IndependentAge

Supporting older people at home

Older people, technology and community

the potential of technology to help older people renew or develop
social contacts and to actively engage in their communities

Acknowledgements

Preface

The project culminating in the publication of this report was seeded in a serendipitous conversation we had some time ago about the part social networking plays in young people's lives and what potential technology might have to enable older people to engage actively in community life.

At the time of this initial conversation relatively little attention was being paid to the issue of older people and access to and use of new technology. Since we started the project the wind has changed. The Digital Britain report has been published, underlining the salience of the issue, and significant funding has been made available for digital participation initiatives; one priority for this spending is older people. Our steering group, particularly Damian Radcliffe from OFCOM, has provided us with invaluable briefing on new initiatives concerning digital participation. The sheer number and scale made us wonder sometimes if we would ever get on top of the topic! It also underlined a clear problem – no one organisation seemed to have responsibility to provide the glue on this important issue, to pull together evidence and learning from the many programmes in this field. The myriad initiatives made it hard even for those concentrating their professional time on this area to have a clear picture of the lie of the land, let alone ensure that effective schemes were scaled up into real and sustainable interventions. For this reason we welcome the setting up of the Digital Participation Consortium, a consortium of organisations from across sectors committed to achieving digital participation. Led by OFCOM the Consortium aims to achieve greater impact through better coordination and greater collaboration.

The scale of activity also made us wonder what role we could play. We needed to constantly remind ourselves that our interest is not simply access to technology but more specifically how technology can foster improved social interaction, engaging older people in their communities and promoting high quality face-to-face contact. Our work is focused on digital participation for a purpose and the purpose links closely to the belief that the scope to contribute, participate and engage is an essential ingredient of older people's wellbeing.

We are mindful that there are many facets to wellbeing. The New Economics Foundation (nef) have identified five ways to safeguard wellbeing in everyday life: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give. We believe that access to the internet and digital technologies through relevant supported services can indeed enhance all these aspects of life for older people – so long as technology is seen as the means to an end, not the end in itself.

The steering group wrestled with the issue of language, constantly reminding us of the importance of positive framing of the issue. Older people are not all vulnerable and in need of help: many, particularly the younger old, are active and engaged in giving back to society – by volunteering or looking after younger relatives, for example. They are the same as you and I and, like society as a whole, they are heterogeneous. To overgeneralise is necessarily to do older people a disservice. Social isolation and

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loneliness are real issues that everyone can relate to and feel empathy with. Just as universally, social networks and social engagement are positive features of a healthy society. So we have battled with language, favouring the terminology of engagement and social contact over that of exclusion and loneliness.

The potential scale of this project was vast and we have necessarily had to focus on a small number of issues. This means that, reluctantly, we had to set aside some issues that we recognise to be crucially important, particularly the issues of age-appropriate design and the need for more commercial services to be directed to this underserved market.

All of the experts we involved in this project were clear on one thing: the real and urgent need is not for more kit. Rather, it's for more appropriate services that reflect older people's interests and respond to their needs, including sustained, community-based training and support. The problem has a human face. It's not solely about hard engineering, chips and wiring. Our recommendations reflect this.

Our purpose in working with the steering group has been to ensure the widest possible platform to take this pressing issue forward. We are pleased that this work will be picked up by a coalition, due to be established in the coming months. Through awareness-raising, campaigning and stimulating the creation of effective services and appropriate tools, including but not exclusively concerned with technology, this coalition will seek to enable older people to renew or develop social contacts and actively engage in their communities in order to feel, and be, better connected.

Janet Morrison
Chief Executive, Independent Age

Andrew Barnett
Director, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK

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1. Executive Summary

Social isolation and the feelings of loneliness it leads to are common problems for older people living in the United Kingdom today. Recent research documents a worrying trend that many who work with older people have observed for themselves:

- Fear of being alone is a major source of anxiety as people grow old.

- Some older people go for days without seeing another person; many die alone.

- 16% of older people in deprived inner city areas suffer severe loneliness.

- Certain ethnic groups are particularly vulnerable.

- Isolation and loneliness can damage both mental and physical health in older people.

The immediate causes of social isolation are varied and depend on individual circumstances. A scattered family, the death of a partner, a chronic health condition, diminishing sight or hearing are only some of the factors that can leave older people feeling alone. Whatever the causes, social isolation and loneliness take their toll on the quality of life of a significant proportion of our population. The core questions that motivated this research are: How can technology help prevent and alleviate isolation and loneliness amongst older people? What is its potential for enabling them to develop and retain social connections and actively participate in their communities, both key components of happiness and wellbeing?

Technology, older people and social inclusion

This report was commissioned from Independent Age by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK. To develop the work, Independent Age set up a steering group comprised of telecoms companies, voluntary organisations and academic institutions all with expertise to bring to the issue of how digital communications technology can enable older people to develop and maintain social networks and actively engage in their communities.

In the last decade, an array of technologies has changed the way many of us interact. Internet communication systems such as email and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have revolutionised personal communication for younger people. Government service provision is being transformed by technology, too, and many people are enjoying faster, easier access to public services through digital means. Not the over-65s, though: studies show that they have been largely excluded from this revolution and the benefits it brings. A startling 70% report that they have never used the internet.

At the time research for this report commenced, little attention was being paid to the issue of older people and access to technology. Today, things are different. The Digital Britain report in 2008 highlighted the issue and spurred the Government to devote significant funding to digital participation initiatives, many with an emphasis on older people. Yet among a panoply of new initiatives, there has been little attempt to connect

the use of technology by older people with potential social benefits such as reduced isolation and increased social participation – until now. This report demonstrates that technology is not merely an end in itself, but can be a means to enable older people to renew and develop social contacts and engage actively in their communities. It can provide opportunities to:

- participate in meaningful work and other activities (whether paid or on a volunteer basis);

- interact in new ways with family and friends;

- learn, develop skills and gather experience;

- share learning, skills and experience with others.

Addressing barriers to technology adoption

To develop a sense of how this might be achieved, we began by looking at older people's attitudes toward technology. We know that a large proportion of older people do not use communications technology, the question is, why not? Some of the important barriers to older people adopting digital technologies include:

- **Lack of home access to the internet:** Only half of people aged 60-69 have access to the internet at home, but this falls to 17% among the over-70s. Adults over the age of 60 are also less likely than younger adults to get internet access in the next year. The dominant reason for not having or seeking access is that older people don't feel they need it.

- **Low awareness of what technology can offer:** 10% of people aged 60-69 have access to the internet but don't use it. They feel that digital technology has no relevance for them and that they would gain nothing by using it.

- **Inadequate marketing:** Technology marketing is generally aimed at the young, promoting gimmicky aspects of products that don't interest older people. Or, marketing is aimed at the frail elderly, a group with which most older people don't identify.

- **Inappropriate design:** Digital equipment is designed to attract young buyers who have grown up using technology. Small buttons, fiddly controls and unnecessarily complicated interfaces can all be barriers to older, or less adept, users. The appearance of 'special' equipment is also a deterrent for some older people who don't want ugly objects cluttering up their homes.

- **Anxieties:** Older people tend to have certain fears regarding technology. One of them is cost: they assume, for example, that computers cost more than they actually do. Another is breaking equipment or doing something wrong. A third is security: although most older people don't know enough about technology to be familiar with common security problems, many know enough to be concerned.

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What works

These barriers prevent many older people from using communications technology for social interaction. Many older people believe they don't understand technology, aren't equipped to deal with it, and don't really need to: technology is for the young, not for them. Yet in spite of the barriers, our research makes it clear that older people are fully capable of learning to use technology and that they are interested in doing so provided they are made aware of its benefits and receive adequate training and support. But what does this mean in practice?

Benefits: If we want to enable older people technologically, we need to help them appreciate what technology can do for them. This means tuning in to their interests, attitudes and expectations and designing programmes around their needs. The belief that technology is a good thing *per se* doesn't necessarily exist amongst older people. They need to have its value demonstrated in concrete terms, with direct application to their lives – for example, enabling them to connect to family members living on the other side of the globe using Skype.

Training and support: Training and ongoing support help older people overcome some of their anxieties, build skills and develop their confidence in using technology. The view of most experts is that we have all the kit that is needed. What we lack is the human element: the people and programmes to deliver the necessary training and support.

