Linking Generations Northern Ireland

Evaluation of the Digital Age Project

February 2018

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INTRODUCTION

The Digital Age Project was led by LGNI and supported by funding from the Big Lottery Fund's 'Reaching Out Connecting Older People' Programme for Northern Ireland. The project supported the use of technology as a tool to link generations whilst promoting the digital and social inclusion of older people.

Year 1 and 2 of the project (2014 – 2016) involved working with sheltered housing and delivered IT courses to older people within residential schemes. Through linking the schemes with local schools / youth groups, intergenerational sessions using ICT were also delivered as a tool to create links between older and younger people in communities, with the aim of creating better understanding and interaction. An evaluation of both years was undertaken by the Learning and Work Institute and is available on the LGNI website.

This report details the findings from the evaluation of the third and final year of the project. The focus of this year was different in that instead of working with sheltered housing, the project worked with post primary schools and older people's groups. In addition, digital inclusion sessions and workshops were delivered focusing on intergenerational practice and its applicability to digital inclusion.

LGNI's main partner in the final year continued to be Ignite IT, who delivered the project sessions and assisted in the delivery of the digital inclusion sessions and workshops. The project continued to be overseen by a Steering Group consisting of representatives from Go ON NI (Department of Finance), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Supporting Communities NI and Ignite IT. The evaluation was undertaken by Juniper Consulting.

EVALUATION APPROACH

At the outset of the final year a revised set of outcomes were developed to assess the success of the final year of the project. These were that:

- Older people are more skilled in using digital technologies and accessing the Internet;
- Older people are more connected to their community and the wider world;
- Older people are more empowered and independent;
- Young people have gained skills and qualities that will help them with life and work;
- Young people have a greater understanding and appreciation of older people; and
- The sustainability of intergenerational practice in Northern Ireland is enhanced.

To gather information to determine if these outcomes were achieved a series of questionnaires were developed which were completed by participants. The questionnaire results were also complemented by visits to observe and gather additional information, along with observations by LGNI and Ignite IT staff.

PROJECTS

OVERVIEW

Across Northern Ireland eight projects took place during the final year. They involved pairing post primary schools with an older people's group in the local community. The pairings were arranged by LGNI staff in consultation with the schools and groups. Two projects in four council areas were planned at the outset, however schools in the Lisburn & Castlereagh area were unable to commit during the timeframe and so a third project took place in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Town	Council Area	School	Group
Kilkeel	Newry, Mourne & Down	St Columbans College	Ladies of Mourne
Newry	Newry, Mourne & Down	St Mary's High School	Ballyholland Sunshine Club
Saintfield	Newry, Mourne & Down	Saintfield High School	Saintfield Parish Church Wednesday Welcome Group and other local residents
Bangor	Ards & North Down	St Columbanus College	North Down Community Network
Comber	Ards & North Down	Nendrum College	First Comber Presbyterian Church
Strabane	Derry City & Strabane	Holy Cross College	Strabane Community Network
L'Derry	Derry City & Strabane	St Joseph's Boys School	Rath Mor 55+ Group
Dundonald	Lisburn & Castlereagh	Dundonald High School	Ballybeen Women's Group & St Elizabeth's Church Dundonald Mothers Union

Across the eight projects, 103 younger people and 82 older people started the projects and 83 younger people and 72 older people finished the projects. There were a number of people that dropped out while others joined during the projects.

Most of the young people were aged between 14 and 16 years old, while the older participants ranged from 55 to 85+ years (see Appendix I for further details).

Once the pairings had been established, 11 sessions were planned for each of the projects. These sessions were delivered by Ignite IT, with LGNI staff attending the single identity sessions, the first joint age session and the final celebration and evaluation session.

Session	Activities
1	Two single identity sessions (one with pupils, one with older people) to: • Discuss their experiences/views of older/younger people • Preparation for the joint sessions – including how the sessions would work, toolkit, and do's and don'ts. Pupils were also given guidelines for how to plan for the sessions with the older learners • Complete initial questionnaire
2	First joint age session, covering:

Session	Activities
	• Introductions, practicalities, aims of the sessions • Ice-breaker / getting to know you activities • Do's and don'ts of online safety • Completing skill set sheets
3 – 6	• Introduction to sessions by Ignite IT tutor, joint activity • One-to-one sessions using the Digital Age Toolkit learner cards (see below) or personalised learning as required
7-10	• Creative IT work – developing content for the Generations GO website (see below)
11	• Final week celebration event • Final evaluation forms completed

The **Digital Age Toolkit**, which was developed during the first two years of the Digital Age Project, is a resource to assist with the development of digital skills. It contains a number of sections:

- Planner's Toolkit – to assist those creating a digital literacy programme;
- Champion's Toolkit – to assist those supporting someone with digital literacy;
- Tutor's Toolkit – to assist those teaching digital literacy as part of a formal course;
- General Resources – to support tutors and champions;
- Glossary – of digital literacy related terms; and
- Learner Cards – activity cards focused on five areas to help learners and those supporting them:
  - Keeping in Touch – using the internet to keep in touch with family and friends
  - Safe and Responsible – how to use the internet safely
  - Sharing – sharing photos, thoughts and ideas
  - Taking Part – using the internet for buying, selling, researching etc
  - Using Your Technology – learning about devices, connecting and using them
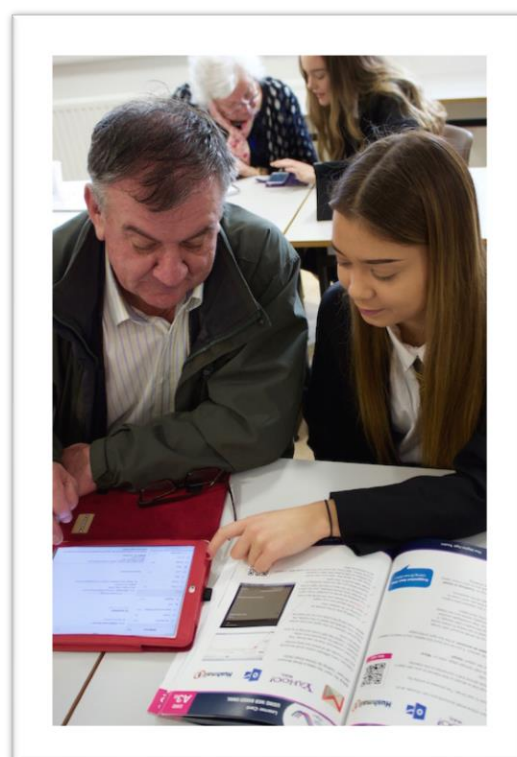
All of the participants were given a copy of the toolkit and the learner cards were used to help with the one-to-one sessions between the pupils and the older learners. However, the content of the sessions was flexible and were tailored depending on the learning needs of the older person.

