



Linking Generations Northern Ireland

Evaluation of the 'ConnectIT' Project

Bringing generations together to build positive relationships and enable older participants to develop their digital and on-line skills

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Report prepared by: Vicki Titterington, LGNI Manager

1. Introduction

In the Autumn of 2017, LGNI were funded through Belfast City Council Super Connected Communities to co-ordinate and deliver 2 intergenerational IT projects. These were based in Belfast City Council Community Centres linking up teenage post primary school pupils with local older learners to help them get online and engaged in using their own iPads, tablets and smartphones.

The following community centres and schools were involved: Knocknagoney Community Centre and Ashfield Girls' School and Girdwood Community Hub & Belfast Royal Academy with pupils aged 16 – 18 years. Girdwood had 6 older persons who registered but attendance was not regular and at the last session only 3 attended to complete final forms. The original day and time for the project was changed at the last minute by the school and this did not suit some of the older ones who had originally indicated they might attend and the session time of 3.30 – 5.00 pm in the winter months impacted on the final numbers of older participants.

Each project involved preparatory sessions with the older and younger people on their own to establish the learning needs of the older participants and to provide the younger people with advice on online safety and tips on how to teach. These sessions were followed by four intergenerational IT sessions taking place in late afternoon after school. Girdwood sessions were supported by volunteers from HMRC, kindly identified by BITCNI Digital Assist. The sessions focused on using LGNI's Digital Age Project (DAP) toolkit as a resource for the younger people to assist the older people using a one-to-one, tailor-made approach to learning. This approach enabled the older learners to learn at their own pace and to focus on their own interest areas. It also maximised the use of the digital skills of their younger partners and the DAP toolkit. A deaf older participant appreciated the opportunity of working one to one and face to face with his student teacher and being able to ask and get answers for his specific questions on how to use his own tablet computer. His mentor felt great satisfaction in being able to help and support him.

The two Community Centres kindly provided internet access, refreshments and iPads for those who did not have their own. In Girdwood, HMRC volunteers provided additional IT support when necessary. The sessions had the overarching outcome of improving older people's digital skills but also had the added social element of increasing contact between generations.

The evaluation shows that the projects worked very well. They were welcomed by the community centres, schools and the younger and older people involved. The input from HMRC Volunteers was greatly welcomed as an extra resource and feedback from the volunteers on their enjoyment from the project was very positive.

Comment from HMRC volunteer: *It was great to see the older generation being interested in and really excited to learn new skills ranging from basic to difficult questions; it was a great experience for me to help out.*

Comment from teachers.: *This has been a fantastic opportunity for the pupils to help build their confidence and allow them to share their expertise. They have definitely improved their communication skills and are more confident in interacting with older people. We plan to include digital inclusion work in the future.*

Comments from community Centre staff included:

The older members were keen to learn how to use their own devices.

There was instant engagement between the generations.

The pupils were willing to help and share their knowledge and proved sensitive to the needs of our older people.

Technology usage can be intimidating for older people but with patience, the pupils have been able to reinforce their learning and if needed, repeat information. This project has helped us bridge the gap between generations which can often be difficult within communities.

It has been particularly beneficial to those older people who are isolated due to disability. We would definitely recommend this project to other groups.

2. Evaluation data

Below is the evaluation information collected by LGNI through post project questionnaires issued to participants. For the purpose of creating a baseline, LGNI also collected preliminary forms from a sample of older participants (20 forms) a sample of feedback from these forms has been included below.

A: Preliminary forms – summary of responses – only from older participants

Older people 20 forms received

Q 1: How often do you use the following? (Tick 1 option per row)

	Very often	Quite Often	Sometimes	Never
Smart phone	5	1	3	4
Desktop Computer	2	2	1	5
Laptop	2	3	5	5
Tablet Computer	4	1	4	5

Q 2: How confident do you feel using technology on your own? (Tick 1)

Very Confident
 Quite Confident x 7
 Not very Confident x 9
 Not at all Confident x 3

Q 3: Circle the topics you are most interested in learning about:

Online shopping x 10
 Social media x 8
 Email x 15
 Skype x 9
 Other online communications e.g. Whatsapp x 7
 Youtube x 2

Q 4: How often do you use the internet?

