Alexandrina Council

Alexandrina Seniors

Tech Engagement Project

Final Report

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Executive Summary

The Alexandrina Seniors Tech Engagement Project (ASTEP) aimed to increase digital literacy and improve the well-being of older residents in the Alexandrina region. Supported by Office for Ageing Well through an Age Friendly SA grant for the year 2021-22, this project sought to bridge the digital divide and address the challenges faced by older adults in accessing digital resources. Through small group and one-on-one conversations, the project collected valuable feedback from older residents, leading to the redesign and refresh of the Alexandrina Council's website, which now boasts improved accessibility, usability, and age-friendly content.

This final report highlights the key objectives, achievements, and future recommendations of the project, emphasizing its contributions to the Age Friendly SA Strategy. The project has played a pivotal role in increasing older people's involvement in co-design activities and ensuring their voices are heard and valued. It has also focused on enhancing confidence and knowledge among older adults in accessing information online, aligning with Age Friendly SA Strategy themes: Making a contribution and Age Friendly Services.

Key project components included the redesign and refresh of the council's website, creation of a specific Our Older Adults page, establishment of a Community Noticeboard, installation of the Userway widget for improved accessibility, and staff training in creating accessible communications. The project's impact has already been felt, as the website now achieves a 95% accessibility score and includes features that cater to the needs of older users.

The project has also recognised the importance of addressing barriers to participation, such as the impact of COVID-19 and transportation limitations. It has identified opportunities for future work, including expanding communication methods, offering information sessions, and promoting the project through various channels. The report concludes with recommendations for using libraries as vital hubs for supporting digital literacy programs.

Age Friendly Strategy

The project aligns with the Age Friendly SA Strategy by addressing two primary themes: "Making a Contribution" and "Age Friendly Services."

Making a Contribution. We enabled and supported older people to be involved in co-design activities to contribute and inform Council's website redesign. Valuing older people's perspectives increased their opportunities to feel understood and heard. Small group and 1-1 conversations ensured people felt listened to and their opinions valued. Staff also valued the skills and knowledge older people brought to the conversations and heard making a contribution was important to increase and maintain their sense of wellbeing. Responding to their feedback through this project recognises their skills, knowledge, experience and commitment to giving back to their community.

Age Friendly Services. One of our key priorities from our Community Wellbeing Action Plan 2022-2026 is 'to advocate, collaborate and deliver information about services, learning and social opportunities'. It recognises that making it easier for older people to connect is important for our community's wellbeing and social connections, and friendly and supportive community groups are valued by our older adults. As a rural community Alexandrina Council has limited access to face-to-face services which means for many it is a necessary requirement to access services online. Developing skills in navigating My Aged Care and other government portals was identified as a need by the community. The continuing challenge is educating and supporting people to access online resources. Delivering age friendly services encourages people to participate in lifelong learning, building skills and knowledge. Information and education sessions delivered in small groups allow older people to feel comfortable asking questions, be heard and understood.

Access to information and communication technologies is essential to living and participating in today's society. Digital inclusion includes learning new skills and streamlining access to services. In addition to the co-design activities, ASTEP was deeply committed to improving the confidence and knowledge of older residents in

accessing information online. Access to information and communication technologies is now vital for active participation in modern society. Using technology to generate opportunities for older people to meet, learn and contribute to the community is supported by the libraries in our communities with the Being Digital program.

We also believe that the enhancement of accessible communication skills among our staff was crucial in delivering age-friendly services. Staff were trained in creating inclusive content.

Above – Our new Community Development webpage

Barriers to Participation

The consultations during the project uncovered several significant barriers that older adults continue to face:

- Impact of COVID-19: Many participants reported a substantial impact on their lives, including a loss of confidence and a slow return to their previous activities due to the effects of the pandemic.

- Transportation Limitations: Transport remains a substantial barrier for those who are at risk or socially isolated in our region. Collaborating with local Community Passenger Networks (CPN) to provide transport to information sessions is an opportunity that could significantly alleviate this obstacle.

- Digital Divide: The digital gap between generations has further widened, presenting challenges that older adults need to overcome in tasks such as entering, selecting, and reading text on digital devices. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) has ranked Australians aged 65 and over as the most digitally excluded age group, with a digital literacy rate of only 63%, well below the national average of 71.1%.

Above -Older adults taking part in an information session about Chat GPT.

Project Components and Achievements

Our co-design work included meeting with 26 individuals from across the region and small group conversations with approximately 40 other individuals in small groups.

After completing the initial co-design activities of meeting with older people to hear and listen to their views on accessing information and ways to connect with each other, we engaged with experts who received the design brief for the website refresh.

