

**Digital Inclusion in North Tyneside –
Residents' views and practical
solutions – Report of key findings**

May 2023

Contents

1. Background	3
Part 2 – What we heard – Views about Digital.....	5
2.1 People need help with a wide range of technology.....	5
2.2 Choice	5
2.3 Lack of confidence and fear.....	6
2.4 People say they need help with kit.....	6
2.5 Cost is a real limiting issue	7
2.6 Information and help.....	7
Part 3 – Solutions identified by residents’ feedback	8
3.1 Engaging people.....	8
3.1.1 ‘Planting digital seeds’- How best to engage with people about digital issues	8
3.1.2 Next steps to learn more	9
3.2 Getting the kit you need	9
3.2.1 Financial support to buy and run technology	9
3.2.2 Help to understand the choice of tech that is available and what to buy	9
3.3 Information about support offer	9
3.4 Getting help or support	10
3.4.1 Level 1 – User guides / self-help guides / top tips	10
3.4.2 Level 2 – Frontline support with the basics	11
3.4.3 Level 3 – More detailed one to one support or more complex situations – Support with IT issues.....	11
3.5 A whole North Tyneside approach.....	11
4. Conclusion.....	12
5. Acknowledgements.....	12
Appendix 1 – Organisations involved in the project	12
Appendix 2 – Data from Wallsend Primary School	14
Appendix 3 – Sample case studies.....	15

1. Background

Healthwatch North Tyneside first raised the issue of digital inclusion in the early days of the Covid 19 pandemic. Since then, we have worked closely with partners to look at ways digital inclusion can be better understood and addressed.

After a consultation exercise on health inequalities to support North Tyneside's Equally Well strategy in Summer 2022, Healthwatch North Tyneside had an opportunity to explore digital inequalities further, with support from NHS Improving Access funding. The information gathered will feed into the North Tyneside Digital Inclusion Strategy and provide evidence and solutions for addressing digital inclusion in North Tyneside.

Method

In January and February 2023, Healthwatch gathered feedback from 22 organisations across North Tyneside around digital inclusion. Over 500 people shared their experiences and ideas; from children to people in their 90s. This included residents, staff, volunteers and trustees.

Focusing mainly on open conversations, either one-to-one or in small groups, we were able to explore an issue that impacts on residents of all ages.

Evidence was assimilated to inform our findings. A total of 30 local organisations were involved across both consultations. See [Appendix 1](#)

Organisations involved in evidence gathering were briefed on a range of possible topics, focusing mainly on technology people already have and want to use better. Funding was available to support organisations with this task.

Our key goals were:

- To identify the help people need to feel more confident and able to engage with today's digital world.
- To outline ideas for practical solutions to improve digital inclusion.

Reports

This report provides a summary of findings and our suggested actions which have been tested with 12 of the organisations and 20 of the residents involved in the evidence gathering.

For more detailed information on our methods, findings and recommendations, please see our more detailed report on Digital Inclusion in North Tyneside. <https://healthwatchnorthtyneside.co.uk/report/digital-inclusion-in-north-tyneside/>

Part 2 – What people said about ‘Digital’

Often the people who need the most help with technology are very reluctant to talk about it. They feel awkward and put on the spot. Talking about more basic devices like TVs and phones provides a helpful way in. The words ‘online’ and ‘digital’ are very off putting.

Many people feel technology is racing ahead and leaving them behind. Technology is becoming ever more complex and pressure to be online is increasing. Some people feel excluded and that their choices are being taken away. This can add to health inequalities by reducing access to support for health and wellbeing.

Most people we spoke to felt they struggled at times with technology, irrespective of their age, level of skill or confidence.

