Doing Digital Inclusion: Disability handbook

There are around 11.9 million disabled people in the UK[1], many of whom face barriers to getting online, meaning specialist knowledge and tools can be required to help them access all the benefits the internet has to offer.

This handbook outlines some of those barriers, and offers advice and resources for those already delivering digital skills who would like to better support disabled people, and disability support organisations wishing to offer digital inclusion activities for the first time.

All the tips, suggestions and examples of best practice in this document have been provided by the Online Centres Network and disability self-advocacy groups, as part of a Good Things Foundation research project.

Good Things Foundation
Formerly Tinder Foundation.

Key statistics

12.6 million UK adults lack basic digital skills[2] and 5.3m of have never been online.[3]

• **25%** of disabled adults have never used the internet, compared to **10.2%** of the entire UK population.[4]

• Disabled adults make up **50%** of the 0.9 million lapsed internet users (those who last used the internet over 3 months ago).[5]

• Disabled people are significantly less likely than non-disabled people to have internet access (**65%** compared to **88%**).[6]

• Employers report that **92%** of the positions they recruit for require at least basic level IT skills,[7] making it unsurprising that **46.7%** of disabled people are employed compared to **80.3%** of non-disabled people.[8]

• Disabled people spend on average **£550** a month on disability related expenditure.[9]

• **23%** of disabled people say they are quite or very lonely on a typical day.[10]

Being digitally included has lots of benefits:

• Those with new basic digital skills feel they are able to connect and communicate with their community, friends and families **14%** more frequently.

• Shopping online saves individuals on average **£143** per year and by accessing government services and online banking transactions online, individuals can save an average of **30 minutes** per transaction.[11]

• Having used Learn My Way[12], **93%** of disabled people reported improved well being, **85%** progressed to further learning and **59%** reported employment progression.[13]

The social model of disability says that disability is caused by how society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people.

2. Go On Basic Digital Skills UK Report 2015, p.7.
3. ONS, Statistical Bulletin Internet Users, 2016.
4. ibid.
5. ibid.
6. Ofcom. "Disabled Consumers' use of Communication Services: A Consumer Experience report." 2015.
7. E-skills UK 2009 employer survey.
8. Disability Employment Gap Inquiry, 30th March 2016.
9. Extra Costs Commission, Driving Down the Extra Costs Disabled People Face, p.6.
10. Sense, A Right to Friendship, 2015, p.4.
11. Tinder Foundation and GO ON UK, The economic impact of Basic Digital Skills and inclusion in the UK, November 2015.
12. Learn My Way is a website of free online courses for beginners, owned by Good Things Foundation, which helps people gain basic digital skills.
13. Taken from Online Centres Network learner progression surveys 2015-16, based on 179 disabled learners.

Barriers to learning

Access

• **Website and device accessibility:** Colour, size and layout of text, and incompatibility with screen readers mean many websites are inaccessible to people with visual impairments. Other disabled learners can have difficulty holding a mouse, using keyboards, or sitting at a device for long periods of time.

• **Financial constraints:** Families with a disabled member are more likely to live in poverty, compared to those in which no one is disabled.[14] Cuts in health and social care have led to a loss of income, support services and access to transport for disabled people - making travel to learning venues difficult, and accessibility devices and software unaffordable.

• **Venue accessibility:** In addition to barriers such as a lack of level access or fully accessible toilets, insufficient space at or around a computer, including for Personal Assistants, can make it difficult for some disabled people to attend learning venues.

Motivation and skills

• **Negative attitudes towards disability** in wider society can lead to low self confidence. Learned helplessness and passivity can prevent disabled people seeking advice and help. This together with anecdotal evidence of negative learning experiences faced by many disabled people can affect motivation to learn basic digital skills.

• **Fear and insecurity:** Fear of breaking a device can counteract a willingness to learn, exacerbated for many disabled people by not owning the technology to which they have access (e.g. in a day centre or library). Fear can also arise from stories of internet scams, spam email, computer viruses and people misrepresenting themselves online.

• **Low English skills:** Disabled people have lower literacy levels than the UK average,[15] British Sign Language is the first language of many deaf people, rather than English. This means some disabled people find reading on-screen text difficult.

• **Reliance on 'proxy users' and lack of consistent trusted support:** The time pressures on paid home support, and a lack of digital confidence amongst unpaid carers, can mean less chance of individuals receiving trusted support to develop and embed digital skills in their daily lives. With 36% of disabled people living alone - compared with 16% of non-disabled people - they are more likely to be without support at home.[16]

14. Department for Work and Pensions, Family Resources Survey 2011 to 2012, June 2013.
15. The 2011 Skills for Life Survey: A Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Levels in England, BIS RESEARCH PAPER NUMBER 81, Dec 2012. Page 96.
16. Ofcom. "Disabled Consumers' use of Communication Services: A Consumer Experience report." 2013

Delivery challenges

• **Digital not a priority:** Funding cuts in the health and social care sector mean that digital skills aren't high on the disability agenda, and the benefits of digital are not fully understood by many social care providers.

