



Embedding digital skills in your support offer

A how-to guide



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We all need digital skills

The long months of the pandemic have only brought home how deeply digital is already embedded in our lives. Being online helps us to stay connected to those we love and to get hold of essential information. And it's crucial to making our lives better economically, whether that's finding a job, moving into quality employment, managing our household finances, and claiming benefits when we need them.

But many of us don't have access to digital technology or the know-how to get online, especially if we are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Embedding digital fully throughout the support we offer those needing help with getting work or managing their finances can bring people the skills and confidence they need. Supporting organisations to achieve this was at the heart of the Power Up initiative.

This slide deck draws on what we've learnt from Power Up so far about embedding digital skills in services. It:

- Explains the benefits of embedding digital in services and support
- Shows how some organisations are already doing this
- Offers tips to get your organisation started or further on
- Provides pointers on how to judge where you are on your journey
- Suggests some resources to help you move forward



Embedding digital matters

With the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and so many restrictions on face-to-face support, many support organisations have had no option but to supercharge their digital offer.

But despite its terrible pressures, Covid-19 has also brought some opportunities. Living through lockdown has highlighted the importance of having – or learning – digital skills to those who might have been reluctant or nervous about going digital.

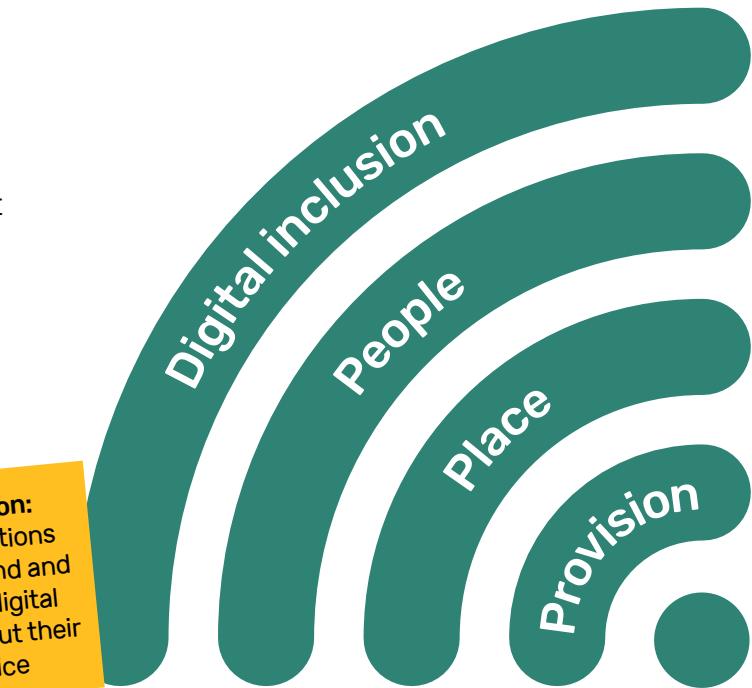
The Power Up vision is for a more inclusive digital economy – one where everyone can benefit from digital to improve their lives, businesses and communities. Ultimately, that means embedding digital across all service provision.

Digital inclusion:
All of us benefit fully from digital

People:
Individuals are confident using digital skills to improve their lives

Place:
Organisations connect digital support across communities

Provision:
Organisations understand and deliver digital throughout their service



About Power Up

Power Up is a pioneering initiative to drive economic inclusion through digital in disadvantaged communities. It does this by helping organisations embed digital skills into support for employability, financial inclusion and small businesses. It's delivered by Good Things Foundation and funded by JPMorgan Chase Foundation.

Power Up 1.0 ran from February 2020 to June 2021 and was [independently evaluated](#). Participating organisations included housing associations, law and money advice centres, employability and financial health services, organisations supporting young people, one-parent families, and families with disabled children, and those advising new microbusinesses or start-ups. Most people supported were vulnerable or living in challenging circumstances.

The programme set up a **framework for local action** to help bring about a step change in the way that support for individuals, businesses and communities is designed and delivered.



Power Up People

By building digital confidence: individuals are motivated to learn and keep on learning, and to apply digital skills in their lives, businesses and at work.



Power Up Provision

By boosting existing services: digital is embedded into what programmes already know about effective support, to improve tangible outcomes for individuals.



Power Up Places

By connecting organisations: through partnerships of local providers, individuals, businesses and communities get the joined-up support they need to thrive.

Embedding digital is good news for organisations

Power Up organisations found imaginative and effective ways of operating under Covid lockdowns and restrictions. And these have paved the way for a deeper shift that they can take forward to support people and communities better in the post-pandemic world.