2.1 People need help with a wide range of technology

- People want help with their TVs, games consoles, digital washing machines etc. as well as with phones, tablets and laptops. While many people may not have computers at home, they may need help with them for work or education purposes.
- Language is important – Many people see ‘digital’ as referring to computers only and therefore not relevant for phones or tablets. Implications for engaging with ‘digital’ sessions.
- People often don’t know how digitally ‘switched on’ they are – don’t realise phone/tablet is a computer. Lack of awareness of own digital needs.
- There is a potential appetite for support with a wide range of digital ‘activities’ e.g. internet searches, email, Apps, cloud storage, buying and selling online, benefits and housing, banking.
- Rather than focusing on ‘digital’ support generally, better to build on what people already want to do better e.g. keep in touch with family, watch catch up TV, access a GP. Also focus on the essentials e.g. universal credit, job searches/applications.

2.2 Choice

- Feeling pressured to move to online options. Universal credit and housing applications are only available online, GP encouraging people to manage prescriptions online.

- Unequal service – Services that provide alternatives to digital do not always work well or digital customers are seen to have a better experience. e.g. poor phone response.
- Concern about being left behind. “Tech is moving away before people have had a chance to catch up.”

2.3 Lack of confidence and fear

- Lack of confidence to use technology to full potential – stay within comfort zone, fear of ‘breaking’ the device. Not just older people, 57% of the 61 year 8 (12-13 year olds) asked at Norham High School wanted to be able to use their phone better.
- Shame – embarrassed to admit to lack of digital skill. “I’m dead thick because I can’t use a computer.”
- Safety of self, device and personal information – especially important for children, young people and vulnerable
 - Privacy settings
 - Passwords
 - Bank details and other personal information
 - Parental controls and inappropriate content
 - Virus protection
 - Scams
 - Tracking
 - Digital footprint
 - Online bullying
- Poor experiences in the past
 - Making a mistake and not being able to ‘undo’ it
 - Incomprehensible tech instructions
 - Websites and online forms that did not work well
 - Computer courses that were too hard, irrelevant or too much like school

2.4 People say they need help with kit

- Knowing what to buy/selecting new or second hand kit
- Help to make kit work
 - Connecting to internet
 - Setting it up – including linking devices
 - Updates
 - Repairs

- Help on how to use the kit
 - To use it to do what I need/want – choosing and installing software/apps, getting the right broadband speed for amount of use and changing provider if needed.
 - To use it to its full potential – understanding features and what’s available/relevant and maintaining optimal performance.

2.5 Cost is a real limiting issue

- “Many people cannot afford to become digitally connected.”
- However many people regard it as “essential” for everyday living – not a luxury. People are getting into debt to maintain mobile phone contracts for themselves and their children. Some people told us they use Pay As You Go to manage cash flow e.g. paying for 5GB every few days, resulting in poor value for money
- In a Wallsend school, 60% of year 6 (10–11 years) boys and 40% of girls said they had no access to a computer or tablet for their homework. (See Appendix 2)
- More people who have previously been managing are now in need of support an – in-work poverty
- Price of kit is often a barrier
- Ability to pay for data/Wi-Fi connection

2.6 Information and help

- Reliance on family for help – problem for socially isolated
- Help from a trusted person/organisation is important
- People don’t know where to get help and often don’t know how to articulate the help they want

Part 3 – Solutions identified by residents’ feedback

Based on the feedback we heard, we present the following suggestions about what support people need in North Tyneside to become more digitally included.

3.1 Engaging people

3.1.1 ‘Planting digital seeds’ – How best to engage with people about digital issues

- Don’t focus on ‘digital’ and watch the language
 - Be mindful that many people will not engage if the focus is on technology or digital – particularly for conversations early in their journey.
- Take a **Person-centred approach** when designing interventions
 - Understanding the person, what they are interested in and what they want to do.
 - Use familiar language rather than technical jargon.
 - Opportunity to nudge a step forward – e.g. ‘Did you know you can also do...’
 - Support from trusted person/organisation is important – Invest in training and support for community groups.
- **Making Every Contact Count** – taking opportunities to help with basic digital needs in context and signposting where necessary.
- **Embed in other activities**
 - Include digital opportunities within other activities to familiarise the more digitally excluded with handling devices and knowing what’s possible.
 - This could include:
 - Using an iPad/tablet for registration at a session or evaluation at the end
 - Internet searches for ideas or instructions
 - Taking photos or videos of a process or outcome
 - WhatsApp group to connect members during a series of sessions
 - Using familiar context e.g. online search for free knitting patterns at a Knit and Natter group.