The **Creative IT** element of the projects involved participants working together to develop content for the Generations Go website, which had a number of sections that the participants worked on, sharing their stories and life experiences: GO Indoors, Out, Learn, Share, Eat, Deals and Far.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following sections set out the findings from the questionnaires completed by the participants during the eight projects. They were asked to complete two questionnaires – one at the start and one at the end - to help determine the benefits of participating in the projects.

The findings focus around the achievement of the following outcomes:

- Older people are more skilled in using digital technologies and accessing the Internet;
- Older people are more connected to their community and the wider world;
- Older people are more empowered and independent;
- Young people have gained skills and qualities that will help them with life and work; and
- Young people have a greater understanding and appreciation of older people.

Teachers and group leaders were also asked to complete questionnaires and their views are set out at the end of this section.

Digital Technology and the Internet – Ownership and Usage by Older Participants

Both questionnaires completed by the older participants captured information about the usage of different types of devices and the internet. This was to help determine if the outcome of "older people are more skilled in using digital technologies and accessing the Internet" was achieved.

A comparison of the results from the initial and final questionnaires shows that in most cases their *usage, and confidence of usage, has increased substantially as a result of participation in the projects*. The key findings are that:

- *Ownership of digital devices was high at the start of the projects*: 68% of participants owned a tablet, 48% a smart phone, 48% a laptop, while only 23% owned a desktop computer. Over half of the participants (56%) owned two or more devices, with a further 28% owning just one device, and 16% not owning any device.

- *Actual usage of these devices varied widely*. At the start of the projects, 48% used a tablet every day, compared to 38% for smart phones, 15% for laptops and 6% for desktop computers. *Usage of all devices increased by the end of the projects* for all types of devices with 54% using a tablet every day or most days (+6), compared to 49% for smart phones (+11), 24% for laptops (+9) and 7% for desktop computers (+1). In interpreting the results, it is important to consider what "usage" can mean. Observations from the Ignite IT tutor highlighted that at the start of the project many of the older participants were limited in their ability to use their device(s), only using them for a small number of tasks that they were familiar with. Therefore, while usage of the devices increased by the end of the project, the participants were also able to use their devices for a greater range of tasks.

- *Confidence levels in using the devices was quite low at the start of the projects*: only 37% of laptop users, 36% of tablet users, 31% of smart phone users and 29% of desktop computer users felt 'very' or 'quite' confident in using these devices. When asked what one thing they would like to learn during the project, many participants responded that they wanted to become more confident in using their devices and the internet. *By the end of the projects, confidence levels had increased substantially*, with 90% of smart phone users, 89% of tablet

users, 84% of laptop users and 67% of desktop computer users feeling 'very' or 'quite' confident in using these devices. Observations from the Ignite IT tutor noted that some of the participants initially worried about touching their device for fear of pressing the wrong thing. However, by the end of the project they were comfortable operating their device and carryout out routine tasks online. In one project the oldest participant (aged over 80 years) bought an iPhone as a direct result of participation in the project and had become proficient in many apps, including WhatsApp, by the end of the project.

- *The most common usage of devices* was to send and receive emails and documents, connect with friends/family and to find out information about an area. There were substantial increases in many of areas (see table below), particularly in relation to finding out information about an area, connecting with friends/family and researching or developing hobbies or interests.   Pinterest was a particularly favourite app for many of the women that participated in the projects as an aid to researching their hobbies.

Do you use a device and/or the internet to do the following?	Initial	Final	Change
Send and receive emails or documents	48%	61%	+13
Watch TV programmes or films	24%	29%	+5
Listen to music	27%	42%	+15
Play games	21%	28%	+7
Connect with friends/family – e.g. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Skype	46%	67%	+21
Find out information about your area (e.g. local activities, what's on, public services (e.g. council, healthcare)	45%	74%	+29
Undertake daily tasks – e.g. online shopping, banking, paying bills, booking travel	35%	46%	+11
Buy or sell items – e.g. eBay, Gumtree	22%	15%	-7
Research or develop hobbies or interests (e.g. family tree)	28%	53%	+25

- *Usage of the internet was high at the start of the projects* with 71% advising they used it. Of these users, 57% used it every day or most days and 36% used it once or twice a week. Sixty-five per cent had asked someone else to access the internet on their behalf. *At the end of the projects, there was a substantial increase in internet usage*, with 92% advising they used the internet. Of these users, 73% used it every day or most days and 11% used it once or twice a week. Only 36% had asked someone else to access the internet on their behalf. As noted previously in relation to usage of devices, often participants were limited at the start of the project to using websites and apps that they were familiar with. Through the project participants were able to learn about different website and apps and so expanding their usage.

- *Confidence levels for those that used the internet were quite low at the start of the projects*, with 40% feeling 'very' or 'quite' confident in using the internet. *By the end of the projects confidence levels had increased significantly* with 83% of users feeling 'very' or 'quite' confident in using the internet.
- There were also high levels of agreement from participants at the end of the projects when responding to the following statements. There were a small number of participants who came to the sessions and who were already quite skilled and frequent users of technology and the internet. For this group the benefits were limited, however as noted later on, there were additional benefits in terms of social interaction opportunities.

