

Impact Report

2023 - 2024



Our Year in Numbers

8,223



New Learners Supported

5,232



Learner Sessions

386



Digital Champions

23,455



Attendances to Sessions

969



Devices and Data Gifted

768



Organisations Engaged

2,056



Support Calls

67



Events and Training

10



Projects Led

Our Work

Our vision - an inclusive society where everyone can benefit from being online

Our mission - to be the voice of the digitally excluded to ensure they are not left behind in the digital world

We achieve this by supporting:

1 Individuals - We help people to develop digital skills, access devices and data. We run a UK freephone helpline that anyone can call to get support.

2 Organisations - We advise organisations with recommendations to improve digital transformation and embed digital inclusion into everyday practice.

3 The sector - We conduct research to understand more about digital exclusion and encourage innovative solutions, we share our findings and collaborate with others.



Learners are the people we support



Digital Champions are those that support learners



Taking a sample of 638 of our learners:

52%

have a health condition or disability

60%

do not have access to a device

70%

are on a low income

26%

do not have internet access

Mr Jones' Journey: New to the digital world

Mr Jones is 84 years old. Before attending our support sessions in Bala, Gwynedd he had “virtually no interaction with tech except dealing with a clock”. Welsh is his first language. In the past he has found it difficult to understand information on using tech because it has only been available in English and can be difficult to understand.

We gifted Mr Jones a tablet as he did not have a digital device. With support from his digital champion, Mr Jones can now:



“

I'm thankful for the opportunity to support Mr Jones each week and his achievements are truly inspirational. He's a great example of how it's never too late to start to use technology. No matter how nervous you feel a digital champion can help you to achieve your goals

”



Mr Jones'
Digital
Champion

Learner-led Support Sessions

Digital skills and using technology are powerful enablers to improve people's lives in many different ways. Our work is learner-led, as we know that a person centred approach works best when developing essential digital skills. Our digital champions support learners to:



Connect with friends and family



Hobbies and Leisure Activities



Navigate with online maps



Manage and improve health



Complete courses



Create CVs and apply for jobs



Shop online



Save money and budget



Access services



Feel safe and secure online



Manage accessibility settings



Book appointments

5,232
Learner
Sessions



23,455
Attendances
to Sessions



“ It has been absolutely amazing. It's opened so many doors for me! Youtube, google maps, all these things. I think how did I manage before without them. ”

Home-based support

Our digital champions in Brighton & Hove offer support in peoples homes for those not able to get out into the community easily.

42

Learners supported with home visits



169

Sessions in homes



Our digital champions have also helped learners to keep their house-hold costs down.



In one session, a learner was able to reduce their BT bill by 73%.

Setting up home support

We recognised a gap in provision for home based digital support in Brighton & Hove. There are many residents who cannot easily leave the home, because of health conditions, mobility or caring responsibilities. Being digitally excluded further excludes them from society. Members of our Digital Inclusion Network confirmed our concerns and we developed our home-support offer.

The importance of home based support was highlighted by a staff member supporting a person with agoraphobia:

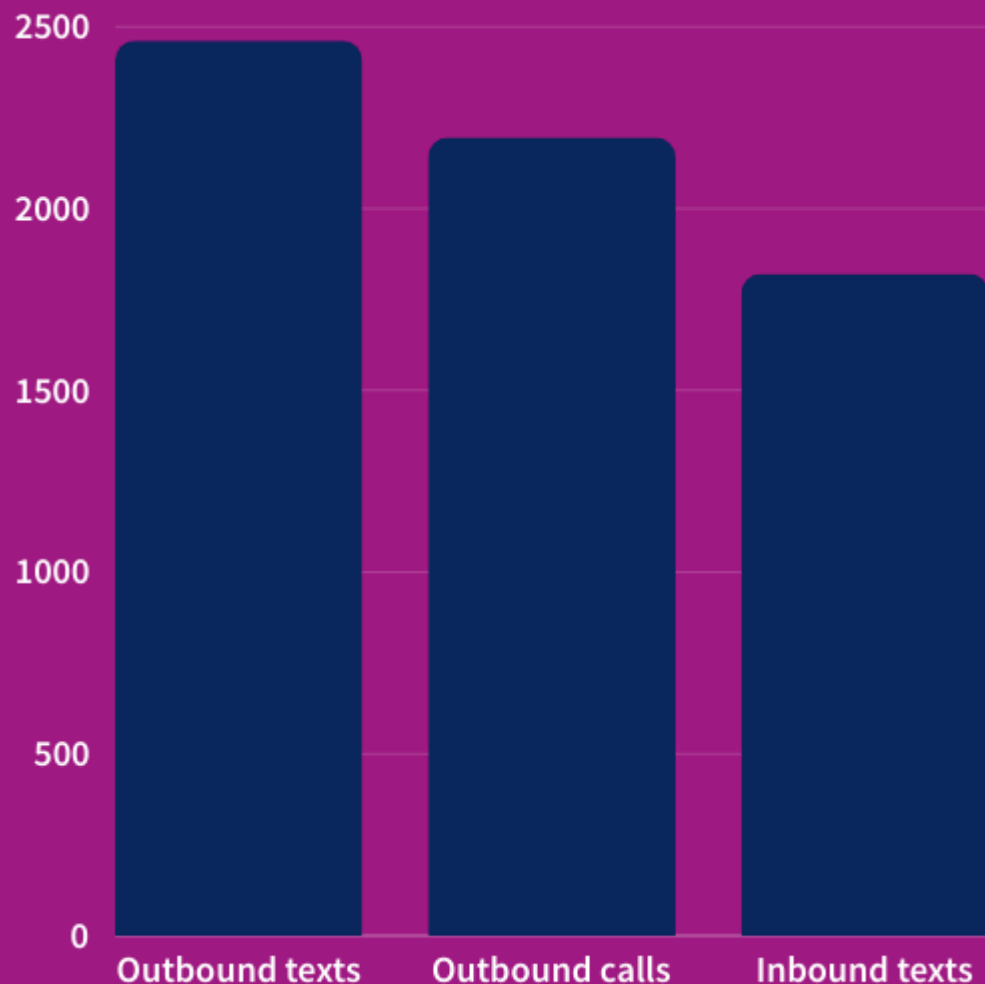
“As J won’t go outside I would like the outside to go to J”

A referrer from the Hospital Discharge Service told us:

“This will have such a positive impact on [the patient’s] wellbeing and give him back some independence”

Freephone Digital Skills Helpline

Anyone in the UK can call us free to get help to get started or become more confident with technology. Our helpline is run by our team of trained digital champions.



The support line can also be used for texting - for quick queries, or for our learners we support in person to contact us.

One project is run solely through the phone line, this is what one of our learners had to say:

“

To begin with I had absolutely zero confidence, I was even scared to turn [the device] on and now I feel quite comfortable about that.

Without your help I would have needed my kids to help me with it and I do prefer to be independent if I can. They are very patient, but you know there is a limit to how much you want to use them, so yes more independence is what it has really meant to me.



Learner who received phone support sessions

”

Devices and Connectivity

This year we have distributed 969 devices and data (SIM cards) to learners:

969

Devices and Data Gifted



383

SIM Cards



72

MiFi Units



315

Laptops



150

Smartphones



36

Tablets



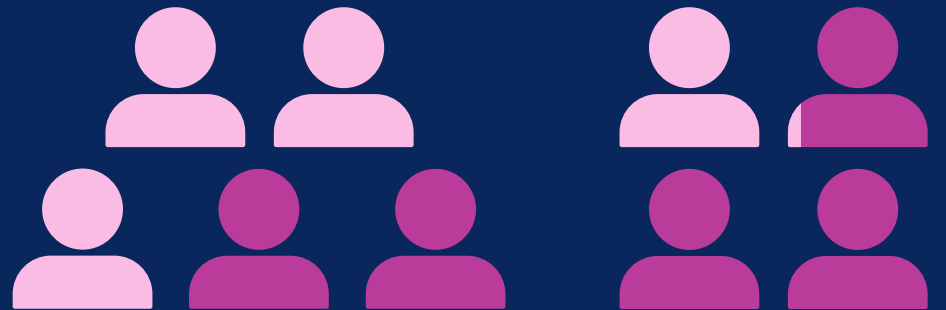
13

Other



Digital poverty is a huge barrier to digital inclusion. Without a device and a connection to the internet a person cannot be digitally included.

