



Building Digital Confidence:

Evaluating Family Fund's Digital Skills
Programme for parents/carers raising
disabled or seriously ill children



Family Fund

Helping disabled children

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Introduction

In 2015, Family Fund began to develop a Digital Skills Programme to support families raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people to use tablet computers, primarily iPads. This was in response to feedback from families who received a grant for a tablet, but found they lacked the skills to support their child's use of the device with confidence, and be able to make the most of the tablet, including its accessibility features. By February 2018, over 600 parent/carers had received face-to-face training through the programme, either through individual home-based sessions or small group workshops in their local area. To evaluate how useful the programme has been for families and how we could make improvements, we asked those who took part to tell us about their abilities, attitudes and skills relating to their tablet before and after the training, and how they felt about doing a range of tasks using their devices.



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Key findings*

Parent/carers were asked about things they knew how to do using their tablets:

- Before training, only 16% of parent/carers said they knew how to apply accessibility settings appropriate to their families' needs on their device. After training, this rose to over 90%.
- When asked how they rated their ability to use their tablet, only 32% of people considered themselves to be good or excellent before the training, but this increased to 70% after the training.
- Some families found particular aspects of the device useful in relation to their child's specific needs. In some cases, training focused on creating resources (such as social stories), with 47% of trainees stating that their confidence in this area increased after training. Similarly, the number of people who felt confident in using their tablet to support communication skills (for example, if their child was non-verbal) rose from 24% before training to 73% afterwards.
- Many parent/carers were concerned about online safety and reported having anxiety about their child using the tablet unsupervised. Prior to training, only 16% of parent/carers said they knew how to set parental controls on their device and just 28% felt confident about staying safe online. After training, these figures rose to over 90% and 70% respectively, and respondents who stated they were happy for their child to use the tablet without supervision went from 41% before training to 70% after.
- Few people felt that they were using their tablet to its full potential. However, once training had taken place, 62% of people considered that they were fully utilising the device, an increase of 49%. Similarly, when asked if they were confident in using their device, 86% of people who had received the training said they were, compared with just 46% before training.
- The digital skill level of those who received training varied immensely, although most already had some digital ability. For example, many were proficient in making purchases online, sending emails, completing online forms and searching for things on the internet. One area that proved useful for almost 40% of families was that of scheduling, particularly using calendars and reminders.



“[The trainer] trained us on exactly what we needed to know at a pace that I was able to understand and was patient and very knowledgeable. I felt I have gained more confidence and understanding of how well I can use the iPad to help with my child's needs.”

* The results presented in this report are based on those surveyed between January and October 2017.

Shelley's story

When Shelley received a tablet grant from Family Fund for her 12-year-old son, Jake who has autism, she signed up for Family Fund's Digital Skills Programme, through which she received one-to-one iPad training in her home. Jake uses the iPad for YouTube and various other apps, but mainly for making photos and videos. *"We like going out and videoing wild rabbits together, as he loves wildlife"* explains Shelley.

"Since the training, Jake is much calmer when using the iPad, because the Apple Education Trainer, Ian, showed him how to reset the iPad if it freezes by holding two buttons down for ten seconds. Jake used to get very stressed if something crashed on the iPad, so Ian showing him this trick has made a huge difference – he feels much more confident with the iPad, and comfortable using it on his own" says Shelley. *"Ian also showed us the Garage Band app, which Jake now loves using to make films and music."*

Shelley has been using the iPad in lots of different ways since she had the training and has built iPad use into Jake's routine by using it as a reward when he has done his homework. Shelley and Jake were also pleased to learn how to store photos and videos on iCloud. *"Ian showed us how to take screenshots and how to delete unwanted photos to avoid using storage."* Shelley explains. *"Overall, the training was really useful. Learning about storage and the reset button was brilliant, as Jake knows how to do these things now. Jake's sister was also able to join in and learn from the training session. It's good that her and Jake can keep learning together!"*

One thing that Shelley really liked was the way she was able to fit the training around her availability.

"I was pleased with how well Ian accommodated us. I told him I wanted to book a session on a day when Jake was at home and he was really flexible, which was great. Ian arrived in plenty of time and was focused on us throughout the training, taking as long as we needed. He let Jake ask the questions and be really involved, which Jake loved! The training has really expanded Jake's knowledge. He doesn't ask me questions any more – now he enjoys teaching me how to do new things on my iPad! It's made us both feel so much more confident."

