

Digital first or people first? How the digital divide affects public legal education work – Reflections on engaging with the digital divide

PLEAC Virtual Fair 2025

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Agenda

Segment 1: Equality vs equity and why the distinction is important for inclusion and social justice

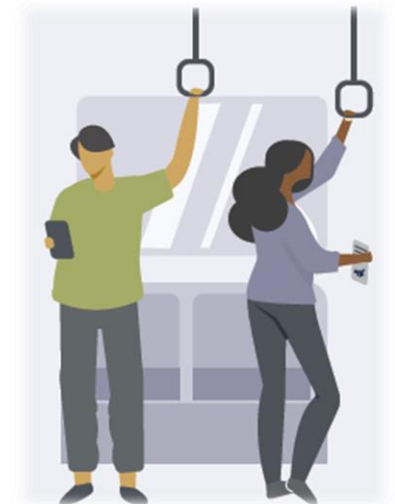
Polls: What do you think about digital access?

Segment 2: Relevant stats from research about adult skills and with adult learners

Survey: Digital challenges of your clients

Segment 3: Storytelling of living in digital spaces and what we can do to adapt and assist

Q&A and discussion: Please put your questions in the chat so we can address them at the end.



Equality or Equity, or Liberation and Social Justice

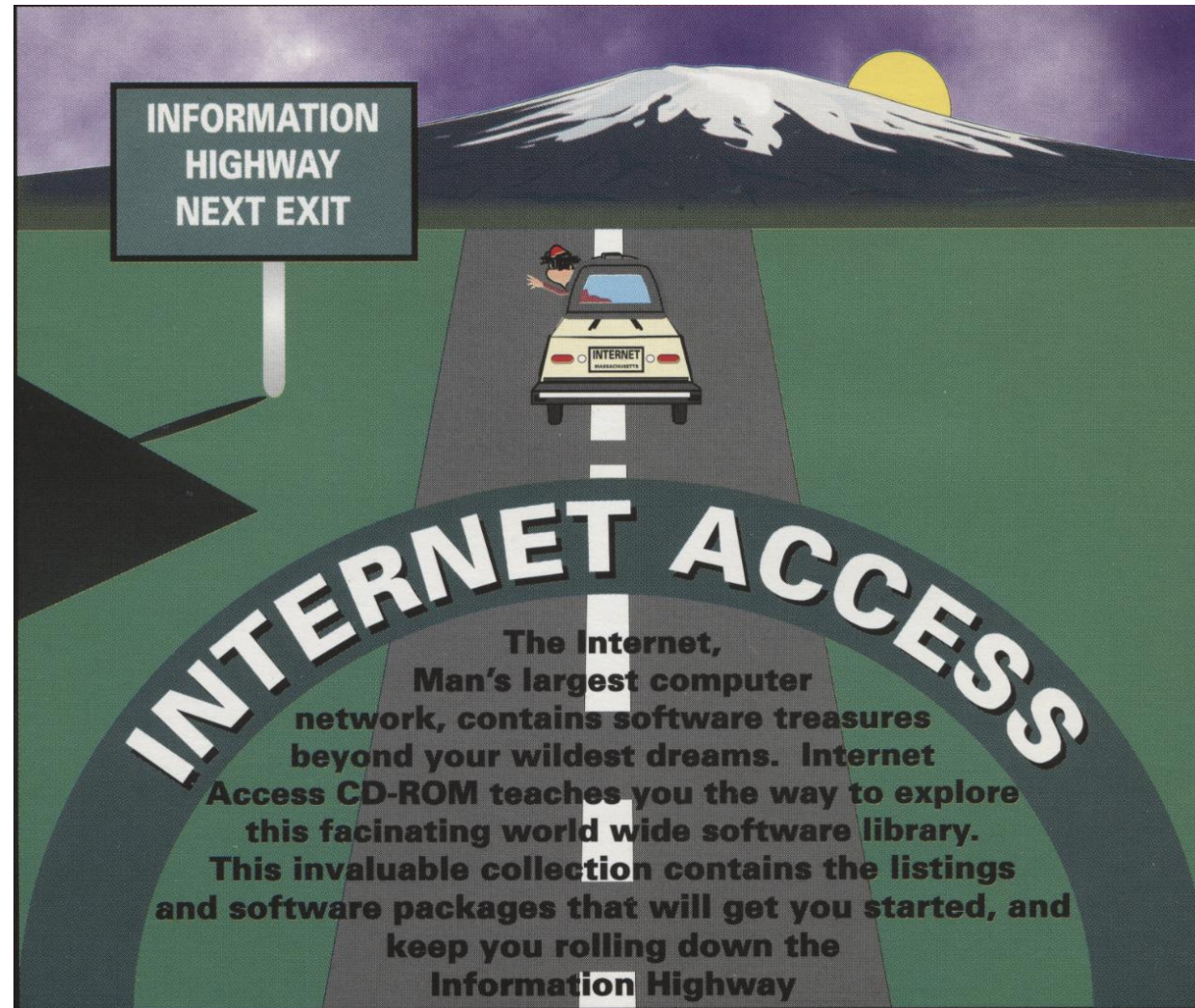


Source: Status of Women Canada (2018). <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/med/multimedia/videos/gba-ac-s-ee-en.html>

Equality or Equity, or Liberation and Social Justice

- Equality of Opportunity is a central aim of liberalism.
- Socialism strives for equality of outcomes (equity).
- Liberalism is about equal conditions and chances, and no structural or interactional discrimination that influence the competition between people.
- Liberalism is all about equal opportunity with the concept of meritocracy at its core.

Digitality



Digital Turn:
“The rapid digitalization of literacy practices”.
(Mills, 2015)



Source: Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/InternetAccessToTheInformationHighway1994/>

Digital Equity

- Digital Divides and Agency
(Van Dijk, 2020)
- Digital Fluency
(Miller & Bartlett, 2012)
- Cultural and Social Capital
(Bourdieu, 1977, 1992)
- Capital-Enhancing Activities
(Ignatow & Robinson, 2017)
- Techno-capital
(Rojas et al., 2012)



Polls: What do you think about digital access?

