"Closing the Digital Divide"
BCS Specialist Group Webinar

Enabling digital participation for all:
What we can do to support older people.

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Some of the basics

- 11- 13% of UK adults do not use the internet; (Ofcom 2019).

- One in three adults never use a computer to go online. (Ofcom 2019).

- Existing approaches can only help those for whom they are appropriate.

- The pandemic has been a wake-up call signalling the urgent need for a new approach

" If you always do what you've always done, then you'll always get what you've always got"

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Benefits of Digital Participation

BUT . . .

Not everyone is enjoying these benefits

Why?

- the Sus-IT project was conceived ...

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'Sustaining ICT use by older people to sustain autonomy and independence' (Sus-IT) project:

A three year investigation into digital participation of older people and how to sustain ICT use.'

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Sus-IT project information

- Funded by RCUK i.e. jointly by all five UK research councils: ESRC, EPSRC, BBSRC, MRC, AHRC

- Part of the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) Programme

- c£1.5 million funding received for 3.25 years of research

- Involved a multidisciplinary team of academics from 8 UK universities, with participation of 1000 older people and 100 + research users
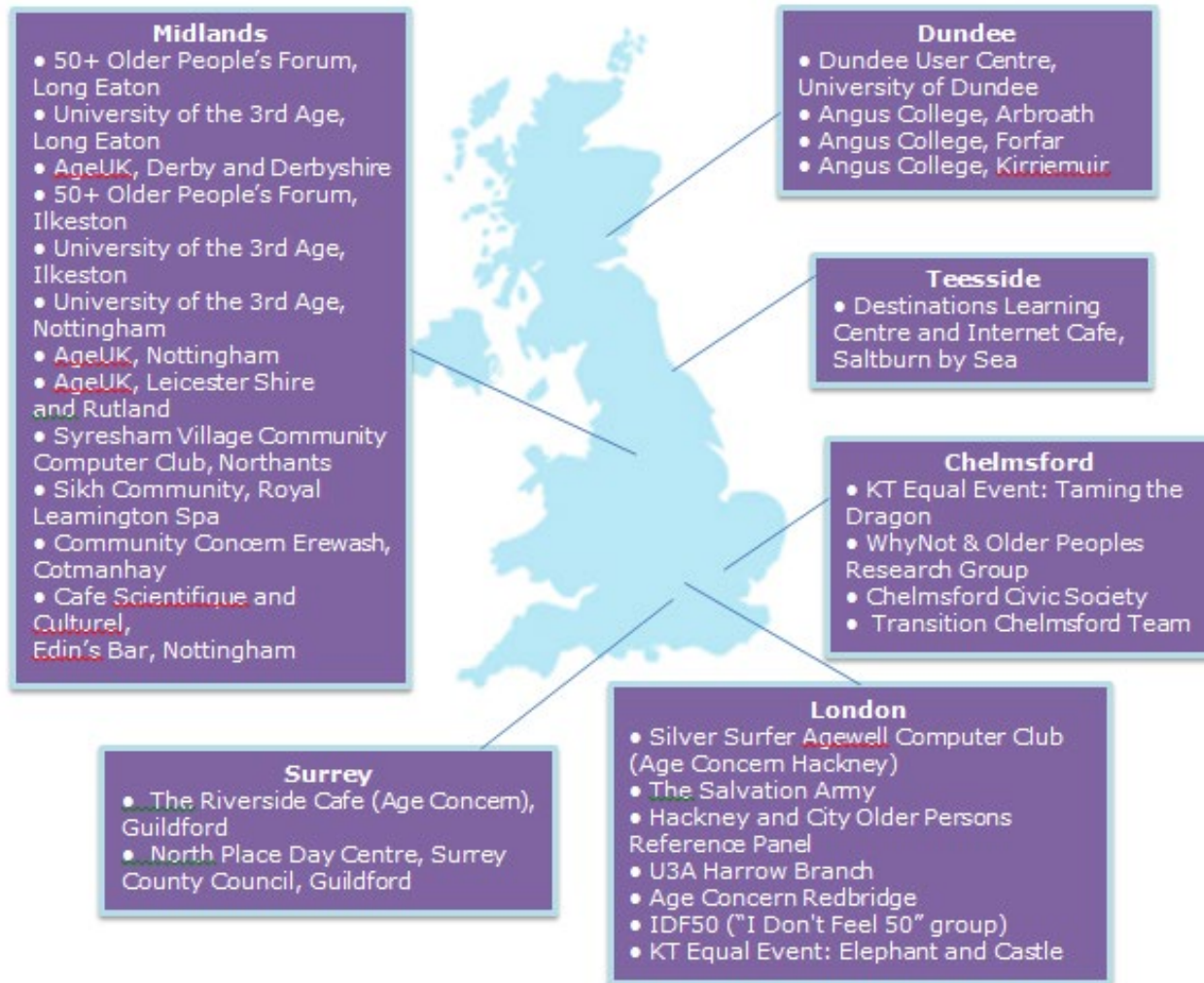

