

# Digital inclusion: How Age UK Camden helps older people to connect

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**Organisation:** Age UK Camden

**Country:** United Kingdom

**Level of government:** Local government

**Sector:** Recreation, culture and religion

**Type:** Public Service

**Launched in:** 2002

**Overall development time:** 1 year(s)

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# Description

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If you are reading this case study you will be online. As somebody who is digitally connected you will understand the benefits of the internet on how you communicate, and access information and services. Individuals unable to harness the power of modern information and communication technologies are digitally excluded and are on the wrong side of the 'digital divide'.

In order to help older people to connect with each other and their grandchildren digitally, the charity Age UK Camden, in partnership with the London Borough of Camden, provides computer and internet training services for older people in Camden.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- Older people are more likely to be disadvantaged in this way than other age groups.
  - Statistics on the digital divide show that in the UK 44% of people over 65 years old have never used a computer compared to 1% of young people between 16-24 years (2012).
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## Objectives

Improve access, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction

- Age UK Camden has developed a range of computer training services to enable people over 50 to enjoy the benefits of computers and the internet.
  - Their 'Beginners Guide to Computers' training course aims to help people who are over 50 to learn the basics of using a computer, the internet, and email. Age UK Camden provides more advanced courses to enable older people to become even more adept at using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to improve their quality of life.
  - For those individuals who complete the beginner course and don't own a computer or have access to the internet, Age UK Camden provides drop in sessions. These sessions provide this target group with access to ICT and also an opportunity to receive further technical advice.
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## Main beneficiaries

Elderly people

- Elderly

# Results

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## Effectiveness

- What Camden Council think of the service: There is a good partnership working between Camden Council and Age UK Camden to recruit learners and plan provision. Our learners are a fair representation of target groups in terms of age, gender and skill level. Learners have reported that the training is very effective in meeting their needs and helping them overcome their fears about attending a computer class.
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## Service quality

### Accessibility:

- What the training means for Age UK Camden: "We strive to make sure that we are able to save our learners from digital exclusion and isolation. We teach our learners how to make the best use of internet so that they are able to access public services, find information on almost any subject – internet shopping, booking travel and staying in touch with family and friends. Using email to keep in touch with family, friends and colleagues and word processing for creative purposes like typing letters and creating documents."

### Responsiveness:

- Outcomes: The impacts of the computer training programme vary on an individual basis, and often depend upon an individual's motive for participating. This can range from a person being able to email and stay in-touch with their family; to another who is delighted that there new skills mean they can make a complaint about council services online.
- The experience of users of this service: Here is an example of the impact that the computer training course has for elderly people: "I had never used a computer, and I wanted to learn so as to be able to buy online tickets for railways at cheaper prices, also for general bills and information. I also wanted to know how to use email. The course has given me the confidence to use computers and other new technology. My overall experience was positive, I got everything I wanted out of the course and more" - Joyce

### Other:

- The benefits volunteers accrue: "Nine years ago I retired having run my own business for 15 years. When I did so I decided to offer my skills to various charities. I volunteer as an IT tutor at Age UK Camden to keep me active both physically and mentally. I also wish to put something back into the community and use my skills for the benefit of others. I meet a wide range of people and deal with a wide range of problems or questions from users which I find enjoyable as well as feeling I am doing something worthwhile. It also makes me keep up to date with new ICT issues and enables me to pass on my skills to others." - Alan

# Development

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## Design

Age UK Camden's computer training services were launched in 2002. As part of its computer training portfolio Age UK Camden developed a number of services.