Good practice

As an initial step, we sought to identify existing projects within our sphere of interest. We found that provision was patchy and that projects were often short-lived. In general, projects focused on getting older people online as opposed to providing them with the ongoing support they need to *stay* online. There were very few examples of projects with a specific focus on using technology to address social isolation. However, we identified four examples of sustained good practice – Digital Unite, CareOnLine, INtouch kirklees and Angus Gold (the latter three are all public sector projects although Angus Gold started life in the voluntary sector). These projects have each begun to apply technology creatively to enable older people to make connections, build social networks and actively engage in their communities. They have some other key features in common that further address the issues identified in the previous section:

- Good design, including appropriate interfaces for the target group;

- Training focused on how older people want to use technology;

- Ongoing support from a trusted source;

- Low costs for participants.

Recommendations for the voluntary and public sectors

Our research concludes that communications technologies can help prevent and alleviate social isolation and loneliness among older people. To realise the potential inherent in these technologies, we need to develop and support intermediaries who can empower older people by educating them about communications technology and the benefits it can bring. With the right support, older people will have the ability to become part of the solution, for example, by participating in peer-to-peer support schemes.

In our view more voluntary organisations could act as intermediaries, encouraging and supporting older people in their use of communications technology. We therefore propose to:

- launch a voluntary sector pledge which commits charities and other voluntary organisations to run events on Silver Surfers' Day and throughout the year, reaching out to older staff and service users, helping them to get and stay online;

- develop a scheme called *Learn to Help* which will provide older people with one-to-one support in learning about technology and enable older people to provide peer support and network.

The public sector could do more, too. Local authorities and primary care trusts are already making significant investment in technology. But so far few have made the connection between access to technology and the broader issue of helping older people stay healthy, happy, independent and engaged in society. To encourage the public sector to make the most of the potential for alleviating social isolation offered by technology, we propose to:

- work with bodies like IDeA, the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Local Government Association to raise awareness of the issue and to promote the good practice that some public sector organisations have already developed (see the good practice examples above);

- commission the development of a 'plug-in' (a piece of software that adds functionality) for Looking Local, the public sector local digital information service. This plug-in would enable local public sector organisations to offer older people online opportunities for social networking around common interests, volunteering and community service.

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What we often discuss in terms of new technology isn't really new technology anymore. For example the telephone is about 100 years old, TV about 80 and the computer 30, and we've been doing video conferencing for 30 years.

Kevin Carey, Humanity

This report examines the hypothesis that technology can enable older people to renew or develop social contacts and actively engage in their communities. It can help prevent older people from becoming socially isolated and lonely because of life changes including retirement, bereavement, a deterioration in health. And it can help those who are socially isolated escape their situation. This hypothesis seems a reasonable one. We live in an age in which technology offers quick and relatively cheap contact with colleagues, friends and relatives across the globe. A proportion of us are highly networked, using technology to supplement and maintain periodic direct contact with a large number of individuals with whom we have something in common, such as work, hobbies or common experiences. This report concludes that technology does offer solutions to older people. It explores the barriers to their use of technology and makes recommendations about how best to develop work on this theme in the future.

A review of government policy documents concerned with ageing and older people suggests considerable interest in promoting older people's participation in society. These documents also contain passing references to reducing the social isolation of older people in the community. An objective is to end the perception of older people as dependent; ensure that longer life is healthy and fulfilling; and that older people are full participants in society.[1] There is also concern to promote social inclusion, while a lack of social contact and engagement is acknowledged to be one dimension of exclusion. Government also recognises that social exclusion, isolation and loneliness contribute to the incidence of mental illness, particularly depression.[2] However, despite this, very little work is undertaken which is preventive and which addresses the need for social contact and social engagement amongst older people.

The majority of public sector investment in technology to support older people takes the form of investment in telecare.[3] According to the Department of Health, telecare includes 'equipment provided to support the individual in their home and tailored to meet their needs' and may include anything from a 'basic community alarm service' to 'detectors and monitors such as motion or falls or fire and gas that trigger a warning to a response centre.' Experts suggest that while telecare equipment (some of which enables internet access) and support services (telephone response centres) could potentially provide mechanisms to help older people renew or develop social contacts and to actively engage in their communities, this potential is rarely exploited.[4]

There are about 12.5 million people in the UK who do not currently have access to the internet.[5] The government is seeking to improve access by investing in a range of digital participation initiatives with the intention of reducing this 12.5 million by 60% by 2014.[6, 7] These initiatives include the Race Online 2012 campaign that is asking organisations of all types and sizes to help inspire and educate their

employees, customers and communities to use the internet. A priority for government investment is improving the access of older people and people with disabilities. However, our question about such initiatives is: digital participation to what end? More specifically: has sufficient thought been given to how digital participation can address what is starting to be recognised as one of the biggest threats to older people's health and wellbeing, a lack of meaningful social contact and social engagement?

A major concern about the majority of work on the theme of digital participation is that it is not sufficiently focused on addressing social issues. Access to technology is not an end in itself; there should be more focus on what it can enable individuals and groups to do for themselves and others. As one member of our steering group said:

The problem with talking about technology is that it focuses minds on kit, rather than purpose, outcomes, services and applications such as the way smart and inventive use of communications, information or knowledge can make new, really important things possible.

Kevin Johnson, Cisco

We are interested in considering technology as a means to enable older people to:

- participate in meaningful work and other activities (paid and unpaid, enabling society to benefit from their energy and experience);

- interact in new ways with family and friends;

- learn and develop skills and experience and share that learning and experience with others.

We conclude in this report that there are relatively few projects that use technology to help older people renew or develop social contacts and actively engage in their communities (voluntary sector projects providing telephone befriending aside).[8] Those projects that do exist are generally small-scale and many tend to be short-lived.

Nevertheless, some organisations have been delivering sustained work that directly contributes to our agenda under the heading of digital participation. Notable examples include Digital Unite and UK online centres. Both have as their mission getting older and disadvantaged people online and have been working to this end for a number of years. A newer organisation also worthy of note is Digital Outreach which helps local voluntary organisations to support older, disabled and other potentially vulnerable people to adopt digital technologies.

Other important examples include CareOnLine, INtouch kirklees and Angus Gold, digital participation projects run by public sector agencies, all with a particular focus on addressing social isolation. These projects are notable because they place a particular emphasis not only on getting older people online but on supporting their ongoing engagement with technology – a theme that needs to be given much more attention. (More information about these organisations or projects can be found in Annex 1.)

This report has been developed by Independent Age with funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK. It has been informed by a literature review and telephone interviews with 15 experts identified in a stakeholder mapping

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exercise and a seminar at which an interim paper was discussed (see Annex 2 for a list of interviewees and seminar participants). The recommendations contained in this report have been developed by a steering group comprising individuals with
relevant expertise from across the public, private and voluntary sectors (see Annex 3 for membership). Independent Age and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK are now establishing a new consortium of organisations that is seeking to help older people develop social networks and actively engage in their communities. The intention is that this coalition will refine, develop and follow through by implementing the recommendations contained in this report.

An issue the steering group has debated is the definitional issue of what we mean by older people. In this instance we have decided to focus on the over-65s although some of the statistics and the projects that we mention also cover the younger old, namely the over-50s. We are also keenly aware that older people are not a homogenous group. There is a great difference between a 65-year-old, who is still in work and actively engaged in learning about technological developments and a person over 80, who never used a computer during their working life and may regard themselves as too old to start now.

Some challenge the importance of older people's access to and use of technology because, they suggest, as younger generations, more familiar with technology retire, the problem will disappear. However, there will continue to be older people who have had little access to technology through work, the place where many people learn their skills, as well as those who lose their skills or confidence when no longer working. There will also be older people who begin to find it difficult to use technology as they age because of poor vision, poor dexterity, poor hearing, and/or cognitive problems associated with ageing and who require assistance to stay connected. We also have the current problem to address: the older old (those over 80) are most likely to need the social support technology could facilitate since they are more likely to have outlived spouses and friends.

The remainder of this report contains the four following sections:

Section 2: The potential of technology to support older people's engagement in society. This section covers the evidence about social isolation and loneliness among older people and explores whether technology might offer part of the solution to addressing it.

Section 3: Older people's access to and use of technology. This section summarises the evidence about older people's access to and use of technology and identifies the barriers to greater usage.

