L&W LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

DIGITAL AGE PROJECT

Evaluation Report

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Susan Easton, Kevin Campbell-Wright and Eleanor Penistone

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Digital Age Project was funded by the Big Lottery Fund Northern Ireland's *Reaching Out: Connecting Older People* programme. It ran between 2014 and 2016, aiming to increase internet access and develop the digital capabilities of older people living in sheltered housing in Northern Ireland.

The project programme consisted of: a 10-week ICT course delivered by specialist tutors, working with 409 older people in 37 housing schemes; intergenerational digital projects involving 135 older people and 219 young people, from across Northern Ireland.

The programme produced an active Facebook page[1], a programme website[2] and digital toolkits for learners and champions.[3]

One laptop or tablet was provided for participating housing schemes, providing communal technology and internet access to residents so they could maintain and develop further digital skills. Therefore, sustaining the programme beyond the project lifetime.

The course and supporting toolkits provided innovative approaches and resources to support development of digital capabilities in communicating, carrying out online transactions, finding and using online information. Intergenerational digital projects developed further digital capabilities, specifically in digital creation and problem solving.

The Digital Age Project established new partnerships between schools and sheltered housing schemes to prove opportunities for older and younger people to connect and to develop both social and digital capabilities.

Older people participated in the Digital Age Project as they were concerned they were being left behind in the use of technology and wished to become digitally literate to use technology for particular purposes, especially for hobbies and interests.

Schools participated to develop pupil's digital and communication skills and build links with their communities, in line with Department of Education Northern Ireland policy recommendations.[4]

Sheltered housing schemes participated as residents themselves were interested in digital skills, to provide opportunities for residents to engage with young people, especially where residents did not have grandchildren.

The Digital Age Project evidenced positive impact on older and young people, building communities for all ages within the context of improving digital skills.

[1] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/DigitalAgeProject/
[2] Available at: http://linkinggenerationsni.com/our-work/digital-age-project/
[3] Available at: www.digital-age.org.uk
[4] Available at: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/every-school-good-school-policy-school-improvement

Prior to the programme, the majority of older people had no or very limited digital capabilities and low technology usage, while both older and younger people believed they had little in common.

- 3 in 4 older people were not confident in using technology.
- Most learners had little experience of using various technologies.
- 1 in 4 older learners accessed the internet every day, with less than 3 in 20 accessing it once a week. Almost half had never accessed the internet.
- 15 in 100 used the internet frequently to find information, roughly 1 in 20 frequently make online transactions and only 1 in 50 frequently learn online.
- Almost half were concerned about online security.
- Both older and younger people felt they had little in common with each other.

At the end of the programme, older and younger people had increased their digital skills, particularly in the areas of problem solving, digital creation and online transactions. Both generations also developed more positive attitudes to each other.

- 2 in 3 older people and 4 in 5 young people had improved their digital skills.
- Roughly 3 in 5 older people were more confident using technology.
- More than 4 in 5 older people had increased the frequency of their use of technology: More than 1 in 4 to find information, roughly 2 in 5 to communicate, 1 in 10 for online transactions roughly and the same number learnt online.
- Almost 3 in 10 older people had bought their own technology, with approximately a further 1 in 4 planning to do so.
- Benefits for older people include increased self-confidence, increased awareness of public services, and increased contact with friends and family.
- Almost all older people now feel safer around young people and are more likely to speak to them, while almost all young people believe they share common interests with older people and are more likely to speak to an older person.
- Young people increased their self-confidence and improved their personal and social skills, including patience, active listening, and communication.

By the end of the programme, a significant percentage of older people were confident users of technology and could support their peers.

All housing schemes believed that the programme had been useful to residents and that residents are more confident in using technology to communicate with friends and family, resulting in improved relationships between residents and their families. All schemes plan to continue working with schools and youth groups and would recommend the programme to other schools.

Schools found that the Digital Age Project broke down misconceptions about older people, built relationships between generations, increased pupils' communication and digital skills, and increased their self-confidence.

The Digital Age toolkits were used for both supported and self-directed digital skills development and could be adapted for wider use.

The toolkits have been downloaded 693 times since their launch in April 2016 by 155 different users, with the most popular toolkits being ‘using QR codes’ and the learner cards. Residents have benefited from them, further increasing their digital skills, notably their ability to find information and communicate with friends and family.

The Digital Age Project overcame age-related challenges to digital inclusion in sheltered housing, associated with ongoing support and internet access.

These included limitations to hardware and Wi-Fi access and the need for older people to consolidate and further develop their skills.

Further challenges included sustainability, particularly in maintaining hardware and long term skills development .and older people’s health difficulties, impacting upon their ability to access technology and attend all sessions.

MEET THE PARTNERS

Linking Generations Northern Ireland

Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) is part of the Beth Johnson Foundation. They specialise in the promotion of intergenerational practice, creating opportunities for different generations to learn from, support, meet and enjoy each other's company. Since 2009, they have supported people across NI to bring generations together in the places where they live and work. They believe intergenerational practice provides structured opportunities to link generations, improving understanding and increasing mutual support, contributing to the building of age-friendly communities where we respect each other, have a voice and get to play our part.

Linking Generations Northern Ireland are leading and managing this project – supported by The Big Lottery Fund Northern Ireland – and providing expertise in intergenerational working.

http://linkinggenerationsni.com/

Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. They research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new app roaches. Working with partners, they transform people's experiences of learning and employment, benefitting individuals, families, communities and the wider economy. L&W bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'.

Learning and Work Institute are developing the toolkits for this project and conducting the evaluation as part of the project.

http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/

IgniteIT

Ignite IT is an IT solutions company specialising in bespoke training, IT systems and data solutions.

IgniteIT and their tutors are delivering the 10-week IT courses with sheltered accommodation residents as part of this project. They also facilitate the delivery of sessions to intergenerational groups following linkages and age awareness work developed and delivered by LGNI.

http://ignite.it/

GoOn NI

Go ON NI is a government funded service that highlights the benefits of being online. It brings together all the wonderful initiatives, places and tools to help and encourage off-liners to become internet beginners.

GoOn NI are providing expertise in the field of digital literacy and progression

https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/go-on-ni

Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA)

NIFHA represent Housing Associations in Northern Ireland. They aim to help shape the operating environment to enable housing associations to flourish, whatever their size and type; be the leading independent advocate on housing and related issues and be regarded by members as a highly effective representative body.

NIFHA are providing a link between housing schemes that are utilising, or could utilise, digital literacy programmes.

http://www.nifha.org/

Zenith IT Solutions

Zenith are providers of quality IT support and solutions in Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland.

Zenith are providing expertise and with regards to hardware and equipment. This includes the installation of tablet devices in all participating schemes

http://www.zenithitsolutions.co.uk/

INTRODUCTION

Use of technology and the internet governs how we access information and public services, how we interact with government and with each other. However, 5.3 million people in the UK have never used the Internet[5] and approximately 12.6 million adults in the UK don't have Basic digital skills,[6] so are excluded from these opportunities. As the world becomes more and more digitally dependent, to take advantage of the Internet, or even undertake the simplest tasks, requires basic digital skills.

Since the Office for National Statistics internet access survey began in 1998,[7] the number of internet users across the UK has increased steadily, but the demographics of digital exclusion remain roughly the same, compounding the effects of social exclusion. There are variations across socio-economic groupings, with basic digital skills levels significantly lower amongst lower socio economic groups, while 4.1 million adults do not use the Internet.

Age is a significant factor. Just 43 per cent of over 65s in the UK have the required skills, compared with 93 per cent of 15 to 24 year olds. Older people have lower levels of digital capabilities in using technology to create, solve problems, manage information, communicate or carry out transactions. In particular, older people struggle with using technology to create something new and with installing apps.[8]

The age structure and composition of the UK population is changing, with the proportion over the age of 65 due to increase by 8%. Such changes will affect relationships among different age cohorts in society.[9] As the trend for products and services moving online continues, there is an increasing need to address digital inclusion for older people and to support positive relationships between older people, their communities, their families and between generations.

Basic digital skills levels are also regionally dependent. Recent estimates by GO On NI suggest that 345,000 adults still lack basic digital skills, making Northern Ireland one of the UK nations with the lowest levels in the UK, with approximately 30% unable to:[10]

- Use a search engine to find information;
- Bookmark useful websites and services;
- Store data on a device or in the cloud;
- Keep in touch using email, instant messaging, video calls and social media;
- Book travel or using other ecommerce sites for shopping; and
- Create a social media post.

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[5] Office of National Statistics (2016) *Internet Users in the UK: 2016*, Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2016

[6] Ipsos Mori (2015) *Basic digital skills.* Available at: https://doteveryone-prod.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/Basic%20Digital%20Skills_UK%20Report%202015_131015_FINAL.pdf

[7] Office for National Statistics (2014) *Internet Access Quarterly Update*, available online: http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccessquarterlyupdate/2014-05-14 [accessed:07.04.16]

[8] Ipsos Mori (2015) *Basic digital skills.* Available at: https://doteveryone-prod.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/Basic%20Digital%20Skills_UK%20Report%202015_131015_FINAL.pdf

[9] Government Office for Science (2015) *Intergenerational relationships: Experiences and attitudes in the new millennium*, Foresight, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/458697/gs-15-23-future-ageing-intergenerational-relationships-er11.pdf

[10] Go On NI works to promote digital inclusion and help people and organisations to gain basic digital skills http://www.go-on.co.uk/ni

The importance of digital skills to individuals, families, communities and to the UK economy has been formally acknowledged by the UK government, through an amendment to the Digital Economy Bill, which proposes publicly-funded basic digital skills training free of charge to adults in England who need it.[11]

The Digital Age programme was designed to address challenges of digital inclusion for older people across Northern Ireland living in social housing, engaging them with technology and developing their digital capabilities. It was funded between 2014 and 2016 by Big Lottery Fund Northern Ireland Connecting Older People programme.

In this report, L&W brings together the findings from the programme evaluation over the last two years, evidencing its impact and making recommendations for policy and practice, to contribute to the digital agenda in Northern Ireland.

This report

The evaluation[12] took a mixed methods approach, combining the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Data was collected through paper-based and online beginning and end questionnaires for the 10-week courses, and end questionnaires for the intergenerational projects. This was enhanced by data collected from focus groups and face-to-face interviews with learners, housing scheme co-ordinators and teachers, along with telephone interviews with partners and the tutor.

This report looks in detail about how the different Digital Age programmes were implemented, the impact of the project on the older people involved in the 10 week courses, and examines the impact the intergenerational projects have had on their participants and wider community. The report then discusses the successes and challenges of the project. Finally, it looks at the sustainability and future plans for The Digital Age Project.

The Digital Age Project

Beginning in November 2014, the 2-year Digital Age project, led by Linking Generations Northern Ireland,[13] sought to develop digital skills for residents[14] in sheltered housing schemes across Northern Ireland. Designed to reach over 380 older residents in approximately 37 sheltered housing schemes, Digital Age helped older residents to understand how technology can enhance their lives, increased their access to the internet and developed their basic digital capabilities – aiming to increase channels of communication; improve access to information, services, hobbies and interests; and reduce social isolation through interaction between different generations.

Digital Age consisted of a free, in-house, 10-week IT course for residents in sheltered housing schemes.[15] The project also provided free IT hardware for each participating housing scheme, free online digital toolkits for older learners and their supporters, and a series of intergenerational digital projects to encourage links between older and younger

[11] Department for Culture, Media &Sport (2016) *Government has announced plans to make training in basic digital skills free for adults lacking relevant qualifications*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-plans-to-make-the-uk-one-of-the-most-digitally-skilled-nations

[12] For full details please see annex 1.

[13] LGNI has taken on the role of lead partner for year 3 and 4 of the project. Prior to their closure, the Workers' Education Association Northern Ireland led the project.

[14] Residents include both those who took part in the project and those who live in the housing scheme.

[15] Referred hereon as housing schemes

people, further develop residents' digital capabilities and help to sustain the programme beyond the project lifetime.

- **Free, in-house, 10-week IT courses for sheltered accommodation residents**

The 10-week course provided training to address basic digital skills needs, with the aim of empowering older people with the knowledge and skills to go online – enabling more independent living, greater connection to families and the wider world, and contributing to overall well-being.

Digital skills were embedded in key drivers such as accessing information, shopping, pursuing hobbies and interests, keeping in touch with family/friends and wider community by using email, Skype, Facebook, Twitter and other applications.

- **Use of tablets and laptops**

Training was delivered through the use of tablets in the second year, rather than the laptops, as the portability, lightness and simplicity of touch-screen devices are more user-friendly and present fewer barriers to developing digital skills.

- **Hardware provision to schemes**

The ongoing impact of the programme was strengthened by the free installation of hardware for continued use. In year one, a laptop was donated to each participating scheme. From year 2 onwards, a tablet computer was provided instead of a laptop. Both options enabled residents to continue their learning and connect digitally. Each piece of equipment had the Digital Age toolkit uploaded and a printed copy available for residents to refer to.

- **Intergenerational Activities**

Intergenerational interventions are shown to have tangible benefits in combating digital exclusion among older people[16]. Digital Age incorporated intergenerational projects to build a stronger sense of community and connectedness between young volunteers and older people, bridging differences in age, ethnicity and culture, and challenging negative stereotypes. Digital Age offered the opportunity for housing schemes to link up with a local school/youth group for an additional 4 to 6-week intergenerational IT project.

[16] AgeUK (2013) *Digital Inclusion Evidence Review*, AgeUK, UK. Available at: http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Research/Age%20UK%20Digital%20Inclusion%20Evidence%20Review%202013.pdf?dtrk=true [accessed:07.04.16]

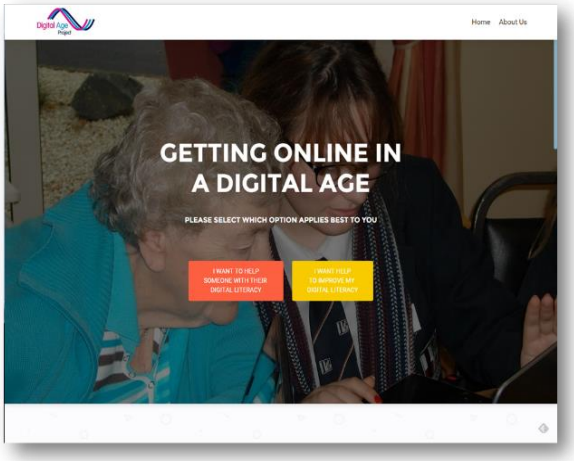
- **Toolkits for learners and digital champions**

Toolkits were developed for tutors and helpers to use with learners, as well as to facilitate self-directed learning. Toolkit design was informed by recommendations from European action research[17] which identified the need for a sustainable supporting resource providing flexible, bite sized learning opportunities within meaningful contexts. The toolkits support learners to explore and learn techniques for themselves, rather than having step-by-step instructions, so they are better prepared for changes and updates to software and digital tools. The avoidance of step-by-step instructions also allowed for the inevitable regular change in procedure when using online platforms. Each section contained a series of cards which included: A brief introduction to the topic;

- Useful links or links to a task that could be completed;
- References to other learning where appropriate (e.g. YouTube videos).

