health challenges.

**Key words:** Intergenerational, Community service, Telephone reassurance, Community partnerships, Social media, Volunteer

### Introduction

In the midst of an unprecedented increase in the aging population comes increased challenges for older adults to “age in place” or remain living in the community for as long as possible. Residing in the community often means maintaining independence, maximizing quality of care and perceptions of quality of life, and continuing contributions to the community at large [1, 2].

Maintaining independence and managing health care and mental health needs of older adults has become a serious public health issue. Some factors that contribute to this public health issue for older adults who live alone include indicators of quality of life such as: limited mobility and the inability to get around; physical health problems; anxiety/worry; no family support; limited finances; language barriers; transportation; loneliness and depression; difficulty taking care of home; and caregiving responsibilities. [2-4]. One way to possibly mitigate some of these needs may be to implement psychosocial supports offered through intergenerational programs. Teen Connect is one such program model that has potential to maximize independence and quality of life for community-residing

older adults by specifically targeting such issues as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and isolation.

Teen Connect is a replicable telephone reassurance intergenerational project that matches youth and older adults in a mutually beneficial relationship in an attempt to bridge the gaps between generations. Teen Connect is based on a community service concept that was developed in 1998 by students at a preparatory high school in Broward County, FL [5] and was replicated in Salt Lake City, UT through the joint collaboration of the Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN) program and [6]. This writing shares the anecdotal experiences as well as a supplemental review of excerpted findings from a previously conducted program evaluation of the first two years of implementation of this project (2004-2006) both successes and challenges and offers insights into how to build upon the project's strengths, overcome its limitations, and expand the project to other formats (particularly social media), locations, agencies, populations, and venues.

### Community Context

Utah is a particularly rich locale to successfully implement an intergenerational community service project, like Teen Connect, because of its great pool of resources of youth volunteers and its rapidly growing at-risk older adult population. It is estimated that nearly 17% of Utah's population will be over age 60 by the year 2030, an increase of 29% from 2012; it has the sixth fastest growing population over the age of 65 in the nation [7]. Approximately 13% of the state's population is currently aged 60 and older [7-9]. Conversely, Utah is the youngest state in the nation with a median age of 29.8 years and has the highest birth rates, an increasing growth rate of school-aged children, the biggest share of preschoolers in the country, and one of the highest dependency ratios shifting in its age structure from young to old [7, 10, 9].

Additionally, Utah continuously ranks first in the nation in rates of volunteerism [11]. Research has shown that people who begin volunteering as youth are twice as likely to volunteer as adults than those who did not volunteer when they were younger [12-14]. The median numbers of hours per year a youth volunteers is 36.

Approximately 26.4% of teenagers volunteer and youth volunteers make up 25% of all volunteers in the U.S. [15]. Eighty-three percent of U.S. high schools offer community service activities that are non-curriculum-based and are recognized by and/or arranged through the school [16, 17] about 55.5% of middle and high schools require some kind of volunteering [18]. Nationally, private high school students are 25% more likely to have volunteered in the past 12 months than public high school students [18].

Community service helps youth to improve academic performance, values, self-efficacy, leadership and interpersonal skills, choice of a service career, and continued plans to participate in service/volunteering [18,12,19,16,20,17]. Community service heightens a sense of civic responsibility and personal effectiveness as well as enhances awareness and understanding of social issues [17-19]. Additionally, [19] stated that community service provides a way for youth to connect with adults and build social networks, helps youth to find direction and purpose in life, and offers a way to "empower the disempowered" and to "connect the disconnected." Teen Connect is one effort to engage today's youth in community service in order to ensure a generation of caring adults tomorrow and meet the needs of older adults today.