Section 4: An appropriate response. This section considers what sort of provision is needed to encourage and support older people in their use of technology and highlights notable projects from which we can derive useful lessons for future work in this field.

Section 5: Conclusions and recommendations. This section summarises our conclusions and contain a small number of practical recommendations about how work on the theme might best be developed.

3. The potential of technology to support older people's engagement in society

This section considers the evidence about social isolation and loneliness amongst older people and explores whether technology might offer part of the solution to addressing it.

Defining the problem: social isolation and loneliness among older people

As the population ages and as more people are living alone, social isolation amongst older people is emerging as one of the major issues facing the industrialised world because of the adverse impact it can have on health and wellbeing.

Dr. Robyn Findlay, Australasian Centre on Ageing, University of Queensland[9]

Social isolation, a lack of contact with friends and family and other looser networks of acquaintances, is a major issue for significant numbers of older people. The charity WRVS identified that 8% of the people it works with see no one each day, while 72% see only two people a day and 32 older people a day die alone at home.[10] Fear of being alone is a major source of anxiety as people grow old.[11]

Social isolation is objectively defined as a lack of social contact; loneliness can be the result. Loneliness is subjective; the individual feels the lack of social contact. Research suggests that the influential factor is not the number of relationships but their quality.[12] The result is that housebound older people with a carer visiting three times a day for 15 minutes may continue to feel lonely because they miss the contact that they had in the past with friends and family. Research shows that 'severe loneliness' (people saying

that they are always or often lonely) affects about 7% of the older population, showing little change over the past five decades.[13] Since stigma attaches to admitting loneliness, it seems likely that this is an underestimate of the extent of severe loneliness amongst older people. For some older people loneliness may have been a continuous experience, reflecting lifelong patterns of behaviour, others experience 'old age onset', which may be a response to losses that occur later in life such as bereavement or declining health.[14]

There are a multitude of reasons why people become increasingly isolated in later life. Many older people have to make the transition to living alone because they are widowed and/or children scatter. Health factors also play a part: chronic illness and/or mobility problems may confine older people to their homes more than they would like (6% of older people leave their home once a week or less);[15] while sensory impairments or mobility problems may make older people self-conscious and less inclined to socialise. Another factor is that, as people get older, the deaths of those close to them may mean that they lack the sort of confiding relationships they had with people in the past. For some the lack of material resources and poor environment (for example living in an area with inadequate amenities and services and fearing going out) may also have an impact.

Older people are heterogeneous and some groups are likely to be more at risk of loneliness than others, for example, those over 80 who live alone, particularly men.[16] Older people living in urban areas

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are also at greater risk than those living in the country; stronger support networks tend to mean lower levels of reported loneliness in rural areas. Some 16% of older people in deprived inner cities experience severe loneliness, with certain ethnic groups, such as Pakistanis and Somalis being particularly affected.[17]

Reports by Age Concern and Help the Aged have defined social exclusion as 'feeling detached from society, trapped at home, cut off from services, lonely and isolated, and struggling to cope.'[18] There is a clear relationship between social exclusion and loneliness. For example, in their analysis of severely excluded older people, Age Concern identified that 43% of the severely excluded aged 50-64 group, 42% of the 65-79 age group, and 37% of the 80-plus group felt lonely, compared to about 9% of the non-excluded groups.[19]

There is also a clear link between social exclusion and digital exclusion. The Oxford Internet Institute found that those most deprived socially are also most likely to lack access to digital resources such as the internet. Three out of four of those 'broadly' socially excluded lack a meaningful engagement with the internet. In addition to this, those deeply socially excluded, with no meaningful internet engagement, account for 10% of the total UK population.[20]

There is increasing recognition that social isolation and the loneliness it causes can adversely affect older peoples long-term health, mental and physical. Depression particularly is a problem. It affects one-fifth of older people, two-fifths of those living in care homes, and is a significant problem amongst older caregivers, particularly

those caring for people with dementia.[21] Social isolation, resulting in loneliness, among older people is therefore a major issue. Yet it has so far received relatively little attention and the potential of technology to help in addressing it has been both underexplored and underexploited.

Technology: a part of the solution?

Some current technology trends are both relevant and exciting, for example the interoperability between different systems, and the high-speed, always-on connectivity that's enabling increasingly easy, effective and efficient ways to communicate and collaborate. The explosion that's happening in video-based approaches – helping people to interact visually – is one example.

Kevin Johnson, Cisco

Some are sceptical about whether technology can reduce social isolation or whether it actually reinforces it. There is concern, for example, that public sector efforts to deploy technology in social care will result in older people feeling more isolated as face-to-face contact is replaced by remote monitoring systems. For example, a small-scale evaluation by one local authority provider of telecare showed that a very small proportion of older users, less than 4%, reported being more lonely after receiving telecare. Tunstall Healthcare Group, a private sector leader in the provision of telecare, speculates that this may be in part because some friends and relatives, reassured by the installation of the system, became less engaged.[22]

Others question whether technology is eroding community links and reducing

social capital.[23, 24] Some research studies challenge this view, concluding that use of email chatrooms and noticeboards in particular communities results in stronger ties between community members offline.[25]

Our view is that technology, if deployed in the right way, as a supplement to and an enabler of direct contact, can help older people to maintain and develop social support networks. Some aspects of technology have obvious benefits. Email and voice over internet calls can enable quick and cheap contact with friends and relatives across the globe. At a recent International Federation on Ageing conference in Melbourne on the topic of social inclusion and technology, video was also highlighted as a means to help improve people's quality of life, for example the value of Skype for friends and families who would otherwise not see or be able to feel close to each other.[26]

These and other technological developments meanwhile will continue to enhance both access and experience. One of our steering group members, Kevin Johnson of Cisco considers that:

Video is perhaps the most disruptive and liberating area of technological development right now. It is also one of the most relevant for social inclusion, because it's about enabling human contact, interaction, participation and engagement (i.e. the very things that make people feel good). Some examples of the way it could be used include:

- live interaction: easy-to-use, ultra high definition links between individuals or groups in community facilities, home, and public spaces;

- recorded video: new, easy ways to share

moments with others, help people feel involved, and feel good;

- broadcast video: sharing events via digital media platforms, to interest, amuse or create a buzz.

Meanwhile, work on an internet over TV protocol[27] and the availability of pre-programmed remotes will make it easier to use the internet over TV, potentially making it possible for more older people to have access the web using familiar technology that is already in their front room. The Digital Switchover Programme, and the support it gives to older people[28], provides the opportunity to promote use of the internet over TV and to provide access to many older people without computers.

Technology is becoming a bigger part of everyone's life, making it easier for people of all kinds to:

- maintain contact with family, friends and a wider group of individuals with whom they have something in common, such as work, hobbies or common experiences;

- gain access to information about activities and services that meet their interests and needs;

- learn;

- engage in paid work and volunteering;

- participate in debates and have their say on issues;

- find the best prices for products and services.

Without the technology that benefits an increasing majority of the population, older people do not have access to the same information and opportunities as

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their younger peers. They may as a result begin to feel over time that they have less in common with younger people and other members of the community. Quite simply, they lack the same opportunities for engagement.

There are relatively few projects which use technology to address social isolation among older people. However, the small number that we came across in this research reported very positive user experiences. A user of INtouch kirklees, a local authority digital information service that also acts as a host to online interest groups (see Annex 1 for more information) said:

When you live by yourself (and I don't get out all that much actually), it's contact. You feel that you're with people. Well, it opened up a whole new world for me, doing things that I never would have done in a million years… It's not just a resource centre, it's a sort of a club, and it gives people a voice – it can empower people as well.[29]

In an evaluation report for the Leicestershire CareOnLine initiative, which provides computer and assistive technology training and support in older people's homes (see Annex 1 for more information), participants reported that they had benefited in a number of ways. They felt the training had enabled greater social interaction. Participants said they had made new friends through the service and reported that it had made them feel like they had things in common with younger people and others in the community. It had also improved their confidence and the ability to access other services through the internet.[30]

Another evaluation, this time of the Angus Gold project which offered training and

support to the over-50s in using technology (see Annex 1 for more information), also emphasised the social benefits. Participants said the training helped them maintain social ties, especially with dispersed family. They were able to discover common ground with younger family members and re-establish links with lost contacts. The result was increased social contact and a more developed network. It had also helped some to participate in community events.[31]

An explicit objective of Angus Gold was to support community engagement. Some of the participants became volunteers, actively supporting others to adopt technology. This illustrates an important factor, older people can give as well as receive social support. This element of reciprocity is crucially important. In common with the rest of the population, older people want to feel that they are giving something back to society and that the positive contribution that they make is valued.