Links on the cards were contained within a QR code, a two-dimensional barcode that can be scanned by a mobile device. QR codes work in printed format, and can take people to the correct link when scanned by a smartphone or tablet, provided there is internet connection. For use on a desktop PC, codes were also clickable and full links were provided in a reference section within the downloadable toolkit. QR codes provided a way for older people to access specific internet sites quickly and easily.

The toolkits are available online via the Digital Age website,[18] and a printed version will be made available to all the participating housing schemes.



- **Communication and dissemination**

The project was publicised through a variety of different means, including an active Facebook page,[19] an online video publicising the project[20] and a website hosting the digital toolkits in a downloadable format.[21]

When first created, the website did not have analytic capabilities. WordPress Analytics were added to the site later. The analytics will continue post-project, to allow further monitoring to take place.

[17] More information about Digital Literacy 2.0 can be found at: http://www.digital-literacy2020.eu/content/sections/index.cfm
[18] Available at: www.digital-age.org.uk
[19] Available at: https://www.facebook.com/DigitalAgeProject/
[20] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91aMvkpIIIo
[21] Available at: www.digital-age.org.uk

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Working as partners

The partnership was developed by Linking Generations Northern Ireland, based on a model developed previously by Learning and Work Institute and WEA Northern Ireland.[22] Linking Generations were the main project co-ordinator and facilitator, with a designated project co-ordinator being the main point for communication for all project stakeholders.

The partnership held regular project meetings to inform and develop project activities and support ongoing evaluation. Working together, the Digital Age Project drew on the specific expertise of each partner to create and deliver a holistic offer to participants.

In between project meetings, Linking Generations also held regular working group meetings, drawing on partners' expertise on specific areas of the work. For example, they facilitated additional meetings between the tutors and the toolkit developers to ensure that what was being created would meet the needs of learners.

Co-ordinating Digital Age

The Digital Age project co-ordinator sought expressions of interest from housing schemes interested in running the 10-week course. They visited each potential site to check Wi-Fi availability and establish whether the venue could support the needs of the course. They also talked with residents about their interest in the course, what they would like to learn and their availability. If a site was suitable, they then went ahead and organised the delivery of the course by Ignite IT.

> *'Before they would meet each other … I would meet with the separate age groups so that they can talk about their views and their experiences, and what they think. I may answer any questions or worries they might have about what it would entail.'*
>
> Project co-ordinator

Linking Generations was also responsible for setting up the intergenerational projects. Projects were established at housing schemes where older learners showed an interest in taking part, with schemes then matched with a local school. The co-ordinator facilitated meetings between the housing scheme and the school, in which practical arrangements, such as risk assessments, transport and safeguarding plans were put in place.

The project co-ordinator was also responsible for running a session with each age group before the intergenerational projects started. These sessions outlined what the learners could expect from taking part in a project and provided an opportunity for the learners to voice any their views and experiences of the other age group. It also allowed them to raise any concerns they might have about taking part or working with a different age group. The older learners were then given the opportunity to decide if they wanted to continue with the project.

[22] The Digital Age partnership was governed by a partnership contract signed by all partners and a specific memorandum of understanding around the responsibilities of individual partners.

When a course or intergenerational project had been set up, the project co-ordinator would then notify the tutors at Ignite IT, who would agree timings for delivery.

Design of the 10-week course

Ignite IT designed the curriculum for the 10-week course[23] *'Introduction to Tablet Computing'*, based on the following core learning outcomes:

- Understand the hardware controls and built in devices.
- Understand what applications are and how they can be made to work for them enhancing their day/activities/hobbies.
- Be able to browse the web efficiently and safely, be able to find, compare and purchase goods and services and understand when it is safe to do so.
- Have experience in online communication and leave the course with accounts in email, VoIP and social networking.
- Be able to use the tablet for entertainment, productivity and creativity.
- Be aware of social networking, and understand the benefits.

The course design was flexible, enabling the curriculum to be adapted to the group's interests. All the courses included core subjects, such as: learning how to use the tablet, browsing the internet, staying safe online, emailing, using an App Store and video calling. Later sessions could be adapted depending on learner ability and interests. Popular subjects with learners included, Skyping, photography and researching family history.

> *'Over the years we've weaned out the subjects that most interest the students that we're working with. But we still keep a broad spectrum for those that are maybe there for other reasons.*
>
> *We would quite often have a student that comes along who's not interested in any of it until we say something like 'there'll be a creativity session where they learn how to draw'. One particular student wasn't interested in anything else apart from drawing on the tablet; which is perfectly fine because artists use them now as well.'*
>
> Course tutor

The course was delivered by Ignite IT to groups of 10 learners. It ran in weekly 2-hour sessions, over 10 weeks, with one exception which ran twice a week. The course was tutor led, with two main tutors from Ignite IT leading delivery, supported by other tutors.

The course was taught on Lenovo Yoga tablet computers, provided by the Digital Age Project, using communal Wi-Fi available at each of the housing schemes. Older learners were encouraged to bring their own tablets, though other technology, such as laptops, was advised against, as their use requires different digital skills.

Delivering intergenerational projects

[23] Hereon referred to as the 'course'.

Intergenerational projects began after the older learners had completed a course. Each project ran for 4-6 weeks, with weekly 2-hour sessions.

Interest in taking part in an intergenerational project was scoped out throughout the course, with older learners voting on whether to take part. Projects initiated only if the tutor and the Digital Age Project co-ordinator both felt there was sufficient interest in running them.

Intergenerational projects were tutor led. Where possible, consistency in allocation of tutors to projects, ensured continuity for the older learners and helped ease any anxieties about interacting with the younger learners.

Each intergenerational project was different. At the start of each project the learners would agree on what they wanted to design - ranging from tea towels and cushion covers, to mugs and T-shirts. Learners used the same tablet computers the older learners had used in their course. Technology was used creatively throughout the project, with the use of different apps to create artwork, poems, QR codes and Wordles to adorn the various end products. Though technology was used as a medium within the intergenerational projects, the main aim was to build relationships across generational boundaries and support older and younger learners to develop their digital skills together.

Who took part in The Digital Age Project?

In total, 37 housing schemes, from 6 sheltered housing providers, and 16 schools or youth groups from across Northern Ireland took part in the Digital Age Project, with projects from Ballycastle to Crossmaglen, and everywhere in between.

In total, 409 older people took part in the Digital Age Project[24], of which 135 took part in an intergenerational project. We received 397 beginning questionnaire returns from the course. A third (33%) were male, and almost two thirds (63%) were female, with the rest preferring not to say. The majority of the participants who responded to the questionnaires (65%) were of a UK nationality. Almost a quarter (24%) were Irish and 3 per cent were from other ethnic backgrounds. The participants came from across Catholic and Protestant communities, with around 32 per cent belonging to a Catholic community and 49 per cent belonging to a Protestant community. Around 27 per cent of the older people considered themselves to have a disability, with a further 23 per cent also having caring responsibilities.

Overall, 219 young people took part in an intergenerational project, with 184 young people completing an evaluation questionnaire. Their ages ranged from 8 to 18, depending on the project and the school or youth group involved. Similar to the older people, a third (33%) of the young people were male, and two thirds (66%) were female.

[24] Figure represents the number of different individuals registered at the 10-week courses

FINDINGS OF THE DIGITAL AGE PROJECT

This section presents evidence on the impact of the three different project activities: the course, the intergenerational projects and the toolkits.

COURSE FINDINGS

In total 409 older learners took part the Digital Age 10-week ICT course. Over a 2-year period, the course was delivered in 37 sheltered housing schemes, using communal rooms as venues. The following section presents the impact of the courses on their participants.

'The screen has a habit of disappearing quickly so mistakes can happen e.g. Internet banking.' Older learner.

'I fear if I click something it will be lost forever.' Older learner.

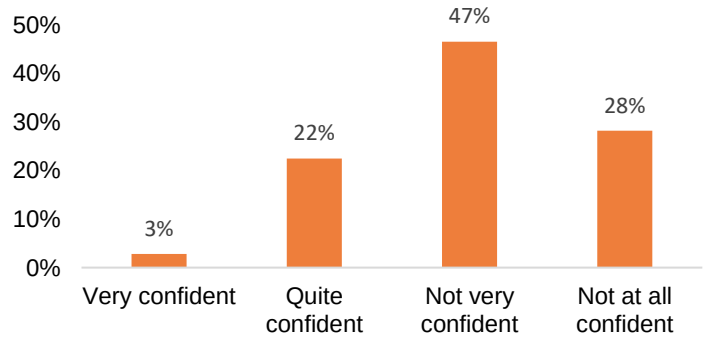
'A lack of knowledge makes it quite intimidating' Older Learner.

The starting point: Fear of technology

Just under half (46%) of the older learners on the course came with a fear of some aspect of using or learning to use technology. In particular, privacy and security was a major area of concern for many. Before starting the course, nearly one-quarter (23%) of older learners were worried they could lose personal information or bank details through using technology. Older learners were also concerned about buying things online and being scammed or hacked.

Many older learners were concerned that they would make mistakes whilst using the tablet. Just under one in ten (9%) of older people were concerned they would make mistakes or lose information. Some of the learners were also worried that they might look stupid when making a mistake or that they would accidentally share information they didn't mean to. As with other adult learners, a lack of confidence and poor digital skills, can act as a potential barrier for older learners. At the beginning of the course three quarters (75%) of respondents reported being 'not very confident' or 'not at all confident' using technology. This was supported in the qualitative responses, where not understanding and having limited experience of using technology before the course, was also a concern.

Figure 1: Older people's confidence using technology at start of course



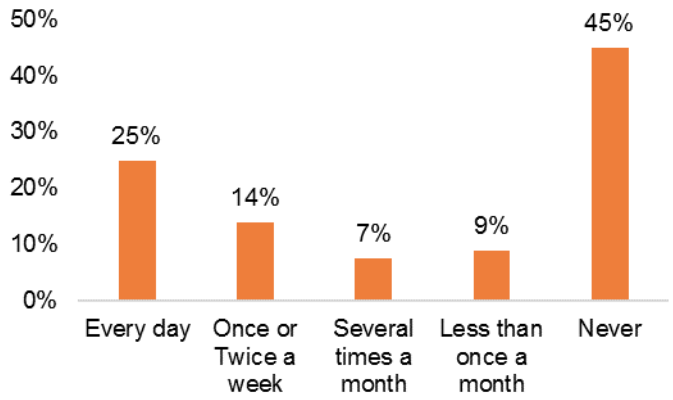
Base: 387 responses.

Left behind?

Prior to taking part in the Digital Age Project, only a small proportion of learners owned and regularly used technology. One quarter owned a smart phone, 29 per cent a laptop and 28 per cent a tablet. The majority had limited experience of using technology: 69 per cent had never used a desktop, 68 per cent never used a tablet computer, 68 per cent never used a smart phone and 66 per cent had never used a laptop.

This pattern was also reflected in the frequency that older learners were accessing the internet before starting the course. A quarter of the learners were accessing the internet every day, with a further 14 per cent accessing it once a week. In contrast, 45 per cent of older learners had never accessed the internet.

Figure 2: Frequency of accessing the internet at start of course



Base: 365 responses

With the large majority of learners not owning or regularly using technology to access the internet, being left behind was a concern for some – and a reason why they decided to take part on the course.

However, being left behind was not the only motivation for taking part in the course. The opportunity to become computer literate was also a powerful motivator. Other learners took part out of curiosity, whilst some were incentivised by the opportunity to learn one particular aspect of technology, such as downloading music or drawing. A few had taken lessons previously, but had forgotten the skills they had learnt and wanted to re-learn how to use the technology again.

Testimonial: Aoife* – Resident

'I done the course on computers and learnt a lot from it … Nowadays, there's so much new technology that I find that you are left behind if you don't do a course on the tablets or the laptop. That's why I done it and I've learnt a lot from it. I feel more confident now, than ever before on the computer. I do all these things that the young ones are able to do today. I just feel it was well worth the effort.

And I also think that with this new project coming up, with the young ones being also involved with the older population, is a good thing because it makes you learn the skills of communicating with the younger generation and also they feel they're not leaving the older generation behind.

So all in all I have to thank the project. It was really worth the while. And I would advise anyone else, if they are interested, to go ahead and do it because it opens new worlds for an older person. Facebook, keeping in touch with family and friends, is wonderful. And you really never feel lonely once you are on the computers.'

**Names have been changed for anonymity*

'I joined because I wanted to keep up with my family. I was being left behind, so I joined to learn the tablet. That was the reason I joined.' Older learner

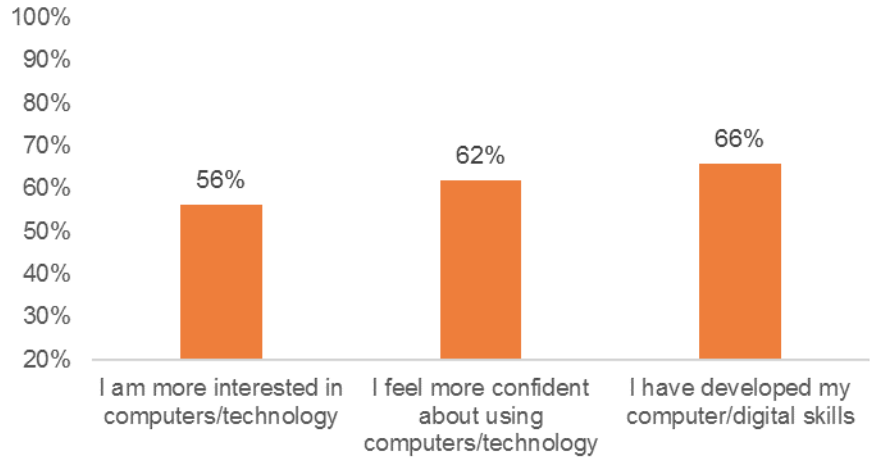
'I decided because I didn't know anything about computers, how to turn them on, or anything. Knew nothing at all' Older learner

'Curiosity. That's all I can say, curiosity. Because I know nothing about computers and I wanted to see what it was all about.' Older learner

After taking part: Developing digital skills in older people

After completing the course, two thirds (66%) of older learners reported that their digital skills had improved. Figure 3 shows that, in addition to developing their digital skills, a similar number of older learners (62%) also felt more confident using technology, and over half (56%) became more interested in computers/technology through the course.

