culturehive

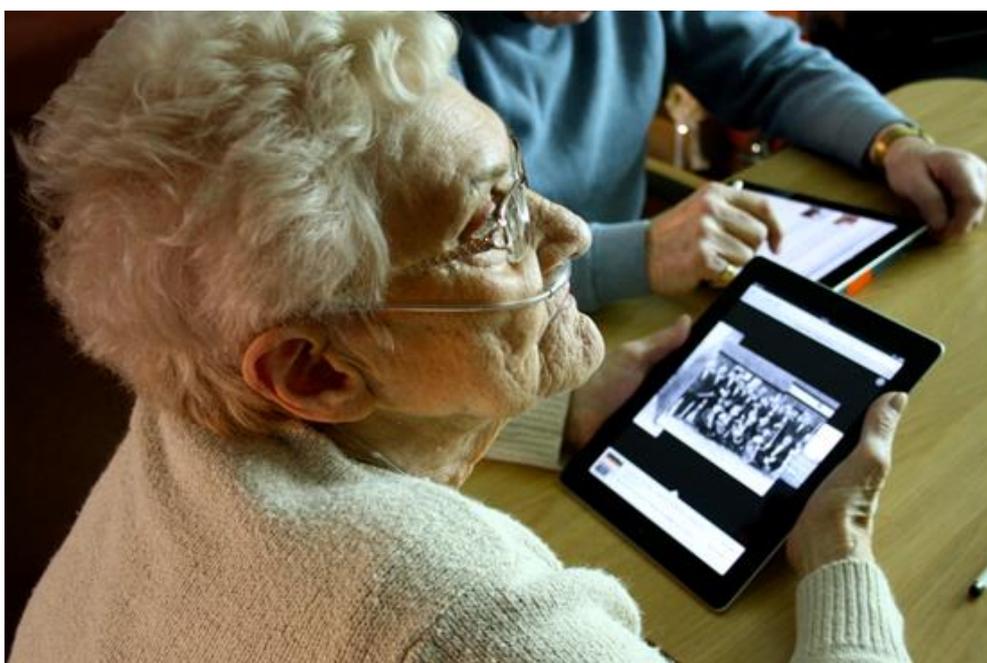# Can you hear me? I can see you!

Photo credit: FACT

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Background

FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) is the UK's leading media arts centre, based in Liverpool. The award-winning FACT building houses three galleries, a café, bar and four cinema screens, run by Picturehouse and showing the best in independent and mainstream film.

FACT's Community Programme grew out of the legacy of the 12 year old community arts and media project tenantspin. The programme works with artists and technologists to develop creative learning and digital literacy programmes and projects for adults and communities with a special focus on older people.

Can you hear me? I can see you! was a year-long programme working with residents of Sheltered Housing across Liverpool, Wigan and Warrington. The programme was supported by the Baring Foundation and set out to build the digital literacy of the residents all over 55 years old through creative engagement with artists.

Through activities and practical advice sessions, artist collective Re-Dock and artist/educator Jon Turton worked with Your Housing residents aged 55 to 95 to discuss technological innovations within their lifetimes, whilst exploring the outer limits of emerging telecommunications platforms. During this process the residents were introduced to the Internet, Apps and Social Media through iPad coffee mornings.

The programme resulted in an exhibition of prototype communication devices that were developed through an experimental workshop and training programme with the residents. The exhibition was presented in the FACT Connects space, an open exhibition space for pop-up installations and beta-testing artist projects, reaching the wide and diverse audiences that visit the venue.

Objectives

- Engage with residents and staff from across 10 Sheltered Housing Schemes to tackle isolation and enhance wellbeing
- Increase digital literacy through creative activities
- Create a year-long comprehensive programme of creative learning, workshops and artists sessions
- Produce a high quality artist commission in collaboration with the participants

Target Audience

Older People 55 + living in Sheltered and Independent Living Schemes.

Process

- Working with staff from Your Housing, residents were invited to 'getting to know you' sessions with the FACT Project Lead, Learning Facilitator and artists to learn more about the project, input their ideas and agree on dates to meet in 2 monthly slots.
- Residents met in groups of 6-10 people with a Creative Learning Facilitator 3 times a month to explore iPad's and the online world. Each time the groups met, the facilitator re-visited he previous sessions learning.

Photo credit: FACT

- The FACT Project lead attended all sessions to observe the progress of participants, pinpoint areas for improvement in the next session and carry out evaluation.
- Once a month residents met with artists from Re-Dock to explore some of the skills they'd learned through creative experiences. From these experiences, residents created small films of their activities which were eventually shown in a gallery exhibition at FACT in April and May 2013.
- Workshops continued monthly and ended with a special celebration screening and a visit to FACT in Liverpool for food, Skype bingo and a chance to see their work in situ.

Outcomes

- 40 participants took part in 30 workshops over 7 months
- 50% of residents involved bought iPads as a result of being engaged with the project and continue to use them in everyday activities
- High quality exhibition at FACT that supported the development of emerging artists
- 1,133 visitors attended the exhibition over 2 weeks
- The following positive changes were observed in the participants at the end of the project:
  - 60% increase in digital literacy
  - 70% increase in confidence using computers
  - 75% increase in understanding around terminology i.e. app, online, offline etc
  - 95% increase well-being
- Increased appreciation within the housing association as to the role of creative learning in residents lives
- Ongoing commitment from the housing association to continue Wifi provision in residents lounges due to demand from participants

Key points for effective practice

- The role of the Creative Learning Facilitator to support the residents to develop confidence and practical skills before the artists started their project was a successful model of engagement
- Working with artists that were open to sharing their practice and came from a socially-engaged ethos was critical
- The informal environment of iPad coffee mornings offered social opportunities for developing practical skills. This was an effective way to build engagement with the residents in the lead up to the artist's commission.
- The balance between practical skills development and artist activity was a successful way to encourage interest in the arts
- Resource issues around travel time, budgets and logistics restricted the activity that FACT could deliver as the schemes' locations were geographically spread out
- The economic divide became apparent when some residents where able to purchase iPads and others couldn't, which has led to discussions with the housing partners about investment in these facilities or continuing iPad coffee mornings to maintain digital access for all involved
- The model of social learning groups through the workshops and coffee mornings did not suit residents who were not comfortable with group situations. With hindsight and greater resources, one-to-one workshops could have helped to develop confidence with some individuals before introducing them to a group dynamic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main insights gained from the project were:

- Social and informal learning and artists sessions set within the community are two effective methods of engaging with difficult and hard to reach older people
- iPads really help the learning process because they are very visual and removed all barriers associated with mouse, keyboard and monitors
- It is important to maintain sufficient and consistent contact with residents through phone calls, letters and visits
- Games and funny scenarios using technology really enhance learning – e.g. Skype Bingo, leaving messages for your younger self, worked especially well
- A tailored learning experience for 55 – 75 year olds and then people over 80 may work in certain situations as different challenges exist at 55 than at 80
- It is important to provide a closure experience for residents via events and exhibitions.
- Providing written workbooks outlining how-to's for future reference was important.

- Relationships with scheme managers can prove to be the most important contact of all as they are the bridge between residents and the outside organisation when starting to build interest and engagement with the project

Additional Information

www.fact.org.uk
http://www.flickr.com/photos/tenantspin/sets/72157632170484048/
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UV_omd_fCzQ
http://www.fachttp://adviceportal.wordpress.com/t.co.uk/projects/can-you-hear-me-i-can-see-you!/
http://adviceportal.wordpress.com/

About CultureHive

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