### Description of the Teen Connect Service Model

Teen Connect provides opportunities for both youth and older adults to contribute to their communities and build better interactions between age groups. The basic service model for Teen Connect consists of having youth volunteers make a minimum of one 15-minute telephone call per week to a community-residing older adult. The era in which Teen Connect was created, prior to the advent

of social media and widely accessible electronic communication devices, was based on the then stereotypical notion that teenagers were constantly on the phone connecting with friends; so, getting them to call older people to provide telephone reassurance seemed like a natural fit. Contemporary stereotypes of teenagers are that they are very technologically savvy and constantly on their "screens" (e.g., smart phones, tablets, laptops) and connecting virtually with friends and family to maintain regular communication. Therefore, future implementations of this model might incorporate social media venues in addition to or in lieu of telephone calls. The goals of the project are two-fold, including benefits to older adults as well as benefits to youth [5]. Benefits of Teen Connect to older adults include:

- (1) decreasing isolation, loneliness, depression, and anxiety,
- (2) increasing socialization and community connections,
- (3) being a role model and sharing life experiences and wisdom,
- (4) teaching history from first-hand experience, and
- (5) dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions of younger generations.

Benefits of Teen Connect to youth include:

- (1) providing opportunities to volunteer and do community service,
- (2) learning about issues and consequences of aging,
- (3) sharing life experiences,
- (4) gaining wisdom from older adults about social concerns, how to get along with others, how to cope with life's trials and tribulations, and how to succeed in life,
- (5) learning about history from a personalized perspective,
- (6) improving communication and social skills, and
- (7) dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions of older generations.

Consistent with community service models, Teen Connect strives to link the missions of the partnering agencies. In the case of this partnership, Teen Connect helps to meet the goals of NHN by assisting with community needs related to at-risk older adults, while simultaneously meeting the goals of RHSM by offering community service opportunities to youth.

### Context of Teen Connect within the Collaborative Community Partnership RHSM

Graduation requirements for students at RHSM include community service hours. The school's mission is to develop students who will lead productive and ethical lives. The school, located in Salt Lake City, UT, offers a college preparatory program that combines the "pursuit of academic excellence" with the "development of moral character." The goals for RHSM students are to:

- (1) gain commitment toward bettering our world; and
- (2) encourage to learn tolerance and achieve understanding through education, role models, and community service programs. (RHSM, Retrieved from <https://www.rowlandhall.org/page.cfm?p=4258>).

Participating in Teen Connect offers youth an opportunity to better society by meeting a community need; namely, assisting the dramatically increasing number of older adults. Assisting this particular population may help youth to appreciate their elders and gain a better understanding of the issues of aging and the implications on society at large, for their own aging process as well as that of their family members. It is a way for youth to prepare their communities, themselves, and their futures for the current age wave. By providing a community service and engaging with older adults, youth gain knowledge and learn tolerance from esteemed older adult role models.

### NHN

NHN is a nonprofit, community-based organization that provides multiple services to community-residing older adults throughout Salt Lake City, UT using a grassroots community-building approach [21] reliant on volunteers. NHN strives to enable older adults to reside in the community for as long as possible. Its mission is to improve the health, safety, and quality of life of

community-residing older adults through the promotion and maintenance of independent living [2-3]. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model for the NHN program as a whole and highlights the place of the Teen Connect project within this organization [22, 4]. NHN provides a variety of services, such as: (1) information, referral, and assistance; (2) linkage to existing benefit programs, formal aging services, and community resources; (3) case management; (4) limited crisis intervention; (5) advocacy; (6) companionship and reassurance through friendly home visits and regular telephone contact (including Teen Connect); and (7) the coordination of community service projects [2-3, 22]. Teen Connect is one specific service implemented by NHN in partnership with RHSM to provide telephone reassurance to its older adult program participants. This service purposely targets high school aged youth from the local community who attend RHSM and older adult participants of NHN to promote intergenerational communication and relationship building in order to meet the reciprocal needs of both parties.

#### Structure of Teen Connect and Expectations of Participants

Volunteers for Teen Connect were asked to make a minimum of a one-year commitment to NHN. Teen Connect volunteers were expected to contact by telephone the older adult with whom they were matched at least once a week for a minimum of 15 minutes. It was expected that they be consistent and reliable in their scheduled phone calls. For example, if the volunteer agreed to call every Wednesday at 4:00 p.m., then s/he needed to be responsible to follow-through with that plan. Volunteers were expected to maintain documentation of each telephone call and log their community service hours appropriately. They were expected to contact their school's Community Service Coordinator or a NHN representative with any concerns or unmet needs identified during phone conversations with their older adult match.

