00:00:41 Interviewer

I’ll just go through quickly what this study is about <JOHANNA>. Then I'll go through the seven consent statements so you can just listen to those.

They're pretty much the same as were in the survey, but because this is an interview, I have to go through the process again from ethics perspective.

00:01:23 Interviewer

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 of school and college. 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.

00:01:57 Interviewer

Now with regard to the consent statements, I'll go through each of these and I'll number them.

00:02:03 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 date 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 am involved in this project. Anonymized data will be offered to Lancaster University Archives and will be made available to genuine research for reuse.

Number four, I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles, or presentations without my consent #5, 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 data will be kept according to university guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study and

Number seven, I agree to take part in the study. So how does that all sound <JOHANNA>?

00:03:26 Participant

That sounds fine with me.

00:03:28 Interviewer

OK, great. So, the other formal thing then that I want to do is to just go through the demographic, general questions in the survey. I'll remind you of what you said and if anything has changed, or you know how easy it is to slip the finger or whatever so I'll just go through those.

00:03:59 Interviewer

Your gender is female.

00:04:02 Interviewer

You live in County Kerry.

You live in a rural area.

You live alone.

And your highest level of formal education is a higher certificate.

Does that sound right?

00:04:27 Participant

Yes.

00:04:27 Interviewer

OK, can I just ask what that was? This is from the CSO so I never really understood what they meant by a higher certificate and I haven't met anyone yet who has one. So, what did you do?

00:04:41 Participant

Oh well, and this is one of my gripes that CSO, for example, nowadays have a value on qualifications. There's so many numbers allocated from as I understand it, I don't know it in detail, but if you do your Inter cert., you get so many points.

You get so many for Leaving search and then you go up in levels of education like level 5, level 6, level 7, etc.

So because of my age I'm before all of that. I attended Kevin St College of Technology, which is now a university level, but it wasn’t then, it was a college of technology and so the certificates I would have got there would have been City and Guilds. Now I think they've been appointed points since where they were a third level qualification past the Leaving cert, but not to a degree level.

00:05:41 Participant

I have done over the years multitudinous courses with everybody. They cannot be quantified. But higher certificate. I went through sales and went through marketing. I've had my own business. I've had all of those types of training. I was a member of the Marketing Institute, a member of many UK institutes that came with it, but none that you can add.

So the highest level I feel that I would have had is, I am a yachtmaster offshore. I studied celestial navigation and I qualified with the highest level in that. It's not quantifiable, so that is why I chose higher certificate.

00:06:18 Interviewer

Wow, that's so interesting. And to me Mary, you're the classic, my interpretation, of who a lifelong learner, is.

00:06:26 Participant

Yes, and I and if I am to go in through somewhere here, like I have done through the North and East Kerry Development, I‘m basically coming in as uneducated <laughs>

Yeah, and there's a big problem with that. It doesn't bother me personally, but I don't think it's fair on a lot of people if they need it. I’m one of those people I don't need that type of recognition. But there is a huge gap there that something should be done about it at a later stage.

00:06:56 Interviewer

Absolutely, and I didn't know any of this. I try to keep in touch with the education sector in in Ireland even though I'm doing my degree at Lancaster and I know mine is a is a level 10 (In Ireland), but I never knew what these levels were. So when people would say level 7 or level 8 I didn’t know what these were and I teach project management at masters level so I know now that they're a level 9.

00:07:25 Interviewer

Back in my day I got my degree in UL before it was UL, the last year of NIHE, again like Kevin St., it became a university afterwards and so on, but that really is quite interesting because I think, and of course, now like there's a full minister, Simon Harris, as you know, for further and higher education. I haven't looked at those education policies yet but it seems to me like they're saying the right things, but in practice it doesn't sound like that at all from what you're saying, <JOHANNA>.