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Project Participants

Midlands
- 50+ Older People's Forum, Long Eaton
- University of the 3rd Age, Long Eaton
- AgeUK, Derby and Derbyshire
- 50+ Older People's Forum, Ilkeston
- University of the 3rd Age, Ilkeston
- University of the 3rd Age, Nottingham
- AgeUK, Nottingham
- AgeUK, Leicester Shire and Rutland
- Syresham Village Community Computer Club, Northants
- Sikh Community, Royal Leamington Spa
- Community Concern Erewash, Cotmanhay
- Cafe Scientifique and Culturel, Edin's Bar, Nottingham

Dundee
- Dundee User Centre, University of Dundee
- Angus College, Arbroath
- Angus College, Forfar
- Angus College, Kirriemuir

Teesside
- Destinations Learning Centre and Internet Cafe, Saltburn by Sea

Chelmsford
- KT Equal Event: Taming the Dragon
- WhyNot & Older Peoples Research Group
- Chelmsford Civic Society
- Transition Chelmsford Team

Surrey
- The Riverside Cafe (Age Concern), Guildford
- North Place Day Centre, Surrey County Council, Guildford

London
- Silver Surfer Agewell Computer Club (Age Concern Hackney)
- The Salvation Army
- Hackney and City Older Persons Reference Panel
- U3A Harrow Branch
- Age Concern Redbridge
- IDF50 ("I Don't Feel 50" group)
- KT Equal Event: Elephant and Castle

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Sus-IT project: research questions

- What are the problems and support needs of older ICT users?

- What potential solutions are available or could be developed?

- How can a wide range of stakeholders, including older people, work together on this?

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Critical success factors for digital participation

© Fox Business

1. Design of hardware and software

2. Quality and availability of learning opportunities, help and support

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Barriers to uptake for older people

Change pic

- Physical changes: e.g. eyesight, hand dexterity, mobility

- Psychological and cognitive changes: e.g. confidence, memory

- Social changes: e.g. family members moving away

- Technology changes: e.g. new versions of familiar things

Despite these barriers, many older people are enthusiastic and successful users of ICTs but often find it hard to sustain their digital participation

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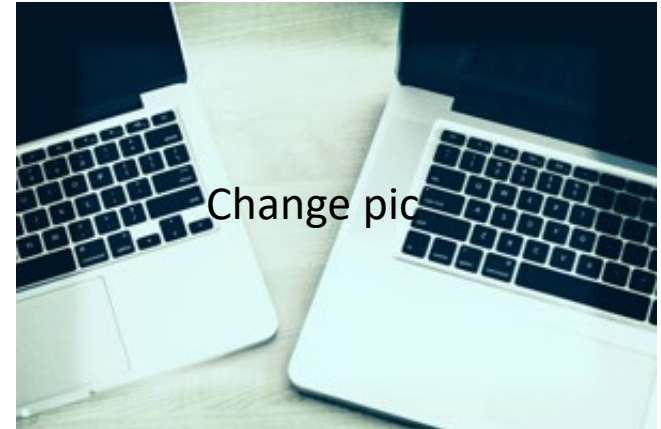
Support Needs

Over 56% of older people surveyed said that **support of family and friends was the most important factor** in enabling and sustaining participation in the digital world.

