



Digital Champion Programme – Memory loss evaluation

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Project context: Digital Champion Programme

The Digital Champion Programme aims to tackle digital exclusion by improving digital skills of older people and loaning digital devices and connectivity to those who otherwise would not be able to access it. The Programme achieves this through recruiting and training Digital Champions, who support older people as volunteers to raise their awareness about the online world, motivate them to develop their digital skills, and provide them with the support to improve their skills and confidence using the internet. As part of the Programme, Age UK National is working with 40 local Age UKs/Cymrus over a period of 2022-2026. The Programme is delivered in two cohorts, each lasting 18 months.

All local Age UKs/Cymrus involved in the Programme deliver the following four services, recognised as key to tackling main barriers to digital inclusion:

- **Volunteer Digital Champions:** recruiting and training volunteers who support older people to improve their digital skills;
- **Awareness raising activities:** reaching older people at risk of digital exclusion to inform them about how digital technology can help them and encourage them to join the Programme;
- **Digital skills sessions:** supporting older people to develop their digital skills by providing flexible, tailored digital skills sessions that focus on what they want to learn and achieve;
- **Provision of technology and connectivity:** offering device loans and connectivity to those who otherwise would not have access, so that alongside access to a Digital Champion and digital skills sessions, they can try using technology and the internet to see if it might be beneficial to them.

Within Cohort 1, seven local Age UKs/Cymrus exclusively focused on supporting particular groups of older people identified as being at higher risk of digital exclusion, as part of a pilot study. These **'high-risk' groups** included: older people living on low income, older people who are housebound and/or have mobility problems, older people who are living alone, and older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. The local Age UKs/Cymrus involved in piloting support for 'high-risk' groups applied for the Programme funding on that basis. They chose the specific groups to focus on based on the demographics and the needs of their community, and their expertise and capabilities in supporting that particular high-risk group. Two of these local Age UKs piloted Digital Champion support specifically and exclusively targeting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss.

Age UK commissioned this evaluation to understand experiences and outcomes of the Digital Champion Programme focusing on supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. This evaluation complements the main evaluation of the Digital

Champion Programme¹ by providing learning around potential adaptations needed to support older people living with dementia and/or memory loss.

1.2. Evaluation objectives

The evaluation needed to provide ongoing learning during the project and evaluate its impact, in line with the main evaluation. To achieve this, the evaluation needed to answer the following main questions (same as in the main evaluation):

1. Sustainable engagement and benefits:

- 1.1. How successful or otherwise is the Programme at encouraging older people supported to continue to engage with and use digital technology over the medium term (6-12 months)?
- 1.2. What are the enablers for this success or the disablers and barriers when not successful?
- 1.3. For whom the Programme is successful; how does it impact the day-to-day experiences/life of that person? e.g. wellbeing, money, access to services.

2. High-risk beneficiary groups²:

- 2.1. How successful or otherwise are local Age UKs/Cymrus at identifying, engaging and supporting older people in high-risk groups to begin or further develop their use of digital technology in a confident and safe way?
- 2.2. What capabilities and adaptations of the general model, if any, is required for local Age UKs/Cymrus to support older people from high-risk groups to fully participate?
- 2.3. What are the experiences of older people from high-risk groups participating in the Programme, including the benefits and challenges they may experience?

In addition, the evaluation needed to explore the following additional questions specific to supporting older people with dementia and/or memory loss:

- **Assessing eligibility:** What approaches, resources, processes, and tools are staff using to determine the eligibility and suitability of the Programme, then to continually assess eligibility and suitability on the Programme? What has worked well and less well here?
- **Impact of the level of memory loss:** How does the level of memory loss an older person is experiencing / their stage of diagnosis, affect their drive, attitude, and confidence to engaging with the Programme?
- **The role of carers:** When engagement has occurred, how important was the older person's support network to their ability to engage with the Programme and improve their digital skills?

¹ The interim evaluation report for the Digital Champion Programme is available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/programmes/digital-champion-programme-2022-26/age-uk-digital-champion-programme-interim-evaluation---cohort-1.pdf>

1.3. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation involved three research strands using the following methods:

Research with clients supported by the Programme & their carers	Research with the target audience (not currently in the Programme)	Research with Age UK staff and volunteer Digital Champions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 x depth interviews with clients (8 with clients only, 2 depths with clients and carers too; 45mins long); 1 x depth interview with a carer of a client. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 x paired depth interviews with older people living with dementia/memory loss and their carers (45mins long) 1 x group discussion with carers of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss (90mins long, 6 respondents per group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 x depth interviews with volunteer Digital Champions 5 x depth interviews with staff <p>39 respondents involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 older people living with dementia and/or memory loss (10 of them were clients) 13 carers of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss 7 volunteer Digital Champions 5 Age UK Programme staff

Table 1: Evaluation methodology

Revisions to the original evaluation approach

The evaluation was initially aiming to include only Programme clients, staff and volunteer Digital Champions from the two local Age UKs who were piloting the Programme with an exclusive focus on targeting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. The following approach was planned at the outset:

- 16 x initial depth interviews with clients (25-30mins long) to establish baseline situation regarding their use of digital technology and early experiences of support;
- 8 x follow-up depth interviews with clients 3 months after the initial ones to track impact over a longer period of time;
- Carers included where possible in depth interviews with clients;
- 1 x group discussion with staff at two local Age UKs with an exclusive focus on targeting this group of older people;
- 1 x group discussion with volunteer Digital Champions at two local Age UKs with an exclusive focus on targeting this group of older people.

However, this initial approach had to be revised due to some challenges during the delivery of the Programme and clients' barriers to participating in the evaluation. Two particular challenges were significant during the initial stages of the memory loss evaluation. These included:

- **Long Programme set-up phase:** Recruitment of volunteer Digital Champions took longer than anticipated at the two local Age UKs with an exclusive focus on supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. As a result of the limited volunteer resource, there were also fewer older people receiving support in the initial phases of the Programme. This slowed down the pace at which older people and Digital Champions could be recruited for the evaluation, as the pool of potential respondents was smaller than anticipated.
- **Barriers to participating in the evaluation:** Health-related problems sometimes stopped some older people from participating in the evaluation. For example, some clients accepted to take part but then had to pull out as their health worsened. There was also a perception among some carers and volunteer Digital Champions, that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were too vulnerable to take part in evaluation interviews. These factors further affected the pace at which clients could be recruited and interviewed for the evaluation.

To address these challenges and meet the evaluation objectives, the following adjustments were suggested to the evaluation approach:

- **Re-balancing the number of interviews between clients, on the one hand, and carers, staff, and volunteer Digital Champions, on the other hand:** As mentioned, there were challenges affecting the recruitment of clients for the evaluation, resulting in lower numbers of client interviews within agreed timescales. At the same time, interviews with staff and volunteer Digital Champions, as well as carers, proved to be very useful in providing observations and learning around supporting older people with dementia and/or memory loss. In this context, it was agreed to increase the number of staff, volunteer Digital Champion and carer interviews to reflect any reduction in the number of interviews with clients.
- **Broadening the scope beyond the two local Age UKs exclusively focusing on supporting older people with dementia and/or memory loss on the Digital Champion Programme:** Through our main evaluation of the Digital Champion Programme, other local Age UKs/Cymrus were identified who had considerable experience of supporting people living with dementia and/or memory loss as part of their Digital Champion Programme (rather than as their sole focus). Three such local Age UKs/Cymrus were included in the evaluation, which helped understand a wider range of practices used to support older people living with dementia and/or memory loss.

In addition, the sample was expanded to include the target audience not presently involved with the Programme, specifically, older people living with dementia and/or memory loss and their carers. Including these respondents helped boost the sample of target audience – older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. These respondents were presented with simple information about the Programme to understand their interest in such support, motivations and barriers for taking part, and views on how it could be adapted to be helpful in terms of supporting them with using digital technology. While these respondents did not have direct experience of the Programme, they still provided extremely valuable information on how they felt about the Programme and how it could support them.

Through the adjustments above, the evaluation was able to maintain the same sample size and volume of research activity and meet the objectives.

Sample structure

The sample of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss had the following make-up:

- All experienced memory loss or were diagnosed with dementia
 - Of those diagnosed with dementia, all had their diagnosis within the last two years;
- A mix in terms of whether they were clients or not – 10 clients of the Digital Champion Programme and 4 older people living with dementia and/or memory loss who were not involved with the Programme;
 - Of 10 clients, 9 were clients at the two local Age UKs exclusively focusing on supporting this group of older people and one client was supported by a local Age UK as part of their general Digital Champion Programme;
- A mix in terms of gender – 9 men and 5 women
- In terms of ethnicity, 12 respondents were White British and two from ethnic minority groups;
- A mix in terms of local Age UKs and regions:
 - Clients were recruited by the following local Age UKs: Worcester & Malvern Hills, Age UK Teesside and Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland.

The carer sample included three carers whose family members were clients of the Programme and 10 whose family members or close friends were diagnosed with dementia and/or experienced memory loss.

The staff and volunteer Digital Champion sample came from the following local Age UKs/Cymrus: Age UK Worcester & Malvern Hills, Age UK Teesside, Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland, Age UK South Gloucestershire and Age Cymru Dyfed. Within this, there was a mix in terms of whether their Programme delivery exclusively focused on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss or they supported this group as part of their general delivery:

- Three staff and 6 volunteer Digital Champion respondents were involved in delivering the Programme which exclusively targeted older people living with dementia and/or memory loss;
- Two staff and one volunteer Digital Champion respondents were involved in general Programme delivery but supported older people living with dementia and/or memory loss as part of that.

2. EXPERIENCES OF PROGRAMME SET-UP

2.1. Client recruitment

Experiences of local Age UKs/Cymrus in terms of identifying and engaging older people living with dementia and/or memory loss varied depending on whether targeting this group was their exclusive focus or part of broader Programme delivery. The evaluation found that focusing exclusively on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss brought significant challenges in terms of client referrals, whereas recruitment worked well where they were incorporated within the broader Programme delivery.

Different approaches to getting referrals

There were three main approaches used to identify and engage older people living with dementia and/or memory loss with the Programme:

- **Promoting the service in community spaces:** This was an approach initially taken by one of the local Age UKs with an exclusive focus on supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Staff liaised with the local libraries to try and engage older people visiting the libraries. Age UK staff agreed weekly sessions where they were present at local libraries and older people could come to talk to them about support they might want with using digital technology.

However, having to engage only older people living with dementia and/or memory loss posed significant challenges in this set-up. As many older people without memory problems approached staff for help, staff were often in a position to reject people as ineligible, without being able to signpost them to any other help as none was available locally. This was causing stress for both staff and some older people, so it was abandoned as an approach after some time.

“It’s like you’re telling them they are not good enough to access the service that they really need. And there’s no other service like that in our area so it’s not even like you can refer them somewhere else.” [Staff]

- **Targeted referrals from other services and professionals:** This approach was used by all local Age UKs/Cymrus involved in the evaluation and worked well to produce referrals for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Most effective referrals pathways included: other Age UK services, including dementia services; local memory clinics; and social prescribers. Within this, there were some variations in how effective

different pathways were. In particular, the evaluation found that there may be a difference between different dementia services, as those catering for people with more advanced dementia (such as day centres) were often less likely to produce referrals. Some staff reported that they had very few referrals from clients at day centres, for example. Conversely, services such as Maintenance Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (MCST), supporting people living with mild to moderate dementia, were sometimes more productive in producing referrals for the Digital Champion Programme.