• **Cost of delivery:** Disabled people tend to require more one-to-one support for a longer duration of time, and the cost of digital skills training for a disabled learner is nearly four times as much as that for a non-disabled learner.[15]

• **Lack of digital infrastructure:** Care homes, sheltered housing schemes and day centres are often without the infrastructure needed to provide larger scale digital inclusion training or support. Lack of appropriate staff resource, limited available computer time and adaptive technologies make this even harder.

• **Low digital skills amongst disability support staff:** Disability support staff may not always have the right skills to help clients develop basic digital skills.[16] Service providers and individuals that lack digital skills or confidence are unlikely to feel able to provide support, and so not advocate digital to service users.

• **Limited knowledge of the specialist equipment available** amongst both disabled people and support organisations, and the cost of such equipment means many community organisations are unable to provide the full range of tools needed to support a range of clients with varying needs.

• **Challenges recruiting and managing volunteers:** Although a valuable resource, recruiting and training specialist digital skills volunteers can be time consuming and expensive due to the need to ensure they're aware of the range of access needs that people have, as well being up to date on all accessibility options.

Disability digital inclusion resources

• The Disability Digital Inclusion Toolkit at www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/resources/disability has case studies, research links, and resources to help you tackle digital exclusion amongst disabled people.

• Making your Work Club Accessible: A guide from WECIL.

• AbilityNet's Factsheets are free to download and provide advice and information about how computers and other digital technologiues can help people with a range of conditions and impairments.

15. Tinder Foundation and GO ON UK, The economic impact of Basic Digital Skills and inclusion in the UK, November 2015, pg 26.
16. 4.5 million of the 12.6 million who do not have basic digital skills are in work (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (2016) Digital Skills Crisis, Second Report of 2016-17, p.10)

How to engage and recruit learners

1. Work in partnership - go to where your audience is: Day centres and disability organisations can lack the capacity to support learners with digital skills, but the interest is there with many. If you already deliver digital inclusion, go to where people meet. Contact your local disabled people's user-led organisation, Learning Disability Partnership Board or self-advocacy group to start with. Be bold in convincing people of the value of digital skills.

2. Get carers invested: Sell the benefits of being online to paid and unpaid carers and families. They might lack digital skills and confidence too. Design activities that involve carers and those they care for. Unpaid carers and families can contact their local Carers' Centre to get their advice and support.

"We couldn't have delivered our project helping adults with physical and learning disabilities get online without student volunteers - they've been wonderful, and taught us a thing or two about technology along the way!

The relationships between our student volunteers and our service users have been pretty special too - and that's been key in the progression of both parties."

Kathryn Flagner, Cumbria Libraries.

Good Things Foundation has produced the Doing Digital Inclusion: Unpaid Carers Handbook full of tips and resources for helping unpaid carers gain digital skills, and the Dementia and Digital research report which looks at barriers and best practice for supporting people with dementia and their carers to benefit from technology.

3. Communication: Show learners how they can use online tools such as Skype, Facebook or email to keep in touch with friends and family, for free. Speaking to others with similar experiences, and learning about disability news and current affairs are also easy online. Scope's online community, and the blogs and forums recommended by Disability Rights UK are a good place to begin.

4. Hobbies and interests: Find a topic the individual is interested in to open up the potential of going digital. E-books, sharing photos, playing games, listening to music, on demand TV and sport are just some ideas to start with.

5. Independence: Highlight how the internet can make life more convenient by assisting with tasks such as the weekly shop, banking or finding cheap deals. The internet is a great source of information, whether you want to learn more about an impairment or health condition, look up maps, book holidays or check the local bus timetable.

"I use the internet for repeat prescriptions and shopping, so if it's horrible day outside I can just order everything online and it gets delivered to my door."

Pat Shaw, Online Centres Network learner.

See a video of Pat talking about how being online improves her life, on the Good Things Foundation website.

6. Dynamic activities: Blogging or editing videos and pictures can be a great way to attract people's interest, and to communicate and ensure comprehension amongst clients who find text-based communication challenging.

7. Employment and benefits support:

• The introduction of <u>Employment and Support Allowance</u> has led to Work Capability Assessments (WCAs) and related medicals where individuals have been reclassified as fit to work. Many disabled people's organisations do not have the capacity to offer employment support.

"If we haven't got the technology that someone needs to access the computers, we've got a small budget to get tech in and we'll try and help them with that. Along with accessibility, we provide a nice place to come to and we put people at their ease, so they want to come back."

Geoff Gorton, Work Club Coordiantor, WECIL.

If you're a disability support provider unable to help with employability, contact your local Jobcentre Plus. There are Disability Employment Advisors (DEAs) at every JCP. If you already provide digital skills support, let your local JCP know that you can help disabled people with searching and applying for work online.

• Some disabled people might need help understanding their <u>Personal Independence Payment (PIP)</u> and making it work for them. This is a good chance to introduce digital skills, with understanding available benefits, online form filling and online payments.