As a result of taking part in this project, would you say that…	Yes
You have increased your use of digital technology devices (e.g. smart phone, computer, laptop, tablet)	92%
You have increased your use of the Internet	79%
You are now more confident in using digital devices and the Internet	89%
You have developed your skills and knowledge of digital devices and the Internet	89%
You are more aware of the risks of using the Internet and how to reduce these	79%
You have enough knowledge to protect yourself online (e.g. scams, password protection, fraud)	81%
You would like to explore and learn more about digital devices and the Internet in the future	94%

Benefits of the Projects to Participants

The questionnaires completed by both sets of participants aimed to capture the benefits of participating in the projects. While the previous section focused on older people's skills in using digital technologies and accessing the Internet, this section focuses on the following outcomes:

- Older people are more connected to their community and the wider world;
- Older people are more empowered and independent;
- Young people have gained skills and qualities that will help them with life and work; and
- Young people have a greater understanding and appreciation of older people.

Contact Between the Generations

As part of the initial questionnaires all the participants were asked about their contact with the other generation. In comparing the results, it was found that **contact levels between the generations were quite high outside of the projects:**

- 44% of older people had contact with young people at least once a week, and 54% had contact at least once a month. As would be expected, this figure rose substantially for contact with family members and friends, with 69% having contact with family members at least once a week and 54% having contact with friends; and
- For younger people, 43% had contact with older people at least once a week, and 59% had contact at least once a month. Again, this figure rose substantially for contact with family members, with 86% having contact with family members at least once a week;

Benefits for Older Participants

When asked what the main benefit to them in taking part in the project was, there was a clear pattern to their responses, with three key areas identified:

- **Improved confidence** in using devices and the internet;
- **Learning how to use their devices** and being better able to use them, and less fear in doing so; and
- The **social interaction** provided through the project, both with older and younger participants.

These benefits were also observed by the Ignite IT tutor who highlighted that some of the older participants commented at the start of the projects that they felt isolated in their community and the project had given them access to social activities where they would normally be at home alone.

Comments from the older participants included:

"Feeling more confident about playing around with the tablet and finding things out by myself"

"Getting a better insight into how tablets work and gaining confidence to try new techniques and apps"

"I knew nothing about an iPhone before this project but I am quite confident now"

"Learning about my tablet and being able to make better use of it"

"Learning how to work the internet, online shopping and email"

"Social side, company and interaction"

"Getting to know younger people"

"Scared over iPad at beginning. Lauren encouraged/inspired me to keep trying"

There were also high levels of agreement from older participants at the end of the projects when responding to the statements below, which were designed to specifically capture information on the outcomes. The results indicate that there have been positive benefits for the majority of participants as a result of taking part. In addition, several participants commented that by increasing their digital skills they felt 'less left out' and are now more able to participate in conversations with others about digital technology and using the internet. The Ignite IT tutor noted that:

"Participants were delighted and always keen to report back when they carried out an online activity without the assistance of their friends or family. There were many of examples of this but one of my favourites being a very pleased older participant who'd ordered online a new bin from the council and informed of either a streetlight out or pothole. One participant was delighted to have booked a holiday, and another tickets to a show. Other students were more interested in the entertainment opportunities such as online catch-up services or streaming music between sessions. Communication by far seems to have the biggest influence in particular apps such as Messenger and WhatsApp, with participants proudly showing family images each week that they previously were not privy to without the digital know how"

As a result of taking part in the project…would you say that you…	Yes	Outcome
Are less reliant on others (e.g. to find out information for you or access a service)	76%	Older people are more empowered and independent
Can do more things for yourself (e.g. online shopping, online banking, booking travel)	64%	
Have more choices (e.g. when making purchases, activities, choosing services)	65%	
Are generally more informed (e.g. about the options available to you)	79%	
Have developed a new hobby or interest	51%	
Feel less isolated	72%	Older people are more connected to their community and the wider world
Are more connected with friends/family (e.g. through social media	71%	
Know more about what's happening in your local community/area (e.g. what's on, local activities)	75%	
Have made new connections/friends (young and old)	85%	
You plan to get involved in other projects or activities in your community	82%	

The younger participants were asked the same question about what had been the main benefit to them in taking part in the project. Their responses focused on improvements in their **communication skills** (such as listening, talking, patience, understanding), gaining **confidence**, developing a **greater understanding of older people**, and improved **social skills**. These improvements were also noticed by their older partners, who could clearly see developments as the weeks progressed. The Ignite IT tutor also commented that:

"Pupils self-confidence has improved over the course of the projects, I would personally notice changes in their behaviour and confidence though this could be down to the younger and older learners getting used to one another over the sessions. Introducing a new topic or medium to any student whatever age can be challenging and the younger participants had to be quick on their feet and creative in their instruction/explanation of procedures. Many of the younger tutors/mentors chose to use analogies to explain IT concepts…where older learners could not grasp a topic I noticed on several occasions students using clear and clever analogies to enlighten and bring the subject to life. A clear indication of the younger participants commitment and responsibility in the project can be drawn from the attendance register. Many of the younger participants attended every week clearly feeling a responsibility toward the continued development of their partners ICT skills"

Comments from the younger participants included:

"Taking part in the project has raised my confidence as at first I was reluctant to engage with the older members but as I got to know them more it became easier to engage with them"

"I have become more confident and made new friends. I have learnt how to teach properly and have patience"

"I got to learn some new things that I wouldn't have learnt otherwise"

"To have a different view of the older generation"

"Taking part in this has boosted my confidence in socialising with the older community and also gaining friends from it"

"I developed new skills teaching others, I like working in teams and also this is good for my future and it's going to be on my CV as well"

A couple of participants also noted that as a result of the project they were interested in either teaching or working with older people as a career.

