

Learn to Zoom helps newcomers stay connected to the world



In the midst of revolving lockdowns, Zoom and other online platforms have been invaluable tools in staying connected face-to-face.

But not everyone has the same level of skill needed to use the tools to their full potential.

That's where organizations, including the Aurora Public Library, have stepped in with programs like ?Learn to Zoom: Live Practice Lab for Newcomers.?

Hosted by the Aurora Public Library (APL) in partnership with Catholic Community Services of York Region (CCSYR) through Library Settlement Partnerships, the initiative helps newcomers to Canada learn and practice basic Zoom skills including how to access the app, how to join and leave meetings, muting and unmuting, and how to turn your camera on and off.

?Coming out of the pandemic, there were so many communications platforms and they became important and popular online tools that allow newcomers to stay connected with our communities, friends and family members, as well as to access community services and programs,? says Claudia Olguin of the APL. ?Learn to Zoom allows newcomers to learn and practice basic or advanced Zoom skills in small group settings with the support of a live Zoom skills coach.

?During the pandemic, so many programs, services, workshops and group supports started to be offered through Zoom, but not everyone is tech savvy and knows how to use Zoom, and without knowing how to use Zoom, newcomers cannot connect to their services or attend programs offered by the Library or settlement agencies. This is a big problem because when you move to a new country there are so many things to learn and needs to be met [including] learning English, finding housing or employment, or sending their kids to school. Without those supports, the challenges newcomers face continue to increase.?

The first session of 2022 was just after the start of the New Year and an example of the value of the program immediately rose to the top. One of the participants needed to use Zoom because she has a lawsuit pending in her country of origin and needs to be present ? albeit virtually ? for the proceedings.

?She doesn't want to make a mistake for not knowing how to properly use Zoom,? says Ms. Olguin. ?For other newcomers to Canada that are now eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship, they are also facing some challenges because Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada made some changes to the program. For example, the Citizenship Ceremonies are going through Zoom and during the ceremony they ask participants to join the meetings and follow specific instructions.

?Zoom gives an opportunity for newcomers to Canada to attend the programs that they otherwise might not be able to attend due to

distance, commuting times or other challenges, including the cost of transportation. While this program is being advertised to newcomers, learning Zoom is important for everyone in the community. Right now at the Library, all of our programs are being offered online and if they don't know how to use Zoom [it is a challenge]. It is very important to keep connected not just with your friends and loved ones, but with the community. A lot of seniors are isolated and when they can be a part of the programs the Library offers [they can stay] connected with the community. This new variant has been infecting a lot of people and that is the only way to stay connected: attend online programs until we can offer in-person programs again.?

For more information, including how to register for upcoming sessions of Learn to Zoom: Live Practice Lab for Newcomers, email LSP@ccsyr.org, or you can call or text to 416-258-9015.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter