

One Digital 2017-2020

Embedding digital inclusion through Digital Champion approaches: lessons learned

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Executive summary

One Digital is a UK digital inclusion collaboration funded by the National Community Lottery Fund. The collaboration partners are Age UK, Citizens Online, Clarion Futures, Digital Unite and the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).

One Digital helps people to develop the essential digital skills needed to participate in the online world. The ‘golden thread’ of One Digital’s approach is the use of Digital Champions – individuals who have been trained to support others to improve their essential digital skills.

This report is part of an independent evaluation of the One Digital collaboration. It uses four diverse case studies to better understand what factors contribute to successful Digital Champion projects, and in particular what contributes to the ‘embedding’ of essential digital skills support into an organisation’s service delivery.

Each case study project hosted a site visit from a member of the research team, and the findings in this report are based on over thirty interviews with a range of stakeholders in each project – staff, volunteers and beneficiaries.

We develop a portrait of each project, including the organisation’s motivation for engaging with digital inclusion work, the aims and activities of the project, and the outcomes for different groups of beneficiaries. We then use our analysis of the case study data to identify factors in a range of organisational domains that drive the successful embedding of Digital Champion models. These include:

- *Strategic planning* based on an understanding that digital inclusion is a ‘whole-organisation’ issue
- *Organisational communication* that demonstrates the relevance of essential digital skills for all staff and clients/customers, and celebrates digital skills successes
- *External relationships* that reflect an understanding of local digital inclusion needs and a willingness to work in partnership to address those needs
- *Training and support* that enables all staff/volunteers to act as Digital Champions in some way, either for clients/customers or for their colleagues
- *Service planning* that recognises the value of essential digital skills support activities and facilitates them alongside day-to-day service delivery
- *Integrated assessments* of digital support needs, in tandem with other needs assessment, made at the earliest stages in the customer/client journey
- *Monitoring and evaluation* of digital support activities and their outcomes, including the use of light-touch approaches suitable for the context of the support.

We go on to provide an organisational checklist for embedding digital inclusion into services, and resources for further guidance on measurement and evaluation.

1. Background

1.2 About One Digital

One Digital is a UK digital inclusion collaboration funded by the National Community Lottery Fund (formerly the Big Lottery Fund). The collaboration partners are Age UK, Citizens Online, Clarion Futures, Digital Unite and the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).

Through the work of its partners and networks of organisations they support, One Digital helps people to develop the essential digital skills needed to participate in the online world. The ‘golden thread’ of One Digital is the use of Digital Champions – individuals who have been trained to support others to improve their essential digital skills.

The collaboration was funded by the Big Lottery in 2015 for an initial ‘test and learn’ phase and received a further three years of funding in 2017. The collaboration’s activities are due to end in June 2020.

About Essential Digital Skills

One Digital uses the UK Government’s Essential Digital Skills Framework as a core reference point. This Framework defines the digital skills adults need to “safely benefit from, participate in and contribute to the digital world”.¹ The Framework specifies ‘Foundation Skills’ – typically required by people who have never used a digital device – and then five categories of ‘Essential Digital Skills’:

- communicating
- handling information and content
- transacting
- problem solving
- being safe and legal online.

These five skills categories are then further refined into digital skills for everyday life and digital skills for work.

About Digital Champions

The One Digital collaboration partners are united by their use of Digital Champion approaches. Put simply, a Digital Champion is an individual who helps others engage with and reap the benefits of using digital technologies. The Digital Champion role may be formal or informal, paid or unpaid. The One Digital partners have interpreted the role of Digital Champion in diverse ways, and this diversity has afforded valuable shared learning opportunities for the partners themselves and for other organisations with an interest in digital inclusion and participation.

¹ DCMS (2017) Essential Digital Skills Framework

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework>

About embedded approaches

Many of the projects supported by One Digital partners use what we have termed an 'embedded' approach. Our working definition of an embedded Digital Champion model is one where digital skills support is embedded in another transactional process with a beneficiary. Examples of this might include essential digital skills support given by:

- welfare advisors while assisting someone with benefits claim
- library staff while helping someone access their e-books service
- employment support workers as part of helping someone to look for a job.

We have tested and refined this definition as a result of the research findings presented in this report.

1.1 About this report

This report is one element of an independent evaluation of the One Digital programme being carried out by Sara Dunn Associates (SDA). The report is based on a set of four case studies. One Digital wanted to use case studies to better understand what factors contribute to successful embedded Digital Champion projects.

The research was led by Sara Dunn of SDA, working closely with Kate Gallant, the Community of Practice Facilitator for the One Digital collaboration.

2. Methodology

The brief was to identify a case study from each of the four One Digital partners whose projects support direct delivery to beneficiaries i.e. Age UK, Clarion Futures, Citizens Online and SCVO. The impact of the Digital Champions Network online platform – the pan-partner contribution from the fifth partner Digital Unite (DU) – was a cross-cutting theme within the case studies.

As we were primarily concerned with practical learning about the nature and effectiveness of embedded Digital Champion projects, the selected unit of analysis was a single Digital Champion service in a single location.

Selection criteria for case study projects

Each partner was asked to shortlist up to three organisations as case study participants, using the following criteria:

- organisations that deliver directly to beneficiaries, and whose organisational remit is not primarily digital skills support (e.g. housing providers, care providers, welfare advice services, community support services)
- projects that use embedded Digital Champions, i.e. individuals who provide support for essential digital skills as part of a pre-existing transaction or relationship with the beneficiary

- projects that include examples of digital skills support for both staff and customers/clients
- organisations that have supported at least 25 percent of their intended beneficiaries and are sufficiently far into their delivery cycle to be able to reflect on their processes, activities and outcomes.

Because we wanted to be able to compare and contrast the approaches taken by our four projects, we selected the final four case study participants to give us the widest range of data across the following parameters:

- spread across UK and rural and urban mix
- type of organisation: public sector and third sector
- client/customer groups: older people, people looking for work, users of library services, recipients of welfare advice
- type of Digital Champion: staff, volunteers, clients
- type of Digital Champion support: peer-to-peer and Digital Champion to client/customer.

Research activities

A qualitative case study is built up from data collected from all the main actors in the intervention under study. For each case study we therefore interviewed at least two project staff (one strategic and one operational), three Digital Champions and three beneficiaries. Each organisation hosted a site visit from a member of the research team, where Digital Champions and beneficiaries were interviewed (mainly one-to-one or occasionally in focus groups where circumstances required). Interviews with project staff were conducted by phone. In total, we conducted 34 interviews, comprising 9 project staff, 14 Digital Champions and 11 beneficiaries.

All interviews were conducted using semi-structured scripts. Case study scripts generally use open questions, allowing participants to describe their experiences using their own language and constructs. This enables the build-up of a rich set of qualitative data which is grounded in the experience of the stakeholders involved.

Because context is so important for DC interventions, we used PEST² – a broad and simple contextual framework – to underpin the design of the scripts to ensure consistent data collection. This enables the impact of factors such as local policy landscape, delivery organisation culture, Digital Champion motivations etc. to be covered in each case study.

The Essential Digital Skills Framework³, the Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit⁴ and the SCVO Essential Digital Skills Toolkit⁵ were referenced in developing suitable indicators for

² PEST is a simple framework for environmental scanning often used in strategic planning: P = policy factors; E = environmental factors (local and regional) ; S = social factors; T = technological factors.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PEST_analysis

³ DCMS (2017) Essential Digital Skills Framework

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/essential-digital-skills-framework>

beneficiary outcomes. Relevant quantitative and qualitative data from partners' own monitoring and evaluation efforts was also included in the data collection and analysis, where available.

We used thematic analysis techniques, whereby all the data collected is coded into a framework, which is then refined and amended as common themes and issues emerge. Each theme was then examined from a range of stakeholder viewpoints, adding up to a comprehensive and rounded view of each case. Salient comparisons across the case studies could also be made.

Methodological limitations

All participation in the research was voluntary, participants were self-selecting and therefore may not represent all shades of opinion. The interviews with beneficiaries and to some extent Digital Champions may not be representative; we were dependent on the participating organisation to identify interviewees, and they in turn were dependent on participants' willingness to take part.

