

Going **BEYOND** Awards

DIGIGALLUS CONNECT

Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns led to an epidemic of loneliness – especially among over the 50's who lacked access to digital communications technologies and the skills to use them.

DigiGallus Connect addresses this bringing community participants together with students in an intergenerational mentoring initiative that provides training, devices and internet access.

Digital inclusion rates tend to be lowest amongst the elderly with over half of non-internet users being over the age of 75 and 49% of non-internet users classified as some of the most deprived in society (The Good Things Foundation).

40% of established digital users found the internet made them feel less alone and 72% of established digital users were better connected to friends and family (2018 Lloyds Research Study).

To tackle this in Glasgow the student group designed and deliver an online program which trains student volunteers, provides crowdfunded devices and internet access to community participants connecting people online.

Student volunteers developed a 'being digitally gallus' toolkit that other universities and community groups are seeking to adopt, and have gained skills in intergenerational communication, enabling even students studying at distance online to feel part of Glasgow's community.



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This unique life-changing project combines Professor Riach's academic expertise on ageing inequalities and dynamics, with the desire for students to support communities to leverage and develop their own digital literacy and learning skills. Such expertise and motivation provided the foundation for realizing the power of intergenerational dialogue and exchange into mutual benefits for all.

Community participants benefit working one-to-one with a volunteer who adapts to their learning style; students gain cross-generational communication skills and an age-sensitive awareness of digital capabilities - vital employability skills within a multi-generational workforce. It has a direct, positive impact on society in helping learners to gain skills, confidence to find and gain a job and engage in online communities.

The program provides localized needs-led content and builds in context specific experiential learning. The project is sustainable and scalable, with potential to motivate and inspire students worldwide with a sense of their ability to unleash life-changing impact within their communities. In addition, it enables international students living abroad, who are mentors, to feel part of Glasgow.

Mentor McDonald Banderlipe said:

"Before coming to Glasgow, volunteering gave me a platform to be part of Glasgow, understand the local community and their challenges. I took part as a mentor to participate actively in the Glasgow community. I recommend international students to take part, use their experience to help those who are underprivileged. It helps open doors for people and change lives."

DigiGallus Connect is an exemplar of how the Adam Smith Business School continues its namesake's legacy creating graduates who are changing the world for the benefit of society.

The power of collaboration is at the heart of the University's strategy to transform lives through ideas and action; the project is showcased on UofG's strategy website as an example of staff-student collaborative civic engagement, reflecting how students are working to co-design scalable initiatives with real, lasting impact in Glasgow and beyond.

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PROGRAM IMPACT AND SUCCESS

DigiGallus Connect has been recognized by the University as a blueprint for a scaffolding model for civic engagement whereby academics utilize their research expertise to provide an enabling framework for student initiatives. The project exemplifies the ambitions of the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2021-2025 to 'Connect with real-world challenges' and develop students 'professional skills and attributes to support career advancement'.

This program is aimed at people who would otherwise be excluded from education and lifelong learning, and would not consider the University of Glasgow as being relevant to them. It speaks to a key component of Glasgow City Council's strategy to improve digital inclusion and participation of older people in its 'Digital Glasgow Strategy'.

It has fast-developed a reputation nationally for fostering skills and enhancing digital accessibility by providing resources and generationally sensitive, partner-led skills development. Bodies including the Department for Work and Pensions and Clyde Gateway have recommended community participants, while Voluntary Action and Marie Curie have sought advice on DigiGallus Connect's experience and permission to use the mentoring materials as part of their own programs. Its reach and impact has been praised at the highest level by a motion in the Scottish Parliament, along with being recognized by Scottish Enterprise as an example of innovative education in 2020.

James O'Rourke, community partner who has been on the program said:

"At the unemployment places they say to you 'sit down and do this' and I would say, 'but I don't know how to do it'. Working with DigiGallus Connect was a good experience, a good way to learn. The students took you through it, stage by stage instead of rushing. It's made it easier to stay in touch with family and friends now I can type in what I want to say. The amount of news and information the internet can give you is much better than trying to pick it up in a newspaper. I haven't spoken to my sister in England in ten years. Now through Facebook I've contacted her, it's been good."

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DigiGallus Connect is working to become a group that advises and has a reputation in this space and a number of community organizations have reached out to the program for advice on how to effectively run similar programs.

Niki Spence from Clyde Gateway, which supports and regenerates communities to flourish advertises the initiative to their clients.

She said: "The students are offering a fantastic service, particularly to local people who might be a bit concerned about using technology that they haven't used before. Anything that can be done to make sure people are connected is a fantastic thing. Sometimes we find that those over 50 really struggle with technology and being familiar with it and feeling confident to use it in everyday life, so the support the students offer is really appreciated."

SDG IMPACT

GOAL 4: Quality Education

GOAL 10: Reduced Inequalities

This initiative directly speaks two of the SDGs.

It considers the potential of intergenerational relationship to be a basis for quality education (SDG 4) in creative and practical way. It also seeks to reduce Inequality (SDG10) through tackling the digital divide.

Digital Inclusion rates tend to be the lowest amongst the elderly population with over half of non-internet users being over the age of 75 while 49% of non-internet users are classified as being some of the most deprived in society, according to the Good Things Foundation.



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LOOKING FORWARD

The project is sensitive to broader sustainability goals and is looking at how to encourage and embed circular use of IT from University of Glasgow within procurement relationships that would see computers from the University and local businesses being used by DigiGallus community participants and other digital inclusion providers.

DigiGallus Connect is working to become a group that advises and has a reputation in this community outreach space and a number of community organizations have reached out to us for advice on how to effectively run similar programs.

We are working with the Department for Work and pension (DWP) to create a sustainable long term business model for the purchase of equipment and internet for DigiGallus Connect mentoring teams. This includes current discussions with the DWP Labour Market Advisory team who are keen to support DigiGallus Connect becoming a Dynamic Purchasing System 2. We plan to scale up by further developing resources suitable for other devices so that more community initiatives and educational groups can run similar programs.

We are developing guidance on the learning of DigiGallus Connect and accessible guidance on intergenerational digital mentoring that is published and publicly available.

www.digigallusconnect.com