"I liked getting to work with older people as I would like a job with them in the future"

These findings concur with the results from the statements in the table below, which again were designed to specifically capture information on the outcome relating to **young people gaining skills and qualities that will help them with life and work**. The results indicate that there has been a positive change/benefit for the majority of participants as a result of taking part. The results for improvements in ICT skills and awareness of the risks of the internet are lower as many participants already had very good ICT skills, or were studying ICT at school.

Do you think the project benefited you in any way?	Yes
Improved my confidence	94%
Improved my communication skills	98%
Improved my ICT skills	71%
Improved my awareness of the risks of using the Internet and how to reduce these and protect yourself online	71%
Improved skills such as listening and empathy	92%
Improved skills such as thinking, decision making and problem solving	96%
Developed my interest in helping others to learn or teaching as a career	88%
Developed my interest in a career working with older people in the community	86%

Participation in the projects also helped to support the achievement of awards for a number of the younger participants. All of the participants in the Dundonald project were part of a Prince's Trust group, while six of those from the Strabane project were working towards a Pope John Paul Award.

Has your participation in the project counted towards an awards scheme?	Yes
Pope John Paul Award	6
Duke of Edinburgh Award	5
Prince's Trust	8
Heath and Social Care	3

In relation to the second outcome of **young people having a greater understanding and appreciation of older people**, in addition to the comments above, participants also responded very positively to the following statements:

As a result of taking part in the project, would you say that you…	Yes
Have learnt more about older people and their interests, needs and concerns	99%
Have learnt that you have things in common with older people	99%
Have made new connections/friends (young and old)	94%
Are more confident interacting with older people	96%
Would like to take part in further projects with older people	95%

Their comments reflected the results:

"I enjoyed being able to interact with people who I wouldn't usually interact with"

"I enjoyed getting to know older members of the community and changing my perception of them"

"I liked getting to know the older people, they were very nice. I also liked that we got to help and spend time with them"

Project Delivery – Participants' Experiences

All the participants were asked about their experiences of how the projects were delivered by Ignite IT and LGNI. They were asked to rate different aspects of the project, the toolkit and the DAP approach. The table below compares the results from the ratings the participants gave of each of the key elements of the project. While broadly similar, younger participants gave a slightly higher rating for the toolkit and they rated the Creative IT work higher as well.

	Younger			Older		
How would you rate…	Average	Good	Very Good	Average	Good	Very Good
The Digital Age Toolkit and other resources	8%	57%	34%	13%	42%	42%
Information about online safety	14%	41%	41%	6%	47%	46%
Creative IT work	12%	48%	37%	36%	50%	10%
Support from Ignite IT	4%	28%	66%	6%	31%	63%

Note: the percentages *will not add to 100% as there were a number of participants that did not answer the questions.*

There was a mixture of comments made about the *Digital Age Toolkit*. Most of the older participants liked it, while others commented that they did not use it very much during the sessions, preferring to work with their partner, while at the same time recognising that they could refer to it afterwards. The younger participants on the whole responded more positively to the toolkit, and commented on how it had helped them to teach the older participants. A few younger participants from the Dundonald project found the toolkit too long.

Older Participants	Younger Participants
"Very helpful and well thought out"	*"Very helpful for teaching and made it a lot easier"*
"Very easy to understand"	*"The resources were very good in ensuring I was able to teach the older members exactly what they wanted to know"*
"I think the toolkit is useful to have when I am on my own"	
"In essence good, did not work our way through it, good to refer to"	*"The book was extremely useful in helping me be able to teach the older members of the community about different online projects such as emailing and shopping online"*
"We did not use the toolkit in any in-depth way in the class but it will probably be useful for my own use after the class finishes"	*"I thought it was very useful as it gave step by step guides on how to carry out tasks"*
"I read it early in the project but did not find it very helpful"	*"I didn't really use the toolkit because I knew what to do"*
"I didn't use it that much I followed my partner's instructions"	*"I didn't honestly really look at the book but I know my partner did"*
	"We didn't really use the toolkit much and made notes on the day e.g. I wrote step by step instructions for my student"

In relation to the **Creative IT work**, this had a mixed reaction. While it worked well in the first four projects and a lot of content was added to the website, due to time pressures in the last four projects (cancelled sessions and shorter sessions) it was difficult to allocate sufficient time to its development. This was reflected in some of the comments:

"More teaching and learning rather than adding to a website"

"If I had to change something I would maybe make the website based on ourselves and each other"

"Not to go onto doing projects on sites too soon but to learn simpler things more thoroughly"

"Make the sessions longer, more teaching sessions rather than making websites"

"I would have preferred to have all the lessons based on an individual choice rather than try to put material on a website"

"Could have prepared people for content for website in last sessions"

"I would have preferred to have all the lessons based on an individual choice rather than try to put material on a website"

One of the key aspects of the DAP model, was that **participants would work on a one-to-one basis** so that they would have individual tutoring and that the teaching could be tailored to the older participant's needs. Partners would be paired at the start of the project and remain together for its duration. This proved to be difficult to achieve due to difficulties in recruiting the same number of older and younger participants, along with drop outs, sickness, non-attendance, and new members joining part-way through projects. Where participants did manage to work on a one-to-one basis it was very successful, however in some of the projects the pairings were one older person to two or three younger participants. Another issue that was highlighted by the older participants was the mixed abilities of the younger participants, in areas such as confidence and ICT skills. Comments from older participants included:

"Generally worked well but some of the younger students very quiet"

"My experience was very good. Everything worked well and if the student didn't know there was sufficient professional help on hand"

"I had the same student every week, so we built up a great relationship as he soon became aware of what I wanted to do"

"I didn't always get to work with the same person and would have liked that consistency"

"Maybe an older age group with a lot more IT skills"

"My one-to-one was very quiet so I think this held her back from offering advice but we got on well"

"The young person / older person ratio was not 1:1 throughout"

"3 young people to 1 adult meant not everyone was always involved"