Staff turnover affected our interviews to some degree, as for some of the case studies the staff who had responsibility for setting up the project were no longer in post. This meant some data about whether the projects had run according to plans and expectations was not as complete as it might have been.

The Hawthorne effect,⁶ in which the responses people give to researchers are influenced by the presence of the researchers, may have had an impact. Similarly social desirability bias,⁷ where respondents say what they feel either the researchers or other stakeholders may want to hear, may also have an impact. Mitigations for the above included reflective discussion between the researchers, triangulation of responses between and across respondent groups, and cross-checking with documentary records where possible.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the staff, Digital Champions, clients and customers we spoke to for their time and insights. We are particularly grateful to the staff from each participating organisation who spent considerable time and effort facilitating our research visit and helping set up interviews. We would also like to thank the staff from the One Digital Partner organisations who brokered our introductions to the participating organisations.

⁴ Just Economics for DCMS (2017) Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/605089/DigitalInclusion_MainReport.pdf

⁵ SCVO (2018) Essential Digital Skills Toolkit <https://digitalparticipation.scot/resources>

⁶ <https://catalogofbias.org/biases/hawthorne-effect/>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_desirability_bias

3. Case studies

Age UK South Lakeland: Digital skills and later life

Background

Age UK South Lakeland <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/southlakeland/> is an independent third sector organisation based in Kendal in Cumbria. They offer a range of services to local people aged 50 and over to improve their wellbeing and promote independence and choice.

The organisation covers a large rural area, so outreach work – including delivering directly in local villages and in people’s homes – is a key element of their approach.

Age UK South Lakeland’s motivation for engaging with digital inclusion

- The migration of key public services online – in particular access to GP services, council services such as Blue Badge, and social housing – impacts disproportionately on older people. This is compounded in a rural area with poor public transport, where physical access to services is harder. Age UK South Lakeland know that some older people risk being ‘left behind’ as they lack the skills and knowledge to use digital technology.
- Social isolation is also a significant risk for older people, and Age UK South Lakeland believe digital technology can help people get more connected to community, family and friends.
- In addition, the organisation is completing a major digital transformation, rolling out a bespoke digital hub which records all service activities and outcomes measures, and also incorporates a multi-agency referral system that can be accessed by local NHS, social care and other third sector agencies. This internal change process has highlighted the need for all staff and volunteers to have the essential skills to engage with digital technology themselves and help others to do so.

Aims of Age UK South Lakeland’s One Digital project

The project aimed to support older people to engage with digital technologies in order to improve their wellbeing, in particular to increase their social connectedness and to improve their access to services.

Age UK South Lakeland’s Digital Champions

The organisation has a long-established volunteer programme and Digital Champions (known in this project as IT Volunteers) are recruited through this system. A monthly recruitment drive through a range of local networks picks up recruits who are interviewed by the volunteer co-ordinator. Suitable candidates are then given a standard Age UK volunteer induction, which includes mental health awareness and safeguarding. Those interested in the IT Volunteer role are given access to the Digital Champions Network (see below). They also receive Digital Champion training from the One Digital Project Co-

ordinator, including in the use of tablets where required, as these are the devices offered to beneficiaries through their project loan scheme. The Project Co-ordinator also attends the volunteer's first support session as a mentor.

Staff in client-facing roles – such as information, advice and guidance or Case Officers carrying out needs assessments – have also received Digital Champion training to help them identify older people needing digital support. All new staff now have Digital Champion training as part of their induction.

The project's IT Volunteers are mostly retired, many with either a teaching or an IT background. The retention rate for IT Volunteers is high, with 22 recruited for the project (some new, some existing volunteers) and 20 remaining active throughout, with high levels of commitment to the role. The One Digital Project Co-ordinator themselves started as an IT volunteer.

Ongoing support for the IT Volunteers is from the Project Co-ordinator, who considers this one of the key aspects of their job, freeing the volunteers to focus on supporting older people. All IT Volunteers commit to a minimum one drop-in a month, with many doing up to 14 hours a month of drop-ins and home visits.

Age UK South Lakeland's beneficiaries

Beneficiaries are identified through two main routes:

- Self-referral; older people who see adverts for the digital support service in their local paper or shops or hear about it through word of mouth
- Referrals from triage; whenever people are referred by third parties, such as GPs or social services or friends and family, they are assessed by case officers as to their needs and preferences, including their use of and interest in digital technology.

Clients fall broadly into two categories:

- 60 to 70-year-olds, who are aware of most services going online and fearful of falling behind, and hence feel some pressure to engage with new technology
- 80 to 90-year-olds who tend to see digital technology as optional, something that is of potential interest rather than a pressure.

To date the project has helped approximately 1000 older people, of whom:

- 41% are aged 70+
- 33% live alone
- 28% are either living with some disability or are housebound
- 31% are living with at least one long-term health condition.

Project activities

Support is delivered by the IT Volunteers through a mix of drop-ins and home visits. Drop-in sessions are approximately monthly in local libraries, some have taken place in GP surgeries, and also at the Age UK centre in Kendal. These might be in groups or one-to-one, depending on demand. A large proportion of support is provided one-to-one in people's homes, usually up to six visits of varying frequency according to the client's circumstances.

The advice given is wide-ranging, typically including:

- technical queries around devices and WiFi access
- support with online shopping
- help with using the internet to connect with families and friends (e.g. email, messaging apps, videoconferencing such as Skype).

The project also runs a tablet loan scheme. People can borrow a tablet for up to three months and the IT Volunteers help them to set it up, including providing a Mifi connection if required. To date 108 loans have been made by the project.

Monitoring of the project activities includes recording numbers of people supported overall, as well as their demographic data, existing internet access and levels of confidence in using the internet at the start of the intervention. Most of the people who receive digital support also have a record on the organisation's online management platform, Compass eHub. This includes a structured and holistic assessment of each client's situation, needs and preferences, including for example social connectedness, physical health and mood. The assessments are revisited after interventions, in order to provide a measure of impacts.

The use of the Digital Champions Network

Age UK National Office facilitated access to the Digital Champions Network (DCN) online platform as part of their funding and support offer to Age UK South Lakeland. All IT Volunteers were offered the chance to register as learners on the DCN, but it was not compulsory. The project co-ordinator made use of DCN resources such as handouts for learners on essential digital tasks such as setting up emails. Some IT Volunteers use the DCN monitoring tools to keep a tally of the clients helped and the types of skills supported.

Project outcomes

Outcomes for beneficiaries

The project supported beneficiaries effectively by offering a range of support led by what people wanted to learn. Loaning tablets to people who needed them encouraged initial engagement, giving people the opportunity to become familiar with a device they could use in their own time. Some of the recipients of loaned tablets had requested to purchase the device at the end of the project period, and others had been spurred to purchase a device (usually a tablet) themselves.

The Project Co-ordinator reported a social benefit for people attending the drop-ins, which could help in reducing isolation. Those who received support at home tended to be those with the least experience and confidence:

“I feel I have got over the most important hurdle, because I had this enormous build-up of fear about technology.”

The client-led approach, finding out what people’s interests or needs are and then supporting them to achieve their goals, suited the beneficiaries we spoke to:

“The [IT Volunteer] went at the pace that I could enjoy. I did not feel under any pressure; I did not feel bombarded with too much stuff. I feel really happy about it because I have the email, and I can browse for anything I need.”

All the beneficiaries we spoke to were more convinced at the end of the intervention than they had been at the start that the internet can make their lives easier, and would strongly recommend the project to family and friends.

Outcomes for Digital Champions

The Digital Champions (IT Volunteers) we spoke to were positive about the difference they felt their support was making to older people; it gave them a sense of satisfaction: “I have enjoyed it and feel it is useful to the community.” And also of occupation: “It has given me something interesting to do.”

They were particularly positive about the benefits of the one-to-one sessions at home, feeling that this was the most effective way to support older people.

The IT Volunteers’ confidence in their own digital skills had also increased, both as a result of helping older people and learning from project staff and other volunteers.

Outcomes for Age UK South Lakeland

- As a result of this project, the organisation now has digital inclusion embedded into their initial assessment of clients, meaning that it is part of a holistic package of support.
- There is greater awareness amongst staff and volunteers of the benefits of digital inclusion for older people.
- An experienced and dedicated cohort of IT volunteers created as part of the project means there is greater capacity to support older people with their essential digital skills.

Legacy and next steps

The outcomes described above provide a strong legacy of the project and a driver for continuing the service. Managers told us:

“We think we are in a strong position to continue to offer the services, because it has become so embedded in our assessment and referral systems, and because all staff now have the awareness around it.”

Funding for the dedicated Project Coordinator post has now ended. The Volunteer Coordinator has taken over the role of managing the IT Volunteers, who remain as a valuable resource, so the organisation continues to be able to offer the same level of support to clients. Ideally the organisation would like to secure further funds for dedicated

co-ordination of the IT Volunteers, and also to enable the continuation of the home visits, which are resource-intensive but which staff and volunteers consider to be the most effective and appropriate way to deliver support to their particular demographic.

Top takeaways from Age UK South Lakeland's One Digital project

- ✓ Training all client-facing staff as Digital Champions made the support offered to clients consistent and holistic, as well as more sustainable
- ✓ Thorough assessment by case officers of beneficiary needs, including digital support needs, so that digital is seen as part of a holistic package of support whenever anyone engages with the organisation
- ✓ The matching of IT volunteers with clients, approached in a similar way to a befriending service to maximise the chances of positive outcomes, from a known and trusted local service
- ✓ Highly motivated group of volunteers, many retired, remain committed to the Digital Champion role and bring a range of previous experience and skills to the role
- ✓ A tablet loan scheme to address the problems of access to kit at the same time as supporting skills and encouraging motivation and enabling self-directed learning
- ✓ Flexible drop-in sessions held at known venues in the local community to encourage and maintain client's independent digital capabilities
- ✓ One-to-one client-led support including home visits and including the set-up of devices in people's homes where required.

One Digital supporting partner: Age UK National

Airdrie Citizens Advice Bureau: Digital skills and citizen welfare

Background

Airdrie Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) <https://www.airdriecab.co.uk/> is part of the Citizens Advice Network in Scotland. The Bureau works with approximately 4,000 people a year in the North Lanarkshire area, offering advice on welfare, consumer and citizen rights and allied services. The Bureau has 30 staff, and a cohort of 53 volunteers who are central to service delivery.

Airdrie CABs Digital Champion project ran for one year from autumn 2017 and was part of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation (SCVO) One Digital programme. SCVO gave Airdrie CAB support in the form of training for Digital Champions, plus a grant through their Digital Participation Charter Fund. The then CEO also attended SCVO's Senior Leaders Programme.

Airdrie CAB's motivation for engaging with digital inclusion

There were several drivers for the CAB to engage with digital inclusion:

- Public service reform: the development of ‘digital by default’ welfare systems such as Universal Credit, and other government services such as the EU Settlement scheme, had triggered a huge increase in client need for ‘assisted digital’.
- Local demographics: the Bureau’s catchment is a rural one with pockets of high levels of social exclusion which is associated with digital exclusion
- Client need: a survey by the Bureau found that 38% of those attending for benefits advice had never used the internet; the Bureau were also aware of particular client concerns about online security relating to online banking.
- Local authority resources: decreases in funding from the local authority led the Bureau to do more work digitally, delivering through their digital channels to increase their reach while keeping costs down.
- Outreach: the Bureau have an organisational mission to increase their reach, and new channels such as webchat contribute to this aim.
- Organisational upskilling: The Bureau recognised the need to improve the digital skills of the staff and volunteers within the CAB.

Aims of Airdrie CAB’s One Digital project

The aim of the project – called ‘Beyond the Screen’ – was to provide essential digital skills support to Bureau clients who lacked the skills needed to access a range of public and consumer services online.

Airdrie CAB’s Digital Champions

Both Bureau staff and volunteers were offered the opportunity to join the Beyond the Screen project by training as Digital Champions. The project team looked for people who already had a particular interest and/or skill in digital, and the motivation to help others engage. Digital Champion training was a mix of:

- initial Digital Champion training provided by SCVO, including an introduction to digital inclusion, the concept of essential digital skills and national digital skills frameworks
- in-house training in specialist topics such as assisting with digital applications for Universal Credit, EU Settlement scheme and others, including case studies and role plays
- e-learning from Citizens Advice Scotland, focused on the Digital Champions’ own essential digital skills.

Seven Champions were trained during the course of the project, with the majority being pre-existing volunteers at the Bureau.

Airdrie CAB’s beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the project were existing clients of the Bureau, usually identified during their first contact – for instance if they needed advice on filling in their tax return online. The project also started a successful outreach programme through the local library, offering

an advice drop-in service for local people which surfaced digital skills support needs. Some beneficiaries were also referred for support by local partners, such as the community mental health team and Job Centre Plus.

In addition, some of the Bureau volunteers also benefited from digital skills development and support given by their peers who were Digital Champions.

Project activities

Digital skills support was primarily provided at the CAB offices and fortnightly at the local library, mostly on a one to one basis according to demand. Occasional group sessions were also held in community venues including schools and colleges.

The service was also promoted via ad hoc presentations in a range of community settings including mother and toddler groups, food banks and carers organisations.

The most common skills support needs for clients were:

- Foundation digital skills including how to access a device such as a tablet or laptop
- Essential digital skills such as:
 - setting up and accessing email
 - accessing information online such as benefits information or advice on debt management
 - using the internet to look for work
 - making and managing an application online such as a benefit claim
 - preparing information for the Court Service.

The Bureau volunteers also received help from Champions with some of the essential digital skills for work such as word processing and scanning, and some volunteers got support on more specialist tasks such as managing social media accounts, or communications design work.

In addition to using Digital Champions to support clients Airdrie CAB have also produced guides to online safety which are available on their website, and 'Biteable' short video animations to promote their digital skills support services.

In total, the project supported over 400 clients and an additional 32 staff and volunteers to improve their digital skills.

Project outcomes

Outcomes for beneficiaries

Benefits for Bureau clients reported to us by project staff included:

- library visitors, previously unable to use the internet, being supported to use the internet to search and apply for jobs
- Bureau clients who improved their digital confidence sufficiently to be able to engage with online services themselves, meaning they no longer needed to come to the Bureau for help.

The beneficiaries we spoke to for our case study research were Bureau volunteers, who had received digital skills training from Champions who were either project staff or fellow volunteers trained as Champions. They were all very likely to recommend digital skills support, particularly 'having more information on how to use things safely' and had increased their digital confidence as a direct result of the support they had received.

Outcomes for Digital Champions

Champions told us they had a better understanding of how digital exclusion affects a range of people in a range of different circumstances, and an improved ability to empathise and give support as a result. Champions also reported a feeling of satisfaction through seeing people gain in confidence as they developed their digital skills.

The project team told us that volunteer Champions felt empowered by the Digital Champion role, being responsible for something that is valuable and that provides knowledge and skills for other people: "I'm a Champion and it's my job to do this to keep this alive within the organisation".

Champions told us they valued the organisation's culture of staff and volunteers all supporting each other to learn. Some volunteer Digital Champions had gone on to take up paid roles in the organisation.

Outcomes for Airdrie CAB

Project staff told us of a number of benefits of the project for the organisation:

- Increasing the reach of the Bureau in the local community, drawing in people who would not previously have used their services; this also meant that some preventative support could be offered, helping people avoiding crises which would otherwise have required more sustained interventions
- Alleviating some of the demand on the Bureau's advisors, by offering them a route to refer people for dedicated digital skills support from Digital Champions
- Improving the overall 'digital maturity' of the organisation, through a generally increased awareness of the importance of supporting essential digital skills for staff and clients, for example by incorporating digital skills training into the standard training given to all Bureau advisors.
- The project was a 'game-changer' for the Bureau in that the expertise and learning gained from it directly influenced their successful bid for further funds to support a financial inclusion project using the Digital Champion model.

Legacy and next steps

The organisation has retained their volunteer and staff Digital Champions, and the project team regard support of essential digital skills as thoroughly embedded in the Bureau's services. Examples of this include:

- Successful bids for funds including support services for EU Settlement scheme applicants and the 'Tech your Finance' project which aims to build financial resilience through digital tools
- Screening of all new Bureau clients to identify digital skills needs
- Specific digital skills campaigns on topics such as online safety, promoted via their website in 'Biteable' videos and other accessible guides.

The Bureau is also now working in partnership with their local authority as part of a digital skills steering group; staff told us that the organisational experience gained through the project puts them in a strong position to contribute to this group.

The Bureau are hoping to source funds for additional facilities such as a digital skills training room, and also to continue and increase the digital skills outreach work which they have found so valuable.

Top takeaways from Airdrie CAB's One Digital project

- ✓ Offering the Digital Champion training to all workers, whether paid staff or volunteers, contributed to ensuring that digital inclusion is understood as a cross-organisational responsibility
- ✓ A strong culture of peer-to-peer learning, and of valuing volunteer workers as core to delivery, enabled the Digital Champion role to be quickly cascaded through the organisation
- ✓ Establishing delivery partnerships with local services – most notably the library service – fostered multiple benefits for the organisation, not only contributing to the direct project outputs but also opening up avenues for preventative work and reaching a previously untapped demographic for the Bureau
- ✓ Establishing a thorough understanding of beneficiary needs, and the place of digital skills support within a broader package of advice and support according to individuals' circumstances, contributed to a holistic service
- ✓ The experience and learning on 'Beyond the screen' was a major factor in a successful funding application for an ongoing financial inclusion project 'Tech your finance'
- ✓ Embedding digital skills into basic training for all advisors has been a strong legacy for the project.
- ✓ Learning from the project also enabled Airdrie CAB to contribute expertise to national policy around digital inclusion for Citizens Advice Scotland

One Digital supporting partner: Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

Brighton & Hove City Council Library Service: Digital skills and access for all

Background

Brighton & Hove City Council Library Service <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/libraries> has one central and 14 local libraries serving local communities. The libraries offer includes free access to computers and WiFi, and volunteers from the 'Library Connect' service help customers access the digital facilities on site.

Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) are also a lead partner in the Digital Brighton & Hove Network <https://www.citizenonline.org.uk/digitalbrightonhove/>, a local cross-sector partnership promoting digital inclusion across the city, facilitated by One Digital partner Citizens Online.

BHCC Library Service's motivation for engaging with digital inclusion

There are diverse policy, economic, social and technology drivers for library services to provide essential digital skills support:

- Statutory duties and standards require libraries to provide equal access for everyone in a Universal Offer. This includes 'having the resources and skills to deliver digital activities and training to the public, especially to individuals with limited digital capacity'.⁸
- Library resources are severely constrained, including staff shortages; shifting transactions online wherever possible reduces pressure on staff, but assistance needs to be available to ensure equality of access is maintained.
- Libraries have a longstanding link to literacy; digital literacy – being able to use information safely and to judge the trustworthiness of information in the digital realm – is now vital for society.
- Libraries are moving into e-books, lower cost than print as losses are less and storage is not an issue. Assistance is needed to ensure everyone can use the e-books service.
- Baseline research and the experience of library staff shows that not all customers have the digital skills needed to make full use of the library services.

Aims of BHCC Library Service's One Digital project

The aim of the BHCC Library Service digital inclusion offer is to provide digital skills support to library customers, including but not limited to help with accessing library services.

BHCC Library Service's Digital Champions

⁸ <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/universal-offers-0>

All 34 Library Officers have the capacity to use digital services and the aptitude to help others included in their job descriptions, as these are regarded as essential skills for library staff. Staff can then opt to specialise in digital support, and receive training which includes Digital Champions Network courses (see below), specific training on online library services such as e-books, and training in Universal Credit online applications.

The Library Connect service is staffed by volunteer Digital Champions who are recruited via local channels, including Citizens Online, and a city-wide online platform Volunteer Plus. Volunteers do not necessarily have any IT background, though some do, but they need an aptitude for helping people. Many are retired, and some students from local universities also apply. Potential volunteers are interviewed by the Digital Co-ordinator, and then shadow another volunteer running a support session. If they are keen to pursue the role, they are assigned their own sessions in their local library or where a slot is available, and monitored and supported by staff.

Volunteers get guidance from library staff on maintaining boundaries with customers and dealing with confidential tasks such as online banking. There is a six-monthly forum, co-convened by the library staff and Citizens Online, where Library Connect volunteers can meet other Digital Champions, hear about resources to support their role, and receive further training.

A total of 23 Library Connect volunteers currently work across the city's libraries.

BHCC Library Service's beneficiaries

Beneficiaries of the library's digital support are members of the public, often but not always older people, accessing library services on site. Beneficiaries primarily self-identify, by asking staff for help. Beneficiary needs fall broadly into help accessing digital services – often the library's own services or other local council services – and help with information-seeking, which might be for leisure or for study/work purposes.

The range of digital skills of the beneficiaries is very varied, some people having almost no experience and needing help with foundation skills, and others being quite expert digital users who need help with specific or specialist queries.

The reduction of local services means libraries are also serving more disadvantaged groups including homeless people, people with special needs, people using the library as a safe place for them and their children. This in turn drives a need for assisted digital services.

Project activities

The staff Digital Champions we spoke to deal with high numbers of digital skills queries, around ten a day, most often related to using library services such as initial log-on, printing and scanning. Where the problem can be easily resolved, staff usually deal with it themselves, and only refer on to the Library Connect volunteers for a bookable session if the query is complex and the staff have other demands on their time, or if a beneficiary asks for a one-to-one session.

The one-to-one support sessions run by Library Connect volunteers are booked in advance and typically last around 45-60 minutes. Sessions might make use of the library computers, or they might use the beneficiary's own device. Beneficiaries can attend up to 8 sessions.

Typical queries include:

- scanning and printing documents such as passports
- using e-books services on e-readers, tablets and smartphones
- accessing council services such as Blue Badge or housing services
- accessing online newspaper and magazine services such as RB Digital and Which?

The Library Connect service currently offers 17 sessions a week across seven sites in the city, and the service scales up and down according to the availability of volunteers. Volunteer hours are recorded via the Volunteer Plus management platform.

During the course of the One Digital project, staff from Citizens Online also ran a series of workshops for beneficiaries, for example during the local Older People's Festival and the annual Get Online Week. These covered topics such as online safety, getting started with tablets, getting started with social media.

The use of the Digital Champions Network

Citizens Online facilitate access to the Digital Champions Network online network as part of their support offer to Brighton & Hove City Council. Both library staff and Library Connect volunteers are encouraged to use the DCN course and resources. The project staff see it as repository of tried and tested resources which the library service does not have the capacity to create itself.

Project outcomes

Outcomes for beneficiaries

Outcomes for beneficiaries who receive ad hoc help from staff in the flow of overall customer service are hard to capture, but staff and volunteers participated in a two-week city-wide 'snapshot' data collection programme (administered by Citizens Online). This showed over 8000 people across the city received help from Digital Champions between May 2017 and May 2019. (Data on the proportion of these delivered by the Library Service is not currently collected.)

Beneficiaries we spoke to who had received additional support from a Library Connect volunteer found the advice effective for resolving specific problems which required more in-depth help, and felt they were able to get more out of the library services as a result of the volunteer's help.

Outcomes for Digital Champions

The staff we spoke to felt the Digital Champion role and training had helped them to increase their own digital skills, and their confidence in supporting others.

Volunteer Digital Champions spoke of the satisfaction gained from helping others in their local community, particularly in regard to using online services safely: “It’s citizen advice – it’s a moral thing. I don’t like to see people being swindled.”

Outcomes for BHCC Library Service

- Digital inclusion work is central to the library service and part of its statutory mission. As a result of the Library Connect service, Brighton and Hove Library Service has increased capacity to help local people access online services, which eases pressure on library staff.
- The Library Service’s contribution to the Digital Brighton and Hove Network has enabled the service to be community focused and networked. Local people talk of ‘my library’, and library services are a central part of the multi-agency partnership which seeks to deliver a joined-up approach to digital inclusion in the locality.
- Participation in this local partnership network has elicited interest across the City Council as an example of community working, especially with third sector organisations, to increase the effectiveness of service delivery.