00:08:04 Participant

There are a certain amount of boxes. They are very constricted in very few boxes that you can fit. To me, I think that there are many more people outside of those boxes and they just do not slot in and if you don't slot in, it's not valued.

00:08:29 Interviewer

So let me ask you, because I think we're delving into this a little bit, and so when I think of lifelong learning, and when I was looking at the policy research from the Irish Government it seemed to be that lifelong learning opportunities are geared towards the labour market to getting people into different work areas and so on. And yet, the literature is quite consistent in this, that lifelong learning is formal learning on the one hand, so up to you know, Leaving cert or college. Then you have non-formal learning offered by a provider, any provider who gets a group of people together. So it could be, you know, it could be a community group. It could be through an ETB course. It could be any one of those things. Then you have informal learning which is like just now what you're sharing with me, this is informal learning for me.

00:09:30 Interviewer

When I explain this to people they don't tend to think about it in those ways because we're conditioned to look towards those boxes that you are rightly speaking about. So, what are your thoughts then on lifelong learning generally, <JOHANNA>, what does it mean to you?

00:09:53 Participant

I'm one of those people. I always want to learn. I always have wanted to learn. I'm curious and I am not always interested in the reciprocal end, which is the achievement award or what it gets me. I want to learn because I want to know and so I have huge variety of interests. Now this week alone, for example, I've joined a dance class which I've never done, an online dance class. I'm part of a writers group and I'm looking at anything else. I'm with Age Action. I took a mobile phone course even though I feel I know it, but I don't know the correct way, for example, and I would like to know that, to just even know if I'm doing something correctly.

It's for those reasons now. Only because I'm retired now have I time to go into those different directions and for example, I did do a North East County Development (course). It was called Equality for Women Measure and I got onto that by accident because Dee Keogh who ran it advertised it through Radio Kerry. I heard about it and I got on it. But that has been the exception because generally what happens is you have to be unemployed or receiving a welfare payment of some sort. You have to be under-privileged in some way. You have to be extremely young or extremely old, and if you work and didn't tick any of those boxes, you couldn't go forward with any type of learning.

00:11:33 Participant

Now when I met Dee Keogh and I did that course, I would have said I did not have a creative bone in my body, not one, and that was ten years ago. And I now realise I'm one of the most creative people I know, myself. I have creativity coming everywhere through the learning.

And so it has taken me through art, through photography and through creative writings. I'm founder member of the local writers group. Keeping that going is a battle, but we do have a group at the moment with 23 people in it. More than 50% of them are men, and the vast majority are over 65, so it is there but not one of those people can get in by ticking a box, you know. The formality of it is terrible.

There's so much there and in Kerry, but there are so many limitations. I think COVID has been one of the best things by opening up the virtual area, however, there's a huge amount of people who are not computer literate and who rely on a son or a nephew or somebody to connect them. And the classes have been, let’s say it’s a two-hour group session, more than 30 minutes of that would be people logging on so that time is gone.

00:12:56 Participant

Now I tend to run away with talk, I'm not structured in my thinking, I just go down rabbit holes. So if I'm going the wrong direction, call me back.

00:13:03 Interviewer

No problem <JOHANNA>, this is semi-structured, so the rabbit holes are what I want. You're ringing bells with me because I was speaking with a lady last week who was taking dance classes on Zoom and in a creative writers group. And she was based in Kenmare, I believe.

I think the point that you're making (about COVID), is very, very valid because, people took to Zoom a lot and I did a study with them. It was for a module I had last year and I did a survey of university students to see who helped their older family members during the lockdown with digital communications. I had about 440 responses and over half of those actually did help older family members out and that was such a good thing. What's happened since then, I don't know, but I think time will tell. But what do you think then since COVID?

Let's say for example, one of your groups, so the creative writing group, I mean, that must have been quite a different experience because you write on your own, and presumably you get together then and you would talk about it. So, what was that like during the lockdown period when you couldn't get together?