The younger participants were on the whole very positive about working with their older partners, although the participants from the project in Dundonald highlighted that they had to work on a three to one basis with the older participants. Some of the participants from the Comber project also noted that working on a one-to-one basis did not allow them to interact with the other groups in the room. Comments from younger participants included:

"Working one-to-one was easy as I could explain everything and answer questions that were specific to my partner"

"I think it was easier and less daunting to everyone - you can help them go at their own pace and learn their own way while helping them to improve their skills"

"Everything went really well. The relationship created was fantastic and it was invaluable to experience both teaching and learning between two people"

"It was useful as you could focus on one topic but we were not interacting with other groups"

"It was extremely successful as we could spend time focusing on one topic if needed however it distanced us from other members"

"I wasn't looking forward to it, but then it was good and the person I helped was really nice"

"I enjoyed it as you created a bond with your partner and were able to talk to them as though you knew them your whole life, much easier to learn one-to-one than group work"

Overall 93% of older participants and 99% of younger participants thought that the **DAP model** was **a good approach**. In addition, 93% old older participants and 100% of younger participants would **recommend the project to a friend.** When asked if their school was to host the project again, 99% of younger participants agreed they would volunteer to take part.

Experiences of Teachers and Group Leaders

Each of the teachers (8) and groups leaders (7[1]) were also asked for their views and experiences at the end of the projects. While it was hoped that the teachers and group leaders would have participated the sessions, several of them just observed or only attended some of the sessions. The feedback received from some of them was therefore quite limited.

In terms of the reasons for taking part in the projects, teachers advised that this was to help establish links between the school and the local community, for the pupils to gain new skills, and for the experience pupils would have of engaging with older people. For group leaders, the main reasons for taking part was to help improve the digital skills of their members.

Benefits of Taking Part

In terms of the benefits to schools and groups, there was good agreement with the following statements:

Do you think the project has benefited your school/group in any of the following ways…	School (n=8)	Groups (n=7)
We are more knowledgeable about intergenerational practice	8	5
We are more knowledgeable about digital inclusion work	8	5
We have used our experiences to influence or inform other work we do	7	4
We are more connected to the community as a result of this project	8	4

Teachers also agreed that there were multiple benefits for pupils including improvements in their confidence, communication skills, problem solving, behaviour, and the ability to interact and understand older people. They regularly commented to the Ignite IT tutor about their surprise at the level of confidence of the young people and with one or two pupils that had not been as engaged in other school activities and "really coming out of their shell". Some teachers also commented to the tutor that they were surprised by the caring and patient nature of their students with the participants and noted that some took on roles of responsibility that they

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[1] The Comber project did not have a group leader

maintained for the duration of the project, organising refreshments, making sure there was enough chairs, making instruction notes for their partners.

Comments from teachers included:

"I felt that our children benefitted from the one-to-one experience with older members of the community"

"Lovely to see a real soft side of the students working so well with the 50+"

"The students have had a great learning experience and have gained invaluable knowledge through this project".

"The kids have learnt valuable life skills"

"I believe the students engaging with the older members of the community went extremely well, I could see the students building in confidence"

"Pupils have taken ownership of the project, pride in their work, and the fact they can help others"

Group leaders also saw benefits for the older participants in terms of improved digital skills, confidence, interaction with younger people and less reliance on others.

"I did not attend all weekly sessions but all the ladies said they loved it, they learned lots, got confidence using ICT and loved spending time with the boys"

"It has provided an enthusiasm to engage more fully in a medium that was largely unfamiliar and to do so with confidence. This engages them in new interests, leads to learning more skills, opens up new worlds. For those with family it brings together common interests and so strengthens family"

"This has benefited our older people in many ways: new skills have been learnt, new friendships have been created and a better understanding of each other has been brought about"

All of the teachers and group leaders thought that the Digital Age Project model is an effective approach for increasing older people's ICT skills.

Improvements

In terms of suggested improvements, these mainly related to the practicalities of running the projects. The improvements that teachers noted mainly related to internal issues within the schools – such as difficulties with scheduling the sessions, clashes with other classes and pupils having to leave early for bus transport. Some of the group leaders highlighted practical issues too, including that 11 weeks was too long, consistency of attendance, and the abilities of some of the young people to teach the older people.

"I think it would have been much better had it started earlier in the year, to allow Year 12 pupils to benefit more from the project. As their GCSE exams started in the middle of the project, they were unable to attend all the sessions"

"Some found it quite good but others spoke about some of the students being very quiet and they fount if difficult to interact with them"

Future Plans

Six of the eight schools advised that they intended to continue digital inclusion work in the future as did all of the group leaders.

"We intend to use some of the children's skills to mentor other young students in school during computer club"

"A really worthwhile project for us and we fully intend to build on the links made"

All of the schools would recommend the project to other schools, while all of the groups would similarly recommend it to other groups.

DIGITAL INCLUSION WORKSHOPS

LGNI and Ignite IT facilitated 11 workshops (one per Council area) across Northern Ireland between February and October 2017. The workshops focused on intergenerational practice and its applicability to digital inclusion, with the aim being that attendees would learn more about how their organisations could use technology to link generations in their local area.

Sixty people attended the 11 workshops, which were held in public libraries. The workshops were promoted in multiple ways including via social media, LGNI contact lists, statutory and community websites and Councils. However, despite extensive promotion, the numbers attending some of the workshops were very low.

Workshop	Attendees	Workshop	Attendees	Workshop	Attendees
Newry	10	Antrim	8	Banbridge	1
Holywood	5	Dungannon	7	Ballymena	6
Lisburn	7	Dungiven	2	Belfast	5
Derry	5	Enniskillen	4	**Total**	**60**

Despite the low numbers, a broad range of attendees came to the workshops - including care homes, young and older people's organisations, housing associations, health trusts, councils, schools, community groups/projects/partnerships, and support organisation such as Dementia NI, Action on Hearing Loss and Action Mental Health.

Attendees feedback was gathered at the end of the workshops through a questionnaire. This asked a variety of questions aimed to assess the motivations for attending and the benefits of doing so.