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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- A 'Beginner's Guide to Computers': this is a ten week course for complete beginners. For the 'Beginner's Guide to Computers' course every participant is provided with detailed training notes.
- Advanced Classes: Age UK Camden also provides more advanced weekly classes on Accessing Public Services Online; Beginners Guide to Digital Photography; Beginners Guide to Skype; Beginners Guide to Social Networking Online.
- Drop-in sessions: The sessions typically last three hours and are available from Monday to Thursday. They are open for older people with computer skills who do not have their own computer, and individuals who have completed the beginner's course but who want to continue their learning in a supported environment. Furthermore, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community specific classes and drop in sessions are held each Tuesday and Thursday. Each session lasts for an hour and a half.
- Enrolment: Services are open to anyone over 50 years of age and lives in Camden. Local residents who fall in this age group can book a place on the training courses by calling the Computer Training Coordinator. Additionally, a large number of people are also enrolled after being referred to the course by local libraries and family members. Also, the project has linked up with social care services providers in the borough, who will suggest individuals who can gain from accessing these services.
- Volunteer team: To help the one. Age UK Camden, staff member run the sessions Age UK Camden has built up a team of volunteers. Currently the team is made up of 20 volunteers. Age UK Camden has a robust recruitment process for these volunteers. Prospective volunteers have to fill out an application form, provide references, attend an interview, and shadow a class.

### Resources used:

- The computer training project receives GBP 20 000 from the London Borough of Camden, GBP 20 000 from the Henry Smith Trust and GBP 10 000 from Age UK.
- The costs of the project for a nine month period are about GBP 54 000 including GBP 38 000 on direct staffing and volunteer costs.
- The intensive nature of the Age UK Camden training programme means that the costs per hour and per student are approximately three times higher than for large national computer training providers. However, the more intensive model of learning used by Age UK Camden is fundamental to the success of the training.
- The project is part funded by the London Borough of Camden's Adult Community Learning department. This funding covers a third of the cost of the courses. The Adult Community Learning team set out clear targets for the minimum number of participants for the training course to reach. For example, the target for the year 2012/13 is 180 learners.

# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- **Project Structure:** The staffing model was historically based on a one-person project. To reflect the changing needs of the project the management of Age UK Camden split the role to allow improved teaching focus. There is now a Computer Training Tutor (21 hours a week), supported by a 14-hour a week course administrator. The additional administrative support frees up our tutor to focus on Individual Learning Plans and delivery of one-off short courses.
  - **Flexible learning model:** The specific needs of our learners means that Age UK Camden has to ensure flexibility e.g. by ensuring that staff absences caused by illness or care responsibilities etc. don't end learner contact. We work with learners in a flexible way to ensure they complete the 10-week course. This rationale is evidenced to all funders and reflects that the standard adult community learning template and normal attendance model does not work with the needs of our learners. Evidence from completion/achievement records shows that a very high proportion of learners achieve their learning goals despite having a high ratio of disabilities.
  - **Drop-in sessions:** We provide added value via our drop-in service (four sessions per week) – learners who attend our drop-in sessions have usually completed the short course but have no PC at home. The drop-in sessions provide an extra value service for those financially unable to purchase ICT equipment.
  - **Short courses:** The need for speciality subjects is met via short courses such as digital photography, Skype, social networking, and smart phones.
  - **Progression routes:** Next steps for learners are covered in the 'end of learning' review.
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## Other information

Changing motivations and increasing demand: Age UK Camden has noticed an evolution in the motivations that trigger people to access its training since the service was first launched. During the initial six years people became involved because they would think 'oh that looks interesting, I'll give it a go!' like they were starting a hobby. However, in the past four years, people accessed the training as a necessity.

This will often be because the person will have tried to access a service but can't because it can only be done, or is much cheaper, online.

Furthermore, the ways in which families now communicate now requires greater computer literacy. These factors have made older people more aware that they should develop ICT skills and keen to take up opportunities to do so. During the past three years, this has meant that Age UK Camden computer services have been accessed by an increasing proportion of people that are over 75 years old.

This level of demand means that all of the computer services that Age UK provides currently operate at full capacity. Drop in sessions, in particular, often have individuals that queue for the opportunity to use a computer or tablet. This high level of take up highlights a strong level of need and the fact that many elderly people do not have computers at home.