In the int.'l Adult Skills Survey, where does Canada rank?

- Top 5 countries
- Better than average
- Worse than average
- Bottom 5 countries

What do newcomer language learners say about tech barriers?

- ☐ Internet issues
- ☐ Lack of devices
- ☐ Improve reading
- ☐ Improve language

Do the following issues apply to ABE and ESL learners?

- ☐ More smartphones
- ☐ Less home Internet
- ☐ Mobile data limit
- ☐ Share a device



International Adult Skills Surveys

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & StatsCan
- Previous IALS (1994/98) and ALLS (2003-07), then two cycles of PIAAC
- Large scale assessment of reading, numeracy, and problem-solving
- 2012: Canada with one of the largest proficiency gap in PS-TRE (Problem-Solving in Technology-Rich Environments)
- 2022: Adaptive Problem Solving skills measured (not comparable to PS-TRE)
- 2022: Average proficiency of Canadians aged 16–65 remained stable in literacy and improved in numeracy¹
- 2022: Canada's average skill levels are higher among the 25–34-year-old group and lower for the 55–64-year-olds¹
- 2022: Canada ranks 10th out of 31 countries, slightly above average

1) Brigid Hayes (December 11, 2024): <https://brigidhayes.wordpress.com/2024/12/11/piaac-2023-survey-of-adult-skills-released-my-thoughts/>



LINC Settlement Language Programs

- Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada federal funding
- Blended and online learning LINC curriculum at Avenue.ca
- Ongoing data collection with learners completing a survey as a learning activity part of a digital citizenship print and e-module
- Nine out of ten find technology very or sometimes helpful to connect to others newcomers about their settlement
- Nine out of then find video and audio most useful to learn
- When asked about barriers to use tech, 5 out of 10 said they needed to improve their reading and 6 out of 10 their English



California WOI A adult education

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act federal funding
- Adult Basic/Secondary Education and ESL programs
- More learners connect to the Internet using their smartphones and less learners have home Internet
- One in five learners have a cap on their data plan
- Less learners use a computer or tablet, the same number use smartphones – more learners do not have a device
- Between 3-4 out of 10 learners share their device

OTAN Technology and Distance Learning Report (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023): <https://otan.us/AboutUs/Reports>



Seamless and Limited Access in Canada

- 27.2% use the internet 20 hours or more per week¹
- 45.1% use the internet 10 hours or less per week¹
- 2018: average internet cost was \$80.31 per month²
- 2022: average internet cost is \$95 per month³

1) CIUS 2020, Intensity of use of internet: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=2210013601>

2) CRTC 2019 Monitoring Report: <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/policymonitoring/2019/cmr2.htm>

3) The Star: https://www.thestar.com/sponsored_sections/2022/10/29/internet-in-canada-costs-more-than-anywhere-else-in-the-world--b.html



Seamless and Limited Access in Canada

Everyday seamless access means people:



have **more devices** and the resources to pay for them



are **nearly four times as likely** to use the Internet for personal use from work

can be **responsive and efficient**, no matter where they are, leading to personal, social and economic benefits

Everyday limited access means people:



are **more dependent on public access** in libraries and public spaces



often use **pay-as-you-go** cell phone plans that are cheaper to purchase but more costly per minute

spend a higher percentage of their budget on communications and **sacrifice other basic needs** to pay for them, particularly if they have school-age children



Adapted from: https://www.learnit2teach.ca/wpnew/Learnit2teach_other_help_files/Digital-Divide-NLS-WEB.pdf

Survey: Digital challenges of your clients

What kind of digital challenges do the clients of your organization have? What would fit your clients' profiles?

- ☐ Limited or no internet access at home; may use public wi-fi
- ☐ Mobile data limit and/or pay-as-you-go cell phone plans
- ☐ Higher percentage of budget spent on communication
- ☐ Mobile-friendly form-filling formats instead of PDF forms
- ☐ Need for digital skills training and support using tech
- ☐ Need for access to current and affordable devices
- ☐ Other (feel free to share in the chat now or during Q&A)