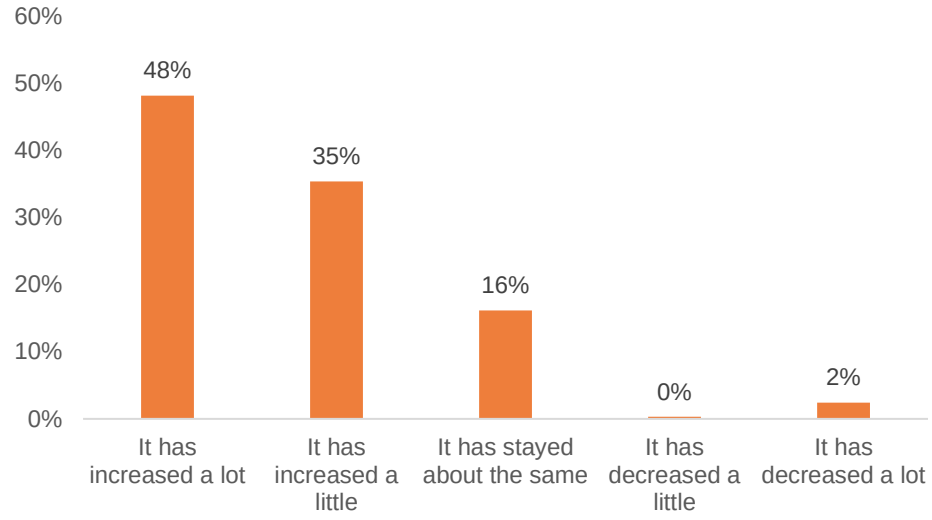
Figure 3: The difference made to digital skills in older learners



Base = 345

Eighty-four per cent of older learners reported changes in their use of technology and the internet. Almost half (48%) reported that their usage had 'increased a lot', whilst over a third said it had 'increased a little' (see figure 4). Two per cent reported that their usage had 'decreased a lot', although the reasons for this were not given.

Figure 4: changes to use of computers and the internet as a result of the course



Base = 328

Some older learners also reported increased usage of smart phones (21 per cent 'a lot'; 10 per cent 'a little'). As with the use of computers, 1 per cent reported their use of this technology had decreased 'a little' or 'a lot'. Again, no reasons for this response were provided.

Figure 5 shows, older learners reported using technology more frequently for a wide range of different tasks, including searching for information (+12 percentage points), learning online (+9 percentage points) and social networking (+8 percentage points). As well as improving their confidence, the course is likely to have also raised awareness of ways in which the technology could be used.

'I had never even seen one [Tablet] before and I'm surprised I did so well. And my family think I'm marvellous. I'm 88…they thought I wouldn't carry on with it at my age because they thought it would be too difficult for me. They're pleased. They're happy.'
Older learner

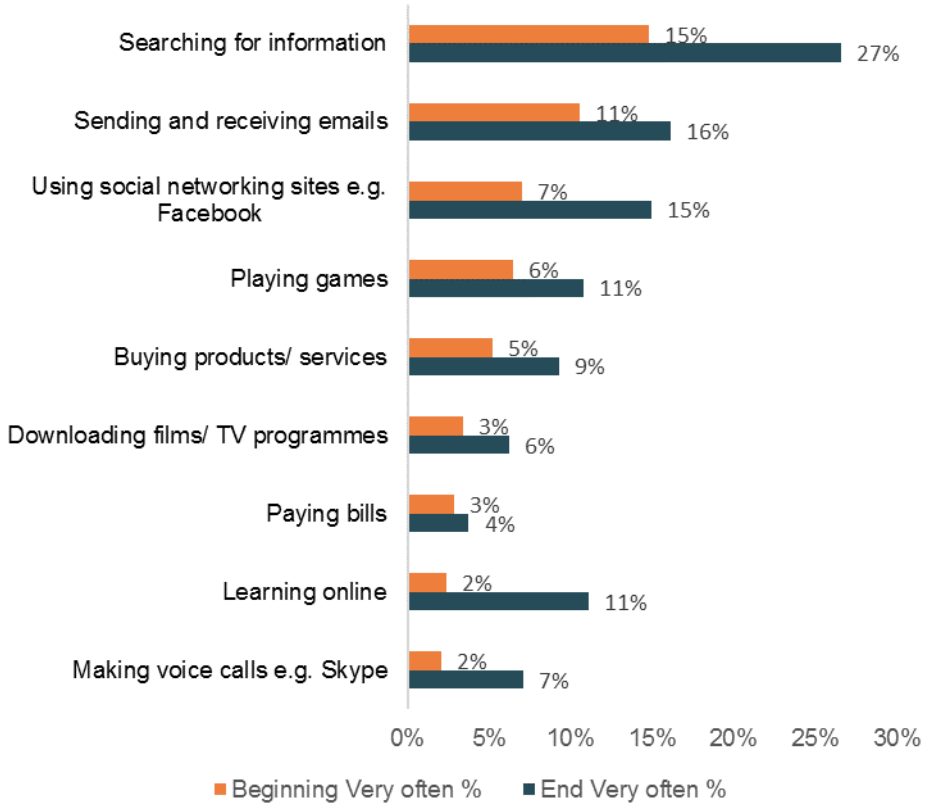
Testimonial: Wendy - Resident

Before taking part in the Digital Age Project, Wendy would have called herself a 'technophobe.' She had been given an iPad by her grandson, who works in the USA, as a method of keeping in touch. He had set it up for her to be able to email him, but she was not confident in using it.

Since taking part in the 10-week course, Wendy's confidence in using email and skype has improved. She can now save her favourite apps on her iPad, and read and watch BBC news.

Having sessions take place in the familiar surroundings of her Fold, alongside her fellow residents, helped her to feel more relaxed and able to learn. She felt that the IT sessions were delivered at the right level and pace for her to keep up with, and were tailored to her interests and needs.

Figure 5: Comparing before and after of older learners use of technology by task, in per cent



Bases vary by question see footnote[25]

After taking part in the course, over a quarter (29%) of older learners had purchased their own technology and a further quarter (26%) planning to. Overall, 86 per cent of older learners were 'interested' or 'very interested' in learning more about computers or technology.

'It was fabulous to be considered 'not too old' to learn.' Older learner

'A splendid learning curve! Learning new skills gave me a sense of achievement!' Older learner

'Well when I started I could do about 10% of what I wanted to do. Now I can do practically 90%-95% of what I want to do' Older learner

[25] Bases are as follows:
Making voice calls e.g. Skype – 385 beginning; 323 end
Learning online – 382 beginning; 324 end
Paying bills – 386 beginning; 320 end
Downloading films/ TV programmes – 385 beginning; 321 end
Buying products/ services - 385 beginning; 322 end
Playing games - 386 beginning; 323 end
Using social networking sites e.g. Facebook - 386 beginning; 328 end
Sending and receiving emails – 389 beginning; 334 end
Searching for information – 391 beginning; 331 end.

'I was very worried about the whole thing…just afraid of doing something wrong. Now I'm not really afraid of browsing…I can send emails now with confidence…I'm going to invest in an iPad. It's more like a hobby now.' Older learner

'I do not have to rely on other people so much now to do things for me.' Older learner

'It opens new worlds for an older person, Facebook, keeping in touch with family and friends, it's wonderful. And you really never feel lonely once you're on the computers.' Older learner

'I was a complete novice. Now I have purchased my own tablet and I am learning every day.' Older learner

'[The main benefit] Being able to keep in touch with family abroad by using Skype or facetiming' Older learner

'Learning to use computers is a new way of life and I've found computers to be very enjoyable.' Older learner

'The experience of this course has been great. I didn't know how to use a tablet or a phone. Now I can use both with more confidence.' Older learner

'I am quite happy that at my age I am still able to learn a new skill, giving me renewed confidence.' Older learner

Additional benefits of taking part

In addition to developing their digital skills, older learners also reported other benefits of taking part in the course, with. over half (56%) reporting an increase in self-confidence and 26 learners identifying this as the main benefit of taking part. Self-confidence is critical for the continued development of digital skills, as learners move on to using technology without the support of a tutor – and was evidenced by the number of older learners reporting they were no longer afraid to make a mistake.

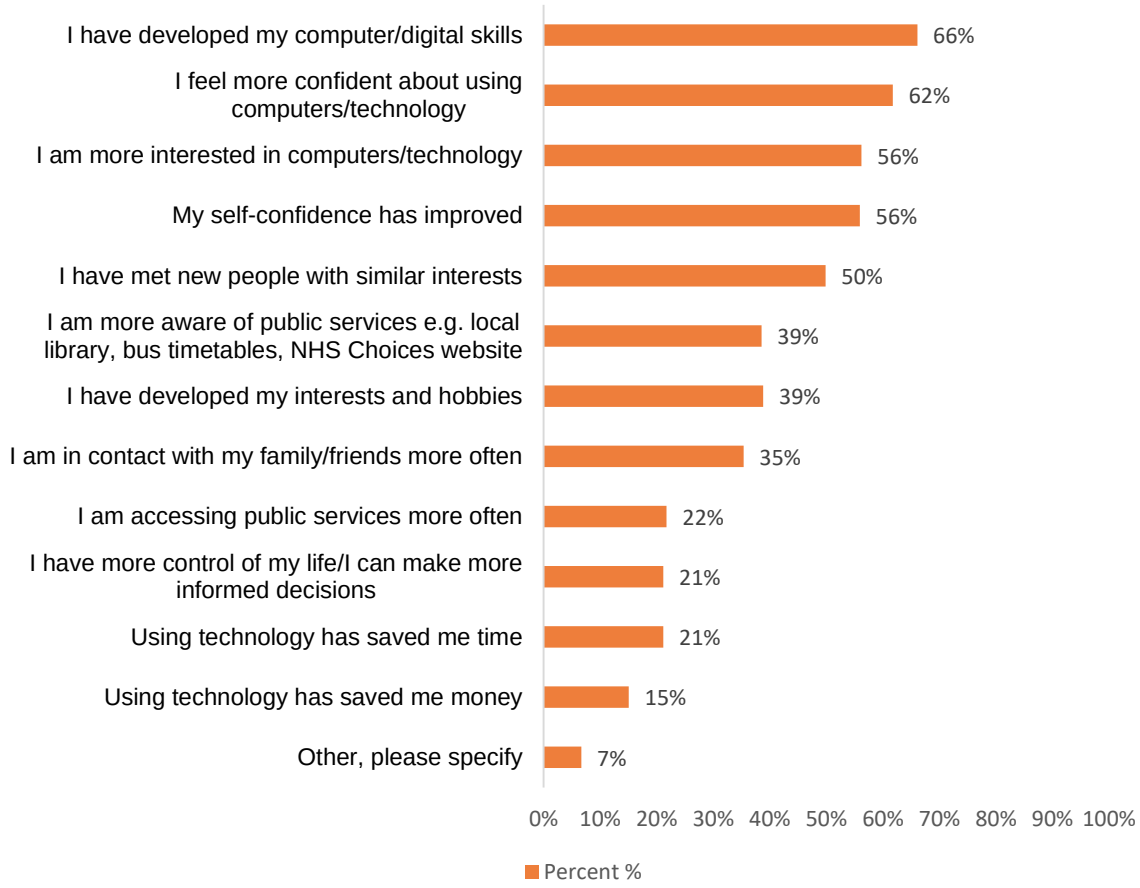
The social benefits of taking part in the course was also evident: Half (50%) of older learners reported benefits from meeting new people with similar interests. This was supported by the qualitative data, where many older learners reported meeting new people and getting together with neighbours, as an important outcome of taking part in the course. Building relationships with other residents in their housing scheme helped to decrease loneliness and isolation.

Being able to use technology to find out more information about public services has also benefited older learners. Almost two fifths (39%) reported being more aware of public services after taking part in the course.

Additionally, a similar proportion (39%) reported developing their hobbies and interests through the course. Being able to use the internet to look up information about their interests opened up new opportunities to the learners.

Digital inclusion has enabled older learners to maintain contact with family and friends in new ways, with over a third (35%) now keeping in contact more often. Having more frequent contact with loved ones can decrease isolation in older learners, and is particularly important for those with family outside of Northern Ireland.

Figure 6: Benefits of taking part in the course reported by older learners

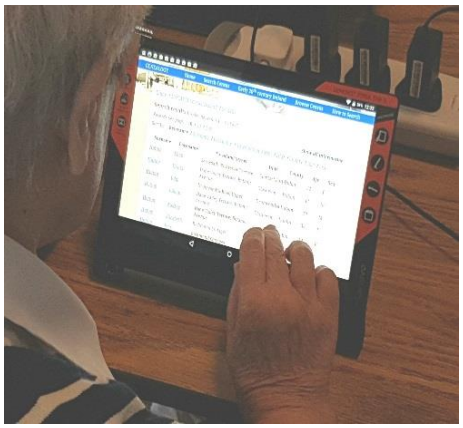


Base = 345

Overall, 80 per cent of older learners enjoyed all or most of the course: 96 per cent of older learners found the course ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’ and 92 per cent agreed that taking part in the Digital Age Project had improved their quality of life. By the end of the course, 99 per cent of older learners said that they would recommend it to other residents living in sheltered housing.

Case Study: Sheltered Housing Scheme – 10-week course

The scheme was looking to run a new digital skills course, and jumped at the opportunity to take part in the Digital Age Project. They had a number of residents who were already using their communal computer and wanted to improve their knowledge about the internet and how to use the computer, as well as a number of newly arrived residents also interested in developing their digital skills.



They discussed the course with residents at their weekly coffee morning and the scheme manager encouraged people to take part by emphasizing the benefits that technology could have for them. The scheme has a number of residents who have family abroad, and being able to communicate with them this was an important incentive.

The course ran once a week for 10 weeks. It covered a different topic each week, from learning to take and send pictures, to learning about shopping safely online. All the older learners who started the course went on to complete it.

