



Digital Angels: support to get older people connected

Time to Shine end of project report
2017 (revised 2021)



Summary

Staff and volunteers assisted older people to get online for the first time, supporting learners in their home and over the phone. Digital tea parties in community centres and libraries introduced learners to each other – in person or via Skype – and helped unlock the mystery of the World Wide Web.

This report has been re-published in July 2021 with many digital resources added in the final section. It was an early digital project and much of the learning gathered went on to inform 100% Digital Leeds's work with older people's organisations and the fantastic support they offered during the Covid-19 pandemic. The body of the report has been left as it was written in 2017.

Digital Angels in numbers

- 149 Older People received 1- 2-1 support in their homes
- 191 Older People received support outside their home
- 120 people receive light touch support
- For those who told us their age, the biggest group was aged 80 – 84
- 64% of participants live alone



What was planned and how did that change?

This project was originally to be run by Leeds Federated Housing Association, through their own managed residential housing schemes and with outreach to older unemployed adults.

Leeds Federated Housing Association had to withdraw, and the contract was re-let to [Age UK Leeds](#). Whilst their project remained true in many ways to the original, as a smaller organisation they had to scale back some of the targets and use other referral routes such as housing schemes and the Fire and Rescue Service Safe and Well Plans, which did not work as well as had been hoped. Reliance on large referral partners was challenging as those partners work to different timescales.

Digital Angels excelled in some areas such as supporting older people outside of their homes but found it hard to reach as many individuals within their own homes as they had planned. They worked in inner South Leeds in year 1 and outer South Leeds in year 2 in a change to the original plan, to keep their focus on one area.

They did successfully reach many very isolated and lonely older people, they developed some very creative ways of working and new partnerships that enabled them to extend their reach, and through securing some new funding from Age UK, will be able to build on and extend this excellent project.

'I am 85 and it has given me a new interest and a new lease of life, and I am enjoying it immensely'.



What difference did it make to older people?

Of those who completed an evaluation questionnaire 50% reported reduction in social isolation and loneliness, and 53% reported improvement in wellbeing

Older people with visual impairments or limited manual dexterity were supported by sourcing specialist equipment. For one man who had been using his laptop in a dark room with the assistance of a magnifying glass, this transformed his use of IT.

By working in partnership with [Health for All](#) and the BME Network (another Time to Shine project), Digital Angels were able to run groups sessions almost entirely in Hindi/Punjabi, thus reaching a community who were isolated, both socially and digitally.

“This message is to tell you how helpful Digital Angels have been to me over the past several weeks. Rachel has been my tutor and has taught me how to use a tablet, e-mail, Google, camera, and much more. I am 85 and it has given me a new interest and a new lease of life, and I am enjoying it immensely, but without Rachel I wouldn’t have got this far because at first it was all Double Dutch. Rachel is not only a good tutor she is a really nice person. Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to be involved in technology.”

Learning

The one-to-one support for participants was increased from four to eight weeks when it became apparent that more time was needed in order to embed skills.

Higher levels of technical expertise were required by volunteers than originally anticipated.

As part of the original plan to work with a housing association, Leeds Involving People (a volunteer organisation) successfully recruited volunteers for and set up an active Advisory Group. Most of the participants were not from South Leeds, which is where the project worked, and the majority did not have digital skills. In future Age UK Leeds would seek to develop their own Advisory Group with members who had more direct links with the project to facilitate coproduction.

Good partnership working is often reliant on key contacts for the successful promotion and engagement.

When the project happened most of the sheltered housing schemes didn’t have WiFi in communal areas. This meant that residents were not able to practice in between sessions which slowed down their progress. It also reduced the opportunities for social interaction within the communal areas.