Legacy and next steps

Managers stress that digital inclusion is central to the Library offer, and the work will continue as a core service: “You can’t have libraries without digital... Our aim is to keep the skills of staff and volunteers up to date and then hope that over time there will be more resources to increase the offer we can make to customers. If we close services, just like if we close libraries, they won’t open up again. We need to keep things going, so we have a system to reinvest in.”

A recruitment drive via the newly embedded Volunteer Plus platform aims to increase the numbers of Library Connect volunteers over the coming months. The team are aware that there are likely to be significant numbers of digitally excluded people who cannot attend sessions at libraries, and are considering starting a ‘Library Connect at Home’ service, whereby volunteers would undertake home visits.

The Digital Brighton and Hove Network, convened by Citizens Online, is considered to be central to sustaining the Library Connect service and ensuring it joins up with other channels of local delivery, particularly third sector services. Funding until June 2020 will support planning for sustainability across the local area.

Top takeaways from BHCC Library Service One Digital project

- ✓ A hyper-local service – 95% of Brighton and Hove’s population live within 1 mile of a library – available 7 days a week
- ✓ Baselining of the demographic and digital exclusion profiles of the local population, combined with mapping of existing services, encouraged optimal use of the available local resources
- ✓ Library devices on-site and the provision of free WiFi mean the barrier of access to kit and connectivity is overcome

- ✓ The careful introduction of a volunteer-based service as an adjunct to existing staff services ensures that staff do not see the Library Connect service as a threat but as added value to their own customer service work
- ✓ Staff with high awareness and expertise in digital skills support work in concert with volunteers who supplement and extend the capacity and capability of the staff support
- ✓ Networking with other local services, council and third sector, enabled a joined-up, community-focused approach.

One Digital supporting partner: Citizens Online

Poplar HARCA: Digital skills and employment

Background

Poplar HARCA <https://www.poplarharca.co.uk/> are a social housing provider in the borough of Tower Hamlets in East London. They have 10,000 homes in the Poplar area of the borough, and future plans for expansion and regeneration.

The Poplar HARCA digital inclusion project ran from June 2018 to June 2019 and was part of the Clarion Futures One Digital programme, which focuses on embedding essential digital skills support into employment and training services.

Poplar HARCA's motivation for engaging with digital inclusion

There were several drivers for Poplar HARCA to engage with digital inclusion:

- Local policy: the London Borough of Tower Hamlets has a mission to be 'paperless' by 2021
- Organisational channel shift: to encourage their residents to transact with them online via the Poplar HARCA residents' portal
- Community inclusion: to improve social inclusion in their locality by improving levels of digital participation, which previous research had shown to be low
- Resident employability: to contribute to the aims of their Employment Support Service by helping clients acquire the essential digital skills needed to find and secure a job.

Aims of Poplar HARCA's One Digital project

Poplar HARCA had previously run a project where staff delivered basic IT skills support for residents. The One Digital project aimed to build on that experience by recruiting volunteer Digital Champions to provide targeted essential digital skills support to clients of their Employment Support Service, and as a result improving their ability to find and secure work.

Poplar HARCA's Digital Champions

The project team recruited volunteer Digital Champions from the local area through their existing volunteer programme, with the Volunteer Coordinator conducting initial screening interviews.

Recruits were of working age, and the aim was to provide the volunteers with transferrable skills that would help them into future employment. The team wanted to ensure that volunteers were strongly motivated and would be committed to the Champion role. Some of the recruits had previous experience as trainers, some had IT expertise, but the main criteria were enthusiasm for helping people and willingness to commit to the role. Twenty-one people were recruited of whom fifteen became regularly active Digital Champions.

Initial training was through an induction day run by the project team, followed by online learning via the Digital Champions Network (see below). Recruits then shadowed team members and other Digital Champions as they delivered support sessions for clients, before going on to take charge of sessions themselves.

Poplar HARCA's beneficiaries

Beneficiaries were identified primarily through the Poplar HARCA employment support service, and some other local services. They were a mix of working ages, from young mothers to people over 50, including long-term unemployed. A large proportion were from BAME communities, and many did not have English as their first language.

Initial screening of beneficiaries was done by the employment advisors from the Employment Support Service, using an online digital skills screening tool provided by Clarion Futures. The employment advisors developed a plan with the client about what digital skills they needed help with, which then got passed on to the Digital Champion as part of the referral.

Project activities

Weekly digital skills support sessions were run on a group basis in Poplar HARCA community centre's IT suites, with several Digital Champions at each session so that intensive support could be given where needed. Clients generally attended five sessions in total, usually with the same Digital Champions throughout. Volunteer Champions also provided one-to-one sessions for some beneficiaries.

The focus of the sessions was on skills support related to job-seeking. The sessions were delivered using laptops and desktops (i.e. devices with keyboards rather than touchscreens), the most relevant technology for the workplace.

The most common digital skills supported were:

- Foundation digital skills such as setting up an email account and printing documents
- Essentials skills for seeking work, in particular how to create a CV, how to use the internet to look for work
- Workplace information processing skills such as using Microsoft Office software (word processing, spreadsheets etc.)

Clients who needed help with language skills were given sessions that combined basic English language skills support with digital skills and/or were referred to Poplar HARCA's ESOL support services.

In total, 331 people were supported during the course of the project.

The use of the Digital Champions Network

Clarion Futures facilitated access to the Digital Champions Network online platform as part of their funding and support offer to Poplar HARCA. The project team made the completion of the DCN 'Digital Champion Essentials' course mandatory for their volunteer Digital Champions, and encouraged them to do additional courses, thereby earning Digital Badges to enhance their CVs. Project staff also made use of the DCN for specialist guidance on topics like supporting learners with disabilities, and resources such as templates for recruitment flyers. The reporting tools on the DCN – tallies of learners helped, and records of skills supported – were also used alongside in-house monitoring tools.

Project outcomes

Outcomes for beneficiaries

The beneficiaries we spoke to all said they would recommend the Digital Champion approach to others, valuing in particular the personalised nature of the support:

"It's a gentle way of doing it, you are not stressed, you are learning at your own pace. I could call on... one-to-one support."

They said the support had increased their digital confidence and made them more aware of the benefits of digital participation – particularly in relation to job-seeking.

Digital Champions and project staff pointed to particularly positive outcomes for those who were complete digital beginners, for those who needed ESOL support, and for those who otherwise were unable to access digital devices. The support the project gave beneficiaries – while not enough in itself to secure employment – definitely contributed to this outcome for some people:

"We had one lady whose first language was not English who came to the Employment Support service unable to use the internet or to create a CV. By the end of the project she had secured a job at Primark which she applied for online."

Outcomes for Digital Champions

Digital Champions experienced a range of positive impacts as a result of their role:

- the satisfaction of sharing knowledge and helping others
- increased self-confidence, especially for example if ill-health or other circumstances had been a challenge
- increased social interaction, particularly through building working relationships with other Champions
- development of key employment skills including team-working and problem-solving

- work opportunities provided by the project – several volunteer Champions have become paid ‘bank’ (i.e. session) workers for Poplar HARCA, continuing to deliver digital skills support.

Outcomes for Poplar HARCA

Project staff reported several benefits for the wider organisation:

- increased capability for the Employment Support Service, as employment advisors could refer clients on for dedicated digital skills support
- increased capacity for the employment service, as some Champions have been retained as bank workers
- contributing to the KPIs of the employment support service by helping clients find and secure work using their improved digital skills
- offering a more integrated support service for clients overall.

Legacy and next steps

Clarion Futures One Digital funding has now come to an end, but the project has retained some volunteer Digital Champions and bank workers who will continue to deliver support in two of Poplar HARCA’s community centres, and they plan to continue to embed digital skills screening into the Employment Support Services client journey.

Learning from the One Digital project has reinforced the relevance of digital inclusion and in particular essential digital skills support across the whole range of community support programmes Poplar HARCA delivers. The team want to do further digital inclusion work using Digital Champions, and funding proposals have been submitted for a project on in-work poverty including essential digital skills support, using the Champion model as a key aspect of delivery.

