DIGITAL INCLUSION PROJECT

Year 1: Impact Report

April 2019 – March 2020

Hammersmith & Fulham age UK
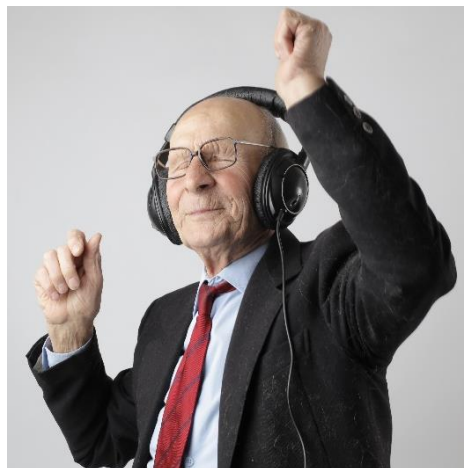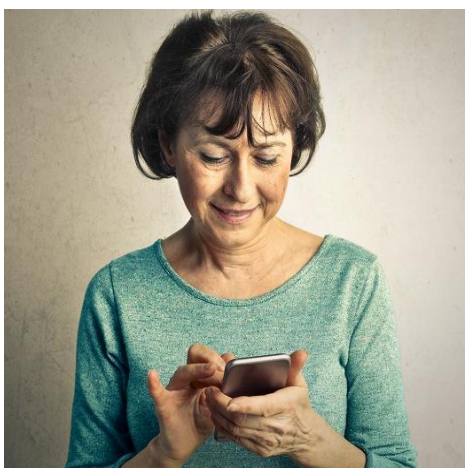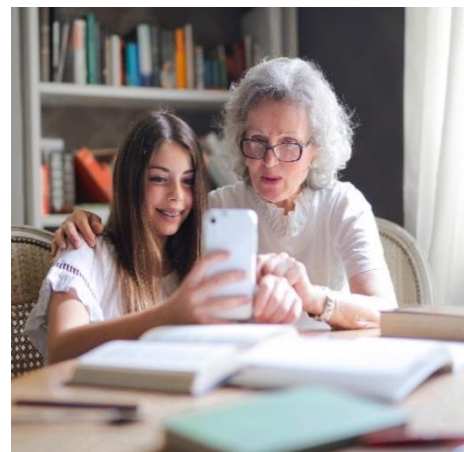
Who are we?

Age UK Hammersmith and Fulham is an independent local charity supporting older people across the borough.

Our aim is to promote the wellbeing of older people and to help make their lives fulfilling and enjoyable by offering a wide range of practical services and activities.

We are committed to addressing poverty, improving mental and physical health, combatting disadvantage, defeating ageism, recognising diversity, addressing social exclusion and promoting more effective public services for older people.
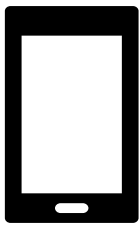
The Digital Inclusion Project

The modern age is dominated by the Internet and older people can be left at a disadvantage as a result. The generous 5-year funding and support by The National Lottery Community Fund since April 2019, has enabled us to provide free digital skill training, in order to reduce such disadvantages and as a consequence, address loneliness, isolation, poverty and deprivation. It has also helped to give access to significant services across the Borough and enable older persons to stay connected with organisations, friends and family.

The project connects skilled Digital Champion volunteers with clients to demonstrate the usefulness of technology in their everyday life. Digital skill sessions are provided on a one to one basis, using any type of device (laptop, tablet, smartphones etc) giving clients the opportunity to learn at their own pace. Given that older people often lack confidence when it comes to learning digital skills, we have adopted a method in which they choose both the pace and content in which they learn.

In order to reach as many clients as possible, we combine social events and activities with the process of learning. We endeavour to continue reaching as may clients as possible to share the much-needed gift of digital skills.
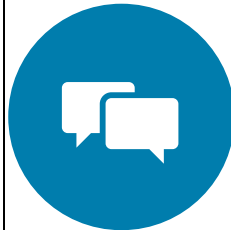
Our Impact in Numbers

53,000 Approx. minutes Spent teaching Digital Skills	**879** Older People Supported to Learn Digital Skills	**662** One to One Digital Skill Sessions	**27** Digital Champion Volunteers recruited and trained
30 Outreach Events, Workshops and Roadshows Delivered	**207** Clients Engaged via Outreach	**25** Enrolments on Learn My Way Online Training Portal	**15** Local Business and Community Partnerships

Digital Skills Focus

43% Digital Foundational Skills (inc Health and Wellbeing)	**19%** Handling Info and content (Finding Info Online)	**9%** Transacting (Managing and Saving Money)	**5%** Being Safe and Legal Online	**18%** Communicating	**7%** Problem solving

