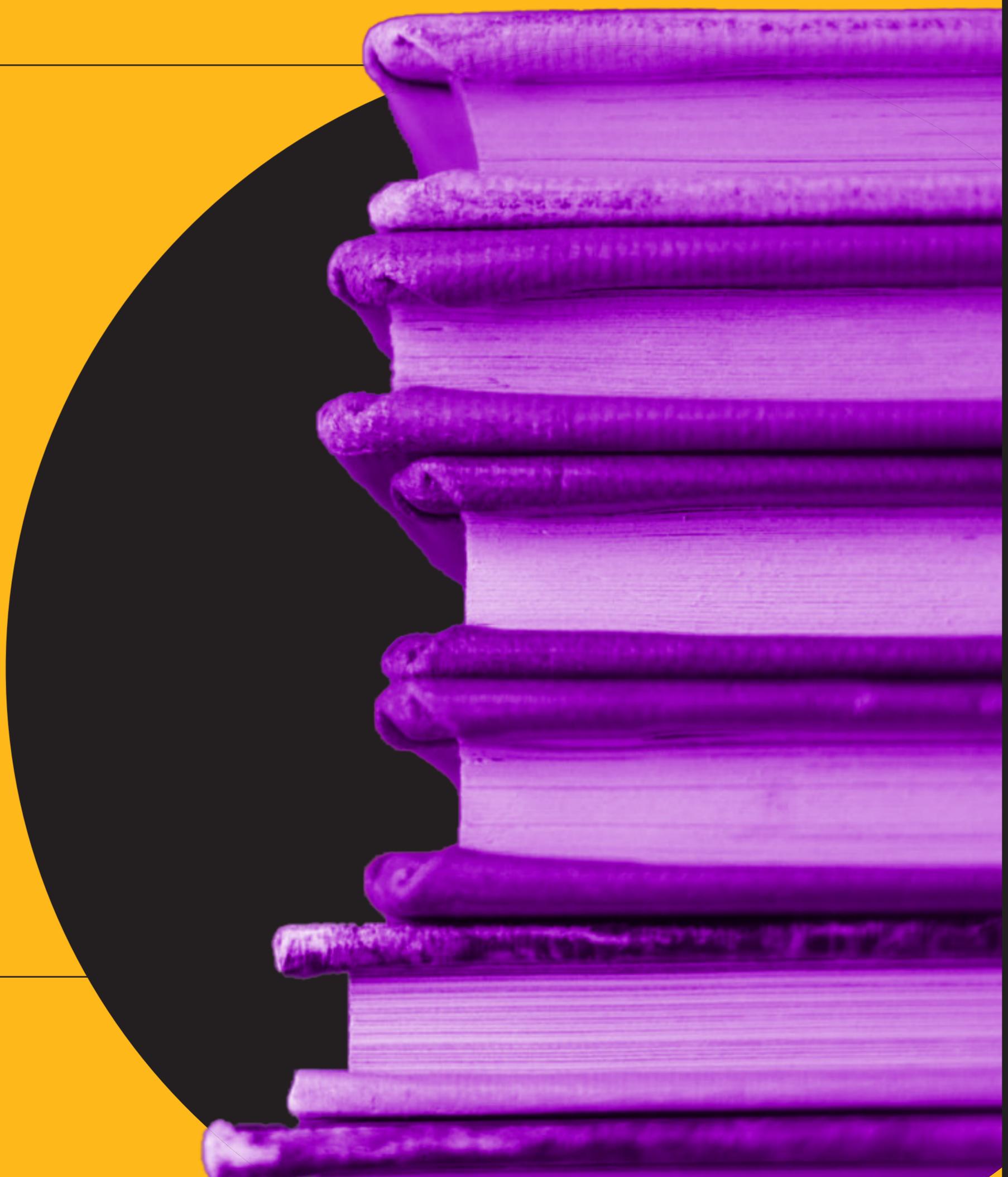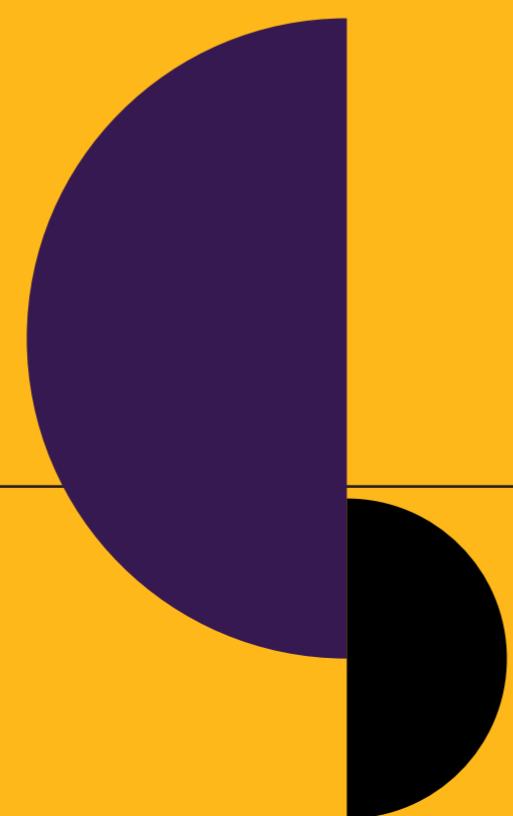# Citizen Literacy CIC

User-centred
evaluation

Citizen Literacy CIC

Citizen Literacy CIC, an independent social enterprise spinout from the City of Glasgow College, worked with its partners: ccConsultancy Ltd; ReachWill Ltd; Micro-phonics Ltd; Scottish TUC Union Learn; That Reading Thing.

