

Positive Ageing: Using technology to improve everyday life



Participants from Age Concern Leicester Shire and Rutland's computer class



Sus-IT: Helping older people to use digital technologies for a better and more independent future

Sus-IT is a research project funded by the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) initiative, the largest research programme on ageing ever mounted in the UK. It is a collaborative, multi-disciplinary project, led by Loughborough University and involving six other Universities, working together with a range of research users, organisations representing older people and older people themselves.

Project aims and objectives

Digital technologies, such as networked computers, mobile telephones, and digital televisions and radios can help everybody, young and old with their daily lives, and help older people to live independently. Growing numbers of older people are already enjoying the benefits of using digital technologies, but they may find it harder to carry on if their capabilities and circumstances change over time. Other older people may not be sure how the technologies can help them, or may face challenges in getting access or becoming confident users.

The **Sus-IT** research project aims to understand the challenges faced by older people using digital technologies, to identify ways to help older people to be confident and competent users of computers and other digital products, and to explore how older people can be helped to keep using these technologies if their capabilities and circumstances change.

The project has the following specific objectives:

- to create an engaged community of older people who will actively participate in exploring problems and solutions related to sustaining and enhancing the use of digital technologies;
- to identify and investigate age-related change (through a study of a diverse sample of older people) and the implications for digital technology use and development;
- to develop and pilot a method for automatically detecting and responding to changes in user capability ;
- to identify the learning and support needs associated with sustained and effective use of digital technologies and to pilot innovative mechanisms for meeting these needs;
- to generate outputs to inform policy, practice, design and research, and in turn enable older people to access, creatively shape, use and adapt digital technologies to maintain and enrich their autonomy, independence and quality of life.

To find out more visit our website (<http://sus-it.lboro.ac.uk/>), or contact Nga Nguyen, Loughborough University N.Nguyen@lboro.ac.uk Tel: (+44) 01509 635653; or Professor Irene Hardill, Nottingham Trent University, Irene.Hardill@ntu.ac.uk

Digital Engagement Study

One important element of the Sus-IT project is our digital engagement study. This study is being led by academics from Nottingham Trent, Loughborough and Middlesex Universities.

We are studying the ways in which older people are using digital technologies in their everyday lives, and to this end we are speaking to users, and non users. In particular we are exploring how, for example, people listen to music; sustain IT use; master a new appliance; as well as the digital technologies they have stopped using. In gathering this evidence base we are working in partnership with older people's groups across the country.

In the following section some of our research participants share what prompted them to make the crucial step of wanting to know more about digital technologies, and how these technologies have altered their lives.

Bally – staying connected and seeing the family



Bally's children now work away from home, elsewhere in the UK and one son is abroad. She has discovered Skype, and her children have helped her to use Skype. 'My daughter lives in Nottingham, my son lives in Bristol and my eldest son is coming and going to Holland all the time. So it is nice for me to use my Skype and I can see them when we talk'. She went on to say, 'it is free as well!'

Rosalind – keeping touch



Rosalind loves keeping in touch with people, and she still writes letters, as well as writing e-mails. 'I use my PC a lot for writing letters, because I can store the letters and if I have any queries about the letters I have sent out, I can just go back to the folder and retrieve that letter'. So Rosalind finds it, 'very very useful'. She also communicates by email to keep in touch with her granddaughter, who just got a job working on a Caribbean cruise ship. 'This is fantastic. Now if I sent a letter off it would be days before the letter got there and probably another week before I get a reply'.

Mike – keep challenging yourself



Mike enjoys the challenge of using new technologies; he has a blog (<http://mikestevens.blog.co.uk/>), which is, 'a community'. 'I feel as if I have a community outside my normal community in say the local pub. Whereas I have these other people who are all over the world. So it is like a virtual community, but these people are real'. So for Mike he has a new social world, so why not join him!

New technologies keep Mike thinking, and provide mental exercise, 'to me this is the most important aspect I have learnt a lot of things...it is keeping my brain active'.

Hugh –my journey from cassette tape from MP3



One of Hugh's hobbies is listening to music and speeches, 'it is like a diet' he has a 'daily intake, I have a hunger' to hear music and speeches. For a long time he has used a cassette player, and with the cassette tapes he can listen to them, rewind them, and write down words from the speeches. But his tapes are now wearing out, and he is concerned about trying to preserve and keep them, and he has investigated a new form, a digital MP3 format. He is converting them, and safeguarding his treasured music and speeches.

Catherine - Don't be afraid, discover a new world



Catherine was, 'petrified' about using a computer, but 'with a lot of persuasion, principally from my doctor who thought I would enjoy it', she has bought one. Catherine has made a real effort to overcome her fears, 'it's been a slow process.' She has realised that, 'I couldn't really do anything irrevocable on the computer; I could always press the back button'. Catherine has found that a computer can, 'augment your social life. It's an easy way to find out what's going on at the cinema, what's going on in the city. If you like cookery you can access different recipes - a vast, wider selection than you could just by having individual books. Even dealings with local hospitals or booking appointments - it's so much easier'.