Hammersmith & Fulham ageUK

Client Feedback

"Hidden kindness abounds around every corner at Age UK Hammersmith and Fulham and last week was no exception. Thank you for all your help with my computer". **Priscilla**

"The Digital Champions have been absolutely fabulous in helping me with learning new Excel skills. I know that I can call on them when I get stuck, as they are always on hand". **John**

Volunteer Feedback

"Volunteering with Age UK H&F has kept me busy and responsible within my community. Helping others gives me purpose and I get to give back. Helping them to keep in contact with their friends and family, is very rewarding" **Nicholas**

"It has helped me to stay focused and busy, it made me feel better about myself, as I was helping others who were struggling" **Ndy**

"Volunteering for Age UK H&F gave me back a sense of purpose and fulfilment that I had long missed. I have met new people, put my skills to good use and have grown both personally and professionally. The brilliant team here supported me every step of the way and I am very grateful to have had this opportunity" **Victoria**

Staff Feedback

"I just wanted to pass on my thanks for helping Jane* (name changed) get on to the induction via Microsoft teams. A huge accomplishment! Although she was viewing on her phone, she worked out how to mute and unmute herself within the call and engaged appropriately with the session, as well as the other participants". **Emily**

"I have found in the past that a lot of older people have expressed their frustrations at being unable to engage with a changing world. The Digital Team has allowed me to offer such clients direct, meaningful expertise and tuition" **Peter**

Key Learning Points

Positives

- **Internal Processes and Services Defined**
  At the onset of the project, the first step was to "build the ship" as it were - by defining the service's processes and procedures which underpin it. In conjunction with colleagues, we developed partnerships, as well as useful contacts and resources. We promoted the project to service leads and other partners to consolidate an initial client "Expression of Interest" list which provided a sense of potential demand.

- **Ongoing Volunteer Support**
  Volunteers have been essential and have provided at least one digital skill session per week. We value the idea of mutual benefit between the Digital Champion and the client, whereby both parties enjoy their commitment to each other and the relationship they form. Volunteers are updated and contacted through quarterly meetings and phone calls. We are careful to ensure that they feel part of our team by listening to their advice and input.

- **Online Training Portal**
  A structured volunteer training and induction programme which includes an online training portal is beneficial and standardises the process. Supporting volunteers in using the portal has also provided additional opportunities to extend the project's client base.

- **Client Enthusiasm**
  How the client is offered the service and the manner in which it is conveyed is essential in attracting clients, especially as there can be an element of reluctance or doubt. Tuition is offered as something to "try out" so that initial contact is not seen as daunting and is combined with interactive sessions, "drop-in" and fun quizzes. Word of Mouth among clients, (i.e. how an older person who has benefited from digital skill sessions encourages others to try) has proven a successful method and there have been a total of 320 individual first time users and 559 occasions in which a rebooking has taken place.

- **Social Digital Activities**
  Client engagement increases when there is the option to "drop in" for a social activity, such as digital quizzes using a device or "fun" interactive sessions alongside the one to one support provision.

- **Staff IT Training and Engagement**
  Staff have actively sort support to engage with
  the Microsoft Office Suite and file management best
  practices. As the Digital Inclusion Project Team
  has offered hands on support, there has been a
  noticeable increase in staff confidence in using
  these tools to the extent that paper annual diaries
  have been superseded with a MS Excel booking sheet.

- **Dynamic Project**
  Allowing the project to be flexible by concentrating on clients and staff need has
  shaped the focus of the project in creating new services and providing alternative
  solutions to legacy processes. This has created project momentum and keeps it
  fluid both reactive and proactive. Age UK H&F management buy-in has authorised
  the purchase of equipment such a smart speaker, a mobile hotspot and
  peripherals to attract curiosity, offer a loan device service within the centre (soon
  to expand externally) document management and general housekeeping.

- **IT Suite (Cybercafe) Attendance Increase**
  As one to one digital skill sessions have been delivered within our IT Suite
  (Cybercafe) clients have felt comfortable to use the computers without assistance
  and know that they can ask for help, if and when it is needed. Additional care has
  been adopted to ensure that the PCs are kept updated and large icons and useful
  desktop shortcuts are incorporated. 6 new chairs were purchased, as well as
  information noticeboards and desktop power supplies to charge their personal
  laptops, tablets or mobiles.

- **Local Authority Buy-in**
  A member of the local authority is a representative on the project Steering Group
  and this has been a significant help. They assist with client referrals, request
  involvement in product and or service user group forums and provides meaningful
  collaboration opportunities.

