



# Age UK Digital Champion Programme

September 2023

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

# Introduction

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 40 communities across England and Wales, engaging 96,000 older people. The Programme is being delivered across two cohorts of local Age UK/ Cymrus, 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
- Technology loans and donations

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

- Recruited and trained 480 volunteer Digital Champions
- Delivered awareness raising activities to 96,000 older people to inspire and motivate them to get online
- Assisted 12,000 older people through digital skills sessions to improve their digital confidence and develop new digital skills

# Key Milestones & case stories

In this document we are delighted to have this opportunity to share with you a snapshot of the Programmes key milestones, and impact stories kindly shared by a handful of volunteer Digital Champions as well as older people who have benefitted from their support.

The Digital Champion Programme has reached the following key milestones since it was launched in June 2022:

## 25

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

## 409

**Digital Champion volunteers have been recruited and trained to inspire others to get online and support them to develop their digital skills and confidence. 4,430 Older people have been supported through digital skills sessions, which are flexible, learner-led and focused on what the older person wants to learn.**

## 51,414

**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.**

\*: The above milestones are representative of June 2022 to the end of July 2023



\*Images used do not represent storytellers

# Volunteer Digital Champions' stories

## **JOHN, AGE CYMRU DYFED, VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPION**

***John is particularly happy to have helped an older person in their 90s who struggles with visual impairment to enjoy audio books on their new tablet.***

John, a long-standing volunteer with Age UK, decided to become a Digital Champion volunteer at his local Age Cymru Dyfed, after hearing about the programme and its success so far in supporting older people to build their digital skills and become more connected.

John shared that his biggest success on the programme so far has been supporting an older person in her 90's - who is visually impaired - to add voice recognition on her tablet and download audio books to listen to. He's also set her up with an Alexa speaker, adding a voice function to her TV to make the everyday so much

easier. During his visits, John was also able to help to identify benefit entitlements online, that relieve the pressure a little from soaring food and heating costs, amongst other things. The older person being supported shared, **“John has been marvellous with me, all the Age Cymru Dyfed staff are ever so thoughtful”**. John explained that he loves being a Digital Champion as the role brings him great satisfaction knowing that he can make a difference to someone's life.

**“I feel that I have made a friend in my client, she always makes me laugh.” – John**

## **ALICE, AGE UK GLOUCESTERSHIRE, VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPION**

***Alice is able to put nervous clients at ease as she supports them with their digital skills and has gained a lot from volunteering herself.***

Alice, 34, is a teaching fellow and doctor. Alice signed up as a volunteer through the Digital Champion programme at Age UK Gloucestershire in order to **“give back”** and support older people with their digital skills.

Alice has great digital skills and has used her warm and approachable style to support clients who are particularly nervous about getting online. Volunteering on the Digital

Champion Programme has been a great experience for Alice too. By making time for the role of a Digital Champion outside of her busy job, she has also gained a lot from supporting older people to tackle the growing digital divide.

**“Nothing is too much trouble, and she puts people at their ease” – Older person describing Alice**

## **SHYANNE, AGE UK HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM, VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPION**

***Shyanne is making time in between her studies at college to support older people in her local community to get online and build connections.***

Shyanne, 21, is a college student who wanted to volunteer for Age UK to gain experience outside of her studies and provide support to her local community. Since becoming a Digital Champion, Shyanne has found it incredibly rewarding to provide face to face, one-to-one sessions for older people, helping them to set up their loaned tablets, along with carrying out crucial administrative work to ensure the programme continues to be a success.

Shyanne has learnt a lot about the impact of digital exclusion for older people through her volunteering. She feels determined to play her part in tackling digital exclusion,

and more specifically how this forms a barrier that increases some older people's feelings of isolation and loneliness. Shyanne enjoys her role as a Digital Champion very much and is highly respected and liked by the older people she is helping.