1.Redesign and Refresh of the Alexandrina Council Website

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2 were developed with a goal of providing a single shared standard for web content accessibility that meets the needs of individuals, organisations, and governments internationally. The website was redesigned to improve usability, accessibility, and age-friendly content. A website accessibility audit was completed, and the issues resolved within the website have resulted in it now achieving a 95% accessibility score.


Above- Accessibility report demonstrating 95% compliance with WAG 2 standards.

2. Userway Widget

Upon advice from the experts, a Userway widget was installed allowing the website to adjust it's visual presentation, adapting to users' specific needs, and making it easy for users to engage with its content. It allows users to personalise their website experience, including options for dyslexia-friendly fonts, contrast adjustments, and screen reader compatibility.


Above- Userway icon.
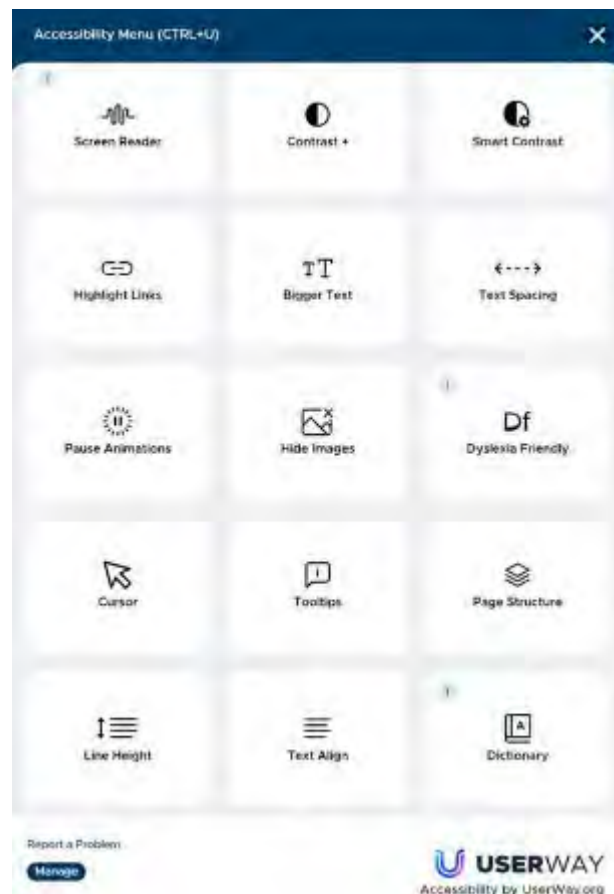
Above – Menu from the Userway widget.