Through funding from the CareerTech Challenge, Citizen Literacy built 'Citizen Literacy Taster' - **a freely accessible app that supports adults who are beginner readers and writers to develop their basic and digital literacy skills**. The project also aims to contribute valuable knowledge and understanding regarding how an appropriate use of technology can help adult beginner readers and writers to develop their literacy skills.

Evaluation findings and lessons learned

The evaluation identified a range of positive outcomes for learners, who reported that a phonics-based solution that is adult-centric increased their engagement with the tool and motivation to learn. Engagement with the app also supported learners to widen their physical movements and interactions. Learners who previously felt their daily lives and activities were restricted by their literacy skills reported catching the bus, going into a shop and engaging in text-based tasks at work.

The evaluation has enabled Citizen Literacy to understand the factors that influence learner outcomes. This knowledge will continue to inform and shape product development and contribute to generating knowledge and learning in the sector. It has also served to spotlight the needs of adult literacy learners and the need to explore what works for this cohort further. The team intends to disseminate their evaluation findings more widely in the sector via blogs and articles.

The experience has shown the Citizen Literacy team the value of taking a collaborative approach to evaluation. Bringing the design, literacy and evaluation team together on a regular basis provided opportunities for both teams to feed into learning iteratively, which shaped the development of the project overall. They intend to continue this practice going forward.

Citizen Literacy will continue to embed a range of aspects of the evaluation process into their work. For example, the Theory of Change process supported them to improve their understanding of the aims of their project and to map the relationship between the activities and the outcomes that they hope to see as a result.

Learner case study: Stephanie

Before engaging with the app, Stephanie felt restricted within her everyday activities because of her limited literacy skills. For example, navigating public transport timetables and dealing with complaints at work. Stephanie said not being able to read and write made her feel trapped:

"When you can't read and write you feel always small in a box and you put yourself in the box forevermore...it's very difficult to come out and climb out and say 'ok I'm gonna do this"

Stephanie was keen to improve her literacy skills and talked about the many benefits it could bring – namely being able to interact with her grandchildren:

"I want to sit down... with a book reading to my grandkids, that would be beautiful that would"

However, she had tried many times to improve her literacy skills and given up because of challenges faced such as the amount of paperwork involved in a college course. Therefore, she was keen to try the Citizen Literacy app as it offered a fresh approach to literacy learning.

As she previously hadn't found any phonics resources tailored to her age group, Stephanie really appreciated the adult-centric nature of the app - from its grown-up content to the choice of voices and activities.

"I went on YouTube and I saw a video cos it was like for kids… there's nothing for adults…so it sang the words out…but this app it's like for grownups so it's much more better…it's refreshing"

She also enjoyed the use of voice within the app that clearly provided instructions as it meant there was less written text to engage with. She found that being able to access the app at any time in bite-sized chunks and revisit content and re-attempt activities supported her motivation to engage and persist with the app, as well as improving her literacy knowledge:

"I feel more knowledgeable, I feel that, because I'm learning every week, I can turn the app on and I can start doing it…it helps you cos we only go to college once a week so the app when you got into it you've got it there every day"

"I've got a lot better on that app by using it. I can make mistakes on it"

Stephanie also feels that her confidence around literacy learning has grown since using the app, she attributes this to the positive feedback that the app provides:

"I think my confidence has increased and I know if I need to ask for help I can ask for help in work"

Another important outcome is Stephanie's new-found independence – she feels good about not having to rely on people to support her with literacy-based tasks and feels confident enough to engage in tasks by herself:

"[I'm] not having to rely on people as much…not having to rely on colleagues as much…reading I will give it a go"'

Evaluation approach

Citizen Literacy undertook a process and impact evaluation. The key aims of the evaluation were:

• Understand which elements of the app worked effectively

• Assess the effectiveness of the tool in developing beginner readers and writers' attitudes, behaviours and skills as outlined in the theory of change

The Theory of Change (see Figure 1 on page 06) developed as part of Citizen Literacy's evaluation is based on adult beginner readers' and writers' need for an adult-centric phonics app to support their confidence and motivation to engage in learning and skills development. It recognises community learning and development stakeholders and networks as key to facilitating user engagement with the app.

The key consideration for the evaluation was the learner group. The Citizen Literacy team therefore needed to give careful consideration to their choice of evaluation methods given the known literacy challenges and complex needs of adult beginner readers and writers. The team therefore decided to take a **user-centred approach to evaluation**.

Table 1 summarises the methods used in the evaluation.

