

Older Adult Digital Literacy Best Practices

Community Engagement Report

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HelpAge
Canada



SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS

The Project



This project, in partnership with HelpAge Canada, explored best practices for building digital literacy among older adults. HelpAge Canada is a national charity focused exclusively on supporting older persons in Canada and around the world. As part of their work, HelpAge Canada developed Dig-IT, a national digital literacy program for low-income older adults. The program partners with community organizations providing devices, data, training, and IT support.

The goal of this community engagement initiative was to understand the barriers and enablers to building digital literacy among older adults from multiple perspectives. Qualitative interviews were conducted with experts in the field, organizations providing digital literacy training and education to older adults, and volunteers and participants in the Dig-IT program.

Multi-stakeholder Interviews across North America

10 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted virtually with participants in Montreal, Victoria, San Francisco, Winnipeg, Hamilton, and Toronto. Interviews took place over the months of July and August 2022.

Community partners of the Dig-IT program included Ross Place Seniors Community, A&O Support Services, and the Atwater Library. One participant and one volunteer were interviewed as well as a volunteer coordinator that oversees the operation of the Dig-IT program. The Program Manager of Dig-IT at HelpAge Canada and three researchers working in the field of digital literacy were interviewed.



Three organizations providing digital literacy training, support, and/or curriculum for older adult learners participated in interviews:

- ABC Life Literacy
- Community Tech Network
- Cyber-Seniors

What We Heard



Financial Barriers

- The high cost of internet and devices act as barriers to acquiring digital literacy and contribute to the digital divide experienced by low-income older adults.
- It is important to be aware of "hidden" costs such as transportation to and from the training.
- The Dig-IT program reduces barriers to access by providing a full suite of digital literacy resources at no cost to the participant, including a tablet, which participants are gifted upon completion of the program.



Fear of the Unknown

- Fear and anxiety were commonly identified as barriers for older adults.
- This fear was attributed to limited prior exposure and experience as well as the ever-evolving nature of technology that requires a constant upgrading of skills.
- This fear can be reduced by creating a supportive environment with encouragement provided to participants from volunteers and staff.

"Digital equity creates real equity."

- Digital Literacy Program Director

Impact on Social Connectedness

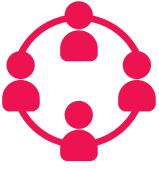
**24% of older
Canadians report
low social
participation.¹**

"You're reading up on different things, you see the pictures, you see the little video...and it's kind of nice, it does take you into another world. And you're not sort of feeling isolated because you could take a trip and see oh, well there's that guy and he's going on his yacht, and he's sailing...so you get to enjoy, you know, other people's experiences. And then later on, you say well, I'm still sitting here but for that while you did not feel shut off and you kind of feel connected."

-Dig-IT Program Participant

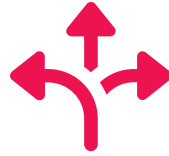
- The tablet opened up a digital world of possibilities for older adult participants.
- Older adults in the Dig-IT program used the tablet to attend virtual recreational and social programming, connect with family, and for entertainment such as watching videos and listening to music.
- Digital literacy training programs are a step toward the digital and social inclusion of older adults.

Best Practices



Community-Based

- Working with community organizations can help to identify eligible older adults and elicit trust.
- In rural and remote areas, look for areas where people congregate to host the training, such as community centres or schools that have a strong wifi connection.



Flexible Program Delivery

- Successful program delivery will largely be dependent on the preferences and needs of the older adult.
- Provide a range of delivery methods such as 1:1 training, group-based classes and/or drop-in sessions for troubleshooting.
- Providing the option for phone-based and in-person training can reduce accessibility barriers for older adults who have mobility challenges.



Accessibility

- The tablet was the preferred device among older adults due to the large screen and portability.
- Providing a stylus can be useful for older adults with dexterity challenges.
- Translating the curriculum into multiple languages can reduce language barriers.



Marketing

- Focusing on the goal of the training rather than a generic skill set can increase motivation.
- Capitalize on the interests of older adults. For example, many older adults want to use technology to connect with their family.
- Utilize existing connections for the recruitment of socially isolated older adults, for example, having their health care provider send home a flyer or brochure.



Cybersecurity

- Include cybersecurity training as part of the curriculum to reduce fear.
- Ensure participants have an understanding of common scams and how to keep their personal information secure.



Peer-to Peer Teaching

- Support older adults in learning from one another by allotting time for discussion throughout the training.
- Co-facilitation can be used as a strategy wherein older adult graduates of the program help to lead the training.
- This can empower participants and contribute to their sense of purpose.