Foreword

Our world is driven by technology, and the internet is now an integral part of most of our lives. This can bring many benefits. For example, the range of apps and accessibility features that come as standard with many touch-screen devices has opened up a more accessible world to many disabled children and young people. In addition, children often use tablets at school to support learning and development, and it's clear that tablets can support learning and development in ways that more traditional methods cannot.

Recent statistics indicate that 7.8 million people in the UK don't use the internet at all, and a further 7.4 million are limited users, representing around 23% of the population. This group predominantly comprises those classed as disadvantaged, including both those on low incomes, and disabled people. With this in mind, it is likely that many of those who obtain tablets through Family Fund fall on the wrong side of the digital divide¹ and this is something we want to change.

Through our Digital Skills Programme, we are working to address this area and help families understand more about internet safety and the tools they need to use their device to its full potential. By equipping our families with relevant knowledge and understanding, we can support them in accessing the benefits of being online and provide them with the skills they need to navigate the digital world.

Family Fund has seen a huge increase in demand for digital devices over recent years, especially tablet computers. Digital devices are now one of the most frequently requested grant items, with 12,481 grants for computers or tablets, worth over £6.8 million, provided to families across the UK in 2016/17. We believe children will benefit most from using these devices and being online if they have guidance and their families are involved in their online world. Family Fund's Digital Skills Programme was set up with this in mind.

Carers of disabled children are a group with very specific needs, with many parent/carers not able to access other forms of digital support easily. The high support needs of a disabled child, for example, can make it difficult for parent/carers to find time to attend a course. The Digital Skills Programme was built around families' needs and, recognising the logistical difficulties many families raising disabled children face, we arrange for our trainers to go to families rather than the other way around. Most importantly, the training we offer is bespoke; it's based on the devices people receive through their Family Fund grant and the things they want to be able to do with it.

The outcomes from the Digital Skills Programme to date have been tremendously encouraging. Families have reported a range of benefits as a direct result of the training they have received, including reduced anxiety, increased confidence and more time to themselves, as they are able to let their children use the tablet independently. We want to share the positive results from the work we have done to date, and support further work to help our families and also to contribute to reduced digital exclusion amongst families raising disabled children.



Cheryl Ward
Group Chief Executive, Family Fund

"Excellent - much appreciated! It's increased my confidence and made me think about how we are using the iPad. It's been mind-blowing to learn all that the iPad can do."

¹ Good Things Foundation, June 2017:
<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/news-and-blogs/news/152-million-people-uk-not-fully-using-internet-says-new-report>

Our research

All training delivered as part of our Digital Skills Programme has been evaluated since its inception in late 2015, with the evaluation process being adapted as the programme has developed. This report is therefore based on the most recent feedback from surveys completed by 172 individuals between January and October 2017.

The surveys were completed in two parts: one before the training (either several days/weeks in advance or immediately before the start of the session), and the other at the end of the training session.

Both surveys asked identical questions and aimed to measure 'distance travelled' by the person attending the training. These questions queried the trainee's existing ability to use their tablet, frequency of use and knowledge of different features within their device. The surveys also asked them to indicate how confident they felt in a range of areas, from using the internet and downloading apps, to supporting their child in using the tablet and being safe online.

It should be noted that the results reported here do not necessarily interpret the individual learner journey. Whilst most people who completed survey 1 also completed survey 2, not all participants completed both surveys.

All of the trainees surveyed received face-to-face training from an expert trainer. Around half of the trainees were trained at one-to-one sessions in their homes, with the remainder attending small group training workshops. Often workshops would take place within an existing group the parents were part of, for example local parent-carer groups.

The trainees

All of the people who received face-to-face training were parent/carers raising one or more disabled child.

The main eligibility criteria for the programme are that trainees are tablet users (90% of trainees were iPad users) and parent/carers of a disabled child. All of the people who received one-to-one training and many of those who attended group workshops had received their device through a Family Fund grant (46%) or had previously received a Family Fund grant which may have been for something other than a tablet (63%). As such, they fitted within Family Fund's grant eligibility criteria and so were likely to be on a low income.