Jackie – finding family members via the information superhighway



A whole new world has opened up for Jackie, 'the superhighway of the web'. Recently her favourite, 'occupation has become that of producing my Family Tree. It has become the most compelling thing I've undertaken with information technologies'. She has discovered family members scattered across the world without even leaving the UK. 'I've 'linked' to family in Canada and Australia and having done so, exchanged family photos and even Christmas cards in December, so the

experience has been positive and taken me down avenues I might not otherwise have gone down. It's certainly been a very sociable and life expanding experience'.

Keeping 'silver surfers' surfing?

It is clear from these examples that older people are discovering many advantages and pleasures in using digital technologies. The outcomes of the Sus-IT research project will help to ensure that they can continue to 'keep surfing' and enjoy these benefits as they age.

Case studies of how websites link organisations with potential clients

Community Concern Erewash's website

(<http://www.communityconcernerewash.co.uk>) helps them to reach out to people including those who may benefit from their projects. According to the Chief Executive, 'it is a window to our services and gives people more information to read at their own pace. One family member in Australia emailed asking us if we cover the area in which her father lives as he was in need of having his laundry collected and she had seen our laundry project on our website'.

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged, and is active in Erewash. The Charity aims to help people enjoy a better later life by providing life-enhancing services and vital support. In addition to their services and support, they have a range of digital inclusion programmes including the Digital Inclusion Network of 172 projects across England that offer IT training to older people, annual digital inclusion campaign events such as 'itea and biscuits week' and 'myfriends' online week and helpful publications and leaflets: (<http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/it>) or ring 0800 00 99 66. If you want to know more about activities in the East Midlands contact Simon Main on 0115 8524308. Age UK has two Internet Champions for 2010: Lucy Berry, 80, and Frederick Briggs, 72, who will help to inspire the 6.4 million older people who have never used the internet to get online: (<http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/local.asp>).

Derbyshire Library Service

Every Derbyshire resident can use Derbyshire Libraries by visiting one of their 46 branches, 12 mobile libraries or by via their website: (<http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/leisure/libraries>). The Library Service has over 400 computers that people can use, and six Learning and Training centres. Library members have free access to online information resources from home and from the library. The information databases available include: Encyclopaedia Britannica and Ancestry.com (<http://www.Ancestry.com>)

Some useful local information

Community Concern Erewash (CCE) offers a number of services including gardening, decorating, DIY, fitting security and safety equipment, and run projects such as a Befriending Scheme, a Shopping Scheme, and Luncheon Clubs which enable residents to be supported in their own homes.

To find out more: <http://www.communityconcernerewash.co.uk/>

Community Safety

There are a number of agencies available to help Erewash residents stay safe and secure;
Derbyshire Constabulary website: (<http://www.derbyshire.police.uk>)
Derbyshire Constabulary on Facebook: www.facebook.com/derbyshireconstabulary
Derbyshire Constabulary on Twitter: www.twitter.com/DerbysPolice
Derbyshire Constabulary non-emergency number: 0345 123 33 33
Erewash Community Safety Partnership: 0845 907 22 44
Neighbourhood Watch (Gill Riley): 0115 930 54 14
In an emergency, always dial 999

Derbyshire County Council: provides a number of services for Erewash residents. By visiting their website (<http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk>) look for information on such services as libraries, adult community education and 50+ forums.

Digital switchover

During 2011 the East Midlands will be switching over to digital television. Digital UK is the not-for-profit company leading the UK's switchover to digital TV. A new TV is not needed as existing ones can be converted by the purchase of a Freeview digi-box (which some people may get free under the BBC Help Scheme). All households with a Freeview TV or box will need to re-tune at both stages of switchover and from time to time to keep receiving channels and services. Help is on hand via the BBC Help Scheme and Digital Outreach. In some cases this help is free of charge (e.g. for people over 75 years; care home residents). To find out more visit (<http://www.digitaluk.co.uk>).

Erewash Borough Council provides a number of services for Erewash residents. By visiting their website <http://www.erewash.gov.uk/> look out for information about: refuse collection, housing, planning, culture and leisure, Council Tax help and Benefits advice.

Erewash Partnership (<http://www.erewash-partnership.com/>) runs the Cotmanhay Enterprise Centre which offers IT classes for beginners, IT taster sessions, and an internet café with IT buddies. To find out more email them: Info@Erewash-Partnership.com.

Erewash Voluntary Action (EVA) and its Volunteer Centre serves people from 14 years old upwards across the whole of Erewash. They provide information about both local and national volunteering opportunities, brokerage and support when managing volunteers and voluntary organisations. EVA also offers a number of support services for older people and carers. For more information telephone 0115 9466740 or visit: (<http://www.erewashvoluntaryaction.org.uk/default.asp?id=volunteering>)

Another useful website about volunteering is: (<http://www.do-it.org.uk/>)

For information about Voluntary and Community Groups in Derbyshire go to: (http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/community/community_db/)

A useful **NHS information resource** is the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) website (<http://www.derbyshirecountypct.nhs.uk/partnership-organisations-.asp>), or telephone 0800 783 7279. or Email: palsave@derbyshirecountypct.nhs.uk

Three Valleys Housing (<http://www.threevalleyshousing.com/>); offer a Carelink service and a Telecare service. To find out more visit: (<http://www.threevalleyshousing.com/Residents/ContactUs/>).