Recent research has identified some of the life changes that encourage older people to take up the internet. Triggers include: taking up a specific hobby, entering retirement, having relatives move abroad, becoming housebound or losing a partner.[32] Four of these life changes could also mark reduced social contact and potentially loneliness and depression. More evidence that for older people, technology can be a means of preventing or alleviating social isolation and loneliness.

Emerging findings from an ongoing research project at Loughborough University based on focus groups and individual interviews with older people

reveal that they are motivated to use technology by a number of factors. These include the desire to remain active and independent and to communicate with family and friends, especially remote ones, using email. They were also motivated to use technology in order to ensure 'the world does not pass them by', to seek information, particularly news and health information, and to support their learning and education generally. Those who participated in the research reported that having the ability to get online gave them the sense of having more social support.

They also reported feeling more mentally alert, challenged, useful and 'younger'.[33]

Technology then has potential to help older people renew or develop social contacts and actively engage in their communities but our research and consultation indicates that we need to increase older people's access and use of technology before we can realise this potential. The next section explores this issue.

> *When you live by yourself (and I don't get out all that much actually), it's contact. You feel that you're with people. Well, it opened up a whole new world for me, doing things that I never would have done in a million years… It's not just a resource centre, it's a sort of a club, and it gives people a voice – it can empower people as well.*

4. Older people's access to and use of technology

This section considers the evidence about older people's access to and use of technology and barriers to greater usage.

Technology isn't the thing we want older people to access (or anyone else for that matter) – it is the services and capabilities and experiences that technology can enable. Ubiquitous network connectivity, and easy access is the key to the door.

Kevin Johnson, Cisco

To take this further: in this instance it isn't network connectivity or access alone that provide the key. Services and applications designed to help older people renew or develop social contacts and to actively engage in their communities are also needed to unlock the potential of technology to improve lives.

Some of the figures on older people's use, or rather non-use, of technology are startling. 70% of over-65s report that they have never used the internet.[34] This is notable given the evidence that digital exclusion is linked to and can exacerbate other forms of disadvantage.[35] Further, the groups least likely to use technology are those older old people, 80-plus, who have low or no educational qualifications, who would most benefit from the cost comparison, special offers and delivery options that it offers. Another factor of note is that access to technology falls off dramatically if you compare the age group 65-75 with the over-80s so for example, 33% of people who are aged 65-75 have broadband, but the figure declines to 13% for the over-75s. Similarly, 81% of 65-74 year olds own a mobile phone but for the 75-plus age group, this figure decreases to 50%.[37]

The figures for older people's use of the internet remain surprisingly low, yet this isn't because they are incapable of using it. The research suggests that older people do have the capacity to use technology and are willing to learn.[38] This willingness, coupled with enthusiasm for acquiring new knowledge, appears to be one key determinant of success for older adopters of new technology, just as it is across all age groups. And, like people of other ages, with the right support older people can master technology and gain significant benefit from it.

Research by Age Concern and Help the Aged[39] indicates that one in six adults aged 55-plus use social networking services like Facebook, Skype, Twitter or YouTube, although OFCOM indicate that only 8% of those aged 55 and older have a social network profile (compared to 25% of all adults).[40] Also, older people are the fastest growing group of internet users (although a smaller percentage of older people are online – as already noted)[41] and people aged over 65 who have internet access spend more hours online than the average for all ages (perhaps because older people have more time).[42] Just over two-thirds (68%) of internet users aged 65 and over use it for communication on a weekly basis, only slightly less than all UK adult internet users (72%). Nearly one-third use the internet for transactions (for example banking, or shopping) on a weekly basis. Over one-quarter use it to look at news, although overall breadth of use is narrower than that for all UK adults.[43]

The barriers to older people using technology

There are a number of significant barriers to older people's use of technology:

A lack of home access to the internet

Home access to the internet varies considerably by age amongst those aged 60-plus. Half of those aged 60-69 have access to the internet at home but this falls to one in six (17%) of those aged 70 and older.[44] The younger old are also more likely to have digital radio and digital TV than the over-70s. In 2009, older people were still lagging behind younger adults in having access to digital TV. Nearly a fifth of 65-74 year olds only have analogue TV, and 30% of people aged 75-plus still have analogue, compared to less than 10% of adults of all ages.[45]

Meanwhile, adults aged over 60 are considerably less likely to get access to the internet in the next year, and more likely to give a voluntary reason for not getting it than younger adults; in other words, older people don't get access to the internet because they think they don't need it. This same group is less likely than others to use all new media. Predictably, the medium it is most interested in is television.[46]

Home access to the internet is higher among those in the higher socio-economic groups. This is also the case, but less dramatically so, for digital radio and television.[47]

Low awareness of what technology can offer

10% of those aged 60-69 have access to the internet but don't use it.[48] A knee-jerk reaction by some older people, unaware of its potential benefits, is that technology is not for them, that they would derive no benefit from it. OFCOM characterises people with such an attitude as 'resistors'. OFCOM makes the point that attitudes towards technology and digital services, rather than age, are what determines engagement with digital communications. Yet it also indicates that older people are among those most likely to fall into the category of 'resistors'.

Resistors are detached from digital services, believing them to be of little relevance to their lives and actively resisting technology adoption. However, this initial rejection frequently masks a sense of being daunted by technology and a desire for digital products and services that are easier and simpler. These people also need to be clearly shown how digital services could benefit them.[49]

OFCOM research examining the effect on attitudes of showing a five-minute video to older people demonstrating what the internet would enable them to do is striking testimony to this. After seeing this video there was a significant drop in the number of older people saying that they thought they would gain nothing from having access to the internet. However, despite this most people still said no when asked whether they would take up the internet if it was given to them for free.[50] This research seems to reinforce the view that many older people are not online because they do not see the relevance to them. Overcoming this barrier will, for many, be the first step in getting them online.

4. Older people's access to and use of technology

Marketing does not reflect older people's interests

Generally, technology is not marketed to older people in a way that reflects their needs and interests:

Once someone has seen a photo of a grandchild or bought something online or checked their bank account then they've got it and you've successfully engaged them with digital media and, unbeknown to them, the relevance of digital literacy.

Emma Solomon, Digital Unite

The most common examples given by older people of why they get on to the internet are to send and receive photos and keep in touch with family and friends. We must talk about technology in terms of what it can help them do, and how they can benefit from it rather than in technical or theoretical terms. Making it easier to shop, bank, get the latest knitting patterns, is much more appealing than talking about the Windows platform, hardware, and broadband speeds.

Steve Tyler, RNIB

The marketing of technology is often aimed at young people, emphasising the new 'gimmicky' aspects of the product, which most people, regardless of age, will never use fully. Or it is aimed at the 'frail elderly', a group with which most older people do not identify.

Inappropriate design

Many of the experts that we interviewed also considered that design was an important issue:

Most technology gives the impression of being designed by and for 24-year-old males. Little technology is sensitive to the needs and wants of older people.

Alan Newell, Dundee University

The private sector is much more concerned about having a market among the younger age groups:

The so-called business case only works in a utopian environment of unlimited capital. When you compete for capital in the real world the teens win out against the oldies. If there really was a business case it would be pursued.

Kevin Carey, Humanity

This lack of interest on the part of designers can mean that products aren't as user-friendly for older people as they might be. For example, small buttons, fiddly controls and unnecessarily complicated interfaces are daunting to people who may not have grown up with technology and whose manual dexterity is not as good as it once was. The experts we interviewed were clear that the appropriate response to this problem was not to create specially designed products for older people (this is regarded as stigmatising) but rather encourage more inclusive design for all. The issues older users highlight, it was acknowledged, affect all of us to one degree or another.

Design is also important in another way. Older people don't want ugly equipment, which would not look out of place in a hospital, in their home. In common with everyone else, they want objects they are happy to live with because they are aesthetically pleasing:

There... appears to be a view that it is not necessary to design beautiful objects to support older and disabled people, and manufacturers do not seem to correlate poor (private) sales and/or utilisation of their equipment with this view.

