

# The digital coach.

## A critical part of the future workforce in aged care.

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In this, the International Year of the Health and Care worker (WHO) it is timely to hone in on the experience of working in the aged care sector and offer some fresh thinking into the conversation.

With the findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety imminent, the attention on this issue is high. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said in a recent Press Club speech “growing and upskilling the aged care workforce will be a key focus”. He went on, “Workforce challenges are some of the biggest challenges Australians face economically and it is essential to both our economic agenda and services delivery agenda to meet demand”.

As other sectors respond to the future of work, the rapid adoption of digital service delivery exposes skills gaps and highlights the need for reskilling, in the aged care sector this is even more intensive.

### The problem to solve

Before diving into solutions, it's important to understand the problem that needs to be solved. In the Aged Care Workforce Taskforce report it was identified that 'high employee turnover' is one of the most significant challenges the industry is facing.

In some instances this can be as high as 50%. When coupled with over 28,000 job ads for care workers on seek.com.au the story of the workforce crisis in aged care begins to take shape.

The implications of this level of turnover and lack of ability to fill roles is not only on the quality and continuity of care for older Australians, but also on business performance as the costs of recruitment, productivity and cultural impacts take hold.



According to Louise O'Neill, Chair of the Aged Care Workforce Industry Council, "aged care and its ongoing workforce issues are expected to form a significant part of the Australian Government's response to the findings of the Royal Commission into the industry's safety and quality." She went on to talk about the challenge to attract the talent that's needed, "[Aged care] doesn't have the same gravitas to draw people in, and that has been lacking," she says. "It shouldn't be an issue for the sector because it's a great sector to work in".

This challenge has been amplified in the past year with the dramatic shift to online service delivery and social interactions. This shift has exposed the gap in digital literacy that exists in the care workforce which in the future will be more in demand from seniors as they become more digitally enabled.

There are two challenges that need to be addressed quickly:

1. What is the profile of the 'workforce of the future' in aged care?
2. How does the sector attract the talent it needs to sustain and deliver the quality of care needed?

It's the first question that YourLink can bring some perspective to. The work we do in the sector, with our partners Apple and Telstra Wholesale is to get devices into the hands of seniors and train them how to use them - a simple and incredibly powerful formula.

We exist because there are two assumptions being made by the organisations driving their service delivery online for seniors - a) seniors have access to a device and b) they know how to use it. We have discovered the answers to those questions - a) they haven't and b) they don't.

Our objective is for all seniors to be active participants in the digital world - confident to access online services, health advice and connect easily with family and friends. This is about equal access to the technology and, as a result, to the services they need to live healthy and flourishing lives.

In our work we are increasingly training care workers so they in turn, can help seniors learn how to use their devices. Before we get into more detail on this we have a story to share about one of our team - the essence is, aged care can attract new talent.