- Peer learning/mentoring – at work, social and leisure activities. Opportunity to learn in bite-size chunks when it's relevant, from someone who is only a few steps ahead and 'speaks the same language'.
- Link to 'next step' opportunities (see 3.1.2)

3.1.2 Next steps to learn more

- Offer variations on a digital course/drop in according to need
 - Short course on specific topic based on identified need
 - One-off drop in for specific queries or 'bite-sized' learning opportunity
 - Hybrid – drop ins running alongside course – for course queries and practice
 - Pick and mix –bespoke offer with tablet and 'pass' to attend sessions at different locations/online
 - Co-production of digital support offers
- Self-help guides – including large font, easy read (see 3.4)

3.2 Getting the kit you need

3.2.1 Financial support to buy and run technology

- Support with cost of kit/data/Wi-Fi for those on low incomes (benefits and in-work poverty)
- Free/loan/hire of kit through organisations **with support on how to use**
- More public Wi-Fi
- Easy access to free Wi-Fi in community buildings
- Internet café **with support** in community settings
- Campaign for subsidised access to data as a right

3.2.2 Help to understand the choice of tech that is available and what to buy

- Tech display room so people can see the options and costs – especially for specific needs e.g. dementia, sensory needs.
- Impartial advice on what to buy to meet individual needs.

3.3 Information about support offer in North Tyneside

- We need a central directory of how to access digital support and opportunities to learn e.g. Living Well website – including maps of locations, explanatory videos

- Information line/somewhere to ring to get information about help on offer.
- One Stop Shops – places where people know they will get help and support (based in community hubs, libraries etc).
- Set up a scheme similar to safe places where people know they can ask for help with digital issues. (links to 3.4.2)
- Rolling communications campaign across the borough to promote sources of support – must include multiple methods, not just online.

3.4 Getting help or support

People told us they might need different types of help and support depending on their situation, skills/confidence, and the issues they need help with.

Based on this, we suggest a tiered support offer across North Tyneside so that people’s needs are better met. It is not intended that you have to work through the tiers in order.

Level 1 Self-help and peer support
Level 2 Frontline support with the basics in community settings
Level 3 More detailed one to one support or complex situations

3.4.1 Level 1 – User guides / self-help guides / top tips

To help people better help themselves and to support family/friends to help others when they feel confident to.

- Online and paper versions, including accessible formats
- Guides should include screenshots and links to videos/YouTube
- Available in libraries, community centres etc.

3.4.2 Level 2 – Frontline support with the basics

Build a network of community based support in neighbourhoods across North Tyneside. Trained staff and volunteers provide a basic level of digital support to people using their services. They can also connect people to other support and act as a hub for further sessions. A social prescriber specialised in digital support could be an option.

These could be community hubs, community organisations, GP practices etc.

Common branding would be helpful so residents can easily identify that they can get support at the venue.

The following points need to be considered to manage and deliver this type of support:

- Auditing digital needs of the venue/organisation and customers
- Help with broadband/kit upgrade
- Loan/hire of kit
- Help to design and manage digital support offer – including funding/sustainability, particularly voluntary sector organisations.
- Initial and ongoing training for staff and volunteers
- Advice and guidance including safeguarding and insurance
- Networking opportunities to keep updated
- Opportunities to deliver drop in sessions and courses either delivered by themselves or others.

3.4.3 Level 3 – More detailed one to one support or more complex situations – Support with IT issues

- Phone line and remote access.
- Support at home – one to one support in people's homes/a neutral venue.
- Drop in sessions for more complex needs at community settings.
- Supervision and support needed for those delivering this.