On the day after each class, the housing scheme holds weekly coffee mornings, which are used these to help reinforce learning from the previous day. During the coffee mornings, older learners come and tell the staff what they have learnt, and bring their own tablets or laptops to ask for help. The scheme manager encouraged the older learners on the course to practice using their own devices.

Some of the older learners found it hard to learn new digital skills. They felt there was not enough time on each subject for them to understand it properly and that they needed more time to repeat what they had learnt and embed the skills into their daily lives.

The scheme received a laptop from the Digital Age Project at the end of the course, which they are encouraging residents to use. The scheme is also in the process of putting in a separate desk, so that if the computer room is being used, there is the opportunity to use the laptop in a different area of the communal building.

The key benefit to the residents is their increased ability to keep in touch with friends and family using technology. Residents are now able to independently take and send pictures by email and to see and speak to family in other countries. One resident with family in Australia found this instant communication particularly beneficial, as she had previously been communicating through letters.

Though the scheme doesn't have any current plans for further courses, they are keen to run another in the near future to help residents develop their skills further.

INTERGENERATIONAL PROJECT FINDINGS

Overall 16 intergenerational projects have taken place over the last two years. Projects were held at housing schemes in their communal rooms, with younger learners coming to visit. At the end of each intergenerational project there was a celebration event held at the school

Outcomes for learners

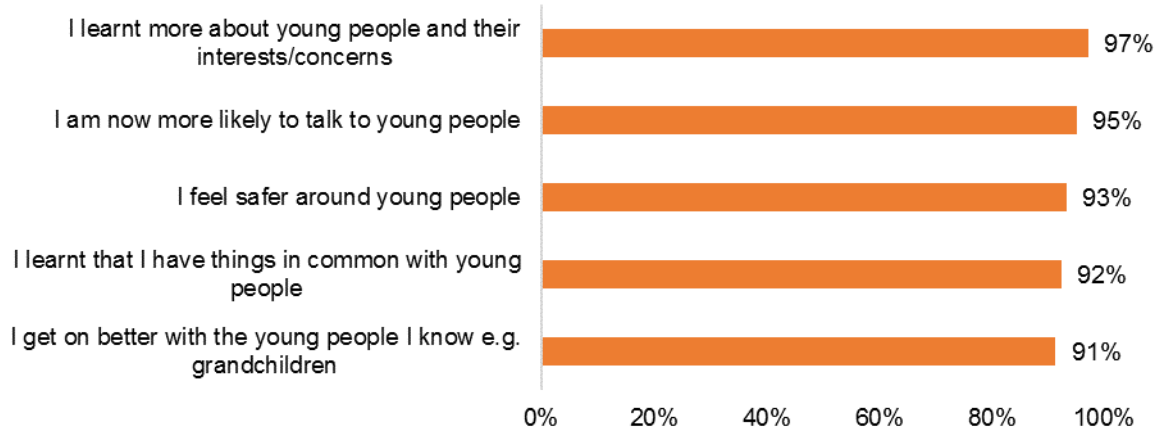
There were many outcomes for both older and younger learners taking part in an intergenerational project. The following section highlights some of these impacts.

Changing the attitudes of learners

Prior to commencing an intergenerational project, the project co-ordinator at Linking Generations held a separate session with each age group to discuss their views and experiences of the other age group before taking part: many of the participants, from both age groups, were worried about not having anything in common and were concerned that the sessions may be initially awkward. Concerns were rarely realised, however, with 92 per cent of older learners taking part reporting they had something in common with the younger learners.

In total, 97 per cent of older learners reported learning more about young people and their interests. As shown in figure 7, 95 per cent of older learners are now more likely to talk to a younger person, and 93 per cent reported feeling safer around younger people.

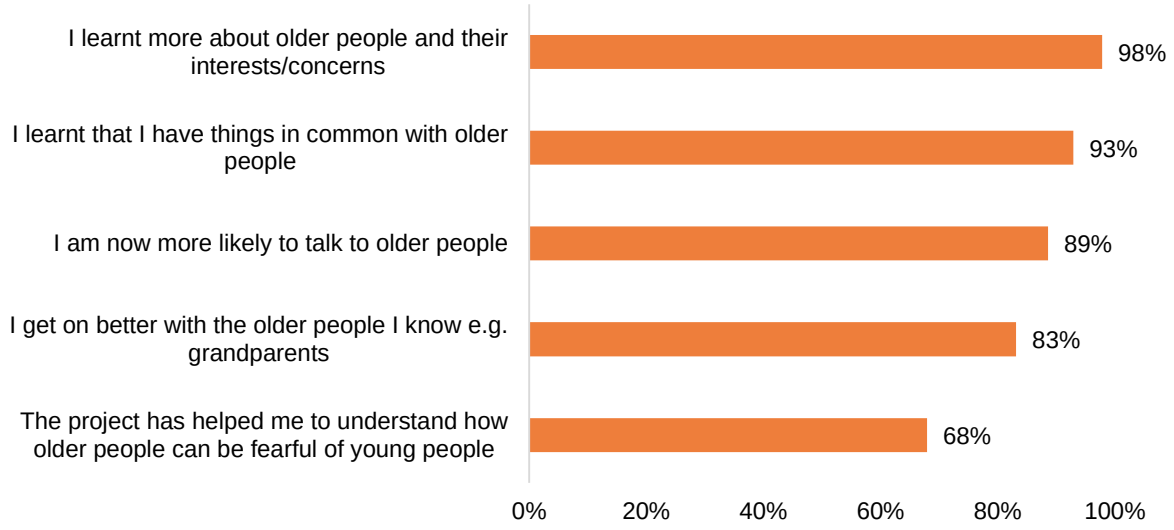
Figure 7: Percentage of older learners who reported gaining the following benefits



Base: 115 responses

The results from the survey of younger learners were similarly positive. Overall, 98 per cent of younger learners felt they had learnt more about older people and their interests, 93 per cent felt they had things in common with older people and 89 per cent were now more likely to talk to an older person.

Figure 8: Percentage of young people reporting the following benefits



Base: 184 responses.

'I have learnt a lot about the war and that the older people are not grumpy.' Young learner

'*Realising that even though we all come from different generations we all have much in common and we aren't all that different.'* Young learner

'I feel more comfortable working with young people.' Older learner

'Learning and working together with people of different ages …it helped with any negative preconceptions either party may have had.' Teacher

These figures were supported by the qualitative data, with both older and younger learners reporting that one of the main benefits of taking part in an intergenerational project was being able to interact and communicate with a different generation. In some cases, this changed prior attitudes about the other generation. One of the other most frequently reported outcomes was finding out that they have something in common with the other generation.

One of the main aims of the intergenerational projects was to build relationships between the different age groups, increasing social inclusion. Teachers interviewed as part of the evaluation described how young people who took part reported seeing the older learners in the street, and approaching them to say hello. This would not have happened before the project.

'There's a mystery about what each age group is all about and these perceptions. It's only through spending time with each other that those get dispelled and people start seeing each other as individuals and somebody that they do connect with…Whether that's a young person or an older person.'

Project co-ordinator

Case Study – Wesley Court and Carrickfergus Model Primary School Project

Having completed the 10-week course, older learners of Wesley court were asked if they were interested in taking part in an Intergenerational Project with Carrickfergus Model Primary School, which is situated next door to the housing scheme. The housing scheme had previously been involved in the primary school under the old head teacher, with the children putting on concerts for the residents at Christmas and Easter. However, this relationship had lapsed when the head teacher had changed.

Course tutor with some of the work completed by the Intergenerational Project

The older learners were excited by the idea of doing an intergenerational project with the children at the primary school. The current head teacher was also enthusiastic at reinstating the community links with the housing scheme, and saw the project as a way of doing this.

The children, aged between 10 -11were in their final year before moving onto secondary school.

The intergenerational project took place in one of the communal rooms in the housing scheme. Led by the same tutor the scheme had had for their 10-week course, the participants worked in groups of three to design their chosen project: tea towels.

The groups used tablets to create their designs for the tea towels, utilising a sketchbook express app to draw a portrait of each other to go onto the tea towel. They also learnt to use Wordles and QR codes, which they could link to stories and poems that the older learners and children wrote together.

All those involved in the scheme were amazed at the energy and firm friendships that were made through the project. The older learners and the children got on so well, and forged such strong relationships, that the tutors found that their main challenge was being heard over the conversations.

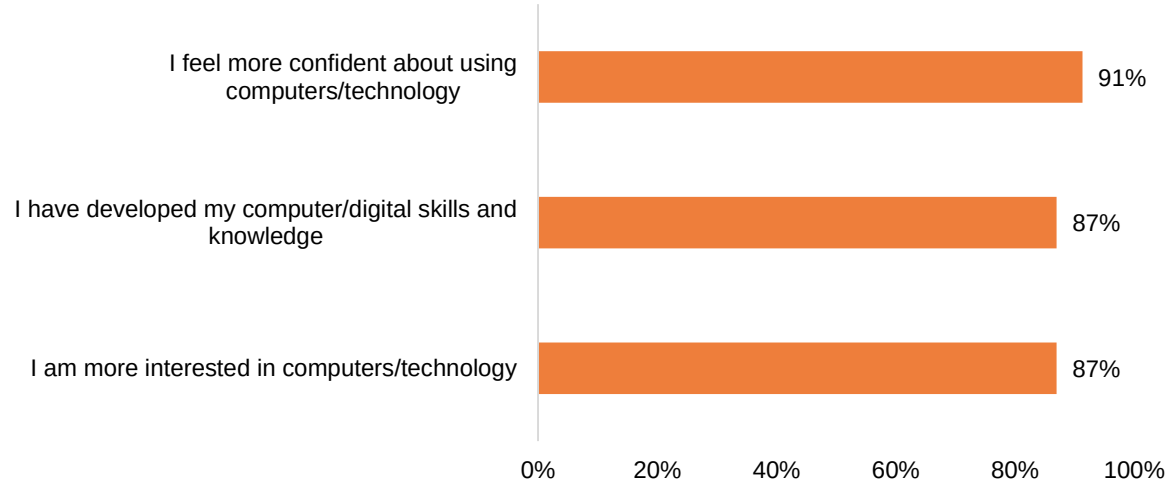
At the end of the project the primary school put on a show for the older learners, which included a performance by the school's choir and orchestra. As part of the show, they were also presented with the tea towels they had designed together and a certificate for taking part.

The intergenerational project successfully rekindled the relationship between the school and the housing scheme. The head teacher and housing scheme co-ordinator are now working together to start up another intergenerational project, focused around the primary school's garden and greenhouses.

Digital skills in older people and intergenerational projects

Ninety-one per cent of older people reported that taking part in an intergenerational project helped increase their confidence in using technology, while 87 per cent reported that they had developed their digital skills and knowledge. A further 87 per cent said that they were now more interested in technology.

Figure 9: Percentage of older people who reported the following benefits as a result of taking part in an intergenerational project.



Base: 115 responses

Questionnaire feedback also showed that 81 per cent of younger learners felt they had developed their digital skills and knowledge through taking part in an intergenerational project. Additionally, 88 per cent felt more confident using technology.

Qualitative data suggests that having the younger learners involved in a digital project benefited older learners. During the projects, the older and younger learners took it in turns to use the tablet computer during different activities. The younger learners' confidence in using new technology influenced the older learners' approach to using technology, and gave them more confidence to try new activities. This helped develop the older learners' digital skills, as they learnt not to fear making mistakes.

> *'But their confidence, how they approach stuff, rubs off on the older ones that's what they've noticed. They're not afraid to touch the different keys or if they don't know how to do something they'll try. They're not going to say 'oh I can't do that in case I break it.'*
>
> Project co-ordinator

Case Study – Corliss Fold and St. Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen

The project at Corliss Fold also involved young people from St. Joseph's High School – and was markedly different from the other intergenerational projects delivered through the Digital Age Project.

The young people, aged between 13-14, were chosen to take part as a reward for good behaviour. As such, they did not necessarily come with their friends, which meant that the younger learners had to form friendships among themselves, as well as with the older learners.

For both the older and young learners involved in this project, their nervousness of each other was a key challenge to be overcome. Both groups were very shy, making it challenging for the tutor to encourage relationship between the age groups. It was therefore decided that the main focus of the project would be to encourage social engagement, using technology as a means to achieving this.

The first few sessions were focused on getting to know each other. One activity was to write down information, such as hobbies and interests, about their partner. The tutor also used a website which uses a person's date of birth to produce fun information, such as your age in dog years or key events that happened on that day, to help learners engage with each other.

By week three there was a marked change in the atmosphere, with friendships beginning to form between the different groups.

As part of the project the groups designed cushion covers using digital technology. Each groups' project chose a different topic for their design, including the 40th anniversary of the Fold Housing Association, boxing, Christmases past and present etc. Different apps were used to produce the designs, with learners being taught about QR codes and Wordles as part of the project.

The celebration event at the end of the project included a performance of Irish dancing by the students, while some of the older learners also sang. They also all received their cushion covers and certificates for taking part.

By the end of the project, both the housing scheme coordinator, the school teacher and the Digital Age project tutor commented on how well the group had bonded.

Developing the soft skills of learners

Intergenerational projects provided the opportunity for younger learners, not only to improve their digital skills, but also to practice their personal and social development skills. Qualitative data from the teachers highlighted how younger learners had gained confidence in communicating with new and older people through participating in the project and, 89 per cent of younger learners reported that they were now more likely to talk to an older person since taking part.

> '*This has helped them to develop self-confidence as they built relationships with new people. They also developed self-confidence through teaching the Fold residents how to use tablets.*' Teacher

> *'The main benefit would be progressing in my communication skills with the resident's and building a far better relationship with the older generation.'* Younger learner

During the project the tutor gave the younger learners responsibility for helping older learners learn about the technology. Teachers reported that this helped the younger learners to develop skills such as patience, active listening, and communicating with older learners.

> *'They learned a lot by listening to the residents and also they were introduced to some new ICT skills. Their communication skills improved and they learned to give time to people older than themselves.'* Teacher

The majority (89%) of younger learners said that taking part in a project was 'quite useful' or 'very useful' and 97 per cent expressed an interest in taking part in another intergenerational project in the future. Suggestions for future projects included those with a focus on games, art and sports. However, the most frequent request – made by a quarter of younger learners – was for another digital project.