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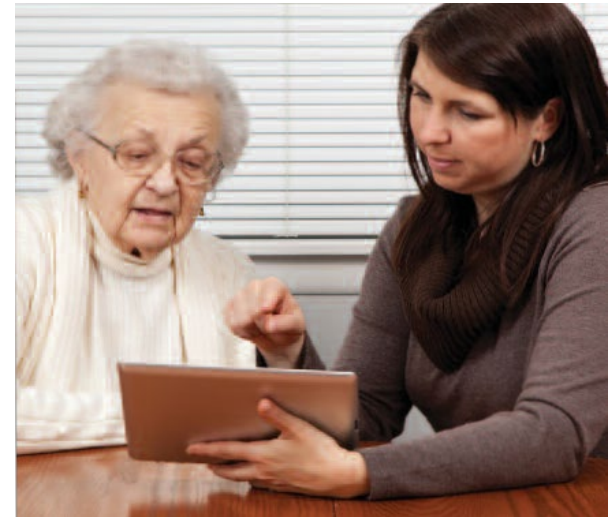
User Needs: *specified **by users***
What older people really, really want…..

informed by 1000+ older people

ICT support that is:

- readily available and trusted

- delivered in welcoming local venues

- embedded in social activities

- free of time pressure and assessments

- sustained and on-going support

- inclusive of problem solving/troubleshooting

- impartial and that offers 'try before you buy' opportunities

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What Older People *actually* Get

- 'Patchy' availability and quality

- Limited access

- Lack of impartial advice

- Reduced public access in some areas eg libraries closing

- Skills training designed for the workforce

   - *rather than empowering them and enhancing their quality of life*

- "Interventions" e.g. 'taster sessions', trials and pilots; training to claim benefits; job search instruction. These emphasise *getting* online rather than *sustaining* connection

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Reality of user experience: Worlds apart

Workplace support

Home Alone

✓	No cost to end user	X
✓	Troubleshooting assistance	X
✓	Access to free training	X
✓	Internet provision	X
✓	Spam filters and virus protection	X
✓	Updates and hardware maintenance	X
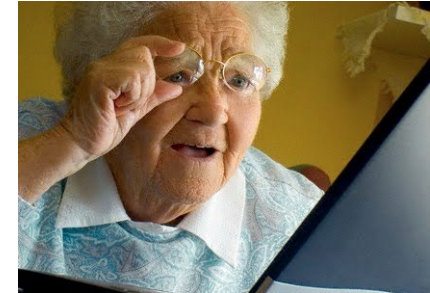
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So those who need the most help get the least...

What can this specialist BCS group and its partners do to change that?

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What can we do to close the digital divide?

What we can do to support older people

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Case study: 84-year-old Maureen's journey from digital exclusion into the digital world

In September 2020 Maureen was living alone in lockdown. Her daughters set her up with an iPad to reduce her isolation and see her grand children. She had **never used ICT before**. An iPad was selected because of its larger screen size, ease of use and **adaptability for poor eyesight.**

The family also tried to set up her NHS app but as Maureen doesn't have a driving licence or passport, it required additional support from her GP to do this.

Maureen's daughter said, "Introducing my mum, to her iPad was incredibly hard work, her first response was usually **negative, followed by her anxiety** that she will click on the wrong thing."

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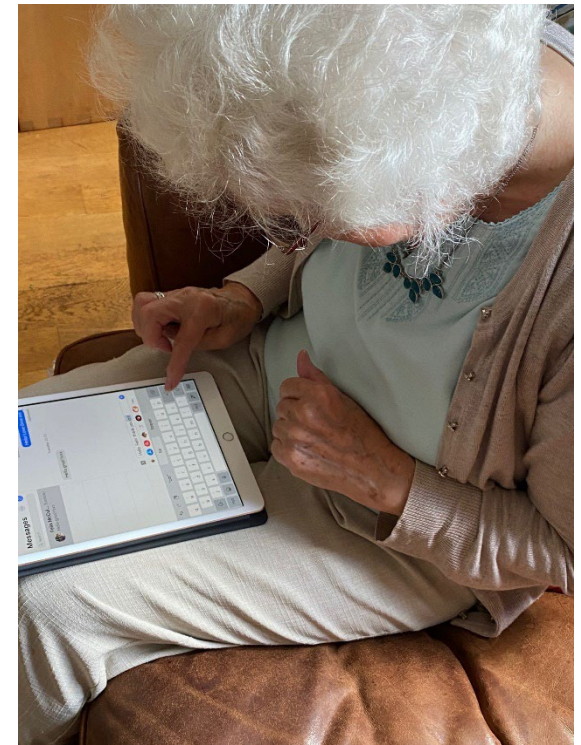
Case Study (continued)