Motivations for Attending

The main motivations for attending the workshops were to find out more about the DAP, to get information and ideas, and to learn about how to deliver a digital age type project.

Previous Involvement in Intergenerational Work

Just under a third of attendees (30%) had previously been involved in intergenerational work. This mainly related to community based projects and workshops bringing generations together facilitated through areas such as crafts, photography, history and cooking.

Benefits of the Workshop

When asked about the benefits of taking part in the workshop, attended responded very positively to the following statements:

As a result of taking part in this workshop, would you say that…	Agreed
You are now more aware of who LGNI and Ignite IT are and the work that they do	98%
You are now more aware of intergenerational practice and its benefits	97%
You now understand the links between intergenerational work and digital inclusion	98%
You have learnt about the Digital Age Project	93%
You have learnt about the DAP toolkits and how to use them	97%
You have learnt about how to plan a project using the DAP toolkits in your own setting	93%
You have learnt about good practice and practical tips in delivering intergenerational projects	95%
You would recommend the workshop to others	95%

Satisfaction with the Workshops

Attendees were also very positive about the different aspect of the workshops

How would you rate…	No answer	Poor	Average	Good	Very Good
The content of the workshop			3%	33%	64%
The length of the workshop			12%	42%	47%
The delivery of the workshop by the facilitators			2%	30%	68%
The usefulness of the discussions about using the DAP toolkits	2%	2%	3%	28%	65%
The usefulness of the workshops to your work/organisation	2%		10%	30%	58%

Note: percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Attendees comments included:

"I thought the toolkit was an excellent resource to be given, which can be used again and again in the future"

"It was very easy to follow and really good information"

"A very informative and enjoyable seminar with excellent and qualified members"

"I found it useful and enjoyed finding out about the work that other participants are involved in"

"Great workshop, will recommend to everyone"

"Presenters very knowledgeable and enthusiastic"

"Well organised, good event, useful ideas for projects"

In terms of the most useful aspects of the workshops attendees found these to be the DAP toolkit and learning how to use it, learning more about the benefits of intergenerational and digital inclusion work, discussing project ideas, and meeting other people from organisations that they could potentially work with in the future.

Suggested improvements from attendees mainly focused on practicalities such as the choice of venue, the timing and length of the workshops. A couple of attendees felt that that the workshops could have been more interactive. The opportunities for this in some of the workshops was limited due to low attendance numbers.

Going Forward

Going forward, attendees planned to use the information from the workshop in a number of ways, including sharing it with others, planning a project, and incorporating intergenerational aspects to their work.

"I hope to bring this into our community so it can help to blend all the ages and learn from each other"

"I hope to promote IG work to the community groups I work with"

"It will help me be able to work with older people"

"Looking at ways we could use the information to deliver our own project"

"Show the toolkit to volunteers so they are better informed about how to support our service users"

"To develop a programme to support older and younger members work together on campaigns"

DIGITAL INCLUSION SESSIONS

The digital inclusion sessions were 'one-off' sessions that aimed to improve digital skills of older people while at the same time bringing generations together.   Sessions took place in three towns across Northern Ireland – Donaghadee, Newry and Antrim between August and October 2017. A fourth session had been planned for L'Derry in July 2017, however this was cancelled at the last minute by one of the groups involved and it was not possible to re-arrange.

The session in Donaghadee was held as part of a larger event (Let's Learn Digital) organised by Go ON NI. The session involved young volunteers helping some of those attending the event to improve their digital skills, such as taking, uploading and sharing photos. The session in Newry was again part of a larger event (Positive Ageing Day) organised by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. Some of the pupils involved in the Newry project (see previous sections) volunteered to help the older

attendees with digital skills including photos, email, social media, and introducing them to apps relevant to their hobbies and interests.

The third session in Antrim was the largest and was held over two days. It brought together older people and staff from Castle Lodge Care Home with young people from the Rathenraw Youth Group. A preparatory meeting was held between the youth group leader and care home activity co-ordinator, LGNI and Ignite IT tutor to plan the sessions. The first session involved young people receiving dementia awareness information from the activity co-ordinator before meeting the care home residents. The second session involved the young people working with the residents on a one-to-one basis. Depending on the interests of the residents, they introduced them to the tablets to search and play things such as their favourite music, games and puzzles. They also showed them how to use apps such as Snapchat (for photos) and Google Earth/Maps for information about where they lived. Using the tablets in turn provided a stimulus for memories and conversations between the participants. The contact between Rathenraw Youth Group and Castle Lodge Care Home has continued and they are developing ideas for further projects. The care home has also made contact with a local nursery to explore the possibility of further intergenerational contact for their residents.

Across the three sessions 31 people completed evaluation forms. All but three of the participants were female.

Town	Young People	Older People	Group Leaders	Total
Donaghadee	3	1	0	**4**
Newry	4	8	0	**12**
Antrim	6	7	2	**15**
Total	**13**	**16**	**2**	**31**

Of the participants, two of the older people and seven of the young people had previously been involved in activities with an older age group. Twenty-eight (90%) of the participants agreed that there is a need for older people to engage with younger people in communities, while 27 (87%) would take part in more intergenerational sessions in the future. When asked what type of activities they would like to do together they suggested areas such as arts and crafts, sports, dancing, singing and computers/ICT.

Comments from participants included:

"I increased my understanding of people with dementia and also that the young people were more understanding and willing to learn. I would love the young people to continue to develop as caring citizens" (Youth Group Leader, Antrim)

"The young are so knowledgeable like the young girl who helped solve the problem with my tablet today"

"I know where to get information from and what types of phones are available to me"

"I learned what a QR code is. It will be helpful if I want to find out more info in the future"

"I believe it is good to connect with older people as it gives us valuable life skills" (young person)

"It is important we do not forget to communicate with other communities as it is something that is becoming dated and we don't know how much we really need them. Generations work better when they are together and have a sense of self-worth and can prevent loneliness"

OTHER ACTIVITIES

In addition to the projects, digital inclusion workshops and digital inclusion sessions, LGNI undertook a number of other activities during the final year of the Digital Age Project that helped to contribute to enhancing the sustainability of intergenerational practice in Northern Ireland.

