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Digital Unite

Digital Champion stories - "trust is absolutely key"

15th August 2019

John Thompson was named Best Volunteer Digital Champion in our recent Achievement Awards 2019 and is a Digital Champion with [Phoenix Community Housing.](#)

Phoenix Community Housing joined Digital Unite's [Digital Champions Network](#) as part of the Lottery-funded [One Digital programme](#).

Following early retirement John wanted to give back to his local community and use the skills he'd gained in his professional life. Being a Digital Champion with Phoenix Community Housing was the perfect way to do this. He volunteers his digital skills at his nearby Job Centre Plus and runs Digital Drop-in sessions at a local community building, The Green Man.

John has helped over 130 people so far with some being supported every week for months. He is also a mentor to other Digital Champions and actively helps to engage new Champions so that more local people can benefit from this vital support.

We wanted to understand John's motivation in becoming a Digital Champion and what his experience has been like.

Why did you become a Digital Champion

"I had been made redundant in late 2015, and whilst I was contemplating full or part-time employment opportunities I also felt that the skills and experience I had could be put to good effect within the local community in a voluntary capacity.

"This led to me working with several organisations, both small and large e.g. Age UK, Shaw Trust, Lewisham

Pensioners Forum and Phoenix Community Housing to name a few. In fact my role at Phoenix Community Housing meant that I was offered a paid part-time role as a Digital Skills Connector."

How useful did you find the Digital Champion's online training?

"The online training on the Digital Champions Network is an extremely useful aid for those Digital Champions wishing to increase their own knowledge and skills. I found that the information regarding visual impairment and accessibility needs most useful and highly informative, and I certainly learnt something new in the way of the Be My Eyes app and how this is a great help to those with little or no sight, so I've now signed up as a volunteer with this organisation!"

To bank or not to bank online...that is the question

"One of the challenges I've experienced is based around using online banking. People have raised concerns over whether this is something they should avoid. Of course these concerns are quite understandable but I do think it's up to me to make sure learners fully appreciate what the actual risks are. By taking time to explore and discuss these concerns fully I have been able to allay their fears.

"This of course takes time but actually it's about developing your relationship with them because building people's confidence and trust is absolutely key."

The highlight of my Digital Champion experience so far

"The most rewarding aspect for me is knowing that I've managed to help someone improve their digital skills as well as increase their confidence and appetite to learn more, and to receive this acknowledgement straight from the horse's mouth".

"You don't need to be an IT Guru"

We asked John what he would say to other people who may be interested in becoming Digital Champion. This is what he said:

"It's not something that you should think about - just go ahead and do it!

"You certainly don't need to be an IT guru, simply someone who is willing to help others, is patient and a good communicator, has some digital skills and a willingness to learn and help others do the same".

Would you like more information?

[Click here](#) to get more information on becoming a member of the Digital Champions Network and join John and hundreds of others.

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