The majority (91%) of older learners reported that their self-confidence had increased as a result of taking part in an intergenerational project, demonstrating that intergenerational projects can help develop soft skills in both older and younger learners.

Testimonial: Teacher from Crossmaglen intergenerational project

'The first main reason [the school took part] was I'd seen the word ICT and I said right, well that could be for us. Then I looked at the fact that they were liaising with residents for Corliss and I just thought it would be a brilliant experience for our children, for communication and things like that. I also think - I thought that our kids could learn something and vice versa; it could be a two-way street.

'We are all a bit pastoral in our schools, we encourage pupils to look after each other and the fact that there was an opening, there was an opportunity for pupils to meet with older people. A lot of children don't have access to older people. We thought it would be a great opportunity for the children to be able to link years, and learn skills such as patience and listening. We thought it was a golden opportunity.'

'I felt that it was a really, really good project and that all the pupils I know for a fact have gained an awful lot.'

Testimonials: Intergenerational Project

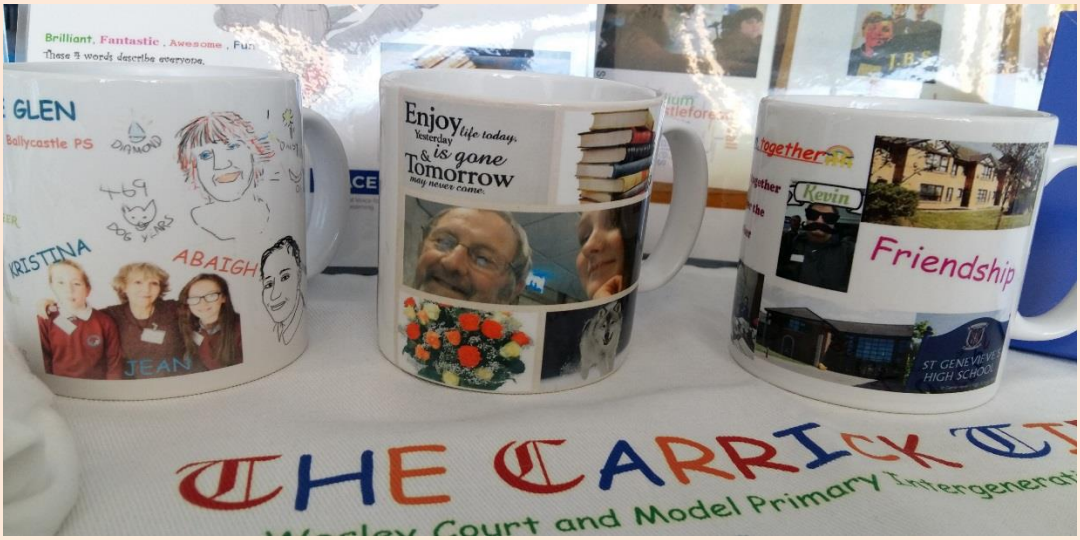
Older learner

'Together we done different themes. There was about eight of us, and my theme was old movies and film. So they put me with a young chap, who was a wee bit of a whizz-kid with computers, so at first it was a wee bit hard, but once we relaxed, we got in to it.

So he had done what it was like growing up and what he likes in films, and I gave him my perspective. When we grew up the technology wasn't there. There was no TV, just radio. So it went down a treat. And then we made a wee short film with each other. There was mutual respect and enjoyment, and a bit of a laugh. So we produced a wee magazine, and that went down there.

So some of us chose cookery, or transport, but ours I thought was very interesting because it was about what sort of singers did they like. It was Elvis Presley for me; he likes the modern ones, like Katy Perry and things like that. And we done our favourite films, so he put down the 'Titanic' and I put down 'The 39 steps'. It went down well.

So we were learning lots of things. For the magazine I had to look up the picture for 'The 39 Steps', on my computer. And he had done his on his computer, and then put them together.'



Younger Learner

'What we did was a piece of paper at the start, and we filled in common interests at the start, as a sort of ice-breaker. We got to know each other on the first lesson. We had music and another group really liked sports. Then we made a project around the things we wrote.

I thought it would be more scary than it was. It was awkward at first but it was okay. Getting to know them and being with your friends helped. Not being isolated in a little room was good, as everyone in the class was there too.

We got to try out loads of new apps, and we got to know how much the residents knew about technology. It was nice to get to know the older people. I hadn't met them before, and the only older people I really get to meet are like my Granny and Granddad, so it was nice to sort of meet them.

I hope we can do something like this again.'

Outcomes for housing schemes

Housing schemes got involved in the Digital Age Project for various reasons including: residents showing an interest in developing digital skills; wanting to promote learning as a group to build a sense of community within the housing scheme; and providing a chance for their residents to meet with younger people. The latter was thought to be particularly important for their residents who did not have grandchildren or family nearby.

Thirteen scheme co-ordinators provided feedback on an intergenerational project via an online survey; for eight schemes this was their first experience of an intergenerational project. All scheme co-ordinators reported that the project had been useful to residents, with twelve stating it had been very useful. All scheme co-ordinators said they would recommend the project to other housing schemes, and have plans to either continue the project or do further work with the school/ youth group they partnered with.

Scheme co-ordinators found the opportunity for older learners to interact with younger learners helped to break down barriers between the different age groups, while the involvement of a supportive tutor helped maintain interest in taking part.

> *'The intergenerational part of the project was great watching old and young working together. The enthusiasm was fab…We had a great time learning and our tutor was amazing. Would recommend it to everyone.'* Scheme co-ordinator

Scheme co-ordinators reported two major benefits of taking part in Digital Age for their housing schemes. Firstly, increased confidence and knowledge of how to use technology among older learners, allowing them to talk to their family and friends both about, and through the use of, technology.

> *'They have learnt how to go online, and the e-mailing especially, they can now contact their friends in another country.'* Scheme co-ordinator

Secondly, scheme co-ordinators noted that older learners who took part in the project formed friendships with each other, creating a sense of community within the housing scheme. One scheme co-ordinator interviewed said that it was usually difficult to encourage their residents to take part in communal events and maintain numbers, but that the

Housing scheme co-ordinator at Fold Housing Association

'There was a few people here quite interested in the internet and stuff, because we do have a tenants' computer. But not many of them were using it, because they were afraid to use it. But there were classes available outside, but then they didn't want to travel outside either.

So this come up at a great time, an opportunity for them, not just both to learn how to use a tablet but to work with younger people and share ideas and then to swap history even from living in Crossmaglen, going to the same schools, or what things were like in the Troubles here. There could be a lot of exchange. The kids could learn that. The kids could probably teach the adults a few things.

So we just thought it would be fantastic for them. Then for the other people in here to socialise again together. It was an opportunity for that as well.'

Digital Age Project had maintained turnout, providing an opportunity for the residents to build relationships within the housing scheme.

> *'Enabling older people, who tend not to socialise even with their neighbours, to actively engage with local school children and now their fellow residents.'* Scheme co-ordinator

Use of the hardware provided by the Digital Age Project to housing schemes

Through participating in Digital Age, each housing scheme was provided with either a laptop or a tablet for the communal use of their residents.[26] Twenty-five housing scheme co-ordinators responded to an online survey on how their residents were using the technology provided by the project. Of those who responded, 7 had received a tablet computer, whilst 18 had received a laptop. Residents either had open access to this technology in a common room, or had a booking system where they could sign it out from the scheme office to use.

Over half of respondents (14 out of 25) reported that their residents used the technology 'quite often' or 'very often', with just under half (11 out of 25) reporting that the technology was used 'not very often'. The majority (24 out of 25) reported that their residents found the technology 'quite useful' or 'very useful'.

Since been given the technology, the majority reported that their residents use of technology had increased a little or a lot, with only two considering it to have remained the same. Respondents felt that residents mainly used technology for researching information and sending or receiving email (see figure 10).

Figure 10: Main uses of technology by residents as reported by scheme co-ordinators

Note: Base = 25. Respondents could select three choices.

The main benefits of having access to the technology provided through the project were seen to be: an increased use of technology to find information, an increase in confidence using technology, and an increased use of technology to communicate with friends and

[26] 'Residents' includes everyone who lives in the housing scheme and friends or family members visiting from the local community.

family (see figure 11). The impact of this being greater independence for residents, reduced dependence on others to access information on their behalf, and a reduction in isolation.

Figure 11: Main benefits of technology by residents as reported by scheme co-ordinators

Base = 25
Note they could select all responses.

Outcomes for schools

Schools were attracted to the Digital Age Project as an opportunity to develop their pupils' digital and communication skills, whilst also building links with the community – in line with the 'Every School a Good School' Department of Education Northern Ireland policy recommendations.

Nine teachers provided feedback about an intergenerational project via an online survey. All reported that this was the first intergenerational project for their school and that they would recommend it to other schools. All of the teachers said the project had been useful for the young people involved, with eight saying it had been 'very useful'. All had plans to continue the project or to do further work with the sheltered housing scheme they had partnered with.

Teachers reported seeing three main benefits for young people involved in the projects. Firstly, providing opportunity for young people to engage with older learners developed their communication skills and enabled them to build relationships with older learners, breaking down previous misconceptions or assumptions the young people may have held.

Secondly, sharing their skills with older learners developed the younger learners' self-confidence. This, coupled with increased confidence to communicate with new people, helped build relationships between the two generations.

Finally, younger learners were also able to learn new digital skills on the tablet. Many had not previously used some of the apps introduced to them through the project, and were therefore required to work together to learn how to use new software to develop their end products.

Teachers reported the main benefit to the school was in developing stronger links with the community, highlighting that taking part in this type of activity opened the school up to other opportunities to run similar projects.

'The students gained a much deeper insight into the local community and people they don't normally spend time with. Working in small groups gave the participants time to really get to know each other well and build relationships. They have changed their opinions of the older generation and want to maintain the bonds built. School policy will be looked at next year to see how we can further incorporate community.'
Teacher

'The school benefitted as it was provided with the opportunity to work with people in the community. Part of the 'Every School a Good School' document recommends that every school should get more involved in the community.'
Teacher

'The project was excellent. I was apprehensive at first because of time constraints, but I realise now it was an excellent way to spend some time in the community after the pressure of exams mid-May, until the end of June. It was an excellent break away from the norm, a move from the comfort zone of a school and an invaluable experience for students and staff.'
Teacher

TOOLKITS – DESIGN AND IMPACT

Toolkit rationale

Learning and Work Institute[27] (L&W) developed the toolkits based on their expertise in the development of learning materials for adults.

L&W were a key partner in the development and evaluation of the government's *Get Digital* project, a government programme targeted at addressing digital exclusion in older people by providing training and resources in sheltered housing.[28] This project developed comprehensive step-by-step handouts around a large number of digital practices (e.g. Skype, email etc.). The evaluation of *Get Digital* subsequently informed the development of toolkits for the DLit2.0 project,[29] an EU wide project that looked to develop and implement training programmes for staff in non-formal learning settings such as public libraries, community centres and care centres. The project developed a curriculum, based on research conducted with EU partners, where the content was user centred and supported by a trainer.

The rationale for the Digital Age toolkits was informed by both projects referenced above to:

1. Enable anyone within a sheltered housing situation (not just teachers) to support a resident (referred to as a learner) in accessing digital literacy tuition;
2. Promote self-directed learning around an area of interest noted by the champion
3. Promote a culture of learning within housing schemes
4. Provide an adaptable, and therefore sustainable, product that would stand the test of time

To support points two and three the resources departed from the approach used in *Get Digital* and *DLit2.0* to provide less prescriptive support to the learner. Rather than step-by-step guides, the Toolkits linked to instructional videos, help pages and other resources that enabled the learner to explore the subject themselves without direct tutor support. This also helped address point four, as generic exploration of a particular media or software tended not to change over time, but specific instructions would. By linking to instructions that were updated by the developers or development communities associated with the subject of the learning, there was a strong likelihood they would be updated alongside the software itself. The toolkits were made available, licensed under CreativeCommons, in Microsoft Word format, alongside a guide explaining how to adapt them. This allows people to modify them as necessary.

Format

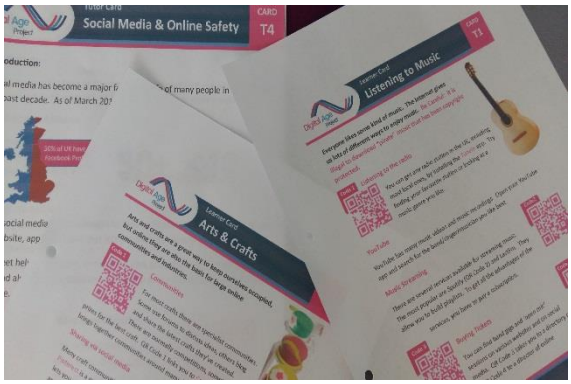
The toolkits were designed in a series of A4 cards that could be cheaply and easily printed and would not look intimidating to learners and made available in a downloadable form, online and a final printed version. The toolkits were divided into:

- A guide for those setting up digital literacy programmes

[27] Learning and Work Institute was formed on 1st January 2016 after the merger of National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion.
[28] http://getdigital.org.uk/
[29] http://www.digital-literacy2020.eu/

- A guide for digital champions using the cards
- A guide for formal teachers using the cards*
- A set of generic resources (e.g. a glossary)
- A series of “learner cards” that champions and teachers* could give to learners

The links within the cards were presented as QR codes, enabling those learning on mobile devices to access the links quickly and easily. Links were also embedded into the codes, meaning that those accessing them online could click on, rather than scan, the QR codes to follow its link. For those using print outs of the cards on a home desktop computer without an internet connection, a long version of the links was also included within each section.



Content

The cards were split based on the headings of the DLit2.0 curriculum:

- E-Citizenship
- Collaboration
- Social Networking
- Communication
- Basic Skills

The headings were later modified to better suit the audience, but the broad categories remained the same, being:

- Keeping in touch;
- Staying Safe;
- Sharing with friends and family;
- Taking Part;
- Using your technology.

There was also a toolkit guide for:

- Those working to start a digital literacy programme;
- Those delivering a formal digital literacy programme, including intergenerational groups*;
- Digital champions making use of the cards;
- Generic resources and glossary.

L&W built a website to house these resources, where cards could be downloaded individually or in packs[30]. A version of the cards optimised for printing was also distributed to participating housing schemes.

