00:01:14 Interviewer

What I'll do is I'll send you a link to the shortcut that I have for the survey, and if you can share it with any of your friends.

00:01:34 Participant

A lot my friends would be teachers and they all like to help students so yes, they like help out <laughs>.

00:01:42 Interviewer

The interviews are taking about the 45 minutes. But I wouldn't let it go over that and then really we need to pick up something up again, then maybe there's an opportunity for that.

00:02:20 Interviewer

I'll just go through what the study is about. If you don't mind, then I'll go through the consent statements, so this will probably take about two minutes, and then you can just tell me whether you agree and hopefully you will, and that'll all be fine, but it's just to have on the university records and so on, so how does that sound?

Participant

Grand.

00:02:42 Interviewer

Alright, so the study aims to explore the experiences of older adults and lifelong learning with specific focus on intergenerational exchanges and digital skills. Little is known about the concept of intergenerational learning in Ireland. Outside of formal learning environments and by taking part in this study, your insights will help contribute to our understanding of the contribution intergenerational learning can make to the lifelong learning and digital skills development of older adults. So, there are six consent statements, so I'll just read those out.

00:03:22 Interviewer

So number one, I confirm that I understand the information about the study that has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily.

Number two, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I'm free to withdraw my participation within two weeks of the interview, without giving any reason and my data will be removed.

Number three, I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications, or presentations by the researcher. But my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect my anonymity when I'm involved in the project, anonymized data will be offered to Lancaster University archives and will be made available for genuine research reuse.

Number four, I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles, or presentations without my consent.

Number five, I understand that interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.

Number six, I understand that the data will be kept according to university guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.

And finally, I agree to take part in the above study. So how does that sound, Maeve?

00:04:43 Participant

That's fine, that's great.

00:04:45 Interviewer

I'm just going to quickly run through the personal and demographic questions that we had in the survey, just to make sure that nothing has changed.

00:05:04 Interviewer

OK, so you've indicated your age range is in 65 to 74 cohort. Your gender is female. You live in Dublin. You live in an urban area (because it's Dublin). You live alone and your highest level of formal education is a is a bachelor's degree, so is that all correct?

Participant

Yes.

00:05:29 Interviewer

OK great. I've had occasions where people had their education in the UK for example, and it might be slightly different, so they weren't quite sure.

00:05:48 Interviewer

The semi structured part of the interview, I have two research questions so one asks about in formal and non-formal learning exchanges and the digital technologies and how that's contributed to lifelong learning. So that's the first theme. So, what I would usually I'd like to start with if that's OK, is to ask what lifelong learning means to you.

00:06:16 Participant

Means lifelong learning, learning forever, basically <laughs>.

For as long as I'm here, I'll be learning.

00:06:25 Interviewer

Yeah, I'd be the same and here I am doing my PhD at 56 <laughs>

00:06:30 Participant

Ah yeah, that's what I feel like too, yeah.

00:06:33 Interviewer

So just on that topic, because I have to read articles and I'm doing a lot of research into the various government strategies at the moment. And beyond that I've been looking at some of the EU stuff and the OECD stuff. And you know, it seems to me that when they're talking about lifelong learning, it's about lifelong learning for the labour market, for the workforce. What are your thoughts on that?

00:07:02 Participant

Well, my idea of lifelong learning, although I would have done it for work as well, but to me it means more than that, something that I'm very interested in, something outside work, that I can pick up and leave down if I kind of get fed up with it.

00:07:18 Interviewer

Yeah, absolutely, I'd be the same and I think it's quite interesting. And if you look at some of the you know the language that they use, like they've moved away from adult education, they've moved away from, you know, they use different terms I think these days...

Participant

Yes.

00:07:38 Interviewer

...and there's a lot in the language that you kind of have to unpack.

That's just one thing that I'm interested in, someone had made that point to me before I brought it up when I was speaking to them a couple of days ago that you know, if you're not in the workforce, then it feels like you know, maybe lifelong learning isn't an opportunity anymore.

00:07:59 Interviewer

I did a study for an earlier module but it was a shorter study last autumn, so I surveyed university students to see who helped their older family members with, you know, digital communications during lockdown. But as part of that, when I was looking at the data from Eurostat, I contacted Eurostat and it turned out that they don't need to collect data from anybody under 16 or over 75. So, it was optional for the CSO to send. So as a result of that study I sent a recommendation to the Director of the CSO. Lo and behold, within months now they're capturing data from the over 75's. So there are things like that that when you go looking for them and you can certainly see that they contributed to some of this ageism that goes on in society that we need to be careful, so yeah, just thought I'd share that.

