Connect@Xmas campaign encourages thousands to make digital connections

7th January 2021

Throughout December 2020, we encouraged people to support others to use digital technology to get – and stay - connected. As we will all remember for years to come, no doubt, the 2020 festive season was like no other. With in-person connections being hard if not impossible, we all had to use digital tech more and more creatively.

For those without digital skills and confidence, this was an even greater challenge. At Digital Unite we believe everyone with some digital know-how – and time, patience and kindness – can make a digital skills difference to someone without, or with less. Our campaign was designed to tap into, and support, that inherent people capacity: to encourage folk to be Connectors and to share and encourage others to use digital technology.

Practical and fun festive resources

The Connect@Xmas website was full of practical – and fun – ideas of things to do digitally with and for others. We also produced three new mini courses to support Connectors to develop their connecting skills. All of it was all free to use, and, we gave out just under £500 in prizes to Connectors who shared stories about their connecting activities and ideas.

Launched on 6th December, in just three weeks, Connect@Xmas achieved over 60,000 engagements across social media channels. 1,600 Connectors accessed the Connect@Xmas website's resources and courses. We

are delighted with the response.

From virtual reality to voice notes, Facebook communities to grief support on Zoom, the inspiring stories we heard showed the magic of helping others get and stay connected in simple and clever ways.

These are the stories that really caught our eye and won Connector prizes over the month

Exploring new worlds when you can't go out

Mrs G told us how her organisation had *started introducing elderly residents, many of whom have been shielding/self-isolating for a long time, to the wonder of virtual reality via headsets. "For people with mobility issues, being able to experience (virtually) 'being' at the beach or woodland, from the comfort of one's own home is truly incredible. It has given them a real boost, being able to escape from the current pandemic, if even for a little while . My top tip is to find out what an individual's interests/passions are and then find a suitable VR experience that's perfect for them. You can get all sorts - from touring round Anne Frank's House, meditating or even seeing dinosaurs up close - there really is something for everyone!"*

Using technology to speak the same language

Ellie *runs a digital inclusion project with families in her community. This includes 1-2-1 and group support, as well as using WhatsApp groups and video explainers to* show people how to use technology. Ellie said "*As we have a strong Latin American community, we are also running these services in Spanish and the project is led by parent volunteers that are part of this community. My tip is if you are offering support to members of the community that do not have English as their first language, it is helpful to offer support in different forms. We find that voice notes and screen recordings sent through WhatsApp are easy to understand and share."*

Connect and carry on learning

At the Volunteer Midlothian's Connect Online project, they moved their regular drop in sessions in libraries and community hubs online using Zoom. Their first step was talking everyone through downloading/installing and using Zoom and these now weekly online sessions are a lively combination of current affairs, chat and digital skills. The sessions are followed up by a weekly email with information to encourage learners to go online in between the sessions. This regular support has been very successful, spurring people on to get involved in other online community groups, such as the Older People's Assembly, as their confidence grows.

Using Facebook to unite a local community

Anne created a Facebook group for people who live on her estate and it now has 82 members. She printed off and distributed posters and leaflets to promote the group and laminated signs to put on the lampposts. "It's been lovely to see new residents joining the group and people keen to offer assistance with local information. I am proud to be part of an online group that will respond quickly to anyone who needs help or even just a chat if they are feeling lonely."

Grief support through Zoom

Drewseph very sadly lost his beautiful partner unexpectedly and the family found it hard to navigate their grief while being socially distant. So Drewseph helped them all connect via Zoom. "I watched zoom tutorials on Youtube that gave me the confidence to help family members set up zoom calls. Some people found it incredibly easy whilst others struggled finding the microphone or kept sitting within an inch of the screen! Once we got the hang of it, I found it was a quick, simple way to stay connected, explore our grief and remember the wonderful person sadly taken from us."

The [Connect@Xmas website](#) will remain live through January 2021 and you can still access – and share – the resources and courses on it.

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