Case Study: Volunteer Digital Champion

At Citizens Online, we use the term 'Digital Champion' to refer to people who help others understand the benefits of using the internet and can show them how to do simple things online. We believe Digital Champions can make a huge difference to people's lives.

We advocate for the use of different types of Digital Champions (DC) to help tackle digital exclusion. This case study looks at a 'Volunteer Digital Champion' – someone who supports family, friends, colleagues, customers or people in their community to enjoy all the benefits that basic digital skills can bring.

ABOUT VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPIONS

Volunteer Digital Champions provide support both one-to-one and in group sessions in a relaxed, informal environment. They provide person-centred support which is learner-led.

Volunteer Digital Champions give up their time in places such as:

- Local libraries

- Local councils or GP surgeries

- Social housing landlords

- Local charities and community groups

- Local businesses

The most important skill a Volunteer Digital Champion can have is to be enthusiastic about the benefits of being online and be willing to share this with others.

INTRODUCING PETER

Peter Greenfield has been volunteering on the Digital Brighton & Hove project since October 2016 on an ad hoc basis. With over 40 years' experience working in IT in technical and management roles, Peter was keen to start doing some volunteering as he reached retirement. As a Volunteer Digital Champion, he assists older people using smart phones and tablets, while also providing occasional help with Windows or Apple Laptops or PCs.

He currently visits senior housing schemes approximately once a week to run 'Digital Gadget Drop-ins'. During these drop-ins, residents can bring their own device and ask for help using them. From initial set up to support accessing the internet and downloading applications, Peter gets asked a whole range of questions on a range of different devices.

Peter Greenfield standing near the derelict West Pier in Brighton, during Volunteers Week 2018.

COMMUNICATION RATHER THAN IT KNOWLEDGE IS KEY

Peter has found that since starting to volunteer as a Digital Champion, one of the main skills he has learnt is how to best communicate with older people. As Peter explains:

> *"I have found that since volunteering as a digital champion, communicating with elderly people is a new skill I have started to learn. I believe this is just as important if not more so than assisting with the technology. Often someone has a device and no one has taken the time to explain to them in simple terms how to access a browser or what the internet can be used for - e.g. borrowing e-books from the library, communicating to friends and family via Skype etc."*

During his volunteering work, Peter also realised that while having an IT background might help to be a good digital champion, it is not a requirement for a volunteer:

"I have over 40 years working in IT across Mainframes, UNIX servers, Windows and MAC desktops in technical and management roles. I expected my IT experience to be a benefit to the role but I have not met a single person who uses a Mainframe or UNIX server and I doubt I ever will!"

CHALLENGES FOR OLDER PEOPLE – ONLINE SECURITY

One of the main issues that Peter has encountered while volunteering as digital champion is underlining the importance on online safety.

"The question I am asked the most is 'I have forgotten my user ID and/or password' - what do I do now? Resolving this issue can take a while. Forgotten passwords procedures usually send a link to an email. And when the elderly person can't remember their email and/or email password this can be challenging."

While there are software solutions that can be used to help people remember their passwords, Peter has noticed that many older people have more trust in a pen and paper which can prove challenging when mislaid!

LEARNING FROM PROFESSIONAL DIGITAL CHAMPIONS…AND ONLINE!

Peter's main training has come from shadowing one of Citizens Online's Professional Digital Champions, Glenn Lloyd, which has helped Peter become more confident in his own role as Digital Champion.

"I have watched how Glenn interacts with the elderly people and helps them with their devices. This hands on approach with a professional Digital Champion has proven to be a very effective training method."

Peter also finds a lot of support online working through the courses on the Digital Champions Network website. He has found some of the courses like 'Engaging with older people' useful when it comes to learning how to best communicate with elderly people, some of which have difficulty recalling information.

As well as the Digital Champions Network website, Peter also turns to Google and YouTube for technical help and further problem-solving.

> *"When I have been asked a question I can't answer, I have, so far, always been able to find an answer online somewhere".*

JOIN PETER AND BECOME A VOLUNTEER DIGITAL CHAMPION

Peter is enjoying his role as a volunteer and is looking forward to running some more digital gadget drop-ins in senior housing schemes across the city. We are very grateful for Peter's time and help and we think that volunteer digital champions are an important part of any digital inclusion project. If you are interested in becoming a Volunteer Digital Champion like Peter, please contact the Digital Brighton & Hove team at digitalbh@citizensonline.org.uk.

> *"The support I have been given by Citizens Online has been very good. I hope that helping an elderly person to access the online world is a first step to providing them with a skill that is becoming more essential as the internet replaces paper forms and snail mail."*

Thank you, Peter!

On the citizensonline.org.uk website you can find out more about **being a digital champion**, and learn about **working with digital champions** across your community.