Alan Newell, Dundee University[51]

It is to be hoped that greater interest in inclusive design processes and greater engagement from manufacturers and designers as the population ages will make design which is appropriate across age ranges more of a commercial imperative.

Other issues

Cost: Cost is often cited as a significant barrier in the minds of older people. Older people tend to assume that the costs of technology are higher than they actually are (for example, assuming that computers cost £1,000, when they are now available for much less).[52] As technology has become ubiquitous, prices have come down. Other costs of course come into play, and older people may also be concerned about the costs of ongoing support, of replacing hardware and updating software and maintaining a broadband connection.

Breakage: Another issue, raised by our steering group, is the fear of breaking equipment:

Some older people may have worked in factories where an error could break a machine and cost lives (and their jobs).
Kevin Doughty, Centre for Usable Technology York University

Qualitative research conducted with people aged 55-64 and those aged 65-plus found that the main barriers to digital inclusion were a lack of understanding and confidence, combined with fears about doing something wrong and security.[53]

Security: Research undertaken in 2005 by Loughborough University identified a number of barriers to older people's use of the internet, some of which have already been mentioned here. Additionally the research identified concerns about security and privacy as barriers for older people using the internet.[54] These worries have been echoed in more recent Loughborough research with focus groups and individuals where once again security and privacy were notable issues for participants. For a complete list of barriers identified by the research, see the notes.[55]

5. An appropriate response

This section lays out the sort of provision that is needed to encourage and support older people to use technology to actively engage in their communities. It highlights some notable projects on whose success we might build.

What sort of provision needs to be put in place

The view of some of the experts whose views we canvassed is that we don't need new technology. Instead, we need continued improvement in technology's speed, functionality and interoperability, further reduction in costs and easier ways to interact with it. Most of all we need to apply the technology we have intelligently, developing service options that:

- encourage and support older people's use of technology by taking into account such issues as training, ongoing support, cost and design (including appropriate interfaces);
- apply technology creatively to enable older people to make connections, build networks and actively engage in their communities.

Consumer Panel Research suggests that older people are interested in using technology if they are aware of its benefits and if they receive the right training and support.[56] Similarly, emerging findings from ongoing research by Loughborough suggests that older potential users need, amongst other things, to understand the relevance of ICT to daily living and they need ongoing assistance, advice and reassurance.[57] This research also suggests that older people require information about the costs of

getting and maintaining equipment and a broadband connection. The implication is that we need to help older people better appreciate both the costs of technology and what it can offer them, while giving them the right support and training to enable them to use it well, developing their confidence and skills.

The provision of training and ongoing support is key because it helps older people overcome some of their anxieties about technology, their preconceptions about how difficult it is to use and about the cost of support when accessed on the open market. Training and support is also vital to ensure that older people can continue to use technology as it develops or as they experience sight or other problems which necessitate changes either in the technology they use or how they use it. However, training and ongoing support is perceived to be one of the biggest gaps in provision:

One of the biggest problems is education, making sure there are ways for people to access technology which make it attractive. Lots of money is often put into capital purchases like hardware or infrastructure but ongoing training and support... is what people want and need.

Steve Tyler, RNIB

Research canvassing older people's views about what would help them access and use computers and the internet supports this analysis. Interviewees said that awareness raising, training, subsidies and ongoing help would support them to adopt technology. With regard to training, those questioned preferred small classes or one-to-one tuition that would allow them to learn at their own pace, not feel

embarrassed by asking questions and learn alongside people like themselves.[58] One emerging finding from ongoing research by Loughborough University indicates that older people have a preference for training in informal settings where they work with their peers.[59] Our steering group also emphasised the need to provide training for people in their own homes either because they may be unable or unwilling to visit community facilities or other venues where training is provided.

Access to technology and the contact that it enables is likely to help reduce social isolation but so too will the training, education and support which facilitates access, particularly if based around group activities. A systematic review of a range of interventions used to alleviate and prevent social isolation and loneliness among older people identified that the most effective approaches were group activities with an educational or support input.[60]

Given that one of our concerns is to prevent and address social isolation and loneliness our emphasis is on making and maintaining connections through technology. One of the members of our steering group stressed the need for:

…more volunteers to become involved, families to take responsibility. It's about actually spending time with people and talking to them, people making themselves available through technology… We need to get people to accept that being a virtual or remote friend is something that is needed. Then we can put together the technology package that best utilises that resource.

Kevin Doughty, Centre for Usable Technology, York University

We therefore need to develop service options focused on facilitating older people's opportunities to connect and actively engage.

In summary then, we need service responses that enable older people to get online and which support them to stay online. At the same time, services should use technology creatively to provide opportunities for older people to connect with others and develop mutually supportive networks. The good practice examples below are starting to demonstrate how technology might be used in this way.

Building on good practice

One of the experts involved in this project summed up existing provision in the following way:

Being diffuse, projects are small-scale and tend not to last.

Leela Damodaran, Loughborough University

Other experts suggested that there is a dearth of provision based on the key elements we have identified as important (design including appropriate interfaces; training focused on how older people want to use technology; ongoing support from a trusted source and affordability). However, in our research we came across a small clutch of projects that have been sustained over a number of years and which demonstrate all, or the majority of, these elements.

Three of the four projects described below are public sector projects, although one started life in the voluntary sector. One is a private sector initiative albeit one

5. An appropriate response

that delivers significant social benefit. In our research we also came across notable voluntary sector schemes which ran successfully for a couple of years but were not sustained once their initial project funding ceased. The four sustained practice examples that struck us as noteworthy are:

Digital Unite helps organisations such as sheltered housing landlords get their residents online and trains specialist tutors which visit learners at home. An important initiative developed by Digital Unite is **Silver Surfers' Day**. This provides resources to support local organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors offering free IT taster sessions to older people in their communities on one national day across the UK. Digital Unite has sought to overcome design and technical issues by developing appropriate resources and it has supported older people's continued use of technology by developing 'digital learning communities' which are self-sustaining.

CareOnLine, an initiative of Leicestershire County Council, provides information about local services and offers a chatroom facility. It provides computer and assistive technology, training and support in older people's homes. It developed its own web interface based on feedback from its users. It is notable because it offers a comprehensive service, providing access to the equipment, training and ongoing support that older and other vulnerable people need. Also, it has a dedicated team that provides support.

INtouch kirklees is a local digital information service which also enables local people to provide content and participate in interest groups run by a volunteer. It has an attractive interface which is designed to be easy to navigate. The service is accessible over digital TV, mobile phones and the Wii.

Kirklees has found that take up of digital TV in disadvantaged areas is very high. It believes that the Digital Switchover Programme will significantly extend access to the service particularly amongst the over-75s who will benefit from the Help Scheme.

Although InTouch kirklees is predominantly a local information service, Kirklees considers that it has been most valuable for those who are in some way isolated, who previously felt 'left out' and 'left behind'.

INtouch spawned the Looking Local initiative, a not-for-profit company set up by Kirklees to provide similar digital information platforms to other public sector agencies on a subscription basis. Other public sector authorities have therefore used the service to offer interest groups and therefore networking opportunities of various kinds to community members.

Looking Local develops plug-ins or particular additional elements that local authorities and other public sector agencies can add to the basic digital package. It is currently developing a plug-in with Timebank that provides access to information about timebanking opportunities on its platform. This adaptable platform therefore has the potential to support applications which are specifically aimed at older people and which support social networking and community engagement.

Kirklees is also a partner in the **VIRTEx** project. This is a partnership between Tunstall Healthcare Group, Fold Housing Association, Housing 21, Looking Local and the University of Sheffield.[61] VIRTEx is using digital TV to set up a virtual community of service users and carers. It is also piloting two-way video conferencing. It characterises the project as social networking using digital TV.

Angus Gold sought to provide information and increase awareness, usage and uptake of IT/internet access by the over-50s. It developed a website involving the participants and focused on the access and usability needs of inexperienced and frail users. Free training was delivered to small groups, tailored to each learner, in community locations. A mobile training facility was also used. The project was regarded by participants as an opportunity to establish or widen their social networks. A key objective was to involve participants in the community. This was achieved through forums, which engaged in discussion and action relating to the interests and concerns of the participants. The project, started in 2004, was due to finish in March 2006 but was extended for a further year to allow for completion. The approach is now embedded in the Community Learning and Development Service in Angus.