00:14:24 Participant

This, for me viewing it, is an interesting one because I belong to about three different writers groups and the first one which is the local one here (I live in place near Castleisland... the Sliabh Luachra area?) <neither Sandra nor the software picked up the place names correctly I don’t think>.

00:14:38 Participant

And that particular group do not want direction, they particularly want acknowledgements, someone to listen. They want to produce something, somebody to maybe prompt them or give them that bit of a nudge to start. And then they like to come together in a social atmosphere and it's entertainment where you read what you've written and you have, say 10 in a group. You have 10 different aspects on one word that come out.

00:15:07 Participant

I'm in another group where it's all about wanting to learn. It's about the craft of writing, how to improve it, not just the grammar, but maybe how to structure a book, how to get characters alive, things like that. That’s a different way of doing it.

00:15:21 Participant

Then the third way is an in-between of the two and people want to be published, that's very important to them. They want to be on microphones and reading their work and doing it and... what was the question?

00:15:38 Interviewer

That’s okay, this is great, and I will send you the transcript anyway, so that we have it all. But I just want to understand what it was like doing that online if you were able to, with any of the groups versus doing it in person.

00:15:47 Participant

So the problem again with this particular Castleisland group who liked to meet and who like to get together, there is nobody from the core group continued with that online setting. Because one, they were older, and two, the purpose of it was the gathering, the physically being in the space. The storytelling aspect of it, the camraderie of clap on the back kind of thing so that fell down. The people who went to Zoom on, that was about five people and they weren't. They wouldn't have been the core feeling, they wouldn't have been the ones that had that real feeling. They would have fitted into any of the other groups, so it's been marking time for most of the members. They have not been doing it, and so they're now a year and a half without that interaction. And that's very sad because you wonder what we do, waiting for September now to see if we can get back into a group situation and how many of them will actually just drop it because but they loved it so.

00:16:57 Participant

So that's what's happened. Now the people who did continue on with doing it online, the whole atmosphere is different, and it's more like a schoolroom. It's more like a class. It's about not wanting to lose the thread, which is why we've continued with it, I think.

Most people would say we've continued with it. People are more likely not to attend every session, or they've not done their homework for want of a better word. You know, if there's been something they haven't had the enthusiasm to do that in a Zoom setting, so it's been different, but it has been great. For me it has been better because I'm one of those people who's a blow-in to this area and one of the reasons that I was delighted to meet Dee Keogh in the beginning was, I don't go to church. I don't go to mass. I don't have children at school and I don't belong to say, I don't know, some other thing downtown.

So, the information in the community seems to go at the church gates and at the school gates and in the community halls, and if you're not in those areas, you don't get local information about what's going on or you don't get involved in it, and that's one of the reasons that the community groups, I think, are very good.

00:18:20 Interviewer

Yeah, I think so too and I'm digressing a little bit here, but I'm really quite fascinated just to hear your perspective.

What do you think would take then to have that group be successful online in the way that that they are in person? Or is that even possible do you think? Is it down to the right leadership, the right knowledge of the group leader. What are your thoughts on that?

00:18:48 Participant

I think there's absolutely the fact that there was no training whatsoever.

Preempt with a Teams meeting or a Zoom meeting, either, nobody knows how to raise their hand. They talk over each other. It then ends up in a teacher and student environment rather than if, for example, you can think about a Rambling House which is particularly Kerry. You can still have a Bean an Tí run a Rambling House with one voice and everybody else in the in the room so it doesn't feel teacher-ish.

00:19:25 Participant

So I think it's about the structure. There's a sense in a lot of these community groups is that they are a group of people and there's a bonding. It's not necessarily an academic exercise, and that’s what I think is missing in the Zoom meetings.

00:19:41 Interviewer

And are there any die-hards amongst them who will only get involved in-person? Who just won't do anything with the technology, do you think?

00:19:53 Participant

Yes, there are a few who are “it’s just not for me, I won’t try” and they’ll wait until it’s over.

