

DIGITAL INCLUSION PROJECT

YEAR 5 - INTERIM REPORT
APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2022

HOW WE HELP

The Digital Inclusion Project with Fulham Good Neighbours (FGN) has been running since April 2018, successfully addressing the demand for digital support from older residents in Fulham. The project works to reduce digital exclusion and social isolation and so far it connected 104 older people with volunteers who supported them to develop their digital skills via one-to-one lessons.

Since January 2019, the project benefits from the generous patronage of the ExPat Foundation, who increased the support by over 400% from March 2022. This enables the project work to continue to develop individual digital skills, grow older people's connectivity and interactions with the community and local services, helping to address feelings of isolation and loneliness.

The project continues to support the organisational vision of building a community where neighbours look after each other and increases the availability and access to social activities via online or hybrid delivery. The Online Chair Based Exercise, Art Groups, Online Gardening events and online Quizzes attract residents who are housebound or self-isolating. The project also supports the FGN volunteer training and events by enabling volunteers to join the Induction training and events online via online video meeting tool Zoom.

Although the use of online services has increased during the pandemic, we are aware that many older or disabled people remain isolated in their homes without online access, with the Lloyds Consumer Digital Index 2021 estimating as many as 5% of the UK population is still digitally excluded. To help us in our mission to reduce the digital gap, we created local partnerships with Ready Tech Go and received funds from London Marathon Charitable Trust, ensuring that access to digital equipment does not constitute a barrier for those wanting to go online.

The project now offers equipment on loan to beneficiaries, so they can start their digital learning journey. We currently have a laptop, tablets and SIM cards with Wifi placed with beneficiaries who needed this support so they can get started.

By September 2022 the majority of the digital lessons are facilitated by volunteers via home visits while observing Covid-19 safety measures. We also continue to support beneficiaries remotely via Zoom and regular check-in calls, as some of the beneficiaries are shielded in their homes:

"I have helped several people both remotely when Covid prevented home visits and in their homes. I've enjoyed all of the tasks and I think the users have benefitted."
Volunteer, 64 years old, September 2022



ABOUT THE PROJECT



The project encourages older people to be digitally curious and try technology and volunteer support. It enhances their day-to-day lives and their health, supporting them to remain independent at home for longer. To this end, we aim to match each beneficiary with a volunteer who will meet them regularly and support them for as long as they wish to continue learning.

In addition to the social benefits of meeting the volunteer, or the facilitator and other attendees at the FGN online events, the beneficiaries who engage with the digital inclusion project feel more confident in managing their health, by finding information on the Internet, booking a GP appointment, emailing their support worker, booking an online health talk or exercise class. To aid with this, since July 2022 FGN are hosting a series of monthly well-being talks delivered both online and in-person by biokineticist Simon Makell and covering topics like: management of diabetes, muscle and joint pain or how to stay active in later years.

Volunteer recruitment continues on an ongoing basis via platforms with Team London, Do-it, increased advertising via London university sites, our social media channels and FGN monthly e-newsletters.

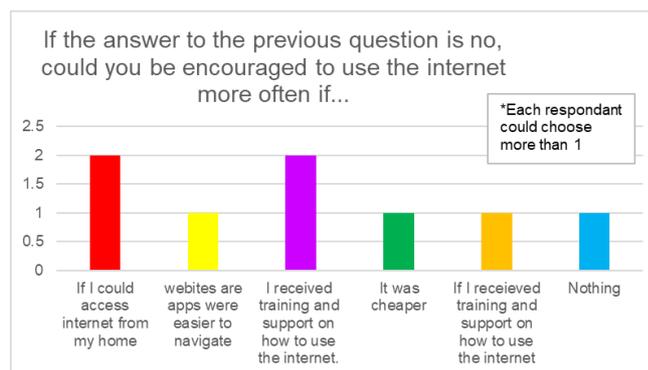
FGN RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Between July - September 2022, to help us identify any obstacles in accessing digital support and evaluate our provision, we undertook research into the perceptions of our Digital Inclusion project amongst the beneficiaries and volunteers who are engaged with the project, and those who are not. This work was undertaken in partnership with University College London alumni researcher Melissa Amato and can be read in the “Evaluation of Fulham Good Neighbours (FGN) digital inclusion support to promote improved outcomes for older, disabled, and disadvantaged Fulham residents” report (please contact us if you would like a copy).