"She has since explained that the negativity is due to her frustration at not finding any of it intuitive, when to us all of it is. If there's anything we don't know, we try clicking on buttons or arrows that we think might resolve our issue or googling to find out. When she lifted the screen lid **for the first time**, she told me **her heart was racing. Her fear was very real"**.

Other design challenges for Maureen included the need for more force to the 'Home button' than Maureen could muster, puzzlement as to why she had to press it at all; "finger recognition" **initially confused** her; as did knowing where to place her finger; forgetting about the procedure meant that she could not get the iPad to work; knowing what was meant when her family told her to touch the "button" on the iPad in order to unlock it; keeping the device charged as it required finding a tiny hole in which to plug the cable! It took a few failed attempts at FaceTime before Maureen was able to respond to an incoming FaceTime call; This was a significant triumph as these calls became critical to sustaining contact.

Her daughter said " my mum having an iPad or smart phone is **as important as having an emergency pull cord.** It's her life-line to stay connected."
https://wessexahsn.org.uk/news/2004/my-mum-gets-her-first-ipad

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Some lessons from the case study

Barrier	Solution
Difficulty seeing a regular screen due to poor eyesight	Choice of iPad for larger screen and capability for adapting icons
Requirement for a smart phone, driving licence or passport in order to register for the NHS app	GP surgery provided verification for registration
Maureen's concern that 'it would all go wrong' caused fear and trepidation	Compassionate, patient support from family (with the reward of seeing her grandchildren regularly)
Poor short term memory meant she couldn't remember her pass code	Pass code written on paper attached to the iPad
'Finger recognition' was baffling to Maureen and she wasn't sure which button to press to make her thumb print work	Regular phone calls were essential to remind Maureen what to do
Lack of familiarity with charging the iPad (need to locate the tiny hole for charger cable!)	Patient, in-person support and explanation from her family and practical problem solving.

Outcome – Maureen learned to use her iPad in limited but life-enhancing ways

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Why does support from family & friends work ?

Because it is:

- Embedded in a social process
- Takes place in a comfortable setting
- Uses the older person's language
- Does not require the older person to fill in forms, pass assessments, pay charges etc
- Usually trustworthy and compassionate
- Usually able to demonstrate clear advantages that are relevant

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What does all this evidence tell us?

From this inspirational case study and extensive research and reviews of good practice, common themes emerge regarding both the barriers that exist and 'what works' to overcome them

COMMON BARRIERS

- Access issues/problems;
- Low confidence;
- Support void;
- Stress & Fear;
- Poor design;
- Perceptual, motor and cognitive challenges.

WHAT WORKS

- Ease of access;
- Empowering users;
- Appropriate design;
- Light-touch administration;
- Continuity of in-person support at home/in the community;
- Building confidence.

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Solutions people want

Community-based support venues which are informal and welcoming and offer opportunities to:

- drop in for a coffee,
- meet friends,
- pursue hobbies,
- learn new skills in a relaxed and familiar setting
- escape the 'angst' of digital participation at home alone
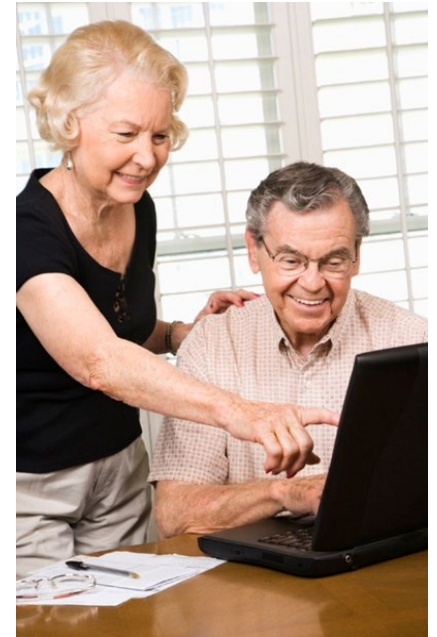
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Embedding support that works (1)

