



Age UK Digital Champion Programme

March 2023

Helping older people to get online, feel less lonely, and get the most out of life.

Introduction

In an increasingly digital world, the Age UK Digital Champion Programme is helping older people to get online.

Through the Programme we are recruiting and training Digital Champion volunteers to provide support for older people to improve their digital skills, as well as loaning technology to those older people without access.

Between 2022 to 2026, the Digital Champion Programme will take place in 50 communities across England and Wales, engaging 120,000 older people. The Programme is delivered across two cohorts of 25 local Age UK/Cymru, each lasting 18 months.

The Digital Champion Programme model combines four key activities to address the barriers older people face in engaging with digital services. Each local AgeUK/Cymru that is part of this programme will offer:

- Volunteer Digital Champions
- Awareness raising activities
- Digital skills sessions
- A scheme lending free technology and Internet connectivity to older people

By the end of the Digital Champion Programme in 2026, we will have:

- Recruited and trained 600 volunteer Digital Champions
- Delivered awareness raising activities to 120,000 older people to inspire and motivate them to get online
- Assisted 15,000 older people through digital skills sessions to improve their digital confidence and develop new digital skills
- Loaned technology to approximately 3,000 older people



*At request, models have been used to represent people

Key Milestones

We are delighted to have this opportunity to share with you a snapshot of the Programmes milestones and impact stories kindly shared by a handful of the older people who have already benefited from Digital Champion support.

Age UK would like to thank everyone who is supporting and engaged in the Programme for your benevolence, commitment and experience.

The Digital Champion Programme has reached the following key milestones since it was launched in June 2022¹:

25

Local Age UKs and Age Cymrus charities, have signed up and are already working on the ground.

303

Digital Champions volunteers have been recruited and trained to inspire others to get online and support them to develop their digital skills and confidence.

2,438

Older people have been supported through digital skills sessions, which are flexible, learner-led and focused on what the older person wants to learn.

29,572

Older people have engaged with the Programme through awareness raising activities, informing those who are at high-risk of digital exclusion how digital skills could help them personally, and motivating them to take part in the Programme.

293

Older people have been helped through the Tablet Loan Scheme, with the loan of a tablet and/or internet connectivity, in order to give digital skills a try when they otherwise would not have had the means or access.

¹The above milestones are representative of June to the end of December 2022

*At request, models have been used to represent people

Stories

The following stories are just a few examples of the positive impact the Programme is making to the lives of older people across the country.

WILLIAM, 86 YEARS OLD, AGE UK PORTSMOUTH

William's confidence has grown and technology has 'changed his lifestyle'

William lives alone in Portsmouth, and had never used technology before he joined the Digital Champion Programme at Age UK Portsmouth. He has no family nearby other than a brother who occasionally visits. William lives with mobility issues which mean he is unable to leave the house very much.

He borrowed a tablet and connectivity through the Tablet Loan Scheme, and a volunteer Digital Champion supported him to learn how to use it at his own pace, access the internet safely and explore things he was interested in.

Working with the Digital Champion, William quickly progressed to setting up and using his own email address, allowing him to download an app to play chess. He was soon watching YouTube videos

of old football footage and wartime documentaries as well as using google to find images of times gone by, fuelled by his passion for his favourite topics – sports and history.

William has gone from being completely offline, to now a vocal champion for being online. He explained that his confidence has grown and that access to technology has **'changed his lifestyle'**, providing learning opportunities and endless entertainment which before, he missed out on entirely. Alongside this he is keen that other people in similar situations to him benefit from the support Age UK offers around getting online. William insists that he **'could never have done this before being involved in this great project from Age UK [Portsmouth]'**.

JEANNIE, 73 YEARS OLD, AGE UK TEESSIDE

Jeannie is now making her own NHS appointments, enjoying podcasts and video calls with her family.

Jeannie lives alone and has mild cognitive impairment, arthritis, and sight loss, but she is cheery and upbeat, and refuses to let these challenges stop her. Her arthritis means that she is partially housebound, and her poor eyesight makes it difficult for her to use her mobile phone. Jeannie wanted to get online principally so that she could do video calls with her family.

Jeannie was referred to the Digital Champion Programme at Age UK Teesside, which specifically focuses on supporting older people with memory loss. Jeannie borrowed technology through the Tablet Loan Scheme and had one-to-one support from a volunteer Digital Champion, in her home and over

the phone. As a result, she is now able to confidently make NHS appointments using the NHS app and has been improving her health through YouTube tutorials for yoga and arthritis advice. She has also enjoyed listening to podcasts and music through Spotify, online shopping and, of course video calling her family.

She has learned a lot through the Digital Champion Programme and is now looking into buying her own device. Both Jeannie and her Digital Champion have enjoyed the process of learning together, and Jeannie told Age UK Teesside that **"it's certainly so useful... it's nice to see [myself] not squinting on [my] small mobile phone"**.

TOM, 70 YEARS OLD, AGE UK NOTTINGHAM AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Tom's engagement in group and one-to-one sessions has prompted a desire to learn more.