A sample of 638 of our learners before they received support shows:



3 in 5 didn't have a device

Over 1 in 4 had no internet access

“ Thank you so much, this will really help me with my studies so I can train to be a paramedic once my daughter starts school. It will mean I can get a head start on my studies. ”



Learner who received a laptop and support session

Health and Digital Exclusion

The people more likely to be digitally excluded, are also more likely to have poorer health outcomes. 62% of our learners have a health condition or disability. With health services moving increasingly online, digital inclusion must be a priority to avoid worsening health inequalities.

We know from our learners that digital access makes health conditions easier to manage and improves both physical and mental health. It is crucial that health services recognise digitally excluded patients and offer support, or signpost to local support.



**1 in 8 of our learners
in Brighton & Hove
were referred to us by
NHS staff***

*46 of the 359 learners we directly supported

Online Support Group - Sophie's Story

After a recent stay in hospital, Sophie was referred to Digital Brighton & Hove by her Hospital Discharge service.

She has multiple disabilities that significantly impact her life. Sophie needs to attend online support groups to manage her condition but she lacked digital skills and confidence to do this.

Our digital champion contacted Sophie, and arranged to visit at home. They worked together to make using her laptop more accessible, by changing the size of the font and mouse pointer and enabling Touch ID to minimise password entries.

Despite a few bumps in the journey, Sophie is now able to attend support groups and health meetings online.

Digital Champions

What has being a digital champion meant to you?

“I've been able to give a lot to the community through my role and has boosted my confidence in dealing with people and confidence in regard to digital skills”

“I have become more tech savvy, in helping other people with their technology”

“It has definitely helped me in terms of my mental health”



Our network of 386 digital champions is key to supporting learners across the UK.

386
Total Digital Champions



There are three types of digital champions (DCs):

110
Trained this year



1. PROFESSIONAL

People employed as a digital champion - it is their main job role



2. EMBEDDED

Those who incorporate digital champion support as part of their role, although it's not their job title



3. VOLUNTEER

Digital champions recruited and trained by an organisation to support digital inclusion work, who offer their time for free

Embedding digital support in Tafarn y Plu pub, Gwynedd

We were asked by a local community organisation to run digital support sessions with local residents. Our digital champion Llion helped the group to become confident to navigate their devices and the online world safely. Thanks to [our funders](#), we are able to gift refurbished devices to those in need. After running the session for a few months we were introduced to Ian, who was keen to volunteer.

We provided Ian with support and he was happy to take over running the group. Ian told us:

“

I believe, I can help people to take control and manage the digital age by supporting them with regular meet ups every Thursday. It is a pleasure to help people who have difficulties using technology and see their confidence grow.

”

A learner who attends the weekly group told us:

“

Ian has been very supportive not only to the IT sessions but also to our community. He's even started learning Welsh! He makes things easy for us to understand and will go out of his way to help.

”



Digital Skills for Employment

Recent research finds that 92% of jobs now require digital skills*. Being online makes job searching, writing a CV and completing job applications much easier. Many interviews now also take place online. As part of Digital Gwynedd, our digital champions have been supporting residents with digital skills to be work ready.

*National Skills Coalition 'Closing the digital skill divide' 2023

68%

find the workplace
the easiest place to
learn new digital
skills*

18%

lack the Essential
Digital Skills for
work*

*Lloyds Consumer Digital Index 2023

To embed the work
we have:

5

Job centres we
are working from



124

Organisations
engaged



27

Trained digital
champions



Outcomes so far:

194

Devices gifted



68

Data devices
gifted (SIM and MiFi)



221

Ready to work
support sessions



This has led to good news stories, like Rachel who has set up her own business and website:

“

Llion's help has been invaluable in starting and growing my business. Firstly for the use of a laptop to create a website and also upskilling and creating spreadsheets. I have and would recommend this service to anyone who needs support.