Immediate responses

- Incorporating digital skills development across services
- Training and redeploying staff and volunteers
- Developing new courses, content or resources
- Giving out or loaning devices to get people online
- Providing people with data and connectivity



Long-term shift

- Deeper understanding of the value of digital within support
- Prioritisation of digital skills
- Improved understanding of clients/users and their needs
- Assessment and development of staff skills, expertise and motivation
- New and improved systems and tools
- Expanded capacity and reach
- Stronger partnerships and clearer collaborations
- Access to new funding streams
- Greater organisational resilience

“This is not an area we would have been involved in prior to Power Up. This has increased our involvement with other organisations and led to the development of joint projects around digital training, and the creation of another job with the resultant increased service provision.

Embedding has meant a far greater focus on the identification of digital needs and adjusting service provision to meet those needs. It has led to the provision of digital services/training becoming an integral aspect of our service provision.”

“Power Up has been fabulous for us. [Two years ago, as we joined the programme] we had a team of volunteers, who just doggedly kept doing this and keeping it alive. We'd not attracted any funding, because no one quite got us. And [Good Things Foundation] got us, and we have grown and developed the service in so many ways.

We've managed to leverage other funding and then the pandemic came along and we couldn't have been in a better position to respond to that, and I can track that all back to Power Up. You'll hear more from us, because we've got lots of plans going forward. And we now have a lot of support too, new funding streams, exciting new projects in the pipeline, so that we can change things for people in our community ...”

“We continue to have a healthy reciprocity between parents who come to the project seeking employability/digital skills help who go on to get other forms of help such as mental health and wellbeing, family support, as well as the reverse.

It feels as though the project is becoming increasingly holistic and integrated.”



Embedding digital: addressing barriers people face



There's no 'typical' learner. Some you support may already have a little digital experience and are looking to go further. Others don't know what they could do with digital. But many need basic digital skills before they can fully engage with broader support. The greatest barriers to people's engagement are lack of confidence and lack of access.

- Think about how you carry out your initial engagement with people.
- Understand what matters to individuals: addressing an immediate need will help develop trusting relationships.
- If you need to encourage people into digital learning, find a 'hook'; know what your users' needs are now.
- Offer opportunities to try things; in-depth sessions or shorter blocks.
- Repetition and extensive and relatively frequent opportunities to practice skills allow people to build confidence.
- Creating a pattern of activity or ensuring a degree of predictability can be helpful for some learners.
- Watch how people progress in their learning and be prepared for when they're ready to move to the next stage.

- Analyse in depth what support you already offer, and what new content you might need to develop.
- Drawing together multiple elements may well be more effective and efficient; this might be a mix of group and 1-to-1 support; staff and volunteers; and also peer support.

Helping people recognise the need for learning in the first place and then engaging with learning is perhaps the most challenging and resource-intensive aspect. Put steps in place to understand what each individual needs, where they are in their journey, and be ready to tailor a mix of support to help meet those needs.



Bear in mind

- Many people come with urgent problems which need addressing first, but may be encouraged to access longer term support which would improve their circumstances.
- Using digital to help people with an immediate need can spark their motivation to do more using the internet.
- Some people may be reluctant to engage in any kind of learning, not just digital skills learning.
- Developing trusting relationships and taking people's concerns seriously is an essential first step.
- Work with where each individual is now: for example, are they vulnerable and reluctant or committed and motivated? Have processes in place to assess this at an early stage.
- Tailoring support towards individuals in your target groups and communities is essential.



Starting up

Put steps in place to understand what each user needs, and prepared to tailor a mix of support towards those needs.

East End Citizens Advice Bureau

When someone makes an appointment to discuss debt, East End Citizens Advice Bureau now always assesses their digital skills as part of that first meeting. The advisor then uses new tools to signpost them to appropriate information, such as suitable online learning platforms or learning organisations. EECAB has also created a directory of local digital skills provision so they can refer on anyone who needs additional support.

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“The biggest barrier we encountered to using technology was fear ... Showing clients empathy and being flexible in meeting their needs has been an important factor in engaging with them.”

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Community Renewal Trust

With classroom sessions for job search and work readiness all prepared, the biggest concern Community Renewal Trust had when lockdown hit was how to reach people with limited skills and no connectivity.

They applied for 10 tablets from DevicesDotNow and used them to support those lacking digital skills, equipment or internet access. They've renewed efforts to contact clients and engage them in more formal one-to-one learning. Their focus is on getting people to a place where they are comfortable learning remotely using Zoom.

The plan is to create group classes for those comfortable with remote learning, freeing up more individual time for those with no to low digital skills.



Case study: Castlemilk Law & Money Advice Centre

Castlemilk Law & Money Advice Centre identifies people who have problems with the new digital requirements of Universal Credit.

