**Get Connected Technology Project**

**Impact and Evaluation Report**

**November 2017**

## Background

As a charitable organisation, Gateshead Older People's Assembly supports older people (50+) across Gateshead in a number of ways.  The projects undertaken by the Assembly and the services it provides are guided by the organisation's Strategic Delivery Plan, which was driven by the charity's trustees, themselves older people from Gateshead.

The Strategic Delivery Plan is underpinned by nine strategic objectives:

1. **Increase older people's knowledge of issues affecting them**
2. **Be the voice of older people in Gateshead**
3. **Reduce loneliness and isolation for older people in Gateshead**
4. **Increase opportunities for older people to live fuller lives**
5. **Improve the health and wellbeing of older people in Gateshead**
6. **Reduce the number of falls suffered by older people across Gateshead**
7. **Build stronger networks to support older people across Gateshead**
8. **Increase opportunities for older people to participate in wider society**
9. **Increase community safety and awareness of safeguarding issues**

These objectives are not mutually exclusive and the Assembly aims to meet at least three of these objectives with every project it undertakes.  The Get Connected technology project meets objectives 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9.



Loneliness and social isolation are major issues for older people in Gateshead. Approximately 20% of Gateshead households are occupied by older people (women aged 60+, men aged 65+) living alone.  For those aged 75+, 61.4% live alone.

Technology is one of the easiest ways to connect with others, but many older people either do not have the skills or are not confident in the skills they do have with regard to using computers.  Across the UK, approximately 40% of older people do not have access to the internet at home.  Access to the internet is not enough, however, with 77% of older people reporting that they would need someone to walk them through setting up a new device.

The Assembly provides dozens of opportunities for older people in Gateshead to connect with others, but there are many who want more.  They want to stay in touch with friends and relatives who live far away.  They want to connect with those who share their interests.  They want to feel a part of the connected world – many are curious about technology, but are intimidated by it.  To that end, Gateshead Older People's Assembly sought funding from the Comic Relief Local Communities Fund at the Community Foundation to deliver four 10-week technology classes to a total of 40 participants.



## Outline of the Project

The Get Connected programme was not designed to be a "traditional" technology course.  The focus was on helping participants connect with the wider world, so there would not be any discussion of spreadsheets, word processing, etc.  Instead, Get Connected focused on:

- The Basics (How does a computer work?  What is the Internet?  What can a computer do?)
- The Internet (basic navigation, searching, bookmarking, etc.)
- Taking and editing photos
- Email
- Skype

- Facebook

- Making life easier (banking, paying bills, shopping online, etc.)

- Apps and extras (based on cohort interest – may include topics such as genealogy, YouTube, blogging, etc.)

- Staying safe online

- Shopping for technology

Our vision for the Get Connected programme was that participants would leave with an increased level of knowledge and confidence regarding the use of computers. By no means would participants exit the programme as experts, but they would be able to connect with friends and family and the wider world using computers on a basic level.

All forty spaces were filled within days of announcing the class, resulting in a waiting list. This indicates the level of demand for a technology course. Delivery of the project commenced in February 2017 and closed in November 2017.

Of the 40 participants who began the course, 33 completed it successfully.

Participants were given pre- and post-course surveys measuring their knowledge of and confidence in performing basic technology tasks. The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was administered to assess the impact learning new skills and becoming more technologically connected had on participants' mental health.

The WEMWBS consists of 14 positively worded statements, which respondents score to indicate how well the statement describes how they've felt over the previous two weeks. **The average WEMWBS score pre-course was 44.78 (out of a possible 70, with each statement scored from 0-5). Upon completion of the course, the average rose 12.22% to a score of 50.25.**



Impact on Mental Wellbeing (WEMWBS)

The WEMWBS statements with the highest average levels of improvement following the course were:

- **I've been feeling useful.  (32% average improvement)**
- **I've been feeling relaxed.  (22% average improvement)**
- **I've been feeling optimistic about the future. (18.5% average improvement)**
- **I've been thinking clearly.  (17.5% average improvement)**

**Exit surveys also indicated a marked increase in the level of confidence participants felt in using computers, with the average rising 29.6%** (1.69/4 pre-course v. 2.19/4 post-course).

**Participants were asked to rate their confidence in performing seven computing tasks** (e.g., sending an email, taking a photo, making a purchase, etc.).  Pre-course, the average reported confidence rating for these tasks was 1.3/4.  Post-course, the average reported confidence rating for these tasks was 2/4, **an increase of 53.8%.**
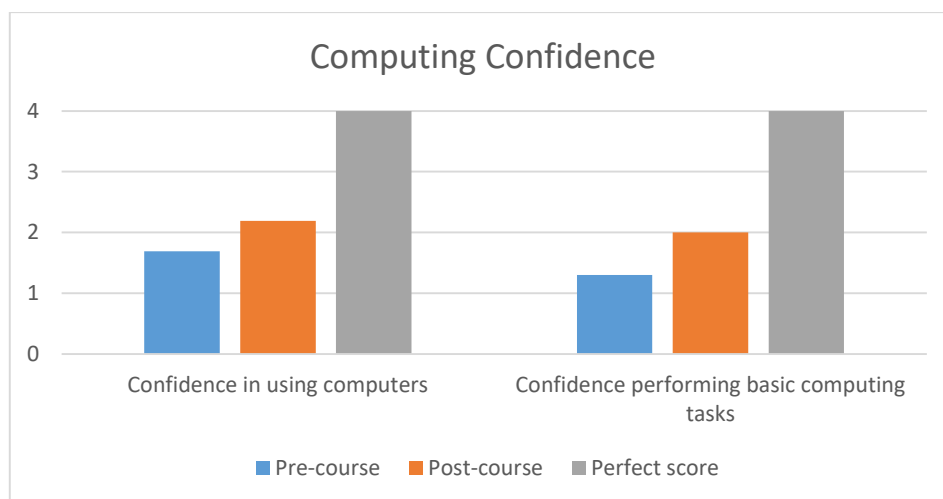