Participant

A lot of it about, yeah.

00:09:00 Interviewer

So, the next set of questions will just help me understand your experience with digital technologies and devices. Now some of the conversations I've had would range from, you know, smart TV's to amateur radio to all sorts of stuff so it really can be anything. I don't want you to, you know, to feel restricted in any way by what you want to share with me.

So, the first question that I have would be, you know, just to tell me just a little bit about your experience of technology. How long have you been using it, what about your workplace, what devices you use, for what purposes, that kind of thing, Maeve.

00:09:47 Participant

Well, I suppose, and I've been working for an awful long time. I mean, the computers came in. We had to learn how to use them.

You know the first course I went to and they showed me how to take a computer apart and I kind of felt I don't want to know about this. I have no interest in taking off the back of a computer to know what's inside it, so it kind of put me off it for a while. But then I kind of knew I had to get into it. I changed jobs and the next job I got I needed to use computers all the time basically. So I went back and I did an ECDL course and I loved it. I got very much into it so I would use anything to do with computers. I'd use laptops and tablets and things like that.

00:10:47 Participant

Televisions, I don't know anything about <laughs>.

00:10:56 Interviewer

You mentioned ECDL. I've two questions I just made a note of.

I think that's interesting and I'm just trying to think of the timing when ECDL came out, so we're probably talking about the 90s, maybe?

00:11:22 Participant

Earlier, I'd say it's probably around the 90s. And it was probably before that when I was brought in to put on this course to learn how to dismantle the computer <laughs?.

00:11:36 Interviewer

Tell me a little bit more about that Maeve, because how did that happen? How did that come about?

00:11:42 Participant

Well, the guy that was given the course was just a real techie guy and he thought we'd all be really interested in the mechanics of what was in front of us. And all we wanted to know was how to input stuff, how to pull up stuff that we needed, but no, we had to. I mean, we went to about three classes and every one of us said no, this is not what we want. This is no good to us. So, we’re downstairs, and we're doing our work, we're not going to take a computer apart <laughs>.

But he loved it and he wanted us to know.

00:12:16 Interviewer

Yeah, and I think it, it kind of goes to show because you know the government has this Digital Skills for Citizen Scheme, so it's 10 hours free training, pretty much for anybody.

Age Action do it through their ‘Getting Started’ (obviously not at the moment), and there are other ones like that, but it seems to be very much, you know to me, obviously you have to go to a location.

My local ETB centre offers classes to learn how to use an iPad and that kind of thing and it didn't seem to me that there was much co-participation, it was kind of come along, and we'll teach you what we want to teach you.

00:13:54 Interviewer

And so from a motivation perspective, our motivations shift for various reasons, but what's your motivation today would you say for using technology and the devices that you use?

00:14:09 Participant

I'm still working. I’m actually retiring next week, so that will be the end of worrying about that. But yeah, I have to use it in work and, but I'm also involved with the Tidy Towns in Skerries and I do all of their planning and everything else about it. So I spend a lot of time on the computer so that would be my motivation to use it. Also, I love going away on holidays and I research in depth places that I might like to go.

00:15:10 Interviewer

In terms of the Tidy Towns group, within your group how digitally connected are they generally, you know, your committee or volunteers?

00:15:28 Participant

The ones I have at the moment are great. I mean, we had a previous committee and the only way you could ever talk to anybody was by phone and that was landlines you know, so now it's great. They all get their emails. They all are on WhatsApp and it makes life so much simpler <laughs>.

00:15:48 Interviewer

My guys, they don't all have smartphones so WhatsApp is out of the question so literally it's the same text message if I'm sending it, I have to send the same traditional text message. Now my mobile phone plan is a good one, so I have all this included.

00:16:04 Participant

That's what I'm going to say. It's the cost of all these things. You know, we have one woman who refuses to get into it, and I have to ring her on the landline.

00:16:14 Interviewer

And there are plenty of people. I mean if I look at the Eurostat data and so like you know in 2019 that was like 33% of over 65s had never accessed the Internet. That's coming down now. Obviously with COVID last year that has improved further.

00:16:33 Participant

Oh yeah.

00:16:33 Interviewer

But it's still a long way to go, so if somebody has a smartphone and uses WhatsApp, technically they are accessing the Internet.

But you know, they wouldn't see themselves necessarily as an Internet user.

00:16:45 Participant

No, no.

