

# Agencies Receive Funding To Address The Digital Divide

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ST. LOUIS — United Way of Greater St. Louis recently awarded 10 one-time grants totaling \$46,914 to local nonprofits, community agencies and faith-based organizations working to bridge the digital divide in the St. Louis region. In total, the funding will allow organizations to provide more than 150 youth, seniors and individuals living with disabilities impacted by COVID-19 with internet access and digital devices for virtual learning and continued access to critical programs and services.

The digital divide refers to the growing gap among vulnerable populations with little to no access to computers or the internet.

“The digital divide is not a new challenge for many across our community, but the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated that need, as more students engage in virtual learning and people need alternatives to face-to-face interactions,” said Michelle Tucker, president and CEO of United Way of Greater St. Louis. “United Way is committed to supporting local agencies that are helping to bridge this gap, with the majority of our Safety Net partner agencies providing digital supports in this crucial time. These grants

will provide additional, needed support to agencies that are helping our most vulnerable populations to keep learning, working and stay connected socially to live their best possible lives.”

The funding was provided through a \$21,250 grant from the Starbucks Foundation and Points of Light, as well as an additional \$25,664 from United Way. Organizations receiving the grants were carefully determined by a team of volunteers, which considered agencies offering virtual learning supports and other virtual programming for youth, seniors and individuals living with disabilities.

The following organizations each received a \$5,000 grant:

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southern Illinois** will provide digital devices to school-aged children enrolled in the agency's virtual mentorship programs.
- **Boys Hope Girls Hope St. Louis** will provide a year of internet connectivity to its virtual scholars via its Collegian Computer Lab to ensure ongoing access to educational resources.
- **FamilyForward** will provide connectivity and hardware to at-risk youth and families to support educational and telehealth services.
- **Highland Area Christian Ministry** will use funding to support connectivity and hardware to ensure local families can access remote learning and critical virtual resources.
- **Illinois Center for Autism’s** Special Education program will help participants stay connected socially and for virtual learning.
- **Youth and Family Center’s** virtual programming is focused on educational, health, recreational and fitness programs, and arts and crafts.

Other organizations receiving grants include:

- **Lincoln County Council on Aging** received a \$4,864 grant to connect homebound seniors to virtual classes through its Seniors Helping Seniors program.
- **Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition** will use its \$4,800 to aid foster care youth, caregivers and families with virtual learning.
- **Catholic Urban Programs’** \$4,000 grant will purchase digital devices for its Learning Lab participants to access online learning activities.
- **Down Syndrome Association of Greater St. Louis** received a \$3,250 grant to support its virtual programs, which offer connection, socialization and skill-building for individuals with Down syndrome and their loved ones.

“We are incredibly grateful to the Starbucks Foundation and Points of Light for their generosity and commitment to addressing this complex and critical need in our community,” said Regina Greer, chief impact officer at United Way of Greater St.

Louis. “This crisis has highlighted the critical importance of having access to technology and the internet for one to thrive and succeed in life, and it is our goal to continue to support digital access and literacy into the future.”

The grants are just one of the ways United Way is working to address the digital divide in the greater St. Louis region. In addition, [United Way's Volunteer Center](#) works to recruit and match volunteers to agencies that train young people, people with disabilities and seniors on digital skills and literacy. All volunteer opportunities are available at [www.stlvolunteer.org](http://www.stlvolunteer.org).