**“Volunteering has shown me the incredible power of human connection. Through technology, we can bridge the gap between generations and combat loneliness. It’s inspiring to witness the joy and fulfilment of helping people in their daily lives” – Shyanne**



## **NIGEL, AGE UK ISLE OF WIGHT, VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPION**

***Nigel is using his strong IT skills to support local older people in solving problems and tackling feelings of loneliness and isolation through digital skills.***

Nigel lives on the Isle of Wight with his wife, where he ran a software company for many years. After recently retiring, Nigel wanted to use some of his free time to give back to his local community, benefitting the lives of others through his digital skills. Having volunteered with Samaritans for ten years, Nigel was all too aware of how isolating and lonely life can be for some. He could see the huge benefit of teaching people how useful digital skills could be to tackle these feelings.

Nigel is very confident with digital technology and can support older people with even the most difficult of tasks through bespoke one-to-one home visits. However, he also supports with group workshops which help many older people at a time with more common digital

needs. Nigel finds great enjoyment in his role as a Digital Champion and shared his satisfaction at being able to support an older person and see the **“twinkle in their eyes”** when they learn and understand something new.

**“It’s not just about visiting people’s homes to explain the technology or solve a problem; more than half the time with a client is spent listening to their stories, experiences and issues they may be facing. I’m proud to be a part of the team and feel valued for the time I give supporting our clients. It’s not just about the technology for me; I meet some very interesting clients who all have a story to tell” – Nigel**



## **MIKE, AGE UK SOLIHULL, VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPION**

***Mike is a dedicated Digital Champion volunteer and enjoys using his wealth of digital knowledge to get older people online and more connected.***

Mike, 72, volunteered as a Digital Champion when the programme started in summer 2022 after retiring from his job in Human Resources. He has always enjoyed meeting new people and teaching them new skills, which he does in one-to-one and group settings for the programme. His experience of different technologies allows Mike to offer a wealth of knowledge to many older people in Solihull to help them to tackle digital exclusion.

Mike is well known for making his sessions fun and interactive, and he is always encouraging older people

to ask and answer any questions without the fear of getting something wrong. His approachable and passionate nature means Mike often receives very positive feedback from older people and they often comment that his enthusiasm for the programme shines through in his volunteering.

**“My standout moment was when I supported a client that had relocated from Spain and needed all her technology to re-align to the UK. It was a challenge, but we got there in the end!” – Mike**



\*Images used do not represent storytellers

# Older people's stories

## **ANN, 77 YEARS OLD, AGE UK DEVON**

### ***Ann is now aware of how to stay safe online and feels ‘valued and connected to the world’.***

Ann, 77, was recently widowed and decided to seek out digital support sessions in her local community so that she could better stay in touch with family who live far away. She came across Age UK’s Digital Champion programme and decided to give it a go.

John, Ann’s Digital Champion, has since been visiting Ann in her home to help her to make better use of her phone and establish ways that it can support her daily life. Ann has learnt how to keep her personal data safe online, and how to deal with the ever-present

threat of online scams, which makes her feel far more confident. Ann is particularly inspired by John because he avoids technical language and explains things in a way that makes it much easier to understand. Importantly, Ann shared that John’s support makes her feel **“valued and connected to the world”**.

**“People from my generation feel excluded from a society that is becoming more digital by the day and this wonderful service is invaluable and essential!” – Ann**

## **LAURIE, 78 YEARS OLD, AGE UK HERNE BAY AND WHITSTABLE**

***Laurie has learnt how to effectively manage his finances and other important day to day tasks online.***

Laurie, 78, is a retired Chief Inspector of the Metropolitan Police. He lives a very active life with his wife in Herne Bay, often enjoying long walks along the coast together.

Laurie contacted his local Age UK looking for some support to set up his new laptop, as he had limited digital experience. With support alongside a Digital Champion, Laurie learnt how to navigate around the laptop's many applications and – with perseverance - has since progressed onto more complex tasks such as online banking,

having never used it before.

Laurie has overcome his initial hesitation and can now comfortably manage his finances online after several bespoke one-to-one sessions. Having made so much progress, he now feels confident enough to browse the internet and carry out various daily tasks online.

**“It’s given me a lot of confidence to move into an area that I was previously very hesitant to approach” – Laurie**

## **JANE, 85 YEARS OLD, AGE UK LAMBETH**

***Jane's digital confidence has grown and she's now able to manage bills and access savings online.***

Jane, 85, lives in Brixton and is very active, enjoying long walks whenever she can to see nature and interact with others.