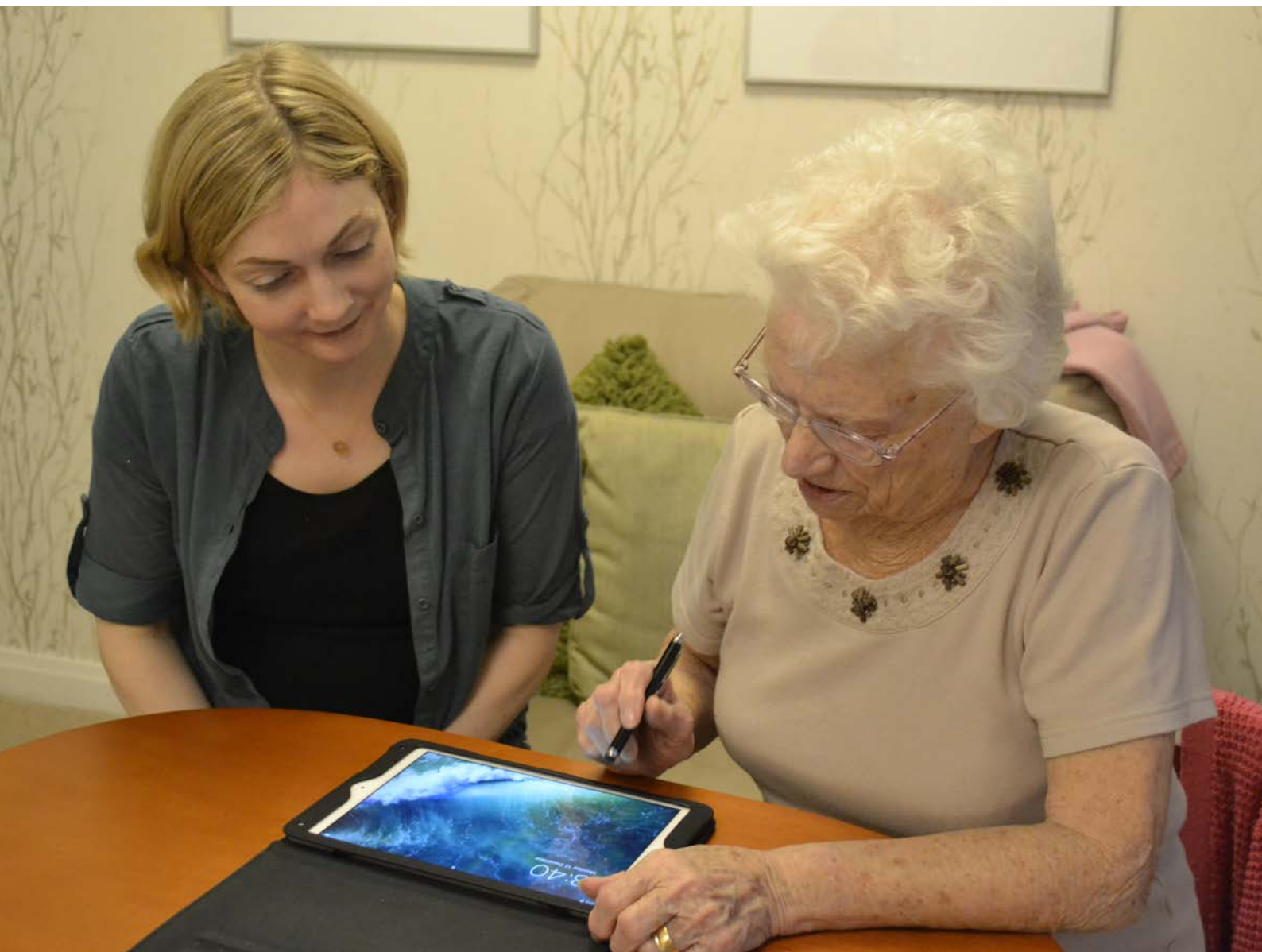
Legacy

Community Development Workers identified a need for an Easy Read Evaluation Questionnaire, based on their work with people with Dementia and limited literacy. Working with Leeds Involving People and the Time to Shine Team, an Easy Read version was developed; it was the precursor to simplifying all the Evaluation Questionnaires used across the programme.

A pack was produced to enable housing schemes to support residents to get online together.

Learning from this project helped to inform the development of 100% Digital Leeds's work with older people.

Sustainable partnerships were developed with other organisations South Leeds, including Neighbourhood Networks, care homes and the South Leeds Recovery Hub. Links were also made with dementia cafes where Digital Angels ran techy tea parties.





Case Study – Sunny View

Digital Angels delivered a Taster session at Sunny View Care Home in Beeston attended by a Community Development Worker, two volunteers and six female residents.

They were invited to have a go with the technology to which worker and volunteers received a resounding 'No thank you'. One resident made it very clear she didn't want to take part. Undaunted, the Digital Angels carried on: got out the tablets and switched them on, and one by one the residents became engaged with the technology. Conversations opened up about interests and hobbies, memories, games and fun things. Before long everyone was using and looking at a tablet and connected online. The session was alive and went on for the full two hours without any breaks. The attention of the residents was captured as Digital Angels showed them things they were already interested in could be found online.

They showed people videos on Youtube, where they could listen to their favourite music, they looked at Google Earth at places which they had visited in the past allowing memories to come alive. One resident recollected walks at Oakwell Hall Country Park in Kirklees and was delighted to see photos and information relating to her experiences. Residents were playing online simple interactive games - creating pottery on a virtual potter's wheel and they explored catch up television, news online, books and sport and more. The session ended and the tablets were turned off. They were asked if they had enjoyed it to which again there was a resounding 'No!' The evidence of the last two hours told a different story!

The resident who had made it clear she didn't want to take part took the workers arm and said: 'Rachel you will come back won't you? I really enjoyed that'. They had sat together; the resident had recounted her life story; they had looked at places she had visited all over the world whilst supporting her husband who was a Diplomat. This included pictures of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg in Russia.

Following this session two residents were paired with Digital Angel volunteers. One resident was 100 years old; the other resident used a wheelchair after having her leg amputated; she was keen to go online so that she could maintain her health and fitness by watching online exercise videos. She engaged in boxercise and regularly did her weights to keep her arm and upper body strength.

As a result of the taster session, Sunny View Care Home bought some iPads for residents to use. Digital Angels supported staff with training to be able to use appropriate apps and websites relevant to residents; this means the care home can offer a sustainable solution for residents to have access to the Internet.

Resources

- [A Lifeline in desperate times: lockdown learning from Time to Shine delivery partners](#) (Time to Shine, March 2020)
- [Exploring the online world](#) (Time to Shine, September 2020)
- [Reducing loneliness through digital connections: case study of the Digital Angels project](#) (Care Connect)
- [Learning snapshot: positives of digital](#) (National Lottery Community Fund, March 2021)
- [Positives of digital connection](#) (National Lottery Community Fund, March 2021)

[100% Digital Leeds](#)

[Online Centres Network](#)

To find out more about Age UK Leeds go to ageuk.org.uk/leeds/

To find out more about Time to Shine go to www.timetoshineleeds.org



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