00:20:11 Interviewer

But do you ever get any indication of why that's the case and I'll just give you one example. There's one lady I was speaking to. She's 69, only 69, and she said “No, Sandra, it's not for me at this stage in my life.”

<Note: when I checked back my records this lady was 79, not 69>.

00:20:52 Participant

Do you mean that she wasn't interested in learning anything new in terms of the technology to attend the course rather than she didn't mean that she didn't want a new course?

00:21:03 Interviewer

No, she didn't want the technology and she gave me a few examples.

When she goes into her bank branch, she's lucky enough to be in the city and she still has a counter with a person behind the counter, but they would direct her to the machine the whole time, and she says “no, I want to speak to a human” and will insist on going to the counter.

She's not interested. She has a mobile phone and she can text and that's everything that she feels that that she needs to do now. She’s just not interested and feels that that's her right, and that she shouldn't be forced into going online.

00:21:48 Participant

I understand her.

I do understand her. It is about the communication between people. It's about being side-lined and being left on your own. But it is being shut into a room and the door being closed.

00:22:03 Participant

And for me, the feeling with most of them is it is this logic of those steps. Now I've noticed with younger people, 40-ish (I would say we might be in the limit), when we would have any sort of discussion and a problem, if you were to ask that person to tell you why they arrived at this conclusion, they will draw these almost yes/no steps, you know like programming logic, so go to step A and if that doesn’t work go to step B. Their thinking is like that. Prior to that age group it was about service and it was about people and it was about help and I think the first time it ever struck me, banks were the worst because they just put brick walls in front of everybody, means that we weren’t coming in (to the bank?). And so one day there was some problem made with my account. I spent hours as you can imagine.

I don't have to explain how I got there and all the rest of it. Eventually, this person said, she didn't say it was a typing mistake, but it was, but she just said “I fixed it now, OK, that's it.” And so the feeling that you're left with is: I hit the amend button. I hit edit. Now what about my day, the two days and the inconvenience of everything that happened in all of that. And that is what those people are feeling. And all of those people of that age group that you're talking about, because I know few. So, all of that age group, that I see what's happening, they are the kind of people who are very helpful to others and will go to give that service and they feel that being part of the bank is part of the service, right? “It’s not up to me to do your job” and that’s what’s being done, but it's the shutting out. I think it's the closing and then the non-choice that you have. There's no room for initiative and so you get a yes/no answer, there's no maybe, there's no grey area, and quite often there are grey areas.

With young people, that's way they've they fit in with your education, with your level. If you don't get level 5, you go back and you do level 4. You learn the steps in how to get from level 4 to level 5. It is not always education. It is achieving a qualification, but it doesn't mean that people are educated and so they're in that system and they accept it.

00:24:33 Participant

And older people are not. That I would think is the main reason people won't accept it, you know, and they just don't want to be another box, it’s cold.

00:24:44 Participant

I mean, I'd love to see you. I'm sure there's a glow about you, but your hair, you’re flat because you're outlined around you, obviously it’s a virtual image behind you and there's not a hair going anywhere

<laughs and Sandra sets about removing the Lancaster University background, noting for future reference!>

00:24:56 Participant

So you wouldn't have that if we were actually across a table from each other, you know the more of a 3D kind of connection to it.

00:25:05 Interviewer

Yeah, that's quite true so I'm going to turn it off and I'm in my kitchen.

I have to turn off the light. I had the light on so this is me, so the hair is a mess <laughs>.

00:25:20 Participant

I had to mention that that is the way people present.

00:25:32 Interviewer

I do think as well that younger people have lost, or maybe they never had, a capacity for problem solving and working their way through that. And I'm just thinking back to comments from one or two of the students who (and these would have been 18 to 25 year olds) who would have helped the granny of the granddad with the communications and you know one of them. So I asked them how they felt and this student said he felt frustrated because Granny or Granddad didn't want to learn so that they could do it themselves the next time. Fix the problem was what they wanted, and I thought it was quite interesting because this was a very observant young person who was trying to solve for the root cause and help them help themselves in the future. And you know Granny or Grandad wasn't having any of it, but by and large that was the exception.