”



Kevin's Story



Kevin was looking for work but lacked digital skills and confidence. He didn't have wifi at home and only had a smartphone to access the internet. He was looking for jobs using the local library computer, booked on one hour sessions. He attended a Digital Gwynedd support session in Blaenau Ffestiniog. We provided him with a tablet and SIM card with 6 months data. This meant that Kevin could job search at home, without having to set up broadband.



We supported Kevin to set up an email account so he could receive job alerts on his tablet

He translated his passion for art to a more digital style, using new software on his tablet

Kevin got a job in his local area and now works part time. He has also applied to be a Digital Champion



Support For Organisations

We offer a range of digital inclusion support for organisations, these include:

Research



Risk assessments, provision and gap analysis



Digital Maturity Assessments



Bespoke research into key groups or services

Engagement



Digital champion training



Establishing Digital Inclusion Networks



Awareness raising and marketing

Resources



Strategies and Action Plans



Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks



Digital inclusion resources and advice

“

Citizens Online are a great team who truly understand the challenges Councils, organisations and businesses face around digital inclusion. The team are incredibly motivated and work seamlessly with internal staff. They are passionate, skilled and incredibly knowledgeable. Outputs are always impactful and insightful demonstrating the collaboration that has been enabled through the work. The team also work so hard to handover work to ensure it can be as successful and valuable as possible.

”



Joanne Blount, Head of Strategy and Engagement, IT & Digital, Surrey County Council



Embedding Digital Inclusion in West Sussex

We worked with West Sussex County Council for 18 months, to improve and embed digital inclusion into local services.

Baseline Research of digital exclusion in the County

Consultation with 385 stakeholders to produce the Digital Inclusion, Safety and Access Strategy 2024-27 and Action Plan

Recruited a Partnership Manager to grow the West Sussex Digital Inclusion Network, engaging with local organisations

Launched the Network website, with a referral form and signposting site. Implemented a device and data gifting scheme

Analysed a digital skills survey of West Sussex County Council staff. Made recommendations to further embed this work, to help deliver on Council priorities

To embed digital inclusion across the county we have:



Engaged 110 organisations



Engaged 259 stakeholders



Hosted 10 digital inclusion events



Trained 32 digital champions

And in six months, the network has:



Supported 200 new learners



Distributed 135 devices



Over 40 places offering Digital inclusion provision in West Sussex

Events

In the past year we have run and attended:

67 Events and Training



- Womens and Equalities Committee
- Communications and Digital Committee
- Digital champion training
- Digital inclusion workshops
- Health, digital, and equality conferences and hearings
- Digital Inclusion Network meetings
- Job fairs
- Support events for digital champions

“

It was good to get some more information and to meet/network with other people from other organisations and also to share some of our experiences with the group

”



Network Meeting Attendee



We presented at NHS England and Royal Society of Medicine's 'Tackling Inequalities' 2024 conference



Our Digital Gwynedd team at a local job fair promoting digital skills support for job-seekers



Our Digital Brighton & Hove Coordinator meeting Caroline Lucas MP at a funder event

Supporting Tower Hamlets Borough Council

Citizens Online were funded by social value provision through Hyperoptic, to work with Tower Hamlets Council to improve digital inclusion in the borough. As part of our work we provided:



Digital Maturity Assessment



Disability and Digital Inclusion Report



Monitoring and Evaluation Framework



Digital inclusion resources and advice

“

Being able to tap into the expertise of Citizens Online has enabled us to delve deeper into the key digital inclusion issues we face in Tower Hamlets and put in place structures to help us address these over the long term.

”



Digital Inclusion Ambassador, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

“

This report helped by giving us further valuable local insight and a set our clear recommendations to work towards.

”



Our Funders

Thank you to our funders. Without our funders, the work we do at Citizens Online would not be possible.

Our work to tackle digital exclusion contributes to the United Nations (UN) Sustainability Goals 1, 3, 4, 8, 10 and 12.

You can read more on our blog about what we do, our case studies and ways you can support us:

<https://www.citizensonline.org.uk/>

If you or someone you know needs digital support, please call our helpline:

0808 196 5883