* *indicates that this was a later addition*

[30] Available at: www.digital-age.org.uk

Changes during development

During the project, Ignite IT used the toolkit cards as prompts when delivering the course. However, older learners wanted to use them as hand-outs and reminders after the course had finished. As a result, several sections of the toolkits had an additional handout developed to better enable them to be used in this way. Extra cards were developed around additional technologies in response to needs identified during the project.[31]

Use of the toolkits

There have been 693 downloads of the toolkits, including 26 downloads of the complete toolkit, since their launch in April 2016. The most popular toolkits have been: using QR codes, learner support cards and choosing a device to buy. Toolkits have been downloaded by 155 different users.

However, of the 25 housing scheme co-ordinators who responded to the follow-up survey, only 7 reported that their residents knew how to access the toolkits. Of those 7, only 1 reported their residents used the toolkits 'quite often' with the rest reporting 'not very often' or unknown. Five reported that the residents found the toolkits 'quite useful'.

Of the 7 who reported their residents accessed the toolkits, 6 noted that the residents benefited from their use. Specifically, the toolkits helped increase the resident's confidence in using technology, increased their use of technology to communicate with friends and family and increased their use of technology to find out information.

Each participating housing scheme received two hard copies of the toolkit for residents to refer to at the end of the project. In the future, this will provide residents the opportunity to quickly access the toolkits and continue their learning independently.

[31] For example, using WhatsApp and accessing Northern Ireland specific services

SUCCESSES

Digital inclusion of older learners

Evaluation data confirmed that the Digital Age Project contributed to the digital inclusion of older people in sheltered housing by developing their basic digital skills through the courses. The project engaged many residents with technology, particularly with tablets, for the first time and supported residents at a range of ability levels to develop their interest, skills and confidence with technology. As a consequence, participants now have increasing options in communicating with family and friends, and have developed their knowledge around interests and hobbies.

'The tutor was great at managing them though, I mean [they] were really great at getting them focused and devised ways of getting their attention and set up wee rules, as well as to what was what you know.' Housing Scheme Coordinator

'He [tutor] would listen to us and he was very empathetic to us. It takes a lot of reassurance when you reach our age group.' Older learner

'He was very patient.' Older learner

'They came down to our level.' Older learner

'I have learned things I was sure I would never know how to do. Our tutor was so helpful and took time with each of us.' Older learner

'I learned a lot of stuff, buying online and setting up PayPal. I bought a printer. On [the Tutor's] advice I got a Wi-Fi printer. So I'm able to use that now, without using cords, through my laptop.' Older learner

Tutor

The evidence highlights the key role of Ignite IT tutors in the project's success. Feedback about the tutors from both the younger and older learners has been extremely positive. Older learners appreciated the patience and the knowledge the tutors showed whilst teaching the 10-week course, with tutors able to engage learners and help reassure them as they progressed through the course.

The Ignite IT tutors also had specialist IT knowledge which the older learners considered particularly helpful. Older learners were able to get advice from their tutor when purchasing their own technology. As a result, many learners bought their own tablet or laptop.

The tutors took different approaches for engaging with younger and older learners, as well as adapting their approach further to each intergenerational project, enabling both age groups to successfully interact and engage with each other.

Overall, the response from those who took part in the project, including feedback from teachers and housing scheme coordinators, highlighted the importance of having a tutor who was patient, knowledgeable and engaging.

Learner led approach

The combination of a set 10-week course syllabus and learner input worked well. The learners had an opportunity at the start of the course to discuss what they would like to learn, with. the incorporation of their input maximising the relevance of the course to each cohort. This approach also meant that participants not only learnt core digital skills, such as email and searching for information online, but were also able to learn how to use technology for their hobbies, such as researching family history or photography.

'He covered different topics we were interested in.' Older learner

'Shopping online, and emails, and all this crack. They were the things I wasn't into before, but now I am into.' Older learner

'[The tutor] has been with them through the 10 weeks …I think they then have confidence in [the tutor]. They don't feel they're doing it alone.'

Project co-ordinator

Continuity of tutor for the intergenerational projects

Using the same tutor for both the 10-week course and the intergenerational project, increased the likelihood of older learners wanting to take part in the intergenerational project. The tutor built a relationship with the older learners during the 10-week course, which then gave the older learners confidence to work with the younger learners – a key factor in successfully setting up and running the intergenerational projects.

Social inclusion within the housing schemes

Running the course in housing schemes provided a communal activity for residents. As many residents live independently within housing schemes, there can be a tendency for some to keep to themselves and to feel lonely or isolated as a result. It became apparent during the project that though many housing schemes try to encourage their residents to use the communal rooms, through providing events or courses, they find it hard to maintain interest. In addition, some of the older learners were members of the public who might not have known anyone at the housing scheme before joining the course.

One important outcome of the Digital Age Project was that it brought residents with similar interests together to form their own community within the housing scheme. This built-up relationships, with strong friendships forming between residents.

'In the early stages of the courses … I hadn't realised that they maybe weren't aware of each other or weren't spending time or hadn't known each other. Quite often they had never spoken to each other and it was making a connection within those venues…I think it really was building a social atmosphere within the schemes.

Course tutor

Building community links

The intergenerational projects created new partnerships between schools and sheltered housing schemes, through which further joint opportunities have since been developed.

In addition, the relationships built between the participants has also impacted the wider community; in some cases, younger and older learners have continued to see each other outside of the projects, developing a greater sense of community within the local area.

A poem written by a resident from Rathain Fold in Coleraine about their experiences of an intergenerational project with pupils of Millburn Primary School and their computer tutor.

For us at Rathain Fold new things have come our way.
Each Monday afternoon at one.
A little group from Millburn School come.
They help us better understand the way to use our tablets.
Now tablets to us here in Rathain mean something chronic.
But John* and the students have taught us they can be electronic!
We learned about our birthdays – that was quite a gag.
Comparing when we were all born – some of us in 1945!
Never mind the age gap – we had a lovely time.
With the boys and girls from Millburn and we hope they come again.
Computers aren't so scary now – we can even switch them on,
Thanks to the Millburn students and John who helped us all along.

*Names have been changed

CHALLENGES

'There is only one problem, for the review. If I go upstairs, I can't play it. So I potter down to the Fold.

So we want more of the wee things that do the Wi-Fi. The Wi-Fi is just in here, and it drives me round the bend. So, If I want to watch something online, I have to come in here every day. I have to go down the stairs. So I wish the [housing association] would actually put Wi-Fi around the building. So we can go in our flats, with the computers.'

Older learner

'The housing association was insisting because they couldn't police what people would be doing, so they said that's why they didn't put them in so that everyone could get it in their flats.

They're of the mind-set as well, well, if you want the internet, pay for it. But I think it's a safety thing. They're worried about what people would get up to, I think. That's what we're hearing.'

Housing Scheme Coordinator

Wi-Fi access in Housing Schemes

A key issue highlighted throughout the Digital Age Project has been the limited access to Wi-Fi or Ethernet connections at housing schemes.

Some schemes expressed concern about providing access throughout their venues, given that they have no control over how this would then be used – particularly in the context of their own ethical guidelines or their legal obligations to ensure that communal Wi-Fi is not being used for illicit purposes. Most schemes, however, allow residents to purchase their own internet provision.

Where Wi-Fi is made available within sheltered housing schemes, this tends to be limited to communal areas and is often low bandwidth and unable to support multiple users at one time. In some housing schemes, tutors found it necessary to provide technology to boost the Wi-Fi signal whilst delivering the courses.

Older learners who participated in focus groups expressed concern about the weak or limited Wi-Fi availability in their housing scheme. Some pointed out that though they enjoyed learning how to use a tablet, they had been put off purchasing their own technology as they could only use it in communal areas. Older learners reported that they would prefer to be able to use their tablet in their own private quarters rather than communal areas, particularly for downloading music or watching catch-up TV.

Overall, decisions on Wi-Fi provision can only be made by the housing schemes or their overarching associations. However, limited access to the internet does present a challenge for older learners in remaining digitally included in practising their digital skills.

Structure of course delivery

Feedback from residents, particularly through the qualitative interviews, highlighted issues and challenges regarding the structure and pace of the 10-week course. As the content of the course is wide-ranging, it was felt that more sessions were needed to support their learning, or for fewer topics to be covered in the same number of weeks.

There was a general consensus from the older learners and housing scheme managers that more opportunity for individual tuition would have been helpful. This was particularly felt where learners were at different levels or where some learners were using their own devices instead of those provided through the project. Several older learners noted that when two tutors were present, this provided more classroom support and allowed them to ask questions without 'holding up the tutor'.

Retention of knowledge between the different weeks was also an issue for some older learners, particularly for those with health issues which limited their ability to remember the skills they had learnt. Spending longer on each subject, and allowing more time for learners to repeat what they had learnt within the lesson, could support learners to develop their digital skills further. At one pilot, lessons were run twice a week and the tutor noted that older learners were better able to retain the knowledge between lessons. Increasing the frequency of lessons could also help older learners develop their digital skills further by providing more opportunities to practice and receive more frequent support.

'Older people can't take everything in at once, so we need more lessons.' Older learner

'The project was very well conducted and very friendly but for me at my age it was a bit rushed. A few more weeks would have been good for us, as beginners.' Older learner

'I am very hard of hearing and I would benefit from one-to-one tuition.' (Resident)

'I felt guilty taking up the tutor's time when other residents needed help. I think maybe a tutor to every two residents would be really helpful.' (Resident)

'I was at a disadvantage because I was using an iPad whereas everyone else was using Tablets.' (Resident)

Learning difficulties and group variation

Each cohort taught through the Digital Age Project were of mixed ability, with some learners requiring more support than others. This was particularly the case in one group where low literacy levels caused a major barrier for one learner. Health issues also created a barrier for some learners; with difficulties, such as hearing loss or mental health issues, creating a challenge for the tutors. The tutors were able to differentiate the syllabus by ability, adapting their provision according to learner needs. However, more one to one support may have benefited some learners.

Delivering to a mixed age group

The main purpose of the projects was to facilitate the interaction between the different age groups through using technology. In some cases, like in Carrickfergus, relationships were built quickly. In other cases, such as Crossmaglen, learners needed additional encouragement from the tutor to overcome acute shyness of each other.

The health of some of the older learners also presented challenges, with some unable to attend all the sessions, creating disappointment for the younger learner with whom they were paired. Working in larger groups, rather than in pairs, could help mitigate this.

'You're not, as a tutor, walking into a class of young people. You have seniors in there as well, who have a lot more experience than I do, and don't take well to being told what to do. So you're having to find creative ways to communicate with a group without offending anyone'

Course tutor

During two of the intergenerational projects an older learner unfortunately passed away. This was handled with care by the Digital Age team, the course tutors and school teachers. Having a strategy for sensitively dealing with these events is important for intergenerational projects, particularly as it may be a younger learner's first experience of death.

'*I suppose the only negative would have been, it would be like, we were a bit confined because of the size of the room*.'

Older learner

'The venue is very, very important. It does have to be comfortable and right for the group. We have run courses in venues before where, maybe a room has been small or it can be cramped or maybe not comfortable and your participants are not going to want to come to it. They're going to want to engage a bit and if it is the case that the room isn't comfortable, it can take away from the experience or inhibit the experience in the first place.'

Course tutor

Size of venues

Most projects took place in communal rooms within the housing schemes, which in most cases, were large enough to comfortably deliver the 10-week courses.

While efforts were made to consistently use the same venue, on some occasions this was not possible due to the size of the group. Making sure there is a room large enough for the whole group is important for ensuring all participants can fully engage with the project. Where the housing scheme's communal room is too small, there might need to be some consideration for finding a larger venue.

Location of venues

Although the project covered the whole of Northern Ireland, it was delivered using only a small number of tutors, predominantly based in Belfast.

To make the best use of the tutor's time, the project co-ordinator tried to ensure that courses taking place in the same area were scheduled on the same day. Having more tutors dedicated to delivery would have helped alleviate some of this challenge.

Ongoing support for older learners

Many of the residents lacked confidence in their ability to use technology independently and require further support to use the technology in the future. However, qualitative interviews with scheme co-ordinators highlighted their limited capacity to provide on-going support to residents. Although they do what they could to help residents, for example, asking them questions about the course at coffee mornings, residents themselves are aware of how busy the scheme co-ordinators are and feel reluctant to 'bother them'. Some residents could ask for support from relatives, but others are struggling to make progress by themselves. It was evident during the interviews that residents at the same scheme can have different knowledge and skills and therefore may be able to help each other – although this would require some encouragement and support.

'A great idea but continuous help and support is the only way many people will take advantage of digital technology.' Older learner

'There isn't anyone at the scheme who can help. Scheme manager has helped but don't like to keep asking.' Older learner

'*Problems can arise if they forget how the software works. However, this problem is usually solved because someone else will remember how to use it. So, they are teaching each other.*' Scheme co-ordinator

Length of intergenerational projects

There was a call for intergenerational projects to be longer than 4-6 weeks, with many of the learners wanting to continue the project. Teachers also reported that it might have been beneficial for a longer project, as the relationships between the younger and older learners were only starting to develop fully after 4 weeks.

'If you made the projects longer that would be great.' Young learner

'There was an excellent opportunity to learn many skills, many were acquired but there was a lot more could have been achieved had the project ran for another few weeks.' Teacher

DISSEMINATION OF OUTCOMES

A key aim of the Digital Age Project has been to promote the digital inclusion of older people. In order to achieve this, the Digital Age partnership has held a number of events and the project has also enjoyed media coverage and online support across Northern Ireland, the UK and beyond, including New York and South Korea.

Media coverage

The project had already gained some media coverage under the leadership of WEA, through a news article on Age UK Northern Ireland's website.

The project continued to be promoted under Linking Generations' leadership, through news articles and radio programmes across Northern Ireland. The project was highlighted as part of a wider BBC Northern Ireland Linking Generations appeal for more intergenerational projects within Northern Ireland.[32]

During the project, housing schemes and associations included articles in their internal newsletters, such as Choice News, promoting the Digital Age Project and its aims for the digital inclusion of older people. The courses were also promoted through the Asda magazine by a local Asda community champion.

One of the intergenerational projects, namely Glen Fold & Shimna College, Newcastle, were the winners of the Fold Housing Association 'Working Together' Intergenerational Award.

Dissemination event October 2015

As part of the Digital Age partnership's promotional work, an event was held to bring partners, policy makers and participants together to promote the ideas and values behind the project. Representatives from the Department of Finance and Personnel NI, and representatives from organisations such as the Commissioner for Older People in NI and the Public Health Agency attended this event, as did 10 of the younger learners and 10 older learners who had participated in an intergenerational project.

