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WESTCHESTER COUNTY ASSOCIATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS SHARE GROWTH OF Y-ZONE PILOT AT PRESS CONFERENCE IN YONKERS, NY

Endorsed by elected officials of the City of Yonkers and Westchester County, Y-Zone continues to effectively bridge the digital divide in low-income communities

Yonkers, N.Y. (December 14, 2021) – Today, the [Westchester County Association](#) joined community leaders, elected officials, and project partners in a press conference at the Yonkers Public Library to highlight the latest developments since the launch of the Y-Zone (Yonkers Zone), a broadband pilot program funded by [US Ignite](#) and [Schmidt Futures](#) as part of Project Overcome.

The Y-Zone is a cutting-edge, community-based collaborative which provides free internet service to Yonkers residents who live in the [Y-Zone catchment area](#). Since the start of the 12-month pilot in April 2021, towers have been installed to employ Citizens Broadband Radio Service (CBRS) to provide internet access, with the service going live in October 2021. Since then, the Y-Zone’s engagement team has enrolled over 40 households in the service, while over 50 individuals have enrolled in the Access Plus service, which provides a free Chromebook and 15 hours of digital skills training.

Interest from the community is high with over 150 residents expressing interest in enrolling for either Access (Internet only) or Access Plus (Internet, Chromebook, and training) with outreach continuing at public housing complexes, in schools, and through community partners. Y-Zone is more than an affordable connectivity solution for underserved communities that lack digital equity; the project helps create a digital ecosystem that aims to be a blueprint for neighborhoods across the country looking to bridge the digital divide.

“From installation to grassroots outreach and distribution days, our partners have worked tirelessly to meet the digital needs of the Yonkers community with this pilot project,” said Michael N. Romita, President & CEO of the Westchester County Association. “The progress of this pilot demonstrates how valuable a project like this is for Yonkers, Westchester, and beyond. Our goal is to extend the program, through additional funding, and continue this work to bridge the digital divide.”

Partners in attendance included the [City of Yonkers](#), [The STEM Alliance](#), [Yonkers Partners in Education \(YPIE\)](#), [Fordham University](#), and [Westhab](#) – some of which spoke about the great impact they are seeing thus far with the Y-Zone pilot project.

Margaret Käufer, President of The STEM Alliance, spoke with tremendous enthusiasm about the work, “In Westchester County, thousands of families cannot afford internet access or computers. Without these tools, their opportunities are limited. From schooling to healthcare to work skills, we live in a digitally-driven world. The fiscal future of all individuals, and of our County, depends upon having all community members living a digitally literate and engaged life. Yonkers is leading the way by partnering to provide digital equity for their residents.”

“We are proud that Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE) students have had this opportunity to make a meaningful impact in their community. Since last summer, they have been actively involved in the Y-Zone, conducting research, surveying the community, and providing recommendations for Yonkers and similar communities across the country,” said Sam Wallis, Executive Director, Yonkers Partners in Education. “This fall, they have been providing technical assistance and promoting this project in their communities. We know these students will continue to use their skills and insights to have a positive impact in our world.”

Elected officials, including Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano, spoke on behalf of the importance of the project and applauded the efforts being made each day to make a difference in the communities that need it most.

“Once again, Yonkers is leading by example and forging new ground for equitable and accessible technology,” said Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano. “We are proud of the strides we’ve made to date in bridging the digital divide and look to enroll more residents to improve connectivity. Due to the collaboration of our Y-Zone partners, led by the Westchester County Association, we can make a difference in the lives of Yonkers families and build for a brighter future.”

Other elected officials, including Senator Chuck Schumer and County Executive George Latimer showed their support of the project as well.

“I fought to deliver federal funding for equitable access to high-speed broadband services so city’s like Yonkers can establish programs like Project Y-Zone that bridge the digital divide. Using National Science Foundation funds, the Y-Zone pilot will provide hundreds of households with one year of free internet access with an option to get training and a free laptop,” said Senator Schumer.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has opened our eyes to the digital divide and it’s time to bridge that gap. The Y-Zone will establish a digital equity ecosystem and place its footprint in Westchester’s largest city, Yonkers,” said County Executive George Latimer. “Having this type of technology, education and connectivity will advance the lives of so many families, including our children

who will grow up with more digital fluency than past generations. We owe it to them, to provide them with the keys to success.”

The Y-Zone pilot project was made possible through the support from [US Ignite](#), the [National Science Foundation \(NSF\)](#) (Award # CNS-2044448), and [Schmidt Futures](#). It was selected as one of seven communities in the U.S. to receive a Project OVERCOME grant in March 2021. As the grant period grows closer to an end in 2022, Y-Zone’s partner efforts are gearing up for another big push in the New Year to give internet access to those who need it.

“As evidenced today, a strong and agile partnership between members of academic, industry, and nonprofit communities made the Y-Zone possible,” said Lee Davenport, Community Development Director at US Ignite. “Together these advocates for digital empowerment work to overcome the challenge of connecting people to the Internet and offering the necessary digital literacy training that unlocks endless possibilities for personal and professional growth.”

In order to qualify, residents must live in the service zone which reaches from Glenn Park to Park Hill Avenue, and from downtown Yonkers to Nodine Hill. Qualified residents can sign up [here](#) for Access or Access plus, or by emailing help@yzone.info.

The latest information on Y-Zone is available at: [YZone.Info](#).

For more information on Project OVERCOME, please visit: www.US-Ignite.org

About Westchester County Association

The [Westchester County Association](#) is the most influential group of businesses and nonprofits in Westchester County and the surrounding region. A professional membership organization, the WCA is committed to smart growth, economic vitality, and presenting a strong independent voice on behalf of the professional community. Its key objectives are economic growth, business development, and policy advocacy on behalf of its members. For more information about the Westchester County Association, visit www.westchester.org.

About US Ignite

US Ignite is a high-tech nonprofit with a mission to accelerate the smart community movement. Our public-private partnership programs leverage advanced networking and data science to drive key outcomes for communities. Our work also enables new opportunities for wireless and IoT research designed to help narrow the gap between cutting-edge experimentation and scalable, real-world technology deployments. For more information, visit www.us-ignite.org.

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