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Local Students Offer Free Tech Support to Area Caregivers
Montclair and Verona Students Partnered with United Way *Caregivers Coalition*

VERONA, N.J. – United Way of Northern New Jersey *Caregivers Coalition* tapped into the volunteer spirit and tech savvy of area teenagers, pairing nine digital natives with family caregivers for a free tech support session last month that was eye-opening for both generations.

Some 30 family caregivers showed up at the Verona Community Center on May 20th with their personal smartphones, tablets and laptops in hopes of learning how to better navigate what can be a bedeviling digital world. Many of the caregivers are hoping to integrate the use of technology in their care for loved ones who are ill, frail or living with a mental or physical disability.

Their tech mentors for two hours were local Verona and Montclair teenagers who negotiate the digital world with ease, having grown up using technology.

Sheila O'Connell, a Cedar Grove resident, brought with her a Christmas present that sat unopened for five months. She had received an Echo Dot but had no idea how to use it. As a former caregiver to her mother and owner of Home & Hospital Medical Personnel, a home care agency, O'Connell said she signed up immediately when she heard about the workshop.

"I need step-by-step directions. I'm much more hesitant than the younger generation," O'Connell said. "I have the directions now in my purse and I'm going to try it when I get home. Jessie was clear, she was great, and this was wonderful."

The idea for the workshop came from listening to *Coalition* members who have shared that technology can be more frustrating than helpful, said Deb Day, the United Way *Caregivers Coalition* manager who organized the event. It was a no-brainer that the perfect candidates for the job would be young people who are immersed in technology, Day said.

"I have a grandma and she needs help, so I thought this would be a good opportunity to help others like her," Verona eighth grader Olivia Egan said. "A lot of the people said it's funny that we're the experts, but we've grown up with this. It's interesting to see the transition from their time with giant TVs and now we have phones in our hands."

Since its founding in 2005, the *Coalition* has helped improve the lives of area residents who assist loved ones with tasks such as finding transportation to medical appointments, managing finances, completing chores and administering around-the-clock personal care. The *Coalition* provides free caregiving workshops like this one throughout its five-county footprint.

Jarvis Hawley, a five-year *Coalition* member and former Montclair acting fire chief, said he's been a caregiver since 2007, first to his father, then his wife, who is an above-the-knee amputee, and now to his mother. Hawley said he retired early because of all the caregiving he was doing. Hawley attended the event with his wife, Audrey.

"I'm one person, I can always learn more," Hawley said. "Coming to the meetings is a good reminder that you're not the only one going through this. The meetings address every issue – mental, physical, financial."

For more information about the United Way *Caregivers Coalition*, visit UnitedWayNNJ.org, email Deborah.Day@UnitedWayNNJ.org or call 973.993, x209.

Caption 1: Verona, N.J. – United Way of Northern New Jersey *Caregivers Coalition* tapped into the volunteer spirit and digital skills of Verona and Montclair teenagers for a free tech support session for family caregivers last month. A group of Verona middle and high school students participated, helping caregivers learn how to better use their personal devices. From left: Olivia Vogel, Jessica Waldron, Olivia Egan, Kiera Egan, Stephanie Boyle, Gillian O'Donnell, and Grace Trupia. Photo Credit: Hailey Womer / Courtesy of United Way of Northern New Jersey

Caption 2: Verona, N.J – Montclair High School Senior Ellie Keating helps Joel Zucker with accessing his email from a laptop during a free tech support session hosted last month by United Way of Northern New Jersey *Caregivers Coalition*. United Way paired family caregivers with Montclair and Verona teenagers who volunteered their time and digital skills to answer tech questions. Photo Credit: Hailey Womer / Courtesy of United Way of Northern New Jersey

Caption 3: Verona, N.J – Claire Searing, a family caregiver from West Caldwell, seeks iPad advice from Verona High School student Olivia Vogel during a free tech support session hosted last month by United Way of Northern New Jersey *Caregivers Coalition*. United Way paired caregivers with Montclair and Verona teenagers who volunteered their time and digital skills to answer tech questions. Photo Credit: Hailey Womer / Courtesy of United Way of Northern New Jersey

About United Way of Northern New Jersey

United Way of Northern New Jersey is a nonprofit organization fighting to improve life for families and individuals in our five-county footprint who are ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) or in poverty. We believe when those who are struggling to afford the basics can succeed, all communities win. By focusing on Education, Financial Stability, and Health, we are helping ALICE now and in the long term. We do this through our initiatives that fill gaps in services, community partnerships, public policy work, and volunteer efforts. United Way of Northern New Jersey serves Morris, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren counties as well as portions of suburban Essex County including the Caldwells, Cedar Grove, Essex Fells, Fairfield, Glen Ridge, Livingston, Millburn-Short Hills, Montclair, Roseland, and Verona. To learn more, call 973.993.1160 or visit www.UnitedWayNNJ.org.