The Centre has created a 'Digital Safety Net', a one-to-one offer as part of their legal support services. People are offered training in digital skills and referred to the Digital Trainer when they first contact the Law Centre. Teaching is carried out through online tutorials or over the phone. As a first step, a Universal Credit Advisor and part-time Support and Training Worker support claimants through making and managing their claim online.

Castlemilk engages with other local organisations through the Castlemilk Digital Inclusion Workgroup. Organisations in the Workgroup can refer their clients to the Digital Trainer or borrow MiFi, iPads and Chromebooks from the technical library. The Universal Credit Advisor has begun online training for local foodbank staff, so they can refer more foodbank users who need assistance with Universal Credit.

A new website and social media pages mean more contact and advice can be delivered digitally. The Centre has plans to post classes on YouTube. The Law Centre is planning to develop a Glasgow SE Claimants Union and has joint projects with Alzheimers Scotland and the local housing association to provide digital equipment and training support.





“All clients can benefit from improving their digital skills. Digital needs to be embedded in all delivery with clients.”

Embedding digital: looking inside your organisation

One of the biggest changes many Power Up organisations have seen is greater recognition throughout their team of how vital digital skills are in all areas of their work. Examining how digital inclusion can be promoted across every aspect of their work has empowered them to take a more structured approach to digital training for staff.

- Assess the digital skills of staff and volunteers; developing their skills will boost their confidence and motivation.
- Train staff – including those on the frontline – in how to identify people's digital skills needs.
- Give staff clear routes and resources for how to address people's digital needs and where to refer them when necessary.
- Look for any gaps and weaknesses in your existing digital delivery.
- Offer a variety and combination of support – face-to-face and online, individual and group, formal and informal – that enables you to be flexible about engaging and supporting people.
- Review what equipment you offer. Devices loaned or given to people to use at home may be more effective than having a dedicated IT suite.
- Consider including digital skills into recruitment and induction for new posts, if you don't already.
- Talk to other services about how you might work together.
- Digital is changing continually: keep staff skills and awareness up to date.
- Incorporate digital as a standard part of your overall strategy and planning.

Each organisation is starting at a different point on the journey. The task may feel daunting for organisations new to embedding digital or with limited experience of working with partners, but they often travelled a long way in their development.



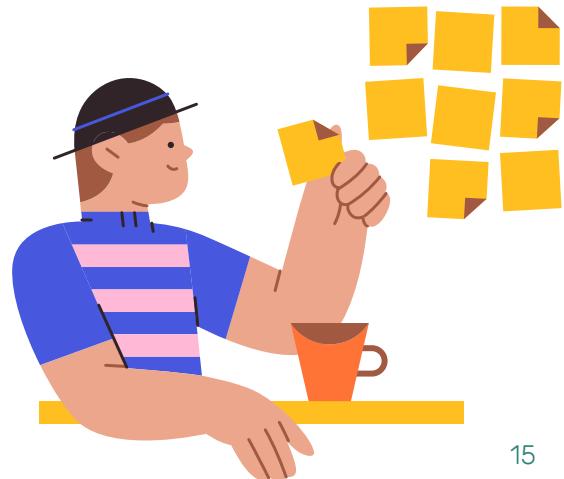
Bear in mind

- Take all staff with you, from the frontline to the board.
- Buy in from senior leadership teams is crucial for bigger organisational change.
- Be willing to change and adapt; bring your creativity and resourcefulness.
- Experimenting and refining delivery approaches in the light of user feedback, levels of engagement and learning outcomes, led to some impressive blended models.
- Tailoring support achieved good short- and long-term outcomes in the most cost-effective and sustainable ways.
- Specialist staff bring valuable experience and help deepen and spread knowledge within organisations as well as to users. But these posts may be vulnerable to time-limited funding. Look for ways to share such input with partner organisations.



Starting up

Review where your organisation is on your digital journey.



East End Citizens Advice Bureau

The huge demand for advice during lockdown helped East End Citizens Advice Bureau promote the value of learning digital skills to both their users and staff. As an organisation, East End Citizens Advice Bureau is also reflecting on how staff can work effectively at home using digital pathways of support, giving them a better work/life balance.

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“We can see the difference placing a device with data in someone's home makes to their progress. Their learning is less fragmented, and they can practice at their own pace ... Staff have reflected that it also changes the relationship they have with some beneficiaries ... the gift of a device suggests a level of trust that builds the beneficiaries' sense of self-worth and confidence.”

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Quaker Social Action

Quaker Social Action adapted its classroom curriculum for online delivery and a mix of one-to-one sessions and groups. Topics covered include online safety, managing Universal Credit, budgeting and using free online apps which encourage and enable saving.

