Title: Learning computer skills: Meanings and influences on occupations for older adults

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The digital revolution is here, yet older adults (OA) lag far behind other age groups in their use of computers and computer skills. Research on OA and computer use have yielded mixed findings: some studies concluded that computer usage has no significant impact on OA; whereas others reported positive attitudes change and psychosocial impact.

Objective: The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate the meanings associated with computer learning and use for OA, to inform the knowledge base about effects of such learning on daily roles and activities of OA, and to describe the experience (successes and challenges) for OA learning computer skills.

Method: This study employed Photovoice methodology, a participatory ethnographic approach in which individualized storytelling is facilitated through the taking of photographs to share participants’ lived experience with funders and service providers to promote resources, services provided, and to determine needs. OA (aged 65+, without mental illness or cognitive limitations, have taken at least one computer course during older adulthood) were recruited from community computer classes. Participants took photographs and discussed 1-2 photographs that best captured meanings, successes and challenges associated with computer learning and use, and effects on occupations. Qualitative data was derived from these interviews and follow-up focus group discussions.

Results: Three themes emerged from the data in regard to older adult’s computer use and learning: 1) self-directed learning, 2) computer as a tool for engagement in occupation 3) sense of inclusion into community of technology users