



Doing digital inclusion with the most excluded: Older People



TalkTalk

Good Things Foundation recently ran a project in partnership with TalkTalk focused on helping people start and stay safe online. 23 Online Centres tried out new activities in order to reach people who are the most digitally excluded in the UK. People over 65, those on low incomes, and disabled people make up a large segment of the population who remain digitally excluded and they're unable to benefit fully from all the opportunities that the internet and technology can provide.

Online Centres worked hard to reach these excluded learners. When we evaluated the project, we spoke to a number of Centres to capture their experiences. This research has enabled us to produce three informal guides to doing digital inclusion with highly digitally excluded people. Each guide is about working with a different excluded audience. This one focuses on engaging older people. It is intended for small organisations who want to do more work to reach the most digitally excluded in the UK.

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Why is it important to engage older people in digital inclusion?

- **Older people are more likely than the average internet user to carry out only a narrow range of online activities.** Around half of internet users over 65 are narrow users, versus a quarter of the wider internet-using population.
- **Older people are also more likely to consider themselves not confident in managing personal data and online security.** This makes a focus on online safety particularly relevant for this learner group.
- **A significant number of older people benefit from the convenience and savings of online transactions by using 'proxy access': asking a trusted person to do the transaction for them.** This can leave older people needing to rapidly adjust to independent internet use if they experience a loss of proxy help - for example through a bereavement, or relatives moving away.
- **People who are socially isolated and lonely are more vulnerable to financial scams. The average age of a scammed individual is 75.** Lonely older people with little social contact can be especially susceptible to calls and messages from apparently friendly people telling them that there's a problem with their device or bank account.

How to generate interest:

- **Beware of talking about 'the internet' in general terms when working with older learners.** Generalist internet courses can seem both irrelevant and overwhelming to older people. Attempting to tackle everything at once can reinforce older people's feelings that they will never catch up, entrenching negative attitudes.
- **Focus instead on the specific positive changes that particular internet activities can generate in people's lives.** Individual skills (such as using Skype to stay in touch with family) can create more interest. Try putting these activities into any promotional materials you create. If you already come face-to-face with older people in your work, start by having a personal conversation about their own needs and interests, and how the internet might play a role in these.
- **Tie engagement efforts to the types of devices that older people are likely to use.** Newer internet users (of whom the over 75s make up a significant number) are more than twice as likely to only go online using devices other than a computer. Older people are often given tablets by friends and family, but the devices go unused as people don't feel confident around them. Promoting sessions encouraging people to get to know their existing devices can attract those who are currently under-using them.



Tutor-Learner Relationships:

- **The fear, mistrust and disinterest that many older learners display around the internet can be an outward reflection of what is actually a mistrust of their own abilities.** Older people can suffer from a perception that their age means they will be less successful at learning. This may be compounded by previous negative learning experiences throughout their lifetime.
- **For this reason, digital inclusion with older people should focus as much on a tutor's relationship with the individual as on hard technical skills.** Take time to build trust with a learner. This is likely to take a significant amount of one-to-one interaction, so if you are working in a classroom setting, try to enlist some volunteers to enable individual conversations.
- **Patience is paramount.** Older learners can take a long time to become confident in understanding a task. Make sure that you explain every step clearly and double check that the person understands before moving onto the next step. Be prepared to repeat things often and give frequent reassurance.

“Older people can feel intimidated if the person helping them just sits and taps away at a keyboard. We have learned to consciously take time with people and explain what we are doing step by step on the computer, allowing the older person to take part in the process and reassuring them as we go along.”

Forth Community Resource Centre Steering Group



Session Formats:

- **Many older people appreciate the social element of group based learning, which is more likely to be created when sessions are held in regular time slots.** Don't be afraid to hold group sessions at the same time each week – but as mentioned above, beware of referring to this as a 'computer course'.
- **Working in a group setting doesn't mean that all learners have to work on the same theme at the same time.** Create free periods during which learners can work at their own pace on Learn My Way, our freely available online learning platform. Many older learners simply value having a supervised space where they can use their device relatively independently, but also feel safe in the knowledge that a tutor is there to help if things go wrong.
- **Encourage learners to keep coming for as long as they need to.** In addition to the patience of tutors and volunteers, it is helpful to allow (as far as possible) an open-ended timeframe to digital assistance. This way, learners can practise what they have learnt, repeating tasks that they have decided they want to master. They may need to carry out tasks with your support multiple times before they are happy completing them alone.

Providing a casual 'troubleshooting' service for existing learners can also stop small niggles becoming big barriers to further device use.

Transacting Online:

- **Only focus on online transactions once learners feel comfortable with simpler online activities.** If you think learners are ready, direct them to specific courses on Learn My Way relating to **online shopping** and **keeping your money safe**.
- **For another way to make online transactions more familiar, walk learners through what you would do yourself if you were transacting online.** Start with well-known high-street names that older learners know and trust. Sit with a learner and a device and go through all of the steps you would complete if you were shopping online for yourself.
- **For another way to make online shopping seem less scary, explain that learners can use PayPal or set up a specific bank account for transacting online.** This limits the amount of money that they are 'exposing' to online risk at any one time, and familiarises them with shopping whilst protecting their main accounts or cards.
- **Use our course 'Staying Safe in Your Digital World' to help learners recognise scams.** However, bear in mind that focussing on scams too early on in a learning journey can strengthen learners' perceptions that the internet is not for them.



Things to Remember:

- **Age-related memory decline means that learners can forget the precise detail and order of steps involved in completing a particular task.** This can be frustrating for older learners, and compound their feelings of being incapable. Remind learners that forgetting things is a completely normal part of the learning process, and allow them to revisit topics as often as they want during supported sessions.
- **Older learners may not engage with digital learning until unfortunate life circumstances have effectively forced their hand.** Some older learners may therefore start digital learning at a time that is already unsettling and stressful. Accordingly, the relationship and bond that forms between a learner and a tutor can become even more important in building confidence and supporting independence.

Real Experiences

"I have learnt to open my emails with confidence, which is very important to me in my role as deacon at my local church. I have also learned to compose and send emails with much more confidence. I have learnt the dangers of opening emails from unknown sources and now never open an email unless I know where it has come from."

Nanette, Learner at Crewe Library

"Previously I spoke to my relatives on my landline telephone. I now speak to them for a lot longer on Facebook and WhatsApp and it doesn't cost me anything."

Learner at Pakistani Community Centre

Useful Resources

- **Friends Against Scams** - An initiative run by the National Trading Standards Scams Team, aiming to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams
- **Age UK Internet Security Booklet**

If you decide to do more digital inclusion with older people, let us know how you get on! We're always available at hello@goodthingsfoundation.org, or tweet us [@Online_Centres](https://twitter.com/Online_Centres). We'd love to hear from you.