00:27:05 Interviewer

<JOHANNA>, I want to ask you because you said you were somewhat dissatisfied with an online course that you took and you said that it was “course driven, directed, no room for whys and wherefores” and I don't think we've talked about that yet.

00:27:24 Participant

OK, so I said there's “no room for whys and wherefores.”

00:27:28 Participant

OK. I do respond honestly. I don't spend time thinking about it. I presume the latest course I did so this time last year I was looking for a course and I wanted to go back into technology and I did a Microsoft Access course, a database course, simply because I always loved databases and it was always something I wanted to do and I just thought I would do it.

00:27:57 Participant

So because of my age I got accepted, right? Because I'm 67 and so I am now getting a state pension, and because I'm getting a payment from the state suddenly now I can do a course. So this was the first part that I thought this is ridiculous because all of the questions were “What are the chances of any increasing your employability” and at 67 where's it going? You know? I mean, they're the ones who designed the form. So it started from there and again so it was run by whatever the Irish, they’re called these days, used to be AnCo or something, so whatever they are now (ETB?)

00:28:38 Participant

So when I went to log in and I did login, it was through eCollege and every single step was exactly how we're describing the bank.

00:28:53 Participant

I finished the course because I wanted to but I didn't apply for the examination because again, I'm not interested. It was a Microsoft official title. But I also did not take the exam to protest because I'm sure there's a measurement as to how many people take these classes.

00:29:11 Participant

But from the beginning I ask questions. I input questions like “how many people take this course? How many people are successful? How many people go all the way through?”

I got no response to any of this. About every two weeks I'll get an automatic email from the tutor telling me “you're doing great work”, “stay in touch there” or “you haven't been logged on this week” and “you can call me anytime.”

I tried to call him. I tried to talk to him. I tried, I just got a complete blocking email all the way through.

00:29:38 Participant

So effectively I was left on my own with the computer to learn this course that I could have done by signing up to Microsoft or anywhere else. And if you read their descriptions of what they're offering, they did not match up in any way. Now within that course as well, though I can't remember what the programming software was, but you had to log on and take exercises on it. So they had modules, so Microsoft Access, they had 2016 and a 2019 module, we were doing 2016. They ran into a problem with the software. We did the first two exercises in 2016. They then loaded up 2019 without telling us. So, I go in one day and instead of finding out how many engineering things I was supposed to count and stocktake I was suddenly in a gymnasium with participants and membership records. So it took me a week to try and find out what was going to happen and they said the software wasn't working and to continue on this.

Three weeks later, they pulled it because they got the first lot done and we're back to working with things. No explanations. No lead through. No follow through. Now for me, that’s what you put a machine in front of you for, put a robot in there, you know. At some stage everybody needs some kind of handholding, hence the reason I was interested in “What was the dropout rate? How many people qualified? How many people got through?”

00:31:18 Participant

You could get your exam by continually taking the question until what do they say? A monkey could write the works of Shakespeare if given enough days and enough typewriters, you know, so you just kept pinging until you got the answer. They will get there and back to (my point that) it's not education.

00:31:39 Interviewer

I wonder as well. I'm thinking of the EU Digital Skills for Citizens scheme that's all grant funded and there are some NGOs in in this country that maybe do that well, and they offer one-to-one training on a digital device or something like that.

00:32:05 Interviewer

And then there are others. They want to get the bodies, the bums in the seats and they want to get you there because that's how they claim their grant money.

00:32:12 Interviewer

I just think there's a lot of disparity and I think it's them ticking the boxes to get funding and keep themselves in jobs, you know.

