

TimeBank's Digitall project – evaluation summary

June 2010

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M&E monitoring and evaluation consulting



Be *open minded*
Be a volunteer

Introduction

In September 2009, M & E Consulting were commissioned by TimeBank¹ to carry out an evaluation of Digital, a mentoring project matching 18 to 25 year-old volunteers with older people who want to improve their ICT (information and communication technologies) skills. The project is funded by V (the national young volunteers' service), and is being delivered between June 2008 and the end of March 2011.

This report is based on a mid-project evaluation covering the period January 2009 to April 2010, when the project was delivered in partnership with centres in two London boroughs; the New Horizons Centre in Kensington and Chelsea and the Akshar Centre in Brent.

The project

The Digital project seeks to address key issues around intergenerational relationships and digital inclusion by bringing older mentees together with younger mentors to develop mentees' computer skills. In particular, Digital aims to:

- increase the digital inclusion of older people
- reduce the social isolation of older people
- break down barriers and promote understanding between the generations
- improve the confidence and interpersonal skills of young mentors
- open up pathways to education and employment for young mentors.

Mentors and mentees meet on a one-to-one basis for a total of twelve hours over a period of three months. Mentors provide support to mentees on various aspects of ICT. Both groups also receive support from Digital's Project Manager which includes induction sessions, handbooks and events.

The evaluation

The evaluation focused on the effectiveness of Digital to date, and also looked at the longer-term value of the project; it centred on four key aspects:

- the quality of the support provided to mentees and mentors
- the difference the support has made to mentees
- the difference that being a mentor has made to young people
- the long-term value of the project including:
 - older people's health and well-being
 - young people's engagement in volunteering.

¹ TimeBank is a national volunteering charity aiming to make volunteering part of the fabric of everyday life and a rewarding experience for everyone involved. www.timebank.org.uk

Methodology

A range of techniques were used to collect the necessary profile and outcome data:

- Questions were added to the project's own monitoring surveys
- A follow-up survey to all mentors who had completed their involvement with the project
- Telephone interviews with a sample of mentees three months after they had completed their involvement with the project.

Evaluation sample

Telephone interviews were carried out with 23% of the mentees that were matched (32 mentees). The response rate to the follow-up survey to mentors was 22% (33 mentors).

The following data collected by the project was also analysed:

- baseline information for all 141 matched mentees².
- profile information for all 141 matched mentees and 150 matched mentors².
- 80 questionnaires completed by mentees at the end of their mentoring.³
- 93 questionnaires completed by mentors at the end of their mentoring.⁴

Key findings

1. The quality of the support provided

1.1 Mentee feedback

The feedback from mentees showed high levels of satisfaction with the support they received from their mentors and from Digitall's Project Manager. All of the mentees who filled in the end of mentoring questionnaire said they would recommend the project to friends and some said they had already done so.

Support from the Project Manager

99% of the mentees who filled in the online survey at the end of their involvement with the project said that the support they received from the Project Manager was excellent or good. Comments included:

[The Project Manager] needs to be congratulated for her support and the information she gave before we started the course. This took the fear out of the course.

The one-to-one support

² Mentees and mentors matched between January 2009 – 26 April 2010 did not all finish their mentoring sessions within this period and therefore some completed questionnaires after this period.

³ Data was analysed for 80 mentees who had completed questionnaires in the period January 2009 – 26 April 2010.

⁴ Data was analysed for 93 mentors who had completed questionnaires in the period January 2009 – 26 April 2010.

94% of the mentees interviewed particularly appreciated the one-to-one nature of the support provided by the project. One person explained:

You can speak more than you would in a class and don't feel you are taking up other people's time. And sometimes I get confused - when you are older one-to-one support is better.

The free support

98% of interviewees said that having free support had made a difference. Their comments included:

My pension is very little and adult education put all the prices up for us pensioners so it's very good.

1.2 Mentor feedback

Mentors' feedback about their experience of being involved with Digitall was extremely positive.

Support from the Project Manager

All the mentors completing the end of mentoring questionnaire⁵ rated the quality of support from the Project Manager as excellent or good. Comments included:

I thought the organisation and communication with the project manager was excellent.

The co-ordinator helped to point me in the right direction when I struggled to explain something.

Almost all the mentors who completed the end of mentoring questionnaire said they would recommend the scheme to friends. Comments included:

I keep telling people how great it was!

It's a very good project as it is short and sweet – perfect for those who want to help but do not have much time to spare.

2. Outcomes for mentees

The evaluation looked at the project's impact for older people in terms of:

- increasing their digital inclusion
- reducing their social isolation
- improving their health and well-being.

2. 1 Digitall inclusion

⁵ Based on responses from mentors who had completed the project's online survey at the end of the mentoring.

The extent to which the project has made a difference to older people's digital inclusion was assessed using the criteria set out in the report 'Delivering Digital Inclusion: Summary of consultation responses'⁶.