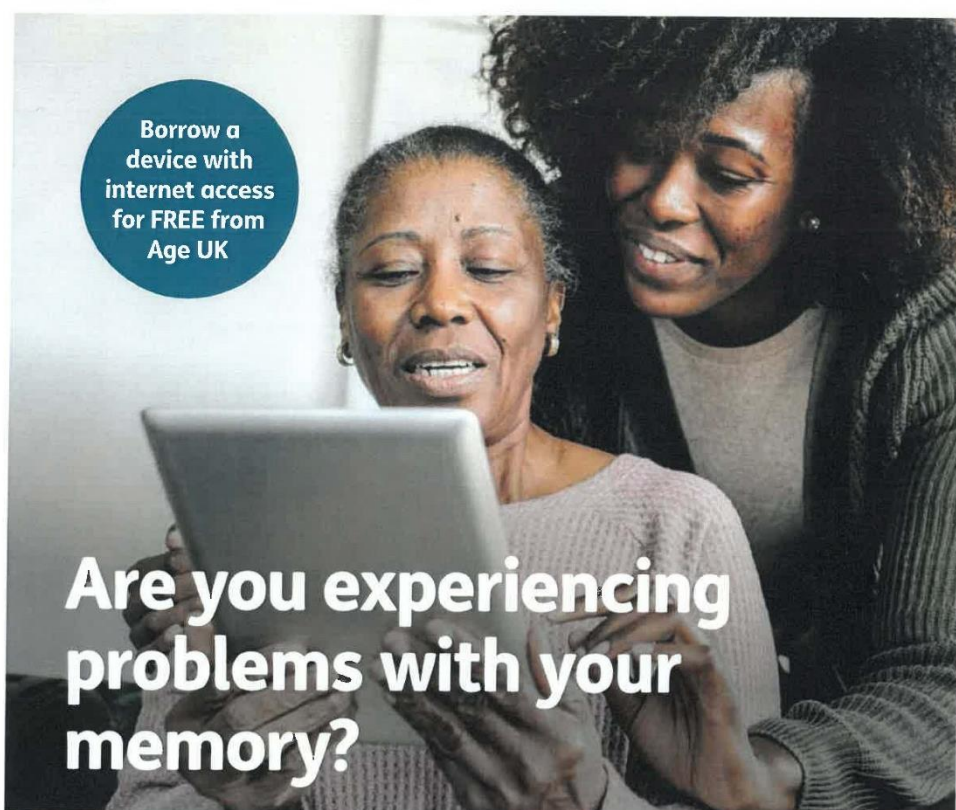
“In an MCST group, they are newly diagnosed. You come in, introduce yourself, come to the sessions, and then after a while they feel comfortable and approach you and tell you what they’d like to do.” [Staff]

“To be honest, when I’ve spoken to coordinators at dementia centres, the feedback they gave me is that people with dementia won’t engage with the screen, that they want tactile things, things they can get their hands on. They like games but they like things they can handle. I tended not to go there because the advice I was given was that I was wasting my time.” [Staff]

- **Incidental referrals:** While the first two approaches above explicitly set out to recruit older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, clients in this group were also sometimes recruited incidentally, as part of a general recruitment drive. This was particularly the case with a local Age UK focusing solely on supporting housebound people, as they found that about a third of their target group included older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Other incidental referrals included people living with dementia and/or memory loss who were part of the core Programme delivery, which supported the general population of older people.

Marketing

Staff reported they promoted the Digital Champion Programme to varied relevant services and professionals, who could refer older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. This included other Age UK services, dementia services, memory clinics and GPs, social prescribers, carer organisations, and libraries. One of the local Age UKs exclusively focusing on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss found it helpful to use a leaflet explaining that the service was offering support to people with memory loss.



Feeling confident online can make some things easier – but we understand it's not always simple to get started.

Age UK's Digital Champions offer **FREE** support to help you make the most of the internet, safely and securely.

There's lots you can do online, from setting reminders and cognitive exercises to finding support in your local area and staying connected with family and friends.

If you're worried about your memory, our friendly one-to-one or group sessions are a great way to learn digital skills in a way that works for you.

Talk to our experienced and supportive team today

Figure 1: Age UK Digital Champion Leaflet targeting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss

Awareness raising sessions

Staff at several local Age UKs/Cymrus held awareness raising sessions with older people accessing other Age UK dementia services, including MCST and dementia day centres. Some staff respondents highlighted the importance of adjusting those awareness raising sessions to this specific audience. For example, they tried to raise awareness of some specific benefits digital technology can bring to older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, such as setting reminders, accessing cognitive activities, creating life stories and photo albums to preserve and bring back memories. In addition to these specific benefits, staff would also highlight benefits in terms of staying connected with family and friends, which were generally popular across the board. Some of these awareness raising sessions included both older people living with dementia and/or memory loss and their carers, highlighting the benefits that technology could bring to their loved ones.

“We basically transformed our talk to say this is what tech can do for someone you care for, with dementia, not our general talk.” [Staff]

One of the local Age UKs exclusively focused on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss also felt they themselves needed to be embedded in local dementia hubs to earn the trust of clients. This local Age UK allocated staff and volunteer Digital Champions to each of their dementia hubs in their area, agreed regular slots where they would be available for any questions regarding digital support, and also attended dementia groups so that they would become familiar to clients and people with dementia would start feeling comfortable with them over time. Staff believed this was necessary to build trust and confidence so that people with dementia would approach them if they needed help with digital technology. This approach was felt to have worked well for a period of time, however, with high staff and volunteer turnover it became difficult to maintain in terms of resource and capacity.

“I come to different sessions at the [dementia] hubs. You can’t just come and say what you do and then leave. Their confidence level is so low. You need to go there multiple times for them to get to know you before they can feel confident enough to come to you and ask questions. You just try to make your presence known.” [Staff]

Learnings around recruitment of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss

The evaluation suggested the following learnings around what may help and subvert efforts to recruit older people living with dementia and/or memory loss to take part in the Digital Champion Programme:

- **Dementia-specific benefits can raise interest:** Raising awareness of specific examples of how digital technology can help manage some challenges of living with dementia and/or memory loss often peaked interest of both older people and carers. Using voice-controlled devices was appealing to some as it seemed easier for people living with dementia. Similarly, using digital technology to set reminders, engage in activities to stimulate cognition, and preserve and access memories through photos, music, and writing was attractive to some older people living with dementia and/or memory loss and their carers.
- **Social contact is a popular benefit in this group too:** Wanting to be able to use their phone for texting, calling and WhatsApp were often the reasons why older people living with dementia and/or memory loss got involved with the Programme.
- **Previous digital technology use also helps to raise interest:** Several carers and some staff commented that those older people who used digital technologies prior to experiencing problems with memory loss were sometimes more likely to join the Programme. They hoped the Programme could help them recover the skills they lost rather than necessarily learn new things.

- **Targeting older people with memory loss as early as possible is critical, but can be a challenge:** There was a perception that there was a relatively short time window to engage older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Staff, carers and older people themselves felt that starting support as soon as possible after someone experienced memory problems and/or received a dementia diagnosis was critical. Respondents thought that people in the very early stages of dementia were more likely to engage and be able to retain the digital skills they learned. At the same time, this and other research³ highlighted challenges in engaging older people who were recently diagnosed with dementia, as they may be experiencing depression and feel they don't need support.
- **Dementia-specific barriers can also be emotional and about perceptions:** Depression and low social confidence can be barriers to engaging with support services and community activities, following the dementia diagnosis and/or experience of memory problems. Also, concerns about ability to retain information can act as barriers to engaging with the Programme. Older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, as well as their carers, would need to be reassured around those concerns and that the Programme would work with them together to look for solutions around those issues.
- **Awareness raising and building trust can take time:** Due to concerns mentioned above, awareness raising of how digital technology can be beneficial to older people living with dementia and/or memory loss is critical for raising their interest and overcoming barriers. Older people in this group and their carers may need more time to identify specific learning goals that would be beneficial and realistic and feel confident enough to engage with learning.

2.2. Assessing / monitoring suitability for the Programme

Assessing client suitability for the Programme worked slightly differently depending on whether local Age UKs/Cymrus were exclusively focused on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss only or included supporting them as part of their general Digital Champion Programme:

- In both cases, staff and volunteer Digital Champions were sometimes in situations where they needed to decide whether someone's dementia was too far progressed for them to be suitable for the Programme.
- However, the two local Age UKs exclusively focused on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss also had the issue of separating clients with memory loss from those with no memory loss.

The discussion below outlines how the two local Age UKs with an exclusive focus on this group of older people went about identifying eligible clients with memory loss as opposed

³ For example, staff interviewed for the Age UK's Maintenance Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (MCST) Evaluation also observed that older people in early stages of dementia may not identify as having dementia and may not be interested in accessing support services. For the final MCST Evaluation report, see: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/programmes/mcst/mcst-evaluation-report.pdf>

to those with no memory loss. It then looks at approaches staff used to assess client suitability in terms of whether their dementia was too advanced to benefit from the Programme.

As mentioned, one of the two local Age UKs with an exclusive focus engaged older people in libraries to identify those interested in the support who also experienced memory loss. To do that, staff screened all interested older people using selected questions from the SMMSE tool,⁴ commonly used to assess cognitive abilities in older people. Their experience of the screening and selection process highlighted some issues with the Programme model focusing exclusively on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss:

- As discussed, the screening process resulted in rejecting older people with no memory loss but who needed support, without staff being able to signpost them to other relevant support as none was available locally. Staff reported this was stressful for both them and older people involved and decided to stop recruiting in this way.

“Previously, we used to be in the library. We had little prompts, questions, to know if they have memory loss. Having to say to old people who need help that they cannot get it because they don’t have memory loss was very hard. We changed our approach so went to where people with dementia are, where we don’t have to question their ability. So, we go to memory cafes, dementia hubs.” [Staff]

- Screening to establish someone’s cognitive abilities was also felt to be potentially problematic in this context. Staff explained that this was because older people approached them for help with digital technology, so did not expect to be screened in that way to access this type of service. In addition, those who did have memory problems could feel stressed answering cognitive test questions, as they could remind them of the memory clinics tests which some people living with dementia and/or memory loss found stressful. For this reason, staff decided not to use the whole SMMSE questionnaire but only a few questions which they still felt would help them assess cognitive levels and someone’s suitability for the Programme.

“We weren’t asking all the SMMSE questions. It’s different if someone is coming for a dementia service than if you are coming for IT support. We were able to ask some questions. [...] I felt it was really invading their privacy. It was really uncomfortable. I felt that wasn’t my place. I’m not a specialist. I felt that’s not what I’m supposed to do.” [Staff]

Eventually, using screening questions was abandoned once staff at this local Age UK stopped trying to recruit in libraries and instead, focused on referrals from other dementia services. This change removed the need for Digital Champion Programme staff to assess whether someone had dementia and/or memory loss, as clients referred from dementia services already identified as living with dementia and/or memory loss.

⁴ The Standardised Mini-Mental State Examination (SMMSE) is a screening test of cognitive function in older people. See: <https://www.ihacpa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/smmse-tool-v2.pdf>

- Staff also found out that some of the clients referred from other services and professionals did not experience memory problems. A staff respondent thought that this was because there was no other similar support locally and there was need for digital support, so other services were inclined to refer older people even if they did not meet the criteria in terms of memory loss. Once staff realised that clients were not eligible as they did not experience memory loss, they felt they could not immediately cease to support them. They continued to provide some support but over a shorter period of time.