00:32:25 Participant

In situations like that I am the type of person I know I learn by... if you talk to me I will never forget it, right? If I read it I might have to read it 10 times to actually get it in.

And so I was interested in this particular course because they had a physical tutor talking to you through the examples. It wasn't just the lines of text. He said what we're going to do is we want to only hit this button and you do this. Do that. So that helped quite a bit, but at some stage everybody has an emotional response to it where it just becomes too much for you or you feel not capable of it. And going back, can you prove that “oh, I did get that” but it can also be soul-destroying as I go through pages I looked at “did I do this?” I only knew I’d done it because it was there because we don't retain everything we learn.

00:33:24 Participant

Having said that, I've forgotten I did another one, but it was complete opposite.

I’ve started it. I haven't gotten further with it. It was through the library. I found that you can do those same courses through the library for free.

00:33:40 Interviewer

I that’s called “Universal Class” (from the library).

00:33:38 Participant

You know that wasn't there a few years ago and I did start one on watercolours, and there was a little old granny in there, and she was so disorganised, pulling out canvases and showing how to do things. And for me that was the connection, because she was just so real and disorganised, and I just haven't had the time to go back to it, but I intend on continuing with it.

00:34:04 Interviewer

I think that's one thing that probably COVID, and the pandemic has shown that is is possible to have good online teaching. I've been teaching online since about 10 years now and it's all about the design and as you said, the learning styles that we prefer - the visual, the aural, the read/write, the kinesthetic. Each of those are appealing to the senses differently in different learners and how we like to learn. So I think that's really important and I think that has to change going forward because it wasn't there in the past, you were given slide sets, or an online course as you said, readings or text or watch this video and answer these questions. Whereas there's so much more to it and I think learning has to be more interactive for many you know.

00:34:47 Participant

Just one of the things that you said there for me. It goes back to where we were talking about the younger people and it’s this.

There is no danger. And that is a problem.

If you were in a course, in a room with ten other people like years ago, a classroom situation, and you do something wrong, or whatever, you make mistake. They laugh at you. They jeer at you. They can be nasty to you, somebody can be helpful or whatever but there is a consequence. With online courses there are no consequences. You have the ability to fix it so you have nothing to say, to learn, if you make a mistake, how it can screw up something else somewhere else because that doesn't happen online as I see it.

 And I think people move on without consequences like that bank, I'll fix it. But the training then that I see given to younger people is a cop-out. That, you know, if they do something wrong, it has no consequences. Nobody else is affected, or they're not aware of it.

00:35:58 Interviewer

And when there is no consequence they're not going to change anything, so they don't know that they've done anything wrong.

And because of the lack of training there's no process improvement action taken and things like that and you would imagine that that should be the case.

I worked as a project manager in Apple for 17 years and we would have a team of coaches and they would listen to customer calls and identify whether a call was handled as well as it could have been, were there opportunities for improvement and then they would take on board coaching, process improvement, training etc.

00:36:53 Interviewer

In the bank situation as an example, I'm not sure that they do that. I don't think they have that level of customer service (they'll deal with you there, whether it's on the phone or on the chat or maybe in-person), but I'm not sure that anything like that gets followed up, and I think that's where you tend to see the fallout as complaints to the Ombudsman and the regulators in those commercial sectors, I believe. Maybe, maybe not. I don't know.

00:37:25 Interviewer

OK, I'm not going to take up too much more of your time because we're coming up to or just over 40 minutes now at this stage <JOHANNA>. But there were a few things I wanted to ask you, because I was interested in some of your selection for your digital skills and some of them were middle of the road.

00:37:53 Interviewer

So this is a self-assessment of digital skills and confidence, and I was interested because of the fact you had one strongly disagree and the statement was “I am confident I know what to do when or if I get stuck.” So, given that you, like myself, live alone, what do you do in that scenario?

00:38:15 Participant

Give me the statement again.