This continues to be a learning process for the team as they strive to make learning accessible, informative and enjoyable. The iterative approach allows the project to adapt resources and methods to meet the varying needs of people using the service. The experience has boosted the skills of their staff and improved induction and training for the large number of volunteers who support delivery.



Case study: Poplar HARCA

A year on from launching its Power Up project, Poplar HARCA has embedded digital inclusion widely within the organisation and into the fabric of their community development offer.

The challenging circumstances of Covid-19 meant the team could highlight the value of digital in the lives of their vulnerable residents. From 30 tablets funded from their Digital Skills for Work, they've since distributed over 400 tablets and laptops. They've forged partnerships with local schools, providing devices and faster broadband to families with children on free school meals.

Being a Power Up grantee gave Poplar access to a network of digital influencers and the chance to learn various ways of enriching its digital inclusion offer. Poplar has also engaged a pool of Digital Champions – they've been energised by the positive stories of those they've supported.

Poplar's ambition is to offer devices and broadband connectivity to 10,000 families within Tower Hamlets jointly with a range of local partners, topped up with skills training and capacity building. Potential supporters have already come forward.



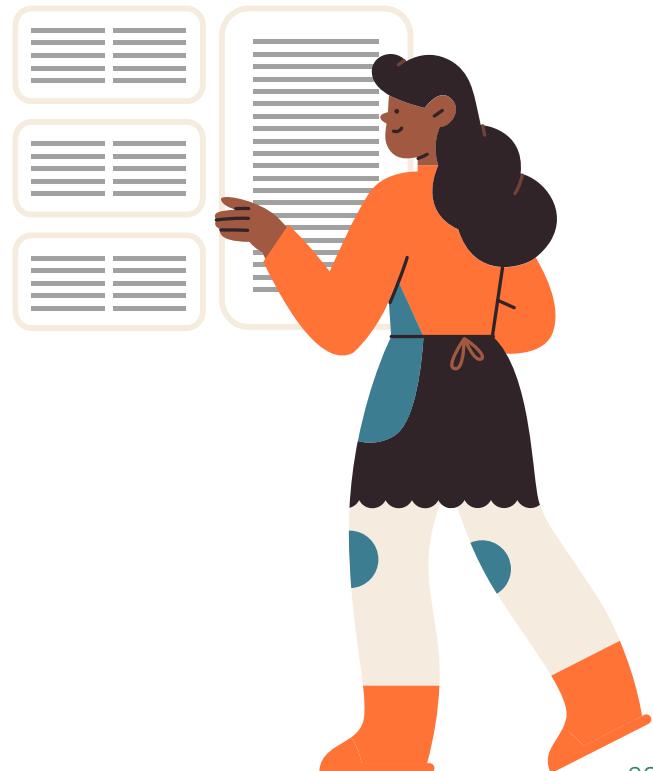


“Poplar HARCA is slowly getting nearer its BIG dream of realising a ‘wireless Poplar’ – getting the majority of its residents connected to the internet and fully digitally engaged...The urgent need for devices, connectivity and IT/digital skills is clear for all to see. Like food, shelter, transport, health, education, digital has to be recognised as a universal basic service.”

Embedding digital: connecting with other organisations locally

Connecting and partnering with others can help organisations progress on their journey towards embedding digital. Place-level collaboration across a local area has the potential for longer lasting impact.

- Recognise other organisations' expertise and consider what your organisation might best contribute - playing to strengths.
- Set up clear referral structures not just within your service but to and from other organisations.
- Compile a directory of resources to other organisations, and map provision to avoid duplication.
- Consider what resources you might share across different organisations: this might be resources, facilities and staff.
- Consider whether your organisation can offer 'train the trainer' and digital support to other local organisations.
- Think broadly about you might connect with, for example local businesses, libraries or local authority teams.



- Explore options for accreditation or more formal learning with education providers or national programmes.
- Aligning strategic priorities across partnerships is important in developing positive cross-sector working relationships.

Place-level impact requires time, long-term strategic focus and commitment, and partnership working. Taken on their own, none of these is a guarantee that the desired changes are achieved.



Bear in mind

- Developing productive and positive working relationships across the government/local authority and third sector organisations is often challenging due to often significant differences in ways of working; don't underestimate this.
- Manage relationships with referring agencies and volunteer centres carefully. Think about training them in your field of support, for example teaching food bank staff about Universal Credit, or become Digital Champions in other organisations.
- Consortia – with each organisation having a clear role to play – are more likely to achieve place-based impact.
- Putting in place local – even regional – provision, supported by multiple organisations rather than dependent on a single one, can lead to greater reach, improved awareness of support available among the local people, new or better signposting and referrals mechanisms, multiple and different opportunities for local people to learn new skills and improve their employability and financial situation, and improved progression pathways.