Staff at the second local Age UK exclusively focused on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss did not use any assessments to gauge whether and how much someone experienced cognitive and memory loss problems. Their experience also highlighted some potential challenges in the service model with an exclusive focus on this group:

- The idea of assessing potential participants for memory loss and dementia made some staff feel uncomfortable. Staff were concerned this could be seen as ‘diagnosing people’ and that any attempt to do so would be violating older people’s privacy and potentially causing stress to them.
- Their experience also highlighted some advantages and disadvantages of defining the target group as ‘older people living with dementia and/or memory loss’. In choosing to define their ‘high-risk’ group in this way, this local Age UK was able to be inclusive and engage a wider range of older people experiencing memory loss, for example, those whose memory loss was associated with other health conditions, for example, stroke.

At the same time, this term also introduced a grey area, extending the target group to include older people experiencing memory loss as part of normal ageing. For example, staff and volunteer Digital Champions at this local Age UK reported that some of their clients experienced some memory loss and cognitive impairment as normal part of ageing. As a result, staff and volunteer Digital Champions mostly felt unable to say whether they supported any clients who were living with dementia. An exception to this was a client who was recruited through a dementia hub so had a dementia diagnosis.

“You see, I don’t know who’s got dementia. If it’s early stages then I wouldn’t know that. It’s not something people talk about. We respect people’s privacy for their medical information.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

While using the term ‘memory loss’ has the potential to be more inclusive and reduce the stigma some people may attach to dementia, it also may introduce lack of clarity over how to define the target group and may ultimately result in limited support for people living with dementia.

“With memory loss, well, that fits a lot of people but most of it is through ageing. People lose their memory at different rates. People can have severe loss without it

being dementia. Some younger people like me have a terrible memory! It's still a very real problem, but more to do with ageing." [Volunteer Digital Champion]

Other local Age UKs/Cymrus, who included older people living with dementia and/or memory loss as part of their general Programme, did not have this issue of having to separate this group from the general older people population. They, however, collected information on whether clients experienced memory loss problems to be able to provide appropriate support. One local Age UK asked for advice from their dementia services on individual client needs and their suitability for the Programme, where they experienced cognitive and memory problems due to dementia. Another local Age UK also closely collaborated with their dementia services to identify clients who could benefit from the Programme.

As mentioned, all local Age UKs/Cymrus involved in this evaluation sometimes had situations where staff had to decide whether someone's dementia was too advanced for them to benefit from the Programme. The general view of staff was to always try and then use the first few sessions to gauge whether the client could benefit from the support in terms of their use of digital technology. Where someone's dementia was too advanced for them to benefit from the Programme, a decision to stop support was typically made in conversation between staff, carers and clients, rather than by using any formal assessments.

How long local Age UKs/Cymrus allowed to assess whether clients were showing some progress varied, depending on the individual in question and volunteer Digital Champion and staff capacity. It ranged from one or a few initial sessions to allowing a few months over which the same things were practised before the person could complete those tasks on their own. Sometimes, whether support continued for older people living with more advanced dementia also depended on whether they had carer support or not. Where carers were present and involved, staff sometimes worked with them to support the client with using digital technology.⁵

"At the end of the day all of our volunteers definitely have the right to say they don't think it's worth carrying on, so that they don't feel like they are failing if it's doesn't work. We usually say three sessions to start off with, if it's not getting anywhere then we can't do much more. We just keep trying our best. If we can't do it but they have a carer they see on a daily basis, then we aim to get the carer to remind them to get on the tablet or set the reminders for things they need to do etc. It works better when you can work with a carer or care agency, e.g. just to remind them to use the tablet. They often forget how to charge the tablet, lose the lead etc." [Staff]

⁵ Evaluation findings regarding the carer role in supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss with digital technology are discussed in section 3.

2.3. Volunteer Digital Champion recruitment

Experiences in terms of volunteer Digital Champion recruitment again varied depending on whether local Age UKs/Cymrus had an exclusive focus on supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss or included them as part of their broader service.

The two local Age UKs who piloted Digital Champion support exclusively for this group of older people found it challenging to recruit volunteers who would solely support older people living with dementia and/or memory loss:

- In one case, the focus of the service was not made clear in the marketing materials promoting this volunteering role. Instead, the role was described in general terms of the Digital Champion Programme, rather than mentioning explicitly that volunteers would be supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Once volunteers found out, most withdrew from the service. The local Age UK then changed their approach to be clear about the service focus but still struggled to attract and retain volunteers.
- The other local Age UK with an exclusive focus inherited volunteer Digital Champions from their previous Digital Champion Programme and decided to carry on with them in the new service. However, the evaluation suggested that their existing volunteer Digital Champions were not clear on the changed focus for the service. Rather, they carried on as they did before, supporting a broad range of older people, some of whom may have experienced memory loss due to health conditions other than dementia.

Both local Age UKs exclusively focused on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss came to the conclusion that the profile of volunteer Digital Champions they should seek may be slightly different to that of volunteers in the general Programme. Staff respondents stressed the importance of caring experience and skills, and potentially also experience of supporting older people with dementia having more importance over IT skills. Staff believed that caring skills were essential, whereas volunteers could be upskilled if they were lacking any digital skills.

“This time, we were very direct. We said we need someone who loves to help people, who would be patient and work with people with dementia. They don’t need to have high IT skills, just to show interest. If we notice they need IT training, we can provide that. That was the new model”. [Staff]

The emphasis on needing volunteers with caring skills and understanding of dementia is likely to be important for developing and expanding digital support for people living with dementia and/or memory loss. However, this is not to say that existing volunteers with IT background should not be asked whether they had interest in supporting this group and if so, provided with training in working with people living with dementia. That this can work well is confirmed by the examples below.

Other local Age UKs/Cymrus, with no exclusive focus on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, did not report any challenges specific to volunteers and working with this group of older people. Their volunteer Digital Champions were given a choice of whether they would work with clients living with dementia and/or memory loss and many volunteers were happy to do so. However, in these cases, this wasn't their exclusive focus, suggesting that this may have been the challenge in the two pilot services above.

“We discuss with the volunteers to say this person has dementia, whether they have carers; we ask them are they comfortable [to support them]. Some champions say no because they're working and so on, they don't want the whole thing of doing screenshots and videos. Others say yes, well I'll do my best and see what is doable or not. We send out to all our volunteers helpful tips and reminders around dementia, some dementia apps that might be useful or websites.” [Staff]

2.4. Volunteer and staff training and support

Most staff and volunteer Digital Champions involved in the evaluation reported they received dementia-specific training, alongside the more general volunteer induction. In some cases, this was because those local Age UKs/Cymrus had an overall policy to raise dementia awareness across staff and volunteers, as a dementia-friendly organisation. In other cases, as with one of the local Age UKs/Cymrus piloting Digital Champion support exclusively for this group of older people, it was to ensure that staff and volunteers had an understanding of dementia, people living with dementia and ways of working with them. Staff and volunteer Digital Champions felt this was essential in their roles.

“All staff have done dementia eLearning. We are a dementia friendly organisation. Digital Champions were also invited to the dementia training as well. They've also had the 'How Technology Can Help People with Dementia' training booklet from the Alzheimer's Society website.” [Staff]

In terms of what dementia-specific training was provided, a staff respondent explained that this involved training by Dementia Friends⁶ and Dementia e-learning. The respondent found Dementia Friends training particularly useful as dementia nurses explained what to expect in terms of behaviour from people with dementia (for example, that they could experience mood swings) and provided guidance around working with people with dementia (what kind of conversation to have, when to take a break etc.)

The one exception in terms of training provision was the other local Age UK involved in the pilot. The organisation carried on working with their existing Digital Champions without providing them with additional, dementia-specific training.

In terms of other training, most staff and volunteers had an IT background so generally did not think they needed IT training. This was partly because the range of issues they could be asked to help with was so wide it would be difficult to know what to focus on. It was also

^{6 6} See: <https://www.dementiafriends.org.uk/>

because there was sometimes a perception that the tasks older people living with dementia and/or memory loss would need help with would be simple so would require only basic digital skills. However, one area where some felt that training may be helpful concerned the tablets used in the loan scheme. A staff respondent suggested it would be helpful to allow volunteers to familiarise themselves with the tablets being used as part of the Programme, as some of them were not used to Android devices.

Following the volunteer Digital Champion induction, the processes for further volunteer support and oversight of their work were similar across different local Age UKs/Cymrus. For example, as one Project Co-ordinator explained, they would do initial risk assessments for all clients and then be in regular contact with volunteers to get their feedback on client progress and to help with any troubleshooting. In addition, new volunteers initially shadowed staff or more experienced volunteer Digital Champions, to observe how they worked with clients and learn and gain confidence through that. In terms of further support, one of the local Age UKs/Cymrus set up a WhatsApp group where volunteers could communicate with each other and with staff and ask questions. Regular opportunities to share experiences and knowledge with other volunteer Digital Champions were always appreciated and where they were not in place, volunteers suggested they would be helpful.

“Volunteers are invited to shadow us or other digital champions when we support clients.” [Staff]

“Shadowing helps you see how to engage with clients, what questions to ask, how to help them through it, make sure you’re not using language they don’t understand. That’s best learnt on the job.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

“Sharing ideas with other volunteers would be good. Somebody might have a great way of doing things which I’d never thought of.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

3. PROGRAMME DELIVERY: EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS



3.1. Client motivations and barriers for joining the Programme

Staff, volunteer Digital Champions, older people living with dementia and/or memory loss and carers highlighted key triggers, motivations and barriers for accessing support with using digital technologies:

- **Communication and social contact:** as is the case with older people more generally, wanting to learn how to use digital technologies to keep in touch with their friends and family was one of the key motivations for wanting to learn. Respondents from all groups involved in the evaluation mentioned that using WhatsApp, texting and calling were most common learning goals for this group of older people.
- **Getting a new device:** family buying a new smartphone or another device as a present for an older person living with dementia and/or memory loss was another common trigger to seeking help. For example, one client was given an iPhone which they haven't ever used before, so wanted to learn some basic things around using their phone (e.g. how to switch it to silent mode, how to call and text, manage their contacts).

“Often, family had given a phone to someone with dementia and they don't know how to use it. So, that's a prompt to try and get support. Sometimes they've been shown how to answer calls on WhatsApp, so want to consolidate that.” [Staff]

- **Help with challenges posed by memory loss and dementia:** some staff reported they had clients living with dementia and/or memory loss and their carers who were interested in voice-enabled devices, e.g. Alexa or Siri or Google Nest, which could be set up to give reminders. One of the local Age UKs/Cymrus found people living with dementia and/or memory loss were interested in using these devices for reminders and this was echoed by older people who were interviewed.

“[Reminders] make a difference. I can totally forget. I take quite a lot of tablets, morning and lunchtime, and there are some times when I miss to do that, I forget. So, it would be very good for me.” [Client]

Some local Age UKs/Cymrus explored the possible use of apps where participants could record their life stories or likes and interests. While one local Age UK found little interest in using the NHS Life story app,⁷ a client thought a similar app would be useful for them. This client worried about the impact of forgetting the music and films they enjoyed in the future and no one else knowing what they would like to listen to or watch. They wanted to record their likes and interests in this app, so that people close to them could use this to play the music and films they liked to them.

