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Byram Hills High School

St. Vincent's Hospital Youth Awards

Over the last two years, I dedicated myself to bridging the digital divide for senior citizens and rehabilitation patients in my community through consistent, hands-on technology assistance. This volunteer work reflects my commitment to making technology accessible to those who face barriers in navigating an increasingly digital world. My passion for this work grew from helping my grandmother with her devices from a very young age, an experience that taught me the patience needed to guide others through the often-intimidating digital world.

Over the past two years, I have volunteered twice monthly at the local community center in Armonk, the Hergenhan Community Center, accumulating at least 40 hours of service working directly with senior citizens developing their technology skills and answering questions regarding devices and online resources. During these sessions, I provide personalized instruction on a wide range of digital tools and platforms. I help seniors learn to use smartphones and tablets, teaching them essential functions such as making video calls, sending text messages and emails, and taking and accessing photos. I also assist them with more practical applications, including setting up medical appointment reminders, accessing social services online, and using delivery apps for groceries and medications. Two experiences stand out as particularly meaningful. I spent a session teaching a grandfather how to use FaceTime so he could video chat with his son who lives across the country. Witnessing his joy during their first successful call was one of my favorite moments. I also worked with a tenured professor who needed assistance modernizing her academic presentations. Together, we created PowerPoint slides that helped her bring her wealth of knowledge to a new generation of students in a more engaging format. On another occasion, I spent multiple sessions trying to explain to a senior how to set up his home scanner, but the process proved too difficult, recognizing his frustration and genuine need, I eventually went to his house to set it up for him personally.

For the past two summers, I expanded my volunteer commitment by spending approximately 120 hours with patients at a local rehabilitation center. The patients were often recovering from injuries or surgeries that affected their mobility or cognitive function, making technology use particularly challenging. I adapted my teaching methods to accommodate various physical and cognitive limitations, helping patients relearn how to use their devices or discover adaptive technologies that could improve their independence. I also assisted them with speech-to-text features, screen magnification tools and voice command systems. My favorite experience at the rehabilitation center was teaching an entire wing of the hospital how to use MyChart, the patient portal that connects them to their healthcare providers. I walked patients through the platform step by step, showing them how they could easily request appointments, send questions directly to their doctors, and request prescription refills without having to make phone calls or wait on hold. Seeing their faces light up as they realized how much easier managing their healthcare could be was incredibly rewarding, and many told me that this knowledge truly changed their lives for the better by giving them greater control over their own lives and health.

Through my volunteering experience, I see first-hand the profound impact that technology literacy can have on quality of life, particularly for seniors, who might otherwise feel left behind. I try to provide them with the skills that enhance their independence, connection, and quality of life. I feel that my work demonstrates that true community commitment is not just about grand gestures but about showing up repeatedly and making a sustained difference in the lives of others.