3. Our Older Adults Page

A dedicated page on the council's website was created with age-friendly content and links to information about relevant services and opportunities. Recognising access to information is essential to participating in today's society. We specifically created an Our Older Adults page to provide a place where people could access a range of information about services and support to live a connected life. This page has a range of information about accessing services and support such as My Aged Care, carer, taxi vouchers and dementia information. Staff heard from the co-design group this page will be a great resource when they are looking for independent information.
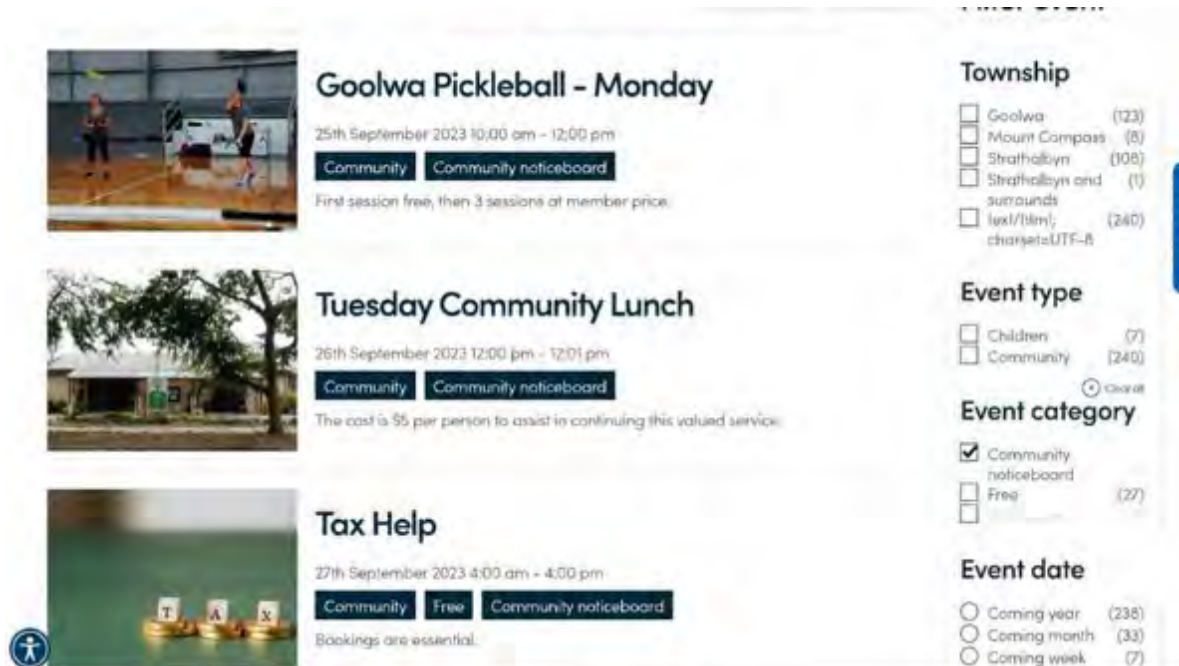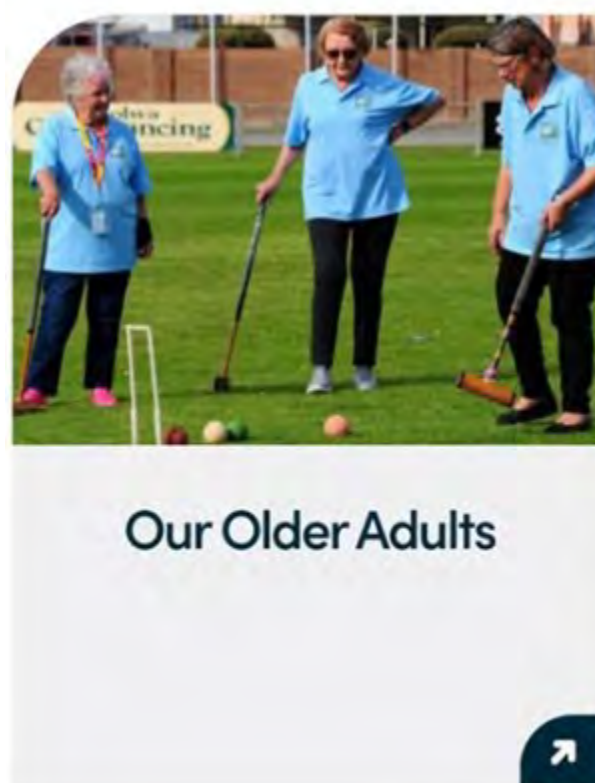

Above– image of the 'Our Older Adults' page from Alexandrina Councils website.

4. Community Noticeboard

A Community Noticeboard was established to provide information about social opportunities and events in the Alexandrina region. Creating the Noticeboard involved working with web designers to ensure it was user friendly. The benefit to the community will be significant as it uses a region wide approach to providing information. Participants expressed the view that this will be a good resource, but it is important to include a range of social opportunities. Staff have already heard community feel it is easy to use and see the benefits of being able to access information about opportunities that will continue to increase their connections. In developing the Noticeboard it was important for information to be print friendly. Therefore we included an easy to find print button on each notice.

Above – Community Noticeboard image from the Council's web page.

Above- Some of Community Noticeboard submissions.

Above 'print this page' button is easy to see and use.

Goolwa Pickleball - Monday

25th September 2023 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Community   Community noticeboard

First session free, then 3 sessions at member price.

a building with trees in front of it

day Community Lunch

26th September 2023 12:00 pm - 12:01 pm

Community   Community noticeboard

The cost is $5 per person to assist in continuing this valued service.

Above – Contrast images and alt text over a picture of a house. Text is spread for use of reading.

5. Staff training and Development

Writing language in the simplest form as possible and reducing jargon increases the readability for those with lower literacy. Consideration is given to format, text size and font, contrast and colour. Writing clearly, accurately, and simply has benefits for all of community and should be considered by all staff who write communications for community consumption. Staff heard this is important to many in the community and people wanted information to be concise. Several staff have completed Accessible Communication training with more booked into training. With up to 20 more staff to be trained Creating Advanced Accessible Documents - Microsoft Office this will increase awareness of the need to create accessible and age friendly content.

Outcomes and Impacts

The ASTEP project has already delivered significant outcomes and impacts:

- Participants felt heard, supported, and more confident, contributing diverse perspectives to community conversations.
- Older residents now have access to online information and resources from a local independent source.
- The website improvements have resulted in increased website interactions and are expected to lead to greater uptake of social opportunities.
- The project has successfully improved the usability and accessibility of the council's website and provided age-friendly information.

Above – two of the participants from the co-design small group conversations.

