

**Report by Chris Ipkendanz, Funding and Community Development Officer
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1 OVERVIEW

- i) This pilot was conducted to inform a wider project by the Councils looking at addressing social isolation among older people.
- ii) Two workshops were piloted on 30 November and 01 December in Lowestoft and Felixstowe respectively. The purpose of the workshops was to survey the willingness of people to participate in digital skills sessions, to determine which subject areas were of greatest interest and to test delivery methods for future events.
- iii) The workshops were facilitated by an external consultant, John Popham. In all, five (5) people attended the sessions in Lowestoft and three (3) people attended the sessions in Felixstowe. The target audience was engaged via advertisement of workshops in resident newsletters, as well as via public notices in the libraries that hosted the respective sessions.

2. SURVEY DATA

- i) Each participant was asked to complete a survey, prior to and upon completing the workshop. The purpose of which was to test how effective the sessions were at addressing the gaps in digital knowledge and skill. The survey sought data about eleven (11) core competencies, based on skills relating to information management, communication, online transactions, online safety and use of price comparison tools (see summary below)

Survey Type	Skills Assessment per Core Competencies		
	No idea what this means	I couldn't do this	I could do this
Pre-workshop	32%	39%	30%
Post-workshop	9%	7%	84%

- ii) The pre-workshop survey showed that on average only 30% of the digital skills and actions could be completed by participants. The post-workshop survey showed that on average 84% of the digital skills and actions could be completed by participants – a 54% increase.

NB: Online banking was not demonstrated at the workshop due to use of public Wi-Fi connections. However, online safety from a banking perspective was discussed in depth.

3. OBSERVATIONAL DATA

The following is a summary of the messages and learning outcomes that arose from the workshops, captured by means of discussions with participants; they have been broken down into key themes:

- i) Skills/Literacy
 - Digital skills varied widely among the cohort of participants. In at least one case, underlying literacy issues created a challenge.

- It took longer than expected to connect participants to the local networks used (in this case within the libraries). This was the result of most people having had a family member set-up and connect them to home networks. Thus they lacked the technical proficiency to do so unassisted.
- ii) Delivery Method
- Generally, participants were grateful for the small class size, stating that it helped them to get personalised attention to better meet their individual needs. Several participants appreciated the time available to 'decode' the computer jargon, stating this was often a barrier to their digital participation and understanding.
 - Several participants had previously completed computer classes – mostly on desktop devices in a classroom setting. They stated that this afforded them limited opportunity to receive tailored support, especially with their own personal (mostly portable) devices.
 - Open discussions helped participants discuss their online experiences and build confidence through shared stories (i.e. good vs bad, dos and don'ts).
 - There was often a need to provide analogous examples when explaining online concepts (i.e. eBay is like a big shopping mall, sellers are like the individual shops within in it). This point correlates to the issues associated with the use of jargon.
- iii) Gender
- The majority of participants were women (5 out of 8).
 - Of the 3 men that attended, each had recently (within 18 months) lost their partner.
- iv) Areas of Interest
- Social connections were a key driver for people to attend and seek knowledge about social media.
 - Participants recognised the benefits of online food shopping to save time and overcome mobility/transport difficulties.
 - Online safety was a key concern, all participants held some reservations about exposure to fraud/scams.
- v) Barriers
- Not understanding computer jargon was a major barrier highlighted by all participants. Decoding this 'computer speak' was a key outcome and most stated it would significantly help their future learning potential.
 - Of those that expressed fear about getting online, the majority have had a bad experience in the past (i.e. fraud, difficulty adapting to new technology at the end of their working career).
 - Scams seemed to add to the general fear of the online environment – participants cited that there is a lot of bad news about it, but not much good.
- vi) Technical Support
- Most participants relied upon family for technical support, often family were impatient and just 'did' rather than 'showed' (usually the grandchildren).
 - Jargon was again a barrier to people seeking or being able to fully utilise technical support from outside (i.e. mainstream or non-family) providers.

