Making the Framework Fit: Streetwork and the Essential Digital Skills Toolkit

Over a two day period, the research team with the Get Digital project engaged with three separate groups to seek feedback on the Essential Digital Skills toolkit:

- those experiencing homelessness and attending the drop in at the Hub;
- the senior leadership team;
- frontline staff.

Broadly, the key skills outlined in the toolkit were felt to be appropriate by of all of those who participated, but there is a need for tailoring staff training in essential skills to ensure that the most desirable elements- as well as the necessary elements- and key applications are covered. Some of these are highlighted below. In consultation, staff also noted a need for ongoing training and support in their own digital development to allow them to provide appropriate support.

Creating the right environment

Many service users noted that they are unaware of the digital drop in and so more prominent marketing to service users would possibly be useful here. One individual noted that he spent hours, on a regular basis, at the job centre, trying to get help with digital skills and trying to complete online forms, but that there were rarely enough staff to help and that there are queues for computers. He wasn't aware of the support on offer at the Digital Drop-In, but would be very grateful for this help and support. It would perhaps be helpful if the drop in was also advertised at these points of engagement, so that individuals are aware they can receive the support they need from Streetwork.

Currently, the digital drop in space is in an open, social space which makes private and confidential digital work a challenge, compromising confidentiality and possibly creating risk. Staff also noted that the social space can also be distracting for individuals trying to work, as friends interrupt and chat. Possible solutions suggested by staff include separate computers, using a booking system for key tasks such as passport applications or UC in a defined, separate space, and possibly specific appointments for digital skills support (sitting alongside the drop-in support, rather than replacing it.

Crucially, support with digital skills will also need to take into account that many of those experiencing homelessness do not have English as a first language. Streetwork staff suggested that between 30-40% of individuals do not have English as a first language, with main languages in this group being Albanian, Romanian and Polish. Staff suggested that Google Translate may be a useful tool, although is limited in scope and application. This issue may be compounded with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Staff also highlighted that there is a need for training and skills in different accessibility tools which can support a range of possible barriers giving examples such as dyslexia and physical dexterity. Many of these digital tools are built in as standard to devices and applications.

The toolkit: feedback from individuals experiencing homelessness.

Feedback on the toolkit was gathered in a series of one to one interviews with ten individuals at the drop-in who were already using digital devices who were assumed to have foundation skills and who may therefore be in a position to discuss the essential skills framework. Consultation was limited by the number of non-English speakers attending the drop-in and this issue should be addressed when considering the implementation of both staff digital skills training and also digital champion training. Individuals were asked to reflect on a scale of 1-5 how important the essential skill listed was to them, with 5 being the most important.

Communicating

Those interviewed felt that the ability to communicate with messaging tools or email was a necessary tool for applying for jobs, receiving pay-cheques and accessing information from the JCP but also for staying in touch with friends and family. One respondent noted how access to social networks (WhatsApp) was influential in providing a route out of homelessness as she received ongoing support from family members abroad who were now acting to help her return home. Another respondent indicated the way in which he accessed food and respite through the Edinburgh-based project Soul Food using Facebook messenger to identify where and when he would be able to access meals.

Tools considered the most necessary: WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and email.

Posting on social media platforms had a more varied response: social media was perceived to be of lesser value, with several individuals giving information about negative experiences and also about the intrusive nature of social media (a bad experience with online dating, another concerned about marketing specifically related to gambling) Two younger users, who self identified as 'millenials' felt that 'social media is no longer relevant to us. We just message people directly'. Those who viewed social media tools more positively reflected again the opportunity to stay in touch with family and friends- with other, less confident users seeing social media as a 'next step'.

Tools considered the most necessary: Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat.

Every respondent rated keeping emails and social media accounts safe as 5 (the most significant). Individuals felt very strongly about the importance of passwords and privacy and a significant number stated that they felt they were competent in this area - contrasting with staff and volunteer experience (this issue will be addressed later in the report). One individual noted that 'Privacy is everything to me'.

Tools to be considered: all social media privacy and security settings but especially those outlined above.

Handling Information and Content

Saving information on the cloud (and finding from any device). There was a lack of understanding about this question and what it meant - staff had to explain a bit more about what cloud is and how it might be useful- after cloud technology was explained, individuals were fairly positive, reflecting on how it might be used to store CVs and necessary

documents. Again privacy and security was highlighted as a concern- two younger men had an extensive conversation about the risk of using cloud technology and in particular that 'anyone could access your data and private stuff' suggesting the risk to data privacy would be significant barrier.

Action: Language around cloud based technology needs to be simplified.

Accessing entertainment was considered by the majority of those surveyed to be of importance, with YouTube in particular highlighted as a useful source of information and entertainment. No participants highlighted subscription services and these may therefore be of limited value in this context.

Tools: YouTube
Action: Gaming was highlighted by one participant as relevant and might be considered in this category
Staff also may need to be supported in the confident use of YouTube

All ten participants reflected the importance of checking whether online information is true or false, rating this as 4 or 5 in importance.Two younger service users spoke at length on this issue and how hard it is to assure veracity - citing examples such wikipedia and how they themselves could doctor that information as an author. They also talked about how (with wiki) you can then check on authors and other edits they have done. Both were very concerned about truth and transparency. Other respondents mentioned concerns with 'fake news', scam emails and websites- with one user highlighting how she did not feel confident in working out whether things are true or false.

Transacting

While buying things online was considered by the bulk of participants (9/10) to be either extremely or very important, many individuals vocalised various issues - including the challenges presented by having no address to receive deliveries, to a preference to 'shop outside', where you are able to see your purchase and walk out of the shop with that purchase. One individual noted that 'I think I would be able to do it but I would be worried about buying something online and how to tell it was real'.

Action: again, privacy and security are of significant concern and digital champions need to be confident themselves in identifying safe online merchants and in addressing concerns.

All participants noted the importance of using the internet for online services and in particular Universal Credit and JCP platforms, as well as passport applications - but with varying skill levels and some participants expressing that -although they knew this to be an important skill, they struggled with this, with one individual noting 'I have used all the online forms a lot, but I don't know how to use them myself'- his access to Universal Credit is always supported by someone else with the skills to navigate the platform.

Tools: Universal Credit, Universal JobMatch and appropriate e-citizenship forms.

Online banking was considered to be an important skill, with several individuals realising the benefits of digital banking and others keen to do so - with one participant highlighting that online banking would allow him to carry out banking transactions out of hours, which he considered of particular importance. Three respondents noted that they lack the skills to use digital banking properly (with issues related to passwords or basic digital skills) but would be very keen to develop skills necessary for this.

Action: staff familiarity with different online banking tools

<u>Problem Solving</u>

Using online chat to ask for help was considered to be relatively important but feedback and engagement with this topic was fairly limited.

Again, most participants felt it is important to be able to use the internet to be able to solve problems - with many citing YouTube, in particular, as a meaningful tool. All respondents use a search engine, and all referred to google in particular, rather than alternative search engines.

Action: staff may need support in helping others to search efficiently, with searching 'top tips', for instance.

Using digital to assist with navigation and travelling was considered to be extremely important to participants, with particular reference to Google Maps. One participant noted 'I get lost a lot, so Google Maps helps me find my way' and another that ''Google maps is my tour guide in Scotland' (also highlighting online street tours he does for fun).

Tools: Google maps and Street View

<u>Being Safe and Legal</u>

As highlighted above being safe online was a key concern for all of the participants- though in this section of the toolkit, several expressed an awareness of their own limitations, in particular in how to recognise suspicious weblinks - one participant noted that: 'I don't feel confident doing this and it makes me worry: sometimes things look true but aren't't', and another 'I don't know how to do this but I know it is very important.' Passwords were also seen as critical and examples given of strong password protection - 'I know this is very important and I use different passwords for lots of things.'