The responsibilities of the Teen Connect volunteers were to hold conversations that were decent and in good taste—no sarcasm, no rudeness or foul language, no sexual content, no soliciting private, identity, or financial information, and to be kind, respectful, patient, and understanding. The main purpose of telephone reassurance is

to provide companionship—in the hope of decreasing loneliness and increasing socialization, which in turn, can reduce depression, anxiety, loneliness, and isolation. Conversations usually focused on aspects of reminiscence such as: past occupation; hobbies; family/children/grandchildren; sports interests; favorite foods; talents; religious involvement; current events; childhood memories; special awards; volunteer activities; holiday/family traditions; family of origin; future predictions or projections about people/life/world; favorite travels; favorite family memoirs; favorite entertainers/entertainment; historical events (e.g., World War II, The Great Depression, 9/11, JFK assassination, Civil Rights Movement, advent of technology/computers/internet, man walking on the moon, and the like). Volunteers were provided information on active listening and instructed to inform staff when anything arose about health issues, complaints, safety concerns, or the like so that representative staff members could follow-up with the volunteers' conversations.

Older adults who participated in Teen Connect had the right to expect that their volunteers would hold in confidence any information disclosed. They had the right to terminate conversations with their Teen Connect volunteers at any time. Also, they were encouraged to call an adult advisor (e.g., designated NHN or RHSM representative) to discuss any concerns or issues regarding telephone conversations. In addition, older adults had the right to request a different volunteer to contact him/her if desired as long as intentions were reasonable [5].

#### Development of Teen Connect Between NHN and RHSM

NHN and RHSM collaborated on the Teen Connect project because its relevance to the missions of each respective organization was clear. Past experiences with group volunteer projects between NHN and RHSM was helpful to establish a collaborative relationship. Responsibilities of each partner organization were identified. NHN took on the recruitment of prospective community-residing older adults who could benefit from participating in Teen Connect; RHSM took on the recruitment of high school students as prospective volunteers for the project. NHN took on the responsibility of training the Teen Connect volunteers and making the matches between the

