

How being a Digital Champion helped one volunteer get back into work



Phil McGarry became a Digital Champion for Clarion Futures in February 2018. Here he describes how the experience gained as a Digital Champion and the people he met through this volunteering helped him back into the workplace.

“I heard about becoming a Digital Champion after meeting my Employment Support Officer at Clarion Housing, through my local job centre. I had been out of work for two months and felt that it would be a good way of keeping up my IT skills whilst looking for new employment and would introduce me to lots of new people. It was also an opportunity for me to give back to my local community, passing on my skills and knowledge to those to those who needed them most.

“The online training provided on the Digital Champions Network was very useful, particularly as a reference library, as I will freely admit that there were aspects of digital technology that I had a very limited knowledge of, especially tablets and smartphones. I found that referring to the how-to guides as well as practicing and learning from fellow Digital Champions, grew my knowledge and understanding of these devices. Completing the Network’s courses also meant I had certificates and badges to show potential employers the new skills I had gained.

Being a Digital Champion not only (hopefully) benefited the people I helped, but it also benefitted me, too.

"I taught lots of different people during my time as a Digital Champion. Often, I found that if new learners became comfortable with you from the outset, then they would stick with you all the time. I had several learners who did that.

"One learner, Michael had a stroke in his 50s and had a long recovery. He was looking to get back into work his restricted movement would allow, as well as needing help filling in and navigating online forms. He also needed help with how to use a computer and keyboard, within the limits of his mobility, as he had never had to use one for previous jobs before.

"Another learner, an Iranian lady in her 40s, had no previous experience of going online, so I taught her how to search and navigate through the internet, emailing, and the basics of Word and Excel. She was so pleased with the way I taught her, that she even took a photo of me to send to her daughter as a 'picture of my teacher' which was gratifying.

"Generally, though, it was nice to help people from the time I first met them through any online problems they'd encounter, right through to getting them back into work. One particular occasion that sticks in my mind is helping a particularly distressed lady navigate her way through the daunting process of applying online for benefits when her finances were near zero. At which point I became as much a reassuring shoulder to lean on as a Digital Champion.

Being a Digital Champion gave my new-found confidence and a great sense of satisfaction

"Being a Digital Champion has led to my new job as a Administration Assistant for Leecliffe Big Local , because it has given me new-found confidence and a great sense of satisfaction from helping people in my community (many of whom I still see out and about and still thank me). Many of my learners needed, not only someone to patiently and non-patronisingly teach them the online digital skills they needed, but also a sympathetic and non-judgemental ear/shoulder to lean on, as well.

"The one piece of advice that I would give to a prospective Digital Champion is that what you do in your local community WILL be appreciated. Especially if you carry that out in a sympathetic and non-judgemental manner. You will see just what a piece of kindness can do to someone's day. From only a little thing like setting up a new password or resolving an e-mail query right up to the big life-changing things like helping people get a job, formatting their CV for them, or helping them apply for benefits. Being a Champion was one of the best things I have ever done, and I have made friends and acquaintances through it that I will have for a long time."

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