

**Case Study**

# Bridging the Digital Divide for North Carolina Veterans



Located in Asheville, NC

**Problem:** Veterans across rural North Carolina faced major barriers to digital access, including poor broadband coverage, limited digital literacy, and high administrative hurdles, leaving many unable to access telehealth, education, or employment resources.

**Solution:** Partnering with Mission Telecom, AMREC delivered reliable, easy-to-use hotspots and tablets directly to veterans, supported by digital skills training and hands-on assistance. The result: a trusted, low-barrier program that empowers veterans to connect with services, community, and opportunities.

Through a pioneering collaboration with the Asheville Medical Research and Education Corporation (AMREC), Mission Telecom is helping transform the lives of veterans across North Carolina. What began as a connectivity and digital inclusion challenge evolved into a far-reaching support network—delivering telehealth access, digital literacy, and reliable connectivity to veterans across 23 North Carolina counties.

*We have a lot of people who are eager to get online, but dealing with utilities can be a bureaucratic barrier. We needed something low-friction, fast, and trustworthy.*

– Sarah Friedman

Program Manager, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

## Quick Facts

- Mission Telecom deployed hotspots within days to ensure telehealth continued for veterans.
- Partnership with Mission Telecom helped AMREC launch a successful connectivity program across NC.
- Tailored to meet specific grant requirements and the real-world needs of veterans, Mission Telecom delivered customized, unlimited high-speed data and device packages.
- Mission Telecom strengthened North Carolina's digital equity network by training staff, advancing digital literacy programs, and building trusted community relationships.

## Connecting a Hard-to-Reach Veteran Population

Sarah Friedman, a program manager at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs working through AMREC, leads an initiative supported by a grant from the North Carolina Department of IT.

The program has three core pillars:

- Telehealth station deployment
- Digital literacy education
- Device and broadband distribution

Despite the broad scope, the mission is simple: serve any veteran living in North Carolina—regardless of discharge status, with a focus on the underserved and often-overlooked westernmost regions of the state.

In many rural areas, traditional internet service is typically unavailable, unreliable, or unaffordable. Also, many veterans lacked the digital skills or confidence to access essential services like healthcare, online education, or workforce development tools. And while federal programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) offered some relief, its eventual phase-out left a major gap.

## Education & Empowerment: Digital Literacy as a Foundation

Veterans receiving equipment are invited into two skill-building tracks: Learn to Earn or Pass to Earn. Participants work with Friedman to identify goals, take a Northstar digital literacy assessment, and then join six- to seven-week in-depth classes focused on computer basics: turning on a device, using a mouse, managing files, etc.

One veteran, a former manufacturing plant worker, drove from a distant county to attend classes after the plant closed. Thanks to Mission Telecom's equipment and Northstar's curriculum, he has begun developing skills for a new career.

Another participant—a full-time caregiver who lost her job during the hurricane—used her hotspot and laptop to enroll in school. "She has had lots of starts and stops in the past, but with an internet-enabled device she can keep going because she knows she'll have service," says Friedman.



Mural painted by volunteers

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*I'm not an IT person, and I needed a partner who could step in for that. Mission Telecom taught me how to explain bandwidth and device limitations in plain language. They helped us to be more trustworthy.*

— Sarah Friedman

Program Manager, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

## Digital Support that Meets People Where They Are

As the program's first broadband provider, Mission Telecom quickly became a key partner.

From the beginning, Mission Telecom's team helped tailor a solution that fit both the grant structure and the realities on the ground. The non-profit organization provided high-speed hotspots with unlimited data along with tablets to veterans who needed both access and devices. To date, the program has distributed 30 hotspots and 22 tablets to veterans throughout the region.

Additionally, knowing that many veterans were wary of unfamiliar programs or burdensome fine print, the Mission Telecom team helped Friedman deliver excellent end-user support by establishing a direct phone line for veterans to get help, creating contracts with minimal legal language, and providing proactive account support, including check-ins and real-time troubleshooting.

## Enabling Telehealth & Transitional Housing Support

Veterans now can use Mission Telecom hotspots and devices to attend telehealth appointments and access care portals that might otherwise be out of reach.

In one powerful example, Mission Telecom's equipment came to the rescue in a transitional housing unit for male veterans after their previous facility was flooded. The new location had spotty internet despite a promised commercial line. A single Mission Telecom hotspot enabled the veteran to receive quality telehealth services while also serving as a shared connectivity option used by dozens of veterans, case workers, social workers, and administrative staff.

## Veteran-Centered Solutions, Made Possible by Partnership

"Mission Telecom is incredibly well known in North Carolina's digital equity circles. I kept seeing their name in advocacy spaces, and now I know why," says Friedman. "They've been flexible, responsive, and honest."

Whether supporting a digital navigator office hour, responding to a hurricane crisis, or empowering a caregiver to go back to school, Mission Telecom is helping to close the digital divide—not just with hardware, but with humanity.

*"Some participants have never held a mouse before, but they're eager to learn. It's about confidence and connection."*

— Sarah Friedman

Program Manager, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



115 veterans currently reside in this transitional housing unit

*"That single hotspot helped keep everything running. It made a huge difference."*

— Sarah Friedman

Program Manager, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



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## About Mission Telecom

Mission Telecom provides affordable and reliable best-in-class broadband to schools, libraries, and nonprofits, ensuring that connectivity is never a barrier to learning, innovation, or community development. With affordable plans, no data caps, and no overage fees, we empower mission-driven organizations with the reliable internet they need to serve their communities and maximize their impact.