Every day or most days x 9
 Once or twice a week x 2
 Several times a month x 3
 Less than once a month x 1
 Never x 5

Q5: How often do you ask someone else to access the internet on your behalf?

Very often x 2
 Quite often x 3
 Sometimes x 7
 Never x 7

Q6: Do you have your own technology? Tick all that apply:

Smart phone x 9
Desktop computer x 1
Laptop x 8
Tablet computer x 11

Q7: Please write any 3 words that describe how you feel about computers and the internet

Cautious, interested, excited
Insecure, frightening
Love it but not an expert
Great for keeping in touch

Q8: What concerns, if any, do you have about using computers and the internet?

I worry that people can get information and can access my accounts
Concerns re security, scams and viruses
New technology
Lose information

Q9 What one thing would you like to learn during the project?

Shopping
Interested in apps
How to manage files and contact lists
Emails, skype and shopping
Using a memory stick

Q10: Do you have much contact with young people in your community?

Yes x 6
No x 12 but would welcome it
4 x see young people daily
2 x see young people 2 times per week
1 x see young people only Sundays at church

Q11 Have you any concerns about working with the young people?

Yes x 0
No x 18

Q12 Age

Below 55 x 0
55 – 64 x 3
65-74 x 11
75-84 x 5
85+ x 1

Q13 What is your gender?

Female x 12

Male x 8

B: Post Project Evaluation forms –

Summary of responses of older participants

11 forms received

Sex Male x 6 Female x 5

Age range
50-54
55-59 x 1
60-64 x 1
65-74 x 5
75+ x 4

Q 2: Your Use of Digital Technology (tick box)

Question	Yes	No	Total
Have you increased your online activity as a result of this project?	9	2	11
Has your confidence in using digital technology increased as a result of taking part?	11		11

Q 3: Please indicate how often you NOW use the following (tick box)

(Some questions no response)

	Very often	Quite Often	Sometimes	Never
Smart phone	3	1	2	2
Desktop Computer	2	1	2	3
Laptop	1	3	2	4
Tablet Computer	2	2	1	3

Q 4: How confident do you NOW feel about using technology on your own? (Tick box)

Very Confident x 2

Quite Confident x 7

Not very Confident x 2

Not at all Confident

Q 5: Before this project had you had contact with groups of young people?

Yes x 3 No x 8

Q 6: Would you recommend this project to a friend?

Yes x 11 No x 0

Q 7: Please use the space provided to make a comment about your experience working with the young people:

The IT knowledge passed on was amazing.

Young people are amazing – very inspirational and they had great patience teaching us

I have learnt a lot over the 4 weeks. The girls were willing to show you and were nice company.

My teacher was very good – I will now buy my own tablet

Q 8: How often do you NOW use the internet?

Every day or most days x 5

Once or twice a week x 5

Several times a month x 1

Less than once a month

Never

Q 9: How often do you NOW ask someone to access the internet for you?

Very often

Quite often x 1

Sometimes x 9

Never x 1

Q 10: Please write three words that describe how you now feel about computers and the internet:

Going to try more

Quite confident now

Feel more comfortable

Complicated, fascinating, enlightening

Q 11: What was the best part about taking part in this project?

Learning about the tech.

Fun way to learn – I enjoyed every minute

I was inspired to learn more!

It made me more confident using my iPad

Meeting up each week and learning things I never thought I would

Learning how to finally use my smartphone

1 to 1 was a much better way to learn things

**C: *Post Project Evaluation forms –
summary of responses of younger participants***

21 x forms received

Sex Male x 9 Female x 12

Age range 16 – 18 years

Q 1: Did you enjoy taking part in this project?

Yes x 19

No x 0

Why?

I got to teach 3 different people new skills especially F. I taught them many skills whilst learning new teaching skills myself.

Meeting people who are at an entirely different stage in life has been an amazing experience.

It was rewarding to help those who do not understand technology.

I got time to bond as well as having the opportunity to teach. It was a great confidence booster.

It allowed me to connect with the older generation. It has helped me with my social and communication skills.

Q 2: Do you think your confidence increased as a result of taking part in this project?