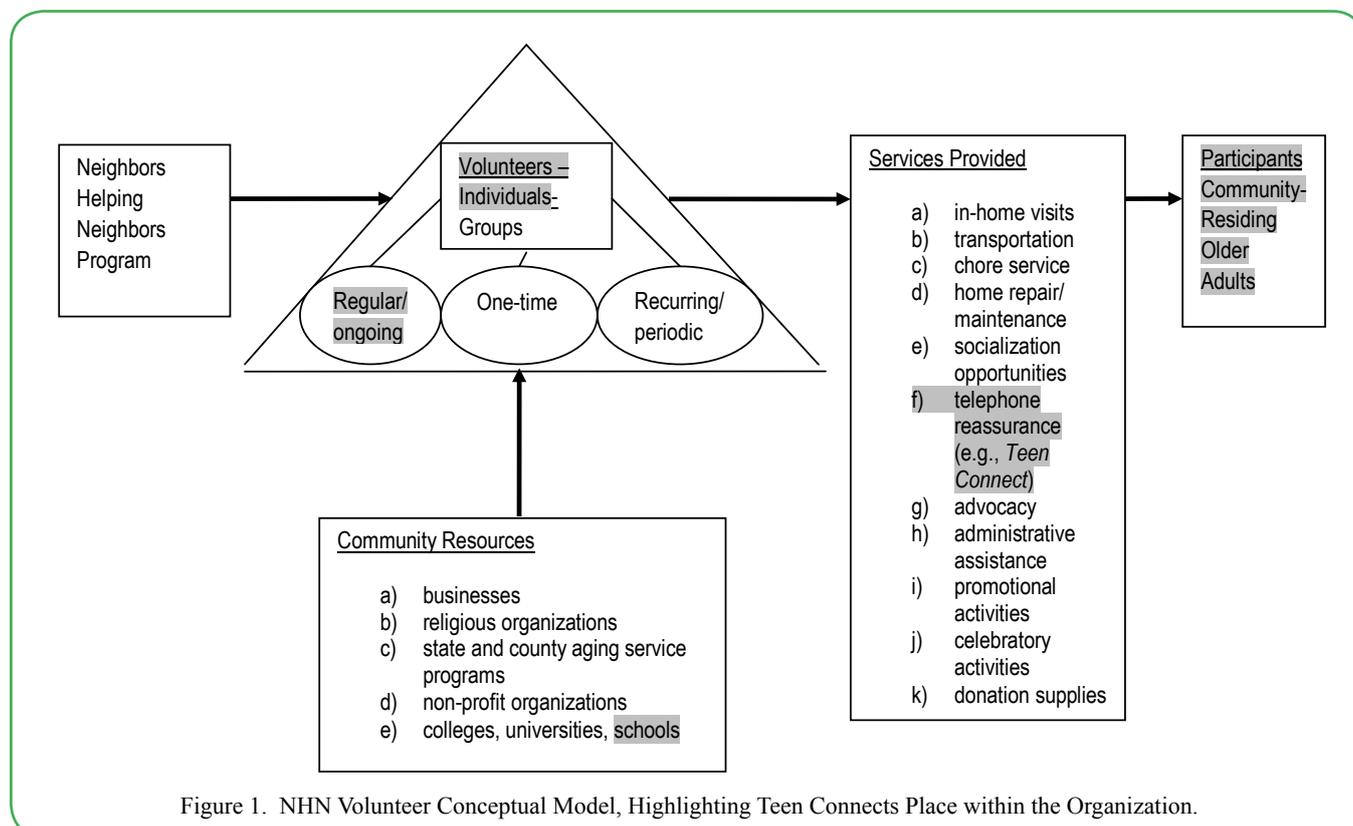


Figure 1. NHN Volunteer Conceptual Model, Highlighting Teen Connects Place within the Organization.

older adults and the volunteers. As an established volunteer-based organization, a training protocol was already in place for community volunteers. An attempt was made to make matches by preferences of older adults and youth based on what things they might have had in common, availability, and the like.

NHN also took on the primary responsibility of monitoring the Teen Connect volunteers. Efforts were made to communicate with both the older adult participant and the youth volunteer on at least a monthly basis. NHN and RHSM worked together to keep track of each match. Documentation was collected from volunteers regarding each phone call made that noted the length of each telephone contact, general topics of conversation, challenges encountered while on the phone, and whether any new needs were mentioned by the older adult participant that NHN might also help to address (outside of telephone reassurance).

### Lessons Learned: Successes and Challenges

Like any newly implemented program, NHN and RHSM experienced challenges as well as successes with Teen Connect during its first two years of operation (2004-2006). Although areas in need of improvement were revealed, Teen Connect achieved many successes too.

#### Successes

During the first two years of implementation, NHN was successful at matching 26 older adults with a Teen Connect volunteer. Half of the youth volunteers (13) continued from the first year and volunteered the second year, which provided some continuity with matches. Those older adults (13) whose volunteers did not continue after the first year were assigned a new volunteer for the second year; volunteers who stayed on but whose older adult participant did not (6), were assigned a new older adult participant with whom to be paired. Therefore, 39 youth volunteers participated in Teen Connect over this two-year period; 13 volunteers maintained involvement for two consecutive years with the same match. Thirty-two older adults participated over the two-year period; 20 of whom maintained involvement consecutively. Positive feedback from both parties (volunteers and older adults) was received anecdotally. One example of this positive feedback came from an older adult participant who stated that Teen Connect offered her the “opportunity to stay in contact with the outside world.” Another example of positive feedback was from a volunteer who said that “getting to know people and interacting with the elderly” was one of the most enjoyable aspects of being involved with Teen Connect.

#### Challenges

Developing longevity and continuity of relationships was one challenge encountered during the first two years of implementing Teen Connect. Youth volunteers who graduated from high school made this difficult. Five of the volunteers from the first year of implementation of the project graduated from RHSM. Younger youth (freshmen and sophomores) were then targeted for the next school year to help build longevity and continuity of relationships, with the hope that these youth might continue volunteering until graduation. Summer time was another challenge. Youth were less reliable and available during the summer time to follow through with their volunteer commitment. Not being in school, jobs, family vacations, summer activities, and the like prevented some youth volunteers from making their regularly scheduled phone calls to the older adults with whom they were matched. Attempts were made to reconnect these youth with their older adult matches the following school year.

