

FULFILLING LIVES LAMBETH, SOUTHWARK and LEWISHAM

Final report prepared by Confluence Partnerships



Presented to Core Strategic Group of the Fulfilling Lives Partnership

Digital engagement scoping and consultation exercise in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham

1. Introduction

Digital technology is becoming the main, if not only, route in to accessing the majority of public and private services. Those who lack the skills, resources, motivation or devices to get online, are increasingly likely to run the risk of becoming excluded from services, unaware of what provision exists and therefore more likely to remain isolated and disengaged.

As part of the Big Lottery funded Fulfilling Lives Programme, the You First project aims to ensure that Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham (LSL) are places where people with multiple needs are effectively supported to move from dependence and isolation, to independence and engagement; with homes, jobs and meaningful relationships.

While it is known that people with multiple needs tend to make disproportionate use of expensive crisis services, there is currently very limited data regarding the extent to which people with multiple needs in LSL are accessing support and/or other services digitally. In response to this, the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Fulfilling Lives Partnership has commissioned a small scale consultation exercise to scope the digital engagement picture for people with multiple needs in LSL.

This report sets out the policy context for digital engagement, highlights the main issues and challenges identified during the scoping exercise and suggests some recommendations for narrowing the gap between policy ambitions and reality for people with multiple needs in LSL.

2. The policy context for digital engagement

Within the space of two years, the policy context has moved from a focus on digital inclusion to digital engagement in recognition of the fact that more needs to be done to help certain groups of people engage with our increasingly digital world.

Why does digital engagement matter?

For most people, using the internet to pay bills, shop, bank, order repeat prescriptions and keep in touch with friends and family via social media and Skype is just part of today's world. Further, those who are excluded from the digital world are also the most likely to be facing social exclusion in some form or another such as health inequality, low educational attainment, unemployment, or disability and tend to be disproportionately older. In fact, they are the very people most likely to make disproportionate use of services and who would

benefit the most from what the internet can offer, including access to all of the information available on the web, advice about finances and benefits, health information and services and access to jobs.

People with multiple needs who are seeking support from a range of services including health, housing, criminal justice, substance misuse, ETE, welfare and benefits, need a range of digital skills to navigate a number of complex systems. Without them, they run the risk of losing contact with services, or effectively ‘falling through the gaps’ of current service provision.

National initiatives

At a national level a range of programmes and initiatives have been, or are currently being developed to facilitate digital engagement across the whole population. The most relevant to this scoping exercise are summarised below.

- The Government [Digital Strategy](#), published in 2013, set out the intention to transform and improve the way in which public services are provided, saving an estimated £1.7 billion per year. Embedded within the Digital Strategy is the Digital by Default Service Standard which is a set of criteria for digital teams building government services to meet. The term [Digital by Default](#) means digital services that are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them will choose to do so whilst those who can't are not excluded. Despite this, a conservatively estimated 12.6 million people in the UK still aren't using the internet (Go ON UK/Ipsos MORI, Basic Digital Skills UK Report 2015).
- In an attempt to begin addressing this issue the government launched in April 2014 the [Digital Inclusion Charter](#) which aims to reduce the number of people who are offline by 25% by the end of 2016 through working together with numerous public, private and voluntary sector organisations to offer support. Even so, the charter estimates that 10% of the population may never gain basic digital capabilities.
- The [Digital Engagement Team](#), housed in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport leads on implementing the Government Digital Strategy. Working with the Digital Engagement Research Working Group, which brings together representatives from academia, government, private sector organisations and charities, they have developed the Digital Inclusion [Outcomes Framework](#). This is a single, flexible template for benchmarking and tracking digital inclusion in the UK, and evaluating digital inclusion activities locally. It aims to evidence the wider economic, health and social benefits of digital inclusion.

- To help organisations use the framework in project evaluations, an evaluation toolkit called [Evaluate-IT](#) has been designed which includes a guide and set of resources. In addition to this, the research Working Group has developed a new dashboard that tracks UK-wide progress towards outcomes on the Framework and is currently developing a 'What Works Toolkit' which will act as a guide to what works in different segments or sectors, due for publication in September 2016.
- NHS England's [Widening Digital Participation](#) programme aims to reach those groups of people who remain digitally excluded, by using a 5,000-strong network of community organisations as well as national partners, to help support hard-to-reach people. NHS England believes that providing digital health training has the potential to reduce demand on face-to-face health services in two ways: in the short term, by helping people identify the most appropriate way to seek non urgent medical advice, and in the longer-term, by empowering people to better manage their health. Since the programme began in 2013, over 250,000 people have been trained in digital skills enabling them to improve their knowledge about healthy living, book an appointment or order a prescription online and take more control of their health and wellbeing.
- Tinder Foundation is a registered charity that supports people to improve their basic digital skills through a network of hyper-local partners, known as the UK Online Centres Network. Tinder Foundation is a key partner in delivering the government's Digital Strategy and receives funding to coordinate its Online Centres Network. Just Economics is currently undertaking an impact evaluation of all UK Online Centres and their role in supporting access to further education for those that lack basic digital skills.

