LIVING IT UP: A DIGITAL TOOL TO PREVENT SOCIAL ISOLATION

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Living it Up (LiU) is an award-winning online self-management hub, which empowers people aged 50 and over to feel more in control of their health and better connected in their communities.

Developed with the input of over 3,000 users, along with health and care professionals, Living it Up’s person-centred digital platform provides wellbeing tracking tools and a wealth of information to support users to live a healthier, happier lifestyle. It also provides opportunities for users to connect with their community, whether it is through local support groups, activity clubs or volunteering opportunities.

INTRODUCTION TO ‘SHINE’

Throughout our extensive community engagement, users expressed a real desire to find more opportunities to get involved within their own community with the potential in some cases to “give back”. This included volunteering and helping others to share their own skills and talents, or to learn new ones. Many reported a challenge in either determining what their untapped talents might be, or finding the right opportunity due to fragmented information sources.

SHINE, one of the four Living it Up core services, was developed in response to that feedback and aims to inspire people to do more of the things that they enjoy. SHINE encourages users to reflect on their skills and preferences through a short interactive picture quiz and presents the user with a range of local opportunities based on their interests. Their results link to volunteering opportunities which are fed in from A Local Information System for Scotland (ALISS) and Volunteer Scotland.

BENEFITS OF SHINE
The effects of social isolation on health and wellbeing are well established - NHS Inform has reported that social isolation is associated with a higher risk of death in older people, regardless of whether they consider themselves lonely.¹ As such, one of the focuses of LiU has been on linking users with their respective communities to ensure they get the most out of life and to positively affect their health.

**User Benefits:**

- The ability to give back and get more actively involved in the community
- Reduced social isolation
- Increased individual contribution and resilience

**Community Benefits**

- The ability to open a citizen-facing channel to build community capacity
- Greater community support capacity and resilience

**EXAMPLES OF SHINE IN ACTION**

Below are some examples of how SHINE has supported positive connections in local communities, with volunteering as a clear factor.

**Case Study - Tristin ap Rheinallt**

Tristan ap Rheinallt is the project manager for Hebridean Connections, a project compiling thousands of records relating to the genealogy, history, traditions, culture and archaeology of the Outer Hebrides. Hebridean Connections support local people from the community to recognise that what they know about history and island life is a hidden talent and that this information should be shared because people are really excited to hear these great stories.

Tristan and his colleagues attended many Living it Up feedback workshops and spotted an overlap in interests with Living it Up and SHINE, which developed into a fruitful partnership.

**Stornoway Pop-Up Shop**

Living it Up created an opportunity for Hebridean Connections to talk with people from the local community in the pop-up shop and promote volunteering based on their skills and interests through SHINE. With their regular presence in the pop-up shop in Stornoway, many Living it Up users became familiar with Hebridean Connections and came to the pop-up shop to share stories about island life, family history and the local community.

"From our conversations with people in the pop-up shop, it was very clear that a common interest in the past is one of the factors contributing to the strength of the local community in our area. When this is translated into volunteering, and people come together to talk about things they already have an interest in, you can then

teach them things like IT skills while they do that – in a less daunting way than if they have to come into a formal class situation.”

Supporting Local Volunteers & Collaborating with Local Projects

With the material from Hebridean Connections being drawn mostly from the archives of local historical societies (known as comainn eachdraidh, a Gaelic phrase) they realised that whilst their volunteers are feeling that they are making a valuable contribution, they are also benefiting from social interaction with people with shared interests.

“Hebridean Connections and Living it Up have supported each other’s activities which has been good and we have had a lot of input developing the Shine side through being involved in workshops.”

Hebridean Connections are also keen to increase digital participation from local people and said, “Living it Up have given us more of an awareness of the training that can be offered – it made us aware of the barriers and hesitations that people have towards technology.” Training is provided to the volunteers so that they can enter information on to the Hebridean Connections website.

Case Study 2 - Jimmy MacLennan

Jimmy Maclennan, chairman of the MS Western Isles branch, has been living with primary progressive multiple sclerosis (MS) for the past 14 years. He uses alternative therapies and natural medication to improve his quality of life and has travelled between the island and Inverness for the past 12 years.

‘The Network Effect’

Jimmy got in contact with Living it Up through his involvement with charitable organisations and attended community engagement events finding them, “vibrant, light-hearted but at the same time, informative”. Through his involvement in the MS Western Isles branch and with the support of Living it Up, he pushed the start up of a new charitable organisation called NERVES (Neurological Equal Rights Volunteers Eilean Siar,) that aims to help people with neurological conditions living in the Western Isles.

“Because of my involvement with various charities, I have been able to use Living it Up for making contacts, and through these contacts and Living it Up I have gained a lot of beneficial information (and feedback) about health conditions and organisations.”

