



SHROPSHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD Report

Meeting Date	14 th July 2022			
Title of Paper	Report on the Shropshire Council Digital Skills Programme			
Reporting Officer and email	Andrea Miller, Digital Champion Lead, Shropshire Council			
Which Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy priorities does this paper address? Please tick all that apply	Children & Young People		Joined up working	
	Mental Health		Improving Population Health	
	Healthy Weight & Physical Activity		Working with and building strong and vibrant communities	X
	Workforce		Reduce inequalities (see below)	X
What inequalities does this paper address?	Digital inequality for older people			
<p>Paper content - Please expand content under these headings or attach your report ensuring the three headings are included.</p> <p>1. Executive Summary</p> <p>In 2019, following a successful application to the LGA's Digital Inclusion Programme, Shropshire Council received £15,000 to help digitally excluded residents aged 65+ to get online.</p> <p>The funding was awarded because council research (2016) showed that approximately 25% of Shropshire residents are digitally excluded, ranking above the national figure of 21%. Of the 25% in Shropshire, 24.9% are over 65, reflecting the ageing population of the county.</p> <p>The funding enabled the council to recruit a digital champion lead tasked with reaching out to residents aged over 65 and without the skills, equipment, or confidence to go online, to help them access the support they needed.</p> <p>Feb 2020: Digital Champion Lead Andrea Miller was recruited 3 days a week to lead the initiative.</p> <p>2. Recommendations</p> <p>The Board is asked to note the contents of this report, and the innovative work taking place.</p> <p>3. Report</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Please see the attached</p>				
<p>Risk assessment and opportunities appraisal (NB This will include the following: Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community, Environmental</p>				

consequences and other Consultation)	
Financial implications (Any financial implications of note)	
Climate Change Appraisal as applicable	
Where else has the paper been presented?	System Partnership Boards
	Voluntary Sector
	Other
List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)	
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) or your organisational lead e.g. Exec lead or Non-Exec/Clinical Lead (List of Council Portfolio holders can be found at this link: https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=130)	
Appendices	



The Digital Skills Programme 2019 to 2023



Online at 80 for Technophobe Mike

Thanks to the Digital Skills Programme, Mike Clarke has learned to use a banking app to manage financial transactions. And he's become an avid user of Shropshire Council's online library services. "I use the digital library every day – it's a wonderful asset," said Mike. "I download the Telegraph to get the crossword results and I've just finished my first online book!

"I worked in farming for many years and then the Post Office and I missed out on everything to do with the internet," explained 80-year-old Mike. "I didn't believe technology would take off the way it has. I thought it was all a gimmick and I regret not tackling my lack of skills sooner."

Mike admits to being converted. "I've realised that the internet is a wonderful tool. I can see the benefits it brings, and I don't think I would go back to life without it."

Background

In 2019, following a successful application to the LGA's Digital Inclusion Programme,

Shropshire Council received £15,000 to help digitally excluded residents aged 65+ to get online.

The funding was awarded because council research (2016) showed that approximately 25% of Shropshire residents are digitally excluded, ranking above the national figure of 21%. Of the 25% in Shropshire, 24.9% are over 65, reflecting the ageing population of the county.

The funding enabled the council to recruit a digital champion lead tasked with reaching out to residents aged over 65 and without the skills, equipment, or confidence to go online, to help them access the support they needed.

Feb 2020: Digital Champion Lead Andrea Miller was recruited 3 days a week to lead the initiative.

Statistics Update May 2022

The national Nobody in the Dark programme estimates that in the UK today, 1 person in 7 cannot use the internet without help.

The Census 2021 population of Shropshire is 325,415 = 46,400 digitally excluded people living in our area. Of the 81,216 over 65s (24.9%), 11,602 can't access the internet without help.

With these figures in mind, the existing Digital Skills Programme providing support for older learners is only tackling 4% of the need.

The Digital Skills Programme Pilot

A unique digital learning system was developed early on by the project lead. Seven key digital skills were identified, with learners assessed pre and post their learning to show progress in attaining the learning outcomes. Learning was to be delivered one to one over 8 -10 weeks through digital volunteers.

August 2020: pilot project supporting digitally excluded over 65s working with 6 digital volunteers begins at the Roy Fletcher Centre in Shrewsbury. Funding from the LGA was used to pay for room hire. In addition, a survey in partnership with Age UK was used to recruit potential learners along with publicity in local press.

The initial response to the call for learners was enormous, with 125 older people registering for support in 1 week. Here are some of their comments:

"I spend so much time alone. I spend a lot of time achieving very little on my computer. This virus has turned the world upside down. I have to get my food ordered online and I get into such a mess!"