Starting up

Reach out to organisations you already have contact with and understand how you might best fit together.

Spire View Housing Association

In partnership with Access Technology Scotland, Spire View Housing Association is working to further develop its community hub.

The Aspire Digital Space offers a drop-in tech bar for informal advice on how to make the most of digital. Spire's Digital Engagement Officer has been active within the hub and beyond – improving internal and external referral pathways, co-designing learning opportunities with potential beneficiaries, and mapping local services to avoid duplication.

Spire View achieved Cyber Essentials Accreditation in 2020, thanks to funding from SCVO.

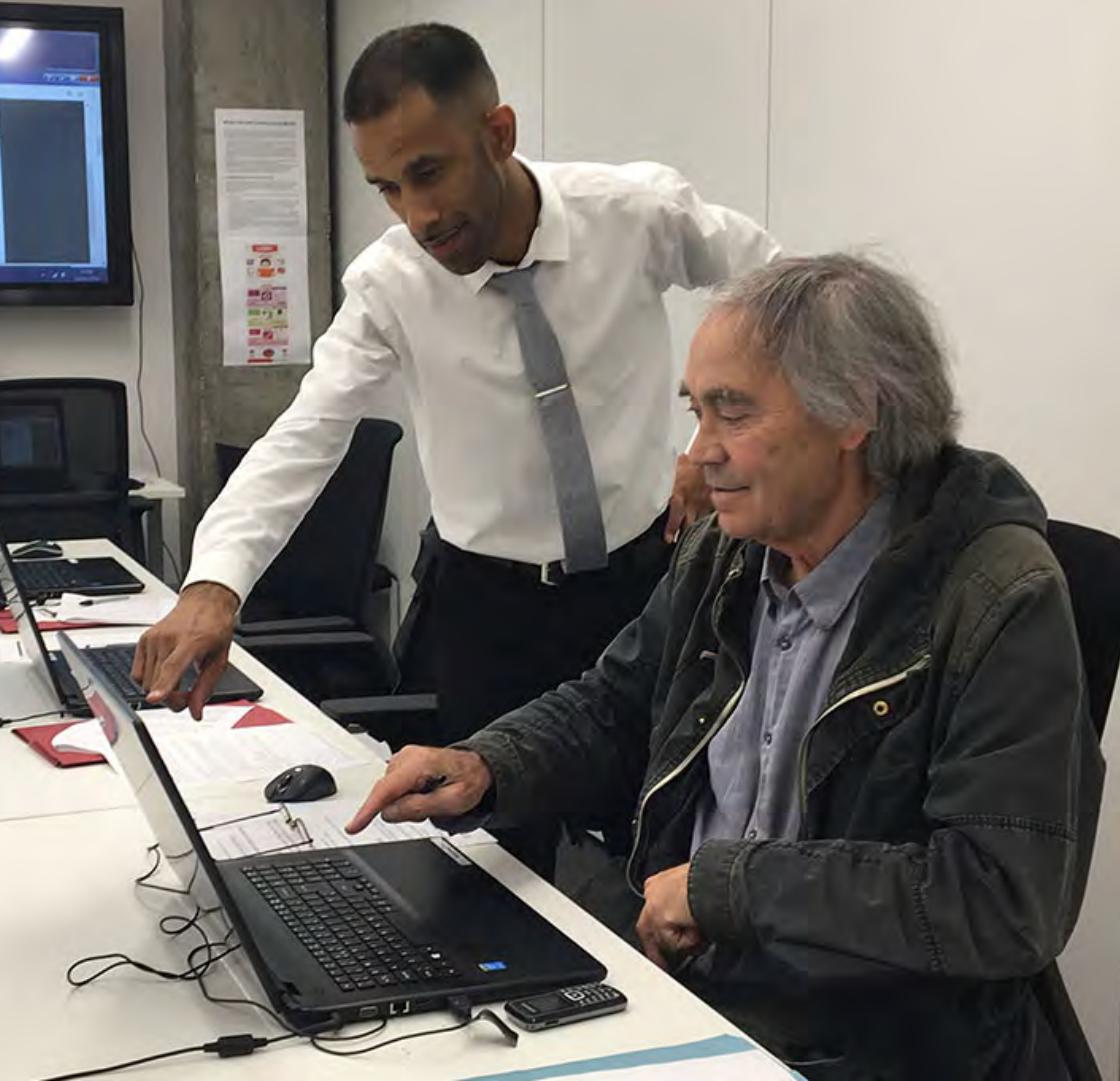


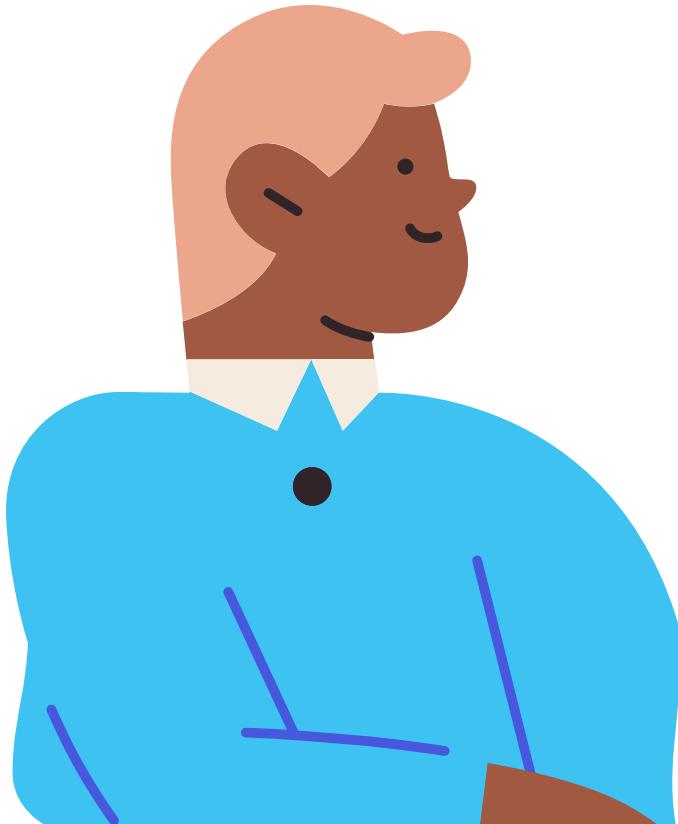
Peter Bedford Housing

Careful work with referring agencies and volunteer centres has brought successful partnerships for Peter Bedford Housing Association.

For example, other local housing associations, IAPT services, the Carers Centre and library services/ IDEA Store have committed to delivering digital and financial inclusion sessions at their sites and to refer on to PBHA's remote Digital Champion offer.