Tom is 70 years old and a full-time carer for his wife. He retired from his job at a bank 20 years ago and, while he had a smart phone, he was unsure how to use a lot of its functions. Despite some help from his children, Tom was becoming increasingly frustrated as he felt that he was **'being left behind'** when it came to the ever-advancing world of technology.

Tom heard about the Digital Champion Programme through his daughter, and was keen to get involved with Digital Support Sessions and the Tablet Loan Scheme. By attending group sessions and engaging in/with one-to-one support at Age UK Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, Tom was able to master using group messaging to stay in touch with his family and quickly got to grips with the tablet he borrowed.

As Treasurer for a pensioners group, Tom had described feeling **'inadequate'** when attending meetings with printed paperwork while being surrounded by people of a similar age all using smartphones and tablets instead. Now, Tom says that he feels comfortable using his tablet and computer, his confidence has grown, and he is grateful to Age UK Nottingham and Nottinghamshire for supporting him on his learning journey.

Tom remarked that the volunteer Digital Champions who supported him were very personable and down-to-earth, and that being with people of similar skill levels in the group sessions improved his self-esteem and prompted a desire to learn even more. Tom plans to continue his digital learning journey!

BETH, 72 YEARS OLD, AGE UK SOLIHULL

Beth is confidently shopping online, buying presents for her grandchildren.

Beth lives alone in Solihull, some of her family live close by and others live in Ireland. Beth has a zest for life, and she enjoys being involved in the community and taking part in different activities. She wants to be more independent, improve her confidence with digital skills and feel more confident using the internet – especially with emails and online shopping.

Beth approached Age UK Solihull after seeing an advert for the Digital Champion Programme. She began attending group Digital Support Sessions and borrowed technology

through the Tablet Loan Scheme. Beth gained confidence using her new device, accessing her emails, and browsing the internet. By week six, Beth was confidently using her tablet and was online shopping, just in time to buy Christmas gifts for her grandchildren. She now uses email and the internet regularly.

Beth says: **"I really enjoyed it. I was made to feel at ease and everyone representing Age UK were brilliant. They do great work."**

IRIS, 84 YEARS OLD, AGE UK LAMBETH

Iris is using her phone to have more contact with her family.

Iris lives in sheltered housing accommodation. She has many health conditions and limited mobility so it is difficult to leave her flat by herself, so she spends a lot of time indoors. Her family visit her often, and in recent years bought her a tablet to use at home.

Iris's daughter referred her to Age UK Lambeth's Digital Champion Programme to help her use her new technology, as though they've spent time trying to learn together, her daughter realised that she

didn't have the patience or time required to help Iris to navigate using the tablet.

At first, Iris knew how to turn the device on, but not how to use it. Since joining the Programme and engaging in one-to-one support in her home, Iris has confidently learned how to use WhatsApp to keep in contact with her family. She modestly described her progress as **“a little better, although a little slow... I am learning to help myself”**.

NICK, 66 YEARS OLD, AGE UK GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Nick enjoyed meeting new people at the group sessions and now feels empowered to do things online himself.

Nick moved into a residential care home in Gloucester during the pandemic. Nick's family do not live nearby and he has often felt lonely and isolated, especially during the lockdowns. Nick has multiple health issues, and due to cataracts is struggling with his sight. Nick wanted something to change, so he contacted Age UK Gloucestershire for support and was particularly interested in the Digital Champion Programme.

Nick borrowed a tablet through the Tablet Loan Scheme and began attending drop-in sessions at the local library, pleased that he could come as often as he needed, and at no cost. During these sessions, Nick was supported by Digital Champion volunteers to get to grips with his

new tablet and learn to do new things online. As the care home had stopped all social activities since the pandemic, Nick was pleased that the drop-in sessions also gave him an opportunity to meet new people and socialise.

For Nick, the Digital Champion Programme has been **‘life changing’**. He feels more confident online, has explored holidays, train travel and even buying fishing equipment. Nick also used his new skills and confidence to search for suitable housing nearer to his family in Devon and moved in January 2023. Nick said he felt **‘empowered’** that he can now do these things himself and has even bought his own tablet to continue learning more.

JENNY, 73 YEARS OLD, AGE WAKEFIELD DISTRICT

With new found confidence in her abilities, Jenny's world has opened up.

Jenny had become curious about getting online to **“keep up with the world”**. Jenny has some mobility issues, and living alone, she had been feeling isolated and was concerned that she had no one to help her. Since the pandemic, she has been nervous of venturing out, but after attending Age UK Wakefield's 'Time for Tea' meet up, which was recommended by a friend, she was introduced to the Tablet Loan Scheme and decided to give it a try.

Through a mix of one-to-one home sessions with a Digital Champion, and regular group support, Jenny learned to use the tablet and to do research on Google about her local area, as well as the town she grew up in. She explained how she

“couldn't have wished for better support” and that although she was very nervous about what she may be able to learn about getting online, she now feels confident in her abilities. Knowing that there was no such thing as a **‘daft question’** was of great reassurance to Jenny as she took things at her own pace.