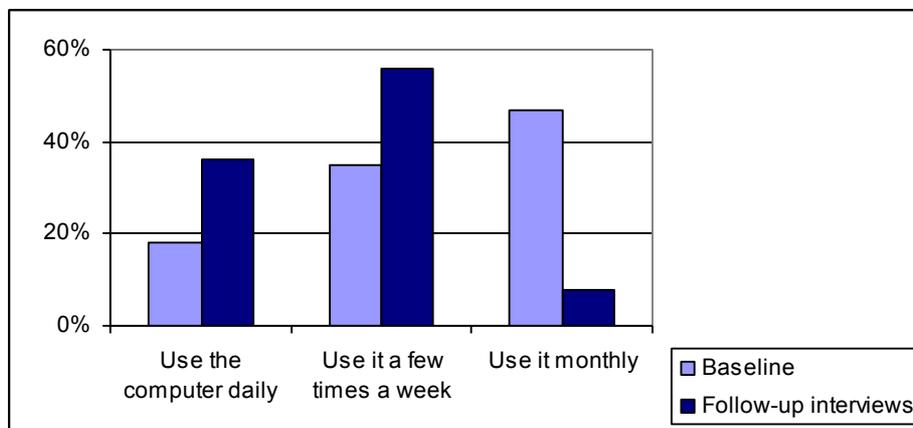
This evaluation has shown that the project has been extremely effective for older people by:

- increasing their digital access
- improving their ICT skills
- increasing their confidence in using the computer and the internet

Increased digital access

In the follow-up interviews mentees⁷ were asked about their digital access prior to and since their involvement with the project. Over three-quarters (78%) of the interviewees said that they now use a computer more frequently than they did before the project, as shown in the following chart.

Chart 1: Changes in the frequency of mentees' computer access



N = 17

Improved ICT skills

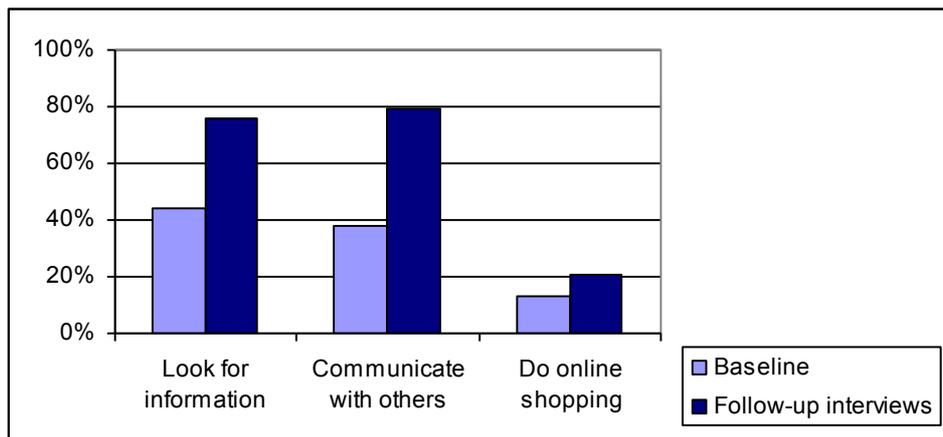
At the end of the mentoring, the majority (95%) of mentees⁸ said that they felt that their mentor had helped them improve their overall ICT skills. In the follow-up interviews almost all (91%) of the mentees said that they are now using the internet to do new things.

Chart 2: Changes in mentees' use of the internet

⁶ Delivering Digital Inclusion: Summary of consultation responses, HMSO, April 2009.

⁷ We carried out follow-up interviews with 32 mentees around three months after the mentoring had ended.

⁸ This is based on data from questionnaires completed by 80 mentees at the end of the mentoring.



N = 16

Increased confidence

The project has positively impacted older people's confidence, as shown below.

Table 1: Mentee feedback from the end of mentoring questionnaire

Outcomes for mentees at the end of mentoring	Number of mentees	Percentage of mentees
More confident using a computer	78	98%
More confident using the internet	77	96%
More confident using email	74	93%
Total number of mentees providing this information	80	100%

Mentors described how their mentees had grown in confidence:

A...is definitely more confident when using a computer. At first, she would wait for prompts, but nowadays she arrives at her sessions ten minutes early and goes online doing her own thing.

J... hadn't used a computer at all before doing DigitalI. She has not only had to learn how to use a mouse but can now use basic computer terminology and use Google with some confidence.

2.2 Social inclusion

The project has also contributed to reducing social isolation, as demonstrated below:

Table 2: Mentee feedback from telephone interviews

Outcomes for mentees at follow-up	Number of interviewees	Percentage of interviewees
More able to keep in touch with their family and friends	23	72%
More able to contact local services	10	31%
More involved in local events or activities	15	47%
More independent	18	56%
Total number of mentees providing this information	32	100%

Mentees described the difference the project has made to them:

They are my only grandchildren, thousands of miles away. It's just wonderful to Skype with them.