- Create community hubs located in welcoming and comfortable local venues

- Using language familiar to the older person

- Readily available, trustworthy and compassionate

- Free of time pressure and assessments

- Good connection: free or affordable broadband and mobile signal and/or Wi-Fi

- Appropriate hardware devices (phone, tablet, laptop etc)

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Embedding support that works (2)

- Formally trained tutors & informal peer support;
- No form filling, assessments or charges etc
- Locally run with on-going dialogue with users
- Responsive to local needs and local assets
- Applying established and ethical good practice
- Sustainable and on-going
- Utilising help from local councils, businesses, schools, third sector and other organisations

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Engage older people in setting the agenda

Digital technologies can enhance lives of older people in many ways:

- Solve their problems
- Manage their lives
- Enhance their well-being
- Engage with friends
- Pursue their passions

Identifying and meeting such needs is
key to encouraging uptake

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Example of good practice

Example: Long Eaton 50+ forum Sus-IT Drop-in and Computer club www.lead50plus.com

User- selected learning topics eg:

- using skype to communicate with friends/family
- using mobile phones
- Printing out digital photos/digital photography
- online transactions and shopping
- price comparison
- accessing public services
- information about different types of tablets
- how to access self-care videos eg keep-fit
- planning and booking travel

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Social process is the key!

" We should not consider increasing online presence among older people on its own; it is easier to bring people together as a community and to make using the internet part of that."

(Adam Hillmore, DWP 2011)

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Practices which can deter marginalised and excluded people

- Fixed appointments

- Standardised formal instruction

- Form filling and assessment

- Use of unfamiliar or threatening language/terms

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The case for a new approach

To achieve digital participation of many of the excluded or marginalised 11%+ of society requires something different:

A needs-based solution embedded in the community

We already HAVE the know-how:

- User-specified needs

- Knowledge of the common barriers to adoption of digital technologies and 'what works' to overcome them

- A proposition for community based hubs

- A strategy for digital participation for all

The pandemic has given unprecedented impetus to apply this knowledge:

What are we waiting for?

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Summing up: key requirements

- Community based and socially embedded

- Understanding and meeting real user needs

- Follow the user's agenda

- Meet people where they are

- Apply good practice

- Adhere to an ethical code of practice

- Appropriate design

- Easy access to devices & support

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The core challenge for this 'Closing the Digital Divide' Specialist Group and its partners & collaborators is to apply the lessons from research and good practice to support older people & other disadvantaged groups in making use of digital technologies.

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Change Mindsets and Habits!

- Acknowledge past mistakes

- Work on exploring and understanding **user needs**

- Challenge your own assumptions

- Work on older-friendly design – as a rewarding task

- Stop doing all the things **we know** are barriers to older people going digital

- Meet real needs by doing what **we know** works

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Next steps

- Develop awareness of the real needs of older people
- Promulgate this with use of tailored educational materials, videos, workshops etc

- Encourage all BCS members who plan to initiate activities to enable digital participation to first develop knowledge and understanding of the intended users' needs and goals

- BCS SG to develop and host a programme of follow-on event(s) on the policies, strategies, guidance & training and ethical code of practice. (Future Webinar *"Closing the digital divide – a strategy for making   digital participation a reality for all":* 2023)

- Implement strategy for delivering digital participation for all

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Thank you for listening

Acknowledgements

- Wendy Olphert for her profound insights into digital disengagement which inspired the Sus-IT project.

- Freddie Quek for leading the vision of the crucial role of the BCS in closing the digital divide

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Q & A

Led by Freddie Quek