Demographically, the majority of trainees (89%) were female and almost all were aged between 30 and 59, with just 3% of people falling outside of this age group.



“Not knowing too much about the iPad I found the course really helpful and gave me more of an understanding of what we can use it for.”

Skills and abilities

We asked trainees to tell us about their existing skills level when it came to using their tablet. They were asked to grade their ability to use their tablet, with a score of five points being 'Excellent' and one point indicating that they were unable to use the tablet at all.

Figure 1 shows that before training, only 5% of trainees rated their ability as 'Excellent' and 27% rated themselves as 'Good'. These figures increased to 25% and 45% respectively after training. 57% of people increased their rating after the training and there was an average increase of 0.6 points, with most people's self-rating going up by one point.

Trainees were also asked to state whether they agreed with the following statements, rating the statement five points if they strongly agreed, and one point if they strongly disagreed.

Statements:

- I am happy for my child to use the tablet without supervision
- I know how to apply accessibility settings appropriate to my family's needs
- I know how to apply parental controls
- I feel comfortable deciding who to make friends with or follow online (for example on Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- I know what information I should and shouldn't share online
- I am confident using my tablet
- I feel that I am using my tablet to its full potential
- The tablet makes my life easier

Figure 1.

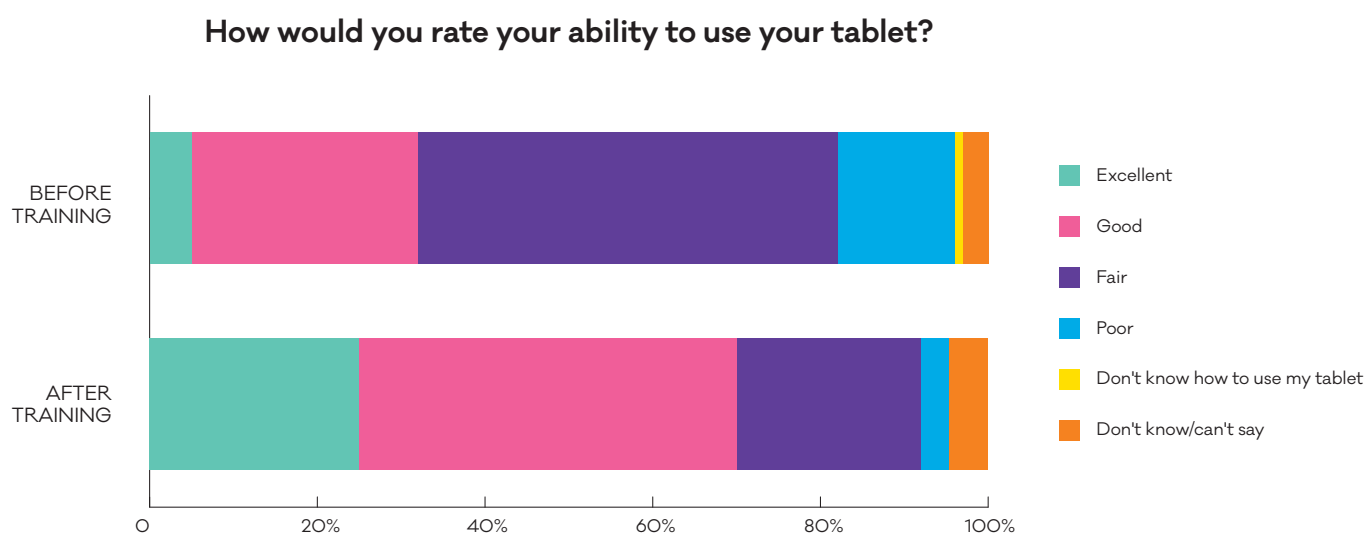
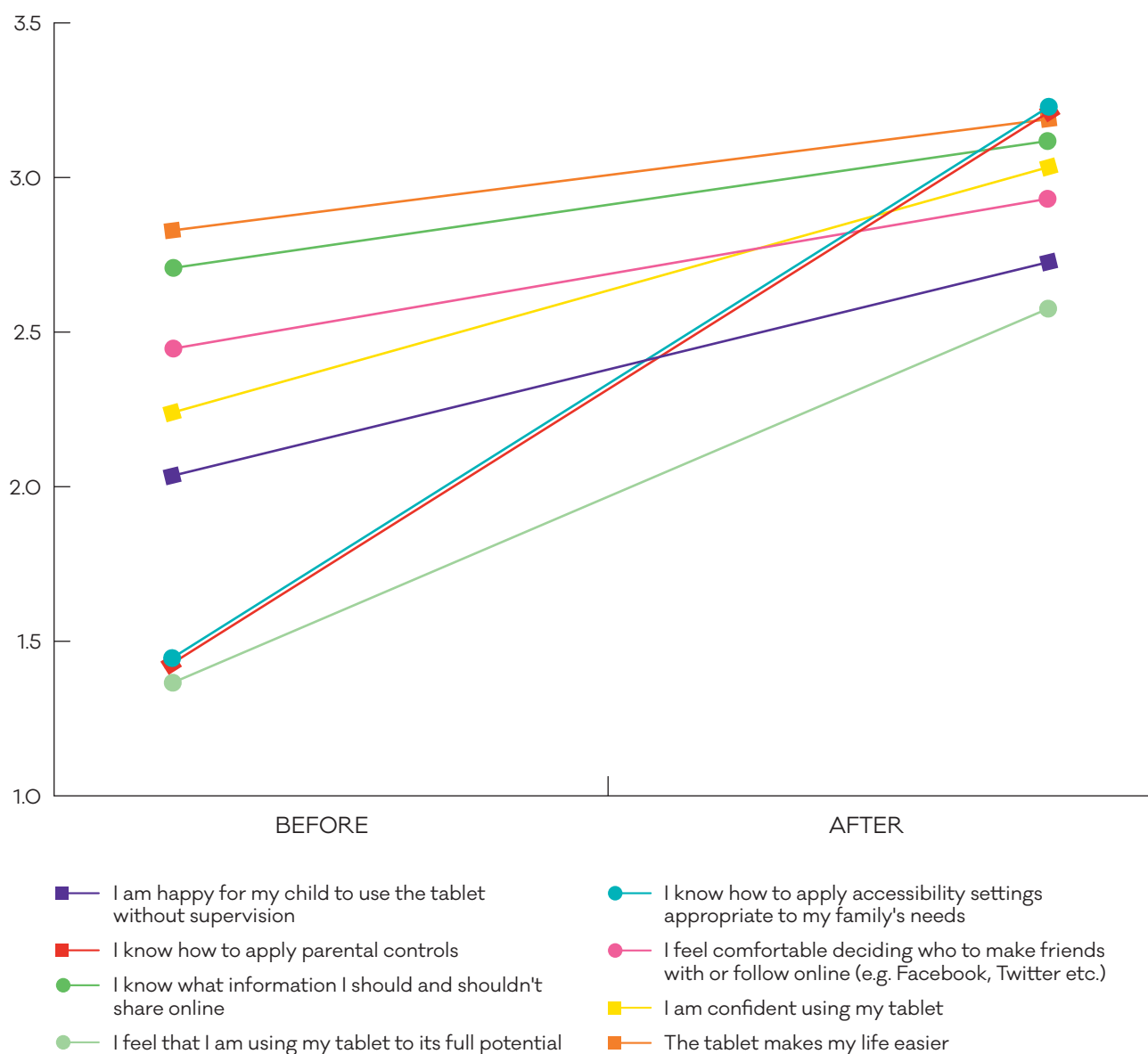


Figure 2.



In the table above (Figure 2), the steepest slope represents the greatest amount of change; all the lines bend upwards indicating a positive result and that, overall, trainees agreed more strongly with the statements after the training than they did before.

People were happier for their child to use the tablet without supervision after the training, with 41% agreeing or strongly agreeing before training which rose to 70% afterwards. In addition, 86% of trainees felt more confident about using their tablet after the training, compared with just 46% of people agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement beforehand.