Top takeaways from Poplar HARCA’s One Digital project

- ✓ An effective volunteer recruitment service was already in place, and helped the swift set up of an efficient recruitment and training process for Digital Champions
- ✓ The project integrated well into the existing employment support offer: employment advisors could see the benefits, and were happy to screen and refer clients
- ✓ The Digital Champion role can be effectively presented as a way to boost CVs for jobseekers, particularly those with an interest in digitally related employment
- ✓ A light-touch screening tool enabled employment advisors to systematically and quickly identify digital skills needs amongst their clients
- ✓ Because the beneficiaries had a common objective of finding work, group skills support sessions worked well, fostering peer support and mutual self-help
- ✓ A high ratio of Digital Champions to learners during group sessions, and the availability of one-to-one sessions where required, meant that beneficiaries with varying needs could be given appropriate levels of support

- ✓ DCs with previous experience of language teaching could create combined ESOL/digital skills sessions, which were effective for learners who might otherwise have been difficult to engage.

One Digital supporting partner: Clarion Futures

4. Discussion

4.1 Embedding digital skills support: what does it mean?

An exploration of the embedding of digital skills support into organisational services was a key focus of this work. Each project aspired to some form of embeddedness, and we wanted to understand how they defined this, and what factors they considered either supported or challenged this aspiration.

Our working definition at the start of the case study research was that embedded Digital Champions were those who provided digital skills support as part of a pre-existing transaction with clients. While this definition was born out by some of the cases studies, it became clear that the term also had considerably wider meanings for organisations engaged in digital inclusion work.

While our informants had wide-ranging views, several common themes around definitions of embeddedness emerged, albeit playing out in different ways according to the nature of the organisation and their Digital Champion services. We have grouped the themes roughly under two headings: cultural and operational.

Cultural aspects of embeddedness

Internal communication

When we asked project staff what they understood by the term ‘embedded’ as applied to their Digital Champion work, their initial responses very often concerned whole-organisation awareness:

Embedded means getting everyone on board, so that they all understand the place digital technologies and digital inclusion has in supporting a person’s overall wellbeing.

Our projects recognised the significant communications work required to achieve this kind of awareness right across their organisations at all levels.

Successful buy-in from all stakeholders depended on explaining the benefits digital inclusion brings. This includes the benefits not just for the organisation’s clients or customers, but for frontline staff and managers and for the organisation as a whole. Informants also told us that care needs to be taken that a new Digital Champion service does not add to existing workloads or undermine or threaten existing staff roles; communications needs very careful planning in this regard.

Our interviewees also pointed out that awareness needs to be two-way: Digital Champions and project managers needed a good understanding of the organisation’s services. This was more easily achieved for organisations whose Champions were pre-existing staff or

volunteers. In projects where Digital Champions were recruited from scratch – particularly if they were volunteers – furnishing them with a comprehensive understanding of the organisation’s overall services, aims and objectives, and where the Digital Champion service fitted, needs particular attention.

The communications task was not just a case of ‘selling-in’ at the beginning, but an ongoing effort, so that all stakeholders could see evidence of the anticipated benefits as the project unfolds. This was also noted as being a significant aid to the recruitment and retention of Digital Champions, particularly if the role is a voluntary one.

Training and support

For all our informants, the training and support of both Digital Champions and other staff and volunteers was a pre-requisite to embedding the service.

All our projects felt that the ideal was to give all staff and volunteers a basic level of awareness training – what digital exclusion is and why it matters – where this did not already exist. Some of the case study organisations have incorporated digital inclusion training into their standard induction, and all saw the benefits this would bring. As a corollary to this, staff need to know where to refer or signpost people who they identified as being digitally excluded. A simple signposting strategy which all staff understand is required as a minimum.

Our informants varied as to whether they offered more ‘specialist’ Digital Champion training to all staff, to staff in client-facing roles only, or to a narrower group of staff or volunteers recruited solely for the Champion role. In the latter case, Digital Champion recruits should receive an induction about the organisation as a whole, not just about the Champion role. We discuss the recruitment, training and support of Digital Champions in more detail in section 4.2 below.

Some of our case study organisations had also identified a need for staff and volunteers to improve their own digital skills and recognised the potential for Digital Champions to contribute to this upskilling. For this to work effectively, an open culture of peer-to-peer support needed to be instilled in the workforce.

Embedding in the community

While most aspects of embeddedness are internal to the organisation, our case study participants all pointed to the importance of being ‘embedded’ in the local community. This took a number of forms:

- understanding the demographics of the local population and the implications of this for what levels and types of digital skills may need supporting
- finding out what support is already available locally for digital access and digital skills
- co-operating with other local stakeholders – this might be third sector organisations, health and social care providers or local authorities – to ensure that digital support is joined-up and non-duplicative (some of our informants pointed out that that this may mean changing your plans)

- partnering with other organisations or services on direct delivery – local libraries are often mentioned here, alongside local voluntary services and employment services
- connecting with the private sector – whether as sources of Digital Champions or as sources of IT kit or connectivity or venues.

All of this requires an organisational culture which recognises the value of partnerships across organisational and sectoral boundaries.

Operational aspects of embeddedness

Assessment and referral

All our case study organisations placed a strong emphasis on the identification and assessment of people needing digital skills support. It was seen as one of the main ways to embed digital inclusion into the organisation’s core operations, so that whatever service people might be accessing – welfare advice, employment support, library services – the digital element of it was quickly surfaced.

Often the ambition is to ask about digital access and digital skills on first contact with all new clients or customers. This might be very light-touch: reception staff asking ‘Do you use the internet?’ and ‘Would you like some help to use it/use it more?’ Or it could be that questions about digital needs are included in any formal needs assessments the service already conducts. In any event, the key is getting digital skills support needs surfaced as early as possible in the client/customer journey.

Where the objectives of the digital skills support are particularly targeted – for example to improve people’s job-seeking ability – we saw use of bespoke screening tools to identify beneficiary need. These tools can also function as a baseline measure for evaluation of outcomes. We return to the issue of measurement and evaluation in more detail below.

All our informants emphasised the necessity of getting to know individual beneficiaries at the start of the process, so the resulting support fits their needs: “You have to know your audience. We have to ask some quite probing questions so that we understand where people are.”

Referrals could also be two-way. For some of our informants, the fact that beneficiaries of the digital skills support got referred to other parts of the organisation was an important indicator of the embeddedness of the service. It potentially widened the reach of the organisation to demographics not being engaged through other service offers, and/or enabled early intervention work which in turn could prevent the need for more intensive interventions at a later stage.

Pre-existing transactions as context for digital support

As previously mentioned, our working definition of an embedded Digital Champion was someone who provided digital skills support as part of a pre-existing transaction with

clients. We saw this model clearly in action in two of our participant organisations, where frontline staff or volunteers – in our case studies they were providing either welfare advice or library services – gave assistance for specific digital tasks to clients or customers in the course of helping them to achieve a particular transaction. These forms of support ranged from:

- very brief interventions or ‘nudges’ to encourage independent use of digital, for example help to use a library printer, through to
- intensive forms of digital assistance, for example completing online Universal Credit applications alongside the client.

The main challenge our informants referred to regarding this approach was time; where the digital element is not the primary purpose of the transaction – and therefore not generally gathered in KPIs – busy staff or volunteers can only afford to give limited time to it. To mitigate this, the projects we investigated combined the embedded digital support with a supplementary Digital Champion service, to which clients could be referred for more intensive and focused help with their digital needs. In most cases, the more intensive support was delivered by volunteer Digital Champions recruited and trained specifically for the role.

Multiple support needs

All of our case study participants raised the issue of multiple support needs of beneficiaries, and how this in itself was a driver towards integrated service provision. Many people needing digital support are likely to have other support needs, with might include:

- learning disabilities or mental health problems
- welfare, financial issues or housing problems
- English as a second language.

Our projects tackled these challenges in a range of ways:

- training for Digital Champions on safeguarding and mental health awareness
- clear procedures for Digital Champions on when referral to colleagues or other services is necessary
- training for all staff on recognising the digital exclusion aspect of a presenting problem (which is not always obvious).