3.5 A whole North Tyneside approach

- Consider a North Tyneside digital inclusion standard akin to a Kitemark and encourage all businesses and organisations to comply. Could link to digital support directory.

- Encourage businesses to become IT Befrienders to community organisations – sharing expertise and access to tech support. Opportunity to work in partnership with universities.

4. Conclusion

A draft copy of this report was shared with organisations involved in this project, and all feedback has been considered. Organisations were asked, given limited resources, what support solutions should take priority. It was felt that the following should take precedence:

- One stop shops with person-centred support within the community with accessible user-guide backup.
- Help with costs – package for people that includes device, data and training – one missing element will limit success.
- Online safety for all – especially children and young people.
- Embedding digital support in everyday life – not in isolation. Access to support ‘there and then’ where it’s needed, focusing on key things people most need to do online e.g. universal credit, banking.
- Accessible access to information.

To illustrate the points raised we have produced some pen portrait case studies in Annex 3.

5. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who participated in this study: local residents and organisations that gave their time to share their thoughts, experiences and information with us. Also, thanks to the NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board in North Tyneside for securing the funding for this research.

Project Lead – Mary Low m.low@hwnt.co.uk

Appendix 1 – Organisations involved in the project

Organisation or key person	Equally Well feedback	Interview/ engagement	Engagement with residents
----------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	---------------------------

	relating to digital needs and provision	with 1 or more staff, volunteers or trustees	Done by HWNT	Done by organisation
Age UK	Y	Y	Y	Y
Carers Centre	Y			
Cedarwood Trust	Y	Y	Y	
CHCF	Y			
North Tyneside Council Digital Outreach Project		Y	Y	
Family Gateway	Y			
First Contact Clinical	Y	Y (team meeting)		
Healthwatch North Tyneside	Y	Y (team meeting)		
Helix Arts	Y			
Justice Prince				Y
LD:North East	Y	Y		Y
Linskill Centre	Y			
Meadow Well Connected	Y	Y		Y
MumSpace	Y	Y	Y	
NCEP	Y			
NTAS	Y			
NT Leaders Together	Y			
Open Labs (Y		
North Tyneside Council		Y		
Out of Sight	Y	Y	Y	
Phoenix Detached Youth Project	Y	Y		Y
SHARP (Shiremoor Health Advice and Resource Project)	Y	Y	Y	
Springfield Community Association	Y	Y	Y	Y
Support and Grow	Y	Y		Y
takepART		Y		
Tynehealth Social prescribing (Y		

VODA		Y		
Wallsend Children's Community	Y	Y		
Whitley Bay Big Local	Y	Y		Y
YMCA	Y	Y	Y	Y

Please note that organisations that did not engage with residents for this project shared insights around digital inclusion or support from their previous or ongoing work.

Appendix 2 – Data from Wallsend Primary School

Do you have a computer/ tablet to do your homework?						
	Boys – Yes it's mine %	Girls – Yes it's mine %	Boys – Yes it's shared %	Girls – Yes it's shared %	Boys – No %	Girls – No %
Year 4	43	33	43	22	14	44
Year 5	67	42	0	8	33	50
Year 6	20	40	20	20	60	40

Appendix 3 – Sample case studies

The following case studies are fictional but based on real experiences people shared with us and the types of support that could work for them.

Derek – Ordering repeat medication

Derek is 62. He has COPD and mobility issues. He used to drop into the surgery on his way to the shops to order his repeat medication but since walking became more of a struggle, he now rings up. Today he couldn't get through on the phone and was getting worried about not being able to order before the weekend, so he decided to walk to the GP Surgery.

