

# Digital Opportunity in the A.M.Y. Region: Connection and Engagement for all

## A Dogwood Health Trust Initiative



### WHO WE ARE

A Cohort (**A.M.Y. Cohort**) comprised of the Toe River Valley Regional Library System (TRVRL), High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG), W.A.M.Y. Community Action (W.A.M.Y.), and Avery County (**Avery**) functioning as a working group towards advancing digital opportunity in Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties (**A.M.Y. Region**). Our activities center around uplifting, supporting, and building, where needed, the environment to support digital connectivity. We see the cohort as sowing seeds of empowerment for our partners to move forward in their Digital Opportunity initiatives and create an immeasurable ripple effect.

### WHAT IS DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY

Internet availability is over-reported by Internet Service Providers	<b>Internet Access</b>
Rural adoption rates fall behind non-rural adoption rates at both the State and National level	<b>Internet Adoption</b>
40% of HCCOG device recipients said the cost of internet was preventing them from subscribing <small>*FCC defines affordable as 2% of monthly income</small>	<b>Device Access</b>
2/3 of adoption in rural areas is not because of lack of access but due to affordability, device access, and skills and support issues <small>*from the Benton Institute</small>	<b>Internet Affordability</b>
Knowledge to use digital devices in support of everyday life: job skills, telehealth opportunities, and combating social isolation	<b>Digital Skills + Support</b>

### WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Assisting in the journey that leads people and households to answer "Yes" to the questions below:

Is high-speed Internet (broadband) available?

If not, do you know of a place you go to access it? Can you get there?

Are you subscribed to a broadband plan? Is the monthly cost affordable?

Do you have access to an Internet-enabled device that fits you and your households needs?

Do you know how to comfortably and safely navigate the device and use the Internet how you need/want to?

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

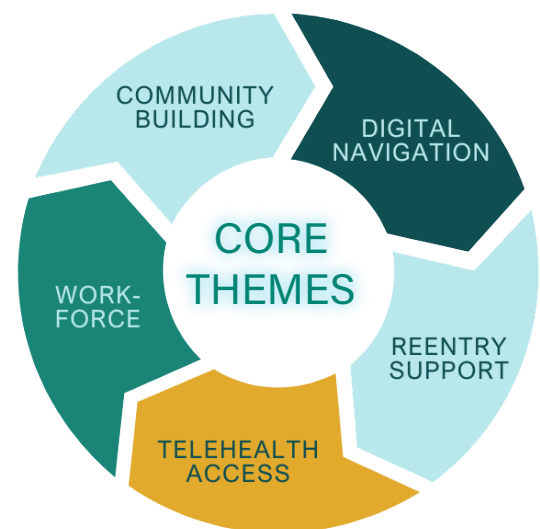
Avery County Cooperative Extension, Broken Wheel Ministries, Buladean Community Center, Center for Rural Health Innovation, Downtown Spruce Pine, Freedom Life Ministries, Hunger and Health Coalition, Long Term Recovery Group for Avery County, Mayland Community College, Mitchell County Department of Social Services, Mitchell County Cooperative Extension, Mitchell County Senior Center, A.M.Y. Region NCWorks, Yancey Reconciliation House.

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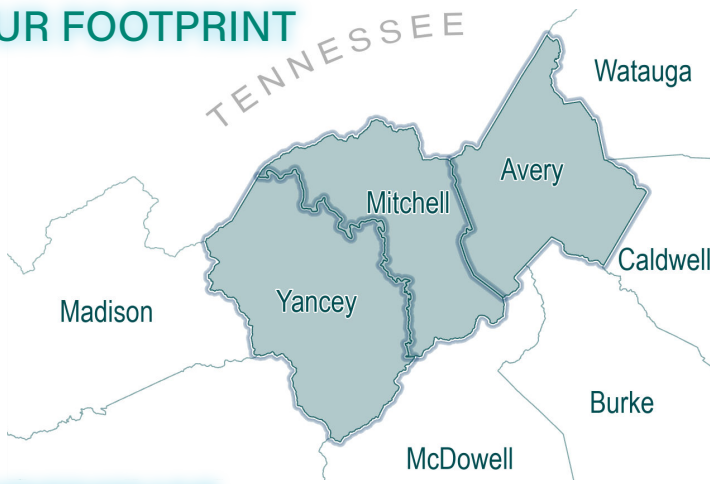
Michael is a justice impacted individual doing his best to turn his life around while helping others. We gave him a laptop and phone to help him with his classes at Caldwell Community College. He used the laptop to complete all of his class work and earned his CDL. **He now has multiple leads on employment.** In addition to his own success, **Michael lifts others up** through his work as Transportation Director at the Refuge

*W.A.M.Y. Staff*

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## OUR FOOTPRINT



I have been able to **propel my life forward in so many ways**. I can do all my assignments, access study materials, gained access to internet, and allowed me to access researching information and creating documents.

Taylor, W.A.M.Y. Client

## EXPERIENCE

Prior to the Digital Opportunities Initiative, the Cohort had a strong working relationship sharing resources, and implementing digital opportunity strategies being led by the High Country Council of Governments and support from the N.C. Department of Information Technology (NCDIT). As a result of the Initiative, A.M.Y. Cohort members have **advanced along the partnership continuum to collaborate and integrate Digital Opportunity within and between organizations**. A.M.Y. Cohort aims to address our Core Themes while taking the intersectionality of what Digital Opportunity is (as described on front page) to create holistic strategies.

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Buladean Community Center was supplied with devices through the HCCOG's device distribution and hosted a laptop basics class six months to the day after Hurricane Helene with HCCOG's Digital Navigator. This full circle approach was further expanded upon with the Digital Opportunity Initiative - Buladean Community Center is now constructing a Business Center to offer a public access point for devices, internet connectivity, digital skills + support, printers/copies/scanners, and a quiet place for virtual meetings. **This illustrates the full circle capabilities of our Digital Opportunity strategies.**


Thankful for amazing people who are **willing to help seniors take computer terminology and help us to understand** what it means... truly God sent. Truly appreciate the willingness to give us hands-on classes.

Carol, Digital Skills Participant

**PLEASE REFERENCE THE A.M.Y. COHORT MAP HANDOUT FOR A BREAKDOWN OF STRATEGIES.**

## SUPPORT

Digital Opportunities is supported and coordinated by **Dogwood Health Trust**, a private foundation committed to improving the health and wellbeing of all people and communities in the region. The Digital Opportunities Initiative is a comprehensive \$7M+ effort to make high-speed internet available, affordable and useful for everyone in the region. These efforts aim to break down barriers like cost and access to devices that prevent people from using the internet for education, health care, employment searches, accessing community information and more. Nearly 50 organizations are part of the Digital Opportunities Initiative across the 18 counties and Qualla Boundary of Western North Carolina.

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