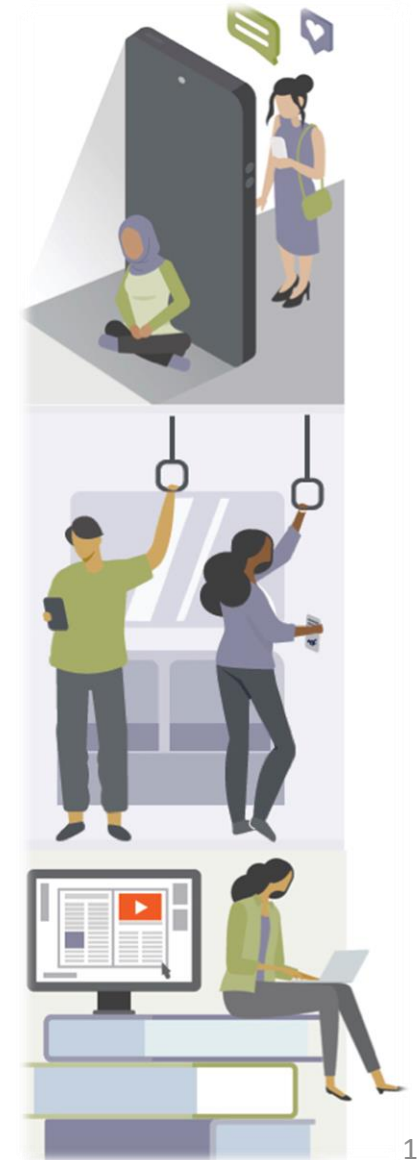
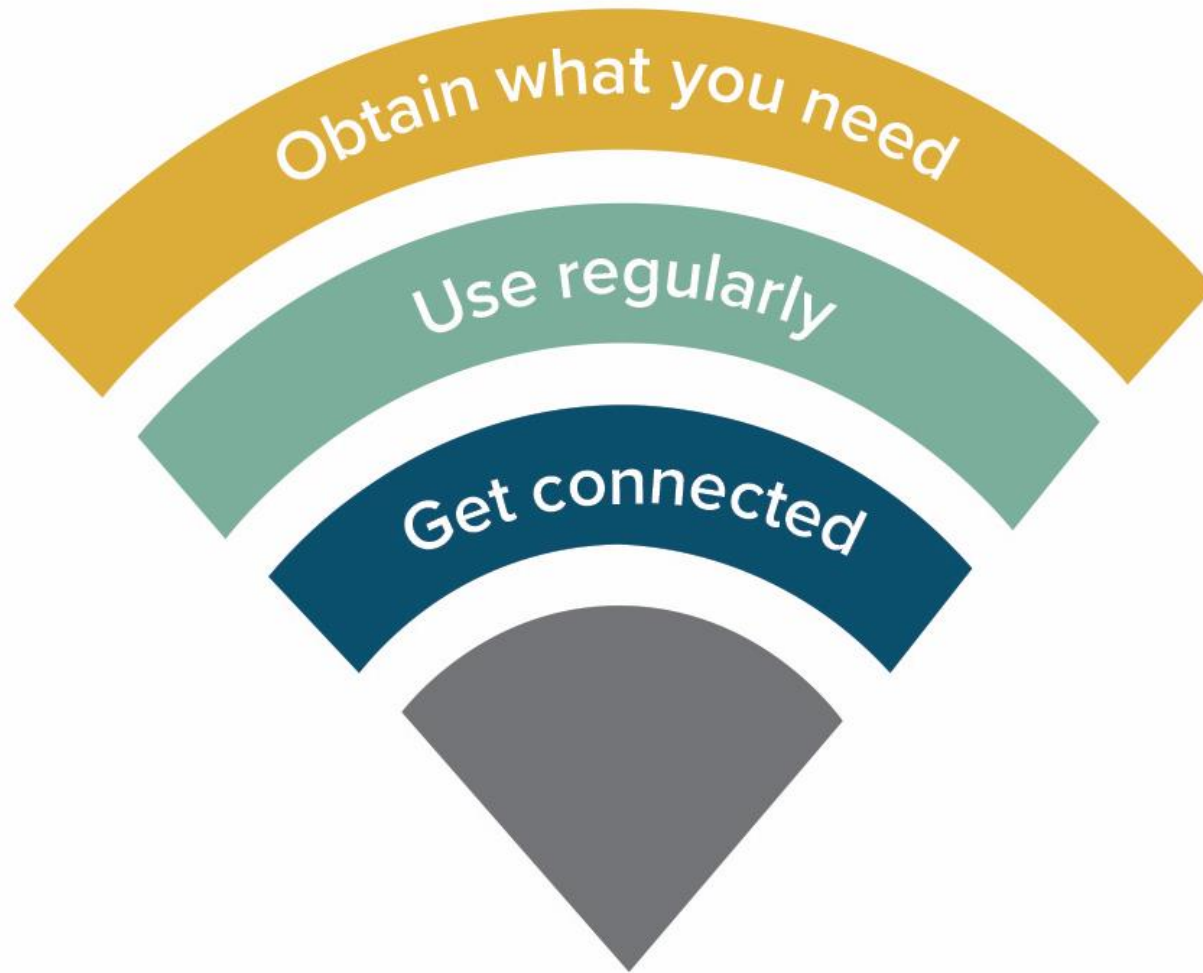
Source: I, Daniel Blake (2016) - Clip "Help" | HD | IFC Films – YouTube: <https://youtu.be/5qRqQn5j7XM?si=qEpXSnPKM31OeaqP>

