## **Digital Connections**

By Stephen Moore, Project Manager Gloucester Life Changes

Age UK Gloucestershire's **Digital Connections** project has taken activity online. Our response to Covid has been informed through an appreciation that isolation has been a constant for many older people as has have the technical and emotional challenges of being drawn into the digital economy.

Age UK Gloucestershire already had successful social and activity groups that we refer to as "Springboard Groups". The older people who have joined these groups, within libraries and public spaces, have given each other support to jump back into community life. As lockdown took effect at the end of March this year, we created a new online space called "Gloucestershire Springboard"

Some of our volunteers have become "**Technology Friends**" and supported people 1:1 to help them adapt their existing technology, start to use a loaned tablet or try software to help them connect.

Gloucestershire Springboard offers a welcome to new members from its private Facebook Group at https://www.facebook.com/groups/gloucestershirespringboard/

Content within the Facebook Group offers information, a chance to connect with others in online conversation and links to online activities that have been developed using the experience from the groups that met before lock down while responding to the new challenges that the immediate crisis and the 'new normal' bring.

At the beginning of each week, the Facebook Group events section offers a timetable of online activities for the week as well as encouragement to join with online conversation about what has been happening in our day to day lives. We also post links through the week to creative and activity opportunities offered by us and other organisations. Through the week, we provide updates to essential local information.

D	An Edinburgh Themed Quiz Zoom Laura Tremble and Jane Davies are going Occurs every Wednesday at 14:00: See all	
	🛎 Invite Members 🖌 Edit 🗙 Cancel	
1	These Are a Few of my Favourite Things On-Sine By Yam Whispering Occurs every Friday at 20:30.See all	
The second second	Interested 🦽 Share 🕶 🗙 Remove	
X	Unlocking lock down zoom Andrew Dawes and 2 other thends are going Occurs every Friday at 14 00 See all @ Invite Members / Edit X Cancel	
Wednesday		
10:36	Mid week Motivation Online event Joy Amphiett and Jane Davies are going.	
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19:00	Creative Writing Workshop Online event	

The events schedule includes links to Zoom facilitated groups that are open to older people around the County.

"IT and Tea at Three" is a group where our "Technology Friend" Volunteers talk to older people about their technology issues.

On Wednesday, we have a regionally themed Quiz and we are just about to start a session called



"Mid-week Motivation" where we use a mix of discussion in zoom meetings and online content to encourage older people to maintain physical and mental health.

On Friday morning, our Ukulele group meet and we share song sheets on screen so that people can play along.

Spontaneous conversation around a post can be revealing and have a positive impact. As an example, we created an afternoon online Disco by sharing YouTube links to requested songs. In advance of the event, we asked people to share their requests and to prepare their living rooms and their wardrobe. One of my colleagues rose to the challenge to the extent that he had disco lights and a mirror ball at home!

We understand the need to offer activities but believe that the space also offers the chance to, gain some social connection, be entertained or informed. To be part of a community of people from a space at home offers an individual the freedom to choose the extent to which they participate.



Older people joining us for online content and activity have given us some feedback and comments have included "This is wonderful" and "I really look forward to this". We have had 90 year olds who we may have assumed, might struggle with their technology, join us in Zoom sessions. Perhaps their growth in confidence can help them engage with other parts of the digital environment?

We have collaborated with other organisations to create content and our next venture with Gloucestershire County Council's Heritage Hub, part of Gloucestershire's Archive, sees us record experiences of lock down at a regular gathering online, "Unlocking Lock Down". As well as inviting older people to come and join us to share their lock down creations, professional creatives are joining us to consider how those experiences can inspire community and intergenerational response.

As we increase the number of members and organisations who use the Facebook Springboard Group, we will want to ask what the growing membership wants from the space. As well as staying in touch with the opportunities that exist to collaborate with creative and activity based practitioners and other organisations, we will want to encourage older people to run some of the sessions for themselves. We will also want to look at how the content develops to ensure accessibility; offline and online. Reaching the audience and delivering the space to those who can benefit from it continues to require some work and is being addressed through collaboration with VCS and Statutory partners as well as the sharing of posts within community social media spaces.

"Digital Connections", offering; "Gloucestershire Springboard and "Technology" Friends, has been a response to a crisis but offers ongoing opportunities for isolated individuals. Beyond lockdown this resource should be maintained and continue to grow.

www.ageukgloucestershire.org.uk

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