The Digital Champions also provide flexible one-to-one support for their peers in Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney.





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“We've been able to take a very flexible approach towards how we embed digital in the local community during this very challenging time. We have adjusted our services to ensure, as far as possible, that we continue to deliver for our local community. This has been made possible due to our resilience, flexibility and determination as an organisation and our core belief that our tenants and local community deserve the best possible service.”

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Embedding digital: recap and moving forward

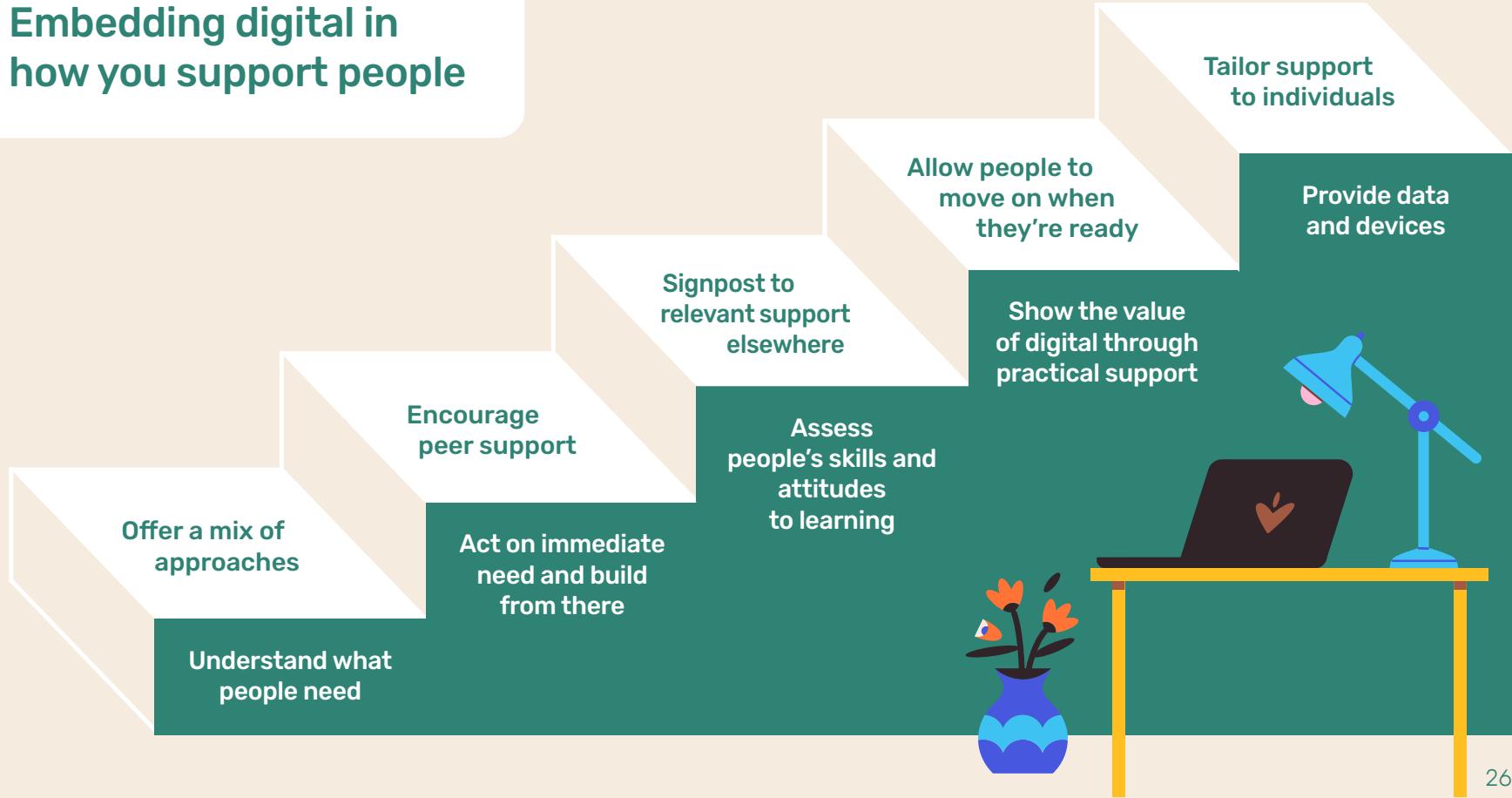
Supporting the most digitally excluded people, especially those who are least motivated, reaps rewards but is often complex, time-consuming and resource-intensive. While the Power Up projects show the value of embedding digital, it is not a quick fix.