Another challenge encountered was that the matching process turned out to take longer than anticipated. Older adults were faster at expressing interest in having a Teen Connect volunteer, so there was a continuous waiting list of up to eight older adults who wanted to participate, which also meant more conversations were needed to keep

their interest until a volunteer match was found. Additionally, this meant that recruitment efforts for Teen Connect volunteers were ongoing.

Theoretically, based on the program model, the 26 successful matches would have resulted in at least 2,704 phone calls over the two year time period accounting for at least 40,560 minutes of telephone reassurance time between Teen Connect volunteers and older adult participants. However, an accurate count of calls and time was difficult because volunteer communication and follow-through was often unreliable and presented yet another challenge to the implementation of Teen Connect. Either the volunteers were not consistent with calling the older adult as scheduled or the older adult did not remember the calls when asked about them. It was very difficult and time-consuming to monitor the volunteers; monthly attempts turned into weekly, ongoing tracking down of youth. They were very hard to get a hold of via phone or email and were not good at returning messages. It was also a struggle to get the volunteers to complete and turn in the documentation forms, regardless of constant reminders. Because of the challenges in communication and monitoring, volunteer accountability was compromised. This difficulty could have in part been due to the age of the youth volunteers and their inexperience with work or volunteer obligations.

The process of termination was also a challenge with both the high school student volunteers and the older adults. There was often no notice given on the youths' end that they were not going to volunteer any more. Also, sometimes unplanned events (e.g., illnesses, hospitalizations) prevented the older adult from being able to continue their participation in Teen Connect or at least to continue it without interruption. This made it hard to keep the youth volunteer engaged in the project and to sustain the “buy-in” of the older adult for future participation.

A final challenge worth mentioning was the issue of offering telephone reassurance instead of friendly visits in the home. This issue was raised repeatedly. When relationships were developed, it was often tempting to want to meet in person. Older adults seemed to want the youth volunteer to visit them in the home and sometimes were hopeful that the volunteer could do more tasks during a home visit. Teen Connect volunteers were often compelled to visit their older adult matches in their homes instead of only providing reassurance and support over the telephone. Because of liability issues and other reasons such as scheduling, transportation, supervision, and the like, youth were encouraged to stick to telephone calls. Teen Connect was often a supplement to friendly visiting services also offered through NHN and complemented efforts to increase communication between NHN and older adult participants.

### Supplemental Insights from a Prior Program Evaluation

A formal program and process evaluation of the NHN program and all of its services was conducted shortly after the first two years of implementation of Teen Connect. Findings from this larger program evaluation of NHN have been reported elsewhere [1-4, 22]. These reports focused on overall findings and specific outcomes related to quality of life perceptions and program satisfaction as a whole; these writings did not focus on Teen Connect solely. However, specific findings related to just Teen Connect are excerpted for review here to supplement the anecdotal “lessons learned” reported above.

The main objectives of the overarching study were to examine how meaningful and satisfying the volunteer experience was for those involved with NHN and to determine the level of satisfaction of community-residing older adults who had received services from NHN, including telephone reassurance through the Teen Connect project. The overarching program evaluation was based on perspectives from 49 older adults and 26 volunteers. The findings directly related to Teen Connect were based on seven youth volunteers and 17 older adult participants. This small sample of Teen Connect participants drawn from the overall NHN program evaluation included

seven high school students, mostly female and mostly juniors and seniors, and 17 older adults who ranged in age from 65-94, with the mean age of 79. Most of these older participants were women and more than half were widowed. Other demographic characteristics and methodological descriptions are reported in other published works [1-4, 22]. This was a cross-sectional study design that drew from a purposive sample to ask opinions of older adults and volunteers about their experiences with NHN, including the Teen Connect project. Older adults were asked how satisfied they were with telephone reassurance services and to what extent these services helped to improve their quality of life. Volunteers were asked how satisfied they were with their volunteer experience and to what extent they felt that they had contributed to making a difference in their community. Although this is a very small subset to analyze, it was a beginning effort to review the experience of the first two years of implementation of a newly developed service (Teen Connect) provided by NHN in partnership with RHSM and offered additional insights as to levels of success and opportunities for improvement.

