GET DIGITAL (2010 – 2012)

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY

Introduction

Get Digital was a digital inclusion programme for residents in sheltered housing schemes funded by the Department of Work and Pensions and the Department for Communities and Local Government. It was delivered between 2010 and 2012 by Digital Unite in partnership with National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

Get Digital worked with staff, landlords and the wider community to promote, develop and sustain digital literacy and awareness among residents. This was achieved through in-depth group learning programmes delivered across 196 schemes and by providing access to learning resources, guidance and support to hundreds more online. In total, over 500 schemes were supported with digital learning activities as a result of Get Digital and around 15,000 older people living in sheltered housing were engaged with computers and the internet.

Through the programme, grant funding of over £700,000 was also made available directly to housing organisations for the purchase of equipment, connectivity, and other products and services that would enable them to embed digital inclusion within their environments.

The programme proved to be a catalyst for change among both schemes and residents. Computer clubs were set up involving students from local schools and colleges, Silver Surfers' events were run with local charities and technical support has been provided by local volunteers. The Get Digital activities also supported local pupils with their Duke of Edinburgh Awards and prompted some residents to set up their own website.

How it worked

The tuition phase of Get Digital was delivered by Digital Unite between April 2010 and March 2011 across 196 schemes. Digital Unite Tutors spent on average 20 weeks in each scheme to help with technical set up, to engage staff and residents in the activities and then to deliver a comprehensive and structured learning programme. The tuition was also adapted to suit learners' individual interests and abilities to ensure full engagement and enthusiasm.

Topics covered ranged from how to handle a mouse and write letters to how to use search engines and send emails. The areas that proved most popular were being able to research family histories, learning how to Skype and create email accounts and playing online games.

The tutors also provided each scheme with ways of helping to extend their digital activities beyond the life of the Get Digital programme. This included supporting the development of a residents' mentor in each scheme, identifying the partnership opportunities in the local area and helping to broker those partnerships with local volunteers, schools and other organisations.

The residents' learning programme was cited by 76% of scheme contacts as key to the success of the programme as was the quality and skills of Digital Unite tutors (74%).

Lorna Hawkins, a resident at Saxon House Daventry and District Housing, was one who voiced her appreciation. "I've really enjoyed the course and have been amazed at what can be achieved using computers and the internet.

"I have some problems with the muscles in my hands which make it difficult to grip and write with a pen.

"Now I can use a headset to dictate letters to print off or email people instead, despite not having had any experience of computers before. I'm looking forward to emailing tenants at some of the other schemes and keeping in touch with their progress."

A dedicated website was also created and managed by Digital Unite to provide extensive learning support and resources enabling hundreds of other sheltered housing schemes to replicate the Get Digital model and establish their own community learning programmes.

Impact of the programme

An Impact Study was conducted by NIACE and published in March 2012. Key findings from the report (see Appendix 1) showed that as a result of Get Digital almost 75% of schemes have seen increased communications between staff and residents, facilitating new relationships. 83% of residents stated that their attitude towards computers and the internet was more positive and nearly 9 out of 10 (88%) residents said they were likely to use a computer again for activities such as sending emails, searching for information and accessing public services.

Award winning

In 2011, as a result of their participation in Get Digital, three sheltered housing schemes received gold, silver and bronze in the Digital Inclusion category in the EAC National Housing for Older People Awards. They were:

- Gresley Road in Doncaster, managed by Sanctuary Housing (pictured),
- Bethany House/Danbury Close in Essex, managed by Riverside ECHG
- Tutor Rose Court in London, managed by Stadium Housing

Taking Get Digital to the next level

The Get Digital model highlighted that once new users have been introduced to digital technology further work is needed to develop the learner's knowledge and skills and maintain their enthusiasm. Many housing schemes want to own digital inclusion within their own communities in the long term but need support to do so. As a result Digital Unite recently launched a new accredited online course – the Digital Champions ITQ (DC ITQ) to help develop formal Digital Champion skills so that digital skills learning for residents can be provided from within a housing organisation. Successful completion of DC ITQ leads to a level 2 City & Guilds qualification.

"I like the idea of being able to pass on my skills. Many of the older people in our sheltered housing schemes are socially isolated. Many are a little bit afraid of computers and don't really know where to begin. Teaching them to use a computer and showing them how to email and use Skype can really help reduce that social isolation. I would really recommend this course. I felt I already knew a lot, however I now realise that there were big gaps in my knowledge. I am already using my new skills to help to try to reduce the social isolation of many of the older people in our

sheltered housing schemes and to involve younger people in the area's more deprived social housing." Natalie Thyer is responsible for resident involvement at Sovereign Housing.