The three statements with the greatest level of change were:

- *"I know how to apply accessibility settings appropriate to my family's needs"* (16% agreed or strongly agreed before training and 90% after training)
- *"I know how to apply parental controls"* (16% agreed or strongly agreed before training, 90% after training)
- *"I feel that I am using my tablet to its full potential"* (13% agreed or strongly agreed before training, 62% after training)

Confidence to do specific activities

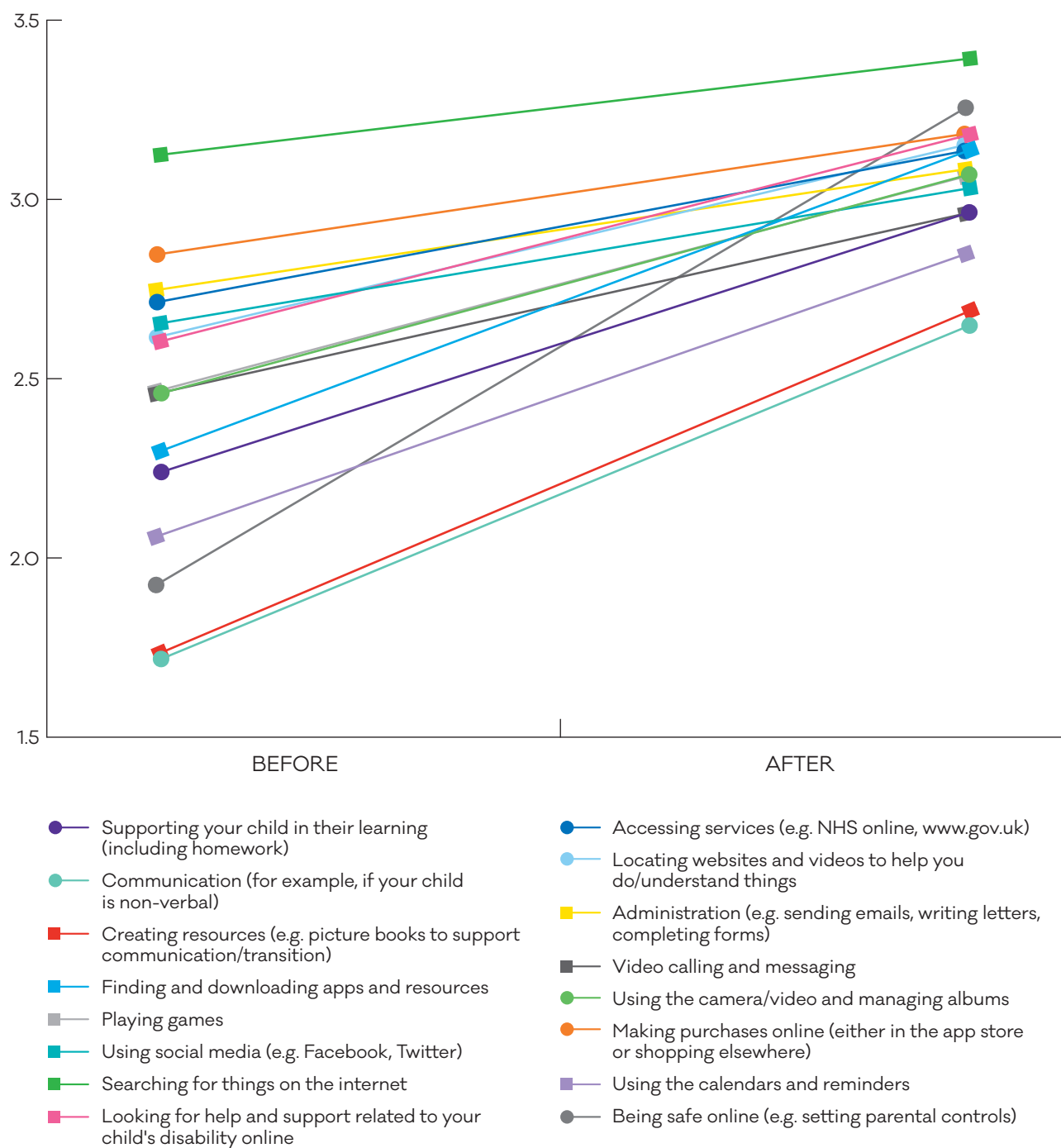
Trainees were invited to tell us how confident they felt when using their tablet to complete a range of tasks and activities. They were asked to rate things they felt very confident in doing with four points, and things they had limited confidence in with one point. Things they didn't know how to do at all were scored with a zero. The results are shown in Figure 3, according to the following activity statements:

- Supporting your child in their learning (including homework)
- Communication (for example, if your child is non-verbal)
- Creating resources (for example, picture books to support communication/transition)
- Finding and downloading apps and resources
- Playing games
- Using social media (for example, Facebook, Twitter)
- Searching for things on the internet
- Looking for help and support related to your child's disability online
- Accessing services (for example, NHS online, www.gov.uk)
- Locating websites and videos to help you do/understand things
- Administration (for example, sending emails, writing letters, completing forms)
- Video calling and messaging
- Using the camera/video and managing albums
- Making purchases online (either in the app store or shopping elsewhere)
- Using the calendars and reminders
- Being safe online (for example, setting parental controls)



“My 10-year-old son uses it as a communication device primarily and for pleasure secondly. The speaker talked about Family Sharing so I have isolated my son's tablet and it is now part of Family Sharing. I have signed up to iCloud. I have introduced YouTube Kids which I didn't know about and have installed Social Stories Apps which I wasn't aware of either. I have discovered how to navigate through 'settings' more confidently and now realise that there are many restrictions and settings I can adjust to suit my son's needs. For me, it has given me confidence that I know his tablet is a safer device with regards to content and security.”

Figure 3.



The statements which indicated the greatest amount of change can be shown in the table below:

Parent/carer felt confident in....	% of people very confident/confident before training	% of people very confident/confident after training	% change
Being safe online (for example, setting parental controls)	28	70	+42
Creating resources (for example, picture books to support communication/transition)	20	67	+47
Communication (for example, if your child is non-verbal)	24	73	+49
Using the calendars and reminders	37	75	+38

Responses to this question illustrated the wide range of digital skill level amongst those who received training. Most people already had some digital ability and were already proficient in making purchases online, administration and internet searching, demonstrated by low levels of change after training, as shown below:

Parent/carer felt confident in....	% of people very confident/confident before training	% of people very confident/confident after training	% change
Making purchases online	75	86	+11
Administration (e.g. sending emails, writing letters, completing forms)	68	83	+15
Searching for things on the internet	87	91	+4

“My son can now photo share and FaceTime relatives. I know that I’m doing more and can be in control. I don’t have to worry what my son accesses. The training is personal and at my level and I’m not in a class where I would feel stupid.”

Other findings

A number of trainees were interviewed about the training, providing case studies to give a qualitative perspective on the programme findings. Case studies have identified a range of outcomes, including how the one-to-one, home-based nature of the training has been valued by families raising disabled children. Case studies have also illustrated

the wider benefits of the training, such as children having more independence in using the tablet because their parents know how to set parental controls. To see examples of recent case studies from Family Fund's Digital Skills Programme, go to www.familyfund.org.uk/digital.

Our conclusions

The training delivered through Family Fund's Digital Skills Programme has been invaluable for many parent/carers. The bespoke nature of the training has helped people to develop skills they may otherwise not have had the opportunity to learn, and home-based support works well for families raising disabled children, a group often excluded from other forms of digital skills training.

Parent/carers who understand how to apply accessibility features and implement parental controls can help their children to use tablets in ways that support their specific needs, while staying safe online. Parent/carers who have digital skills will be able to engage with, and support, their children's school work, have a greater awareness of their child's online life and be able to benefit from the advantages of being online themselves, such as discounts from comparison sites or paying online, searching for support and information about their child's condition, and access to social networks.

Feedback from the trainers and families that have attended training tells us that many families aren't aware of the wide range of features that are built-in as standard to some devices, and that unlocking this knowledge has been transformational in some cases.

We consider it very important that more families raising disabled children across the UK are able to access support to improve their own digital skills, as well as to use devices in ways that facilitate

their children's learning and development. Family Fund will continue to provide this training, whilst also actively seeking opportunities to make the programme more widely available, with further funding and partnerships in order to reach more families raising disabled children and young people for whom the benefits of such training could be life-changing.

If you would like to find out more about our programme, including working with Family Fund on developing further digital skills training opportunities for families, please contact digitalskills@familyfund.org.uk

"It's totally inspired me and given me direction on what I need to make digital work for us. This was fantastic and mind opening. Thank you so, so much."

"I didn't realise how much could be done on the iPad and how it could be restricted for children. The trainer was brilliant and really made me feel more confident with using it and not stupid with the questions and lack of knowledge that I had before starting. I am so pleased that this type of training is offered as without it I would have been really struggling."



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