4. ANALYSIS

- i) Knowledge and Skills
- Social factors such as older age, lower income or socio-economic status, and living in a rural community all adversely impact upon a person's level of digital inclusion (Kwong 2015). Choi and Di Nitto (2013, p.2) further suggest that the use of technology and web-based resources 'promote older adults' physical and mental health and reduces their social isolation and dependence on informal and formal support systems'. Given that many of these factors are relevant to the east Suffolk context, there is a sound case for the Councils and partners to address the so-called 'digital divide' experienced by many of our residents.
- ii) Drawing upon the observational data from the Digital Inclusion Pilot, it is evident that several barriers influence the level of engagement among older residents and others who are digitally excluded. A recurrent response from participants during the workshop sessions highlighted the

lack of training programmes that were relevant to their individual circumstance and/or preferred learning methods. Similarly, a lack of understanding relating to 'computer jargon' and inadequate access to technical support, limits their confidence to seek assistance from mainstream ICT education channels.

- iii) Empirical evidence suggests that older people are more likely to engage with digital technology in conjunction with a friend or family member (Green and Rossall 2013; Gatto and Tak 2008; Xie 2007). Gatto and Tak (2008, p.801) further found that 'personal one-on-one instruction and computer mentors who provide step-by-step instructions to teach basic computer skills have provided the best [digital learning] outcomes'. Peer-to-peer support has been shown to optimise skills transfer among older learners, particularly as it 'allows people to talk through, share and test out new approaches with each other' (Sharp and Oliver 2007, in Cousins and Dunne 2013, p.47). Cousins and Dunne (2013) go on to suggest that the support of other people significantly eases the burden of change and improves an individual's ability to embrace a new technological platform. This is supported by Xie (2007) who found age peers provide an effective means of learning and sharing knowledge about ICT.
- iv) In conclusion, there is not only demand for, but also strong evidence to suggest that a peer-to-peer training model will deliver optimal digital inclusion among older residents and others individuals that may be excluded as the result of the aforementioned social factors.
- v) **Access to Devices and Internet Connection**
In addition to a lack of knowledge and skills, access to a digital device can also be a limiting factor. Evidence suggests that older individuals with a lower monthly income are less likely to use the internet than those with a higher monthly income (Green and Rossall 2013). Reasons for this seem to relate more to cost of home internet connection fees or access to public networks rather than access to devices (Choi and Di Nitto 2013), which are typically passed on to parents by adult children or grandchildren once they update their own devices. Connectivity barriers such as these align with known socio-economic context of east Suffolk given the age profile, deprivation statistics and prevalence of rural poverty (Hidden Needs 2016).
- vi) Although computer workstations are available in community hubs such as libraries, mobility, transport difficulties and lack of adequate personalised support create significant barriers for users. Suffolk Libraries are currently trialling an iPad loan scheme at several of their venues in order to avail members access to 'take home' digital devices. Thus there is opportunity to partner with such organisations to investigate feasibility of signposting users of these programmes to potential knowledge and skills services provided by the Councils and other public sector organisations if adopted (see Recommendation 1).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations outline a means of delivering a targeted digital inclusion programme to meet the needs of the identified beneficiaries (i.e. those who are excluded by means of age, socio-economic status or geographic location).

i) Digital Champions Programme

The use of a 'champions' programme provides an opportunity to engage community volunteers in the delivery of digital inclusion activities within target communities. This would provide a peer-to-peer training platform which is consistent with demand and best practice. By utilising existing social networks and community resources the programme could aim to provide relevant, personalised support in a safe, local comfortable and informal environment.

Recommendation 1:	Develop a Digital Champions Programme in consultation with intended beneficiaries and voluntary and community sector organisations. Develop an outcome proposal for funding through the East Suffolk Partnership.
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ii) Cooperative Approach with Existing Service Providers

Further to the above, it is also recommended that the Councils investigate the feasibility of partnering with existing service providers within the community. To this effect, they could provide ancillary support to said services by signposting users to digital champions within their local area to access technical/social support.

Recommendation 2:	Discover, and consult with, existing service providers to determine feasibility of providing ancillary support to established digital inclusion initiatives.
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