

Lifeline/Link Up Comments on Broadband Pilot Program
WC Docket Nos. 11-42, 03-109
CC Docket No. 96-45

Connected Living, Inc.
August 26, 2011

These comments are made by Connected Living, Inc. in response to the request for thoughts and suggestions on “designing and implementing a Lifeline/Link Up broadband pilot program to evaluate whether and how Lifeline/Link Up can effectively support broadband adoption by low-income households.

Background on Recent Connected Living Experience in Promoting Broadband Adoption among Low Income Seniors and People with Disabilities:

Connected Living is a private company based in Massachusetts dedicated to the mission of transforming the lives of Seniors through technology, training and support. The company offers simplified, web based software that makes computer learning less intimidating to first time users, instructional programs for beginning, intermediate and advanced learners and engaging content and ongoing support for new users. Although the company began providing Internet instruction to seniors living in Assisted and Independent Living communities in 2007, Connected Living expanded its focus in 2009 to include special technology adoption programs for low-income seniors.

Specifically, Connected Living has launched four programs through which it has gained a wealth of insight into the requirements and best practices for getting low income seniors online.

1. **Broadband/Computer Adoption for residents of Atlanta Housing Authority senior buildings.** In January 2010, the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) contracted Connected Living to train a test group of 72 non-computer literate residents at the Cosby Spear high rise community on how to use broadband to connect with friends and family, access government services and obtain job training. During this six month trial, a research study conducted by Dr. Paul Freddolino, a Professor at the Michigan State University School of Social Work, compared the progress / outcomes of these 72 residents against a control group of 72 residents in another AHA building who did not receive training. At the end of the trial, AHA decided to expand the Connected Living training program to all eleven senior communities in their portfolio on account of the positive impact on and sustained broadband usage of participants in the experimental group.
2. **Broadband/Computer Adoption for residents of HUD Project Based Section Housing in Boston.** In May 2010, Beacon Communities LLC, a private manager of project based Section 8 subsidized housing, invited Connected Living to bring its broadband adoption program to the 265 unit Blake Estates community in Hyde

Park. Connected Living installed a computer learning center and within the first few months of the program helped 85 low income residents get online for the first time. Beacon Communities has since expanded the Connected Living program to other communities for senior and disabled residents.

3. **Broadband/Computer Adoption for residents of the Boston Housing Authority senior buildings.** In September 2010, Connected Living was selected by the City of Boston to participate in a Sustainable Broadband Adoption grant provided by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). Connected Living is training residents of three Boston Housing Authority buildings comprising approximately 450 seniors and/or people with disabilities. Each resident who participates in a twelve class training session (conducted in English, Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese) and passes a proficiency evaluation is eligible to receive a subsidized laptop computer and broadband subscription. The program also provides personalized training for veterans affected by anxiety and post traumatic stress disorders that have prevented them from succeeding in other computer training. Boston Housing Authority and Connected Living were recently honored to introduce FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn to several graduates of this program who reside in the BHA's Amory Street high rise and to give Commissioner Clyburn the opportunity to interview graduates on their experience.
4. **Broadband/Computer Adoption for Low Income Seniors and People with Disabilities in Northern Illinois.** This program titled "Getting Illinois Low Income Seniors and People with Disabilities Online" and is described in greater detail in comments submitted by Don S. Samuelson – DSSA Strategies to this inquiry. The \$6.8 million program, funded by a \$4.7 million BTOP grant from the NTIA, a \$1.2 million matching funds grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and \$0.9 million of in kind contributions from program partners, was awarded in September 2010, and continues for two years. The program will generate awareness of the benefits of broadband to approximately 2,800 residents of low income housing communities and to roughly 50,000 senior residents in the neighborhoods surrounding the buildings. The program will generate a minimum of 3,000 new broadband subscribers.

Comments on issues raised by the Universal Service Lifeline/Link Up Reform and Modernization Proceeding

Connected Living does not wish to comment at this time on whether the FCC should impose any terms and conditions on the use of potential Lifeline discounts for broadband service for low income subscribers. However, based on our considerable experience in helping low income seniors get online, we would like to comment on several other issues related to how Universal Service Lifeline/Link Up Reform and Modernization can most effectively spur the expansion of broadband access and usage for this underserved population:

1. **Should support be provided for connection service?** We have found that the two greatest barriers to broadband adoption by low income seniors are: 1) the lack of understanding the relevancy of broadband, and 2) the high cost of getting and staying online. Any pilot program tested by the FCC should consider ways to remove these barriers. That would likely include financial support (subsidies) for low income subscribers but also different approaches to providing broadband awareness generation, training and appropriate customer support.
2. **Should pilot participants be required to either offer hardware directly or partner with other entities to provide the necessary devices as a condition participating of in the pilot program?** Connected Living has found that successful broadband adoption programs must be holistic; they must help trainees secure affordable training, hardware and broadband connections, since most low income seniors lack ready access to all three. For this reason, pilot participants should be required to offer affordable hardware options as a condition of participating in the pilot program(s). Connected Living has managed to reduce the cost of offering hardware in certain programs by teaming up with those organizations that refurbish donated computers.
3. **How much funding should be used for the pilot programs?** Connected Living believes that the FCC could fund multiple pilot programs to test the most effective ways to spread broadband access to low income populations. The total funding required depends on the size of the pilot the FCC wishes to undertake, but Connected Living estimates the total cost to be approximately \$1,600 per trainee. In other words, \$1.6 million would be adequate to get over 1,000 low income citizens online, providing a model and inspiration for many others. This level of funding would be adequate to cover awareness generation, training, hardware, subsidization of broadband access, administration and third party evaluation of each pilot program. Connected Living can provide a further breakdown of costs upon request.
4. **How long should the pilot program(s) should last?** Connected Living believes that pilot programs should last between 12 and 18 months from launch to achieve and measure optimal results. Based on our experience managing deployment of a \$6.8 million BTOP Sustainable Broadband Adoption program, this is adequate time to mount broad based awareness generation programs, secure classrooms, hire and train computer/broadband teachers, incorporate and train community volunteers, and support independent, third party evaluation.

For further information, please contact Andrew Lowenstein, Chief Strategy Officer, by mail at Connected Living, Inc., 300 Congress Street, Suite 406, Quincy MA 02169 or by dialing (617) 328-1600 or via email at alowenstein@connectedliving.com