

DIGITAL INCLUSION IN LEIGHTON-LINSLADE

Update Report June 2022 – November 2022

SUMMARY

During the second half of 2022, the project has progressed well. We continued to recruit, induct, train and manage Digital Champions to support learners. We have strengthened our engagement with local organisations; continuing to deliver in person digital support sessions.

Highlights:

- Recruited and trained two ‘volunteer’ Digital Champions who provide in person and remote support, and have one further Digital Champion in the pipeline.
- Trained five ‘embedded’ Digital Champions who work within other organisations to provide digital support in the community. This has allowed us to extend our offer to include home visits, providing more diversity the provision offer.
- Established a weekly digital skills drop in session at the Chatty Café (Tactic Centre)
- Digital Champions delivered digital skills sessions at a local retirement scheme.
- Produced and distributed promotional material both via social media and in print.
- Continued to establish links with suitable partner organisations for; promoting the Freephone helpline and drop in sessions, to recruit embedded digital champions within existing staff and to explore suitable groups to hold digital champion sessions.
- Worked together with Leighton-Linslade Town Council and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity on introducing a Tablet Loan scheme.

DIGITAL CHAMPIONS

Between May and November, we recruited and trained an additional two volunteer Citizens Online Digital Champions who are providing digital support at weekly drop in sessions. Our existing volunteer has been providing both in person support at the library and at the support sessions. We also have an additional volunteer who is in the process of being recruited.

We are continuing to promote the volunteer role in the following ways:

- [Volunteer recruitment sites for example Dolt and Charity Jobs](#)
- [Social Media](#)
- [CVS Bedfordshire](#)

- Promoting the role to local organisations

We have also had another expression of interest in becoming a Digital Champion and are waiting on further communication from them.

We also trained five 'embedded' Digital Champions. Having digital champions trained in existing organisations to support residents with digital skills is key to making digital inclusion work sustainable. It also raises awareness of the barriers people face to becoming included. Three of these Digital Champions work for Music24, a local community based music charity. These champions are able to provide digital support to people accessing their group in Leighton Buzzard who are 55 plus.

We have also trained two Digital Champions who volunteer for Leighton-Linslade Helping Hands. As volunteers from Helping Hands are able to visit people in their own homes, we have been able to extend our digital support offer to include home visits for those who are unable to leave their home, providing more diversity in the range of support available.

MARKETING

During the last six months we have promoted the service via social media, in print and through partner organisations.

Printed promotions have included:

- Leighton Buzzard Observer
- Bee Local Magazine
- Leighton-Linslade About Town
- Information for Older People Leighton-Linslade Area (Yellow Booklet)
- First Point Housing Newsletter

Most learners who contact the helpline have seen the helpline number advertised in print, so we are exploring other printed options to promote the service in the coming months, including local newsletters.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

We have continued to engage with local organisations to promote the service and encourage signposting. One successful partnership we have formed in this second half has been with First Port Housing where we have been able to provide in person digital skill sessions in one of their scheme's residents lounge. We are also working with two other First Port schemes in Leighton Buzzard to see whether these sessions can be replicated.

We have approached several local organisations in the area to promote the project.

Organisations who have expressed further interest in being involved with and signposting to the service have included Leighton and Linslade Health Connections, The Women's Institute, Carers in Bedfordshire, DWP, Leighton Buzzard Surgery, Age UK, Leighton-Linslade Community Agent and the library who are displaying posters to their customers. We have also sent information to more organisations who have yet to respond to the service who we will be following up with over the coming months.

FACE TO FACE AND REMOTE SUPPORT

Learners have continued to contact us through the technology helpline and through this we have been able to provide support remotely or have arranged in-person support with one of our Digital Champion volunteers at Leighton Buzzard library. This support has been tailored to suit the needs and interests of each learner. Support has included helping learners to browse the internet and to access online forms (such as self-assessment tax forms), using email and adding folders, downloading apps, and using communication tools such as Whatsapp.

'I completed a session with Mr C and he is now happy to continue on his own as he feels more confident to access the Internet and browse'. Citizens Online Digital Champion

We are providing drop in support at the Chatty Café (Tactic Centre) on Tuesdays 10am -1pm. Two of our volunteers attend weekly to provide digital support. To promote uptake of the support, we have provided some stands for the tables at the Chatty Café to advertise the service to Chatty Café attendees. Over the last few months, our volunteers have helped learners to develop skills such as being able to use their devices (tablets, smartphones and laptops), to learn how to use Microsoft teams and help with sending emails.