During the winter months, Jane struggled to get in contact with her gas and electric provider as they didn't provide a direct telephone number and she needed to query her bill increase. Jane felt very distressed at the thought that the only way to speak with them was online. Jane had a very limited knowledge of how to get online and she was left feeling deflated.

When out shopping one day, Jane saw an Age UK Lambeth leaflet offering digital support sessions through the Digital Champion Programme. She was very eager to

get involved and signed up straight away. After several sessions, Jane was able to email the gas and electric company herself to discuss her bills. She also felt empowered through her sessions to learn how various aspects of her smartphone could support her daily life, which she hadn't felt confident using before. Tessa, Jane's Digital Champion, expressed how much progress Jane has made since joining the programme and how visibly confident she now is being online.

**“I know there is more to learn but I am so happy with what I have gained from these lessons, and now I can teach myself” – Jane**

## **HILARY, 69 YEARS OLD, AGE UK LANCASHIRE**

***Hilary finally feels listened to and has been enabled to tackle her fears online through bespoke training sessions.***

Hilary, 69, is an outgoing and sociable individual who enjoyed a very rewarding 40-year-long role as a mental health nurse before she recently retired. Near the end of her career, she found herself feeling nervous when she had to approach online tasks at work that were new to her, in case she made a mistake. Her nerves created a barrier for Hilary to getting online, even after attending digital classes at her local library, as felt this group-based support wasn't best suited to her needs.

Having discovered Age UK Lancashire's Digital Champion

Programme, Hilary decided to sign up for some support sessions with a Digital Champion. Since joining, she finally feels listened to thanks to the programme's person-centred approach. For the first time in her life, Hilary feels confident enough to continue to improve her digital skills at home in her own time and is learning more every day.

**“Hilary feels she is listened to and supported with her individual needs regarding support with digital” – Project Worker describing Hilary**

## **ROBERT, 72 YEARS OLD, AGE UK LEICESTER SHIRE AND RUTLAND**

***Robert is embracing his new online skills and no longer feels isolated in an increasingly digital world.***

Robert, 72, is a retired engineer living on his own in Leicester. Having never spent much time online, Robert began to feel more and more isolated because almost all of the services he required were moving online and he felt unable to access them.

To begin to tackle this issue, Robert decided to purchase a smartphone and ask his local Age UK for some digital support to help build his confidence. After meeting with a Digital Champion, Robert was delighted to have the opportunity to borrow a tablet through the programme so he could have a bigger screen to learn from. Over the course of a few weeks, Robert has regularly attended support sessions and has been able to

cover a wide variety of topics that personally interested him, such as sending and receiving emails, shopping online, and exploring far and wide on Google Maps.

Since taking part in the Digital Champion Programme, Robert feels far more confident and knowledgeable online. He has even been using his newly acquired skills when out and about. For example, using the digital screens in Argos - something he once felt very nervous about.

**“The thing is, I’m isolated basically. Everything’s technology and I don’t know a thing, it’s ridiculous” – Robert**



## **ANN, 78 YEARS OLD, AGE UK MILTON KEYNES**

***Ann is finally able to use her new laptop to support her with daily tasks thanks to Age UK Milton Keynes' bespoke 'how to guides'.***

Ann, 78, lives in sheltered housing in Milton Keynes. Having purchased a laptop a few years ago, Ann felt very determined to get started but didn't feel she had the necessary skills to get it out of the box and switched on.

Ann decided to visit her local Age UK in Milton Keynes to get some support with her digital skills. After meeting with a Digital Champion, Ann was very optimistic about what she could do with the laptop after a few one-to-one sessions behind her. Ann's Digital Champion introduced her to some basic skills to help build her confidence and Melissa, one of the programme's

Project Co-ordinators, even wrote Ann some easy to follow 'how to guides' for different topics she had covered in her sessions.

With bespoke and consistent guidance, Ann has quickly picked up some simple data entry tasks, which are supporting her daily life.