00:38:17 Interviewer

So the statement was, “I'm confident I know what to do if I get stuck.” You strongly disagreed with it.

 So what will you do about it when you get stuck? How do you get unstuck? Is my question.

00:38:40 Participant

In a digital situation what I tend to do now is I Google. I tend to Google. I've suddenly discovered that I can rephrase the question in six different ways and I'll get there. And so when I technically get stuck, it's generally with a computer fix that I need.

I do two things after that. If I feel it's going to happen again, I print it out.

I have a file and I keep it if it's something physically on my computer. If it's something else I do try and work out the logic of how it happened.

No, I don't feel I can fix it without. And if Google wasn't there to be honest, I think we'd all be terribly stuck, you know?

00:39:28 Interviewer

I think we would.

<Short version of Sandra’s troubleshooting steps when her Mac laptop wouldn’t wake up recently>

00:39:59 Interviewer

I find the Apple support is not very good, so I Google, and when two or three different sites are saying the same thing, so to hold the shift key down and the power button for 10 seconds or something like that, and it worked.

00:40:41 Interviewer

So overall, given your experience of technology. And when I think of my quality of life I think of the variables as being health, happiness and wellbeing. There are others, but they're the three that I've selected from the literature for this.

So overall, if you didn't have technology in your life, what would that do to your quality and the converse? For example, have you had any negative experiences by, being digitally connected or anything like that?

00:41:22 Participant

And one of the reasons I liked saying and I did it when I had my own business and I was really busy was because when you got on a yacht and you got offshore, you didn't have to answer the phone.

And my life was around the phone. Now I had computers but we didn't do WhatsApp and all of that was constantly ringing phones and so that was an escape. Now that escape is no longer there. There are very few places that you can go that your excuse is you cannot contact me, you know, genuinely. So that’s the negative side of it.

Personally, it doesn't bother me anymore because I'm retired.

00:42:01 Participant

The opposite to that is where I live and what I would do is I could go back to without having it. I mean, I have very little television, you know, I'm only starting to get enough signal to be able to stream something. I don't have a smart TV because there's no point paying for it because I can't get the downloads on it. So, for me the phone is just the phone and for messages and that's it. But for me the computer is the whole wide world, not the whole wide web, it is the whole world.

00:42:39 Participant

No matter what I want to do now, I can do it. My problem is I don't want to spend so much screen time and so I tend to have different units for different things, like I would not do emails on my phone. I love my phone for my phone and I have a desktop and a laptop. I keep different items on them, but for me it's the being able to... A Kindle for me is something I've just got recently and I just don't know how I lived without it, you know, and the size of getting things down. I read an awful lot of books, but again COVID stopped me going out and going to book shops.

So therefore I bought a Kindle and I started downloading from there. Now there's a technology thing is that if I read a very good book on the Kindle I order it online afterwards. I still like to have a copy on my shelf of a book that was particularly nice. The reference books or something like that, I won't look them up again. Do I still want the real ones? But I won't read on my PC, I'm trying to keep because otherwise I just feel I'm going to be 24/7 on my PC. So I try and keep them for different things, like different rules for different things and different technology.

00:43:58 Participant

If you ask me about the benefits of technology I'd have to go up at about 90-95% and I'm positive, you know, for what you can do with it, and I don't use it stupidly. Maybe there are people who do, but then I never watch television stupidly either. And some people just spend all their life at it.

00:44:18 Participant

Having said that, during COVID I learned how much I missed in learning by not watching enough television because I was watching all sorts of documentaries and things and that I would have been out with other people doing, you know, things and not watching the television so there are benefits to everything, it’s just being selective about it, but I think we're better with technology apart from the increase in electricity and windmills and the lighting and all the rest of it. If we could only have it without all the planet affected it would be great.

