

**AGING IN COMMUNITY COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
COMMISSION ON AGING**

Date: April 12, 2022  
9:30am-11:30 am

“Making Technology Work for Older Adults”

**In Attendance:** Mary Sweeney (co-chair, AIC), Wayne Berman (co-chair, AIC), Barbara Selter, Marsha Weber, Mona Grieser, Sibö Ncube, Joyce Dubow, Betsy Carrier, Laurie Pross, .

**Staff:** Pazit Aviv, MC AAA; Shawn Brennan, MC AAA

**Guests:** Mitsuko Herrera: ultraMontgomery Program Director, MoCo Office of Broadband Programs; Dr. Galina Reitz, Faculty Director, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland; Sara Fought, Jewish Council for the Aging

**Opening Remarks from the Co-Chairs:** Wayne and Mary welcomed everyone and thanked Betsy Carrier, Mona Grieser, and Sibö Ncube for arranging today’s meeting topic and speakers. Everyone had a chance to introduce themselves. Wayne and Mary then reviewed the agenda with the featured topic on “Making Technology Work for Older Adults”.

**Approval of the Minutes:** The minutes of the March 8, 2022 meeting were approved.

**PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS:** “Making Technology Work for Older Adults”. Betsy started the session and introduced the two featured presenters: Mitsuko Herrera: ultraMontgomery Program Director, MoCo Office of Broadband Programs and Dr. Galina Reitz is a Faculty Director in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland

**Mitsuko Herrera:**

Ms Herrera talked about the importance of technology and the keys to technology use. These keys include:

- Home Internet Access
- Computing Device
- Technology Training
- For Older Adults – Tech Help Hot Line

Ms Herrera’s spoke about the challenges faced by the County in efforts to make older adults aware of the opportunities to access and use these four keys to technology. At this stage, her office is conducting a series of events around the County to raise awareness of these keys and to the importance of enabling older adults to use technology in a more accessible and reliable manner.

As part of efforts to advance the use of technology, especially among older adults, Ms. Herrera’s office developed an Action Plan ([www.montgomerycountymd.gov/digitalequity](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/digitalequity)) The Action Plan focuses on Digital Equity which is defined to be a condition in which all individuals in a society can access the technology needed to fully participate in our society, democracy, and

economy. Digital Inclusion are the actions taken to achieve Digital Equity. The Office of Broadband Programs (OBP) focuses our digital inclusion work in three areas to improve digital equity in Montgomery County –Access, Devices, and Training.

The focus of each area is listed below:

- Home Internet Access: The intent of this effort is to Enroll Seniors in the [Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\)](#). The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) program that replaces the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB Program) to help low-income households pay for internet service and connected devices. If your household is eligible, you can receive:
  - Up to a \$30/month discount on your internet service federal
  - Up to an additional \$15/month Maryland discount on your internet service
  - A one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer (with a co-payment of more than \$10 but less than \$50)
 Only one monthly service discount and one device discount is allowed per household. To receive the connected device discount, consumers need to enroll in the ACP with a participating provider that offers connected devices (Note: not all internet company offer device discounts.) The internet company will provide the discount to the consumer.
- Computing Devices: The County has a federal grant to distribute 40,000 computers to low-income residents. The goal of the outreach program, including events, is to make residents who qualify aware of and apply to this program. To date, only 10,000 devices have been distributed. The County initially owns devices, but after three years the devices are owned by individuals.
- Technology Training: The County focuses its training efforts through Senior Planet Montgomery [www.seniorplanet.org/montgomery](http://www.seniorplanet.org/montgomery). A Senior Planet National Tech Hotline is available at 920-666-1959 for older adults who have questions or need some training.

The County needs help in the following ways:

- Find training partners/locations
- Getting the word out about training programs and support available from the County. Barbara suggested 50+ and CoA website.
- County needs help in reaching Spanish speaking population
- They need a strategy for reaching individuals or caregivers of the segment of the population that does not have any computer literacy.

### **Dr. Galina Reitz**

Dr. Reitz described challenges seniors faced when using technology that include lack of good design and lack of consistent support. She has worked on several projects to address these issues that include using Alexa to help prevent social isolation; mentored students in creating a model of a futuristic home for older adults, and educational webinars etc. She described research she has conducted around cybersecurity and supporting caregivers.

Her current focus is on developing an intergenerational technical support lab on the Shady Grove campus and research and design of new technologies so they are senior friendly.

Following Dr. Reitz’s presentation, discussion centered on these themes:

- Seniors, like others, have concerns about privacy and computer scams. This issue must be addressed in training programs.
- Question whether the training Dr. Reitz is doing could be conducted at senior centers. She said not at this time, training is conducted on Shady Grove campus to be near students.
- Wayne raised the question about the role of the medical community and how they have been engaged given the growing role of tele-medicine.

### **POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS DISCUSSED:**

The Committee believed that continued work on Making Technology Work to Help Older Adults is an important area of work. Barbara Selter thanked the AIC Technology Working Groups for arranging this session and strongly suggested that the Technology Working Group continue meeting and establish some clear goals / objectives for next steps and actions.

The AIC affirmed that continued dialogue and work with Mitsuko Herrera and Dr. Reitz, would be beneficial and could include a number of possible actions as follows:

- Work with Ms. Herrera to identify dates and locations for events that would help to promote the ACP Federal Connectivity program and address computer literacy concerns with different demographics and in different locations.
- Work with Ms Herrera to compile available data on technology use in the County, based upon factors like demographics and location (e.g. urban and rural).
- Work with 50+ Montgomery to air PSA's on the ACP Federal Connectivity program.
- Work with Dr. Reitz to provide senior's perspective on design of software
- Help Ms Herrera get out the word about County programs: Using 50+, PSA, Fact Sheet, Newsletter, website
- Advocacy for County budget for technology and training.
- Provide people for focus groups or training.
- Possible future public forum on using technology for aging in place
- COA should set some goals and try to achieve them around x number of seniors trained, X number of seniors getting devices, etc.
- COA to encourage Dr. Reitz to have training program for CNAs.
- COA could help with surveys conducted either by County or Dr. Reitz
- COA can coordinate activities with Age Friendly Montgomery on uses of technology for aging in place.

### **OTHER COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

Wayne mentioned the COA Public Forum titled "In-Home Care – We Can Do Better" to be held on May 5th. He encouraged everyone to attend.

**UPCOMING MEETING:** The next AIC meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 10, 2022 at 9:30 am. The focus of the meeting will be on "Transportation for Older Adults – A County and A Regional Perspective". This meeting will be facilitated by Wayne Berman.

**MEETING ADJOURNED:** 11:20 am