"I was scammed for £600 by an alleged IT technician online 7 years ago that contacted me through a pop up. I felt such a fool and the bank wouldn't give me back the money. They said it was my fault."

"I'm very very lonely - especially in the evenings. I've got 2 tablets and laptop and cannot use them."

"I've had to stop driving and there is no bus service. I feel very isolated. I'd love to be able to talk to friends and family."

"I'm 87 and I don't have any confidence with technology. My family want me to learn, and I feel I'm letting them down."

"I want to learn because I just don't understand the language. Now I'm on my own I've got a smartphone, but I don't know how to use it. It's frustrating. I've got family all over the world and I want to see them and speak to them. I've just found out I'm a great-grandfather!"

"I am very incompetent. I use my iPad for email and looking online. I find it quite difficult and make mistakes. The technical language defeats me."

"I've got a computer and want to feel more confident. I'd like to be able to talk to people face to face on my computer. If I'm not well I could talk to my doctor. I'm out in the sticks 5 miles from my nearest shop and I want food delivered."

"I've lost my confidence and need a boost. I've lost my brain somewhere. I've had a laptop. but the iPad is so different. I can use it but in a limited way. I get worried about con artists and I'm frightened."

"My husband of 44 years died just before Christmas, and he did all the computer stuff. He meant to teach me. but it didn't happen. I worked in a bank and used computers at work but that was a long time ago. I'm 70 but a young 70 and I'm not stupid!"

The pilot project supported 87 learners to become digitally confident and was extended to the Mayfair Community Centre, Church Stretton in May 2021, and Shrewsbury Library in September 2021.

The Digital Skills Programme 2022 to 2023

December 2021: £80,000 council funding was awarded to extend the pilot from 10 January 2022 until March 31, 2023, to deliver to following outcomes:

500 over 65s to receive 8 to 10 weeks of one-to-one digital support
250 over 65s to receive follow-on help through digital support groups
100 learners (based on agreed criteria) given free devices and connectivity

Staff Budget: Digital Lead – 0.6 FTE fixed term post to 31/03/23 additional cost

The Digital Skills Programme is now delivered across 21 library locations and through 3 community providers in Shrewsbury, Church Stretton and a county-wide learn-at-home service delivered through Age UK for learners unable to access a community setting.

One-to-one support is provided over 8 to 10 weeks by digital volunteers in weekly hour-long learning sessions. The programme of learning outcomes monitors progress through the 7 key learning objectives with the aim of achieving digital confidence and an improvement in wellbeing.

Digital Monitoring and Evaluation

Case Studies

A series of case studies has been developed that demonstrate the effectiveness of the programme for learners and volunteers. Extracts from these are included at the end of this report.

Survey

An online survey is in development with the council's Feedback and Insight Team to demonstrate changes in behaviour of participants such as: ability to interact with services (such as the Council) online; improvements in wellbeing; digital confidence.

Monitoring

With the council's ICT, a SharePoint List has been produced to manage participant data and log their pre and post learning assessments. This feeds into a Power Bi Report that shows the impact of the digital support received for learners that have completed their participation in the programme. In addition, the Power Bi Report shows individual provider contract performance, identifies learning centres delivering the greatest improvement in digital skills levels and how many weeks of support individuals receive.

Learner/Volunteer Data

From January 10 to March 31, 2022, 40 digitally excluded learners completed their learning and a further 46 are now in learning. Monitoring for this quarter is due in at the end of June.

As of May 31, 2022, 45 digital volunteers (updated 08/06/2022 to 54) are delivering free digital support in libraries, the Roy Fletcher Centre and the Mayfair Community Centre as well as in the homes of learners unable to access a community setting through Age UK.

The Power Bi platform of completed learners identifies the following:

Average digital skills level on starting learning 18.2%

Average digital skills level on completion 57%

Average improvement in digital skills level 38.8% - this is expected to increase

Average number of weeks of learning 9.7 – this is expected to reduce

Participant age ranges

Under 65: 1.4%

65 – 74: 45%

75 – 84: 41%

85 and over: 12.6%

Referral routes

57% self refer as a result of publicity or word-of-mouth

24% are people from the list of "shielded" residents identified by Customer Services during lockdown

10% are through Shropshire Local

9% a range of other sources including Social Prescribing

There are currently 59 learners awaiting support on the SharePoint List and a further 53 waiting to be contacted on the Shielded List.