Undertaking qualitative research with learners was the key challenge of the evaluation. The Citizen Literacy team developed a series of innovative approaches to maximising evaluation engagement. These included:

Table 1: Citizen Literacy CIC evaluation methods

Process evaluation
In-depth semi structured interviews with 8 learners, teachers and advocates.
Questionnaires (which included capturing learner demographic information) with 6 learners and 19 teachers and advocates
Recordings of project team discussions throughout the project.

Outcome evaluation
In-depth semi structured interviews with 8 learners, teachers and advocates.
Questionnaires (which included capturing learner demographic information) with 6 learners and 19 teachers and advocates.
Analysis of management information from 986 learners across three different versions of the app. Data included engagement with the app (measured by number of installs and length of time using it per session and overall)

• **Videos and webcasts** that provided spoken information about the project and evaluation and how to get involved in an accessible format to learners with low literacy levels.

- **A dedicated single point of contact** who was available on email with a Citizen Literacy address for tutors and advocates to get in touch about the evaluation to arrange interviews. This helped to build trust and provided a bridge between the project team and the tutors/advocates.

- **Taking a person-centred, flexible approach to fieldwork** to ensure learners felt comfortable discussing highly personal and stigmatized issues. For example, not recording interviews when participants didn't feel comfortable, or flexing the interview questions based on learner circumstances. This was especially important for this cohort of learners who tend to face multiple barriers.

- **Triangulating qualitative evidence to build a detailed picture of learner experience** by including a greater focus on the tutor and advocate perspective to overcome the challenges of engaging learners.

Alongside these approaches, the evaluation process highlighted that human support – via advocates and tutors – is paramount in the engagement of low level literacy learners in evaluation.

Capacity building support

Overall, the Citizen Literacy team identified a range of enabling factors that supported them to develop a high-quality evaluation:

- Developing a Theory of Change – the team felt that this brought structure to the evaluation and provided a framework through which to clearly develop links between the activities they were designing and the outcomes they wanted to achieve. They intend to embed this practice into future projects. The introductory webinar which covered this process, coupled with the written guidance in the Evaluation Toolkit, enabled them to successfully develop their Theory of Change.

- Accessing bespoke and contextualised support – the team found it beneficial to work with an Evaluation Manager who had a background and interest in adult literacy as it enabled more in-depth and creative focus on the evaluation itself. They found the intermediary role that the Evaluation Manager played helpful in supporting their decisions around alternative approaches to evaluation in order to best meet the needs of their learners - for example, advocating not capturing learner demographic information.

- Having regular catch ups – the team felt that this improved accountability and provided structure to their evaluation process.

"The formality of the capacity building support for example the theory of change was really helpful because they made us stop in our tracks and say what exactly did we think this action was going to create? I found that a great learning curve – the structure that was brought to the evaluation process"

CITIZEN LITERACY PROJECT TEAM MEMBER

Figure 1: Citizen Literacy Theory of Change

Rationale → **Inputs** → **Activities** → **Outputs** → **Outcomes** → **Impact**

Rationale

Poor Literacy Skills (Reading & Writing) reduces career adaptability - affects 6 million in UK

Learners are nervous about seeking support and may not know where it is available

Shortage of adult-centric courses

Learners need to build confidence and know where support is

Most target learners own a smartphone - this provides a channel for learning and information

Inputs

Learners

Access to Community Learning and Development (CLD) Networks & Stakeholders

PR/Advertising

Technology Delivery Platforms (Web, iOS, Android) & services

Literacy & Phonics expertise

Learning Design Expertise

Software design, media design, Human centred design & UX skills

Grant(s) and funder networks

CLD network feedback

User feedback

Activities

Develop online literacy training for adults using structured phonics and other adult literacy methods, and provide info about local learning providers

Develop tutor support materials

Engage with CLD networks and stakeholders - promote, co-design and recruit users

Design Analytics data (time on activities and in app, successful completion of tasks

Encourage community facilitated access to app for learners (via CLD/ stakeholder networks)

User testing and feedback (learners and CLD tutors)

Outputs

Online literacy course developed and tested with learners and tutors & feedback received

Tutor support materials developed & feedback received from 50 tutors

10 x CLD & Stakeholder networks engaged and contribute to project

Collect Analytics data and analyse

Progress towards 1000 learners engaged, 500 active learners, and 300 learners completing 15+ hours of learning

Outcomes

Attitudinal Outcomes:
• Increased confidence to learn
• More willing to contact support agencies
• Interest in digital learning

Behavioural Outcomes:
• Increased likelihood of signing up for adult literacy courses
• Increased likelihood of signing up for essential digital skills courses/ learning opportunities

Skills Outcomes:
• Improved literacy and digital skills (learners)
• Improved design & training skills with digital tools: tutors and learning providers

Impact

Improved literacy and essential digital skills (learners)

Improved design & training skills with digital tools tutors

Increase in demand for (online) learning from these learners and their tutors and learning providers (multiple beneficiaries)

Interest in continued development of planned product line

Progress in understanding how appropriate use of technology can help these learners, their tutors, learning providers and employers