Find out more about the Digital Champions ITQ and other online learning for those helping others get online at www.digitalunite.com/academy

'Digital Unite builds on the Get Digital success'
Emma Solomon, Managing Director from Digital Unite said: "We are very proud of the Get Digital programme and our role within it. In our experience, we know that being able to understand and use digital technology has the power to transform lives and communities. This was truly apparent among the schemes which took part in Get Digital.

"The programme gave schemes a simple and practical way of modernising their offering, strengthening their resident network and harnessing links with the local communities. For the residents, being able to do things such as connect with far-flung families via Skype and email or actively pursue their hobbies and interests via the internet was nothing short of life-changing.

"Get Digital also showed the ways in which support can and should be given to housing organisations to deliver similar initiatives. With our own extensive learning guides, our online courses for Digital Champions and our popular supplier events we are continuing to build on the fantastic successes and achievements that Get Digital delivered."

For more information about Get Digital contact Katharine Teed, Communications Manager on 07801 138383 or email katharine.teed@digitalunite.com.

Appendix 1 – Key findings from the Get Digital Impact Study (March 2012)

Improved staff and resident interaction:

- Almost 75% of schemes have increased communications between scheme staff and residents, which has facilitated new relationships and developed understanding.
- 45% of staff reported that participation increased communication between scheme staff and other schemes.
- 92% of staff believed social interaction between residents had improved as a result of the programme.
- For almost 75% of schemes, communication between scheme staff and residents had improved
- For almost 50% of schemes, communications improved between residents and landlords.

Improved confidence and awareness about computers and the internet

- 57% of staff have increased confidence with their use of ICT.
- Almost 60% of residents were using email or searching for information on the web at least once a week.
- Residents who rated themselves confident to use email rose by 47% to 73%
- Residents who are confident in searching and finding information rose by 48% to 68%.
- 83% stated that their attitude towards computers and the internet was more positive.
- 75% of residents stated that they now have greater confidence in their ability to learn.

Generated enthusiasm to learn more

- 88% stated they were likely to use a computer again, and that they would be using the internet: for email; to make phone calls over the internet; to search for information; to access public services; to access government websites and; to use social networking sites.
- Over half of the residents wanted to learn more about computers and the internet.

Reduced isolation and loneliness

- 50% of stated it was now easier to keep in touch with people
- 42% stated it was easier to meet new people
- 42% stated they had more contact with family and friends
- The proportion of residents who wrote or emailed their family once or twice a week more than doubled from 10% to 22%,
- 83% of scheme managers reported that tools which enable residents to reduce their isolation most pleased their residents, with Skype a clear favourite.

Demonstrated the ease of access to public services

- The proportion of participants who used the web to access public services, rose from 33% to 39% after the training and 45% two months later – a difference of 11%
- 32% of residents stated that they were more aware of public services
- 10% stated that they now use public services more often

Enhanced health and wellbeing

- Almost 20% of residents now look after themselves better and know more about their health

Helped residents feel part of society

- 49% stated that increasing their contact with young people and the investment in their skills made them feel valued
- 54% of residents stated that taking part in the programme had increased their involvement with the local community

Appendix 2: Get Digital Case Study
Southampton City Council - on-site support Sheltered Schemes

- Participation in the Get Digital scheme has been instrumental in building on some of the initial digital learning activities at Southampton City Council's sheltered schemes.

- Over 200 residents across seven sites (34%) were introduced to computers and the internet between April 2010 and March 2011. Of those, around 40% have gone on to purchase their own computers.

- Nearly half of Southampton's sheltered schemes with on-site support now have permanent IT facilities, and plans are in place to have at least two computers at all 24 sites.

- The Get Digital programme has enabled Southampton to meet the computer training needs of 4,000 floating support clients.

- Computer and internet learning has provided Southampton with opportunities to develop local community links. This includes opening up their IT suites to Age Concern to enable computer training for 200 local residents and local Oasis academies providing buses to bring residents along to use the schools' IT suites.

- Two Activity Co-ordinator roles have been created to develop further business opportunities and harness resident engagement. One idea is to introduce an outreach project, taking a laptop and netbook with broadband access into residents' homes to give them a gentle introduction to the wonders of the internet.

- The impact of digital technology on Southampton's residents has been life changing:
  - One terminally ill resident in her 70s had sisters in Canada but was too poorly to travel. Using one of the computers on-site she was hooked up to Skype and now talks to her sisters and their families once a week.

  - One resident used the computer facilities to organise a Turkey and Tinsel holiday for 40 people including residents across a number of sites, friends and local neighbours. He also films all the special events in his communal lounge, creating DVDs with bespoke covers, and showing them on the big screen for all the residents to watch.

"Here in the Southampton Supported Housing team we have fully embraced the cultural change that digital learning has instigated for us as the benefits have been impossible to ignore. From residents and local neighbourhoods to businesses, schools and the University, it has enabled to us to engage with every corner of our community and enhance our service provision in ways we didn't think possible."

Jean Brown, Supported Services Manager
Southampton City Council