### Relevant Key Findings

Generally, the findings from the overarching program evaluation of NHN revealed that the majority of NHN volunteers were satisfied with their volunteer experience and that they felt they had contributed to making a difference in their community. Moreover, all of the older adult program participants positively rated NHN services and the majority believed that NHN helped to improve their quality of life [2-4, 22].

Contrary to the general findings, however, responses from both target groups suggested that the Teen Connect component of NHN was not as successful as other services at improving perceptions of quality of life or satisfying the needs of program participants. With regard to telephone reassurance specifically, findings revealed that 49% (24) of the sample of older adults received this service from a NHN volunteer and another 35% (17) received telephone reassurance through the Teen Connect project. Of the non-Teen Connect telephone reassurance recipients, 96% (23) reported satisfaction with this service as compared to only 24% (5) of Teen Connect project participants who reported being satisfied with this assistance. Responses from Teen Connect volunteers were also mixed as to their levels of satisfaction and feelings of community contributions.

These findings may be indicative of generational communication problems or administrative challenges experienced while conducting the Teen Connect project as described above. One possibility for such low satisfaction ratings from NHN participants may be that they were not consistently receiving regular weekly phone calls by the volunteers assigned to them. It could also be related to the time lapse between phone calls and the memory recall of the older adult participants. Low satisfaction with Teen Connect by volunteers could be from inadequate training or not having enough in common with program participants to want to maintain regular contact with the individual they were assigned. Alternatively, youth volunteers may have been busy with other commitments in their lives or still learning and developing their accountability skills, including reliably and consistently calling on a schedule, documenting appropriately, and communicating with authority representatives from NHN and/or RHSM.

The findings from the overall program evaluation of NHN that pertain solely to Teen Connect are consistent with the anecdotal experiences reported in this writing. Despite the mixed reports, addressing the challenges and areas of needed improvement with contemporary digital opportunities, such as social media and smart technology, might make for an excellent service model to meet the needs of older adults and minimize the challenges of living alone (i.e., loneliness, isolation, depression, anxiety) that can lead to significant costs to the public in terms of health and mental health care.

**Areas in Need of Improvement:** Teen Connect is an aspect of the

NHN program where improvement can be made. Better communication with both program participants and volunteers in the Teen Connect project is critical to its success. Utilizing alternative forms of digital communication technologies and social media venues may be helpful. Making sure that older adults understand the project and the potential benefits to them is crucial to their interest in participating in Teen Connect and appreciating the weekly telephone calls (or other forms of digital communication) provided by the volunteers. Making sure that Teen Connect volunteers understand the expectations and benefits of the project are essential to their level of commitment and persistence with making the weekly phone calls (or other forms of digital communication) to older adult program participants. Having a more defined way to coordinate, monitor, and provide continuous support to Teen Connect volunteers would be helpful and much more easily mediated through today's technology formats. Also, having a NHN representative checking in with older adult program participants on at least a monthly basis, including the use of alternative communication platforms, to get their perspective on how things are going with Teen Connect would be helpful to building long-term, quality relationships between older adults and Teen Connect volunteers.

Given the significant advances in technology during the past decade, the use of electronic communications may be especially helpful to offset some of the challenges to implementing Teen Connect. Improvements may be worthwhile as the potential is high for improved perceptions of quality of life of community-residing older adults and volunteer contributions to the community-building efforts of NHN.

### Opportunities for Social Media and Other Digital Technologies

The advent of social media and the reliance on email and other technological communications has exploded since the initial implementation of Teen Connect. In light of these contemporary technological advances such as internet mediated social networking opportunities and smartphones, the Teen Connect model has the potential to be adapted to other platforms and in so doing ameliorating the challenges discussed above and fostering more successful outcomes. Email, texting, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, FaceTime, Video Calling, You Tube, Instagram, Snapchat, and the like may be very useful and convenient ways to provide reassurance and socialization between youth volunteers and older adults participating in Teen Connect.