By the time he got to the surgery, he was exhausted, flustered and struggling for breath. The receptionist had recently had training on digital inclusion and saw this as an opportunity to show Derek how to order his prescription online. He was wary at first and said he didn't go online but as she was chatting to him he said he always checked the news on his phone every day. She explained that looking at the news was going online too and doing this would allow him to see his medications any time he wanted – even during the night or at the weekend. He agreed to give it a try on the understanding that he could go back to ordering on the phone if he didn't like it. She set him up with a login and showed him where his medications were listed and how to reorder them. He then put the order in with her alongside keeping an eye. She told him that the order would be processed in the same way as usual so not to worry and that he could log on at any time if he wanted to check when it was time to renew. She gave him his login details and some simple instructions so he could manage the process himself next time.

Derek was uncertain whether the order would work properly but all was fine. When the following order was due he found his instructions easy to follow. At first it was hard to change from the way he was used to doing things but he quickly realised that this way was a lot easier and he had greater control of when he could put his order in. He now recommends other people to give it a go. 'It saves a lot of hassle and you always know you can ring up if there's a problem'

Pat – video call

Pat is 70 and lost her husband 2 years ago. She misses him dearly but talks to her daughter every day on the phone. Her daughter bought her a tablet for Christmas so she could facetime the grandchildren but she didn't really understand what this meant and it's still in the cupboard. It all seemed very easy when her daughter showed her it but when she had a go on her own a box came on the screen that she couldn't get rid of and she knew she had broken it. She knew it was expensive and didn't want to admit what she'd done so had to make an excuse every time her daughter asked about it.

She was chatting with her friend at the community café and he showed her some photos of his grandchildren on his WhatsApp. He said 'I can even talk to them on a video call, just like facetime. It really cheers me up to see them laughing and playing.' She told him about her broken tablet and that she hadn't realised what facetime meant. He suggested she bring the tablet to the drop in at the centre to check whether it really was broken. He reassured her that it probably wasn't and she had probably just pressed the wrong button.

Later that week she had her tablet checked and it was fine after all. She signed up for a short course of 4 sessions at the community centre to learn some iPad basics. There were only 4 people there and it was very informal. She could have a chat over a cuppa and got some handouts and a little task each week to practice at home. She was very proud of herself on week 4 when she was able to help someone to catch up who had missed the previous week. This gave her the confidence to ask her daughter to show her again how to use facetime so she could give it a try. Her daughter was delighted and she now talks to them all every day on facetime instead of on the phone. 'It's so much nicer – and easier than I thought'

Sandra – applying for jobs

Sandra is 52 and looks after her 1 year old grandson two days a week but wants to find a part time job to fit round this. She hasn't worked for a few years so was shocked to find out that everything has moved online. She felt out of her depth and didn't know where to start.

When she was at a craft session at her local community hub, they were looking for craft ideas on the internet and she mentioned her feelings about

looking for part time work. She said she had a smart phone but didn't use it much to go online as she didn't feel confident. The session leader suggested that she pop into a local drop in about using the internet for job searches, and showed her how to sign up for one of the job sites so she could have a look beforehand.

Sandra had a look when she got home and wrote down some questions ready to take to the drop in. The drop in was at the shopping centre so she knew where to go. She was very nervous and walked past a couple of times to have a look in the window before she had the courage to pop in and enquire. The people there were really friendly and set up a session to show her how to update and upload her CV, as well as giving her a list of useful job sites to look at. They said she could call in again if she needed more help or if she wanted to sign up for some sessions to improve her digital skills and confidence. She really appreciated being given time to think about it and come back later rather than feeling pressured to make a decision there and then.



healthwatch
North Tyneside

**Healthwatch NorthTyneside
Spirit of North Tyneside Community Hub
2nd Floor,
Wallsend Library & Customer First
Centre**

**16 The Forum
Wallsend
NE28 8JR**

**www.healthwatchnorthtyneside.co.uk
t: 0191 263 5321
e: info@healthwatchnorthtyneside.co.uk
🐦 @HWNTyneside
📘 @HealthwatchNT**