**Participants also reported feeling more connected to their friends/family and wider world after completing the course.  The feeling of connectedness with friends/family rose 21.5%** (1.91/4 pre-course v. 2.32/4 post-course) **and with the wider world the increase was 13.2%** (2.04/4 pre-course v. 2.31/4 post-course).
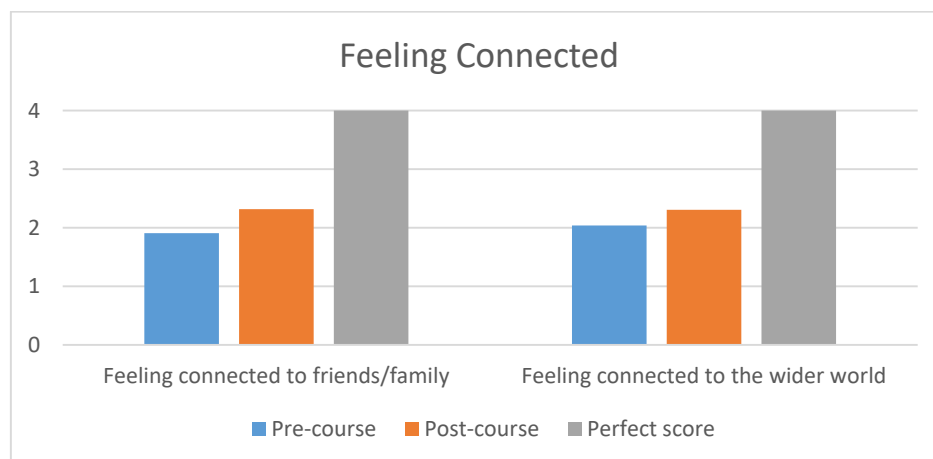
A sample of the feedback from the post-course surveys:

*"Enjoyed learning new things like online shopping and Skyping. The instructor is very patient. Good company and had a laugh. Learned a lot about scams on the computer. Good class, great people. Would like to do another course as I need more help."*

*"Have enjoyed the company and getting to feel more confident."*

*"Enjoyed the camaraderie as we are all in the same boat."*

*"Wonderful instructor. Clear and concise information about the usage of computer equipment."*

*"Enjoyed working with others who only knew as much as me…or less!"*

*"Loved learning more about computers and what can be achieved with them."*

*"Nice learning to take photos and send messages and get in touch with people."*



## Lessons Learned

The Get Connected programme changed to suit the needs and abilities of its learners. It became clear early on in cohorts 1 and 2 (which were delivered concurrently for approximately 6 weeks) that a slower taster-style format should be used for cohorts 3 and 4. Some learners in the earlier cohorts took a bit longer than expected to get comfortable with the mechanics of using keyboards and touchscreens, which meant we could not progress as quickly as anticipated. Secondly, other learners were very focused on mastering tasks and seemed to be placing a bit too much pressure on themselves to know how to perform a task independently by the end of each session.

The course outline for cohorts 3 and 4 was therefore scaled back and delivered on a more basic level and it was repeatedly emphasised to learners that they were not expected to be experts by the end of the course. Cohorts 3 and 4 saw higher weekly

attendance rates and 100% completion rates and it is thought that the slower pace and emphasis on experience rather than mastery accounted for this.

## Legacy

The social element of the sessions provided participants with an opportunity to meet new people.  Providing lunch or refreshments for participants was hugely popular, as all expressed how nice it was to share a meal with their new friends and discuss the topics covered in class.

One participant acquired a tablet approximately 75% of the way through the course, which she is using regularly to search for jobs.  Another bought a smartphone and uses it to text his grandson on a daily basis.  Four other participants are now regularly borrowing class tablets to use while they're visiting our community café, making our goal of creating a mini internet café a reality.

Six participants have brought their own devices in for help in setting up email, Skyping, and downloading games.  All expressed pleasure in feeling more confident in using their devices at home on a more regular basis following the course.

Of the 33 individuals who completed the Get Connected programme, 29 expressed a strong interest in moving on to the next level of technology training, should one be offered.  All identified specific topics they would like to learn more about in the next level of the Get Connected programme, which included learning in greater detail about online banking, social media, shopping online, managing email, and avoiding scams.

Get Connected will be delivered for at least an additional two cohorts, as we still have a waiting list of 24 people.

## Conclusion

The Get Connected programme has been both a success and a learning opportunity. All participants increased their confidence around using computers, reported feeling more connected to friends and family and the wider world, and showed a number of

marked improvements in terms of their mental health and wellbeing. All but four of the participants expressed an interest in attending a second level of the class, should one be offered in the future.

There was a high level of demand for this course, as evidenced by how quickly the classes filled and the fact that we are left with a sizeable waiting list after the delivery of all four cohorts.

Thanks to the Comic Relief Local Communities Fund at the Community Foundation, Tyne & Wear and Northumberland for supporting this project.

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