**“Ann has said the Digital Champion Programme has helped her in her everyday life and her knowledge and experience has improved significantly” – Melissa, Digital Champion Programme Project Co-ordinator describing Ann**

## **JEAN, 79 YEARS OLD, AGE UK NOTTINGHAM AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

### ***Jean has learnt how to use the calendar and set alarms on her smartphone to support her independence and feel more organised.***

Jean, 79, is from Nottingham and lives with long-term health conditions including arthritis and short-term memory problems. Jean had a successful career with BT for over 30 years and just prior to her retirement, new technology was beginning to be introduced into the workplace that she missed out on.

Jean began to feel overwhelmed at the growing reliance on technology to feel connected in society and access local services, and she was very worried about being “left behind”. Jean has a smart phone but was only able to use the text message and phone functions on it. Having come across the Digital Champion Programme at an awareness raising event hosted by Age UK at her local U3A organisation, Jean was keen to get involved to improve her digital skills and gain some independence. She no longer wanted to feel reliant on family members to get online

and was delighted to be offered some bespoke one-to-one support sessions with a designated Digital Champion.

Together, they went through all the applications on her smartphone that she most wanted to focus on – the ones that could help her to manage her day-to-day life better. Thanks to the programme, Jean is now able to confidently use her phone calendar to stay organised, set alarms to remind her to do things (particularly useful given her short-term memory loss) and feel more independent getting online. Jean shared that she now feels she has the skills to keep up with the modern world, as everything continues to be moving online.

**“Learning how to use technology should be every older person’s priority” – Jean**

## **DAISY, 56 YEARS OLD, AGE UK REDBRIDGE, BARKING AND HAVERING**

***Daisy appreciated the ‘person-centred’ approach to her online sessions which have helped her greatly improve the IT skills needed in her job.***

Daisy, 56, found that her job role was increasingly reliant on digital skills, and she was struggling to keep up. Unfortunately, at the time she was feeling more under pressure than ever working full time to financially support her wider family having sadly lost her parents the previous year.

Feeling deflated, Daisy sought help from her manager to fill these crucial gaps in her skillset. They decided to seek support through the Digital Champion Programme at Age UK Redbridge, Barking and Havering. Daisy attended a mix of one-to-one bespoke sessions alongside a designated Digital Champion, as well as group-based sessions. Both focused on what Daisy felt would be most relevant to her role, including using email more effectively.

Since engaging with the Digital Champion Programme, Daisy feels much more confident using digital skills in her role, and more importantly she is feeling much happier on the whole. Daisy was extremely thankful for the support of her Digital Champion, describing their approach as “supportive and patient”. She shared that the teaching techniques used by volunteers were “superb” and that being able to have person-centred sessions was very useful.

**“This is a fantastic service, and I am eternally grateful for taking part, I now work with confidence” – Daisy**

## **BRIAN, 82 YEARS OLD, AGE UK WEST SUSSEX, BRIGHTON AND HOVE**

***Brian feels more connected to loved ones now that he is able to use his new digital skills to search his family tree and video call his friends.***

Brian, 82, is now retired and keeps himself occupied by making and playing violins, as well as managing his allotment. Soon into his retirement, Brian realised that he needed to be more connected to his loved ones and wanted to be able to access more of the sport that he enjoyed online. However, he didn't have broadband or a mobile phone to do either easily.

Brian reached out to Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove, feeling very willing to give it a go, and was able to borrow a tablet and match with a Digital Champion volunteer through their local Digital Champion Programme.

To begin with, Brian was supported through bespoke one-to-one sessions in his own home to learn the basics around how to use his device and remain safe online. However, after no time

he was confidently going online and achieving all sorts of things such as searching his family tree, comparing different products he wanted to buy, and ordering items online. He was also soon able to video call his friends, some of whom he hadn't seen in a long time.

Brian explained that he is now able to enjoy listening to so much of his favourite music on Spotify, which he had never even heard of before taking part in the Digital Champion Programme. Brian now has broadband installed in his home and has joined a small group session at a community centre local to him to continue with his learning.