In addition, a couple of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were interested in accessing online activities that could help to maintain and improve their cognitive skills:

⁷ See: <https://life-stories.hacw.nhs.uk/>

“If there are any tips or things to help me remember things, help me boost my confidence, that would be useful – then I would have to rely less on [the carer].”
[Older person living with dementia]

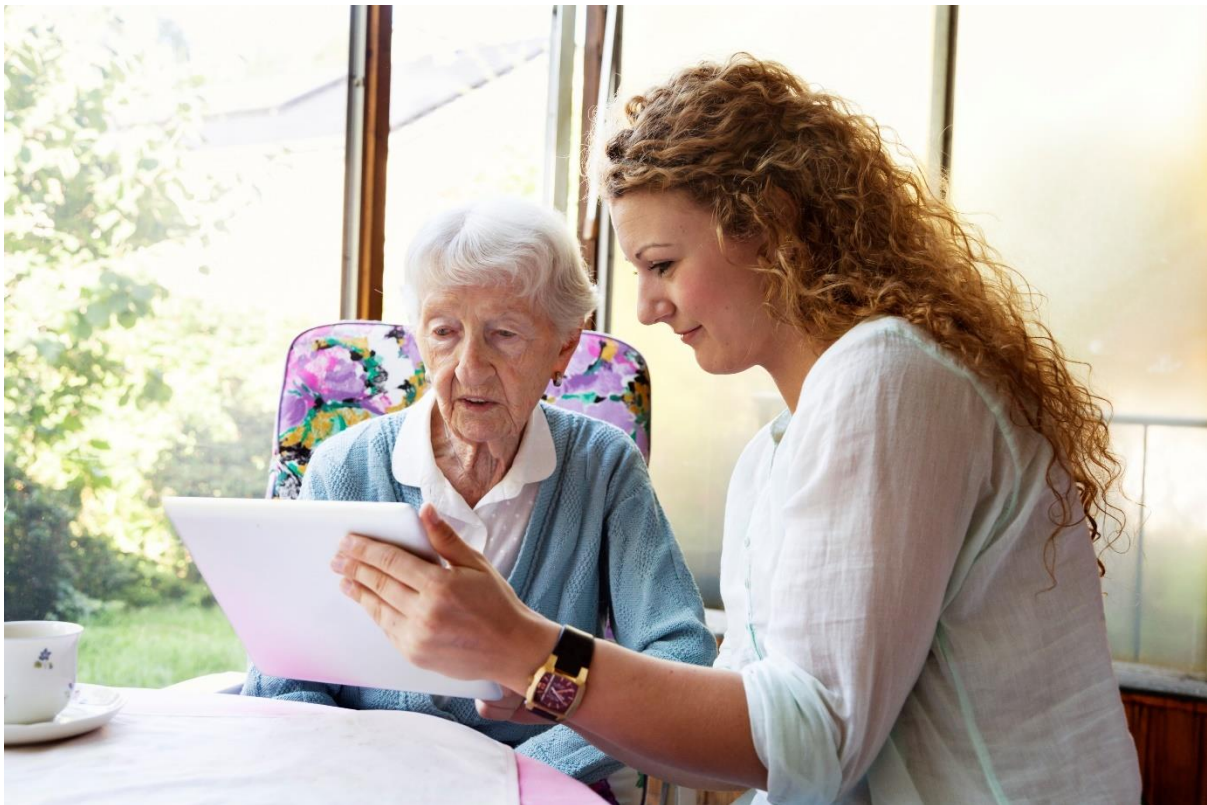
- **Perceived limited interest in expanding usage of digital technologies as a barrier:** A volunteer Digital Champion and a client felt that where older people living with dementia and/or memory loss knew how to do basic things on their phone (e.g. call and text), they had little interest or need to learn about other ways to use their phone or other devices.
- **Difficulty retaining information:** Older people living with dementia and/or memory loss and their carers sometimes expressed concerns over whether the Programme would be of any benefit if they could not find ways to retain information.

“The problem remains his memory. He’s just going to forget. He would always need supervision. His hands are shaking a lot too.” [Carer]

“Once they [the volunteer] have gone, I’m going to forget how to get back on it and look for it online, anyway. So, it would be helpful when they’re there with me. But once they’ve gone, I’d feel like the help is gone as well.” [Older person living with dementia]

- **Mixed perceptions regarding carers’ interest to support people with dementia to learn how to use digital technologies:** One local Age UK stressed that where carers realised the benefits of using digital technologies for people living with dementia, they were willing to support their loved ones with the learning process. Another local Age UK felt carers had very limited interest in supporting their loved ones with learning to use digital technologies, as they were extremely pressed for time and assessed any such activities in terms of time they would need to commit.
- **Perceptions of people living with dementia and/or memory loss as having low interest in support with using digital technologies:** one of the two local Age UKs where staff liaised with local dementia hub co-ordinators to recruit participants reported they received very little interest in participating in the digital champion Programme. As they explained, dementia hub co-ordinators thought that people living with dementia had little interest in screen-based activities, and rather preferred activities that were tactile or involved sound and music or physical activity.

3.2. Views about Programme support and its adaptations



Many of the key features of the Digital Champion Programme model were perceived to work well for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, in the same ways they did for older people in general. In particular, the following aspects of the model were appreciated:

- One-to-one support which can be tailored individual needs, interests and preferences;
- Flexibility in where, when and how support is delivered;
- Holistic approach as clients can be signposted to other services;
- Loan device scheme for those without their own devices and/or internet connection.

“It’s a good approach because being able to be signposted to the relevant services within the community is really good. So, having a primary point of contact whereby the primary focus would be on the tech but if they noticed other things, and they will be aware of the other Age UK services, then if they could refer to a colleague that would be good.” [Carer]

Similarly, certain learning topics and teaching methods were popular across the board, including with older people living with dementia and/or memory loss.

However, the evaluation also found that there were many dementia-specific areas of interest and ways in which support needed to be, and was, adjusted to be helpful to older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. The section below highlights points of crossover between this group’s needs and those of older people in general, as well as how support was adjusted to be helpful.

Learning topics

There were some **topics that were of general interest**, including with older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. These broadly split into those where older people were happy to engage and learn something themselves, and those where they wanted help with setting up or fixing issues with digital devices, but not to deal with that themselves.

The tasks that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were interested in learning included:

- **Calling, texting, WhatsApp:** Being able to call or text their family and friends was one of the most common reasons why older people living with dementia and/or memory loss engaged – or were happy to engage – with Digital Champion support. Within this, some were also interested in being able to use WhatsApp, for similar reasons as other groups of older people in the Programme, for example, being able to see their family and receive photos.

“Communication, Facetime, WhatsApp. They want to speak to their family and friends. That’s been the most asked for support.” [Staff]

Beyond maintaining their social connections, being able to call or answer a call was also perceived as pressing because it was a matter of safety for these clients. Because it was seen as important for their safety, this prompted engagement with the Programme, even where clients had extremely limited prior experience of using digital technology and no interest in learning. For this reason, some stopped their sessions with Digital Champions once they learned how to use their phone to call and text.

- **Using a new device:** Like other older people, those living with dementia and/or memory loss sometimes engaged with the Programme because they wanted to learn how to use a new device they got, for example, a new phone they were given by their family or a new Smart TV. One respondent also reported their hearing aid could be digitally paired with their TV, so they would hear the TV better, but neither they nor their carer knew how to do that. They were interested in getting help to pair these devices and thought that would be beneficial.

“That would be quite good because I think that if I’ve got the functionality of a TV I’ve paid for and I’m not using it. I could actually get more fun out of it. It would be brilliant because a lot of the films are just the ones I can watch on the BBC and there are other providers that I can’t access at the moment.” [Older person living with dementia]

- **Accessing or creating digital content:** Using digital technologies to access online content they were interested in, for example, music or videos, or to maintain their interests and hobbies, was another area of interest, shared by this group and older

people in general. One client also wanted to be able to take photos and videos, whereas another wanted to be able to write her life story.

“If we do support someone with memory issues, who is into sport or music or a specific thing, we raise awareness of what YouTube can do.” [Staff]

“Mainly as a memory thing, music is really good, so we discussed whether they can listen to songs on YouTube and watch clips of old videos on their phones. With one gentleman, we managed to create a playlist and saved it on his phone. When I was with him, he would know how to play the music from the playlist by himself.” [Staff]

In addition, a small minority wanted to learn how to do online banking and shopping to maintain their independence. However, sometimes these goals had to be abandoned, as clients struggled to go through all the steps required. Overall, there was a perception that these online activities were too complicated and potentially risky for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss.

There were other areas where clients and carers wanted specific help with digital technology, involving the **set-up** of particular devices, accounts or applications rather than learning how to do something themselves. For example, some carers were concerned that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were even more vulnerable to scams and fraud, so were interested in help to make their devices safer. Other examples of this type of need for support included: making playlists and photo albums that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss could then access themselves to listen to their favourite music or view their photos; creating a Google account for their phone; downloading apps. In addition, an older person living with dementia wanted help to pair up their hearing aid with their smart TV, so they could hear the TV sound better.

Although the learning topics discussed earlier were popular with older people in general, there were sometimes specific aspects of why and how they were important to older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. In addition, there were **dementia-specific uses of digital technology** that older people in this group and their carers were also interested in or wanted support with:

- **Reminders:** Using digital technology, such as smart speakers, other voice-controlled devices or digital calendars, to set-up and provide reminders was one common area of interest. Staff at local Age UKs/Cymrus supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss reported they used Alexa or Google Nest to set up reminders, for example, for clients to take their medication. One staff respondent also explained they used devices called Memo minders, which the Fire Service donated. The devices worked as motion sensors and played a pre-recorded message to remind the person to, for example, turn off the hob, take medication or lock the door.

Some carers in the sample also reported they set-up digital reminders for their loved ones, independently from the Programme. The reminders were perceived to be helpful but also have some limitations. For example, whether they would remind the person of what they needed to do depended on whether the person would hear the reminder,

which they may not if they are in another room or have hearing problems. In addition, a carer also thought that hearing someone's voice telling them to do something could make some older people living with dementia and/or memory loss anxious. A couple of older people living with dementia also noted that reminders which were alarms may not be able to help them, as they may not remember what the alarm was for. For this reason, one older person living with dementia devised their own system where Alexa reminders worked in combination with their notes. They would set up a reminder on Alexa and make a note what it was for, so that together they understood what to do and when, which worked for them.

"I found that Amazon Alexa is very good for reminding me about things as well. Somebody suggested that to me, that you could set alarms on it. If I've put chips in the oven, I can't remember how long they've been in. So, I either write the time down, or I can set an alarm on Alexa. I find it very useful." [Older person living with dementia]

"It doesn't say what the alarm is for. It just says your 30 min timer is up. But I write it in my notebook. Without the notebook, I would probably forget sometimes what that alarm is for. It has to combine with the note that I've written in front of Amazon [Alexa]." [Older person living with dementia]

- **Memories and selfhood:** Older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, carers and staff talked about the benefits of using digital technology to access content that helped bring back memories and preserve a sense of self. For example, a client wanted to write down her life story, so she did not forget her family. Other older people living with dementia reported how it mattered to them to be able to listen to their favourite music, which carers or volunteer Digital Champions helped them with by creating playlists. Carers and staff also talked about the importance of photo albums, which brought back memories and prompted conversations. Some staff also explored opportunities to use apps designed for people living with dementia that would allow them to store information on things that mattered to them.

"I supported a lady who wanted to write her life story. I got her one of those large keypads and a mouse and she was then able to jot down her life story. She knew how to type. She didn't know how to put things into a sentence, and struggled with her spelling, so I just helped her with that. She wanted to tell her life story because she realised she was forgetting things and she didn't want to forget her family." [Staff]

"There's a new app [called Odyssey]. We haven't had people come in yet to give us a demonstration. It's meant to store information about you, like Facebook but made for people with dementia, where they could have a profile, the things they used to like, music, food, and they can give access to that to family members. It's in a pilot stage and they want to see how beneficial it would be. The scenario we considered – if someone is in the late stage, and they can't remember certain things, someone else could access that and retrieve that information." [Staff]

“Most people are quite keen to get involved, especially for bringing back or jogging memories. A lot of YouTube videos and things like that are of interest. For example, a lady that used to do ballroom dancing, so when we showed her that she could watch ballroom dancing on YouTube she just lit up, started reminiscing about her younger days and her husband doing ballroom dancing.” [Staff]

“The thing that worries me when eventually I won’t be able to help myself. One of the things that keeps me going is music. And if nobody knows my kind of music... my own wife doesn’t know what I really love. She knows that I’m into classical music, but not really what [within that]. So, [Age UK staff] have told me that I can do it through an app, [save the music I love].” [Staff]

- **Cognitive exercises:** A few older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were interested in accessing activities online which would help stimulate and maintain their cognitive abilities. A staff respondent also reported they raised awareness of such activities, for example, through showing clients how to use the MindMate App.
- **Emotional wellbeing:** While accessing online content, including music and videos, was popular with older people in general, this was seen to bring particular benefits to older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. They and their carers sometimes spoke of depression, isolation, lethargy and boredom in their lives, which they felt was or would be relieved through activities such as listening to music or watching content related to their interests, such as sport, news or films. Music, in particular, was perceived to be able to reach and engage and benefit emotionally even older people living with more advanced dementia.