The majority of people attending the event in October 2015, wanted to find out more information about the Digital Age Project, how it was run and opportunities to get involved. Some were also looking to partner with the project. A further two were looking to raise awareness about digital inclusion. For the learners, their main motivations were to reconnect with people they had met during the project, to meet new people and to improve their digital skills further. All of those who attended the event found it 'useful' or 'very useful', with most finding the feedback on the project and learning about the toolkits the most useful part of the event.

[32] This can be found on the BBC website at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/corporate2/northernireland/appeals/broadcast/linking_generations

'Well run, informative and worthwhile. Thank you.' Event attendee

'Excellent speakers, great room layout, friendly and laid back atmosphere, school pupils spoke really well - reflected on positive attributes of project.' Event attendee

As a result of attending the event in October, a number of respondents were looking to share their learning with their organisations. A couple were also looking to partner with Linking Generations and identify areas where they could add value to the project. The older learners attending, were looking to develop their digital skills further, with two considering buying their own technology. A couple of the attendees were looking to use the toolkits to develop their digital skills. One attendee was inspired to become a tutor in their community.

Toolkit launch April 2016

The Digital Age toolkits were launched at an event in April 2016, funded by the Department of Finance 'Spring Online' Week. In total 25 attendees responded to a feedback survey about the event. In addition to some older and younger learners who had taken part in the project, other attendees included representatives from local governments, libraries, church groups and housing associations. All but one, found the event 'useful' or 'very useful'. Being able to practice using the toolkits during the event and finding out how they could be used in different contexts was considered particularly useful.

The launch was supported through online media coverage. This included an online article in Community NI, which promotes work in the voluntary and community sector. The article highlighted the publication of the toolkits, and how to access them online. It was also supported through the Linking Generations website and Facebook page.

The Digital Age Project Conference November 2016

The end of the Digital Age Project culminated in a final conference highlighting the outcomes from the project and plans for the future. The event included keynote speeches from the Northern Ireland Commissioners for Older People, Eddie Lynch, and for Children and Young People, Koulla Yiasouma.

The event brought together representatives from local government, housing associations, Libraries NI and teachers. Also present were some of the learners who took part in Digital Age, either through a course or an intergenerational project. There were around 100 attendees, with 48 completing feedback forms on the event.

All the respondents found the event interesting and useful, with 30 finding it was very interesting, and 29 finding it very useful. In all, 28 felt a great deal more informed about the project by the end of the event.

'[We will be looking to] raise awareness of the toolkit to library staff to use in delivery in one to one IT training with customers.' Event attendee

'I plan to bring the toolkit and my gained knowledge to my boss to come up with new ways to promote the Digital Age Project within our schemes' Event Attendee

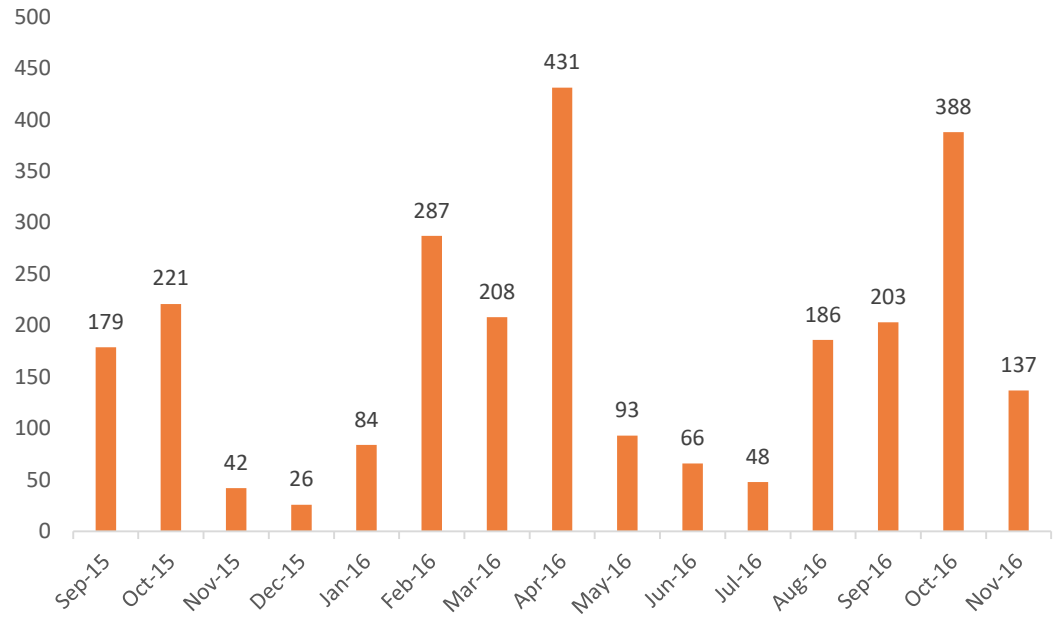
The majority (36 out of 48) were planning to take action as a result of participating in the conference. Overall, 12 were looking to promote and use the toolkits with staff and older learners, 8 were planning to run their own intergenerational project and 3 were considering ways they could promote digital inclusion within housing schemes. Funding was seen as the main barrier to achieving these plans by responders.

Digital Participation

The Digital Age team used social media and a website developed for the project to promote and support its work. The Facebook page has seen a gradual, but steady, increase in both likes and reach and continues to develop. Posts often appear in batches, directly associated with an output of a course, for example a course picture or video. This reach was extended further through the use of Twitter, with a total of 25,811 Twitter impressions over the course of the project.

The website went online in September 2015. Issues identified with the search optimisation (SEO) have now been addressed to promote greater use. Boosts in traffic coincided with the launch of the draft (Oct 15) and final (April 16) toolkits, with dips associated with reduced activity over holiday periods.

Figure 11: Number of views of the digital age website by month[33]



[33] This data shows up to 12pm November 23rd 2016.

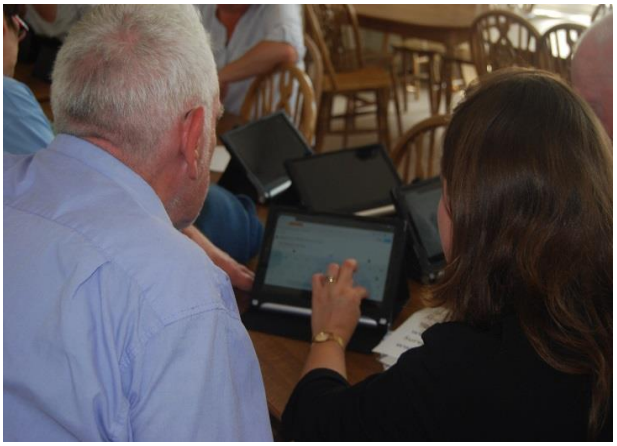
SUSTAINABILITY AND GOING FORWARD

The Digital Age Project sought to ensure sustainability in two main areas: the provision of hardware for the communal use of their residents in each participating sheltered housing scheme; and continuing the relationship between schools and housing schemes.

At the start of the Digital Age Project, partners supplied a laptop to each housing scheme participating. Feedback suggested that residents weren't able to use the laptop effectively, as they had been taught to use tablet computers. Having found this, Digital Age changed their provision of hardware in year two to the same model of tablet computer older learners had used during the course. Feedback suggests that this has helped sustain the digital skills of the older learners.

Sustaining the improved digital skills of older learners has been impacted by restricted access to Wi-Fi. As highlighted through focus groups and interviews, being able to access Wi-Fi in their own home has been a challenge for residents. Residents need to purchase and install their own internet access to their rooms or flats, to use their technology at home. In most housing schemes there is access to the internet in communal rooms. However, the broadband connection in some housing schemes cannot support high numbers of users. Also, many residents do not want to, or are unable to, walk to communal rooms from their residency to use the internet, particularly if this might involve carrying a laptop or tablet with them.

The relationships built between schools and housing schemes through the Digital Age Project has been sustained at a number of the projects. Many of the schools have invited the residents to events at the schools. Carrickfergus, are planning on reopening the school's greenhouses with the help of the residents. At another school, the same group of younger learners were taken to the housing scheme as part of a history project. In the future, many of the schools' plan to take part in additional projects in partnership with the housing schemes.



The use of technology in intergenerational projects has been particularly successful – not only in developing digital skills, but also in promoting interaction between generations.

The toolkits have been designed so that new cards can be developed over time, allowing the toolkits to remain relevant as technology develops. The toolkits also include guides for different users, and can be used in different contexts, including libraries, church groups, as well as housing schemes. They can also be used independently and by family members to teach new skills or as a reminder of how to use the technology. While designed for older learners, they could also be of use with learners of all ages.

In the future Linking Generations plan to use the toolkits to form the basis of new intergenerational projects, pairing older and younger learners together, with the older learner choosing the topic they would like to learn and the younger learner acting as the tutor. Linking Generations has previously used the toolkits in this way as part of a separate pilot project.

Dundonald 'I Tea Time' pilot project with Barclays Bank Digital Eagles

This intergenerational pilot, supported by Barclays Bank, used the toolkits developed during Digital Age to develop 9 older learners' digital skills through the one-to-one support of 11 younger learners. The older learner was assisted by a younger learner to learn something relevant to them. Topics older learners wanted to learn included internet shopping, researching family history and booking holidays. Learners found the one-to-one interaction allowed older learners to develop their digital skills at their own pace. All older learners found the pilot 'very' or 'quite' useful, feeling more confident using technology as a result. Younger learners also reported the pilot was 'useful' or 'very useful', with the main benefit being able to help older learners to use computers. The school is planning to do another intergenerational project following this pilot.

Graham Bailie, Market Leader for Northern Ireland Barclays, said: *'We are delighted to have supported Linking Generations with their Digital Age sessions and would like to thank everyone who helped make the sessions happen. Alongside our Shared Growth Ambition, Barclays has a fantastic Colleague Community Programme that encourages employees to get involved in the causes we care about. It's about giving back our skills, time and energy to support our local communities – so we're thrilled to have taken part.'*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Digital Age Project proved that older people are very capable of using technology, but they need to see clear benefits and receive adequate training and on-going support if their interest is to be engaged. The programme successfully engaged many older people with technology for the first time and supported a range of ability levels to develop their interest, skills and confidence in its use, resulting in social benefits to them, their communities and families. Through the intergenerational projects, the project brought further benefits to both older and young people.

The benefits to **older people** included increased confidence to use technology and the internet, cost savings from online transactions, increased knowledge and use of public services, both national and local, increased self-confidence, increased communication and improved relationships with young people, their communities, friends and families. The programme also increased young and older people's understanding of each other, resulting in positive changes in attitudes and behaviours for both groups, while young people benefitted from increased self-confidence and improvements in their personal, digital and social skills.

Established links between **sheltered housing schemes, local schools and youth groups** improved older people's interaction with their local communities and young people's contributions to those communities. These links also provided possible methods to sustain digital inclusion for older people beyond the project's end.

Participating **housing schemes** believed the programme had been useful to residents, that residents are now more confident in using technology to communicate with friends and family, resulted in improved relationships between residents and with families. Participating schemes plan to continue working with schools and youth groups and would recommend the programme to other schemes.

Schools found that Digital Age broke down misconceptions about older people, built relationships between generations, increased pupils' communication and digital skills, and increased their self-confidence. Participating schools plan to maintain their engagement with schemes.

The **toolkits** have been downloaded 693 times since their launch in April 2016 by 155 different users, with the most popular toolkits being, using QR codes and the learner support cards. Residents have benefited from using them, resulting in further development of their digital skills, notably their ability to find information and communicate with friends and family.

Recommendations

There are many benefits to social landlords who support their residents' digital inclusion. These include effective marketing of their services, increased customer satisfaction, cost-effective digital communications, potential cost savings if transactional services such as repairs and maintenance requests are switched from face to face or telephone to online systems. Social landlords have commercial as well as social responsibilities, but support for residents' digital skills can be a commercial differentiator, offering marketing benefits to social landlords both for existing and potential new residents. Increasingly, residents are more likely to expect internet access as part of the facilities on offer.

Recommendation 1: Social landlords and the National Housing Federation of Northern Ireland should consider and develop the business case to support residents' digital inclusion

The Digital Age Project evidenced the benefits of intergenerational digital projects to older and younger people. Sustaining the benefits of the project presents some challenges for social landlords, including hardware maintenance and ongoing support to develop residents' digital skills. Digital Age identified that in most schemes there was a small cohort of residents with technical expertise and higher than average digital skills. Encouraging and establishing resident led computer clubs, recruiting residents to act as mentors to others or training them to provide basic technical support could partly address these issues. However, volunteers can be difficult to recruit and may be unreliable.

Partnerships with schools and youth groups were maintained beyond the project and could provide possible mechanisms for schemes to sustain the programme. Hosting digital courses in schools could overcome scheme's challenges of technical maintenance and hardware costs, while intergenerational projects could develop older peoples' digital skills.

Recommendation 2: Social landlords and sheltered housing schemes should establish partnerships with local schools and youth groups to identify mutually beneficial intergenerational digital programmes

Recommendation 3: Social landlords and schemes should explore the potential of peer led programmes such as scheme computer clubs to develop and maintain residents' digital skills

Recommendation 4: Schools and local authorities should explore partnership possibilities with local sheltered housing schemes, to benefit pupils and to meet Department of Education Northern Ireland policy recommendation that schools interact with and support their local communities

Recommendation 5: Go On NI and funding organisations should encourage and support intergenerational digital programmes in social housing and other community venues, such as libraries

Digital Age Toolkits provided innovative approaches and resources to develop the digital capabilities of digitally excluded people. These have been published under a Creative Commons licence, allowing adaptation and repurpose to benefit digitally excluded people of all ages.

Recommendation 6: The Digital Age toolkits are widely promoted to stakeholder organisations (particularly Third Sector) to use, adapt and re-purpose with other digitally excluded groups.

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation looked at three different areas of the Digital Age Project. The 10-week courses, the intergenerational projects and the sustainability of the project. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, combining the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

For the evaluation of the 10-week training course, the older learners[34] took two short surveys at the beginning and the end of their learning. The beginning survey collected baseline data on their experiences using digital technology, their views and the potential benefits of taking part in the project. The end survey looked at any changes in their digital skills and the benefits of taking part in the course. Both surveys collected demographic information on project participants. The beginning survey was paper based; whilst the end survey was online, with a paper based option. Overall 397 beginning and 345 end questionnaires were received, although participants did not always complete all of the questions. The total response rate for each question is presented as a base within this report. Full data tables are available in Annex 2, where the base is referred to as question total.