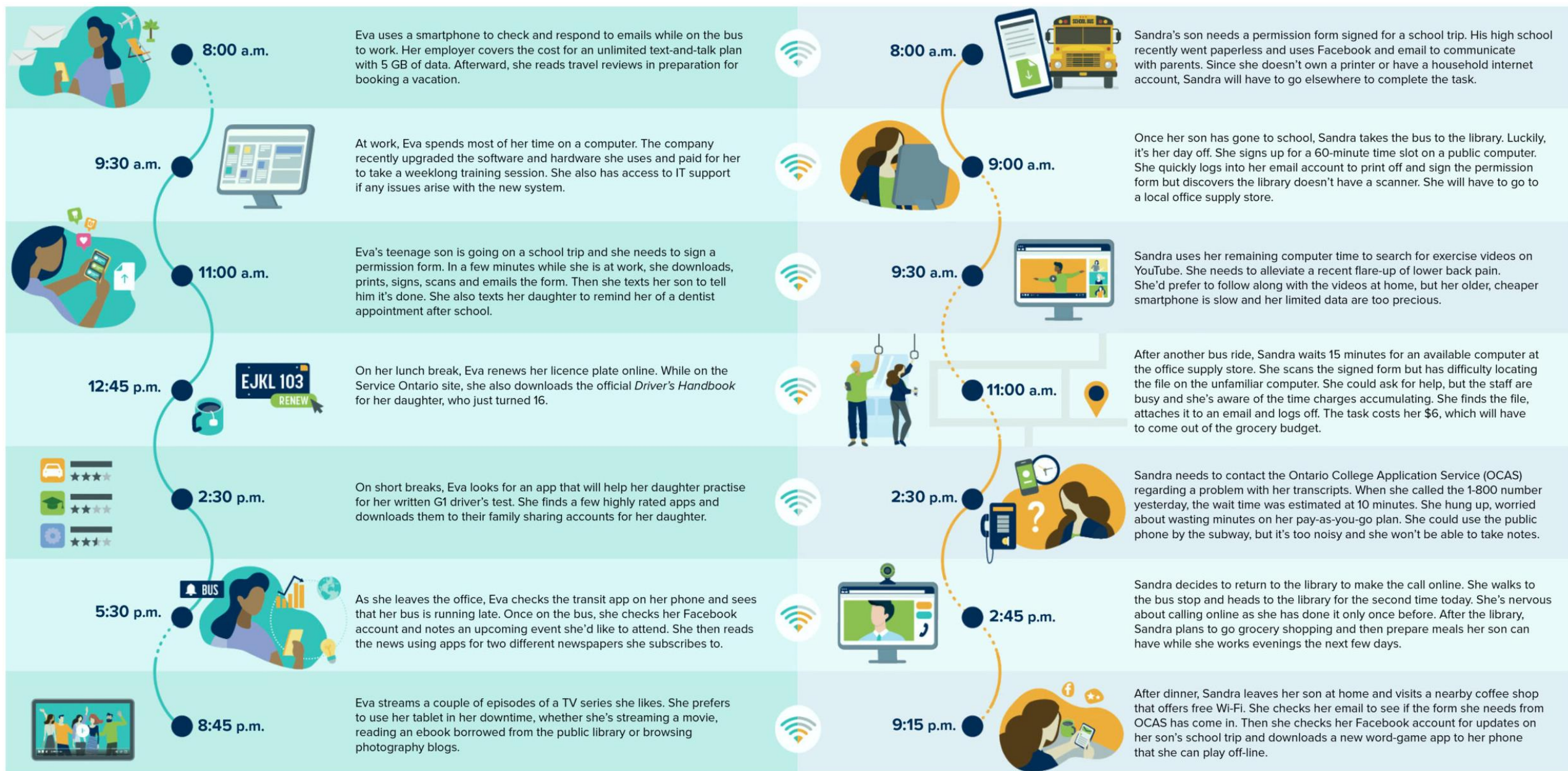
Living in Inequitable Digital Spaces



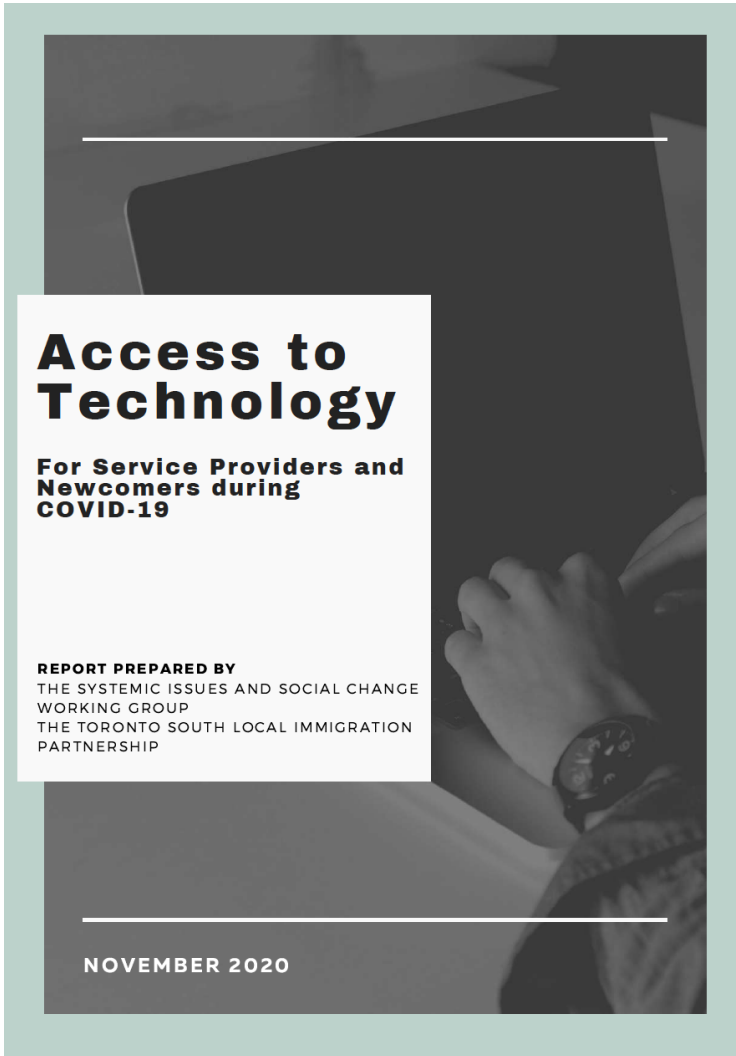
Source: The Lindsay Advocate (2020). <https://lindsayadvocate.ca/community-anger-growing-with-long-wait-times-at-lifelabs/>







Source: <https://alphaplus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Digital-Divide-ENG-4pg.pdf>



Source: <https://torontolip.com/working-groups/systemic-issues-social-change/>

Service Providers cite numerous barriers faced by clients:

- Lack of reliable and sufficient internet.
- Not enough technology devices for family members.
- Cost of technology devices and internet.
- Quality of the devices that clients own or have access to – older and incompatible with newer technology platforms.
- Most clients have access to cellphones – but cellphones are inadequate for participating in many online programs (e.g. language training) and for dealing with lengthy documentation.
- Literacy barriers – clients unable to navigate the internet and understand information on various websites (e.g. filling out forms).
- Language barriers – most programs are conducted in English only.
- Privacy and security concerns – clients do not have quiet or private space at home – especially those in shelters or congregate housing; clients reluctant to share personal information over technology; some providers are not able to share legal information over technology; spouses will not allow clients to use technology.

Digital Equity and Public Legal Education Work

Support user strategies

- Resourcefulness of users
- Peer support and distributed expertise
- Alternative options

Intervention opportunities

- Support organizations
- Personal support
- Institutional support

Please use the chat to brainstorm and share ideas.



Thank you!



Learn more

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