One project had Digital Champions with experience of ESOL teaching who created integrated digital and language skills training sessions. Similarly, literacy/numeracy skills can also be embedded into digital skills sessions, where Champions have appropriate expertise.

Monitoring activities and measuring results

Our informants felt that effective project monitoring could be a major contributor to embeddedness if the outcomes of Digital Champion activities can be integrated into

outcomes measures for the whole organisation or service. Our informants noted that where digital skills support can be shown to directly contribute to a service KPI – for example where a client of an employment service secures a job using newly acquired digital skills, or a benefits claimant is newly able to self-manage their online claims, or a socially isolated person makes connections with newly acquired online communication skills – this is one of the most powerful drivers for embeddedness. However, it requires monitoring and evaluation processes to be in place, and then to be able to link the digital skills intervention to the wider service outcome with a plausible impact chain. Our case study participants had made steps in this direction, and we discuss some of the challenges around monitoring and evaluation in more detail in section 4.3 below.

4.2 Digital Champions: recruitment, training and support

The Digital Champion role is the key mechanism in all the One Digital partners' delivery programmes. As discussed above, all our projects considered the effective recruitment and support of Digital Champions to be central to the success of their digital inclusion effort and to embedding it into their organisation's culture and operations. In this section we drill down further into the profile of Digital Champion recruits, how they are identified and what successful training and support looks like.

Who are Digital Champions?

Champions can be divided broadly into two categories: volunteer workers and paid workers.

- Volunteer Digital Champions

The volunteer Champions we spoke to were diverse in background and motivation for taking on the role. A number of them were retired, and their motivation for taking on the role was a mix of philanthropic – a desire to help others – and personal – a desire for useful occupation, social connection and/or to maintain knowledge and skills. Champions of this type often had previous experience relevant to the role, particularly teaching or training, or in IT.

Other volunteers were of working age, and often undertook the role to develop their knowledge and skills and to boost their CVs. These volunteers might be students at the start of their careers, or people who had experienced a break in employment due to ill health or redundancy or other personal circumstances. These volunteer Champions often considered themselves as peers with the people they were supporting to develop digital skills.

- Paid Digital Champions

Paid Champions were also a mix. Some Champions were staff in customer-facing roles who had digital support as part of their standard job description – library workers were typical of this type. Others had primary roles such as welfare advice and had specialised in helping

with the digital support needs so often surfaced during their transactions with clients, seeing this as complementing and enhancing their main work.

The third group of paid Champions were dedicated solely to the Digital Champion role; they might be salaried or session workers, and they generally supported clients who had been referred on from other services in the organisation.

Champions' prior skills

All the Champions we spoke to rated themselves at least 'fairly confident' in their own digital skills before taking on the role, with more than half rating themselves as 'very confident'. Those who had less confidence at the start – which was generally though not exclusively older Digital Champions – said that undertaking the role had led them to improve their own skills, learning as they went along.

Project staff all emphasised that the qualities they valued most in prospective Digital Champions were attitudinal:

“A DC is simply someone who is prepared to help someone else use digital technology. In both our staff and volunteers we look for confidence in engaging with technology and a can-do approach. They don't need to have tons of prior technical knowledge – we can train them in that if needs be. The confidence and attitude are the important things.”

Recruiting Digital Champions

- Volunteer Digital Champions

Some projects recruited volunteer Champions from scratch, advertising through local channels using word of mouth, printed flyers, organisation websites and social media, as well as digital volunteer platforms. All projects saw recruitment as a challenge. The value of having a Volunteer Coordinator to support recruitment was highlighted, giving structure to the recruitment process and ensuring a consistent approach to induction and onboarding (see below). Projects with a substantial number of Champions of working age emphasised the need for a rolling recruitment programme, to replace individuals who moved on from the role.

Some Champions were recruited from existing banks of volunteers, the advantage being that the projects already knew the individuals to be reliable and motivated.

- Paid Digital Champions

Some staff opted-in to the Digital Champion role when it was offered by their organisation. This might be because they saw it as complementary to their existing work with clients or customers, and/or because they simply had an interest in helping people use technology. As previously mentioned, for some staff the role of Digital Champion is required in their job descriptions (whether explicitly labelled as such or not).

Training and supporting Digital Champions

Initial training

Our case study organisations offered several types of training:

- General in-house induction: covered topics such as safeguarding, mental health awareness, health and safety, welfare reform; generally offered to all staff/volunteers, not just Digital Champions. Always done face-to-face, either one-to-one or in groups.
- Customised in-house Digital Champion training: covered topics such as understanding digital inclusion (the national picture and the specifics for the organisation's clients/customers), managing digital support sessions, online safety, password management. Always done face-to-face, either one-to-one or in groups. Some partners brought in external trainers, including in collaboration with their One Digital partner.
- Generic Digital Champion e-learning: most projects made use of the Digital Champions Network (DCN).⁹ Projects varied in how much emphasis they placed on completing DCN e-learning modules. Those with Champions who were jobseekers made some modules mandatory, with the consequent earning of digital badges for CVs; others left Champions to explore DCN courses for themselves. Some projects offered DCN training to all new staff joining the organisation, not just those in the Champion role.
- Shadowing and buddying: several projects, particularly those using volunteer Champions, teamed new recruits with existing Champions for an initial period.

Ongoing support

Situations in which Champions said they needed support were both technical and managerial. Examples given to us included: finding out how to help someone with sight loss to get online; whether it was appropriate to continue working with a client with dementia; advice on changes to benefits systems.

All the Champions we spoke to, both staff and volunteers, had access to a named person to provide them with support when required. Some had more than one potential source of support – a digital skills Project Coordinator and/or a Volunteer Coordinator. For projects working across multiple locations, ensuring support for Digital Champions could be quite challenging, and the projects acknowledged that particular effort and attention was needed so that Champions did not feel 'out on a limb'.

Peer-to-peer support was important for both staff and volunteer Champions. Some of the project staff we spoke to felt that they had missed an opportunity to capitalise on this. They recognised that the organisation needed to support the sharing of learning between Champions, and to celebrate their achievements as a group. The fostering of a supportive and open learning environment was considered an important aid to retention of volunteers particularly.

⁹ <https://www.digitalunite.com/what-we-do/digital-champions-network>. All projects had free access to this platform provided by One Digital partner Digital Unite.

Champions told us that they were very used to finding solutions to problems themselves, by ‘Googling the issue’ as well as asking other Champions for advice. Some Champions were aware of a range of specific sources of help online, others less so. Some of the project staff felt they could get better at keeping Champions informed about online resources relevant to their role, and this included making better use of the benefit of free access to the Digital Champions Network practitioner resources which being part of the One Digital programme afforded them.

4.3 Embedding digital support activities into outcomes measurement

Measuring the impact of Digital Champion projects is a tough task. It requires advance planning, can feel burdensome, and can seem to suck away resource from the actual service delivery.

None of our case study participants felt that they had wholly cracked the challenge of capturing rounded and robust evidence of outcomes to do justice to the impacts of their Digital Champion work. The projects encountered a range of barriers and difficulties in attempting to monitor activities and measure their impacts:

- risk of alienating beneficiaries, who very often lack confidence, by asking about their existing digital skills or circumstances lest they feel ‘tested’ and/or demotivated
- reluctance by project staff to ask volunteer Digital Champions to spend time on administrative tasks such as recording their sessions, lest it put them off the volunteering role
- reluctance by Digital Champions to ask questions which they feel are intrusive for the beneficiary
- lack of staff time to aggregate and analyse data – particularly qualitative data – provided by Digital Champions about their activities
- difficulty in designing appropriate reporting tools to capture the diversity of activities Champions undertake, and which use natural language (resulting in a lot of use of the ‘other’ category in pre-defined menus on reporting forms)
- lack of ongoing contact with beneficiaries so that ‘before and after’ measures are not possible.

Embedding Digital Champion activities also raised a specific set of challenges around monitoring and measurement:

- lack of time for frontline staff whose primary role is not digital support to record these supplementary support activities
- practical difficulty of recording fleeting ‘nudge’ type digital support in the busy flow of everyday client/customer service activity

- difficulty in designing evaluation plans where digital skills is not a primary objective but rather an intermediate one on the way to a larger goal – for example securing employment or becoming more socially connected.