00:16:55 Interviewer

You mentioned the ECDL so I want to talk a little bit about generally about attending classes for lifelong learning. Whether it's you know anything to do with technology or otherwise, and you know, obviously physically going to classes because that's something that you indicated was important as opposed to you know, logging onto something, so just tell me a little bit about your experience of lifelong skills development I suppose, in that regard Maeve, if you don't mind. So, attending classes versus going online?

00:17:37 Participant

I like attending classes that I can participate as much or as little as I want to. I don't like these classes that everybody has to be diving in and do all kinds of things. I actually want to go to learn most things I will pick up things. I'll go to history classes and I'll go to psychology classes and I'm there to learn about it and to go home and do whatever I have to do. A lot of people go to make friends and I don't. That sounds awful <laughs>. I don't go there to make friends, but I do go because I like getting out of the house because I’m on my own.

So, during lockdown I'm sure I did classes every night of the week because I was here on my own and I was on Zoom every night, which is great because you can just turn your camera off if you're fed up with it and without actually disconnecting, which you can't do in person.

So, there's good things on both sides. But, I think I like, as I say, I like to get out of the house.

00:19:35 Interviewer

So what I wanted to ask a little bit about is I. I think maybe the question wasn't entirely clear (on the survey). And the way I see it is that look, we all need some kind of tech support, so it sounds like for you and me it's the signal goes on the TV OK, which is the on off button and I would say OK, who do I ask?

00:19:59 Participant

Yep, Yep.

00:20:05 Interviewer

So, I'm thinking of that in the broad sense. If something is not working, if the screen froze, press the power button on and off. You know different and things like that.

00:20:20 Participant

The IT people tell you that anyway.

00:20:22 Interviewer

Oh well, they will. I suppose I wanted to explore that a little bit because you know. I wouldn't be a techie person at all Maeve. And so, I just kind of wanted your thoughts on that a little bit, because it sounds like we're in a similar situation.

00:20:53 Participant

Yeah, I actually like figuring out things. I would be quite interested in how to repair things and from anything from washing machines and things like that. I would actually take them apart and put them back together again. You know I do things like that.

And the computer I remember when we started out with computers every you can't do that, just everything in all missing and it'll explode.

But now I actually share my office with the IT guys in our firm and half the time they don't know what they’re at anyway <laughs>.

So, I kind of got much more confident and I will root around and I usually get things back or things that, at home anyway.

But when I’m in work, I’m inclined to call them because they’re beside me, you know, and it's much quicker like they'll come and run it for me. But when I’m at home I'll keep going.

And I'll keep at it until hopefully I find things. If I don't, I'd have to go into work and ask them because none of my kids are and that much involved with the computer that they, they might say, “you know more than we woul”d, or you know, and they're not that interested in it so I don't really have anyone I would call on at home, but I’d have to go to a shop basically.

00:22:18 Interviewer

Yeah, I'd be much the same and it was interesting because with my last study and I had like 442 or something, students mostly, and they were mostly 18 to 24 years and over half of them helped an older family member with their technologies.

But I think that was down to COVID, people had to communicate. If you weren't using Zoom you couldn't, you know, stay in touch.

00:22:45 Participant

Yeah, and I'd say what they have is probably things like selling their phone and maybe their TV because I found an awful lot of the young, younger staff that I'd be dealing with are not very good with technology. They are very good on their phones and they're very good at sending and getting on Twitter and all these kind of... but they're not very good if you said to them “I need to have an excel sheet of such and such thing”, they'd look at you and be astonished that you'd even think that they'd be able to do it.

00:23:21 Interviewer

That's interesting.

00:23:21 Participant

They are very limited and a lot of them wouldn't manage your TV, they wouldn't manage a setup of a TV. They manage to connect you to the Internet and they have managed to stream things onto it once you have it set up for them.

You know so that’s what I found anyway.

00:23:39 Interviewer

You're quite right and is really there was a paper written in in 2001, and it distinguished between the digital natives and digital immigrants.

And it basically said because young people grew up with technology they know all about it and that has been debunked many, many times over. So exactly what you're saying and what I found as well with my study, so of the you know the 220 who did help them out and what they learned was patience. You know, that was a big thing that came through.

00:24:11 Participant

I know. None of them have patience, because even with the simplest things, sometimes something is wrong and I might say “what did I do wrong there” and for God's sake, and they take it from you. I'm doing something and I said “stop taking things from me. Show me what to do, sure I have to keep calling you, you know, but I need to learn.”

00:25:00 Participant

But they're not afraid of technology, you see?

 Whereas we were taught to be afraid of it, yeah?

Yeah, I mean dreadful damage.

00:26:22 Interviewer

When I talk about quality of life, I suppose it helps to kind of explain it. So, I think of it in terms of, you know, health, well-being, happiness.