The Foundation is also currently leading on an innovative action research project called Reboot UK in partnership with consortium partners Family Fund, Mind, and Homeless Link. Additionally, its Libraries Digital Inclusion action research project, in partnership with the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce, funds 16 library authorities across England to deliver innovative pilots to engage those who are socially excluded and to support them to develop basic digital skills.

- [Go ON UK](#) is a digital skills charity that believes in the transformative power of technology to improve the prospects of individuals, families, communities and organisations. They are committed to eradicating digital exclusion and ensuring that everyone in the UK has the motivation and skills needed to benefit and prosper from the internet today and in the future.

- The One Digital programme is a collaboration that will recruit, train and support 1,400 Digital Champions nationwide through bringing together Age UK, SCVO, Citizens Online and [Digital Unite](#). [Digital Champions](#) are considered to be an effective tool, particularly for those who remain persistently digitally excluded, who are harder to engage and who are likely to need personal long-term support. The One Digital programme will use Digital Champions to help around 9,500 people develop basic digital skills, and will reach a cross-sector of society including those with disability and accessibility needs, young adults looking for work, the over-65s, and third sector organisations and their beneficiaries.
- The [Digital Housing Hub](#) is an online forum where social housing providers can seek and share expertise in developing their digital strategies. As well as advice about how to support tenants to overcome the barriers to becoming digitally engaged, it recognises that many organisations themselves face similar barriers and have work to do in winning over the hearts and minds of staff as well as tenants.
- The Laptops for the Homeless scheme, delivered via a partnership between Thames Reach and Socialbox.biz, provides IT training for homeless men and women in London. The project involves refurbishing and recycling some of the estimated two million laptops and computers currently being scrapped every year in the UK, by giving them to hundreds of homeless people.

Initiatives/developments in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham

Many organisations engaging with people with multiple needs offer some form of support around digital engagement, usually in the form of IT training programmes or open access computer suites. These are complemented by a range of other local initiatives including:

- [Go ON Lewisham](#) is the second London borough project planned by Go ON UK to show how local residents and businesses can improve their digital skills. It will work closely with its Board partners such as Lloyds Bank, alongside Lewisham Council and other local organisations such as Age UK Lewisham and Southwark, disability groups, faith groups and wider community groups as well as local voluntary and community partners to help improve levels of Basic Digital Skills on the ground for those most in need of support, including families in poverty, older people, people with disabilities, small and micro businesses, and young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- As part of Lloyds Banking Group's 'Helping Britain Prosper Plan' to help the 12.6 million adults lacking basic digital skills, Lloyds is recruiting 20,000 colleagues as Digital

Champions by end of 2017. They will support local communities, organisations and charities across the UK to develop tier digital skills. In Lewisham, as part of Go ON Lewisham, the High Street branch will be offering digital zones to enable Lewisham residents to benefit from all of the opportunities that digital can bring.

- Two of the Tinder Foundation's UK online centres are based within services in LSL - Evolve Housing in Lambeth and Deptford Reach in Lewisham.
- The Local Government Association (LGA) is funding councils in England to develop [digital schemes](#) to support work on national transformation programmes involving troubled families, health and social care integration and welfare reform. The aim is to develop digital solutions which can be reused by other councils and will enable them to operate more efficiently. Lewisham has received £25,000 to develop an app for adult social care to provide access to information and services to support wellbeing and maintain independence.
- The DWP has made funds available in some areas to enable short term digital support projects to be provided that help new claimants navigate Universal Credit online applications. Since February 2016, the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) has held the contract in Lambeth.

3. The consultation exercise

Research identifies three main barriers that prevent people using the internet. These are a lack of:

- Skills – the ability to undertake a range of basic digital tasks such as communicating, transacting and managing information electronically
- Access – the ability to get online via a range of devices including computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones
- Motivation – the degree to which people recognise the role that the internet plays and see its relevance and importance to their lives

The hypothesis we have developed is that You First clients and other people with multiple needs in LSL experience each of the three main barriers and are unlikely to be accessing the support available to improve digital skills and access.

Method

Desk based research was undertaken in March 2016, to identify key organisations leading in this field, current activity in relation to digital engagement and multiple needs and good

practice examples from elsewhere. Findings were developed into a proposal document which was presented to the Core Strategic Group in April.

