Through conversations with our partners across the UK, it’s evident there’s a huge appetite for supporting people in the local community remotely. We’ve heard amazing stories about how staff at community organisations and libraries have been finding ways to substitute the face-to-face support that is valued by so many of the people they regularly help.

That’s why we’re working with various partners to create a series of easy-to-follow guides for delivering digital skills support remotely. Each guide will include a bit of background information, and a few simple steps you can follow to give it a try.

This guide, the fourth in a series, comes from Nicola Wallace Dean, Centre Manager at Starting Point, who found a way to respond to their communities needs by developing a remote learning programme they named ‘Lockdown Learning’.
As a social enterprise, Starting Point is proud to bring in their own money rather than solely relying on funding. However, in April 2020, they had no choice but to temporarily shut the coffee shop that is the life and soul of their organisation. They knew however that they couldn’t turn their backs on those most in need. Even when facing financial uncertainty, the committed team threw themselves into what they know best - supporting vulnerable families in the community and believing in the power of people.

Over the past few months Nicola and the team have added a variety of new aspects to the support they offer, all of it being done remotely. It included digital sessions via Zoom, aiming to help those worried about being socially isolated, alongside the launch of a new community mutual aid group, so local people could help each other with shopping, picking up prescriptions and arranging online chats. They also then went on to launch Lockdown Learning – a simple and friendly way to learn new skills and connect together.

Lockdown Learning came about after seeing the overwhelming amount of online resources that are thrown at people when they’re expected to engage remotely. Families feel pressure to be up doing exercise videos when they don’t have a device that lends itself to the whole family taking part in the front room. Lots of well intended content just doesn’t cater to the needs of those with poor mental health, where getting out of bed is an achievement in itself.

The team used their people skills to build relationships and trust, allowing them to have conversations about what learning could look like whilst their community cafe was closed. In response the amazing Digital Champions at Starting Point stepped up to learn new skills, allowing them to remotely support roughly fifteen people per day to connect with not just the internet, but other people from the surrounding area.

There was no desire for Starting Point staff to be YouTube sensations. Instead they focus on things like having a very active Facebook group where people know they can get in touch and ask to be pointed to different resources and online content. An example would be a recently created Youtube learning playlist. More often than not people favoured the basics - emails, text messages, phone calls, group Zoom calls and sometimes the odd video or Facebook live. All these are quick and easy to get going.
Setting it up

1. Make it personal. Share your fears, challenges and things that have made you smile with those you’re going to support. That way those engaging with your remote learning offer will feel more comfortable approaching for help.

2. Listen to what people want rather than trying out the latest digital trend. Sometimes a simple Whatsapp group is all that people need. We have found that people who may struggle just might need the time to do things at their own pace, so creating handouts and giving ample time to try something can help.

3. Make time to reflect on what works, and really commit to seeing this as a learning experience. It’s OK to explain to someone you’re trialling something, and take a lighthearted approach if you make any mistakes along the way.

4. Don’t spend lots of money. If your Zoom call can only last 40 minutes because you don’t have the full version, so be it. That said, if you do want to invest, ask other people for their opinions first before spending money. There’s certainly cases where money can be saved when it comes to remote delivery software, possibly equating to hundreds of pounds.

5. Track what you are doing. It’s the only way you will know what is working. It’s a bit soul destroying when only one family tunes in to engage with a cooking class on Facebook Live, but that’s OK, and it’s all part of the learning. It might be that you then go on to get fifty families sharing photographs of their creations once you’ve finished your session. Celebrate these successes.

Helpful resources

- [Working From Home resources](#) - hosted on Make It Click
- [Teaching & Facilitation Handbook](#) - Online Centres Network
- [Video Calling guide](#) - Learn My Way

Keeping in touch
Remember, if you give a remote learning programme like Lockdown Learning a go, we’d really like to hear about it. You could either get in touch with your Network Specialist to give them an update, or tag @Online_Centres on Twitter if you’re posting online about the session.

For more information on Starting Point and the work they do, please visit their official website.

If you’ve got any feedback about this guide, or have an idea you’d like us to include in the series, please get in touch by sending an email to hello@goodthingsfoundation.org.