At the heart of success were:

- Helping people with an urgent, immediate need as a gateway to learning digital skills.
- Ensuring people have access to devices and data.
- Being adaptable and creative throughout the organisation.
- Offering a mix of approaches that can be tailored to individuals.
- Getting staff to ‘think digital’ at all levels.
- Connecting and sharing with other organisations.

“The urgent need for devices, connectivity and IT/digital skills is clear for all to see. Like food, shelter, transport, health, education and other needs, Digital has to be recognised as a universal basic service.”

Embedding digital in how you support people



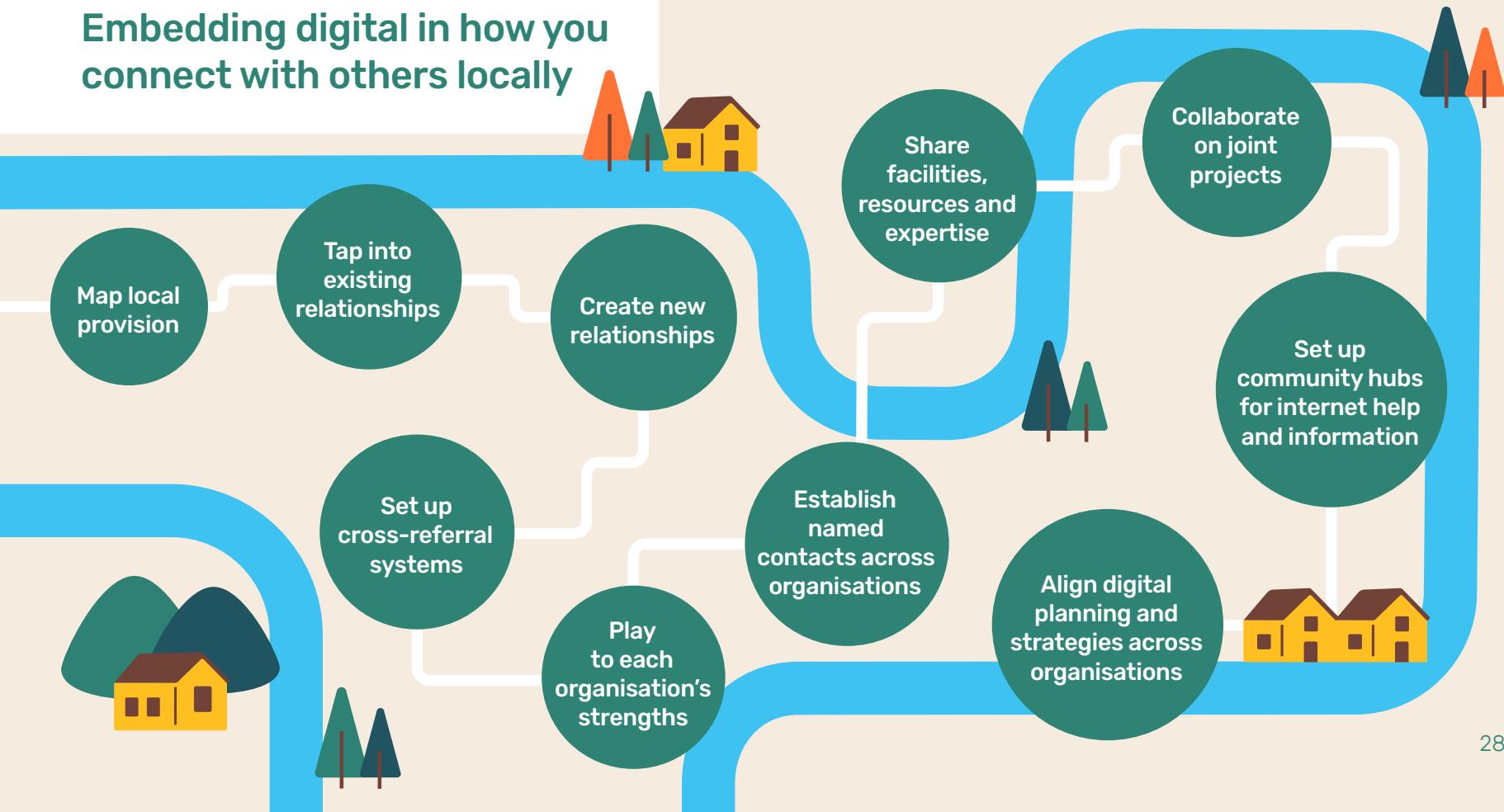
Embedding digital in your organisation



- Review content, resources and facilities
- Assess organisational gaps and weaknesses
- Employ specialist staff
- Offer users multiple mechanisms with multiple entry points
- Train up all staff and volunteers
- Establish Digital Champions
- Add digital to job descriptions/induction training
- Integrate digital to support and systems
- Experiment and refine; keep learning
- Build digital into organisational strategy



Embedding digital in how you connect with others locally



What are the signs of an organisation which has successfully embedded digital?

- You have a clear definition of what digital inclusion means for your organisation.
- You have mechanisms in place within your services and support provision both for identifying digital needs and for addressing those needs.
- Staff, including those on the frontline, can and do identify and address digital skill needs as part of their day-to-day work.
- All staff, including senior leadership, understand and support digital inclusion within and without the organisation.
- You have secured resources which can support these mechanisms, staffing and staff development.
- Digital inclusion work runs throughout your organisation, with skills development where necessary.
- Digital inclusion is clearly defined and embedded in your organisational strategy and planning.
- You work in partnership with other organisations locally – with clear routes for cross-referring and sharing knowledge, training, facilities, and complementary expertise.
- Your organisation is connected to partner organisations, and your digital strategies align.