See Annex 1 for more information about these organisations and projects.

> *One of the biggest problems is education, making sure there are ways for people to access technology which make it attractive. Lots of money is often put into capital purchases like hardware or infrastructure but ongoing training and support is what people want and need.*
>
> Steve Tyler, RNIB

6. Conclusions and recommendations

...I don't think that for the very elderly age group, who are likely to be the most lonely, that a technological revolution is feasible. Using existing technology in a new way is likely to be the way forward.

Alan Walker, University of Sheffield

This report summarises some of the evidence indicating that social isolation and loneliness among older people is a major problem and suggests that technology may be part of the solution, helping older people to renew or develop social contacts and to actively engage in their communities. We have concluded that:

- solutions do not necessarily lie in the development of new kit but rather in better use of the technology that already exists (which is constantly evolving);

- technology by itself is not the answer, it cannot replace human contact, but it may be a means of better facilitating it;

- older people need training and support to start using and keep using technology;

- design and ease of use issues need to be addressed;

- the benefits of technology need to be marketed to older people in a way that reflects their needs and aspirations;

- we need to develop and support intermediaries to empower, educate and enable older people to be part of the solution, for example, by volunteering in peer-to-peer support schemes;

- we need to develop service options which support/create opportunities for older people to connect and participate.

In developing recommendations we have sought to:

- build on what we know about the needs and aspirations of older people;

- build on existing work and complement or supplement it;

- advocate approaches which are sustainable and capable of being delivered across the country so more older people can benefit;

- provide a framework for collective action.

In considering our recommendations, we recognised the need to prioritise among a number of important issues and so had to leave aside two which we consider particularly relevant: the issue of appropriate design and the need to develop a market for services and products suited to the needs and aspirations of older people. Rather than being directed at the private sector our recommendations are directed at both the voluntary and the public sectors.

Our recommendations fall under two headings:

- Supporting older people to get online and stay online. This is a key building block because it enables access to social networking facilities and other applications which support and promote community engagement;

- Increasing awareness in the public sector of the issue of social isolation and loneliness and encouraging public sector organisations to make adaptations to technology-based services that will help address the problem. We regard this as a means of achieving the sustained,

ongoing provision which will bring lasting social benefit to socially isolated older people.

Supporting older people to get online

As indicated in the last section, a significant amount of work is already being supported under the heading digital participation and one priority group for this work is older people.

One important initiative is **Silver Surfers' Day** organised by **Digital Unite**; one national day on which local organisations are supported in running internet taster sessions for older people. Although the initiative is very valuable, it operates only one day each year and Digital Unite are considering how they can extend the programme so that activities are run throughout the year. *We propose to support this initiative by developing and launching a voluntary sector pledge: Using Digital Unite's resources and support (as well as others'), charities and other voluntary organisations would pledge to run events on Silver Surfers' Day and throughout the year with the intention of getting all the older people they work with and their older staff and volunteers online by demonstrating its benefits to them.*

One of the themes of our research and consultation work is the importance of providing education and ongoing support to older people in their use of computers and the internet. A number of technology 'buddying' schemes for older people already exist, including some that match older people with younger trainers/supporters.[62] However we consider that there is a need for more provision *and we propose to develop a scheme called Learn to Help* that will not only help older people to get online but

will help them to stay online through membership of a support community willing to share knowledge and provide practical help. The *Learn to Help* scheme would build on the voluntary sector pledge, working through charities and other voluntary organisations to recruit volunteer helpers (including but not restricted to older volunteer helpers) to support older people, one to one, in their learning about and use of computers and the internet. The volunteer would be someone that the older person felt comfortable contacting whenever they needed help. Assistance would be provided over the phone, by email or face-to-face and in the older person's home if appropriate. Volunteers would be networked through groups with a group leader and would be provided with resources and materials to support their work. Our intention is to develop the initiative as a social enterprise that is both sustainable and scalable.

Encouraging the public sector to respond

Significant investment is made by local authorities and primary care trusts in services for older people but the general perception is that scant attention is given to the issue of social isolation and the serious impact it can have on older people's health. *We propose to work with bodies like IDeA, the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Local Government Association to raise awareness of this agenda among staff in the public sector and to promote the good practice that some have already developed in adapting existing technology-based services to respond more directly to the problem.*

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Our research and consultation work indicates that both telecare and local authority digital information services offer significant potential to provide services enabling older people to renew and develop social contacts and become more actively engaged in their communities. Adapting these services could cost relatively little and bring potentially large savings for the public sector because older people are supported and encouraged to be as independent, as active and as engaged as possible for longer.

Attention is only starting to be paid to the potential that telecare has to address social as well as health and care needs. VIRTEx, described in Annex 1, offers a rare example of using existing telecare technology, in this case digital TV, to develop a virtual community of service users and carers . It provides a potential model that the public sector might consider when developing or commissioning telecare services.

The local authority digital information service, **Looking Local**, described in the last section, already provides a platform for social networking, for example hosting book and bridge clubs.

We propose to commission development of a new plug-in for Looking Local, available to all public sector subscribers, focused on older people, local services, social networking and opportunities for volunteering and community engagement. We will also market this new component to promote its use.

These recommendations are designed to help achieve better outcomes and improved quality of life for older people. We consider that as the population ages and as the number of older one-person households increases that isolation and loneliness will become an ever more pressing issue. On the basis of the work we have undertaken we consider that appropriate use of technology holds great potential to enhance older people's wellbeing, providing opportunities to connect; be active; take notice; keep learning and give.[63] We hope that others will support us in our efforts to realise this potential.

Annex 1 Notable examples of practice

Digital Unite

Digital Unite (DU) defines and manages local and national campaigns to get older people online and to put digital inclusion on the political and media agenda. It provides digital skills training that is focused on the over-50s, and designed for new and nervous users. DU manages a UK-wide network of specialist tutors who deliver on-site digital skills tuition to older learners at home, at work, and in other community and learning environments.

DU services range from providing personal assistance to older individuals, who want to achieve or extend their digital skills, right through to running national campaigns that bring together the voluntary and private sectors and the wider community, to help older people get and remain online. Learning and using of IT is an excellent catalyst for intergenerational dialogue where older people can learn from the young and vice versa. Wherever possible DU harnesses this resource.

The DU Learning Zone is an area on the Digital Unite website providing a rich resource of Learning Guides to help people improve their digital skills from their home. They're designed to work as a resource for trainers and as something people can use to teach themselves. Free to use and easy to print they are a resource available to everybody. Incorporated into this zone is a Q&A area, where users can ask and answer questions and share what they've learned.

DU is probably best known for its organisation of the annual Silver Surfers' Day (SSD) campaign. SSD encourages and supports organisations of every kind to run hundreds of free events for older users up and down the country. Thousands of people take part and try out digital technology, often for the very first time. Even more are reached by the national publicity campaign that explains why digital inclusion matters and encourages more people to try IT.

In 2009, DU worked with UK online centres and ran over a thousand events. They estimate that the associated publicity reached more than eight million people. The 2010 Silver Surfers' Day will be the largest event ever run and will include the active cooperation of OFCOM, The BBC, Decca, MLA, Race online 2012, Age UK, NIACE, UK online centres and the NHS - amongst others.

DU is one of three partners behind BeGrand.net, a website launched in January 2010, that is designed to provide information and an online community for grandparents. The site is funded by the DCSF as part of Family Information Direct, a programme that focuses on finding innovative ways to support families.

Following the government's commitment in *Building a Society for All Ages* to promote and support digital inclusion for older residents in sheltered housing, Digital Unite and NIACE have recently launched a far-reaching digital inclusion programme in these environments, Get Digital. Get Digital is available to social landlords in England who manage sheltered housing schemes. It is funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and will run until March 2011. By the end of the project DU will have worked with 195 sheltered housing schemes to improve the digital literacy of their residents and provided online assistance to the residents in a further 300 schemes.

www.digitalunite.com

Annex 1 Notable examples of practice

UK online centres

UK online centres was set up by government in 2000 to provide public access to computers. Its mission is to connect people to digital skills and opportunities, using technology to improve lives and life chances.

There are 6,000 UK online centres across England – on high streets, in libraries, internet cafés, and community centres. Some are mobile, on buses. Many use the web portal myguide to introduce people to the world of ICT. Launched in October 2007, the myguide website offers a free, easy to use email service and web search facility from a simple homepage, plus taster courses to help people get to grips with computers and the internet.