- **Mutually Beneficial Partnerships**
  As a result of our partnerships within the borough, we have been able to deliver a
  more profound service to our clients. If we are unable to support them, we can
  now refer clients to other partnership organisations which can respond to their
  requirements.

Negatives

- **Volunteer Processing and Retainment**
  The volunteer recruitment and induction processes are labour intensive and on average can take approximately 3 - 6 working weeks per volunteer. The risks, however, is that if they are no longer able to support the project it can leave gaps in the service. As well as clients can become attached to a specific volunteer champion, and if the latter leaves the service the client may disengage, as a consequence.

- **Small Team**
  There is an understandable limit in terms of time and resources given that the team consists of 3 part-time members to deliver the service, as a consequence of its increasing popularity and demand.

- **Online Training Portal Enrolments (Learn My Way)**
  The uptake for the Learn My Way online training portal is low. Our clients can become disinterested in using online training to improve or practice their digital skills, naming a decrease in motivation in the absence of a Digital Champion, as a principle reason.

- **Obtaining Client Feedback**
  Clients are reluctant to complete feedback, which can be due to a lack of confidence, know how, access to a device/broadband or apathy amongst other things. This can add an additional pressure on resources, as clients have to be telephoned or interviewed when they visit the centre. Therefore, measuring client improvement and their digital skills has proven challenging.

- **Lack of Devices and Broadband**
  Outreach visit have confirmed that a number of clients both in sheltered housing and their private homes have limited access to devices and connectivity. The cost of broadband itself has also proved a factor in inhibiting clients "getting online".

- **Demand for Home Support**
  Clients who expressed an initial interest in the service, identified their need to be supported at home. However, this posed a safeguarding issue and a potential risk to the security of client personal and financial data.

- **Lack of Investment in Staff Training and IT Infrastructure**
  The project highlighted that there was also a potential need among staff to improve their digital skills and strengthen the IT infrastructure, within ourselves as a charity.

- **Marketing Flyers**
  Despite designing, printing and distributing over 2,000 flyers the response has been minimal.

Overcoming Challenges

- **Corporate Volunteer Days to Fill Volunteer Gaps**
Working alongside the Volunteer and Befriending
Coordinator has enabled the use of corporate
volunteers to participate in outreach events and the
gathering of client feedback. Such partnerships
have not only provided us with additional support
but have proven to be mutually beneficial.

- **Increased Working Hours**
The Project Administrator's role was increased by 1 working day per week to help
respond to the workload. In addition, the Outreach Worker's working days were
also adapted to ensure that there was a member of the Digital Team on hand
everyday throughout the week. In Year 2, we will explore recruiting volunteers to
support additional project needs to better distribute the workload.

- **Reduced Enrolments to the Online Training Portal**
The project was initially required to enrol 42 clients per quarter, however as there
was limited demand, this figure was reduced to 8 by the Steering Group

- **Exploring Different Avenues for Feedback**
A desktop shortcut to a feedback form was put on the cybercafé pcs and Digital
Champions were encouraged to capture feedback immediately after a session. In
Year 2, volunteers will be recruited to call clients for feedback and encourage those
who may have lost interest in the service to re-engage with it.

- **Reaching Out to the Steering Group and Partnerships for Support**
Seeking support from the Steering Group in both an advisory and proactive
function has allowed ideas to be pooled for possible solutions and challenges. Buy-
in from the Council, Age UK H&F management and representatives from
Corporations has also helped to promote and publicise the project via their
networks.

- **Home Support**
As a result of the home support service involving certain risks, we had decided in
Year 2 to use our befriending service's existing structures which trains and DBS
checks all volunteers. This will give us confidence regarding any issues involving
safeguarding that may occur.

- **Identified Other Avenues to Market the Project**
Additional support was needed from the Marketing and Comms team to explore
social media platforms to promote the service and connect with both existing or
potential clients and or their carers, friends or relatives.

What's Next?

- **Coping with the Covid Pandemic**
  The pandemic is shaping how we deliver the project and requirements and support needs.

  - **Digital Befrienders**
    Providing much needed home support for housebound clients, technical assistance to digital skill training (Covid restrictions permitting).

  - **Online Activities and events**
    Supporting the transition of delivering centre activities online whilst offering clients the opportunity to also attend activities in the centre (Covid restrictions permitting).

  - **Digital Newsletter**
    Encouraging clients to join new activities/events online to stay connected.

- **Focus on feedback and engaging clients with online services.**
- **Device donations schemes in partnership with other organisations.**
- **Campaign for affordable broadband for elderly/low income persons.**
- **Extension of the Loan Device Scheme.**
- **Community printing location.**
- **More collaborative partnerships within the borough.**
- **Celebrating achievements via marketing campaigns.**