Our case study participants had various reflections and insights into ways to mitigate or overcome the challenges they encountered with monitoring and evaluation. The table overleaf combines these with additional hints and tips from the evaluators, based on observations from other One Digital projects since 2016.

There is also a comprehensive set of [guidance and resources on Digital Champion evaluations](#) on the One Digital website.

Measurement activity	Potential challenges	Solutions or mitigations to consider	Resources that might help
1. Understanding digital support needs	Making incorrect assumptions about the levels or types of client need	Conduct desk research for existing data on digital exclusion at national, regional or local population level	Digital exclusion 'heatmap' for the UK (2017) Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index (2019)
		Commission a local baseline study	One Digital guidance on data mapping
		Search existing assessment or outcomes data in your organisation for clues about digital support needs	
		Ask your staff and other stakeholders about digital support needs of clients	Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit: Guide to stakeholder engagement (2017)
		Ask your staff about their own digital support needs	SCVO Essential Digital Skills Toolkit (2018)
		Ask your clients about their needs	Clarion Futures digital skill screening tool (2019)
		2. Defining project outcomes	Being unrealistic about the impacts a project could have
Confusing outputs with outcomes	Develop a logic model to clarify your thinking; ask stakeholders to sense check it		One Digital guidance on impact evaluation (2019) See also Appendix 1
Choosing outcomes that are hard to measure	Refer to standardised digital inclusion outcomes frameworks; don't commit to outcomes over which you do not have complete control		Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit: Outcomes and Indicators (2017)
			SCVO Essential Digital Skills Toolkit (2018)
Difficulty in prioritising outcomes and impacts	Develop a logic model to clarify your thinking; improvement in digital skills may legitimately be the end in itself, or a short-term outcome on the way to a longer-term goal; be clear about which you want to measure		One Digital guidance on impact evaluation (2019) See also Appendix 1

Measurement activity	Potential challenges	Solutions or mitigations to consider	Resources that might help
3. Planning monitoring and evaluation	One-off fleeting digital support hard to monitor	Consider 'snapshot' sampling approach: ask Champions to monitor and record all their interactions but only for a short period (e.g. 1 week, or 1 day a month); ensure chosen time period is typical in terms of project activity	One Digital case study on 'snapshot' approach by SCVO Good Things Foundation overview of Theories of Change
	Difficulty in designing simple, accessible surveys	Aim for 5-minute completion time; only collect data you really need; consider getting expert help to design your surveys; always test your surveys on end-users	Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit: Survey template (2017)
	Before and after measurement timepoints not feasible	Simply asking beneficiaries in retrospect 'what's changed' provides highly valuable insights	See Appendix 1
4. Monitoring projects and evidencing impacts	Champions unwilling to spend time on administration tasks required for monitoring and evaluation	Make reporting tools as minimal as possible; test reporting tools with Champions; consider rewards for data returns; consider 'snapshot' sampling approach as above; consider using external evaluation resource	One Digital case study on snapshot approach by SCVO
	Beneficiaries feel judged or intruded upon by evaluation questions	Frame questions as conversations not interrogations; keep demographic Qs to a bare minimum; make good use of pre-existing data about clients	
	Project staff overwhelmed by evaluation data analysis	Only collect data you know you can use (a duty under GDPR); consider evaluating a typical sample of your project activity, rather than all of it	One Digital guidance on impact evaluation (2019)

Conclusion

Embedding digital inclusion: An organisational checklist

Overall, our case studies show that embeddedness from an organisational perspective is wider and more comprehensive than simply the transactional context at point of delivery.

In the table overleaf we summarise what embeddedness could look like in each of the seven organisational domains identified during our case study research and suggest what processes or inputs might be required to achieve it.

Domain	What does embedded look like?	What is needed to achieve this?
1. Strategy	Digital inclusion is factored in to all strategic planning at board and senior management level	Strategic review to identify all areas (whether internal or client-facing) where digital access or digital skills have impact
		Plans to mitigate adverse impacts and amplify positive impacts
2. Communication	All workers* know what digital inclusion is and understand its relevance for service users and their wellbeing	Rolling communications campaign about digital inclusion including celebration of success stories
3. Community relationships	The organisation understands the digital support needs of the local population	Primary research on local needs; extrapolation from existing national data to establish a baseline
	The organisation is aware of existing local digital support services	Networking with local agencies in public, private and third sector; mapping exercises
	The organisation plans digital support in partnership with other agencies	Networking with local agencies in public, private and third sector; joint funding applications
4. Training and support	All workers are able to identify digitally excluded service users	Digital inclusion awareness training for all existing workers, and included in standard induction
	All workers understand the relevance of essential digital skills for their role	An open learning culture and peer-to-peer support to improve workers' digital skills
	All workers are able to signpost and refer service users appropriately	Procedural guidance for workers on signposting for digital support
	Workers in relevant roles are able to offer dedicated digital support to clients	Digital Champion training for all workers in relevant roles Ongoing L&D support for Digital Champions
	Workers recruited as dedicated Digital Champions understand the organisation's overall aims and services, and where digital skills support fits	Dedicated Digital Champions receive organisational induction, including safeguarding and other relevant training such as mental health awareness, health and safety
5. Pre-existing transactions	On-the-spot, spontaneous digital support and digital nudges by client-facing workers are recognised as a necessary and desirable element of client services	Recognition of digital support tasks in job/role descriptions and in service planning
		Digital support recognised as a KPI, or surfaced as contributing to existing service KPIs
6. Assessment and referral	Digital support needs are identified at the start of a client journey	Review of client contact procedures to ensure digital needs are surfaced in light-touch triage
	Existing client assessments include assessment of digital support needs	Review of client assessment procedures to include relevant digital support needs (and relative importance in light of client and service priorities)
	Digital Champions refer clients to other services where required	Procedural guidance for Digital Champions on referral for other forms support
7. Monitoring and measuring	Digital skills support activities - whether by general staff, embedded Digital Champions or dedicated Digital Champions - are recorded	Extend existing reporting systems to include digital skills support; consider 'snapshot' and sampling approaches to reduce administrative burden
	Outcomes of digital skills support for beneficiaries are tracked	Evaluation of beneficiary impact, ideally baseline & follow-up, or retrospective self-reporting as a minimum
	<i>*The term 'workers' to include both paid staff and volunteers</i>	

Appendix 1

Components of a logic model for a digital champion programme

Logic models (also called theories of change or logical frameworks):

- help you evaluate your Digital Champion programme by giving you a picture of how the programme is intended to work
- identify your programme’s main components, and how they relate to one another
- include the planning and execution of your programme, as well as its intended effects
- there are lots of logic model templates freely available online - choose one that suits your project.

Below are some typical components of a logic model for a Digital Champion programme

Planning and execution	Examples
<i>Inputs</i> i.e. resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding, staff, volunteers, resources such as the Digital Champions Network
<i>Activities</i> i.e. programme events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment, training and support of Digital Champions • Engagement and support of beneficiaries
<i>Outputs</i> i.e. products of programme events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XX number of Digital Champions recruited • XX number of Digital Champions trained • XX number of Beneficiaries recruited/engaged • XX number of Beneficiaries supported

Intended effects	Examples
<i>Short term outcomes</i> i.e. immediate effects in weeks or months Need to be SMART	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Champions improve their digital skills and /or support skills • Beneficiaries improve their digital knowledge and skills, change their beliefs about digital technology, or increase their motivation to engage with digital technology • Organisation recognises the importance of digital skills support for staff, volunteers and beneficiaries
<i>Intermediate outcomes</i> i.e. intended effects occurring over months or years Need to be SMART	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital champions’ wellbeing enhanced by helping others • Beneficiaries’ wellbeing improved in one or more areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Education or training ○ Employment ○ Money ○ Health ○ Socialising ○ Leisure etc • Organisation embeds digital skills support into everyday service delivery
<i>Long-term impacts</i> i.e. years or decades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater digital inclusion, reduced digital exclusion, reduced social exclusion

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