During May and June, interviews were undertaken with relevant representatives from most of the Core Strategic Group organisations and other providers identified as having a significant role in digital engagement, to highlight digital strategies, activity and good practice as well as perceived gaps and challenges across LSL.

Simultaneously, individual interviews were conducted with 15 people identified by the services with which they engage as having multiple needs, and a focus group was held with a further 10 members of Lewisham's service user group 'Make it Happen.' The 25 participants are current users of 10 local organisations and services : Lambeth Integrated Offender Management (IOM); Deptford Reach; You First; Thames Reach (hostels and community services); St Giles Trust; St Mungo's; Single Homeless Project (SHP); Reintegration and Aftercare Lewisham (ReAL); and CRI.

Participants' basic digital skills were assessed using the Basic Digital Skills Assessment Questionnaire developed by Go ON UK. Following consultation with Tinder Foundation, an interview schedule was developed to explore issues around motivation and access. An example questionnaire and interview schedule can be found in the appendix.

Key Findings

Findings support the hypothesis that people with multiple needs in LSL experience all of the three barriers to digital engagement and often do not access the range of support available to help them in this area. Key issues raised by service providers and service users have been analysed thematically and are presented in terms of the three main barriers that prevent people using the internet.

i) Skills

Understanding basic digital skills

Go ON UK defines the five basic digital skills categories as: Managing information; Communicating; Transacting; Creating; and Problem solving. However, many service users (and indeed some staff) consider that since they possess a few basic digital skills that allow them to do the things they want online, they have no need to develop their skills further. For example, young people in particular might be quite adept at using social media but lack the skills to fill out a form online.

'I'm not really interested in improving my skills because I just use the internet for my own interests. I don't need to know all the other stuff if I'm not going to use it.' (You First client)

Of the 25 individuals interviewed, 76% lack one or more basic digital skills. This compares with an estimated 23% of the general population. (Go ON UK/Ipsos MORI Basic Digital Skills UK report, 2015)

Thirty-Six percent of our interviewees could be described as having low digital capability, this being an indicator of actual digital behaviours such as: very little evidence of online shopping; no managing money online; no streaming or content (Lloyds Banking Group, Consumer Digital Index 2016). This compares with approximately 20% of people in the UK.

Eleven (44%) interviewees could be described as living chaotic lives and having a number of complex and co-existing needs. They all completely lack all of the five basic digital skills.

Seven (28%) interviewees are current or recent volunteers and/or peer supporters. Six of these seven describe themselves as being fairly digitally competent and their responses to the questionnaire indicate that they have at least some of the basic digital skills.

Two interviewees have worked in the past in IT and are consequently proficient, though lack skills in some areas they describe as 'modern' such as social media. However, they both own devices and feel confident to explore new areas without support.

Literacy

The overarching skills deficit identified by the organisations consulted is literacy.

'Often this is a group that has 'got by' in the past using verbal skills and have to some extent been able to mask poor literacy and numeracy skills. In relation to digital engagement, literacy and numeracy should be seen as essential basic skills that are inter dependent.' (Thames Reach)

'I would like to be able to read and write better and I know my literacy holds me back but I am starting an English and Maths course at City Lit in September.' (You First client)

However, a problem identified by many is that while literacy and numeracy skills need to be tackled hand in hand with digital skills, funding no longer exists explicitly for literacy. The point was made by Lambeth Council that since many services have an ETE focus, support around literacy is implicit within contracts. In reality though, literacy and digital support is time consuming to deliver and services are struggling to manage either adequately.

Variability in the digital skills of support staff

An issue identified as having an impact on digital engagement is the real variability in the digital skills of the support staff required to provide help in this area. Staff who have their own digital skills deficit or who lack confidence in certain areas are more likely to shy away from

providing digital skills support to their clients. Staff in this position state that they are unlikely to seek support from their managers to develop their own digital skills and tend to stick to tasks and activities which they feel comfortable doing. If specialist support is required in relation to a specific activity, they are more likely to ask a colleague with the requisite skills to help rather than learn themselves.

'It makes me feel inadequate that I can't do certain things. I want to be able to help clients by seeing them through the whole task. Instead I have to get help myself to help them. I tend to grab a colleague. They don't mind but I feel bad about bothering them.'
(St Giles Trust)

ii) Access

Cost

Cost and affordability are key barriers to digital engagement both in terms of devices and connectivity. Almost all organisations consulted, particularly those with a homelessness, criminal justice or substance misuse focus, state that the cost of buying devices such as smartphones or tablets and the associated connectivity costs are prohibitive for many of their service users. Finances are tight for many and limited resources are spent on meeting more basic needs, with digital access being considered an irrelevant luxury, if considered at all.