Case studies

“It’s been brilliant, now I can go-it-alone on my tablet and laptop,” says 74-year-old Elaine Wood. “I used computers in my job until I retired 15 years ago, but once out of the workplace I quickly lost touch with technology. It’s a brilliant service and I looked forward to my learning sessions every week. Meeting up with the lovely volunteer who supported me and being in a new place was wonderful. The way things are now, you must get online or get left behind. I’m using the internet



every day and it’s changed my life for the better.”



“I felt left behind, I couldn’t even send a text,” says 73-year-old Mike Wason. “But with each learning session I could see myself improving. The support was fantastic, and the volunteers made me feel so relaxed that I looked forward to my time the IT Club each week. The digital world is embedded into my life now. I’m online every day checking my favourite sports’ websites for updates and I’m enjoying solving daily Wordle puzzles.” Mike and his

partner Sue Harrison now enjoy video calls with family in Sweden and are managing their finances quickly and easily using online banking. “Sue joined me in getting help and it’s been life-changing for her too. Being confident online has given us both an amazing boost.”



“Older people are worried about everything going online and can feel like their choices are being taken away. It’s worse if they have no family to help them learn how to use the internet safely,” says digital volunteer Allan Read. “I’ve helped a learner who wants to write a book using a digital dictation system, and another who wants to use eBay.

They all need help with their digital confidence and to find better ways to stay in touch with family and friends using Skype or Zoom.”



“The Shropshire Council programme is unique because it gives one-to-one support over 8 to 10 weeks and builds confidence at the right pace,” says digital volunteer Stephanie Maclennan

“It’s an interesting role, you don’t need specific skills but wanting to help people is important. It’s fun getting to know different people and rewarding to see their progress. I share my knowledge of how to use the internet safely, at the same time as building my skills in communication and problem solving.”

Jenny Taylor, CEO Roy Fletcher Centre, Shrewsbury: "Within weeks of people attending the IT Club the positive difference in some was amazing. This was noticeable with one participant who was polite but never said much till one day they walked in with a big smile, cheery word, and quip. Other volunteers noticed the change it was so dramatic. Many of the learners say this is the one thing they look forward to each week, especially those living on their own. At the end of each session volunteers stay for a chat and they all say that these sessions are as much about the social aspect for the learners as they are about IT. Volunteers know the life story of many now!"

Conclusion



The monitoring and evaluation platform of the Digital Skills Programme is adaptable for any adult and setting. The 7 learning outcomes apply to all, and can be adapted for children too. The aim of the programme is to upskill our older citizens, but it delivers far more than this.....

One of the most powerful results of the digital confidence achieved by participants is their increase in well-being, independence, and overall confidence. They are more in control of their future, later in life.

Here are just some of the additional benefits the programme brings:

1. Making new friends at their IT Clubs.
2. Connecting with family and friends not seen for years.
3. Keeping in touch with close family locally and distant.
4. Learning new hobbies and interests such as word games and online sport.
5. Digital banking freedom with many banks having closed high street premises.
6. Online food and shopping deliveries,
7. Digital library access to read newspapers and books on their devices
8. Online prescriptions and health management through the NHS app.
9. Being inspired to get out again and try new hobbies and interests such as walking, U3A, volunteering and sport.
10. Shopping around for holidays and deals to help save money.

BBC Radio Shropshire recently visited a Council-funded Digital Support Group at the Roy Fletcher Centre where learners attend post-learning for friendship and continued digital support. Listen here:

https://soundcloud.com/shropshire-council/ict-training-for-over-65?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Examples of improvements in wellbeing:

"I needed to get out more and meet new people – my digital volunteer has been so patient and kind as well as great company each week. His support has given me the confidence to join the local U3A, so now I've got even more to look forward to.

Improving my internet skills has opened doors for me, and thanks to this marvellous initiative from Shropshire Council my overall confidence has been given a real boost.”

“Getting one-to-one help from my digital volunteer each week at the library has given me a positive new outlook. I look forward to being online now and feel much better about life in general – it’s been fantastic.”

“I have injuries sustained in a car crash and my mobility had decreased in lockdown. I wanted to get moving again and my step-counting app motivates me to get out and about more.”

“We encourage anyone who is older and afraid of the internet to take the plunge and go for it! You’ve nothing to lose and you’ll really enjoy yourself.”

Our 45 (and counting) digital volunteers are gaining life skills, employability skills, problem solving skills and meeting new people. Research shows that helping others reduces stress, boosts self-esteem, and helps people to feel happier.

Enabling older people, in good time, before the onset of great ageing or frailty, not only enhances their wellbeing, life choices and quality of life, it brings the familiarity and foundation for the Internet of Things that could support someone in their own home for longer as an alternative to providing care and support.

Andrea Miller. Digital Champion Lead, Shropshire Council 31.05.2022