Recommendations

Utilising libraries as trusted, independent and equitable facilities to support these activities will provide a basis for continuing capacity building work. Free or low-cost information sessions can support skill and knowledge building. The project confirmed the value of using libraries for this by providing opportunity for learning new skills and encourages social participation and connection.

For better outcomes from digital literacy sessions, it was recognised there are several key factors for successful digital literacy programs:

- Marketing of programs: seek input from older people on what interests them to increase uptake and motivation.
- Communication and promotion need to be in multiple formats to cater for different abilities.
- Library-based sessions can work well as that is where people congregate.
- Flexibility in program delivery: older people like a range of options for sessions,1:1 training, group-based classes and/or drop-in sessions for troubleshooting.
- Peer-to-peer support: learning from one another by providing opportunities to share knowledge.


Above – participants sharing knowledge using phone technology.

Future Work

Evidence shows that there is still work to be done on ensuring that easy to understand information is made available and people are educated that it exists and how to access it. Although the project has concluded, work continues to evolve, and future initiatives are aligned with the mission to promote well-being, independence, and social connections among older residents.

Future work includes:

1. Information Sessions: Continue to provide opportunities for older people to access information through sessions specifically focused on learning how to use technology to connect and participate in the digital world. These sessions will be offered in a range of formats to suit the needs of older adults.
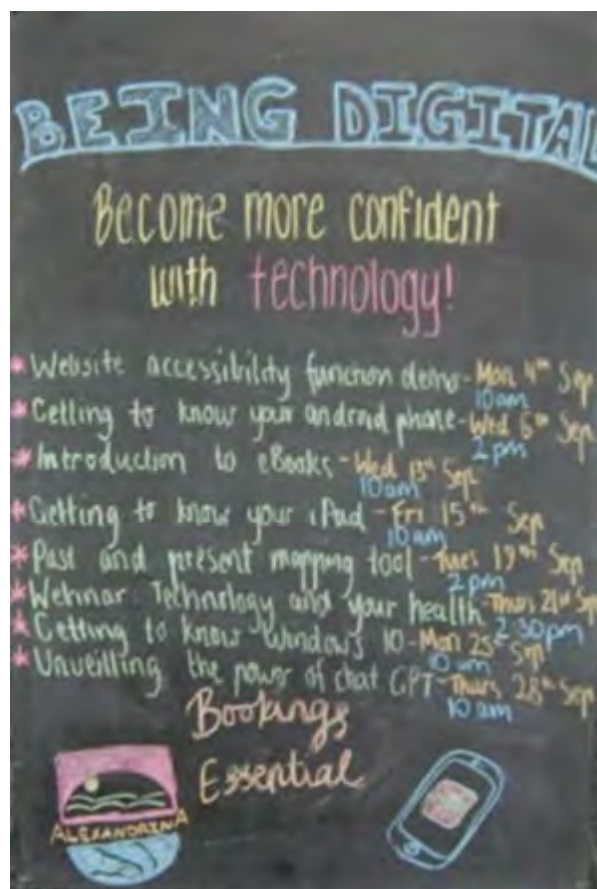
Above- chalkboard on display in the library promoting the Being Digital program.

2. Collaboration with Council of the Ageing (COTA). ASTEP will support the COTA through the Fleurieu Neighbourhood Network (FNN) project, which will have volunteers at the Goolwa Library who will provide information and opportunities for connection. Collaborating with COTA will enhance support for older people who lack confidence in accessing digital information, providing an encouraging and supportive service.

Above- A volunteer at the Goolwa Library

3. Community Noticeboard: Continuing to manage the Community Noticeboard, will ensure that it remains updated and serves as a valuable resource for social opportunities. Planned promotion in local print media including local papers and newsletters will increase awareness and usage.

4. Promoting the features of the Userway widget by staff will support inclusion and age friendly services. Library staff and COTA volunteers will be trained on the features of the widget and can support community to access the features.

5. Training resources will be provided to new staff who create content for community information. This will continue to increase awareness of age friendly and accessible communication guidelines and best practices.

Conclusion

The ASTEP project underscores the importance of digital literacy for enhancing the social participation and inclusion of older adults in an increasingly digital society. Although older people face numerous challenges and barriers, projects like ASTEP can bridge the digital divide, empower older residents, and ensure their active participation in the community.

Our commitment to supporting well-being, promoting independence, and facilitating connections among older residents remains unwavering. Beyond the project's conclusion, we are dedicated to continuing our efforts in this direction, acknowledging that digital literacy and age-friendly services are fundamental to the well-being of our older community members.

We express our gratitude for the support received though the Age Friendly grant provided by Office for Ageing Well, SA Health. The results from ASTEP project is a testament to the positive change that can be achieved when a community comes together to address the unique needs of its older residents.

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