'Access and affordability are key issues. There's a cost implication to digital engagement. How do people afford data download, have broadband at home, pay travel costs to go to a digi-café plus buying a drink there etc. Also some of this client group will get thrown out of Costa or just wouldn't go there. I know that Southwark travellers go to Mc Donald's for free Wi-Fi, just to get their kids' homework done.'
(Thames Reach)

Many service users, particularly those living in hostels, only own basic pay as you go mobile phones and consequently cannot get online or cannot afford the expensive data download costs.

'Lots of clients, especially hostel dwellers, only have pay as you go basic phones so access is a problem. Anything better tends to get stolen or sold.' (Lambeth IOM)

Those that do own more sophisticated devices may not have broadband at home and cannot afford or do not wish to use digi-cafes or Wi Fi hotspots. The issue of connectivity in hostel settings and the fact that broadband costs cannot be included in the rent was identified as a significant barrier by several organisations.

Of the twenty-five people interviewed, ten (40%) have no digital access whatsoever, mainly due to lack of any kind of device, with cost being the main reason for this. Most of these own a basic, pay as you go mobile 'phone which can only be used for making calls and texting. In

two additional cases, lack of access is due to lack of or poor Wi-Fi in their hostel/accommodation.

[‘Smartphone by Default’](#) a recent study by ESRO for Ofcom, found that despite a rising trend in reliance on smartphones and tablets for online access (with 16% of people using only these devices) in the general population they still supplement rather than substitute computer use. In our small sample, it would appear that these devices are substituting rather than supplementing computer use, with 48% of interviewees using only a smartphone or tablet to go online, all of whom are under 35 years of age.

Seven of the twenty-five interviewees use a laptop or computer regularly. However, all seven are currently or have recently been volunteers and/or peer supporters within organisations so much of that use, is in a work setting.

Digital support provision within services

Many organisations offer open access computer sessions at certain times but these tend not be attended by our target cohort for a variety of reasons including a lack of awareness of the sessions, fear, not thinking it is relevant and finding it difficult to plan ahead.

‘We run open access computer sessions here twice a week but they are never full. It’s a challenge publicising them to those who would benefit most.’ (Reintegration and Aftercare Lewisham - ReAL)

There is a real sense of needing to be more creative about how to engage service users in digital support with the term ‘teaching by stealth’ being used by a number of organisations. For example, Lambeth IOM hub has a suite of computers that are not accessed by the majority of service users attending the hub. However, one to one interactions between service users and service providers present an opportunity to introduce digital skills via a tablet or laptop without overtly referring to developing computer literacy.

‘Any approach needs to be flexible, people won’t sit quietly for the whole time, they need to be able to nip out. Training sessions are not just about imparting technical knowledge, the trainer must be able to deal with frustration, disruptive behaviour and be able to really communicate effectively.’ (Thames Reach hostel)

Most organisations state that staff are encouraged to complete tasks such as form filling with, not for clients, but the reality is that time constraints can make that extremely challenging, particularly for those with multiple needs.

‘Support staff do try to do it with them [fill out forms] but it’s very challenging, there is such a time pressure. We have funding time constraints per client and ultimately your priority outcome is getting the form completed. We do offer one to one digital support appointments but many clients attending the drop in centre want their issue

to be dealt with then and there and won't always return for a scheduled appointment.'
(Deptford Reach)

Thirty-six percent of our interviewees have never been online. This compares with 11% of UK adults (ONS, Statistical Bulletin: Internet Users, 2015) and 27% of the 166 respondents to Groundswell's questionnaire (Trends and Friends: Access, use and benefits of digital technology for homeless and ex homeless people. Lemos and Crane, 2015).

Twenty-two percent of our interviewees are not recent users of the internet. This compares with 14% of UK adults (ONS, Statistical Bulletin: Internet Users, 2015).

In terms of how or where people would seek help if needed, the majority (68%) said they would ask their caseworker or a friend or family member. Almost a quarter of interviewees had attended a computer course or courses in the past but most felt they had not been pitched at the right level for them. This corresponds with findings from the Lemos and Crane 'Trends and Friends' report, where respondents felt that the training offered is not appropriate for their needs or usage aspirations and that typically training is not basic enough.

Twenty percent of our interviewees said they had no idea where to go for help and did not know that the service(s) with which they engage, have open access computer sessions and staff available to provide support.

iii) Motivation

Issue based support

Promoting the benefits of broad and sustained digital engagement to our target cohort appears to be an ongoing challenge, despite a number of different initiatives across the three boroughs. All providers interviewed agreed that service users are most likely to seek digital support in relation to a specific issue, for example filling out an online benefit claim form, but are very unlikely to use that intervention as a springboard to developing their own digital skills.