<Sandra talked about the libraries and the support they offered both on and offline during COVID. Also support from the county councils through Public Participation Networks and Older People’s Councils in each county>

00:46:40 Interviewer

<JOHANNA>, is there anything else that when you were thinking about this that you said

"I must say that to her now” or “that might be interesting” because I know we've gone off on a tangent, but this is just hugely valuable. I've really, really enjoyed our chat, but is there anything that anything else you might have thought of?

00:47:07 Participant

The Kerry artist-in-residence and they have a Lisa Fingleton. She did an online of and how to draw for about 6 or 8 weeks I think, or maybe it wasn't even that long, on a Friday morning from half nine to half ten or something like that. It really was just a case of some people need that. It wasn't something I wanted because I didn't get the learning out of it, but it was a case of a prompt to make you take an hour for yourself and maybe draw something.

I just felt it when she had a success rate or something like that. They are the kinds of things that could be built on very much. Because there were people who went on to that, that you knew had not joined anything like that before. You could see them and taking a pencil and doing something with it and there were a lot of those. Whereas you're saying, I think, that the organised ones where there are huge amount of set places in Kerry like Dingle and Kenmare, wherever they have an arts centre and everything has to be there. We don't all want to get in our car and drive there, you know, and especially in Kerry because it can be worse than going from one side of Dublin to the other, and so for that reason I think that would be an area that I would see a kind of a drop in.

And you know it's just put out with the newsletter or wherever and it's a drop in kind of thing that you can.

It didn't matter to her how many people were listening or whatever because she was just saying “do something” and people did it and then it’s what you got out of it. That can open up areas that you could go to other places for. I think that might be something in the future.

00:48:54 Interviewer

Yeah, I think so, because I think the prescribed types of classes. I think we're gone past that now and I think it's where I think creativity (of delivery) has an opportunity now.

00:49:06 Interviewer

And you know, more options and choice. I think it is all about choice for people at the end of the day.

00:49:16 Interviewer

Thanks a million for your time. It'll probably be later in the week, but I will draft up the transcription and I'll email it across to you if there's anything you want to change.

00:49:26 Interviewer

I won't be doing anything with this until October anyway, and it's all great, <JOHANNA>, and thank you so much for your time.

00:49:36 Participant

You’re more than welcome, all the best.

00:49:36 Interviewer

Alright, enjoy the rest of your evening. Take care.

Appendix – top up email of thoughts from <JOHANNA> 07.09.2021

Good morning Sandra,

I enjoyed our conversation last night and two more points occurred to me.

In the past, almost everything came with an instruction manual.

While hardly anyone ever studied the manual it was flicked through on arrival so you automatically gained an overview of the product and at least an idea of what it’s intended purpose was!

If you had a problem, the answer was usually found in the manual and along the way you discovered some other answer you had been unintentionally looking for – exposure to Eureka moments. 😊

Now the manual is online or through a QR code neither of which are conducive to ‘flicking’ or ‘glancing’ with menu tables that do not make sense to anyone outside the production team – no further learing.☹

Not having had children, the lack of younger people in my life is a big drawback. I missed the second chance education opportunity of learning through their schooling, everything from bedtime reading, childrens’ libraries and school books, cinemas, pantomimes, school tours, etc., etc. – so much could have rubbed off with second viewings!

That then leads to the lack of grandchildren and the exposure to changes in the world; new trends – what’s cool hair/music/clothes? What gadgets and methods are changing? How are relationships changing – dating/flowers/easy sex? I may pick up some of these trends and attitudes from TV, etc. however, you cannot question the ‘personal’ reasons, attitudes or outfall of such changes from a screen.

The views of visiting ‘pals’ from school, college, and early adult life do not arrive to single households and neither do their views and influences – this is not a choice, but a fact of life. And single households come in a variety of guises not just childless singletons or couples but also drift and emigration.

Maybe it helps, maybe not.

Good luck with all you do, I felt you had already ’achieved’ more than most people, so well done on your enthusiasm for more!

<JOHANNA> x