## **Attracting the right talent is not impossible**

*Stephen - YourLink digital coach*

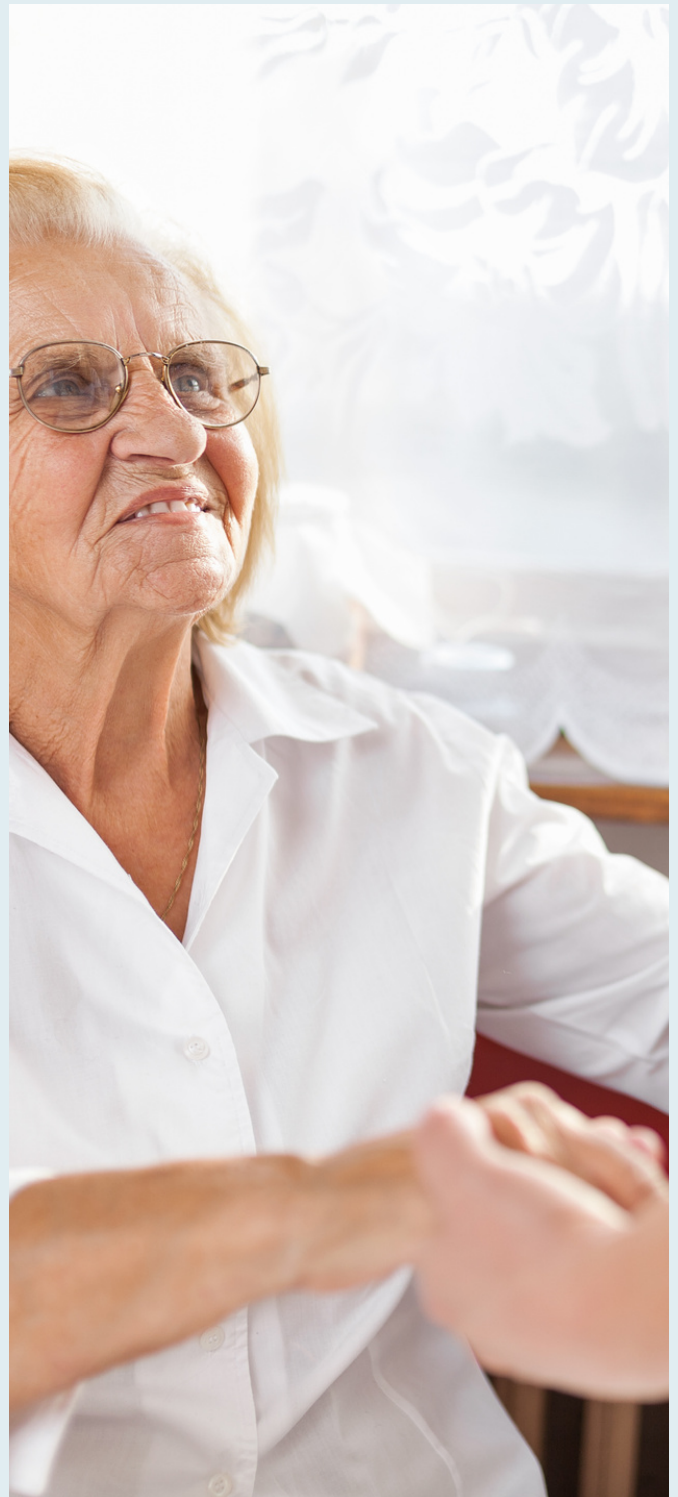
COVID-19 affected every industry, and after 30 years working in the Fashion Industry I was made redundant but within an industry that also seemed somewhat redundant to me.

I left the industry keen to use my skills in other ways, to give back and to work in a role where I was more appreciated. I had, for many years, managed others to help them get their job done and managed the process of getting ideas off paper, into the production line, made and delivered.

An opportunity to be a digital coach at YourLink came up in my LinkedIn feed, with one of the skills needed - patience. That, I felt, I had in abundance.

It wasn't long before I found myself on my first Zoom meeting with a senior looking back at me waiting, and wanting to learn. Everyone learns at their own pace and understanding that meant being patient. The satisfaction of a big smile or the often repeated comment "you mean I did it?" at the end of a session was a huge reward for me.

Being part of the YourLink team has really shown me that technology has wonderful applications outside of work and my usual internet surfing. It can be a valuable tool for so many who haven't grown up with it. Mostly though, what I have learnt after many sessions with seniors is, you're never too old to learn.





## Digital coaches - a critical part of the future workforce in aged care

A key element of our service is the allocation of a digital coach for each senior. Digital coaches help them set up their device before the training begins and then field any questions once the training is over. This got us thinking - in the workforce of the future for aged care, is the role of digital coach part of the solution?

Think about it - the ultimate outcome that banks, retailers, government and health services are aiming for is a high percentage of their customer interactions to be self service. Seniors are a part of this and so they need to have the tools and confidence to participate. Yes we can provide training, but for seniors to get the full utility out of their devices the learning needs to be ongoing - enter digital coaches.

"Often it is not the technology itself that can limit its adoption but a perceived lack of relevance to its utility and the absence of co-designed processes for its integration. Accompanying this integration is the need for workforce training and development as well as building client readiness, and the redesign of existing models of care. At present, even with the impact of COVID-19, adoption is dependent on individual clinicians and their willingness to engage with telehealth. A whole system strategy is needed to address this lag".