'I will arrange an appointment with a client, usually for a specific issue, and the idea is I will use the time to introduce digital skills on a one to one basis. Most help given by Deptford Reach is around job searches which is directly linked to the only source of income for most clients so they tend to keep these appointments but in my experience they have little or no interest in learning any additional IT skills.' (Deptford Reach)

'I only used it once [the internet] to apply for a Freedom Pass. The Library helped me set up an email account but I will never use it, I just had to have it for the Freedom Pass. I'm okay as I am.' (Lambeth IOM client)

Data from our interviews suggests that while most people (70%) believe it is important to be able to do things online and fear being left behind if they can't, many of the same people also believe that somehow the digital world is for others, that they have managed alright without it (24%) and crucially that they don't know where to start in becoming engaged (20%).

'Going online is important because that's the way things work but I don't want to have to. I have got by without it for 50 odd years so I'll carry on.' (Thames Reach service user)

'It is important because it's the way of the world not and I know my daughter needs to be able to do it and I want to help her but I'm scared to learn because I don't think I can do it and I wouldn't know where to start.' (St Mungo's service user)

As previously highlighted, there is a general sense that computer courses are pitched at the wrong level and that newly acquired skills are soon forgotten without follow up opportunities to regularly practice them. Since 40% of interviewees have no access to any digital device and they are unaware of or unwilling to attend open access sessions, this issue is particularly challenging.

'I have been on several courses but they didn't work for me. I need one to one support at my own pace. If it doesn't make sense, I need to be able to say so, stop the trainer and go over it until I understand.' (St Giles Trust)

'I've never been online, I'm not confident at all. It's not a good thing, I feel very left out. I have a very basic phone. I am trying to save up to buy a smart phone but I will need someone to help me use it. Lots of things are online and I would love to learn but I don't know where to go for help. You are the first person ever to bring this issue up with me.' (Lambeth IOM client)

Face to face relationships

Both staff within organisations and users of services made the point in different ways that for some clients, there is little or no incentive to become more digitally proficient because what they are seeking is human interaction with another person. The point was made very succinctly by the Chief Executive of Ofcom at a recent event looking at adults' media use and attitudes:

'Some people don't want to be digitally better because they want to have that face to face encounter'.

A number of service users interviewed reported feeling ambivalent about becoming more digitally engaged because it is seen as an underhand way of reducing the opportunities for highly valued face to face, human interaction.

'I worry about the lack of human interaction with the increase in online activity. Face to face, people can interpret what you are saying but it's just black and white online. I know it's about cost saving but I think there will be a great cost to society and to individuals.' (Thames Reach hostel service user)

'Socially it is worse to do everything online. It will lead to more isolation and people will lose their empathic skills. The system wants people to be unemotional and not to cause problems but the system creates frustration and is time consuming. I think mental illness will increase.' ('Make it Happen' service user representative)

Linked to this is the fact that many, particularly older, people feel more confident that their issue has been fully understood and reassured that it will be dealt with appropriately if some form of interaction with a person has been involved.

'Clients don't use computers in the rest of their lives so are resistant and mistrustful. They prefer the immediacy of using a telephone and engaging with a person at the other end. Housing benefit, DWP, jobseekers is all online and they don't like it. If they have to do it themselves, they want to go to a service and do it in person otherwise they would rather one of us do it.' (Deptford Reach)

'I don't trust that I will get anywhere with online job searches. Everything is about who you know, having a contact, making a connection with someone. I never hear anything back.' (Thames Reach service user)

Internet security

An additional barrier for some of those interviewed is that of internet security and online safety.

'It is important to go online but I don't think it makes life easier. I prefer to do things in person and I don't trust it for safety either. The lack of regulation prevents me going on there.' (Deptford Reach service user)

'I would never use someone else's device I don't think it is safe and I would worry about security, someone getting my details. That's why I would never use a public computer like in a library or somewhere.' (St Giles Trust volunteer)

'Our clients don't use computers like we do in everyday life so they either don't think about them or worry about the risks of using them. Cost and security are main issues. Their resistance comes from fear about what happens to their information.' (Lambeth IOM)

Placing digital engagement within a hierarchy of needs

For clients with the most chaotic lives or complex needs, digital engagement is simply not considered a priority.