From the respondents who told us they have not used the Internet in the last month, we learned that the main support needed to increase their online accessibility includes: having internet access at home and training on how to use it. As our Digital Inclusion project provided both these things to the beneficiaries, we are confident that we can help overcome these barriers.

We have also learned that more awareness work needs to be conducted so that more of the older Fulham residents are informed about what digital inclusion support they can access from us and they know they can reach out for support with free equipment and internet, as well as access to skilled volunteers who can help them learn how to use digital tools and make the most of what the internet can offer.

It was also very encouraging to know that from the people who have benefited from our Digital Inclusion project 100% of them would recommend the FGN digital inclusion support to other people.



BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK

"The volunteer is lovely and has lots of patience. I wanted to write things down but he said not to, so we can try to do them in practice. I keep trying on my own now. But I must admit I called him a few times and asked some things. He said 'that's it' and that I can call him when I'm stuck. Actually, I didn't realise the things I already knew, all the basic things like sending an email, going online, that kind of thing."

Beneficiary, 66 years old, September 2022

VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK

"Thanks very much for all your help and support over the last few years, I thoroughly enjoyed myself and the switch to calls during the pandemic really gave me an appreciation of how varied the work of FGN is. It also helped me get through the pandemic!"

Volunteer, 35 years old, July 2022

19

ONE-TO-ONE
BENEFICIARIES

35

ONLINE EVENTS
BENEFICIARIES

54

TOTAL
BENEFICIARIES

16

VOLUNTEERS

128

NUMBER OF
VISITS / CALLS

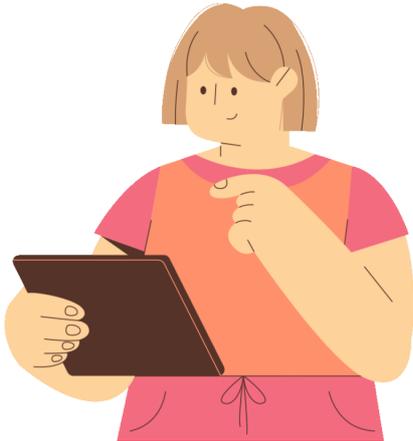
961

ONLINE EVENTS
ATTENDANCES

Digital Skills are helping beneficiaries:

- with daily tasks
- stay in touch with friends and family
- manage and save money
- monitor and improve health (book a GP, exercise class, health talk, etc.)
- find information about local activities, hobbies and holidays
- find out about local news and events





LEILA'S STORY

Leila* is 47 years old, living with long-term health issues, affecting her physical and mental health as well as her ability to go out and socialise. She contacted the Digital Inclusion project with Fulham Good Neighbours in May 2022, wanting a volunteer to chat with as much as someone who would help her set up and use her new laptop.

After being matched with one of our Digital Skills Volunteers, Leila spent her first lesson chatting and getting to know the volunteer while also discussing her digital needs and making a plan on what to tackle first. Once her device was set up and ready to use, she wanted to learn about using technology for entertainment but also to connect with others. She was particularly interested in videos, how to create them using a smart device, and how to view and post videos on platforms like TikTok. The volunteer was very impressed with Leila's enthusiasm and perseverance: *'she is an amazing and clever woman. She learns very quickly!'*

Leila found her experience with the project and the visits from the volunteer to be very beneficial for her:

"Thank you for sending the volunteer. Ever since she came, she has been helping me so much. It has been great, mentally and physically. It's giving me so much energy, even physically. I've been feeling better and I learned a lot from the volunteer. She's got a lot of positive energy and she's giving me so much, not just learning. She's helping me set up my laptop, we will set Zoom and look at that. I would love to join the online clubs, I think it will help."

In time as her confidence grew, Leila learned to use WhatsApp and Zoom, so she can connect with family, friends and activities in the local community. This was a big achievement, as she often felt very alone and isolated. Leila also decided to sign up for the weekly Online Art Group and Chair Based Exercise Class, hoping that with the help of digital tools she will be able to participate in fun, group activities and meet more people. She attended her first online class at the end of September 2022: "Thank you for the exercise class. I only had one session last week, but I have issues with mobility, my left side is weak, [the class] was so good for my joints."

Although she has made a lot of progress, Leila is keen to continue her lessons with the volunteer to learn more about searching for information online or ordering shopping and to enjoy the supportive and friendly visits from the Digital Skills Volunteer. She is also motivated to make the most of the online exercise classes and health talks and she looks forward to join the "Management of muscle and injuries" talk online this fall.

The name of the client has been changed for confidentiality reasons