CONFERENCE

LGNI held its annual **conference 'Let's Go Intergenerational'** in October 2017. One of the workshops at the conference focused on the Digital Age Project with the teacher and some of the pupils from the Comber project attending the conference and speaking at the workshop.

Promoting the Digital Age Project

Promotional activities undertaken by LGNI included a Facebook page, the DAP section of the LGNI website as well as some articles in local newspapers focusing on the projects. In addition, schools and groups promoted projects on their social media pages and website. A reporter from BBC Radio Ulster also interviewed participants involved in the Strabane project for the "Time of Our Lives" programme.

Approximately 500 copies of the Digital Age Toolkit were distributed during the final year of the project. In addition to participants in the projects, workshops and sessions, copies were also provided to libraries where the sessions were held, participants on the LGNI Connect IT projects, and at other events and meetings that LGNI staff attended. The Toolkit can also be downloaded for free at www.digital-age.org.uk

Resources Created

Three key resources were created as part of the Digital Age Project:

- Intergenerational IT Good Practice Guidelines
- The Generations GO website https://generations-go.ignite.it/
- A video on the DAP https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJDC4NvLWX4&feature=youtu.be

THE DIGITAL AGE PROJECT 2016-17

what were the outcomes?

In 2016-17 eight projects took place pairing post-primary schools with older peoples groups.

103 younger people and 82 older people engaged with the project, working together one-to-one on creative IT activities....

The goals were to improve digital skills and community connections for older people and developing skills and age-awareness for younger people.....

CONFIDENCE

90% of older smart phone users, 89% of older tablet users, 84% of older laptop users reported feeling confident using their devices after the project
1 older person even bought an iPhone after taking part!

INCREASED INTERNET USE

92% older participants reported using the internet after the project compared to 71% before taking part
There was a **43% increase** in confidence in internet usage

LEARNING NEW SKILLS

"I learned how to work the internet, online shopping and email"

"I was scared of the ipad at the beginning. My younger person inspired me to keep trying!"

SOCIAL & COMMUNITY

"The social side, company and interaction was great"
85% of older people made new connections and **82%** plan to get more involved in the community after the project

EMPOWERMENT

76% of older participants said they felt less reliant on others to find information / access services after the project
79% felt generally more informed about options available

WORK-LIFE SKILLS

"I have become more confident and made new friends. I have learned how to teach properly and be patient"
(young person)
"I developed new skills teaching others and it's going to be on my CV"

AGE AWARENESS

99% of younger participants said they had learned more about older people and that they have things in common with older people

85% of older participants felt they had made new connections / friends young and old....

CONCLUSIONS

This final section draws together the findings from the evaluation and reflects on what worked well, and the lessons that were learnt from the final year of the project.

WHAT WORKED WELL

The evaluation findings have overall been very positive and have clearly demonstrated the achievement of the outcomes that were set. The key achievements from the project are:

- The DAP model has for the most part worked well, bringing younger and older people together. When a one-to-one sustained pairing between younger and older can be achieved, this is when it is most beneficial for learning and skills development. This is key to the model's success and allows time for older people, with different levels of ability, to work at their own pace on an individual level and for relationships to be built between the pairings.

- Older people are more skilled and more confident in using digital technologies and the internet – the results have shown significant increases in usage and confidence in usage. The projects have given the older participants more of an insight into the world of younger people.

- The skills of young people have been enhanced – particularly in the areas of confidence and communication. There is also now a pool of trained pupils/volunteers within schools and youth groups (particularly Antrim) with the skills to help develop the digital literacy of even more older people in their communities. In addition, several of the young people advised that as a result of taking part in the project they would like to work with older people in the future.

- Participation in the projects also helped to support the achievement of awards (such as Pope John Paul and Prince's Trust) for over 20 young people. This, originally unintended benefit, has opened up potential opportunities for LGNI to undertake further work in this area in the future. Meetings have taken place with representatives from The Prince's Trust, Pope John Paul Awards and the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, along with a number of local community and older people's organisations to discuss how to develop and support this work in the future.

- New connections have been made in communities between post primary schools/youth groups and older people's groups. Many of them plan to continue and build upon these connections and some have already participated in events at Halloween and Christmas. There was also informal contact between some of the older and younger participants outside of the project sessions (e.g. meeting each other by chance in the street) which also helped enhance connections. So inspired were pupils in the Newry project, that some are now involved in sharing their IT knowledge with students from a local special school, and plans are underway to celebrate these initiatives through the BBC School Report Day in 2018.

- Opportunities have been created for older people to become more involved in and connected to their community, in some cases becoming part of a group or making new friends and connections. A number of older people noted that they were primarily participating for the social interaction

and contact opportunities. This in turn can help reduce isolation and increase their social and community connections.

Lessons Learnt and Future Considerations

There were a number of challenges that arose during the final year of the project, in particular working with post primary schools. In most cases these challenges were overcome and the learnings from these can be used to consider how future projects may be delivered:

Projects

- **Working with post primary schools**. There were a number of issues that were experienced when working with the post primary schools.

  - *Project duration* - 11 consecutive weeks proved to be difficult to achieve due to not having 11 straight weeks in any school term. Working with schools was limited to periods from September to December and January to June, and in those periods there were half- terms and holiday periods. Some of the older participants also found 11 weeks too long a period to commit to. A shorter project duration (maybe 7 to 8 weeks) may be more suitable when working with post primary schools in the future.

  - *Disruptions* - half terms, holidays, exams, conflicting classes and unexpected often last-minute school closures including for two days due to storms, led to some pupils not attending the sessions or the sessions being cancelled as schools tried to catch up. This mainly occurred in the projects that took place from September to December, and was quite frustrating for the older participants who had to be contacted by LGNI at short notice about the cancellations. It also affected the momentum of projects, and sometimes it was difficult for the pairings and the learning to re-start after a break of a week or two.