“It would need to be something that could motivate him out of his lethargy and saying he’s tired all the time. The digital would keep his mind active and give him something to do, whereas at the moment all he does is rest and doze.” [Carer]

“I’ve been feeling really depressed, so maybe I would just feel better within myself because I was able to do more things. Maybe some of this depression would go away. That’s what I would hope for.” [Older person living with dementia]

- **Safety around the house:** Digital devices addressing safety risks were of interest to carers, including alarms, sensors and cameras.
- **Accessing dementia support:** A couple of clients were interested in using digital technology to access support with dementia, for example, they wanted to join an online dementia support group.

“We have one couple where the husband has just been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and they’ve never touched technology but that’s what they now think they need to do because a lot of the support groups are online, which is really tricky.” [Staff]

Support formats

Most Digital Champion support for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss was delivered in one-to-one sessions at home, although some one-to-one sessions were delivered at dementia hubs. In addition, two local Age UKs/Cymrus were also exploring whether some support could be delivered in small groups too, for example, where clients were already attending dementia hubs for other activities. The evaluation captured views on some advantages and disadvantages of these different options:

- Overall, there was an agreement that one-to-one sessions were best suited to supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, so that support can be as much as possible tailored to their needs and interests. Small groups, where clients could be given individual attention, were seen as beneficial for reducing social isolation; however, difficult to manage as individual clients needed attention.
- Home visits were mostly seen as preferable to clients attending other venues. Carers and staff stressed it was important that clients learned on the devices they had and that volunteer Digital Champions could see how best to support them in their own home environment. In addition, where clients had other health conditions, having to go to a venue to access support introduced another potential barrier.

“From a carer’s perspective having someone come out to [client name] home would be quite beneficial, because then they could say what tech he has, how he’s interacting with it, what it is about the TV that means he’s struggling with it. In the office it would be a more artificial environment.” [Carer]

At the same time, some advantages of getting support at Age UK venues were also noted. Some carers thought that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss would have a better mindset and be more ready to learn if they went out to a venue than if they were supported at their home. A staff respondent also explained they ran some of their support sessions at dementia hubs because they had a reliable internet connection there, which wasn’t always the case in clients’ homes.

“We prefer to stay in the hub because of the internet. Going out, it requires we go with our internet, because most of them don’t have WiFi.” [Staff]

“If I was visiting him at his home, it would be more of a challenge. When they make an effort to come to Age UK, they are already prepared mentally that he will have a session with a phone. Whereas if I turned up at his house, even if it was pre-arranged, he may not be prepared. I think you may have to take three steps back before you could start.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

Support approach and helpful adaptations

Approaches to supporting and teaching older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were often similar to those used with older people in general. Patience, repetition,

step-by-step explanations, notes to use as reminders were all helpful to most older people, but they were essential for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss.

Within this, staff and volunteer Digital Champions across the Programme highlighted some specific adaptations needed to support people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Carers and older people living with dementia and/or memory loss also shared helpful tips on what they saw as helpful in learning and remembering how to use digital technologies.

- **Pace of learning:** Some staff thought that more time should be allowed by the Programme when supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. For example, one staff respondent suggested that people living with dementia needed the tablet loan to be longer than the usual loan period (6 – 8 weeks), so they extended that.

“It’s just being that little bit more mindful; they need to repeat these skills multiple times. With most clients you can show them once or twice and then they’ve got the idea. With memory loss clients, it could be that we’re covering the same topics on 4 or 5 sessions, so it’s just being mindful of that.” [Staff]

“A lot of patience and be prepared to repeat things and let them set the pace. If it takes 6 times to do something, that’s fine.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

- **Repetition:** Staff and volunteer Digital Champions stressed the importance of providing guidance slowly and repeating the same information and learning over several sessions. They talked about the importance of re-capping on what was learned previously or asking clients to practice between the sessions (with the help of the carer where possible), to maintain what they learned.

“We ask them to practice a few times during the week or with a loved one, just to keep that momentum going, because with a lot of clients, if they do it one and then don’t do it or a whole week, it’s quite a long time to retain that information.” [Staff]

“I do find that the more somebody mentions something; sometimes, if you mention it once, I forget but if you say it again and again, then it tends to stick in my mind a little bit better.” [Older person living with dementia]

“[Client name] has been given an iPhone and his wife has an Android phone so she was struggling to get it working. It was just basic things. The first week it was just how to switch it on and off. An iPhone isn’t really designed to switch it off. I asked him why he wanted to switch it off. He said when they go to the doctor’s surgery, it always says to switch off your phone. I said that airplane mode is just as effective. We spent two hours going over that, doing an airplane mode. I could tell, he had to do things multiple times and his wife prompted him to make sure he could do it. When they came next time, they said they’ve used the plane mode. They were very happy with that.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

- **Step-by-step:** The importance of step-by-step explanations and guides, as well as breaking down learning into manageable, small chunks, was also emphasized for

helping older people living with dementia and/or memory loss understand, retain and re-call what they've learned.

"I help him by going over to his and showing him how to do things in quite a step-by-step approach, which was a strategy recommended by the memory clinic. So I will take him through it bite size chunks because, as he said, he does struggle to take in and recall information. Another thing is I've done diagrams for him, in large font, as a reminder. I have created these visual prompts to help." [Carer]

- **Documenting learning:** This was an important area of activity where older people living with dementia and/or memory loss collaborated with those supporting them – staff, volunteer Digital Champions and/or carers – to devise strategies that would help them re-call information and what they learned. This ranged from using printed guides, written notes and hand-drawn diagrams to screenshots and videos of clients doing certain tasks (which they could then watch and repeat those tasks). Visual memory aids often showed specific buttons and text explaining what they did.

Often, older people living with dementia and/or memory loss and their carers devised highly specific codes to help them remember. Colour-coding and images were felt to be particularly useful as reminders of specific instructions. For example, a carer explained they used pink colour on the buttons on digital devices that the older person living with dementia should not press. An older person living with dementia thought that images were more likely to remind her of what different buttons or apps were for, for example, a music note would tell her to press there to listen to her playlist.

A common issue with using notes and other reminder materials was that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss forgot where those materials were. One person therefore devised a system helping them remember where their reminder materials were, so that they could find and use them. In other cases, carers were those who kept the materials so could support older people living with dementia and/or memory loss could access them.

"A lot of people have made their own strategies which is writing things down step by step, a lot of repetition so we've facilitated that with each client, let them do it in their own personal way. But we also provide a 'How To' guide for each client, so it's all in one booklet about all the different skills they might be interested in learning." [Staff]

"A lot of the training that we did, they either documented it, wrote down in a little book, or one chap videoed himself doing it. Then if the carers continue to show them how to do it then it is possible to maintain using what they learned." [Staff]

"He always has his notebook with him. He uses his notebook in his day-to-day life anyway, he refers to that for anything. It's like a memory backup for him. He reads through quite carefully, refreshing his memory. That's his way of doing it." [Volunteer Digital Champion]

“It’s nice, isn’t it? Because they may be able to make suggestions about things I’ve forgotten about, things that I don’t bother to do anymore. And if they’re trained as well, they’ll know that I’m going to become forgetful and may be able to suggest ways around that.” [Older person living with dementia]

“For the TV remote, I’ve drawn a picture and then the lines of what every button is for, just in case. Sometimes she says, ‘the TV is off and I can’t get it back on’. So, her seeing the picture and knowing exactly what she needs to click on would help her a lot rather than just saying it.” [Carer]

“She gave me drawings of...what’s that TV control box called...the remote. That helped because she told me what buttons to press in what order. That’s useful. Most days [that does help].” [Older person living with dementia]

- **Simplifying devices, interfaces and processes:** All respondent groups in this evaluation also talked about the importance of simplifying devices, screens and steps needed to enable older people living with dementia and/or memory loss to complete certain tasks. Some specific simplifying strategies were highlighted:

- **De-cluttering:** Some respondents suggested that tablets used in the Programme – as well as various client-owned devices – may be too busy, with too many icons and apps, which made learning more difficult for people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Staff suggested simplifying and reducing the number of icons and apps for this group.

“We also try and make the tablet as simple as possible to keep it really basic. We take the settings out, hide them (but leave it in another place so it is there if they need it). We leave the clock, take away email because they usually don’t have that on their phone; it’s Hotmail or outlook so we can set that up separately. We take away the stock exchange, podcast; we ask if they use the notes function; take away the wallet, health thing because they never remember how to use it; leave the weather and get rid of the tips section. We leave the ‘find my iPhone’ on there in case they get lost or go wandering.

Then we add what they want, say Spotify, or Borrow Books from the library. So they can download audio books; YouTube; WhatsApp, MindMate, which is specially designed for people with dementia, gives you a different task every day; then Photobook. We just see what they’re interested in and design that tablet around what we think would benefit them.”

- **Minimising interruptions:** Staff also suggested the tablets should have ad blockers because frequent advertisements were disruptive and confusing for people living with dementia and/or memory loss.
- **Shortcuts:** The idea of a ‘one button’ approach was popular with older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. This idea expressed their desire to remove the complexity of having to go through multiple steps and be able to access and do

what they wanted with one action. To some extent, this idea was reflected in strategies staff, volunteer Digital Champions and carers used to simplify tasks for them. For example, many mentioned they created shortcuts for things like YouTube or calls, which helped with using those apps.

“We’ve downloaded a [Tesco shopping] shortcut onto her desktop so she can just click on that. These shortcuts are really useful on her laptop because she sees the logo & knows that all she needs to do is click on that it takes her to the website that she needs. That’s becoming more evident with a lot of clients with memory loss, that if they save this shortcut, it triggers their memory. It takes away a couple of steps that they might get frustrated with.” [Staff]

“YouTube playlist - he uses that between [my] visits. He has a shortcut using the icon on the bottom of his phone, so goes straight to YouTube. I think we’ve got this thing saying, ‘always go to the three dots at the top’.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

“I think it would be good if it was easy for me to find it on my phone or tablet. It would have to be just like a button that I press. It’s no good putting passwords in, and numbers or letters, because they will go out of my head. I can write them down, but it’s not really the same. It would be better for me to just press something with a finger like that, and it comes up. And then it’s obvious to me, what it is I want to do.” [Older person living with dementia]

“He can call his wife and he has a shortcut on his phone to call her. That was set up for him by another Age UK volunteer. So, he can call her.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

- **Albums and playlists:** To enable older people living with dementia and/or memory loss to listen to music or view photos, carers, staff and volunteer Digital Champions sometimes created playlists and photo albums for them. Potentially, there could be other ways in which varied content could be made more accessible by curating it in one place and simplifying access by reducing it to a small number of steps.