‘Digital is not seen as essential. If you can’t feed yourself and your family, getting a laptop and going online is not a priority.’ (Thames Reach)

‘Our clients are unemployed, homeless with learning difficulties, mental health and substance misuse issues. They can’t take the information in, they won’t retain it. They are just so far away from even considering digital as relevant to them.’ (Deptford Reach)

iv) Digital strategy

Lack of consistent approaches to digital support

None of the organisations consulted have an overt, organisation wide digital strategy. Most of those interviewed said that ‘thinking digital’ is a central tenet of everything they do, but agreed that organisations implement that in very different ways.

‘The main thrust of our digital approach is through the peer assist contact centre, which is a digital platform. It is peer support designed, delivered and led. It’s an offer we can make out to the public, including service users, giving an opportunity to interact with Peer Advisers online or via a telephone helpline. (St Giles Trust)

‘I-Reach follows the Go ON UK model so the focus is on how to get email, use browsers, get deals online etc. It needs to be practical and use good luck stories, i.e. someone like you managed to save money on their bills. It is a service taken to and delivered on site, so for example one of our hostels. It’s effective but the problem is if they are unable to practice their skills in between sessions.’ (Thames Reach)

‘As far as I’m aware there is no organisational digital strategy. It is very much left up to individuals, whose digital skills vary hugely anyway.’ (Lambeth IOM)

Competing priorities

A point raised by many was that digital engagement constantly competes for focus with other strategic priorities, with the link between the issues not always being made.

‘Strategically, digital competes with other priorities, for example mental health or ETE. Obviously there are ways in which being more digitally aware could support mental health, for example searching support groups in your area, but finding the time to creatively make the case and secure funding accordingly is a challenge.’ (Lewisham Council)

Measuring effectiveness

Additionally, it tends to be outputs rather than outcomes or impact that are measured, for example the number of users attending a computer course rather than the skills acquired as a result. Both Lewisham and Lambeth Councils state that digital support should be part of everyone's support planning, but how that actually translates into dedicated, bespoke digital support for individuals is less clear.

4. Analysis and recommendations

Analysis has been grouped into nine categories from which a number of concrete recommendations for policy and practice have been identified.

Assessing skills

Findings indicate that a significant basic digital skills deficit exists among the majority of service users interviewed. The most profound skills deficits were identified in individuals with the most complex and multiple needs, i.e. those with co-existing issues in at least 3 of the 4 categories of homelessness, substance misuse, mental health and criminal justice. None of those assessed could remember having previously completed a basic digital skills assessment. In addition, digital skills among professionals working within support services appear to vary considerably.

- A. All initial assessments carried out by services with new clients should include an assessment of basic digital skills to enable individual support plans to include specific provision that better targets need.
- B. Teaching by stealth or in an informal manner is perceived positively by professionals and users of services alike and should be implemented wherever possible. For some services, this approach would demand a cultural shift and importantly requires those teaching (be they staff, volunteers or peer supporters) to have the requisite digital skills themselves. Basic digital skills assessments for professionals could be undertaken as part of supervision and/or appraisals.
- C. Focussing on individuals with the most complex, co-existing needs is extremely challenging in terms of improving digital engagement because entrenched issues exist in terms of skills, access and motivation. Defining the target cohort in a different way, by identifying those who are excluded but willing and capable of engaging, might provide a better opportunity to develop, test and learn from targeted support approaches.

Awareness and signposting

Often best use is not being made of the support that already exists due to lack of awareness or inadequate publicity.

- D. If service users are unaware of the support that is available in their area, they cannot hope to take the first step. Greater knowledge of local initiatives such as Go ON Lewisham, and improved signposting across and within services would be a relatively simple and inexpensive way to make better use of the range of support initiatives that do exist across LSL.
- E. Importantly, publicity materials need to be created and displayed in a way that maximises their impact for the target group, i.e. posters, leaflets, texts, word of mouth and not just electronically.

Appropriate and relevant training support

Training is often felt to be pitched at the wrong level and even where it is effective, if opportunities to practice newly acquired skills are not available, the benefits are short lived.

- F. A digital element needs to be factored into any initiative being developed. The focus should be on explaining the importance and relevance of the internet and on developing the most basic of digital skills. Approaches should be developed with the most digitally excluded in mind to avoid the issue of training being pitched too high.
- G. It is important for learners to have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills. Where opportunities exist to provide home access to devices in tandem with structured learning, they should be taken. In some settings, for example hostels, this might mean allowing access to computer suites at more and different times of the day and ensuring that staff, volunteers or peer supporters are on hand to help.

Relational support

For many service users, engaging with digital support is almost an unintended consequence of seeking support relating to a specific issue such as job searching or making a benefit claim. It rarely serves as a stepping stone to broader digital engagement. Perhaps linked to this, and certainly a key issue, is the lack of incentive to become more digitally able because of the desire to have face to face encounters.