Around two million people use UK online centres every year, they are in 84% of deprived wards, around half of the people using them have no formal qualifications, and one-third consider themselves to have a disability or mental health issue.

UK online centres has launched an initiative called Pass IT On. Encouraging people to pass on use of IT to friends, family, employees and even complete strangers. A new website developed by UK, www.helppassiton.co.uk includes the information and resources both individuals and organisations (at www.partners.helppassiton.co.uk) need to start passing their IT know-how on to other people.

www.ukonlinecentres.com

CareOnLine

Leicestershire County Council's CareOnLine service provides computer and assistive technology, training and support in older people's homes. It has a comprehensive website and chatroom facility developed to help reduce social isolation for vulnerable adults and older people provided by the Council's Adult and Social Care Services.

It operates a website with significant local information, resources and a grapevine section that provides a place to share information and communicate on topics of common interest. This is also a mechanism for mutual support. Sections of the website cover wide range of topics including hobbies, news, sports, money advice, disability, health and social care and community safety.

Since starting in 2001 it has helped over 600 individuals in their own homes. It has also provided assistance with equipment and training to enable 3000 people in 25 sheltered housing locations, 24 social care locations, and 12 voluntary organisations to experience using computers.

The team is made up of four full-time equivalent staff and has a budget of around £100,000 a year, with approximately 30% coming from grants.

A 2003 evaluation found that 97% of service users reported a favourable experience with the project, while 69% said that they had no prior intention to connect to the internet and would not have connected without it.

A key determinant of the service's success is considered to be its practical, hands-on approach providing users with the equipment that they need, the training they need to use it and ongoing support.

www.leicscareonline.org.uk/index/about_careonline.htm

INtouch kirklees and Looking Local

INtouch kirklees is a local digital TV site which enables residents to access services and information electronically. Kirklees says some of its main motivations for developing INtouch were:

- to give universal e-access to citizens, particularly those without internet access or PC skills;

- to increase social and digital inclusion by making use of the familiar technology of television;

- to build confidence and increase participation by encouraging people to create their own content and valuing their contribution;

- to promote community cohesion and involvement by encouraging discussion between people who wouldn't otherwise meet.

Kirklees believes the site has had the greatest impact for those people who are in some sense isolated and therefore 'excluded' from the community. This applies to older people or those who have mobility problems, those who do not have PCs at home and find it difficult to make use of community IT facilities due to childcare or other caring commitments, and those who are so wary of new technologies that they do not have the confidence to use a computer.

INtouch has been able to remove the barriers between these residents and IT, helping people to take part in their communities regardless of their circumstance because in those areas of Kirklees that are considered to be disadvantaged, the take-up of digital television is high. (INtouch is available on Sky, cable, and freeview boxes with a back channel). INtouch is also available to anyone with an internet-enabled mobile phone and to anyone with a Wii.

INtouch kirklees offers over 5,000 pages of information from Kirklees Council, other public sector organisations, voluntary groups and Kirklees residents. In addition to a range of advice and information and local authority service options, users can contribute their own information, including creative writing, memories and personal stories, messages to a loved one and recipe ideas and can participate in a virtual reading and creative writing group, run by a volunteer, and use related library services and information. Kirklees believes that being able to use services and share information via the familiar medium of television helps participants to feel more confident in their own abilities.

DigiTV - Looking Local was set up to share the knowledge and experience that Kirklees developed with INtouch with other local authorities, and to solve the problems of technical complexity and affordability. It provides a range of public sector organisations with a platform for digital information services. In essence, INtouch kirklees is a customer of the Looking Local service, in common with 120 other local authorities, housing associations and other public sector organisations.

Looking Local is a partner in the VIRTEx project. Other partners include Tunstall Healthcare Group, housing trusts and Sheffield University. VIRTEx is using digital TV to set up a virtual community of service users and carers. It is also piloting

two-way video conferencing. It characterises the project as social networking using digital TV.

www.kirklees.gov.uk/community/intouch/in touch.shtml

Digital Outreach

Digital Outreach is a partnership between Age Concern, Help the Aged, Community Service Volunteers and Collective Enterprises Ltd. Its goals are to:

- Identify and support people who are experiencing or may experience barriers or disadvantage in adopting digital technologies;

- Raise awareness about new digital and assistive technologies;

- Provide information, assistance and research services to organisations wishing to increase the take-up of new technologies through being more inclusive;

- Provide training, expertise and knowledge services around the theme of the use of technology in people's homes.

Digital Outreach has been commissioned to deliver the Community Outreach Programme for the switchover from analogue to digital television. The Digital Switchover Community Outreach Programme supports people who do not qualify for the government's Switchover Help Scheme, but who nevertheless need or would like some assistance or advice in making the switch from analogue to digital TV.

Digital Outreach considers that television as well as being a source of entertainment and information, can also be a form of comfort or companionship to some people, particularly those who are housebound or infirm. It believes that the availability of digital TV will bring many benefits, such as more channels and advanced features, and that it is important that everyone knows what to do to ensure they will be able to receive digital television after the switchover.

The organisation achieves its aims by working with and through trusted voluntary sector and charitable organisations. In each region it enables local organisations to support older, disabled and other potentially vulnerable people by providing information and speakers for events or drop-ins, training volunteers and developing a network of help and advice for older, disabled, vulnerable and disadvantaged people to help them make the switch.

In the Granada region, building on its experience on the Community Outreach Programme for switchover, it has been running a three-month pilot scheme called **Get Connected: Get Online** aimed at older people and people on low incomes. It has worked with two voluntary organisations, one rural and one urban, Age Concern Stockport and Villages in Partnership, to run 100 events about the internet. These have been run at places or gatherings that are familiar to the target group and are delivered by trusted people who are known to them.

www.digitaloutreach.org.uk

Angus Gold

The Angus 50+ project, re-named by users as Angus Gold, aimed to provide information and increase awareness, usage and uptake of IT and internet access in the 50-plus age group. The project developed a website with the participants, and focused on the access and usability needs of inexperienced and frail users.

Free IT training was delivered to small groups, tailored for each learner and carried out in locations the learners felt comfortable with, such as day centres and sheltered housing complexes. The project also offered a drop-in facility with support. A mobile training facility was also used. Over 700 participants have undertaken basic computer training with a quarter progressing to further training at community college level and over a quarter purchasing their own computers.

An evaluation of the project found that of those with access to a computer, 70% reported using it for email, 64% for accessing the internet and 45% for getting information. The project has successfully targeted individuals who might face barriers to accessing training elsewhere, with 44% living alone, 40% with a chronic illness or disabling condition and a third rarely or not always able to get out and about. The training had a less than 10% drop-out rate.

Key factors that led to success were: the age-targeted format, everyone being at a similar level and the relaxed atmosphere and tone of the classes. All these made the classes a welcome opportunity to establish or widen a social network for the participants. The training revealed unexpected levels of literacy problems and instructors had to find teaching methods that avoided emphasis on reading and typing.

Participants noted that they used their new skills to book holidays and make savings, to use online auction sites, buy goods online, use search engines, and for online banking and money management.

The project also produced a smartcard for discounts and incentives and publications. A key object was to involve participants in community engagement activity. This was achieved through Angus Gold Forums, which engaged in discussion and action relating to the interests and concerns of the participants.

The project, started in 2004, was due to finish in March 2006 but was extended for a further year to allow for completion. It is now embedded in the Community Learning and Development Service in Angus.

The project budget was just over £560,000 spread over three years. Key players were Angus Council, Angus College, Age Concern Scotland, Microsoft, Tayside Police and NHS Tayside.

Key to the success of the project has been the development of progression routes for participants; for example they can go on to become IT volunteers or take other training courses to ensure the sustainability of the work and wider engagement (leading, for example, to older people influencing service delivery in other areas).

www.angusgold.com

Annex 2 Interviewees and seminar participants

Seminar participants

Will Abbott, Freesat

Duncan Brindley, Video Juicer

Richard Curry, Imperial College

Kevin Doughty, JRF Centre for Usable Home Technology, University of York

Blaise F Egan, BT

Anne Faulkner, UK online centres

Simon Gallimore, Inclusive Digital TV Ltd.

