



Improving digital inclusion for seniors

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The Shaping Connections project developed by RMIT, in partnership with the University of Third Age, aims to help seniors understand the benefits of technology and how digital skills can improve their health and wellbeing.

It's becoming increasingly difficult to function without a digital presence. From paying bills to keeping in touch with family, digital competencies are vital to wellbeing.

Yet, while improvements are being made in the area, challenges still exist with connecting seniors with digital technology. This is especially the case for older people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, as their unique experiences shape how they understand the value of digital connection.

Shaping Connections – a partnership between RMIT University's School of Economics, Finance and Marketing and the University of the Third Age – has been working with seniors to co-design strategies to address their concerns around Information & Communication Technology (ICT) use.

The project aims to foster social connectedness and digital inclusion in older people.

"Technology can create a sense of social connectedness, as well as benefits in other areas such as health and entertainment, yet some older adults don't understand how," says Dr Torgeir Aleti, Deputy Director of Shaping Connections.

"Rather than saying, 'we have this fantastic new tool to help you, now go and use it', our process is based on asking, 'can you see how this technology can benefit your life?'"

"It's about helping seniors discover what tech works for them in the context they want to use it," he says.

Seniors seeking to improve their digital literacy undertake a workshop that uses self-assessment tools to help them express their concerns about technology use. These concerns are then embodied as personas, with scripted examples of experiences these personas may have presented to the groups.

Participants strategise how their persona can overcome the perceived risks they face with the support of group leaders from their community.



During the workshops, the Shaping Connections team recognised a need to further tailor the process for participants from CALD backgrounds.

For example, at one workshop in Wollert, which included members of the Egyptian community, it became clear they struggled to see their unique concerns reflected in the personas.

“What we witnessed was how much the cultural context can define the way individuals think about technology,” explains Associate Professor and Director of the program, Bernardo Figueiredo.

“For instance, in the Egyptian community, women tended to have higher digital literacy levels and be more active online than men. How such nuances shape the way CALD seniors want or need to use technology is critical to better create programs that are most beneficial for them.”

With the intent to bring co-designing workshops to all older people across Australia, the Shaping Connection team is exploring ways to make them more inclusive and beneficial for multicultural community groups.

“We recognise the challenges CALD community groups face extend beyond the technical aspects,” says Bernardo.



“These include language barriers, concerns from community group leaders that their own levels of digital literacy may not be sufficient to oversee workshops, as well limited connections with educational groups that would help run the program, and, of course, the question of financing them.”

To overcome these and ensure they are meeting all critical needs in the community, we are seeking to collaborate with groups and institutions serving CALD communities to develop the program further.”

Find more information on the Shaping Connections project, or get in touch with the team [here](#)

