



# Doing digital inclusion in libraries: A handbook

# Introduction

**The level of digital inclusion activity taking place in UK libraries varies widely.** Some libraries are able to offer a varied programme of activities and learning to help people make the most of the internet. Others might just offer internet access on a small amount of computers. We hope that this handbook provides something for all libraries, wherever you are in your digital inclusion journey.

**The handbook has been designed to help you navigate the difficulties of delivering digital inclusion,** with hints and tips to help you tackle some of the challenges and barriers within your library service. If you have any suggestions of other ways we can support libraries with digital inclusion, please let us know.

**As well as being part of a community of libraries,** we hope that you'll feel a part of our community, the National Digital Inclusion Network. We're proud to bring together thousands of community partners who are all dedicated to improving lives through digital - and helping each other along the way.

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## Facts and figures

- 11.3 million adults in the UK lack basic digital skills <sup>(1)</sup> and 4.3 million have never been online at all <sup>(3)</sup>.
- 4% of people are unable to check information sources found online <sup>(2)</sup>.
- Investment to get everyone online by 2028 could see a net economic benefit of almost £22 billion <sup>(3)</sup>

### Sources:

1. [Lloyds Banking Group Consumer Digital Index 2018.](#)
2. [Good Things Foundation infographic: Digital Nation 2018: facts, stats and closing the gaps.](#)
3. [The economic impact of Basic Digital Skills and Inclusion in the UK: a report for Good Things Foundation and Cebr \(September 2018\).](#)



## What libraries told us in 2018

In 2018, Good Things Foundation undertook a significant piece of insight work, talking to 75% of the 2,770 libraries in the National Digital Inclusion Network. We dedicated so much resource to this because we really wanted to:

- Find out more about the barriers and challenges faced by libraries.
- Improve our understanding of libraries basic digital skills and digital inclusion delivery.
- Understand the value that our Learn My Way platform does and could provide to libraries.
- Refresh and strengthen our relationships with Library Services Managers.
- Find out what other activities and learning happens in libraries.
- Better understand how we can support our library members in the most effective way.

### Common themes in library services across the UK:

- Many libraries are opening for fewer hours per week (due to funding cuts), meaning what they can offer is reduced. In some cases, this has led to a less scheduled and regular approach to delivering digital sessions.
- There has been a particular increase in the provision of coding clubs in libraries. As well as closures and updates, new library services are also being added.
- Staff turnover can mean that the digital expertise is lost, and takes time to rebuild. Competing priorities reduces the ability to focus on digital needs and services.
- Some libraries are making nominal charges for digital sessions, necessitated by funding cuts.
- Demand appears to have dropped in some areas. This is likely to be because those people who are still offline are often the hardest to reach people, and are not engaged with their local libraries.



## Advice and recommendations

We think the following ideas, hints and tips could help you to deliver digital inclusion activities in your libraries.

### Designing and marketing your sessions

- Don't start with digital. Find out what barriers are faced by those who are least likely to engage with learning in a library - and then address how digital could help them overcome them. For example, if someone is lonely then you could teach them about social media and video calling. If someone wants to share their love for knitting, show them how to use the internet to search for patterns or a local group.
- Use these hooks when designing and marketing your activities. Try 'Keeping in touch with friends and family' rather than 'computer classes', for example. Once they're engaged, they can progress to further digital learning.
- Keep potential learners - and their friends and family - engaged with regular social media or email updates on digital inclusion related activities.
- Word of mouth is one of the most powerful ways of recruiting new learners. Consider a 'refer a friend' campaign - existing learners are your best advocates.



## Advice and recommendations cont.



### Helping learners to feel comfortable

- Libraries are viewed as welcoming, neutral, non-judgemental community spaces. Make the most of this perception by reaching out to people who may be reluctant to go into more formal environments such as Further Education colleges.
- Potential learners may have had bad learning experiences through formal education. Help them overcome their fears by offering digital skills sessions in small, informal groups, or even one-to-one.
- While some people might feel intimidated in group sessions, others will welcome them, valuing social interaction and the possibility of peer-supported learning. If possible, consider offering a combination of booked, drop-in and outreach sessions.