Yes x 19 **No** x 2

Q 3: Would you recommend the project to a friend?

Yes x 21

No x 0

Q 4: Please use the space below to make a comment about your experience working with older people:

It was a very enjoyable experience. They were very easy to work with and were quick learners determined to catch up with technology.

They were appreciative of our help

It has made me want to work with older people in the future

Q 5: Working one to one - do you think it was a good approach?

Yes x 20

No x 1

It allows you to help another generation and create a relationship.

It allows you to focus on that person's individual needs

Q 6: Please comment about working 1:1 – good and bad points

It allowed us to work at the older persons pace and tailored to them personally.

It is a very informal and relaxed way to learn.

Works best with 2 students to one older person in case we don't have all their answers.

The person I was working with could ask me anything and not feel embarrassed in front of the class

Q 7: If the school was to host this project again would you volunteer?

Yes x 20

No x 1

Q 8: Did you use the Digital Age toolkit provided?

Yes x 6

No x 15

Q 9: Please use the space to tell us how useful these were in your teaching:

*I actually knew what to do to help them but for home learning/refreshing it is useful
It was helpful to show your partner what to do instead of trying to explain it.
Helpful in explaining some things*

Q 10: What was the best part of taking part in this project?

*Being able to see my person working on their own and knowing what to do
It was great building relationships and watching the face of the older learners when they understand something.
I gained teaching skills and developed my confidence
Great hearing their stories and creating friendship
Very easy to connect with them about ICT and other things*

Q 11: How could we improve this project?

*Making sure older people bring their own device rather than borrow them.
Make it longer or continuous – like a club
Offer some set topics as older ones often not sure what they might find useful in their lives
Ensure older people attend the sessions regularly*

3. Conclusion

The data above strongly and clearly demonstrates that the project has achieved all of the outcomes that it set out to achieve:

Outcomes

1. Increase in digital and online activity by older people

Of **11** of older participants who answered this survey question **82%** agreed that they had increased their online activity as a result of this project

2. Increase in confidence of older people in use digital technologies

The preliminary survey figures showed that **60%** of older participants felt not very or not at all confident before taking part in this project. The post evaluation survey showed us that this had changed with **82 %** feeding back that as a result of taking part they now felt very or quite confident using technology on their own. **100%** of post evaluation responses from older people said they had increased their confidence in using digital technology as a result of this project.

3. Increased contact between age specific organisations – schools and older people’s groups

Both projects provided linkage and engagement between age specific organisations most of which plan to continue linkages. **73%** of older participants said in their post evaluation surveys that before this project they had not had contact with groups of young people. When asked why they enjoyed the project a young person stated *“It allowed me to speak to new people from different backgrounds and ages. Improved my confidence and socialising skills”* and an older person *“very*

pleasant as I live alone and it was a joy to meet the young people...they were kind and good company and I had a really good time."

4. Increased support and empathy between the generations

100% (2 did not record any response) of the young participants in this project said they had enjoyed it and **95%** would volunteer again. **100%** of older and younger participants also said they would recommend the project to a friend. The following comments demonstrate empathy and support when asked about working with the other age group *"I found it easy to get on with my partner, I definitely had to be patient but it was a good experience"* and *"Very pleasant attitude from the young people they were very patient with me"*.

5. Increased use of Belfast Community Centres

Both projects took place in Belfast City Council Community Centres. As a result of this the older people involved are now more aware and equipped to use the IT equipment and wifi available in these centres to continue their learning. Many of the young people involved in the projects had never been in the community centres where the projects took place and are now aware of the services and activities available.

It has also been very rewarding to note that the young people involved also feel that they have improved their confidence by working alongside the older people. **95%** of the young people stated that they would volunteer to take part in this project again. The projects big strength is the 1:1 element which seems to work really well and offers an opportunity to work at a pace suitable to the individual but also to form relationships.

The evaluation concludes that this has been a worthwhile project that could be valuably extended and adapted into the next financial year. **Indeed, we have recently had enquiries from an older persons' group in East Belfast requesting information on any other courses we are delivering as they need help with their IT skills.** The findings show that the participants thought it enjoyable and a good use of their time. We will use these findings and our learning in this project in creating a new proposal. .