

The bulletin for care home staff

My home life

Issue 14

Digital Technology

For the
STAFF
ROOM



Bringing the digital age to your residents

Easy steps to make a difference

Bringing the digital age into your care home

While the internet becomes the main way that we save photos, connect with people, gather information and plan our lives, many older people are being left behind. This can be a particular problem for those who live in care homes with less than a sixth of care homes providing internet access¹.

Here at MHL we know it's hard for care homes to find the time to develop new programmes of activity, however it is easier and cheaper than you may imagine.

Introducing technology can help connect older people to their family and friends and the outside world. Computers can also be useful for training staff, engaging volunteers and accessing information about best practice, as well as helping run a good business.

This bulletin offers some ideas to help you get going.

Wishing you all the best

MHL team.

¹www.carehome.co.uk/care_search_results.cfm/searchcountry/England/searchchtype/internet-access (accessed on 3.8.12)

My Home Life is a UK-wide initiative that promotes quality of life and delivers positive change in care homes for older people. We work with care homes, statutory bodies, community organisations and others to co-create new ways of working to better meet the needs of older people, their relatives and staff. Our vision is a world where care homes are great places to live, die, visit and work; where care homes are:

- Supported to deliver to their potential
- Valued and trusted by those who work with them
- Cherished by their local communities

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Making a world of difference

David Edkins, Manager of Inglewood Care Home
tells of the remarkable change in attitudes



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I have always felt that the people in our care should benefit from the technology that we take for granted, yet it wasn't until we introduced computer training that I recognised the benefits of it for the whole of the home.

We were fortunate to work with an Age UK West Cumbria tutor along with some great volunteers and our activities co-ordinator who spent quality time with residents including those with high levels of dementia. My staff have felt very buoyed by the way we are engaging residents with technology.

We have created portfolios or scrap books with each resident which have built up over the weeks. They include photos they have found and printed off of significance to their lives or interests. We always learn so much about our residents through these sessions and visiting family can also get involved.

Some residents have enjoyed individual virtual tours of places they have never visited, like museums. We have made very positive links with residents' families with Skype too. We look at games you can play on computers – 'Polar Bowling' is very popular – and they make for very interactive and humorous periods. This in turn often leads to reminiscing about childhood games or about changing technology and then everyone can be involved.

Another bonus – our in-house newsletter has had a real lift from the work of the residents who have picked up some digital photography skills.

We have learned a lot about making the experience more accessible for our residents. There are lots of small changes that you can make – or buy – that can help and it makes a world of difference to get this right.

A view from the care home community!

Kenneth Wallace, **Resident 91yrs**

I didn't know what to expect but I was keen and probably one of the first residents here to get involved in the computers. I was most interested in looking at my family tree. My family and I worked together on this to fill in gaps and with help from the volunteers I have found out so much. Not only that but I have been able to use the computer to look up the aircraft used in the last war. I have a big interest here as I was associated with the Dambusters based in Lincolnshire. Some of us have gone back to where we used to live and taken photos and then learnt how to put them on the computer... That's sparked some great chats!

Barry Wallace, **Ken's Son**

I am impressed with the way the residents here have been introduced to computers. My father has been so stimulated by the whole thing. For a man who has never been employed in a technical field he has found lots to interest him and seeing how he has got on between my visits has been great. He seems to like the memories that have been unearthed. But what they actually do doesn't

matter – even playing games like Solitaire gets the joints moving and stimulates the brain. It keeps people interested. I think it is really worthwhile and should be offered in all care homes.

Myra Lawson, **Care Home Volunteer**

I admire the residents who get involved because they do try and I know they end up feeling they have achieved something. For example for a while one resident created the care home newsletter on the computer ...you couldn't keep her back. I think that introducing computers brings a care home into the 21st century.

Deborah Long, **Activities Coordinator**

When we started I was surprised and interested to see how positive the residents were and how much pleasure it gave them. Not only that but the very people I expected to be challenged here jumped straight in! I am thinking about the residents with learning disabilities and memory problems who have embraced this wholeheartedly and our volunteers have found working with them very rewarding. It has had a very positive effect on the care home.



