

Press release: 'Smart homes' to help older and disabled people get digital skills and tackle loneliness in rural areas

- Cash will also fund app for people with Down's Syndrome to improve health and wellbeing
- New money for projects to help those receiving palliative care and their families and carers

A number of 'smart homes' with digitally savvy older people demonstrating tech in their own homes are being created as part of an innovative scheme to boost the nation's digital skills.

The homes, to be created in rural West Essex by a partnership led by Uttlesford Council for Voluntary Service, will see home owners become trained 'digital boomers' to help others improve their digital skills. They will receive a digital assessment, before having their homes 'kitted out' in tech.

The experts will then open their homes for older people to visit so they can learn first hand from their peers how to make the most of smart technology to control household appliances, book GP appointments online, contact friends and family by video, and shop online. Younger, 'digital buddies' will also be on hand to support with digital skills.

The scheme is one of three to be given a share of £400,000 by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to improve older and disabled people's lives through the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund.

The fund will also see an app created by the Down's Syndrome Association to allow people with Down's Syndrome to monitor their weight and exercise levels from their smartphones to promote good health and wellbeing.

More than 70 per cent of people with Down's Syndrome are classed as overweight or obese. The app will be the first of its kind specifically designed for those with Down's Syndrome. It will also aim to connect people with a wider community of users which can help combat loneliness.

The Weldmar Hospicecare Trust will also explore, for the first time, how the lives of end-of-life and palliative patients can be improved through new technology and skills.

The project aims to research and develop technology to allow users to report on their health on a daily basis; provide consultations in a timely, convenient and cost effective way via video to help patients with regular appointments; and support carers and families who are often also at risk of isolation and detrimental health and wellbeing impacts, while improving their digital skills.

Minister for Digital, Margot James, said:

We are committed to improving the digital skills of people of all ages and abilities so everyone can enjoy the benefits of modern technology.

These innovative projects will not only help some of the hardest to reach people live healthier and happier lives but also boost our mission to make the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital businesses.

John Fisher, chief executive, Citizens Online said:

We were impressed with the standard of entries to the Digital Inclusion Fund. Digital inclusion is essential to help people improve their lives in this digital age and this fund, targeting those most in need is a welcome enabler.

The successful projects will produce valuable learning for all those working in this sector and help to improve the digital skills of older and disabled people.

Alex Rawle, Down's Syndrome Active project manager, said:

The Down's Syndrome Association are delighted to have been chosen to receive a grant from the Digital Inclusion Fund.

This will enable us to create and distribute a "Health Swap" app, made specifically with the needs of people with Down's Syndrome in mind. The app will encourage its users to live healthier and more active lives and will be a gateway to a world of further digital information and tools.

The Down's Syndrome Association is a national charity which aims to help people with Down's syndrome live full and rewarding lives.

Clive Emmett, chief executive of Uttlesford Council for Voluntary Service, said:

Organisations across Essex are backing the Digital Boomers which will see older people redesign their relationship using technology to become even more tech confident and retain their independence for longer.

Thanks to the Digital Inclusion Fund, our exciting Living Smart Homes and Digital Buddies pilots will help us rethink how older people use digital to support their health, wellbeing and

independence.

Caroline Hamblett, Chief Executive of Weldmar Hospicecare Trust, said:

We are delighted to have been awarded Digital Inclusion funding, which will enable us to continue the development of telehealth technologies for patients and their families/carers receiving palliative and end of life care.

With this funding we aim to test the possibility to extend the reach of this project through software development, possibly in the form of an app which will allow patients to record their symptoms and communicate with their clinicians from the comfort of their own home.

Research from Lloyd's Consumer Digital Index 2018 has revealed that older and disabled people with have been highlighted as being the slowest to adopt basic digital skills and also have the lowest internet usage (ONS).

These initiatives will complement Government's existing work to boost digital skills provision across the country. This includes:

The Digital Skills Partnership has seen Government, businesses, charities and voluntary organisations joining forces to deliver more than 2.5 million free training opportunities in areas such as basic online skills, cybersecurity and coding.

Three Local Digital Skills Partnership pilots in Lancashire, the South West and West Midlands bringing together businesses, charities, the education sector and public sector organisations to tackle local digital skills challenges to build thriving and inclusive local economies.

Notes to editors

Contact the DCMS Press Office on 0207 211 2210.

The Digital Inclusion Fund is being managed by Citizens Online and application for bids were open between September and October 2018.

Citizens Online has worked in more than 50 communities across the UK since 2000. It helps organisations make sure the switch to online doesn't exclude people and are passionate about digital inclusion. Its approach is based on detailed evidence and strong local partnerships. Further information on the fund can be found [here](#).

The government is also helping people interact with government online and ensure we deliver the best possible public services, as part of the SmarterGov campaign which has been launched to drive innovation, savings and public service improvement across government and wider public sector.