“I used to listen to music on Alexa. I can never remember the artists’ names now anymore, even that’s gone now. I have a playlist that someone created for me on a smartphone, but it’s remembering how to access it as well. But you can say it to Alexa, that’s the good thing. I like my playlist.” [Older person living with dementia]

- **Managing data:** A staff respondent highlighted a challenge in that clients did not know how to keep within their data allowance, so some used up their data allowance too quickly. They wondered whether a daily data limit could be set up so participants could not use up all their data in a very short period of time.
- **Technology designed for older people (e.g. Doro):** Another staff respondent explained many of their clients – whether or not they lived with dementia and/or memory loss – used phones and tablets specifically designed for older people. These

typically had simpler interfaces, larger buttons or icons, and were easier to use in terms of the digital and motor skills they required.

- **Help with set-up:** Where the general Programme may be teaching older people how to set-up their devices, accounts or download applications, this may not be helpful or realistic with older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Instead, carers, staff and/or volunteer Digital Champions were providing help with set-up, so that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss could use digital technologies in particular ways that benefitted them. For example, carers would download WhatsApp so that their loved ones could use it, rather than show them how to download the app.
- **Wider range of technology:** Staff, and sometimes also carers and older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, talked about diverse digital devices as helpful to older people living with dementia and/or memory loss:

- **Smart speakers** and other voice-assisted technology were highlighted as easier to use for some older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, as they simplified steps required to a verbal command. A carer, however, noted that the person still needed to remember to start their command with the name of the voice assistant, e.g. Alexa.

“You can ask it a question every day to keep my brain active; can put medication reminders in, family birthdays, to contact someone; works the other way round when someone calls them, they can just say ‘Alexa, answer the phone’, they don’t have to remember whether it is the red button or the green button. Also, it saves them the hassle of remembering numbers, or where to find the contacts.” [Staff]

- **Virtual reality** was mentioned by a staff respondent as potentially beneficial in bringing back memories, for example, of places where clients lived or visited. The hope that this could stimulate memory, cognition and communication, as well as bring benefits in terms of emotional wellbeing.

“With Virtual Reality, we’re only just starting to trial it with 3 groups now and a lot of people get quite emotional with it, because they found stuff that they remember from when they were younger. [...] We had one gentleman who used to ride a motorbike so he asked if he could be put onto a motorbike experience, so when he went on it, he came out & started talking to his carer about [things they used to do] so it triggered that he remembered things that he’d not remembered before.” [Staff]

- **Robotic pets** were also mentioned as popular with older people living with dementia, although none of the local Age UKs/Cymrus involved in the evaluation were using them.

“The other thing they have in this area is robotic cats and dogs which pet therapy use. They can make noises, flip, sit down. They give them out to anybody who has dementia to have as a pet. They had 15 in 2019, now they’ve gone up to 65 because

they're so popular with people with dementia. They are controlled with a tablet, the carer can make it purr or roll over or miaow. Pet therapy said that's now really taken off, people talking to them etc." [Staff]

- **Safety devices**, including sensors and cameras, were highlighted by staff and some carers as potentially beneficial and something carers were interested in knowing more about.

"It's a detection, sensor motion on the front which plays a recorded message when they walk past it. It will say, for example, 'remember to turn the gas off' if you've been cooking; or one by the front door to say, 'remember to lock the door'. We had quite a lot from the Fire Service, about 80 of them. But mostly they use it for medication, saying 'are your pills still on the table, you need to remember to take them'." [Staff]

- **Stylus pens** were provided by some local Age UKs/Cymrus as they thought older people living with dementia found them easier to use with touchscreens, where they had reduced motor skills.

While diverse devices above were seen as potentially helpful, some carers also remained cautious around introducing any new devices to the person living with dementia they cared for. Those carers felt that any support to use digital technology would need to be limited to devices that the person already had, and that introducing anything new would be a step too far.

"My main concern would be incorporating yet another device into [client name] day-to-day. We are struggling quite a bit, it is quite a limited number of things that he is using or has access to at the moment, so we could potentially be complicating matters by adding a new device. But I do see how people who may be slightly more technologically advanced could benefit from that." [Carer]

- **Practical support to engage with the Programme:** Staff also talked about the practical support they needed to provide so older people living with dementia and/or memory loss could participate in the Programme:
 - To support attendance, staff helped clients note their digital support sessions in their diaries and communicated the timings to their carer. Staff also called participants and carers to remind them of the next session.
 - Where participants had carers, carers helped by making sure that the borrowed tablet was charged and brought to the session, whereas those without carers sometimes forgot to do that. In some instances, carers were also present during the digital support sessions, which staff felt was helpful as they could then remind participants of what they learned and did after the sessions. Carers' presence also made some participants feel more at ease in the session, at least until they became familiar with the volunteer.

- Flexibility in arranging appointments was also highlighted as important due to day-to-day oscillations in how older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were feeling mentally and emotionally.

“Most times we call them to remind them. But most clients have their diary and we tell their carer.” [Staff]

“It’s important that there’s some flexibility with regard to those appointments and scheduling because as sure you can appreciate every day living with dementia can fluctuate quite a lot.” [Carer]

- **Ad hoc support:** Constant changes in software, interfaces, operating systems etc. were highlighted as a challenge for older people continuing to use what they have learned in general, but particularly for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. For this reason, a staff respondent thought the Programme would also need to provide follow-up, ad hoc support to help assist clients and reassure them if things on their device changed. An older person living with dementia expressed a similar view, as they wanted to have access to a digital support helpline which they could access on an ad hoc basis to solve a problem.

The role of carers

The evaluation showed a mixed picture in terms of carers’ interest in engaging with the Digital Champion Programme. There were strong motivations why some carers wanted to get involved and support their loved ones with digital technology, as well as significant barriers for other carers. With some exceptions, carers who were adult children, sons and daughters-in-law or neighbours of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were more likely to be interested in supporting them with digital technology than carers who were their partners.

Carers’ main motivation for engaging with digital technology to support their loved ones was to help them manage some day-to-day challenges arising from living with dementia and/or memory loss:

- **Managing practical challenges**, for example, using reminders to help older people living with dementia and/or memory loss remember their appointments or to take medication;
- **Addressing safety concerns**, for example, using sensors or reminders to prevent fire hazards from cooking, remember to lock the door when leaving the house or not leave the house at night;
- **Improving mood and wellbeing**, for example, by having some entertainment and being able to watch TV or play music;
- **Maintaining social contact** by being able to answer calls and keep in touch with family and friends.

Some carers who engaged with the Programme also enjoyed those sessions as opportunities for bonding with the person they cared for and learning something together.

“One of the gentlemen we support, his son says they do it together at home and he’s finding it really beneficial. They are learning the same skills. He sits and listens and participates so that they can do it together. He says that’s been a real bonding time with each other too, which is nice.” [Staff]

At the same time, staff and carers highlighted some barriers too, some of which made carers less likely to use digital technology to support their loved ones. Other barriers were more specific to engaging with the Programme than using digital technology per se.

- **Lack of digital skills:** Partners of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss – who were their carers – sometimes lacked digital skills themselves and were not interested in learning how to use digital devices.
- **Frustration:** Staff reported that some carers and older people living with dementia and/or memory loss felt that carers trying to provide support with using digital technology might lead to arguments and make them both feel frustrated and upset.
- **Caring demands:** Staff and carers noted the high burden of caring for someone living with dementia and felt that some carers might feel overwhelmed if further demands on their time and energy were added, to include giving support with using digital technology.
- **Assessment of older person’s capacity to learn:** Carers sometimes also thought that their loved one’s dementia was too far progressed for them to be able to retain any new information and/or complete certain tasks using digital technology independently.
- **Family support:** In a few cases, carers felt that they and the broader family were able to provide any support needed with digital technology, so that they would not need the help of the Programme for this reason.

“It’s quite difficult to observe [what role carers might have]. Some of our clients do have loved ones there but we do find the majority find it really hard to support each other with learning skills, which is natural within a couple anyway because they normally get frustrated with each other. One might be very tech savvy and quite capable whereas the other might not be and they don’t normally share those skills together because they end up getting frustrated or arguing, so it’s quite hard to get that information, to be honest.” [Staff]

While carer engagement varied as discussed above, most staff thought that their support was critical for helping older people living with dementia and/or memory loss re-call and use digital skills they learned:

- **Finding notes:** At minimum, carers’ help was often needed to help their loved ones find their notes or other materials they used to document the steps they needed to take, so they can use that to remind themselves how to do what they learned.
- **Assisting with participation in the Programme:** Carers supported older people living with dementia and/or memory loss by charging their devices ahead of digital skills sessions, providing transport if sessions were held at Age UK venues, and sometimes also being present at those sessions.

- **Encouraging digital technology use:** Staff also thought it was helpful if carers could encourage older people living with dementia and/or memory loss to use their digital devices and practice what they learned between digital skills sessions.
- **Repeating instructions:** Carers could further help older people retain what they learned by repeating the same instructions and steps shown by volunteer Digital Champions.

“I’ve got clients who come to see me, whom I lent a tablet, and they don’t remember to bring a tablet or to charge them. Those with carers, carers always bring the tablet and make sure it’s charged. We want to have a carer group too where we teach them how to support clients.” [Staff]

“His wife will remember things and she’ll be able to talk him through it because she’s seen him do it. If I’ve shown him how to send email, if he forgets, she would be able to remind him. I’m comfortable that I’m explaining it to her as much as to him. She will be patient with him. [...] Without her, it would be tougher. I can’t imagine him being on his own, he wouldn’t even make it here on his own.” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

Carers shared some additional thoughts about how they would be involved with the Programme, if their loved ones were taking part. Most carers thought they would need to accompany their loved ones to digital skills support sessions to make them feel comfortable about the presence of an unknown person. Some also thought that observing digital skills sessions would be useful, as they could learn too, for example how to do certain things with digital technology and how to support the person they cared for. A few carers also noted these sessions may allow them to ask about other relevant support and be signposted to other services.

At the same time, carers wanted to stay in the background during support sessions, to allow older people living with dementia and/or memory loss to engage with learning and communicate with volunteer Digital Champions. Carers highlighted the risk that their presence may make their loved ones too reliant on their help and that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss sometimes engaged more if they had to do that independently.

In addition, staff and carers also thought that the Programme could engage carers directly to raise their awareness of how digital technology could be used to manage challenges of day-to-day life with dementia and/or memory loss. This part of the Programme would, therefore, be about supporting carers to learn – for example, how to set reminders, create playlists or photo albums, find dementia-specific apps or technology – rather than just working with them to support older people living with dementia and/or memory loss with their use of digital technology.

While carer engagement with the Programme was seen as important for its success, some staff also reported they had many clients with no carers. In those cases, staff sometimes liaised with professional carers – for example, domiciliary social care or care home staff – so they could help their clients find the notes (photos, videos etc) they could use to re-call the steps they learned to do something. If there were no carers involved and dementia was too

advanced for the client to be able to locate their learning materials themselves, staff sometimes felt that it was not possible to continue to support that client, as they would not be able to use what they learned during the sessions. Clients without carers, therefore, were more likely to benefit from the Programme if they were in the very early stages of dementia and memory loss, so they could still retain some information themselves.

Dementia stage and engagement with digital technology

Respondents across different groups agreed that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were more likely to benefit from the Programme and digital technology if they accessed support as early as possible following the presentation of symptoms and/or a diagnosis:

- **Cognitive capacity:** Based on their experience, staff and carers noted that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were more alert and more able to retain some information in the early stages of memory loss and dementia. For this reason, they believed that older people living with mild dementia and/or memory loss would have the capacity to develop and/or retain some digital skills in the early stages.