### Partnership

- Building partnerships with local organisations, such as housing associations, Jobcentre Plus, food banks and children's centres can be a great way to engage and recruit learners, and raise awareness of regular digital skills sessions.
- Engage hard-to-reach people in places where they feel comfortable, by attending community fairs and local groups. Build relationships with local community organisations and try attending their activities like coffee mornings, craft groups and carers' groups. If possible, take an outreach session to them using tablets and mobile WiFi.
- Some libraries work in partnership with local organisations who already deliver basic digital skills training, like their nearest Digital Inclusion Hub. You could arrange for them to deliver in your library space. Working in partnership can also enable skills sharing between staff.
- Networking with local organisations, such as schools, healthcare providers and Jobcentre Plus can be time consuming, but can reap large benefits and generate joint ventures.

## Advice and recommendations cont.

### Embedding other activities

- Library events provide great opportunities for recruiting and engaging new learners and volunteers. Weave digital activities into library events such as reading groups, storytimes and arts & crafts sessions.
- Organise drop-in tablet sessions where people can bring their own devices. Offer a basic introduction on how to use them and popular apps and features such as video calls, syncing photos etc.
- Take advantage of the popularity of coding and Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) activities for children, by engaging with the parents and carers who accompany their children to these activities. Many people prefer a hands-on approach to engaging in new things, and an event is an excellent way to let people see and touch new technology, engaging them in digital.

### Volunteers

- Libraries have told us that working with volunteers brings many benefits and that they're a cost-effective option when considering offering one-to-one support to learners.
- Partnerships can often support volunteer recruitment. Students from local colleges, or people working in local businesses (as part of their corporate social responsibility) can bring new expertise.
- Build up a network of volunteers and, if you do not have a volunteer policy, consider training, DBS checks and safeguarding.



## Advice and recommendations cont.



### Staff training

- Training staff and volunteers is key to ensuring they have the confidence to help learners gain basic digital skills and an understanding of the benefits being online can bring. Good Things Foundation offers guides to help embed Learn My Way in your service, with advice for tutors and a focus on engaging learners.
- Libraries Connected have a wealth of information in the [toolkits section](#) of their website.

### Equipment

- When sourcing hardware for your sessions (procurement regulations permitting) do your research and try a variety of devices. Computer recycling companies will often do deals for bulk purchase. Weigh up the pros and cons of high quality kit versus more affordable devices for wear and tear and breakages - this will happen.
- If possible, purchase a stock of tablets that can be used both in the library and for outreach activities. Invest in mobile WiFi hotspots or 4G enabled tablets for places where broadband isn't installed.
- Consider lending kit to learners so they can practise and develop skills between sessions.
- Plan ahead and look out for funding opportunities to help purchase equipment.
- If purchasing equipment isn't possible, try reaching out to local organisations who have their own equipment. They may be willing to share their tablets or laptops with you, in exchange for using your library space or another mutually beneficial arrangement.



## Case study 1 - Paul Skelton and Wickersley Library

Sometimes all that's needed is the right hook and a friendly approach.

Paul Skelton was in Wickersley Library in Rotherham choosing audiobooks for his wife Pat, who is registered blind, when a member of staff asked if he knew about their digital audiobooks: "here we go again" thought Paul.