00:26:55 Interviewer

So, do you think your experience of using technology has had overall, a more positive or a negative impact on your quality of life and how does that look to you?

00:27:09 Participant

Oh definitely positive. I think it makes your life an awful lot easier and even if you leave work out of it and Tidy Towns out of it.

If you look at the holidays that I can book online and that I can actually know it's somewhere I want to go. And like years ago, well you would have gone into an agency and you didn‘t know whether they knew what they were talking about or not, and you could end up anywhere. Which you can actually check everything up yourself and then go in if you want to, you know, but I mean you can do it. It just takes a long time. That's the only thing, and I'm a bit inclined to be lazy and things like that, you know. Yeah, it's a bit like not bothering with the television, and that's just that I'm lazy and won't bother reading because they don't even give you a book, just that I could sit and look at on occasion. I have to come to the computer and read about it and I just get lazy and say if I can get someone to do it for me, I'll get them because I don't really care, you know. And that's laziness, more than not being able to do it, but certainly as they say, for looking things up even for Interests I have and we’re all the same though now, aren’t we? Like if someone says “oh what was that called” and you take out the phone, you Google it. It makes us lazy. That way you know you don't use your brain enough. You know you're inclined to just to Google it every time we want an answer to something. But you know, I think it's been very positive, all in all even if I am lazy <laughs>.

00:28:36 Interviewer

Yeah, I think I will look at a little bit differently, so if it comes to something like I'm looking out at my garden and the fence that needs to be painted, then thinking my time is worth more so I'd rather have somebody come and paint it, or doing something like that. So, I wouldn't say it's lazy. I just think it's how you value you know your time, it's a way of looking at that. But yeah, I think we're saying the same thing there.

00:29:04 Interviewer

So, in terms of, you know, let's say the holidays or whatever. Have you had any negative experiences from you know, doing your own bookings or anything like that?

00:29:16 Participant

<Laughs> Oh yeah, I've really picked bad spots <laughs>.

Ending up out in the projects in New York with my family. When we were gone and I think they nearly all left me.

But yeah, I have ended up in dreadful places at times, but I look on travel as an adventure so it doesn't matter if you end up in terrible places. It's an adventure and it's an experience.

Yeah, but not everybody looks at it like that.

Most people want four star hotels and I don't go to them.

00:30:13 Interviewer

What about these, you know PPS number scams? Have you had any negative experiences with scammers or fraudsters or anything like that Maeve?

00:30:23 Participant

Well, like that I would know now they'll always ring with the number a bit like your own really, so I just don't answer them. But I have answered on occasion, but I just, now I just hang up. I wouldn't, I'd be cautious enough for things like that with emails coming through. Now I have checked things out, especially now during COVID when they had the An Post one coming through and I was waiting for a lot of parcels. So, I did ring An Post to see but I would never answer them. I'd always check things out, you know. Buying things and things like that.

00:31:36 Interviewer

OK, so I think we've covered off this. I have a question just talking about pre COVID-19 really because it is quite surprising how many people didn't use technology to keep in touch with family and friends, so could I just check that with you. I think you might have covered it but just in case.

00:32:01 Participant

Well, I never heard of Zoom before. I don't think many people had heard of Zoom. One of the young girls at work came out and said we have a great way of keeping in touch (I work in disability services and we worked all through COVID but we had to do an awful lot of it online) with the service users and she said “I have a great way of getting in touch with them” and I said never heard of that and it was kind of even the IT guys said “No, we haven’t used that” so and that was certainly something that everybody just took to immediately and even our service users took to it.

And we were able to get them little tablets, so we could have classes with them and do things with them, you know, so they all learned how to use tablets during COVID, so for them certainly going forward. It was very good.

00:32:58 Interviewer

And that will make a difference I would imagine for service users in in the future?

00:33:01 Participant

Oh yeah, for families, in that you know, being in different parts of the country, it isn't just somebody on the phone to chat to, you know?

00:33:09 Interviewer

Yeah, I think we saw that with the tablets for people in hospitals and the nursing homes and, I think that's a change for the good, and there won't be any going back.

00:33:22 Participant

So, they did a scheme in Skerries and I might get Mary with the acorn tablets... (*to talk to you???*)

They got some of those sponsored and they gave them to the local nursing homes and they actually gave a couple to the place I work as well for them to use with families, and they sent someone in to teach them how to do it. So it was great.

00:33:48 Interviewer

A friend of a friend, I don't know anyway but she bought shares in zoom before the lockdown <laughs>.