Rama Gheerawo, The Helen Hamlyn Centre, Royal College of Art

Kathleen Gillet, Counsel and Care

Kevin Johnson, Cisco

Rebecca King, Antigone

Claire Lilley, Which?

Sheena McDonald, BBC

Adam Oliver, BT

Emma Solomon, Digital Unite

Jonathan Sykes, Tiscali

Leonie Vlachos, Age Concern and Help the Aged

Simon Walker, Maidthorn Partners

Bob Warner, OFCOM

Alison Williams, Tunstall Healthcare Group

Debbie Wosskow, Maidthorn Partners

Interviewees

Kevin Carey, Humanity

Alex Carmichael, Dundee University

Sue Collins, JRF

Anne Faulkner, UK Online

Guido Gybels, RNID

Julie Howell, Fortune Cookie

Paul Cann, Age Concern Oxford

Chris Sherwood, NESTA

Emma Soloman, Digital Unite

Steve Tyler, RNIB

Kevin Doughty, Centre for Usable Home Technology at York University

John Gill, RNIB

Alan Newell, Dundee University

Ali Rogan, Turnstall Health Care Group

Professor Gregg Van Der Heiden, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Leonie Vlachos, Age Concern and Help the Aged

Professor Alan Walker, University of Sheffield

The following individuals also provided valuable input:

Mima Cattan, Northumbria University; Ian Retson, Leicestershire CareOnLine and David Rowland, Age Concern Liverpool.

Annex 3 Steering group members

Emma Soloman - Digital Unite

Damian Radcliffe - OFCOM

Adam Oliver - BT

Brian Lamb - RNID

Leela Damodaran - Research School of
Informatics, Loughborough University

Guy Giles - Looking Local

Alan Taylor - BBC

Ben Brown- UK online centres

Kevin Doughty - Centre for Usable Home
Technology, University of York

Paul Cann - Age Concern Oxfordshire

Kevin Johnson - Cisco

Jacques Mizan - Young Foundation

Andrew Barnett - Calouste Gulbenkian
Foundation, UK

Luis Jeronimo - Calouste Gulbenkian
Foundation, Portugal

Annabel Knight - Calouste Gulbenkian
Foundation, UK

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[1] *Opportunity Age: Meeting the challenges of ageing in the 21st century*, Department of Work and Pensions, (2005).

[2] *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say: A new direction for community services*, Department of Health White Paper (2006).

[3] The Department of Health says 'telecare is as much about the philosophy of dignity and independence as it is about equipment and services. Equipment is provided to support the individual in their home and tailored to meet their needs. It can be as simple as the basic community alarm service, able to respond in an emergency and provide regular contact by telephone. It can include detectors or monitors such as motion or falls and fire and gas that trigger a warning to a response centre'. For more information see: www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Deliveringadultsocialcare/Olderpeople/DH_4116208. Recent spending on the preventative technology grant programme totalled £80 million over two years and £30 million has been recently been dedicated to the 'whole systems demonstrator programme' and local authorities also invest in telecare without specific grant support.

[4] Interview for this project with a care manager from Tunstall Healthcare Group, a private sector provider of telecare. She explained that the emphasis is generally on physical not social needs.

[5] *National Plan for Digital Participation*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2010).

[6] *Digital Britain: final report*, Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2009); and *National Plan for Digital Participation*, see previous note.

[7] OFCOM has taken the lead in the establishment of a Digital Participation Consortium, a UK-wide coalition of government, industry and voluntary sector organisations committed to increasing digital participation and achieving greater impact through better coordination and encouraging collaboration between members. For more information see: www.digitalparticipation.com

[8] Examples include the use of teleconferencing for book clubs and other discussion groups currently being piloted and run by Independent Age's *Live Wires* project, Community Network and RSVP. There are also a number of befriending services offered by phone, such as Net Neighbours, an Age Concern York project in which, after a chat, befrienders take a grocery list and make orders online for older people. Independent Age's sister charity The Universal Beneficent Society (UBS) is also running a project called telephone buddies. Befrienders make telephone contact with an older person, matched to them by interest, at least once a month.

[9] Findlay, R. A. 'Interventions to reduce social isolation amongst older people: where is the evidence?' in *Ageing and Society*, 23 (2003).

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[12] Victor, C.R., Scambler, S. J., Bowling, A., and Bond, J., 'The Prevalence Of, And Risk Factors For, Loneliness In Later Life: A survey of older people in Great Britain,' *Ageing and Society*, 25 (2005).

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[16] Ibid.

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[18] *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: social exclusion behind closed doors*, Age Concern (2008).

[19] Ibid.

[20] *Understanding Digital Exclusion,* a research report by FreshMinds for the Department for Communities and Local Government, (2008).

[21] Allen, J., *Older People and Well-Being,* Institute for Public Policy Research, (2008).

[22] From the discussion at our July 2009 seminar at the RSA.

[23] Putnam, R., *Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community*, New York: Simon & Schuster (2000).

[24] Social isolation can be seen as part of a lack of 'social capital'. For the purposes of this report we are defining social capital as: 'the number of people who can be expected to provide support and the resources those people have at their disposal'. This definition is drawn from Boxman, et al (1991). see:
www.socialcapitalresearch.com/definition.html for more information.

[25] Bolam et al, 'Using New Media to Build Social Capital for Health: a qualitative process evaluation study of participation in the citynet project', *Journal of Health Psychology*, 11; 297 (2006); Sum, S. et al, 'Internet Technology and Social Capital: how the internet affects seniors', *Social Capital and Wellbeing* (2008).

[26] Personal communication from Kevin Johnson, Cisco.

[27] The BBC's Canvas Project: see the BBC website for details.

[28] The Digital Switchover Help Scheme has designated that all digiboxes in phase one will have a return path and that all people over 75 and some people on disability benefit will benefit from the Help Scheme.

[29] Case study of INtouch kirklees on the looking local website: www.lookinglocal.gov.uk

[30] CareOnLine Evaluation Summary by Loughborough University Ergonomics and Safety Research Institute (ESRI) (2003).

[31] Ward, R., Ferguson, J., Murray, S., 'Evaluation of the Angus Gold Project (a partnership approach to digital education and social inclusion)', RBS Centre for the Older Person's Agenda, *Queen Margaret University Research Findings*, 8 (2008).

[32] *Introducing Another World: Older people and digital inclusion,* Age Concern and Help the Aged (2009).

[33] *Sustaining IT Use by Older People to Promote Autonomy and Independence,* Sus-IT research (2010). Sus-IT is a large collaborative project (CRP) funded as part of the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) Research Programme which is in turn funded jointly by all five research Councils in the UK and led by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The NDA programme director is Professor Alan Walker at Sheffield University. More information is available at:
www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk

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[36] Ibid.

[37] *Digital Communications for All* Consultation Document OFCOM (2009). For details see:
www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/access/access

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www.ukonlinecentres.com/corporate/images/stories/downloads/digital_inclusion_research_report.pdf

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[47] Ibid.

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[53] *Introducing Another World: Older people and digital inclusion*, Age Concern and Help the Aged (2009).

[54] Olphert, C.W et al *Towards Digital Inclusion – engaging older people in the digital world* Paper given at Accessible Design in the Digital World Conference, Dundee (2005).

[55] *Sustaining IT Use by Older People...* (2010) see note 33. Barriers recorded by this research also included: lack of confidence; reluctance to engage in/lack of familiarity with 'trial and error' approaches; frequent changes in hardware and software; the pace of demonstrations/delivery of instruction and guidance is too fast; confusion regarding the options in operating procedures; use of jargon and unfamiliar terminology; short-term memory problems; infrequent use results in problems remembering passwords, procedures etc; cost (including the cost of training and of updating software including virus protection); design issues - the lack of standardisation of interfaces; concerns about security.

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[59] *Sustaining IT Use by Older People* (2010) see note 33.

[60] Cattan, M. et al *Preventing Social Isolation* (2005) see note 13.

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The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational and social interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support transnational work tackling contemporary issues facing Europe. The purpose of the UK Branch in London is to connect and enrich the experiences of individuals, families and communities with a special interest in supporting those who are the most disadvantaged. In 2008, the Foundation launched an initiative on ageing and social cohesion, with a number of activities developed with colleagues in Lisbon. This report represents the latest development of a wide portfolio of work which we hope will contribute to a growing understanding of the impact of demographic ageing to our society.