Things to consider before you deliver

1. Build your digital infrastructure: If you're a disability service provider that wants to support digital inclusion activities but lacks kit, consider device donation and refurbishment schemes such as <u>Computer Aid</u>. Make sure WiFi is installed in communal areas, not just private rooms.

2. Get the environment right:

• Check that the learning venue is fully accessible and not just for wheelchair-users.
• Are your lighting levels and signage helpful for visually impaired people?
• Have you a quiet area with good acoustics for hearing-aid users, people with speech impairments and for anyone who needs a calm space?
• Are your toilets and refreshment areas/cafés accessible? Do you have a range of chairs to suit different people's needs?
• Have you at least one height-adjustable desk or workstation?

Someone who is uncomfortable is unlikely to return.

3. Get the technology right: You may be supporting people who have never experienced digital technology before, but there are resources to help you find out exactly what your learner needs.

• Abilitynet is the UK's leading authority on accessibility and assistive tech, offering free advice and services to make sure disabled people aren't at a disadvantage when using computers and the internet. The AbilityNet Online Assessment Tool is a great resource.

• Screen readers and software recommended by members of the Online Centres Network are Job Access With Speech (Jaws), Non Visual Display Access NVDA (free), Dragon, Dolphin Guide and Dolphin Supernova Access Suite.

• Some tablets have good speech controls, and touchscreens can be easier to use than a mouse for some people with poor hand dexterity. Support your learners to understand everything that a device can do, and consider home loans where possible.

"We wanted to think differently about digital inclusion, and how we support the very hardest to reach audiences. We already had a Library At Home service for older and disabled people, so we decided to add a digital element to that service with our iPad loan and home support project."

Charlotte Self, Leeds Libraries.

Read more from Charlotte and one of the beneficiaries of the programme, on the Good Things Foundation website.

4. Support staff, learners and support workers to become Digital Champions: Invest time and money into Digital Champion training, enthusing staff about the benefits of digital, and empowering learners to support their peers. Ensure support workers and volunteers have sufficient basic digital skills and confidence to support clients, including knowing when a piece of kit might make life easier, like an ergonomic mouse. Good Things Foundation offers face-to-face Digital Champion training and the How To Be A Digital Champion course on Learn My Way.

5. Find the right partner : If you're a disability service provider unable to deliver digital skills training, consider partnering with a local disability specialist member of the Online Centres Network. The Online Centres Network is made up of local community organisations who are skilled at inspiring, motivating and supporting local communities with digital skills. They offer free support, often specialise in supporting learners with specific needs and may offer outreach training for groups of learners. If you'd like to start delivering digital skills yourself, you could become a member of the network in your own right.

"I teach people how to learn for themselves. Once they know they can't break their computer or laptop, they can start to explore it, and the internet on their own. I like to think I'm a pretty good Digital Champion, because I've been there. Because of my MS, I don't have the use of my arms and legs. But I'm still using computers and helping others to use them too. It proves that if I can do it, anyone can, and that's a pretty strong message for people."

Keir Strugnell, Digital Champion.

Look for trainers that teach from a social model perspective. AbilityNet's ITCanHelp volunteers provide one-to-one support to disabled people and older people, through home visits and remote support.

6. Make sure your staff and volunteers are 'disability confident': People can feel anxious about how to approach and communicate with a disabled person. What questions can you ask? What words can you use? How do you offer help without being patronising? Staff training - such as the Good Things Foundation webinar on disability confidence - can ensure confidence when supporting disabled people.

7. Make it sociable and be flexible: Keep learning informal and provide a relaxed and familiar environment in which people feel comfortable, safe and able to ask questions. Plan regular breaks for learners and ensure they understand they can take a breather whenever they like. Avoid making assumptions and remember to ask people if they have accessibility needs.

8. Be supportive: Aim to provide consistent and trusted support. Allow for more time, as digital skills training might need to be slower paced with a disabled person. Understand the unique needs of each individual, identify the particular barriers they face and make sure you give everyone the same chance to have a go. Encourage people to ask for help and support.

9. Empower individuals to take charge of accessibility: For some issues there are quick fixes, such as making text bigger, reformatting, changing colours and showing people shortcuts to improve their user experience. If relevant, find strategies to help individuals get the most out of less accessible sites rather than rule them out altogether. BBC's My Web My Way and AbilityNet's My Computer My Way have some useful accessible help links.

"With epilepsy, swelling on the brain and athritis, digital skills have definitely helped me to become more independent and confident. I check about my health conditions on websites like NHS Choices if I am not clear on a doctor's explanation. I like to know everything where my health and medication is concerned."

Glen Byrne, Online Centres Network learner and volunteer.

10. Support people to understand online safety: The internet is great for shopping, banking and keeping in touch, but there are stories about the dangers of being online. Show learners that rather than avoiding the internet altogether, there are simple steps to follow - understanding the sharing of personal information, recognising secure websites and being careful using social media - to stay safe online. Encourage them to try the online safety courses on Learn My Way.

If you'd like to join the Online Centres Network or our Specialist Disability Network, please get in touch with our Network Team on 0114 349 1666 or at hello@goodthingsfoundation.org.

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