

Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association

Seniors using ICT for learning and social networking

The Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association, the national peak body for seniors and technology, links computer clubs for seniors so they can use ICT to achieve individual and community goals. Member clubs are able to collaborate and share ICT knowledge and training.

The association encourages and empowers seniors and helps them explore the satisfaction and advantages of using computer technology. With the association's help and support, individual clubs teach seniors to use and enjoy the benefits of computer technology in a supportive environment.

Promoting confidence in online technology

Association membership is open to all computer clubs for seniors, organisations with a membership of seniors, and organisations and corporate bodies that recognise the value of computer technology for seniors. The association, a nonprofit company, is a public benevolent institution endorsed as a deductible gift recipient.

Computer clubs for seniors are a popular and expanding activity overseas and in Australia. There are clubs all over Australia, from Darwin to Perth to Hobart, mostly in and around Sydney. They teach seniors to use and enjoy the benefits of computer technology, with experienced club members tutoring others.

Through the association, individual clubs encourage and facilitate ICT use, catering to members' needs and interests. They demonstrate new hardware and software including word processing, spreadsheets, databases, desktop publishing, graphics and financial packages. At regular meetings members are introduced to useful websites and technologies such as their local council's website, automatic teller machines and EFTPOS, phone banking or the Internet for banking.

The association is member-driven, with a nine-member board representing the participating clubs. There are approximately 20 000 members and they have just opened their 91st club. About 53 000 seniors have learned how to use a computer through the association.

The association also:

- advises and supports existing clubs
- helps establish new clubs
- promotes the clubs to broaden their profile through expos and conferences
- liaises with government and other organisations on behalf of members



- organises seminars and training courses
- tells members about software and hardware discounts.

Trainers are given training to increase their skills and are encouraged to complete an 'international driver's licence' in computing. The association also helps seniors with disabilities to use computers by helping clubs access adaptive technology such as JAWS speech reading software. The association has a partnership with IBM through which IBM web adaptive technology software can be made available, without cost, to any member of an association club. IBM also supports the club's training officer who helps members use IBM software.

Benefits and success factors

The association promotes seniors' confidence in online technologies. By joining the

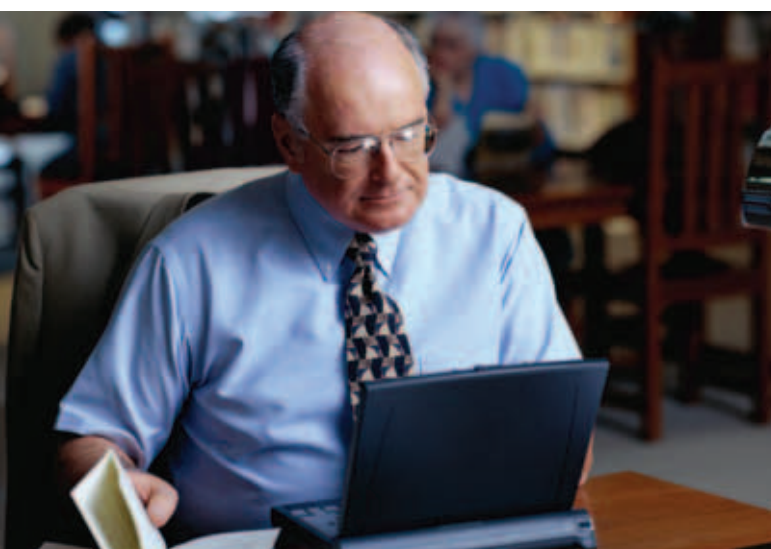
association, clubs are able to share ICT and training knowledge. Another benefit is members' access to discount and free software. For example, Microsoft has acknowledged the association's contribution by choosing it as a founding partner in its Unlimited Potential program. This increases the benefits available to seniors who are members of affiliated clubs.

The services, training and advice the association provides create a trusting environment in which seniors feel comfortable. For many people, particularly seniors, computers and technology are very daunting and sometimes even intimidating. The association provides advice on equipment purchase, suppliers and technical support. Tutors meet monthly to compare scenarios and discuss the various activities they are doing that are of general interest.