We have established digital support sessions at Laburnum Court – a retirement housing scheme in Leighton Buzzard. These sessions have been well attended. Support with online shopping, making video calls, taking and archiving photos and sending messages to one learner's surgery are just some examples of the help provided by the Digital Champions. One of the Digital Champions worked closely with a learner who had brought her laptop. Some of the skills he supported her with was how to remove redundant apps, adding new tabs and sending attachments in an email.

'Adrian (The Digital Champion) was lovely and very patient with me. He helped me with my laptop and told me not to be frightened of it, just to have a go'. Learner from Leighton-Linslade.

By partnering with and providing training to two embedded Digital Champion in Leighton-Linslade Helping Hands, we have been able to offer support to a learner in their own home.

The learner had rung our free helpline, seeking support to update his laptop to enable him to use it. He stated that this intervention was:

'It was very successful, the lovely lady worked extremely hard and now it is working perfectly. I am able to now use my laptop.' Learner from Leighton-Linslade

TABLET LOAN SCHEME

Lack of devices is a barrier to digital inclusion so when we learned about the funding BRCC had to operate a tablet loan scheme, we recognised the opportunity for Leighton Linslade residents. We have partnered with BRCC to access the tablets and internet connection for residents. Establishing a referral process with Leighton-Linslade Town Council also learner agreements and procedures. We plan to identify people in need of a device through Citizens Online Digital Champions who will refer the person for a tablet loan of six months. Once the tablet is received Digital Champions will provide digital support to enable the learner to be able to utilise and fully benefit from the tablet.

CHALLENGES

WiFi – there have been some internet issues at the session venues. The Digital Champions have at times struggled with slow internet speeds. This has been raised with staff at the venues and together with Leighton-Linslade Town Council we are looking into solutions for this.

Learner Engagement – We have had an increased uptake of the service compared to the first half of the project however we need to engage more hard to reach residents for example those who are housebound. We will be looking at different ways of engaging these residents in the next half including local newsletters, reaching out to other local community groups to raise awareness and working with other organisations who visit people at home. We've also provided the Digital Champions with some business cards with the helpline number on as a way of prompting people to contact the service.

CASE STUDY 2 – BARBARA'S STORY

Barbara is 88 and lives in Leighton Buzzard. She had never used any form of computer prior to the Covid 19 pandemic. She only had her landline phone to stay connected with her family and friends. Her son-in-law suggested that she get a smart phone and tablet to 'entertain her' and although hesitant, Barbara agreed.

When Barbara received her new smartphone, her son-in-law helped to set it up and showed her to use it. However, Barbara felt that she needed some more one-to-one support to be able to learn at her own pace. She came along to a Citizens Online digital support session in Leighton-Linslade and met with Liz, a Digital Champion.

Barbara's family and friends are very important to her and she is able to connect with them online via Whatsapp. However, although she can answer video calls from her loved ones, she couldn't figure out how to start a video call herself. Liz helped Barbara to set up a video call with her friend so that Barbara could practise starting the call. She was really pleased and said:

'This is great, I'll be able to video call to them myself now'.

During the session, Barbara talked about her love of music. Her son-in-law had set up a playlist of her favourite artists on Spotify which she loved.

'Being able to listen to my music during the lockdowns kept me going'.

Unfortunately Barbara's free Spotify trial had ended and she thought she was unable to access it anymore. Digital Champion Liz, spent time to explain about the free Spotify service and showed her how to be able to search for and play new songs on the app. Barbara was so grateful for this

'I'm so happy I will have my music back, after this I'm going to go home and start playing my songs straightaway'.

At the end of the session, Barbara expressed how glad she was that she had come along and learnt some new skills

'I wasn't sure about coming along but I'm glad that I have and I'm so happy to have my music back'.

PLAN FOR NEXT SIX MONTHS

Our focus is to reach more residents of Leighton-Linslade who may benefit from Digital Champion support and encourage them to engage with the service. To do this we will:

- Identify further potential opportunities for digital support in established community groups and in retirement schemes.
- Explore ways of engaging hard to reach residents in the area, some of whom may be unable to leave their home.

- Explore further printed opportunities to promote the service including local newsletters.
- Continue to advertise the Digital Champion volunteer role to be able to offer more in person support sessions.
- Continue to promote the helpline and face to face sessions via promotional materials and social media.
- Continue to partner with local organisations who can promote the helpline and face to face sessions by a) starting a conversation about digital skills and b) through distribution of promotional materials. To also identify and train further embedded digital champions.
- Implement the Tablet Loan scheme, identifying learners and providing digital support sessions in conjunction with the loans.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

KPI	Total H2	Cumulative Total
Volunteer Digital Champions recruited and trained	7	8
Learners Supported	35	38
Number of organisations approached / engaged	14	32
Case Studies	1	2