Merle Bush has a new student.
“It’s his first day, and he’s already sitting next to Mr Johnson looking up “oldies but goodies” music videos on You Tube,” Merle proudly says on a November afternoon during American Thanksgiving celebrations.

Merle is the instructor for the Harlem Internet Computer Access Program (HICAP), a course aimed at low-income seniors and those of different abilities in Harlem.
She is also a member of the New York Chapter of the Internet Society, a global independent organization that provides leadership in Internet standards, education, and policy.

Taught out of a low-income housing residence, the course was made possible through the vision of the New York Chapter of the Internet Society in combination with a Community Grant, one of the many ways the Internet Society empowers its members and Chapters to build Internet access and awareness in their cities, towns, or communities.

Merle says she takes pride opening up a whole new world of possibilities to people who may otherwise miss opportunities and connections many of us can make on the Internet. “I really listen to what my students say. I think that’s a big problem when approaching seniors,” she says, “Not many people are willing to listen to them.”

**The course participants couldn’t agree more.**

A reverend and a play writer, Miss Perfet is very aware of her surroundings and her role as a senior citizen in her community.

“Some people believe that when they become seniors, they think that’s the end of the line for them. Now all they have to do is stay home,” she says. “To me, the computer is good for them the way it’s good for me, to get on it (the computer) and see what’s going on in the world, know what’s happening.”

Her laptop on her knees, she just finished checking her Facebook account. “I love it”, she says. “If I want to say something to someone I get the answer right away. You know, the baby was born today”, she laughs, but then explains how she mostly reaches out to friends and family who need a word of support during bad times. “I feel that if I write it there, it stays.”

Merle nods and explains how her approach to teaching is based on personal relationships, attending to each students’ needs on an individual basis.

Merle began working with the Internet Society in July 2009, shortly after the New York Chapter opened. She says she joined the Internet Society community because the organization’s goals are her own: “The Internet for everyone.”

HICAP is the practical representation that the Internet is truly for everyone. Merle is very strong about the need for seniors to be connected. “After all”, she says, “if you can’t walk you can access a computer.”

“Medicare, Social Security benefits, paperwork, personal research, all great things that seniors can do with what they learn,” Merle explains, **“but I have students that take it even further.”**

Dillard Morrison Junior, is one of Merle’s newest students but he says he quickly understood the power of the Internet and how it could help him achieve his goals.

An avid golf player and a proud Jaguar owner, he never runs out of words of praise for his vintage car. He’d love to use the lessons learned from Merle to start an auto renovation business, with a strong sense of community around the Jaguar name. “I’d love for customers to communicate with me through the Internet. I’d love to share my knowledge with them,” he says enthusiastically while working on his car in the parking lot of the building where he lives in the heart of Harlem.

Merle says her motivation to teach comes from her interest in computers and her passion to share her knowledge about them. “I believe that life should be dedicated to serving other people. This is how I feel, I have a sense of community. I was born in
Harlem hospital. I heard people saying, “Oh you’re coming to Harlem, you’re slumming today.” But when I come to Harlem, Harlem is my home, it’s my home coming.” If you would like to learn more about the Harlem Internet Computer Access Program or more ways you can get involved in New York, you can contact the New York Chapter of the Internet Society.

Watch more of Merle and her students on our Youtube Channel