Living it Up was one of the early introductions that Jimmy had to voluntary organisations; and this positive experience inspired him to get involved in a voluntary capacity with other organisations.

“[Living it Up] helps me to do a better job of helping people. We are all human and get self-satisfaction from helping others...

Case study 3- Tina Burgess
Tina Burgess has been a very active member of Living it Up in the Western Isles. She attended workshops to help develop services and even ran a very popular session for other Living it Up members that focused on reducing salt intake by replacing salt with herbs. The session resulted in a well-populated ‘Experience Guide to Herbs for Health’, aiming to inspire other people in the community to improve their lifestyle choices and benefit from healthier living.

“That session gave me confidence, I hadn’t really done anything around that before. It inspired me to do some more training - I now have a diploma in nutrition and have been given the chance to talk to a whole range of people, and share the nutritional value of herbs.”

Developing Talents
Tina went on to gain a diploma in nutrition and has since built upon this experience to develop a programme that provides more in-depth information about the nutritional value of herbs, delivered to various groups including the Pointers Carers, Young Mum’s and the Older People’s Partnership.

Giving Back
When she retires next year, Tina plans to become more involved in the community and hopes that Living it Up will provide her with an opportunity to remain connected with people she has met throughout the project.

“I’d quite like to volunteer for Living it Up. It’s one project that I can imagine would sit in well with my retirement plan.”

She intends to use Shine to find opportunities to give back that utilise her skills and hopes that Living it Up will enable her to become better connected once retired. Buoyed by the interest in her nutritional classes, Tina also plans to offer these on a freelance basis after she retires.

“It’s scary when you retire, after 28 years of working in the same place. I’m hoping Living it Up will give me access to meeting new people. I’m looking at Living it Up as a way of still being involved, but also a way of meeting new people as my life dramatically changes.”

Janette Hughes
SCTT Service Development Manager
Living it up – NHS 24
10 March 2015
CASE STUDY: DONNIE MORRISON
INCREASING DIGITAL INCLUSION AND ENCOURAGING VIDEO CONFERENCING

"LIVING IT UP IS BRINGING PEOPLE IN. IT’S A HOOK TO IMPROVE PEOPLE’S LIVES, THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY. IT’S FUNDAMENTAL. IT ULTIMATELY LOOKS FOR INDIVIDUALS TO JOIN IN COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST USING TECHNOLOGY."

Donnie Morrison, founder of Highlands Connections and Senior Development Manager for Highlands and Islands Enterprise in the Western Isles, has been an advocate of Living It Up from the start, believing that Living It Up is “influencing people to move their thinking forward.”

“I believe in the concept, and the project, and hope that it moves beyond the pilot to mainstream. I see the potential for Living It Up to beleve more, not from day one but the more you push it out into mainstream.”

ENCOURAGING DIGITAL INCLUSION
As a contributor to the Digital Inclusion agenda for the European Commission, Donnie recognises the Western Isles have been innovative in taking Living It Up forward and in particular showing people new ways to use technology in a friendly and meaningful way. He believes “Living It Up has really brought people in, that previously would have been engaged with technology.”

MAKING CSCS, JLBBC AVAILABLE
The most significant change that Donnie has noticed is the use of video conferencing through CSCS, adding, connecting people in the community with specialists.

“Instead of sending a patient from Barra or Uist to Glasgow for a 10 minute pre-op consultation, which is 2-3 hours, and then back at such a great expense, there are systems available that offer so many different things to happen over technology.”

Donnie said he’s heard about the impact Living it Up and JLBBC are having first hand and that people have been excited they can VC either as a group or for one-to-one consultations with specialists that they would otherwise have to wait months for face-to-face consultation.” and highlighted that “for an individual that could be life changing in some instances.”

FINDING CHAMPIONS IN MEDICAL PRACTICES
Going forward, Donnie would like to see Living It Up having champions within each medical practice.

“When it gets to the stage that an individual calls for a consultation with a practitioner, and the practitioner recommends an engagement with Living It Up then we will have made significant progress.”

“Living It Up does really have the ability to make individuals live better, the ability to communicate with friends, people with the same interest or for people engaging with medical consultants.”

Interviewee: Donnie Morrison
Area: Western Isles
Background: Senior Development Manager, HIE
Described US as: Interesting, innovative, pushing boundaries

Programme Benefits:
- Convenient and local access to services.
- Increased digital participation.
- Increased delivery of digitally enabled health and care services.

User Benefits (eCIs):
- CONFIDENCE
- COMMUNITIES
- CONNECTEDNESS

Service Summary:
Connect helps you to learn about different technologies and allows you to keep in touch with family, friends and people who support you.

Flourish provides you with information, advice and access to tools and resources that can support you in keeping well and managing your health.