

Peer-to-Peer Digital Safety in Your Community

A Practical Guide to the CyberGuardians Train the Trainer Model

Northumbria University & Linskill Community Centre | Funded by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

What is this model?

A two-stage approach to spreading digital safety knowledge in older communities. A reputable organisation already equipped to deliver training sessions on online safety (in our case, a university) delivers in depth “train the trainer” sessions with community-based organisations. In turn, each organisation recruits and trains community volunteers to share good practices with their peers. In our pilot, two staff members at a community centre trained six volunteers, who between them spread awareness and knowledge to at least 199 people across just two months.

How it works: Four Steps

Step 1

Recruitment and Training of Community Trainers

- The community organisation recruits staff members willing to become trainers — no technical expertise required.
- These staff members attend in-depth training led by the expert-level trainers; pilot content included passwords & authentication, safe device use, scams & social engineering, misinformation, and AI literacy.
- Tip: Use an open, discussion-based approach in a comfortable, familiar environment. These staff members need to feel equipped to deliver similar training themselves.

Step 2

Recruit Community Volunteers

- The community organisation uses existing relationships, newsletters, and community events to recruit peer volunteers.
- Recruiting volunteers already situated within the organisation can help to develop a sense of a collective purpose and base of operations for the volunteers, as well as a potential for pre-existing rapport with the trainers.
- The recruitment stage should feature clarity about the role and if there are any expectations. Give examples of ways the information could be shared across both formal and informal settings. Optionally, it may reduce pressure to allow people to join the training with no formal expectations for advocacy.

Step 3

Train the Volunteers

- Community staff should consider amending the training materials using their knowledge of their volunteers, using a delivery style and language they judge to be appropriate for the audience - but they shouldn't change the factual basis or recommended practices.
- Trained staff deliver the programme to volunteers according to a schedule that suits them and the group. In the pilot, the content was spread over three days within one week. For others, it may be helpful to spread this more gradually.
- Deliver training in depth, to support full understanding, but maintain clarity that volunteer activities need only relate to what they feel comfortable talking about or explaining to others.
- The expert organisation should maintain availability to respond to questions that go beyond the community trainers' knowledge.

Step 4

Support Peer-to-Peer Sharing

- Volunteers share what they've learned amongst their own networks, in whatever way suits them.
- Approaches can range from brief one-to-one chats to group sessions or dedicated drop-in support — all are valuable.
- The community trainers or the expert trainers should facilitate ongoing opportunities for volunteers to come together to share experiences, feedback, and potentially work together in partnerships.

What We Learned

What Worked Well	Things to Bear in Mind
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff embedded in the community can share in depth information supporting online safety, without requiring specialist technical expertise.• Staff bring expert knowledge of, and rapport with, members of their community. This allows them to recruit well, tailor content and pitch the training at the right level.• Community trainers, volunteers and a number of citizens each showed signs of adopting safer behaviours.• Hosting training at the community organisation provided a familiar and comfortable environment. Rapport between trainers and volunteers can help to ease pressure and make the experience enjoyable for everyone.• Volunteers each have their own perspectives on what needs sharing most, and what they feel capable to share. In our pilot, good password habits, device updates, and scam awareness were often prioritised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set clear expectations about the sharing role, including examples of how others have done it — but firm targets or expectations can add pressure.• Printed materials and simple handouts were more useful for sharing than interactive digital tools in our pilot study. However, providing trusted resources for further learning is valuable.• An online community for volunteers (e.g. WhatsApp) can work, but should be established from the start. Set objectives with volunteers about how they would like to communicate and what would be helpful for them.• Pay close attention to momentum. Long gaps between training sessions or engagements can make things harder and participants less confident.

Free Resources

All training materials from this project are available free under an open-source licence at:
cyberguardianstraining.co.uk

To discuss adopting this model in your organisation, contact: james.nicholson@northumbria.ac.uk