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So let's get started

Simply bringing in a laptop and urging staff to use it with residents is unlikely to make a difference. It is worth developing a proper plan for helping your care home community get connected.

- Without the positive support and involvement of staff, they may see the introduction of technology as just another task that has been given to them. They need to understand the benefits to them

in terms of their job satisfaction. Getting them together to have fun developing ideas for making it happen will help them feel ownership over the project.

- You will certainly need to consider whether you need help from outside the care home. It may be that there are students from the local college or a family visitor to the home who is interested in technology who wishes to help as a volunteer.
- Having technical help is crucial so that they can make an assessment of the home's internet status and functionality and whether it will be able to cope with the new activities that are planned.
- Many homes have found that computer tablets (eg iPads) are cheaper than they anticipated and work really well in the home. You need to ensure that the right routers and Wi-Fi are used to ensure that the network is secure and people can connect to the internet anywhere in the building.
- A technical advisor can also help to identify specialist software e.g. for people with visual impairments, or speech software to meet the needs of older people in your home
- Staff may need training on the technical use of the kit, understanding the use of the internet and the issues around user security. The benefits for the home are significant. Staff may be able to complete daily records electronically and will be able to pass their know-how on to residents.

Getting the residents interested

For starters, staff may wish to think about what types of software or technology would



be most interesting to residents and then to play with the technology with residents. Game consoles plugged into the TV in the lounge might help residents to be drawn in and get interested in something they wouldn't have considered trying on their own.

Why not use the internet to help people to develop life story books, adding their own images and narratives or help them reconnect with previous hobbies, like genealogy?

Don't forget that digital cameras are also a great place to start. Why not help residents take photos of the home and view them on the computer/ tablet?

Using software such as Skype can keep residents (and staff) connected to their families.

Don't forget that your residents will need proper time and support to really get to know the technology. Leave the technology out for people to use rather than locking it away.

Getting the technical know how - Useful links

AbilityNet helps disabled adults use computers by adapting and adjusting their technology. www.abilitynet.org.uk

Age UK has information about digital technology for older people, their friends, families and carers. This includes a network of local Age UKs in England offering computer training. www.ageuk.org.uk/it

Digital Unite equips people with the right digital skills. www.digitalunite.com

Finerday helps residents to connect to their families through sharing photos, messages, memories, special dates, and website links at the touch of a button. www.finerday.com

LASA is an approved knowledge-based ICT suppliers list that has been checked and referenced. www.lasa.org.uk



Top Ten TIPS!

For bringing digital technology into your care home

- 1. Bring the digital age to your residents and staff!** Increase the quality of life of the residents (and staff) through supporting the use of computers, tablets (eg iPads), cameras and games, and connecting them with family and relatives online.
- 2. Make use of your community** and identify volunteers or visitors who understand technology who can help you bring technology to residents. Staff may have children who might be keen to help.
- 3. Consider the interests and capacities** of your staff and residents in thinking about the type of activities that might be valuable to them.
- 4. Seek advice** from a computer specialist for assessing and improving your connectivity and buying equipment that is accessible to your residents.
- 5. Develop a proper plan** – simply bringing a laptop in might not be the answer.

Enable your staff, residents and relatives to take ownership over the ideas and run with them.
- 6. Be realistic** – if your ideas are too ambitious, you may raise hopes among your residents and staff then have to take away a range of experiences that they were starting to get used to.
- 7. Don't lock computers away!** Residents may want to use them between sessions.
- 8. Build IT training** into the work of your staff and into new employees' expectations and their inductions.
- 9. Promote this facility as a real bonus for the business.** Don't forget that people are increasingly wanting to reside in an 'IT friendly' environment.
- 10. Remember!** Our oldest citizens should have a right to feel connected to the outside world. Make a difference to their lives and have fun!