I don't have to ask anyone else to look things up, I can do it myself.

2.3 Health & well-being

Through supporting older people to become more independent and able to contact local services, as demonstrated above in Table 2, Digitall has enabled some mentees to feel more able to cope on their own. One mentee described:

If I fell down and needed things, like shopping, I could do it.

According to a government report,⁹ increasing older people's digital inclusion may also increase their ability to make use of assistive technology and equipment devices such as telecare pendants. Although this evaluation did not directly assess this aspect, by increasing mentees' ability to use technology, Digitall may have contributed to the longer-term health and well-being of some of the mentees in this way.

The opportunity to engage in further learning is also known to have benefits for well-being. Research carried out by the New Economics Foundation¹⁰ suggests that increasing people's ability to use technology can contribute to their longer-term health. The mentees' involvement in Digitall may therefore have played a part in increasing their ability to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

⁹ Delivering Digital Inclusion: Summary of consultation responses, HMSO 2009.

¹⁰ Five Ways to Well-being: The Evidence, nef, 2008

3. Outcomes for mentors

The evaluation assessed the impact of the project for younger people in terms of:

- improving their confidence and interpersonal skills
- enhancing their personal and professional development.
- increasing their engagement in volunteering

3.1 Confidence and interpersonal skills, personal and professional development

Mentors who completed the end of mentoring questionnaire and follow- up questionnaire have reported a wide range of positive outcomes, as shown below.

Tables 3 & 4: Mentor feedback from questionnaires

Outcomes at end of mentoring	Number of responses	Percentage
Improved communication skills	90	97%
Learned new ICT skills	59	63%
Increased self-confidence	91	98%
Improved CV/increased employment options	80	86%
Inspired to engage in further training and education activities	58	62%
Gained from helping someone else	82	88%
Changed their perception of volunteering	62	67%
Inspired to volunteer again in the future	93	100%
Total number of mentors providing this information	93	100%

Outcomes at follow-up	Number of responses	Percentage
Developed new skills	28	93%
Gained useful experience	29	97%
Developed new areas of interest	27	90%
Increased self-confidence	25	83%

Affected their direction in life	9	30%
Done further volunteering	10	33%
Keen to do more voluntary work in the future	28	93%
Total number of mentors providing this information	33	100%

Mentors who took part described the impact it has had on them, in terms of confidence and skills, and professional and personal development:

All in all, it was an enriching experience. It helped me to gain more confidence in myself.

I think it was a fantastic opportunity to develop my communication skills, especially with elderly people and I think I've become a more understanding and patient person.

I'm considering becoming a teacher, and have applied to the TeachFirst programme.

I learnt a great deal about myself in terms of what I can and cannot do during this project. I have definitely grown as a person.

3.2 Engagement in volunteering

They also explained the long-term effect their involvement has had:

I have decided to continue working voluntarily alongside my day job for as long as I can in life.

The experience has made me more aware of the volunteering opportunities out there and I am more likely to participate in another scheme compared to when I first started the project.

The fact that there exists volunteering which does not require long hours of application forms and processing. The flexibility and simplicity of the process and the ease of joining was a great encouragement for people who wish to take part in volunteering.

Increased intergenerational understanding

Finally, this evaluation shows that the project has increased mentors' and mentees' ability to understand and communicate with each other.

Table 5: Mentee feedback from the end of mentoring questionnaire

Outcomes for mentees at the end of mentoring	Number of mentees	Percentage of mentees
Gained a more positive perception of younger people	76	95%
Better able to communicate with younger generation	74	93%
Total number of mentees providing this information	80	100%

For example, comments included:

I was surprised how much patience some young people have got.

I am able to approach younger people with much more confidence than before joining this scheme.

Table 6: Mentor feedback from questionnaire

Outcomes at end of mentoring	Number of responses	Percentage
Better understanding of older people	91	98%
Better able to communicate with older people	88	95%
Total number of mentors providing this information	93	100%

Conclusion

This evaluation has found that TimeBank is delivering a high-quality project that is meeting its aims to:

- increase the digital and social inclusion of older people
- enhance young people's professional and personal development through skills and confidence development
- break down barriers and promote understanding between generations.

The long-term impact of the project also includes a positive impact on:

- older people's health and well-being
- young people's engagement in volunteering.

Certain aspects of DigitalI were particularly important for the project to be effective. Above all, mentees valued the one-to-one nature of the support which enabled the sessions to focus on their particular needs. For mentors, the short-term, flexible nature of the commitment was particularly important as this had allowed them to fit the volunteering into their lives more easily.

In the words of a staff member from a DigitalI partner organisation:

The DigitalI partnership has added value to the service we provide and it is a great pity that this project will end in one year's time. We need more projects like this.

In conclusion, this evaluation has found that DigitalI is an effective project which is successfully meeting its aims, and making a real difference to the lives of its mentors and mentees.



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TimeBank

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