A 'Tech Club' for older adults, people living with dementia, and care partners: A co-designed initiative
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Purpose The digital divide is a widely recognized issue to address for older adults (55+), and 'tech clubs' could be a solution to support older adults, people living with dementia and their care partners. The involvement of people living with dementia in the design of technology-based interventions is important [1], and social connectedness should be examined to address the needs identified by people living with dementia [2]. A previous 'tech club' project demonstrated benefits for digital learning, social connection, and inclusion, though a limited sample size was noted [3]. Building on this work, the current study implemented a more robust recruitment strategy to replicate the 'tech club' with a larger group of participants (n=11), aiming to examine how technology-mediated social connection and digital learning can help address the digital divide. **Methods** Co-designed with the Gilbrea Centre's SHARE Advisory Group and community members, two co-design sessions were held in spring 2025 to develop the program structure and session topics. Eight 'tech club' sessions were delivered between May and June 2025 at a local Hamilton Public Library. Sessions involved the use of Samsung tablets, iPads, personal devices (e.g., phones and laptops), the Wii, and various applications and platforms to support digital skill development and social engagement. Data collection included pre-project interviews; pre- and post-session mood questionnaires; three scales (CPQ-12, ATTQ, WOOP) assessing computer proficiency, attitudes toward technology, and well-being; ethnographic field notes; participant observation; a focus group; and a librarian interview. **Results and Discussion** Reflexive thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were utilized. Findings indicate improvements in participants' mood and well-being, perceived benefits related to learning and confidence-building, challenges related to communication and accessibility, and the overall value of a co-designed 'tech club' for older adults, people living with dementia, and care partners. Scale data suggested that most participants entered the study with good computer proficiency, positive attitudes toward technology, and relatively strong well-being. Mood questionnaire results (5-point scale) showed that participants' moods generally remained stable or improved following sessions. On average, older adults' mood increased from 4.17 pre-session to 4.48 post-session; people living with dementia showed a slight increase from 3.98 to 4.00; and care partners' mood increased from 3.60 to 4.00. These findings highlight the potential of co-designed, community-based technology initiatives to inform age-inclusive technology design and implementation, emphasizing adaptability, social connection, and accessibility. At a policy level, the results support investment in participatory, library-based digital programs as strategies to reduce the digital divide and promote digital equity, well-being, and social inclusion among diverse aging populations.

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