**"Something must have shown on my face because they said that they offered classes if I needed any help with computers and that they'd also get me all set up with the digital library. It was the nudge that I'd needed."**

Paul says: **"I haven't got a computer or tablet at home, so I come into the library to use theirs... it's great because there's always someone on hand just in case I do get stuck. Although these days I'm often helping other people on the computers; that's how far I've come on and how confident I feel."**

**"I mainly borrow audiobooks for my wife... she's absolutely thrilled as she's suddenly got so much more to choose from, and if she finishes her book and needs another one I can get it straight away - even if it's the middle of the night. It's like magic."**

**"Before I went to the classes at the library, I had no idea how much I'd been missing. I'm so much more confident now and feel like I've discovered a whole new world!"**



## Case study 2 - Digital inclusion at Spondon Community Managed Library

### 1-1 support based on learner interests can be a great way to start.

Spondon Community Managed Library is a member of the National Digital Inclusion Network and offers digital support to members of their community. Their volunteer Digital Champions are on hand to promote the service and share information about the types of support and online courses on offer.

80 year old Eileen Firth was supported during her very first session by Digital Champion Lynn. Lynn started by chatting to Eileen about her digital knowledge and identified what skills she wanted to develop.

Eileen was using an iPad but wanted to build her keyboard and mouse skills and to learn how to order her grocery shopping online. In a first session, Lynn supported Eileen to access some of the relevant topics on Learn My Way.

After getting started, Eileen said: **“Lynn has been excellent, very knowledgeable and fluent in her delivery, she has got me using a mouse and keyboard straight away. I feel more comfortable having the support of a volunteer, and I feel relieved as I really didn’t know what to expect!”**



## Case study 3 - Creative engagement at Garforth Library, Leeds

**Sometimes messages of relevance aren't enough and a more creative approach to digital engagement is necessary.**

Leeds Libraries have a long track record of delivering digital inclusion activities, including a programme of digital drop-in sessions in libraries where the Learn My Way website and other resources are used to teach people the basic digital skills they need.

Sessions are promoted by highlighting the benefits of being online: convenience, keeping in touch and saving money among others.

However, those messages are not powerful enough to engage everyone, especially the most digitally excluded and a more creative approach to digital engagement is necessary.

**Garforth Social is a fortnightly club at Garforth Library that brings together people from the local area to enjoy different activities and socialise.**

Their librarians recently delivered a session at Garforth Social that involved controlling the robotic toy Sphero SPRK using iPads. The group was introduced to the controls on the Sphero Play app before being given free time to explore the app and its many elements. They then took on several challenges such as racing the Spheros and guiding them through a simple maze.

None of the participants had used an iPad or touchscreen of any kind before the event. By utilising play, they were introduced to new technology in a way that was approachable and enjoyable. By focusing on the robots rather than the technology, the iPads became a tool to be used rather than a frightening piece of technology, and navigating the app was easily picked up by everyone.

**One member enjoyed the session so much that she intended to buy a Sphero for her grandchildren, allowing them to learn about technology and even coding together in a playful environment.**



## Joining the National Digital Inclusion Network

### Learning from other libraries

You can learn a lot about how other libraries deliver digital inclusion through networking opportunities such as regional and national events, or through social media and newsletter subscriptions, which provide a medium to share ideas, best practice, and to discuss issues. There are thousands of libraries in the National Digital Inclusion Network, so we can help to bring you together and learn from each other.

### Resources

Good Things Foundation provides a whole host of resources for members of the National Digital Inclusion Network, including marketing collateral to help you promote your digital sessions and training resources to help support the development of your team

### Part of a movement

Our mission is to close the digital divide - for good!, and we're always looking for organisations to join our movement. You can help us drive social change by supporting people to improve their skills and confidence so they can thrive in a digital world.

If you can provide a welcoming space for members of your community, a supportive learning experience and access to the internet for your learners, we would love you to join us. You'll have the support of our own dedicated Network Team to guide and advise you through your membership journey, full access to our free online learning platform, [Learn My Way](#), and the opportunity to apply for our funding opportunities, as well as many other membership benefits.

### [Join the National Digital Inclusion Network today.](#)

We are always on hand to answer any questions you might have about how we can help you - give us a call on **0114 349 1666** or email us at [hello@goodthingsfoundation.org](mailto:hello@goodthingsfoundation.org).