- H. There is a need to find more sophisticated yet pragmatic ways of encouraging reluctant people to see the relevance of digital engagement. Explicitly linking support to a hierarchy of needs or building on issue based support opportunities is important.

The opportunity to learn from Tinder Foundation's UK Online Centres via its' forthcoming evaluation should be capitalised on.

- I. Relational services seem to be central to the issue of motivation for users and providers alike. Organisations frequently attended by people with multiple needs are best placed to capitalise on the quality of relationships that are key to successful engagement and learning. Examples such as St Giles Trust which has equipped each interview room with large screens and internet access means that sessions with clients can easily make use of digital technology without it being an overt objective. Similarly, having tablets available to use with clients accessing the Lambeth IOM hub provides an opportunity to 'teach by stealth'.

Learning in the right environment

It is not realistic to expect people with multiple needs who are digitally excluded to routinely access formal learning opportunities. Initial findings from Tinder Foundation's Reboot UK pilot suggest that initiatives that seek to take support to the individual and are opportunistic work best.

- J. Making digital support and training as mobile as possible and taking it to wherever digitally excluded people present or live is effective. Initiatives like the Thames Reach I-Reach model or the SLAM frequent attenders peer support approach are good examples. Full findings from Tinder Foundation's Reboot UK project are due later this year and should provide some learning pertinent to the multiple needs group.
- K. Similarly, help points or information stands could be positioned in busy local areas with heavy footfall such as markets. This would provide an opportunity to have an initial conversation about digital engagement and to signpost people to relevant support in their local area including Online Centres, community support organisations, libraries, Digital Champions etc.

Long term support

Supporting the digitally excluded to become digitally engaged needs to be considered as a long term, on-going aim. Without dedicated, long term funding to this end, exclusion risks becoming persistent and entrenched.

- L. In economically challenging times, creative ways need to be found to deliver personalised digital support. Peer support is recognised as being an effective form of engagement and one that is already embedded within many services. Adding an explicit digital engagement focus to peer support roles could provide an opportunity to draw on and share expertise from the ground up.

- M. Simply digitising services without supporting users to access them does not work. Organisations such as Lloyds Bank and Digital Unite are recruiting and training thousands of Digital Champions, considered to be an effective tool in today's digital inclusion landscape, particularly for those who remain persistently digitally excluded, who are harder to engage and who are likely to need personal long-term support. Efforts need to be made to identify Digital Champions in local areas and use them to support people with multiple needs.
- N. Some people will always need support, no matter how many times they have been shown. Recognising and accepting this and understanding the importance of persisting and being creative about the ways in which support is offered is key. Funding applications should include specific reference to the importance of this issue and the costs associated with providing it.

Cost/affordability

One of the main barriers to digital engagement is the cost and affordability of devices and connectivity. Service users with the most complex and multiple needs, have very little or no access to the internet, largely because they do not have their own devices.

- O. It is becoming increasingly costly, both financially and socially, for government to leave a significant population within society digitally unengaged. Opportunities to make technology available to this group must be sought. Organisations should seek to connect with initiatives such as the 'Laptops for the Homeless' scheme and capitalise on device loans and grants where they exist.
- P. Connectivity is an issue for some. Most of the service users interviewed feel that Local Authorities and/or organisations providing accommodation such as hostels, should view broadband/Wi-Fi as a basic utility and provide connectivity accordingly. Hot spots or guest access points within services could be better publicised for those not willing or able to access 'free' Wi-Fi in cafes etc.

Stigma

In many cases, for professionals and service users alike, stigma (perceived or otherwise) feelings of inadequacy and fear of being left behind go hand in hand with a lack of basic digital skills.

- Q. Opportunities exist to learn from initiatives such as the mental health campaign 'Time to change' which aims to reduce stigma surrounding mental health and encourages people to talk about the issue. While most organisations consider themselves to have

a digital approach at the heart of their work, it does not always translate into meaningful digital support for all. Finding ways to promote a positive message about digital engagement and support to improve skills in this area should be overtly referenced within organisational strategies and communications.

Learning from local and national initiatives to inform change

In some instances, the system appears to compound the problem. For example, Job Centre Plus provides Job Coaches to assist with job searching but their role does not explicitly include digital support. Sanctions exist if individuals fail to job search but support is not always available if they lack the digital capability to do so. Spotting the obvious gaps and increasing awareness of them by connecting to local and national initiatives should be an aim.