Helpful links and contacts

Good Things Foundation

[Good Things Foundation](#) is a leading digital inclusion charity working in the UK, Australia and beyond. We work in cities, towns and communities to help people thrive in a digital world. We want to fix the digital divide.

We have a range of resources which can help you respond to local needs around digital inclusion:

- Helping people to get and stay connected through devices and data connectivity.
- Helping people to learn essential digital skills through [Learn My Way](#).
- Helping you to embed digital inclusion in what you do through joining a community of practice.
- Helping you to campaign as part of a wider movement for digital inclusion.

Find out more at:

<https://www.learnmyway.com>

<https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org>

<https://goodthingsfoundation.org>

Or contact us: hello@goodthingsfoundation.org

Other Power Up reports

Place-based collaboration for digital inclusion: A how-to guide

This guide focuses on place-based collaboration with a view to creating a local ecosystem to support digital inclusion.

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/what-we-do/our-partnerships/jobs-and-money/power-up>

Measurement & evaluation: A how-to guide for Power Up 2.0 grantees

This guide aims to explain our Power Up approach to measurement and evaluation and provide practical pointers.

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/what-we-do/our-partnerships/jobs-and-money/power-up>

Power Up Independent Evaluation: Summary Report

November 2021

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/power-up-an-independent-evaluation-summary-report>

Powering Up: How more people, communities and businesses can participate in a digital economy

June 2019

https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/power-up_report_final_web.pdf

Improving digital skills for small and micro businesses

June 2019

https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/small_business_v4.pdf

Improving digital skills for employability

June 2019

https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/employability_v3.pdf

Improving financial capability through digital skills

June 2019

https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/financial_capability_v3.pdf

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