**“I would recommend anybody interested in getting online to have a go.” - Brian**

## **CAROLE, 67 YEARS OLD, AGE UK WAKEFIELD DISTRICT**

***Carole is using her new online skills to make the most of her smartphone and has even signed up as an Age UK volunteer to give something back.***

Carole, 67, recently moved to Wakefield to be nearer to her family, having spent over 50 years living in London. Carole enjoyed a successful career spanning various industries from leisure and retail to fashion. Although Carole really enjoys taking her dogs for walks in the countryside near her home, after the move she began to feel quite isolated and overwhelmed, as if she had now lost a big part of her identity.

Carole decided to approach the Digital Champion Programme team at Age UK Wakefield District because she wanted to be more digitally active so that she could feel more connected to her new community. She explained that she had a smart phone but was only able to use a very limited number of applications for simple tasks, such as making phone calls. In her first bespoke one-to-one session, Carole shared with her new Digital

Champion that she was too scared to **“get in too deep and make mistakes”**. Over time, Carole’s confidence grew, and she started to enjoy exploring online.

Carole is now able to **“delete anything she doesn’t want on [her] device and to look at things with security in mind”**. In fact, she’s enjoyed the experience so much that she has now become a befriender through her local Age UK as she feels it is a way to give back to the organisation and the wider local community.

**“Knowing how low and alone I felt, with no confidence to do anything... it is life changing. Someone taking time out to teach me something new, to listen to me and to encourage and believe in me, sounds simple but I haven’t found that anywhere else” – Carole**

## **MALCOLM BERRY, 79 YEARS OLD, AGE UK PORTSMOUTH**

***Malcolm is now using his laptop to write and share his short stories having benefitted from bespoke one-to-one sessions with his Digital Champion.***

Malcolm, 79, lives with long term health conditions that unfortunately impact his mobility. Malcolm is a film and music fan with a large collection of vinyl records, and he is also very passionate about writing short stories.

Malcolm first reached out to Age UK Portsmouth for digital support because he wanted to be more confident using Microsoft Word to do his writing, and also needed advice on how to get his printer to work so that he could print and share them. He had engaged with some previous support through a group setting, and although appreciative, he found it challenging not being able to learn at his own pace.

Malcolm was soon visited in his home by a Digital Champion who

he had been matched with. Over the course of several bespoke one-to-one digital support sessions that provided the attention he really required, Malcolm was not only able to fix his printer, but he also learnt more about using his laptop more generally to support his everyday activities and interests. Malcolm said the support he received had been **“wonderful”**.

**“I used to get angry at my laptop, sometimes I would think it had a mind of its own. The help I received through this project by Age UK Portsmouth gave me a lot of confidence using my laptop and to my writing. I don’t feel angry with my laptop anymore, I cannot thank you enough.” – Malcolm Berry**

## PAMELA, 85 YEARS OLD, AGE UK SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE

***Pamela feels much more independent now that she is able to organise her online food shop herself.***

Pamela, 85, a former prison officer, was previously confident at getting online by herself, but after experiencing multiple strokes, her memory - and wellbeing - has sadly been negatively impacted leaving her feeling that **“most things were confusing to [her]”** including getting online.

Pamela also finds it difficult to join in with communal activities in her assisted living community, and although she is close with her sister who visits often, she felt very isolated. Relying on her carers to order her online food shopping, was frustrating and unsustainable as she wanted to be able to do it herself again.

Pamela wanted to feel more connected and independent, and was keen to relearn her digital skills, so, her social worker reached out to Age UK South Gloucestershire on her behalf for support and Pamela was referred into the Digital Champion Programme.

Pamela began engaging in one-to-one weekly support sessions with a Digital Champion in her own home where they worked closely on re-learning how to order groceries online. Subsequently, Pamela borrowed a tablet through the Loan Scheme and learnt how to use a touch screen and started exploring different applications. Pamela found this a little challenging at first, but it didn't stop her. She explained how she **“practiced hard on [her] computer”** to support her learning.

As a result, Pamela's confidence online has grown. She is now able to order her own food shopping and feels more independent and less lonely. Pamela thoroughly enjoyed the visits from her Digital Champion and is about to join Age UK's befriending service too.





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