Seniors have confidence in the training and support they are given because tutors are fellow club members who are often of a similar age with similar life experiences.

Using information and communications technology enables seniors to participate more fully in society. The president says:

In computer clubs seniors help other seniors to use a computer. This in turn increases self-esteem, bridges generation gaps and skills people for employment, for community related projects and for increased communication between family and friends.



One woman decided at the age of 93 that she would like to write her memoirs and she decided to learn how to use a computer to help her achieve her objective. She is now 100 and has published two volumes of her memoirs!



Many older people return to part-time paid or voluntary work or study after receiving computer and software training from an ASCCA club. The training introduces seniors to the Internet and the opportunities it offers for keeping in touch with family and friends, online shopping, chat rooms, research, bill paying and online share trading.

Clubs offer an environment where seniors can learn from other seniors, can choose what they learn and progress at a pace they feel comfortable with. Another advantage is that classes are small, usually one-to-one or one-to-three.

Barriers

For most seniors the biggest barriers to using ICT are cost, access, confidence or trust, and uncertainty about the online environment. For example, many seniors are initially concerned about the concept of providing personal information online. Fear of running up a large phone or access bill is another barrier. Additional barriers include lack of mobility or lack of transport—for example, for people living in retirement villages. The association addresses these problems through its training courses.

As the clubs are purely voluntary, community-initiated ventures, a major impediment facing them is sustainability. The association has a guaranteed budget of less than \$10 000 per year. Expenditure is nearly \$100 000 per year so it needs to seek grants for funding. The greatest costs for clubs are rent and insurance. New clubs must find their own funding through membership fees, and need to balance fee structures to make membership affordable to seniors on limited fixed incomes.

One strategy to minimise costs is to use reputable organisations such as WorkVentures and Technical Aid for the Disabled.



A woman aged 84 had written to *The Australian* complaining that no-one had offered to teach her how to use a computer. One of our club members saw the letter and passed it on to a club near where the writer lived. She was invited to join the club, and now delights in the work she can prepare using her computer for her local CWA group. She has said, ‘When I visit my friends in hostels and even nursing homes, instead of glumly contemplating my future entry, I look about to see where my computer will fit, and think happily of all the time I’ll have available to work on it.’

Similarly, clubs can minimise establishment and maintenance costs by asking established clubs for help and support. For example, working with a senior citizens centre, the Salvation Army or a community centre can increase financial security.



Some councils are cooperative and supportive in helping with establishment and maintenance costs. Clubs also have access to community or cultural grants to help with the financial costs. Clubs can broaden their profile and attract increased private and public funding by joining the association, and participating in association stands at expos or presenting at conferences.

Key lessons

- People are individuals and have different levels of ICT experience, education, adaptability, hearing and vision. Even a class of seniors will have individuals with many different needs and can present challenges. Association trainers are often seniors and have empathy with the particular learning needs and requirements of their peers.
- Clubs provide a senior-centred service in a supportive environment, are flexible and adaptable, and promote seniors' confidence in online technologies. By collaborating in the association clubs are able to broaden their profile, and share experience, ICT knowledge and training knowledge.

References

ASCCA home page www.seniorcomputing.org

Unlimited Potential www.smithfamily.com.au

COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

More information

In these case studies, communities, nonprofit organisations and groups share their experiences and lessons they have learnt using ICT: enhancing capability and service delivery; supporting and building communities, networks and connections; and overcoming barriers and challenges.

Australia's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy 2004–2006 emphasises the need to ensure that all Australians can participate in the benefits of the information economy.

Key strategies in 2004–06 will be to strengthen collaboration and capabilities in nonprofit organisations, facilitate the creative use of ICT for building stronger communities and social cohesion, and develop networks, capabilities and tools to enable participation by people who are facing economic, geographic or social barriers.

For more information visit the DCITA website www.dcita.gov.au or email community.connectivity@dcita.gov.au.

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