



Case Study 2

Digital Skills workshops 2016

Digital skills workshops

1. Introduction

In line with government recommendations, Dacorum Borough Council is moving to 'Digital by default'.

Enabling our customers to access services online will make us more efficient and save money. During the financial year 2015-16 the council spent more than £240,000 on printing. If we can ensure that most of our customers can access the information they need online, there will be less demand for printed matter and fewer phone calls with simple queries. The housing service has already adopted digital-only sign-ups for all our homes.

2. Background to the project.

Our 2014 STAR survey highlighted that there is higher than the national average digital exclusion amongst Dacorum's tenants, particularly those living in supported housing. The overall figure for all tenants was:

Do you have access to the internet at home?

Yes 1579 (54.8%) No 1279 (45.2%)

We asked another question in the 2016 STAR survey, specifically asking residents how often they accessed the internet for personal use. Around 70% of supported housing respondents said that they **never** use the internet.

The government has identified four main kinds of challenge that people face to going online:

- access - the ability to actually go online and connect to the internet
- skills - to be able to use the internet
- motivation - knowing the reasons why using the internet is a good thing
- trust - a fear of crime, or not knowing where to start to go online

We now provide free wi-fi in our sheltered scheme communal lounges. Unfortunately this has seemingly not encouraged residents to take up publicly-funded IT training, even though many of our supported housing tenants own a tablet or laptop.

Dacorum Communities for Learning (DCfL) is a local voluntary organisation and one of DBC's local partners. We worked with them to organise some training courses and sought participants both from our 'Supported Housing Forum' and at the schemes that would be used as venues. Funded by the Policy and Participation team, the pilot course was open to any of Dacorum's supported housing tenants. Housing Involvement officers put up posters and attended coffee mornings to encourage tenants to sign up for the free sessions and get online.

3. Vision for the project

We hope that participants would reach the end of the course feeling confident to access the internet in a way that younger generations take for granted.

Whilst we hope that they will now feel able to make use of DBC's online services, there are so many more benefits. These are some of the ideas that we gave participants at the start of the course:

Searching the Internet

for information:

- About clubs, groups or hobby interests, restaurants, coffee shops or hotels.
- Finding instructions on how to knit or get an instruction manual that they have lost.
- Finding & contacting friends that you served with in the Armed Forces.
- Finding details & maps of walks locally & nationally.

Other ideas:

- Reading - Books, Newspapers & Magazines
- App called Overdrive that will allow you to access your local library services.
- Play Games & help keep the mind active
- Watch Television & Catch Up TV or listen to the Radio
- Google Earth and Google Maps
- Calendar - to keep track of Doctors/Hospital appointments, birthdays, meetings, travel bookings. Set reminders, write notes and to do lists.
- Local & National Transport
- Weather
- Shopping or Banking

Communication with family or friends:

- Video calling
- Facetime
- Skype
- Social media
- Email

Camera:

Use a device to take and edit photos or video. These can then be printed or attached in an email.

4. Recommendations

Each session lasted two hours, as DCfL felt that this is the optimum time for passing on knowledge whilst maintaining concentration. The courses offered 'total beginner' or 'intermediate' training for using IT equipment to access the internet. We held an introductory coffee morning to assess participants' needs and wants. We found that some residents already owned equipment, so we ran separate sessions for Android and iPads. We offered interpreters for tenants with English as a second language and adapted technologies for those with visual impairment were available. No one took up these offers this time round but we will continue to promote them.



First steps to getting online – DCfL volunteer tutor going through the basics

5. Objectives

- To give tenants confidence to use the internet
- Social wellbeing
- Access home delivery services (bad weather)
- Keep in touch with relatives
- Giving tenants access to DBC's website and particularly 'MyAccount' (logging repairs, rent statement, paying their rent on-line)

6. Outcomes

26 residents took part in the first 7-week course at three different venues. From this pilot, Dacorum Borough Council now has the information to create an innovative and effective Digital Engagement Strategy. Each sheltered scheme that hosted a course was given a Hudl, keyboard and cover for use in the communal lounge.

We asked all participants to complete a survey pre and post-training to give us an understanding of the personal impact of learning new internet skills. The overwhelming response was that they had enjoyed the course, felt confident to get online and were keen to learn more.

We are committed to promoting digital inclusion and will offer more free courses, particularly for older and more vulnerable tenants who are less able to access other training opportunities.

To date 80 tenants have now completed the full digital skills course.

Working in partnership, to create a borough which enables the communities of Dacorum to thrive and prosper

• A clean, safe and enjoyable environment • Building strong and vibrant communities • Ensuring economic growth and prosperity • Providing good quality affordable homes in particular for those in need • Delivering an efficient and modern council