### What would the role of the digital coach be?

One of the key insights from our 2018 research was that despite good intentions of family and friends, they often fixed the digital problems and didn't teach their loved ones how to fix it themselves.

If each aged care provider had a small number of digital coaches on their team they could provide the support needed to enable the growth in their clients' digital confidence.

The ACIITC CARE-IT Project provides some interesting perspective. "The majority of organisations surveyed (75.2%) do not assess potential workforce members for their digital literacy as part of their recruitment and selection process. However, 57.4% of these organisations believe that digital literacy training should be mandatory".

### About digital coaches

The types of activities they could undertake include:

- 1:1 coaching so seniors can continue to learn at their own pace
- Provide tips and tricks to help their clients get more from their devices
- Specialising in supporting clients to join the online groups such as social support Zoom sessions and allied health
- Small group sessions on common issues - such as how to log into telehealth, online shopping and signing up for clubs
- Use feedback from care workers to focus on specific areas of interest or concern for clients.

### What are the attributes they need to be successful?

Not just anyone can be a digital coach and while digital knowledge is helpful it is not the most important. A successful digital coach will be:

- Patient
- Empathetic
- A good communicator
- Curious and able to ask great questions
- A teacher (not just a fixer of problems)
- Able to adapt to any situation and remain calm
- Good problem solving skills.



## **Big smiles in the end**

### *A YourLink digital coach story*

We were on our first online group learning session with a new group. I noticed Elizabeth, 79 years old, was not on the Zoom session yet, so I phoned her.

When she picked up the phone she sounded relieved to hear my voice, "I have been trying to get into the session but am not getting anywhere" she said. I quickly reassured her, "I know you're feeling frustrated so let's work through together and get it sorted".

"If you can tell me what you see on the screen we can work out where you are and what we need to do". By asking this I am able to follow on my iPad to see where Elizabeth may have come unstuck.

Within a few minutes we worked out Elizabeth was in an old email from the previous week's handover session and was trying to access that link. I talked her through how to refresh the email inbox so that the current invitation appeared. Moments later she joined the rest of the participants in our online session with big smiles all round.

## **Stuck on settings**

### *A YourLink digital coach story*

I spoke with David, 87 years old, after he requested help regarding his managed device. "I can't turn my iPad on or off, it's stuck on the settings page", he said.

"Ok, that's good to know" I said, "now we can work through the steps to get it working again. I can reboot your device remotely to see if that works". It did and so David was able to put in his passcode.

Then he said, "I was trying to update the iPad, and it was asking for a Wi-Fi connection, which I don't have".

"What are you seeing on the screen now?" I asked. This is our best question, once I know that I can set up the same situation on my device to help. We went through the various prompts as they came up and so he was soon back onto a screen that was familiar.

We talked through the Wi-Fi situation as well so David knew exactly what he needed to do next time.

## The benefits of digital coaches is clear

This type of change in the makeup of a workforce needs a clear benefits case to support its implementation. We have heard from many aged care organisations they have tried to deploy devices to their clients historically with little or no uptake. That's the problem the digital coaches can address within the organisation. Other benefits include:

- **Improved wellbeing of seniors** through more confident access to health services such as telehealth and online exercise
- **Improved ability of seniors** to problem solve for themselves, reducing their reliance on others to support them
- **More rapid adoption of new online services**, delivering earlier benefits for those services
- **Overall capability uplift of the workforce** with addition of digital coaches.

## The Australian community are supportive

A recent Flinders University survey of 10,000 tax payers found that 61% of taxpayers would be willing to pay on average 3.1% more tax per year to ensure all Australians have high quality of care.<sup>3</sup>

With this kind of community backing, aged care providers can reassess their strategic workforce plans and how they attract and retain the workers they need in the future; and give seniors access to the technology and support they need to be active members of the digital world.

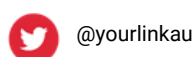
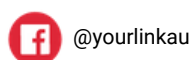


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3. Flinders news Aged Care Services Research



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