00:34:01 Participant

Wasn’t she very smart? <laughs>

00:34:02 Interviewer

I didn’t, wouldn't even have thought about it. But yeah, there you go. So, Zoom and Perspex I believe <laughs>.

00:34:12 Interviewer

So, talk to me just a little bit <MARGARET>, we've touched on it just in relation to the community activities and the volunteering. And I want you just to think back because you know you're obviously very active with your groups but thinking back to when that lockdown happened first, so you're already online, you could keep in touch, but you know the (Tidy Towns) workgroups couldn't go out. And thinking more of those people that just aren't online and maybe were extremely isolated because of their age and the over 70 cocooning at home and that kind of thing. So how was that for you and for Skerries, your group?

00:35:00 Participant

I think the fact that we, the core group, were able to keep in touch with each other and we just had Zoom meetings and things like that. We didn't start the Zoom meetings immediately, but we did when we realised it was going to go on and I'd say, we had about 300 volunteers that we kept in touch with them with whatever way. We didn't use Zoom at all. We used email or we used WhatsApp and then there was a few that you used a text for, an odd one that you used a phone call for, but we did it and we kept in touch and because you were able to do your 2km walks, a lot of them would do litter pickups on their 2km walk. Now some of them wouldn't go out and all or some of them wouldn't pick any litter in case it had germs on it or something like that. But a lot of them just kept it up and it gave them a focus for going out and it was a great way of keeping in touch and then they had of course one of these services in the town that again one of our volunteers from Tidy Towns was one of the main contacts on this and it was a phone number for people to ring whatever they wanted anyone, it didn't matter what age you are, but if you needed a prescription or you needed shopping or you needed anything, then you rang Mary, and Mary had a group of volunteers who had come, said, yeah, we'll do it, we'll do it and

they just matched people up, you know? So yeah, people delivering the newspaper to somebody or you know, bringing food around and there's one of the local catering companies for the first few weeks delivered meals free to people that were nominated to get it, you know, so it was a very good community effort, yeah, you know.

And I think it happened in a lot of towns in a lot of places.

00:36:49 Interviewer

Absolutely. I mean here like I would say that our Tidy Towns volunteers. I mean the average age is probably about 70, so they were all cocooning at home. But for those who could, it was the local Lions Club who helped out with Meals on Wheels and delivering, because the Geriatric Society used to have this luncheon club on Tuesdays and and Fridays. Of course that all stopped, so they had to send out all the meals and then it just got bigger and the GAA were collecting prescriptions from, the chemist and stuff like that. It was nice to see that and I do hope that spirit continues. I don't think we'll go back to the old ways, but it's just sad that it took something like a pandemic.

00:37:38 Participant

I do. I think people will go right back once we open up.

And I think people had time because they weren't travelling to work and I think that's why they were all getting involved.

If it's like the first lockdown, I mean everybody adhered to all the rules. Now everybody just wants to be out. People are fed up with it but hopefully though they'll remember some of the lessons we learned.

00:38:09 Interviewer

OK, that's pretty much everything I wanted to cover off Maeve, but is there anything that you might have been thinking about that might be worth sharing or anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to chat about.

00:38:24 Participant

No, I think I've covered a good bit even filling in there as we were going along.

00:38:29 Interviewer

Yeah, that's why I like semi structured because you can just jump around and I have my sheets and it works. We're yeah, just about 40 minutes so I think that's great. I will stop the recording if that's OK with you?

Participant

Yeah, I think we're fine.

Interviewer

So what I'll do so is I'll send you an email if you want to share it with any of your friends.

00:39:01 Participant

Yes, and I will. I'll send it out to a few. I’m sure some of them would do it you. And as long as you don't mind having a lot of people from around the same area that kind of thing, it's fine.

00:39:12 Interviewer

Honestly, it doesn't matter. I'm oversubscribed in Cork because obviously people know me, but I'm trying to get to every county because I want it to be nationwide and the location really doesn't matter, but it's just the urban rural divide I want to capture.

The more data that I have the better. I think about 50 responses so far but I'd like 500.

We'll have to wait and see how that goes. And then, as I said, I'll transcribe it and I'll send that to you just to make sure everything is represented and/or if there was something, maybe that you might like to like to change or whatever. So, I'll get that done. It's probably going to be Sunday at this stage.

00:39:54 Interviewer

Thank you so much. And best of luck with the retirement and all your projects.

00:39:57 Participant

And the best of luck with this.

00:40:03 Interviewer

I'm sure that you have lots lined up. Alright thanks. Take care. Bye bye Maeve.

00:40:06 Participant

OK, take care bye.