Considering the later stages of dementia, some carers reported that their relatives deteriorated cognitively too much over time, to be able to learn new skills, retain information or use digital technology independently. Staff also reported they have come across clients whose dementia was too advanced for them to engage with learning, which instead made them feel tired and stressed. In those situations, decisions about stopping support were made in discussion with carers. One staff respondent also noted that with clients living with moderate to advanced dementia, their carers would usually be the ones who would decide whether to try and engage with the support, how and for how long.

“The few clients whose dementia was more progressed just didn’t have any understanding of what we were going to support them with, so tricky.” [Staff]

- **Opportunities for cognitive stimulation:** Carers and older people living with mild dementia and/or memory loss also hoped that digital technology could provide activities that promote cognitive stimulation, which they thought may help maintain their cognitive abilities for longer.
- **Hope that some of those skills could be preserved later on:** Some carers and older people living with mild dementia and/or memory loss also hoped that digital skills developed in the early stages could be potentially preserved for longer, benefitting them in the stages when they would struggle to learn something new.

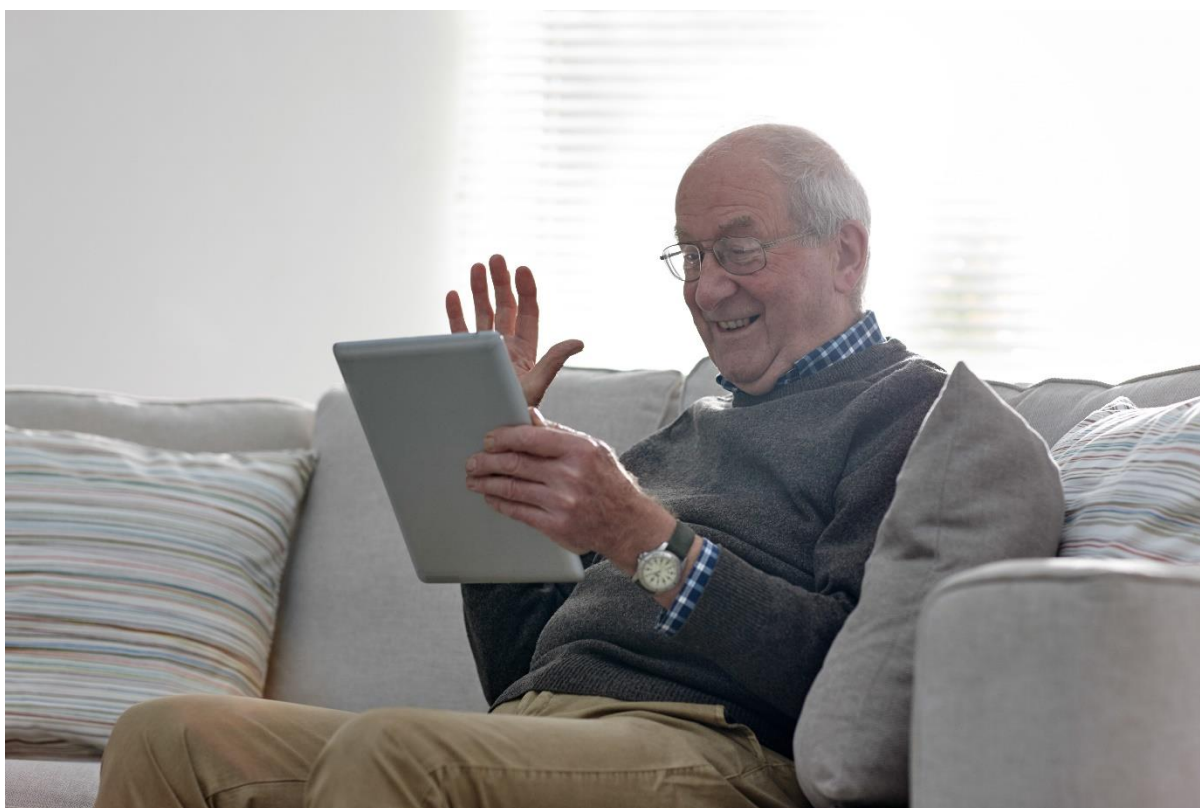
At the same time, there was also recognition that older people living with moderate to advanced dementia may also be able to benefit from digital technology, provided their carers could support them with that. In particular, carers stressed that listening to music, looking at photos or watching videos engaged older people living with more advanced dementia and benefitted them in terms of their mood and emotional wellbeing. The role of

the Programme may, therefore, be to raise carers' awareness and support them to use digital technology with their loved ones in these ways.

4. IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

4.1. Impact in terms of digital skills and use of technology

Staff, volunteer Digital Champions and clients reported that the Programme was effective in improving digital skills of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss under certain conditions. Specifically, to achieve this impact, clients needed to be able to access the records of their learning to help them re-call and follow the steps they learned. This was possible either where clients had mild dementia and/or memory loss so were able to locate and use their records and systems that helped them remember, or where carers were present so could support clients to access their records.



Under those conditions, the evaluation found that the Programme helped some clients develop, improve or remember the following digital skills:

- **Using their phone to text, call and WhatsApp:** Clients who wanted to learn or improve these skills mostly succeeded in that, even if the extent of their learning and use of these skills varied. For example, some learned only to answer calls, others to answer and call themselves; yet, others also learned how to text. Staff noted that many clients were then happy to stop at this, as their main goal with digital technology was to be

able to keep in touch with their family, and they were not interested in other ways of using digital technology.

“I can do far more than I could before and I’m getting slowly, but surely, I’m becoming more competent. [...] A phone is an item that is used regularly, we use it as a means of communication during the day, if we’re out and about.” [Client]

A smaller number of clients were interested in learning how to do other tasks using digital technologies. Some of these clients had used digital technologies before, so had a more positive attitude to doing this. They had often forgotten how to do certain things and wanted the Programme to help them remember and learn other things. Common examples of skills these clients learned included:

- **Creating and sharing content:** A smaller number of clients also learned how to take, save and share photos. With the help of step-by-step instructions – which sometimes included screenshots and videos of themselves doing those tasks – some clients were able to do this independently. In addition, a client learned how to use Word on her computer to write her life story.

“I can use my camera, my photographs I can keep those, shortly I shall be sending photographs to those who I communicate with.” [Client]

- **Accessing music content:** Where volunteer Digital Champions (or carers) created music playlists, some clients learned how to access those and play their favourite music.
- **Browsing the internet:** A client also reported they learned how to browse the internet and access news online.

“I use Google search. I look at politics, sport and music.” [Client]

- **Online shopping:** In a small number of cases, staff reported that the Programme also helped some older people living with mild dementia and/or memory loss learn how to do online shopping, helping them be more independent.

“The lady I see is much more independent now in doing her online shopping. It’s been quite a long time, as I’ve been supporting her for 6 months, but she’s now able to do it by herself.” [Staff]

Staff also stressed the positive impact of Digital Champion support in raising clients’ confidence in using digital technologies, which they thought made older people living with dementia and/or memory loss more motivated and interested in using digital technologies. Some clients interviewed for the evaluation also observed that learning how to do certain things using their smartphones or other digital devices gave them a sense of achievement. In addition, staff received feedback that providing this support made people with dementia feel they were not left out from support, learning and using digital technologies.

“It’s been tremendous. The fact that they feel they are not left out. I have a client whose friend gets digital support but people there are too fast for my client, don’t consider his ability. So, knowing they can come here and knowing that we know they have dementia and that we will go slowly and remind them over and over. I had so many positive responses.” [Staff]

“Something like what we’ve been talking about it could help a long way. it makes you feel as though you’re still amongst other people.” [Client]

4.2. Impact in other areas of life

Respondents across all groups involved in the evaluation observed the positive impact that digital technologies had on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss in other areas of their lives.

- **Contact with family and friends:** Being able to get in touch with family and friends provided reassurance that they could access help if needed and that their family could check on them. It also reassured some older people living with dementia and/or memory loss that being able to use their phones would help them maintain their social connections and reduce loneliness and isolation.

“It made them happier. The ones that could make a phone call, they didn’t need to wait for the family to ring them. They could ring the family.” [Staff]

“I know someone whose son is in New Zealand and he now knows the icon for Facetime so he can call his son. So, the response has been very positive.” [Staff]

- **Improved mood and emotional wellbeing:** Older people living with dementia and/or memory loss being able to access content online, for example, music, videos, TV or photos, was highly appreciated by their carers. Carers observed that their relatives living with dementia and/or memory loss seemed to feel depressed, bored, lonely and isolated. They also observed that activities such as listening to music or watching old photos and videos had a significant positive impact on their loved ones’ mood and wellbeing. Some carers felt these activities made them alive, prompted conversations, and made their quality of life better. Some older people living with dementia and/or memory loss also made similar comments on the improvements to their mood from listening to music, for example.

“With photo albums, it gives them something to do to cure boredom, it can trigger memories and prompt conversation.” [Staff]

“We’ve had some really positive feedback from loved ones, that these sessions have been really beneficial, it’s brought out new experiences for them and they’re talking about more things at home. The holistic view is that we’ve helped their general wellbeing as well as their digital skills, which is quite lovely to hear.” [Staff]

“When we first meet clients, they are generally quite unhappy, they struggle and are very, very lonely and isolated. So, the support that we are giving through digital skills has opened up a whole new world for them. They’re starting to communicate with others which has taken away the social isolation. They’re filling their time with more things that make them happy, simple things like playing games. One lady really enjoys playing card games, so we showed her how to do that on a tablet and that’s opened up a whole new world for her, whereas otherwise she would just have been sat in front of the telly. So, it’s given a real positive to her whole mental state and happiness, which has been really good to see.” [Staff]

“When we google these songs that he’s fond of, we listen to them about three or four times and he literally stares out the patio doors with tears in his eyes. He goes off to his own place. We’ll talk about the song, the band, where he’s listened to those. He’ll give me a full chorus of lyrics... He’ll go back to memories from growing up or a certain situation in his life. He gets quite emotional. And last week he set me off!” [Volunteer Digital Champion]

“It’s good, because sometimes I’m just sat there bored and I don’t know what to do with myself. I like to listen to music when I’m doing a bit of cleaning in the kitchen. Music does help. It’s almost like therapy. It lifts me.” [Older person living with dementia]

“It breaks my heart to see my mum looking sad. So I’ll pull out the tablet or the laptop and I’ll bring up Irish folk music. She’ll listen to records and she’ll be elated. She’ll ask, ‘What else can it do’ and finds it fascinating. She says, ‘Get that electric thing’ and I’ll play her Irish music or sweet little TikTok videos of kittens or something. She loves animals, and it puts a smile on her face. It’s as if she’s bored and lonely in her dementia, but the tablet or the laptop keeps her entertained. You know when you’ve got small children and you put on a video of cartoons or something, so it keeps them quiet and entertained. It’s the opposite for her, it brings her alive.” [Carer]

- **Preserving memories and a sense of self:** Some staff and volunteer Digital Champions reported instances where Programme support enabled clients to maintain aspects of their hobbies and interests or bring back memories, with the help of digital technology. In these staff and Digital Champions’ views, this helped clients feel they were still the person they were before dementia, maintaining their sense of self.

