# Wired for success: Bridging the Digital Divide wins award

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At senior centers across Broome County, SUNY Broome and Binghamton University students are teaching the ins and outs of the digital age.

They're part of the Bridging the Digital Divide Program (BDDP), a collaborative effort with nearly 20 community partners that aims to increase access to and training in information technology for local populations. And sometimes populations farther afield, as well; BDDP partnered with SUNY Broome's Health for Haiti program for Bridge to Haiti, which is creating solar-powered computer labs in the island nation and teaching computer literacy to hundreds of children.

The Broome County Office for Aging gave BDDP a Community Organization award recently for its work in eight of the nine county senior centers.

In addition to structured classes, the program offers drop-in hours, during which seniors can bring their new device to students for help. Seniors who are otherwise computer-savvy may still have questions about their new tablets or smartphones, noted Professor Sandra Wright, chair of the Business Information Technology Department at SUNY Broome.

"They want to keep up on the latest skills," Wright said.

Students from both school volunteer for BDDP, while Binghamton University students also refurbish computers provided to community centers. The refurbishment process originally began under the leadership of Gary Kohut from SUNY Broome's Computer Science department, Wright noted. Anyone who participates in a BDDP class can receive a refurbished computer on an indefinite loan.

For students, the program represents a learning opportunity – as well as a chance to appreciate how sophisticated seniors really are. The experience can also help develop patience. One volunteer used to feel frustrated when his parents asked him for help, Wright said. Now, he's more understanding.

Going forward, the BDDP plans to expand into all nine of the county's senior centers, as well as provide refurbished computers there for seniors to use. Classes and drop-in hours continue. Wright credited Dai Korba, a BU graduate student serving as BDDP coordinator, for doing a wonderful job reaching out to the centers and setting up classes.

Interested in learning more? Visit binghamtonbddp.org.



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