- R. Where existing initiatives exist, such as the DWP funded digital support for Universal Credit claims delivered by the CAB in Lambeth, learning should be shared and evidence gathered to support their continuation and/or roll out to other public services such as Job Centre Plus.
- S. The DSMS' Research Working Group's 'What Works Toolkit', is due for publication in September 2016. It will be available for relevant organisations to pilot and opportunities will exist to input into subsequent iterations. Information about how to engage with this can be found [here](#).

5. Acknowledgements

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Tinder Foundation; OFCOM; DCMS Digital Engagement Team; Lewisham Council; Lambeth Council; St Giles Trust; Thames Reach; St Mungo's; You First; Lambeth IOM; Deptford Reach; Evolve Housing; Single Homeless Project (SHP); Reintegration and Aftercare Lewisham (ReAL); CRI; and members of 'Make it Happen'.

Laura Thorne - Confluence Partnerships

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6. Appendix

Included in this section are:

- the questions devised in consultation with Tinder Foundation to assess issues of access and motivation
- a blank version of Go ON UK's basic digital skills assessment questionnaire
- a completed version of Go ON UK's basic digital skills assessment questionnaire, indicating individual scores for each of the 25 service users interviewed

Questions to assess access and motivation issues

1. How much do you use the internet?
2. What do you use it for?
3. How confident are you at using digital technology?
4. How does that make you feel?
5. How do you mainly get online? E.g. smart phone, laptop, tablet, pc
6. Is that your own device?
7. Do you have any problems with access to digital technology or the internet?
8. Do you think it is important to be able to do things online? Why?
9. Would you like to be able to do more online?
10. If so, what's stopping you now?
11. If you were to need help with any online activity, where would you go for that?
12. Have you sought help there or elsewhere before? Was it useful?

Basic Digital Skills Assessment Questions



Basic Digital Skills category	Action	Could you do this?			Have you done this in the last 3 months?	
		I have no idea what you're talking about	I could do this if I was asked to	I couldn't do this if I was asked to	I have done this in the last 3 months	I haven't done this in the last 3 months
Managing Information	Use a search engine to look for information online*					
	Download/save a photo you found online					
	Find a website you have visited before*					
Communicating	Send a personal message to another person via email or online messaging service*					
	Carefully make comments and share information online					
Transacting	Buy items or services from a website*					
	Buy and install apps on a device					
Problem Solving	Solve a problem you have with a device or digital service using online help					
	Verify sources of information you found online					
Creating	Complete online application forms which include personal details*					
	Create something new from existing online images, music or video					

Here is a list of skills that people need to be able to use the internet through their computers/laptops or other devices (e.g. tablet, smartphone, games console). Use these assessment questions to identify if you or others have the Basic Digital Skills you need.

Questions with the * indicate a legacy question that can be used to measure the previous Basic Online Skills levels to benchmark against previous research.

Basic digital skills assessment questions (Go ON UK)

Collated information from participants – numbers represent specific interviewees

Basic digital skills category	Action		Could you do this?		Have you done this in the last 3 months?	
			I have no idea what you are talking about	I could do this if I was asked	I couldn't do this if I was asked	I have done it in the last 3 months
Managing information	Use a search engine to look for information online	2, 21,	3, 6, 12,	5, 6, 8, 9, 15, 18, 19, 20,	1, 4, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25,	
	Download/save a photo your found online	2, 19, 21,	1, 10, 12, 24, 25,	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 18, 20, 22,	11, 13, 16, 17, 23,	
	Find a website you have visited before	2, 19, 21,	1, 10, 12, 15, 18, 20, 24,	3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 22,	4, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 23, 25,	
Communicating	Send a personal message to another person via email or online messaging service	2, 21,	7, 10, 12, 22,	3, 5, 8, 9, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23,	1, 4, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 24, 25,	
	Carefully make comments and share information online	2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 19, 21,	7, 12, 14, 25,	3, 4, 9, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24,	1, 11, 13, 16, 17,	
Transacting	Buy items from a website	21,	7, 14, 23, 24,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22,	1, 11, 13, 16, 17, 25,	
	Buy and install apps on a device	2, 5, 6, 19, 21,	1, 3,	4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24,	11, 13, 16, 17, 25,	
Problem solving	Solve a problem you have with a device or digital service using online help	2, 8, 19, 21,	1, 12, 17,	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25,	11, 13,	16,
	Verify sources of information you found online	2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 18, 19, 21,	12, 17, 25,	1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 14, 15, 20, 22, 23, 24,	11, 13, 16,	
Creating	Complete online application forms which include personal details	21,		2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23,	1, 3, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 24, 25,	4, 16,
	Create something new from existing online images, music or video	2, 7, 8, 11, 19, 21,	1, 23, 24, 25,	3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 22,	13, 16,	