“One client wanted to be able to remember how to take pictures of flowers. That’s what he wanted to remember how to do. It’s just something that will keep memories going, keep him happy. Another client always used to listen to records. It’s part of his personality. And the gentleman with flowers, it’s part of who he is. So, it definitely helps them because you get a lot taken away from you when you have dementia. So, if you can keep that one thing going, it really helps you.” [Staff]

“I would feel more comfortable that when things go wrong, they won’t go completely wrong. There are things that bring things back. Anything that’s digital that would bring me things back. For instance, a film... a film would bring things back. It’s a

feelgood factor. You're not out of it. you're in it. in fact, I'm cleverer than you are when we're watching things from the 1960s. So, you can be a bit smarter than the person you're watching it with. It's refreshing that you can tell somebody else that doesn't know about it." [Client]

- **Managing day-to-day challenges of living with dementia and/or memory loss:** One older person living with dementia was satisfied that their system for digital reminders worked well to help them manage various day-to-day practicalities, for example, remembering appointments or cooking times. A carer also reported they found digital reminders beneficial for the older person they cared for, although they noted that this depended on whether the person would hear the alarm. Other older people living with dementia and/or memory loss thought that reminders would be beneficial, but providing there was also a system for them to know what the alarm was for (rather than just beeping at a certain time).



5. CONCLUSIONS AND LEARNINGS

5.1. Identifying, engaging and assessing clients

Local Age UKs/Cymrus found that most productive referral sources for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss included: other Age UK services (particularly dementia services), memory clinics and social prescribers. Within this, there were some variations in how effective different referral sources were. For example, some staff found that dementia

centres supporting older people living with more advanced dementia did not lead to as many referrals, as services catering for older people with mild to moderate dementia.

In addition, clients in this group were also sometimes recruited incidentally, as part of a general recruitment drive. This was particularly the case with a local Age UK focusing exclusively on supporting housebound people, as they found that about a third of their target group included older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. But people in this group were also sometimes involved in the Programme as part of the core Programme delivery supporting general population of older people.

The evaluation highlighted the importance of awareness raising to engage older people living with dementia and/or memory loss – and their carers – with the Programme and digital technology. Awareness raising conversations were critical to create knowledge around benefits of digital technology – general and dementia-specific ones – and build trust and confidence to engage with the Programme and digital technology. The evaluation suggested the following factors contributed to effective awareness raising and engagement:

- Highlighting dementia-specific benefits of digital technology raised interest;
- Social benefits of digital technology were popular, as with older people in general;
- Clients who used digital technology before were sometimes easier to engage;
- Clients with mild dementia and/or memory loss were more likely to think they had the capacity to engage with digital technology, however, there were sometimes other barriers to engaging them (for example, depression);
- Providing reassurance around challenges of retaining information for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss was important, for example, highlighting strategies to support learning and re-call.

Assessments of client suitability for the Programme were made on a case-to-case basis, as staff and/or volunteer Digital Champions needed to judge whether clients could benefit from the Programme or whether their dementia and/or memory loss was too advanced for them to be able to learn what they wanted to. To assess this, staff considered a range of things, including client engagement and response to learning, carers' views and what support they could provide, and views of staff from dementia support services (if they had prior contact with the client). Where there were questions over client capacity to engage with learning, staff and/or volunteer Digital Champions used initial support sessions to gauge if clients were engaging and making progress, as well as conversations with everyone involved to assess whether and how long support should continue.

In addition, those local Age UKs exclusively targeting this group of older people sometimes also assessed whether clients were eligible in terms of experiencing memory loss or not. One local Age UK initially used selected SMMSE questions to screen potential clients for memory loss and cognitive impairment to identify those eligible for the service. Their experience suggested this approach involved significant challenges. Firstly, it resulted in having to reject many older people who needed help with digital technology but did not experience memory loss and cognitive impairment, which was stressful to them and to staff. Secondly, staff felt that screening for cognitive impairment and memory loss was not

appropriate in the context of the Programme that wasn't a dementia support service. And thirdly, such screening could be potentially stressful to older people who experienced cognitive testing at memory clinics. For all these reasons, this approach was abandoned.

The experience of the second local Age UK piloting the service exclusively targeting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss highlighted some other challenges involved in this model:

- Staff and volunteer Digital Champions felt uneasy about identifying older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, as they felt they could be seen as diagnosing people (where they did not have a diagnosis);
- Staff defined memory loss in very broad terms, to include older people experiencing memory loss as part of normal ageing.

Defining the target group in terms of dementia and memory loss led to an inclusive approach, as diverse older people experiencing memory loss could be included. However, as the experience above suggests, it also came with a risk of interpreting it too broadly and potentially at the expense of including older people living with dementia, who are likely to be more difficult to engage than people experiencing memory loss as part of ageing.

5.2. Adapting the general Digital Champion Programme model

Many of the key features of the Digital Champion Programme model were perceived to work well for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, in the same ways they did for older people in general. In particular, older people in this group and their carers appreciated access to one-to-one tailored and flexible support, as well as the loan device scheme and signposting to other services. Similarly, certain learning topics were popular across the board, including with older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, for example, learning how to use their phones to call and text or use WhatsApp.

However, the evaluation also found that there were many dementia-specific areas of interest and ways in which support needed to be, and was, adjusted to be helpful to older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Key dementia-specific learning topics that raised interest included:

- Using digital technology to set reminders;
- Accessing cognitive exercises online;
- Accessing music, videos or photos that bring back memories, support the person's sense of self and improve their mood and emotional wellbeing;
- Accessing dementia support online.

Approaches to supporting and teaching older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were often similar to those used with older people in general. For example, patience, repetition, step-by-step explanations, notes to use as reminders were all helpful to most older people, but they were even more important for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Main adaptations to the way support was provided involved:

- Allowing more time and repetition to progress learning;

- Documenting learning and developing strategies to re-call steps that were learned (through a range of methods, including handouts, notes, diagrams, screenshots and videos);
- Simplifying devices, interfaces and processes (through de-cluttering screens, ad-blockers, shortcuts, easy access to content through photo albums or music playlists, using devices specifically designed for older people);
- Identifying most suitable digital devices that are easier to use or have dementia-specific benefits (for example, smart speakers, VR, safety devices);
- Providing practical support to clients to be able to engage with the Programme;
- Providing ad hoc follow-up support with troubleshooting;
- Providing help with setting-up devices, accounts or downloading apps, so that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss can use digital technology in ways that benefit them.

The Programme also needed to adapt in terms of training provided to volunteer Digital Champions. Those supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss appreciated they had training that helped them understand dementia, experiences of living with dementia and/or memory loss and ways of working with this group of older people. Any further adaptations regarding volunteer Digital Champions depended on whether local Age UKs/Cymrus supported older people living with dementia and/or memory loss as part of their general service or their service was designed for this group only:

- **Inclusion within the general service:** Where this group was included as part of general service, volunteer Digital Champions chose whether they wanted to work with this group or not. Those local Age UKs/Cymrus did not report any challenges involved in securing volunteer Digital Champions to support this group (beyond the general challenges in volunteer recruitment that were an issue across the board).
- **Targeted service model:** Where local Age UKs set out to support this group of older people only, they came across significant challenges in volunteer recruitment. Initial problems also stemmed from not being clear with prospective volunteers that they would only work with older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Staff corrected this to be clear about this aim, however, volunteer recruitment remained difficult. Staff concluded that this service should aim for volunteers with caring skills, who could be trained to improve their IT skills if needed, rather than volunteers with IT skills.

The evaluation further suggested the following broader **learnings that could be useful for future Digital Champion support for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss**:

- Including older people living with dementia and/or memory loss as part of the general Digital Champion service worked better than trying to offer a service targeting this group only, which was a model beset by many challenges discussed in this report.
- The profile of Digital Champions supporting this group of older people would need to include not only digital skills but also caring skills. In particular, people with personal,

work or volunteer experience of working with people living with dementia and/or memory loss would bring important skills to this work.

- Close collaboration between Age UK's Digital Champion Programme and dementia services would help with supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Where this was the case, it not only helped with referrals of suitable older people, but it allowed for beneficial exchange of knowledge between these teams, where dementia services benefitted from introducing suitable digital technologies to their clients and Digital Champion Programme staff and volunteers benefited from dementia support staff expertise and advice on needs of individual clients.
- Age UK National could play a role in sharing best practices, as well as helpful resources, across local Age UKs/Cymrus to support future Digital Champion Programme services for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. This would avoid individual local Age UKs having to 'invent' Programme adaptations from scratch and losing valuable knowledge and experience of others. A toolkit or a similar resource would be merited in this context, as Programme adaptations for this high-risk group have been more extensive than for other high-risk groups (as suggested by this and the main Digital Champion evaluation).

5.3. Level of cognitive impairment and client engagement

Respondents across different groups agreed that older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were more likely to benefit from the Programme and digital technology if they accessed support as early as possible after their symptoms started. This was because their capacity to learn was noted to be greater in the early stages of dementia and/or memory loss. Also, there was hope that being able to use digital technology in the early stages would support cognitive stimulation and potentially enable older people to preserve digital skills for longer.

However, staff, carers and older people living with dementia and/or memory loss also believed that there were benefits from digital technology for those in advanced stages of dementia. Specifically, listening to music, watching videos, or looking at family photos, were all seen to bring important benefits to this group too, for example, improving their mood and emotional wellbeing. The difference here was that older people living with more advanced dementia would need others' help to access digital technology to benefit in these ways.

5.4. The role of carers

The evaluation found that carers had both important motivations and significant barriers to supporting their loved ones to engage with the Programme and digital technology. On the one hand, carers could see potential benefits of digital technology in improved social contact, safety, emotional wellbeing, and managing dementia-specific challenges for older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. On the other hand, lack of digital skills for some carers, the pressure of caring demands, and questions over cognitive capacity of the person they cared for to engage with digital technology made some carers feel unsure about the benefits of the Programme.

At the same time, staff and volunteer Digital Champions felt that carers help was often critical for Digital Champion Programme services to have desired outcomes. For example, some older people living with dementia and/or memory loss were able to use instructions they recorded to re-trace the steps needed to do what they wanted. However, they sometimes needed carers' help with finding their notes or other records of the steps. Carers' help was also needed with charging devices, bringing devices to support sessions, encouraging use of digital technology, and attending support sessions so older people living with dementia and/or memory loss would feel more comfortable. Where carers were more involved, they also helped consolidate new skills by repeating instructions between support sessions.

While there is a risk that carers may perceive the Programme as adding more work for them, there are also potential benefits for carers that some are likely to be interested in. As mentioned, carers were interested in digital technology that would address day-to-day challenges in terms of safety and reminders, as well as ways to improve mood and emotional wellbeing of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss, and potentially maintain cognitive abilities for longer for those in early stages. Raising awareness of carers of these specific benefits would therefore be an important part of the Programme supporting older people living with dementia and/or memory loss.

Where there were no informal carers, staff sometimes tried to liaise with paid carers and ask them to help their clients find instructions they needed to use digital technology. Where there were no paid carers either and the client was not able to remember where their notes were, staff found it was difficult to provide support with digital skills.

5.5. Impact of the Programme and digital technology

Staff, volunteer Digital Champions and clients reported that the Programme was effective in improving digital confidence and skills of older people living with dementia and/or memory loss. Learning how to call, answer calls, text or use WhatsApp to keep in touch with family and friends were the most common goals that clients achieved. A smaller proportion of clients also learned other digital skills, including accessing, creating or sharing content and browsing the internet. A very small number of clients went further to learn how to do online shopping so they could be more independent.

To achieve these goals and be able to use digital technology as they wanted, clients needed to be able to access the records of their learning to help them re-call and follow the steps they learned. This was possible either where clients had mild dementia and/or memory loss so were able to locate and use their records and systems that helped them remember, or where carers were present so could support clients to access their records.

Respondents across all groups involved in the evaluation also observed positive impact that digital technologies had on older people living with dementia and/or memory loss in other areas of their lives. As mentioned in relation to perceived benefits, older people living with dementia and carers found that digital technology helped maintain social connections, improve mood and emotional wellbeing, bring back memories and maintain the person's

sense of self, and sometimes also help with day-to-day challenges arising from living with dementia and/or memory loss.