  - *Duration of the sessions*: the sessions varied in length from 45 minutes to 2 hours. The duration was set by the schools, and their length was restricted by factors such as the school timetable and bus collection times after school. Sessions of 60 minutes or less were not ideal as they did not provide enough time for the participants to cover what they needed to. Several of the older participants commented that the shorter sessions were too rushed. Ninety minutes would be a more suitable duration;

  - *Timing of the sessions* – only two projects took place during the school day, with the rest after school hours. This meant that pupils were often tired and not at their best. Again, the timing of the sessions was set by schools, but ideally these would take place during the day.

  - *Participation of teachers* – some teachers were moved to other duties/training at short notice which resulted in cancellations as well. Often teachers only observed the sessions rather than participating in them. In the future it would be worth considering how teachers, and group leaders, could be more involved in the sessions in order to maximise the benefits of the project;

  - *Mixed abilities of pupils* – while some pupils found it quite easy to help the older participants and were natural teachers, some of the other pupils were quite shy and found it more difficult to communicate and assist the older learners. During the single identity sessions pupils were given some guidance on how to work with the older learners, and were also supported during the sessions by the Ignite IT tutor. Some pupils paired up to help the older learners. On

reflection, it would be helpful to have more time with young people on their own in order to prepare them for the sessions with the older participants. In addition, where there is a large group of participants, it would help for a second tutor to be present so that adequate support can be provided.

While there were a number of issues working with post primary schools, it should be noted that LGNI held planning meetings and several conversations with schools in advance of the projects starting. Many of the issues noted above, particularly exam timetables and other commitments the pupils and teachers might have, were not flagged up by the school at the outset, and would have been helpful to LGNI in planning the sessions.

- **Structure of sessions** – sessions three to six focused on one-to-one learning with the use of the toolkit learner cards or personalised learning as required. As noted previously (see page 10) the learner cards were not always used, and some of the older participants came to the sessions with a list of what they needed help with. For the most part this worked well, but some participants felt that there could have been more set topics rather that leaving it 'open' for participants to choose themselves. Some of the younger participants also commented that they felt that working on a one-to-one basis did not allow them to interact with the other groups in the room (see page 12). For future projects, a mixture of structured and flexible learning time could be considered.

- **Consistence of attendance**: The number of participants in the projects fluctuated and there were some issues with drop outs, sickness, non-attendance and new members joining part way through projects. This was also not helped by the disruptions previously mentioned, which also resulted in some participants not returning. With factors often beyond LGNI's control, this is a difficult issue to address, but may be helped by a shorter project duration.

- **Generations Go website** – at the outset of the projects the plan was for four of the 11 sessions to focus on the development of content the website (creative IT work). For the most part this worked well, particularly for the early projects and a lot of content was added. However due to the disruptions in some of the later projects, the time available for the website development was inadequate.   There was also a mixed reaction to the Creative IT work (see page 11), with some participants preferring to spend time on developing their own skills rather than a website.

Workshops

The attendance levels at the workshops were on the whole quite low, despite extensive promotion. It is difficult to assess why this occurred, particularly as previous workshops delivered by LGNI over the past number of years have always been very well attended. The current political situation may have been a contributing factor as many community and voluntary organisations are experiencing budget and staffing pressures due to funding being delayed in the absence of the NI Executive at Stormont. As a result, staff travel and training is often curtailed when budgets are under pressure.

FINAL COMMENTS

The final year of the Digital Age Project, despite some challenges, has been very successful. Building on the achievements from Years 1 and 2, the revised outcomes set for the final year have all been achieved and positive feedback has been received from those that took part.   In particular there are

now more older people who have the skills and confidence to use digital technology and the internet and more younger people who have the skills to help them do this. In addition, the social interaction opportunities created for older people have been a particular success, and in certain cases have helped to reduce isolation.

The sustainability of intergenerational practice across Northern Ireland has also been built on, particularly in creation of links between schools, youth groups and older people's organisations, and it is encouraging that many of those involved plan to continue and build on the relationships established through the projects.

APPENDIX I – PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Profile of those that took part in projects (based on initial questionnaire results)

YOUNG PEOPLE

Note: percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

What is your gender?

	N	%
Female	53	51
Male	49	48
No answer	1	1
Total	103	

What is your age?

	N	%
10 – 14 years	33	32
15 – 19 years	69	67
No Answer	1	1
Total	103	

OLDER PEOPLE

Note: there were a lot of people that did not complete the "About You" section of the questionnaire. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

What is your gender?

	N	%
Female	48	59
Male	19	23
Prefer not to say	1	1
No answer	14	17
Total	82	

What is your age?

	N	%
Under 55 years	0	0
55 – 64 years	11	13
65 – 74 years	34	41
75 – 84 years	19	23
85+ years	3	4
Prefer not to say	1	1
No Answer	14	17
Total	82	

Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

	N	%
Yes	9	11
No	55	67
Prefer not to say	3	4
No Answer	15	18
Total	82	

Are you a carer?

	N	%
Yes	3	4
No	61	74
Prefer not to say	2	2
No Answer	16	20
Total	82	

Please indicate your sexual orientation.

	N	%
Heterosexual	51	62
Lesbian, gay or bisexual	1	1
Prefer not to say	8	10
No Answer	22	27
Total	82	

Please indicate your religion or belief.

	N	%
No religion	2	2
Christian	53	65
Sikh	1	1
Other religion	2	2
Prefer not to say	6	7
No Answer	18	22
Total	82	

Please indicate your community background.

	N	%
Protestant	20	24
Catholic	35	43
Other	0	0
Prefer not to say	10	12
No Answer	17	21
Total	82	

Please indicate your ethnic background.

	N	%
White - English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish/UK	36	44
White - Irish	20	24
Any other Asian background	1	1
No Answer	25	30
Total	82	