Older adults have been late adopters to the world of technology compared to their younger counterparts. Approximately 59% of older Americans report that they use the internet and 77% have a cell phone. Approximately 70% of all Americans use social media; however, there are distinct differences among age groups. A full 90% of younger people use social media, whereas, 35% of those ages 65 or older report using social media [23].

There are several challenges to adopting digital technologies that older adults may face. Physical challenges, skeptical attitudes, and difficulties learning new technologies are some of the hurdles that older people may have to overcome. Many older adults have physical conditions or health issues that make it difficult to use new technologies. According to [24], about two in five older adults reported having a "physical or health condition that makes reading difficult or challenging" or a "disability, handicap, or chronic disease that prevents them from fully participating in many common daily activities." Additionally, a little more than half of older adults who do not currently use the internet believe that the lack of access is not hurting them and that they are not missing any important information. Moreover, 77% of older people feel that they need assistance to use new digital devices, such as a smartphone or tablet, on their own. Even among current older internet users, 56% indicate that they would need help to use social networking sites, such as

Facebook or Twitter. Despite these challenges, once older adults get connected, digital technology often becomes an integral part of their daily lives [24].

Older adults who go online and do use social networking sites show increased socialization with family and friends than older people who are not connected with digital technologies. [24] reported that “46% of online older adults (representing 27% of the total older adult population) use social networking sites such as Facebook, and these social network adopters have more persistent social connections with the people they care about.” Moreover, at least 81% of older adults reported to use social networking sites say they socialize with others on a daily or near-daily basis [24]. This rate compares to 71% of those older adults who go online but do not use social networking sites and 63% for those who are not online at all. Clearly, older adults who use social networking sites, such as Facebook, are more likely to socialize regularly with friends, whether online, in person, or over the telephone, compared with seniors who are not social networking site users [24].

Comparatively, teens are more engaged online and active on social media sites than are older adults. However, generally speaking, young people who have more active social lives (whether in-person or virtually) are more likely to engage in volunteer activities. Volunteer habits of young people vary by what types of technology they use the most and how they communicate with their peers. Those who spend most of their time communicating with friends face-to-face volunteer the most (55.4%), followed by those who text (52.3%), communicate online (51.9%), and talk on the phone (49.3%) [18].

Considering these recent reports, it seems that both older adults and youth crave socialization and fair better when they have access to social media and electronic devices. As societal trends have changed to incorporate the use of the internet and digital devices, it makes sense to adapt service models like Teen Connect to incorporate these communication platforms. Participating in a service project like Teen Connect can help to fulfill teens’ desires for volunteering and socializing as well as meeting the socialization needs of older adults who are at-risk of isolation. For these older adults, communicating with youth volunteers via smartphones and/or social networking sites can offer an additional venue for staying connected and socializing with others [24].

## Conclusion

Through collaborations with youth-centered settings (e.g., schools, church groups, scout troops, community centers) and social service organizations that assist older adults (e.g., senior centers, adult day care programs, area agencies on aging, long-term care facilities, senior housing programs), Teen Connect provides a model of bringing communities together by building on existing strengths and assets [21]. There were notable challenges to the initial implementation of Teen Connect between NHN and RHSM; however, the recommendations to improve upon those efforts are relatively simple to implement and provide great hope for continued project growth and development, especially with the advent of social media and smart technology. NHN has the capacity to be successful with Teen Connect, as evidenced by its success with other services, including telephone reassurance assistance provided by adult volunteers. It is a community service model that provides opportunities for each generation to interact more positively and learn from one another. In light of contemporary technological advances such as internet mediated social networking opportunities and smartphones, the Teen Connect model may also have the potential to be adapted to other venues. Teen Connect may be successfully replicated in other communities to help improve the quality of life of community-residing older adults while instilling the values of volunteerism and community service in today’s youth, thereby potentially minimizing resultant public health concerns of our aging population.

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