Dementia and Technology

A Library-based 'Tech Club' for Older Adults Living with Dementia and Their Care Partners K. Kovalik, A. Innes, M. McLeod, U. Gilani, C. Dupuis & E. Burke. *Gerontechnology* 25(s)

Purpose Addressing the digital divide is recognized as important but less is known about how best to support older adults (55+) living with dementia and their care partners' digital learning needs. Learning digital skills by using technology can help promote digital literacy and social inclusion to foster the well-being of people living with dementia and care partners [1, 2]. In today's digital society, access to digital technologies that enable social participation is increasingly recognized as a human right [3] and is essential for achieving social inclusion for people with dementia [4]. This paper demonstrates an initiative, a library-based 'tech club,' aimed at addressing the digital divide through fostering social connection and promoting digital skills among people living with dementia and care partners. **Methods** Two co-design workshops were held in the summer of 2024 to identify the technology interests and needs of people living with dementia and their care partners. Insights from these co-design workshops shaped the development of an 8-week 'tech club,' hosted at a Burlington Public Library branch. The program focused on using iPads and smartphones to explore various apps and platforms to provide social connection for people living with dementia and care partners. Data collection methods included pre- tech club interviews, a momentary assessment tool, ethnographic fieldnotes and participant observation, a post-project focus group, and a librarian interview. **Results and Discussion** Descriptive statistics and reflexive thematic analysis were conducted. One finding included the improved self-reported mood of participants during all sessions. This ranged from 0.33 to 2.0-point improvements on a 5-point scale. The self-reported mood improvements indicate a positive impact on participants' well-being. Three key themes emerged including (1) motivations for participating, (2) perceived social well-being, and (3) potential challenges and opportunities. Participant motivations for participating included developing new technological skills, and supporting people living with dementia. Perceived social well-being was evident among participant engagement, fostered social connections, engagement with the library staff, and skill development. Potential challenges were identified such as participant fears, ageist perceptions, and environmental challenges. Opportunities promoted by the tech club were learning new tech skills, overcoming technological barriers, continuing to develop skills independently, and community building. This research highlights the importance of involving individuals with lived experience and community partners in developing and evaluating technology-based research and programming. These partnerships are integral in addressing the digital divide for people living with dementia and care partners, through fostering social connection.

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