Through the support of her Digital Champion, Jenny decided she wanted to buy her own device, and now she feels more connected to the world. Jenny said that she **“feel[s] safe when [she] comes to Age UK”** and encourages **“anyone to give it a go, what seems big and scary is not when broken down into smaller pieces”**.

KIRSTY, 67 YEARS OLD, AGE UK HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM

Kirsty's determination to learn has helped her to feel less anxious and more sociable.

Kirsty lives alone and is a regular visitor at Age UK Hammersmith and Fulham's local centre. Kirsty has anxiety and when she first came to the centre, she struggled to fit in and did not participate in group activities, and found it difficult to ask for help when she needed it. However, Kirsty wanted to learn how to use technology as she felt that most services were becoming more easily accessible online.

Kirsty decided to join the Digital Champion Programme so that she could build her digital skills and improve her confidence online. She attended both one-to-one and group sessions, learning how to use Microsoft Word and Excel, and she would also visit the IT room after her sessions so she could practise what she had learned. Kirsty has anxiety and when she first came to the centre, she struggled to participate in group activities and ask for help when she needed it.

However, Kirsty wanted to learn how to use technology as she felt

that most services were becoming more easily accessible online. She decided to join the Digital Champion Programme so that she could build her digital skills and improve her confidence online.

Since attending the sessions, not only does Kirsty feel more confident using her phone and being online, but she also doesn't feel nervous to ask for help anymore. She still books one-to-one sessions with a volunteer Digital Champion so she can continue learning how to do things online. Staff members at Age UK Hammersmith and Fulham feel Kirsty has become more confident and social, she is communicating more with others and seems a lot more comfortable in doing this.

Kirsty says, **“The classes have helped me much; absorbing so much information will take time. I feel more confident now, though it seems like less of a mystery than before.”**

HARRIET, 88 YEARS OLD, AGE CYMRU DYFED

Harriet now enjoys regular video calls with her grandchildren.

Harriet is 88 years old and lives alone. She decided to sign up for the Digital Champion Programme at Age Cymru Dyfed because her family had recently moved away and she was keen to learn how to use a tablet so that she could keep in touch with her grandchildren, who she hadn't seen for six months. She did not have Wi-Fi at home, and had no experience of using a tablet before, so didn't know what to expect. Harriet did have a mobile phone, but it was very old and not a smart phone so she couldn't use it to video call. Harriet borrowed technology through the Tablet Loan Scheme,

and a volunteer Digital Champion visited Harriet in her home to help set up the technology. The Digital Champion explained the basics of the tablet to Harriet and got her registered on WhatsApp so she could video call her grandchildren in England.

Since borrowing the tablet, Harriet is delighted that she can speak to her grandchildren so regularly, and she's been receiving photo updates from them too. As she has been so impressed with the Tablet Loan Scheme, she is now thinking about buying a new tablet or smartphone herself!

ELLEN, 72 YEARS OLD, AGE UK ISLE OF WIGHT

Now she knows how to access bus times online, Ellen will never miss a bus again to her Knit and Natter group where she is now helping others to get online.

Ellen lives with her husband in the Isle of Wight, and loves to learn new things!

Ellen had a smartphone but she wasn't using it to its full potential because she didn't know how. As she was keen to learn, Ellen decided to attend the Digital Support Sessions at Age UK Isle of Wight after seeing a poster in her local library. At the sessions, with the support of a Digital Champion, Ellen learnt about the accessibility features on her smartphone to make it easier for her to use. She also learnt how to email photos,

access the bus timetable, set up folders and use WhatsApp.

Ellen attended five Digital Support Sessions in total, and has been able to put everything into practice. Her confidence has grown so much that she is now helping other people at her Knit & Natter group to get online!

Ellen says, **“I'm on a WhatsApp group with my family and I can message the grandchildren directly, which means a lot, rather than just keeping in touch through their mum. I can't thank you enough.”**

STUART, 75 YEARS OLD, IS ONE OF OUR VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPIONS AT AGE UK NORTH YORKSHIRE AND DARLINGTON

Stuart is using his experience, passion and dedication to help alleviate fears of technology.

Stuart is 75 and a former IT trainer, who heard about the opportunity to become a volunteer Digital Champion through his attendance at Age UK North Yorkshire and Darlington's weekly art group. The idea appealed to Stuart as he believes that digital skills are increasingly becoming a thing of necessity, and he was keen to use his experience to inspire older people like himself to get online.

The team at Age UK North Yorkshire and Darlington describe Stuart as a **'passionate and dedicated'** Digital Champion who goes 'above and beyond' to make an impact for people of varying levels of skills and knowledge. Having started by helping with group Digital Support

Sessions, Stuart is now planning to do home visits for those people who can't get to the venue.

With the hope of supporting older people on low incomes, Stuart kindly brought along some **'Computer Active'** magazines from home that included things like tips on how to save money by making the most of being online.

Stuart understands that a lot of older people are frightened of technology, something his late wife experienced, and he is very mindful of this when thinking about his sessions. Stuart feels that he has joined a warm and welcoming community of volunteers and is pleased to be able to contribute to a cause that is important to him.



**THANK YOU to all the Digital Champions
and older people for sharing their stories.**

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ID205013 03/23