To evaluate the intergenerational projects, online surveys were set up for both older learners and younger learners to complete at the end of their intergenerational project. The surveys gather information on their experiences of taking part and any differences experienced as a result of participating. Feedback on intergenerational projects was also sought from housing scheme coordinators and school teachers/youth leaders through an online survey. Overall the evaluation included115 older learner questionnaires 184 younger learner questionnaires, 11 teachers and 13 housing scheme coordinators.

Face-to-face interviews and focus groups were conducted with a sample of learners and key stakeholders to collect qualitative evidence throughout the project. Two case study visits were also carried out as part of the Digital Age evaluation, focused on two intergenerational projects. Focus groups with older and younger learners looked at their experience of the intergenerational projects, any benefits they may have found, and any challenges or areas for improvement. Face-to-face or telephone interviews with the housing scheme co-ordinators and teachers from these cases studies looked at the broader impacts on the housing scheme or schools taking part. Telephone interviews were also carried out with a course tutor from Ignite IT and the Digital Age Project co-ordinator at Linking Generations.

A short follow-up survey of housing schemes looked at how the technology provided as part of the project has been used since the project. This looked at the ways it had been used by the residence and any differences this may have made. We received 25 returned questionnaires.

The data collected has been used to help inform the evaluation and recommendations for future work. L&W also utilized partner meetings and project events to gather feedback from partners about progress and impact, including key successes, challenges and lessons learnt.

[34] Older learners refer to those who took part in a course or intergenerational project. They include both housing scheme residents, their friends and members of the local community.

ANNEX 2: COMPLETE DATA TABLES

The following tables present the data collected during the Digital Age Project. Please note that not all respondents answered all the questions put to them. As such the percentages presented are those of the question total i.e. of those who responded to the question.

Demographics from beginning of course

Table 1: Age of participants in 10 week course

	Number	Percentage %
Below 55	25	6%
55-64	72	18%
65-74	123	31%
75-84 (year 2 only)	25	6%
75+ (year 1 only)	127	32%
85+ (year 2 only)	6	2%
Prefer not to say	5	1%
Missing or no response	14	4%
Total	**397**	

Table 2: Ethnicity of participants in 10 week course

	Number	Percentage %
White – English/ Scottish/ Welsh/ Northern Irish/ UK	258	65%
White - Irish	97	24%
White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	2	1%
White - Any other white	3	1%
Asian or Asian UK – Indian	0	0%
Mixed ethnicity	3	1%
Prefer not to say	8	2%
Missing or no response	26	7%
Total	**397**	

Table 3: Religion of participants in 10 week course

	Number	Percentage %
Christian	287	72%
Hindu	1	0%
No religion	24	6%
Other religion (unspecified)	13	3%
Prefer not to say	72	18%
Total	**397**	

Table 4: Community participants belong to

	Number	Percentage %
Catholic	127	32%
Protestant	194	49%
Other	10	3%
Prefer not to say	65	16%
Missing or no response	1	0%
Total	**397**	

Table 5: Gender of participants

	Number	Percentage %
Male	131	33%
Female	250	63%
Prefer not to say	3	1%
Missing or no response	13	3%
Total	**397**	

Table 6: Percentage of those with a disability

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	107	27%
No	234	59%
Prefer not to say	25	6%
No response	31	8%
Total	**397**	

Table 7: Percentage of those with caring responsibilities

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	91	23%
No	263	66%
Prefer not to say	19	5%
Missing or no response	24	6%
Total	**397**	

Table 8: Sexual orientation of participants (year 2 only)

	Number	Percentage %
Heterosexual	92	82%
Bisexual	1	1%
Other	1	1%
Prefer not to say	18	16%
Question total	**112**	

Results from 10 week course beginning questionnaires

Table 9: How often participants use smart phones

	Number	Percentage %
Very Often	48	13%
Quite often	32	9%
Sometimes	38	10%
Never	251	68%
Question total	**369**	

Table 10: How often participants use a desktop computer

	Number	Percentage %
Very Often	22	6%
Quite often	21	6%
Sometimes	65	19%
Never	238	69%
Question total	**346**	

Table 11: How often participants use a laptop

	Number	Percentage %
Very Often	33	9%
Quite often	30	9%
Sometimes	55	16%
Never	230	66%
Question total	**348**	

Table 12: How often participants use a tablet

	Number	Percentage %
Very Often	41	12%
Quite often	23	6%
Sometimes	50	14%
Never	241	68%
Question total	**355**	

Table 13: How confident participants are using technology

	Number	Percentage %
Very confident	11	3%
Quite confident	87	22%
Not very confident	180	47%
Not at all confident	109	28%
Question total	**387**	

Table 14: How often participants use technology to complete the following tasks

	Very often	Quite often	Sometimes	Never	Question total
Searching for information	58	48	103	182	391
Sending and receiving emails	41	34	81	233	389
Using social networking sites e.g. Facebook	27	17	49	293	386
Playing games	25	10	46	305	386
Buying products/ services	20	19	50	296	385
Downloading films/ TV programmes	13	9	34	329	385
Paying bills	11	13	20	342	386
Making voice calls e.g. Skype	8	7	44	326	385
Learning online	9	15	47	311	382

Table 15: Frequency of participants using the internet

	Number	Percentage %
Every day	92	25%
Once or Twice a week	51	14%
Several times a month	27	7%
Less than once a month	32	9%
Never	164	45%
Question total	**366**	

Table 16: Frequency of participants asking others to access the internet on their behalf

	Number	Percentage %
Very Often	15	4%
Quite often	35	9%
Sometimes	148	40%
Never	176	47%
Question total	**374**	

Table 17: Percentage of participants who own the following technology

	Yes	No	Yes %	No %
Smart phone	100	296	25%	75%
Desktop computer	53	343	13%	87%
Laptop	113	283	29%	71%
Tablet	110	286	28%	72%
Question total	**396**			

Table 18: Percentage of participants who felt doing the course would provide the following benefits

	Yes	No	Yes %	No %
Find information easily	282	111	72%	28%
Keep in touch with family	258	135	66%	34%
Develop digital skills	251	142	64%	36%
Help pursue own interests	197	196	50%	50%
Save time	131	262	33%	67%
Meet new people	99	294	25%	75%
Save money	96	297	24%	76%
No benefit	11	382	3%	97%
Question total	**293**			

Results from 10 week course end questionnaires

Table 19: Self-reported frequency of participant attendance

	Number	Percentage %
All sessions	140	41%
Most sessions	151	44%
Some sessions	52	15%
Question total	**343**	

Table 20: Enjoyment of sessions reported by participants

	Number	Percentage %
I enjoyed all the sessions	230	67%
I enjoyed most sessions	44	13%
I enjoyed some sessions	17	5%
I did not enjoy any sessions	52	15%
Question total	**343**	

Table 21: How useful participants found the course

	Number	Percentage %
Very useful	238	69%
Quite useful	92	27%
Not very useful	11	3%
Not at all useful	2	1%
Question total	**343**	

Table 22: Equipment used by participants

	Number	Percentage %
Laptop provided by project	49	14%
Tablet provided by project	191	55%
Own laptop or tablet	124	36%
Question total	**345**	

Table 23: Would participants recommend the course

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	342	99%
No	2	1%
Question total	**344**	

Table 24: Participants reporting that the Digital Age project improved their quality of life (year 2 only)

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	95	92%
No	8	8%
Question total	**103**	

Table 25: Change in participant use of computers and the internet

	Number	Percentage %
It has increased a lot	158	48%
It has increased a little	116	35%
It has stayed about the same	53	16%
It has decreased a little	1	0%
It has decreased a lot	8	2%
Question total	**328**	

Table 26: change in participant use of smartphones

	Number	Percentage %
It has increased a lot	69	21%
It has increased a little	32	10%
It has stayed about the same	23	7%
Decreased a little	1	0%
It has decreased a lot	2	1%
Not applicable	213	65%
Question total	**340**	

Table 27: Participants reporting the following benefits:

	Number	Percentage %
I have developed my computer/digital skills	228	66%
I feel more confident about using computers/technology	213	62%
I am more interested in computers/technology	194	56%
My self-confidence has improved	193	56%
I have met new people with similar interests	172	50%
I have developed my interests and hobbies	134	39%
I am more aware of public services e.g. local library, bus timetables, NHS Choices website	133	39%
I am in contact with my family/friends more often	122	35%
I am accessing public services more often	75	22%
Using technology has saved me time	73	21%
I have more control of my life/I can make more informed decisions	73	21%
Using technology has saved me money	52	15%
Other, please specify	22	6%

Table 28: Number of participants reporting buying their own technology as a result of taking part in the course

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	99	29%
Not yet but I am planning to	89	26%
No and I have no plans to	51	15%
Not applicable - I already have my own computer/ technology	103	30%
Question total	**342**	

Table 29: How often participants use technology to complete the following tasks

	Very often	Quite often	Sometim	Never	Question total
Searching for information	88	83	94	66	**331**
Send and receive emails	54	53	125	102	**334**
Using social network sites	49	37	43	199	**328**
Playing games	35	38	68	182	**323**
Buying products online	30	36	73	183	**322**
Downloading films/TV programmes	20	28	69	204	**321**
Paying bills	12	13	33	262	**320**
Making voice calls e.g. Skype	23	24	103	173	**323**
Learning online	36	46	114	128	**324**

Table 30: number of participants who would recommend the course to others

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	342	99%
No	2	1%
Question total	**344**	

Table 31: number of participants who would like to help others to use technology

	Number	Percentage %
Yes	101	30%
Maybe	114	34%
No	123	36%
Question total	**338**	

Result from the intergenerational project survey: Older learners (to be updated)

Table 32: Gender of older people taking part in an intergenerational project

	Number	Percentage %
Female	79	69%
Male	35	30%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Total	**115**	

Table 33: Age of the older people taking part in an intergenerational project

	Number	Percentage %
Below 55	4	3%
55-64	23	20%
65-74	37	32%
75-84	36	31%
85+	15	10%
Total	**115**	

Table 34: Older people who found taking part useful

	Number	Percentage %
Very useful	89	77%
Quite useful	26	23%
Not very useful	0	0%
Not at all useful	0	0%
Total	**115**	

Table 35: Reported benefits of taking part in an intergenerational project, older learners

	Number	Percentage %
I feel more a part of my local community	112	97%
I learnt more about young people and their interests/concerns	111	97%
I am now more likely to talk to young people	109	95%
I feel safer around young people	107	93%
I learnt that I have things in common with young people	106	92%
I feel more confident about using computers/technology	105	91%
My self-confidence has improved	105	91%
I get on better with the young people I know e.g. grandchildren	105	91%
I have developed my computer/digital skills and knowledge	100	87%
I am more interested in computers/technology	100	87%
Total	**115**	

Results from the intergenerational project survey: Younger learners (to be updated)

Table 36: Gender division of young people taking part

	Number	Percentage %
Female	122	66%
Male	61	33%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Total	**184**	

Table 37: Age of young people taking part

Under 11	29	16%
11 - 14	139	76%
15 - 18	13	7%
18 +	1	1%
20 - 24 (year 2 only)	1	1%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Total	**184**	

Table 38: How useful younger learners found taking part in the project

	Number	Percentage
Very useful	102	55%
Quite Useful	77	42%
Not very useful	5	3%
Not at all useful	0	0%
Total	**184**	

Table 39 Reported benefits of taking part in an intergenerational project, younger learners.

	Number	Percentage %
I learnt more about older people and their interests/concerns	180	98%
I learnt that I have things in common with older people	171	93%
I am now more likely to talk to older people	163	89%
I feel more confident about using computers/ technology	162	88%
I feel more a part of the community where I live or go to school	161	88%
I get on better with the older people I know e.g. grandparents	153	83%
I have developed my computer/digital skills and knowledge	149	81%
The project has helped me to understand how older people can be fearful of young people	125	68%
Total	**184**	

Results from follow-up survey with housing schemes

Table 40: How often the residents use the laptop or tablet provided by the project

	Number
Very often	4
Quite often	10
Not very often	11
Number of responses	**25**

Table 41: How useful the residents find the laptop or tablet

	Number
Very useful	10
Quite useful	14
Not very useful	1
Number of responses	**25**

Table 42: Change in technology use by residents since having access to the laptop or tablet

	Number
It has increased a lot	8
It has increased a little	15
It has stayed about the same	2
Number of responses	**25**

Table 43: What residents mainly use the technology for

	Number
Searching for information	21
Sending and receiving emails	14
Learning online	8
Buying products/ services	7
Using social networking sites e.g. Facebook	5
Making voice calls e.g. Skype	3
Downloading films/ TV programmes	2
Playing games	2
Other	1
Paying bills	0
Number of responses	**25**

Note: respondents could select three main uses

Table 44: Differences in residents since having access to the technology

	Number
Increased use of technology to find out information	18
Increased confidence using technology	17
Increased use of technology to communicate with family or friends	12
Decrease in fear of technology	9
Increased satisfaction of residents	9
Improved relationships with each other	5
Improved relationships with family members	5
Increase in fear of technology	1
Not applicable	2
Number of responses	**25**

Note: respondents could select all relevant responses

Table 45: Have your residents experienced any challenges in using the laptop or tablet at your scheme?

	Number
Yes	8
No	13
Don't know	4
Number of responses	**25**

Toolkits

Table 46: How aware the housing scheme co-ordinators are of the toolkits

	Number
Yes – and I know how to access the toolkits	16
Yes – but I do not know how to access the toolkits	7
No	2
Number of responses	**25**

Table 47: Number of housing schemes reporting their residents were aware of the toolkits

	Number
Yes	14
No	4
Don't know	7
Number of responses	**25**

Table 48: How often residents access the toolkits

	Number
Very often	0
Quite often	1
Not very often	5
Never	0
Don’t know	1
Number of responses	**7**

Table 49: How useful the residents find the toolkits

	Number
Very useful	0
Quite useful	5
Not very useful	0
Not useful at all	0
Don’t know	2
Number of responses	**7**

Table 50: Differences in residents since having access to the toolkits

	Number
Increased confidence using technology	5
Increased use of technology to communicate with family or friends	4
Increased use of technology to find out information	4
Decrease in fear of technology	2
Improved relationships with family members	1
Increased satisfaction of residents	1
Other	1
Number of responses	**7**

Note: respondents could select all relevant answers.