

Case study

**Improving Wellbeing Through
Technology and Support: The
Lasting Positive Impact of the
Tech Smart Seniors Program.**



The issue

Australian Red Cross and YourLink teamed up to create the Tech Smart Seniors program, which aimed to help older adults in the Newcastle Hunter and Central Coast regions of NSW. The area had been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and floods, leaving many older adults feeling isolated and disconnected. The program was specifically designed to help these seniors, many of whom are in their mid-80s and live alone. The goal was to help them feel more connected and engaged with the world around them.

“As we’ve never done this before, we needed a partner we could trust to be with us every step of the way. YourLink brings great experience rolling out these programs even during a pandemic”

– Michael Ryan, Regional Operations Manager, Central Coast/Hunter NSW.



The solution

The Tech Smart Seniors program had a unique solution to help address the isolation and disconnection experienced by older adults in the Newcastle Hunter and Central Coast regions of NSW. The program leveraged the power of volunteers to make a real impact. Red Cross identified an opportunity to recruit and retain volunteers from other services such as Emergency Services and Telechat to be digital coaches for the program's clients.

Clients received a loaned iPad, data, training, and personalised support from their digital coach. The program also included up to 12 months of technical support from YourLink, a one-on-one phone or online welcome session with a digital coach, and up to three online group training sessions delivered via Zoom. The training sessions were designed to be in a safe, fun, and relaxed learning environment, and clients had ongoing support from Red Cross staff and volunteers for up to two hours per week.

YourLink ran group training sessions with 5 to 9 clients at a time, and digital confidence was measured at the beginning and end of the program. Aspirations for using technology were also measured. The majority of clients rated their confidence as 2 or 3 out of 5 at the beginning of the program, but after the training, all clients noted a significant improvement. For example, Doreen, who rated her confidence as 1 at the beginning of the program, rated it as 4 after the training. *“It gives me something to do all the time - I’m using it every day,”* she said.

After the training, a number of Zoom sessions were run around topics such as Emergency Services and a regular iPad user support group as well as an online exercise program with an accredited exercise physiologist. These sessions were designed to continue the socialisation with other participants and the broader community, as well as using new digital skills. The program launched in March 2022, and it has been successful in helping older adults feel more connected and engaged with the world around them.

The impact

The Tech Smart Seniors program has had a significant impact on the lives of older adults in the Newcastle Hunter and Central Coast regions of NSW. Ongoing feedback and wellbeing benefits were included throughout the program, and all clients have demonstrated improved digital confidence.

One great example is Kevin, who was initially hesitant about joining the program as he had never used an iPad or a computer of any kind and had no idea of how to use it or what he would use it for. However, with a bit of curiosity and some help from Red Cross, Kevin decided to give it a try. Thanks to the program, Kevin was able to see his sister via video for the first time in 15 years. He said, *"Naturally, we had both gotten older so when we saw each other for the first time we just laughed and laughed for about five minutes!"*

The program also created opportunities for additional services such as allied health and social support by bringing digital skills and confidence into the existing service offering that Red Cross provides. The digital coaches have an important impact on the person's life: enhancing their sense of wellbeing, supporting good physical and mental health, and promoting healthy ageing. As one client said: *"My confidence has increased. I'm not scared to have a go. That was the hardest part to overcome. Learn a small part at a time."*



"The Tech Smart Seniors program is a great example of how technology can improve social connections, enhance wellbeing, and promote healthy ageing for older adults. The program combines digital coach training and client training and support to open a whole new world of possibilities for our clients, and it's been a huge success. We're really proud of the impact the partnership with YourLink has made."

– Michael Ryan, Regional Operations Manager, Central Coast/Hunter NSW.

Client feedback

"I feel more connected with so many more people contacting me. It's been the most significant change since joining the program."

"Life changing"

"I was in the hospital recently for about a week and took the Ipad with me. It was the best thing ever! My life blood. Being able to keep in touch and take my mind off being in hospital."

"My confidence has increased and I'm not scared to have a go. That was the hardest part to overcome."



"I'm 84 and I know communication is there. I can send an email - I hear it whoosh away and know I'll get a reply. The iPad has opened up a whole new world. Helps me when I live alone. I ask Siri throughout the day how he is!"



"Using Zoom has been great and I use my device every day. I've started a trivia group and use my iPad for this."

"My confidence has increased so much and I definitely feel more connected."

"I'm using it everyday. I found a new crochet pattern from the internet. It was my Granddaughter's birthday yesterday and have made a blanket for her. I'm not as nervous as I was. I was hopeless to begin with. I'm more confident now."

"I hadn't actually seen my sister in 15 years, thanks to the iPad and training I can now video call her and will continue to on a regular basis."

"I've been able to research so much online. I managed to find the instruction manual for my air conditioner online and got the answers I was looking for."

Lasting impact

The project was recognised as a Finalist in the innovAGEING National Awards 2022.



For those clients that are coming to the end of their 12 month of the program, the results speak for themselves.

100%

feel more connected

100%

are more easily able to access things they enjoy online

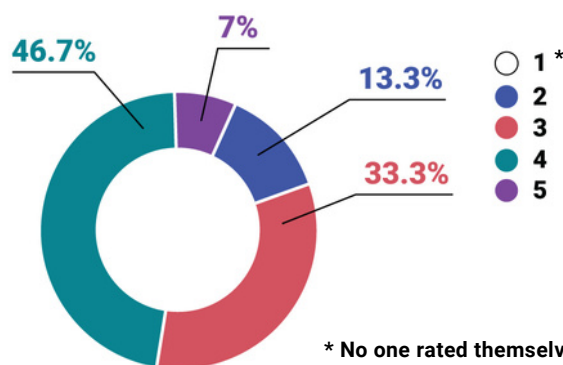
100%

would recommend the program to family and friends

100%

feel more independent when using technology

Confidence: How would you rate your confidence since participating in the program? (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest).



About Red Cross

Red Cross provides social support and a range of services to elderly people. Clients can sign up for face-to-face visits from community members, receive regular wellbeing calls, provide transport to and from medical appointments and be assisted to complete everyday activities such as shopping. Red Cross is the world's largest humanitarian organisation with over 100 million volunteers worldwide and over 60,000 members and volunteers in Australia.

www.redcross.org.au

About YourLink

YourLink is an organisation dedicated to building digital confidence for seniors, carers and care workers. YourLink does this by designing and delivering digital skills programs with clients and providing digital coaches to support ongoing learning so that seniors, carers and care workers are independent and actively participate in a digital world.

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