The toolkit: feedback from staff and senior leadership teams

Staff were incredibly positive about the ways in which essential digital skills might positively impact on individuals experiencing homelessness, with examples such as positive social contact with family and friends and the consequent reduction of social isolation; developing a network of support; accessing information; supporting those with anxiety around social interaction; enabling access to welfare support, developing transferable skills which could be applied to a journey towards employment; accessing up to date information, including

pending transactions giving individuals a 'real' understanding of their finances, which might thus help with debt management.

It was also felt that the potential learning experience undertaken to enhance essential digital skills would support the development of social skills as well as boosting confidence, contributing to greater overall well being.

Regarding the framework, staff felt that foundation skills for the purposes of Streetwork engagement should also include:
- An introduction to the basics of language around ICT- e.g. what is a mouse
- How to type on a keyboard
- A basic introduction to apps and how to download an app.
- How to reboot (turn off)
- How to logout

Communicating

Staff noted that communication tools are vital to those experiencing homelessness, highlighting the need to engage with Universal Credit and JCP as examples, as well as maintaining social connections which they felt essential to mental wellbeing. Staff also noted that digital offers a unique and beneficial communication tool for those experiencing social anxiety.

Staff highlighted that passwords are ongoing issue with service users- individuals regularly forget their password and are logged out (and locked out) of their account and regaining access can be very difficult. Staff may have useful solutions for this which could form the basis of best practice for the organisation and which might be replicated.

Handling information and content

Staff broadly agreed with the content of the framework here - in particular the need for individuals to be able to access important information from different devices, and to be able to attach files to emails and other documents. Again, these skills will help individuals engage with online welfare services.

Transacting

Staff felt online transactions have significant impact on those experiencing homelessness- and again the toolkit could be tailored to reflect skills such as the ability to bid for houses online, sending messages on gumtree, ordering food, using Edinex and EEA Settlement scheme applications (all staff examples).

The ability to support individuals with applications for Universal Credit was defined as a key skill - all staff need to be supported in accessing training on moving through the Universal Credit form and in the ability to use digital tools to check benefits entitlements. Staff also felt that individuals could also be supported in comparing and understanding their rights using the internet. Some staff also noted that the opportunity to sit alongside individuals and help them with complex applications affords greater support.

Digital tools highlighted: Gumtree, Edinex, House Bidding, EEA Settlement Scheme
Action: staff training in Universal Credit

<u>Problem Solving</u>

Staff felt that the internet affords the opportunity for individuals experiencing homelessness to manage all aspects of their health and that the toolkit should also reflect a health specific element for the purposes of Streetwork's project. This element would include accessing 'safe' health and wellbeing resources (including the NHS) and how to book appointments online, and order electronic prescriptions etc.

Staff discussed the importance of Google Maps and Google Streetview. In addition to supporting individuals navigate the city to access different welfare and support services, staff also use Google Maps and Streetview to support individuals in visualising potential properties before bidding as the bid process gives very little property information.

Action: Health related skills should be highlighted in this category.
Key tool: Google maps, Google Streetview, Lothian Bus app

<u>Staying Safe and Legal Online</u>

In addition to issues related to passwords (already noted) staff also mentioned the issue with communal computers and that individuals often fail to logout of these communal computers, compromising their own safety and security. Possible solutions suggested include an automatic logout and clearing of any saved data, or 'have you remembered to logout' stickers on computers.

Staff also discussed issues of accountability and risk for individuals experiencing homelessness and that this should be built into any training and support offered (also referred to as 'responsible communication')

Action: Explore digital solution

Conclusion

Both staff and individuals experiencing homelessness felt the essential skills toolkit broadly reflects the digital skills they feel important to them, with the majority of amendments being the application and use of key tools in each category.

There is a clear and demonstrable commitment at all levels to engage with digital skills training, with staff noting that there are often gaps in their own knowledge which could impact on their ability to share skills- again highlighting the need for ongoing training.

Staff indicated a concern around the time needed to spend with individuals experiencing homelessness on this particular agenda- while there is a recognition of the need to support with digital skills, there is a concern that it may detract from other areas of support. Any programme of support therefore, should highlight that this is part of the already holistic and

person-centred approach offered by staff at Streetwork.