

Learning Snapshot: Positives of Digital

Ageing Better is a test and learn programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

We collect information and insights from across 14 partnerships and use this learning to support service deliverers, funders and policy makers working to reduce social isolation in people aged 50+.

This learning snapshot details key findings and recommendations from the increased use of digital to support people aged over 50 during Covid-19 lockdowns and shielding.

You can use it as a summary of the full [learning report](#) to share practical tools with colleagues and in teams, or include it in your own presentations and briefings.

1. Why focus on the positives of Digital?

- Covid-19 is an unprecedented global situation particularly impacting older people and those classed as “vulnerable”.
- During the first Covid-19 lockdown all Ageing Better face to face activity had to stop and a huge investment was made to move as much activity as possible online.
- Online groups, activities and services have facilitated more meaningful and inclusive social connections, helped target professional interventions, widened reach, and created new volunteer opportunities.
- Digital platforms will continue to feature as part of a mixed delivery model together with phone and face to face support.

2. What are the challenges?

- People continue to be affected by digital inequalities and opportunity (access to necessary devices, finances and support).
- Whilst funding for digital kit is more readily available, funding for training and confidence building, to support people into using digital, is harder to access and this needs to be addressed.
- There are additional challenges involved in supporting people who have low levels of functional literacy to get online.
- Online is not the same as face to face. It is different and so the approach to it, our service design, and our expectations of it should be different.

4. So what can we do with this learning?

- Digital has “opened the door” to previously excluded people to engage in groups, activities and relationships. It is most beneficial when used with wrap-around support.
- Test and learn from services in your area:**
- Identify and address the barriers to being online. This includes access to devices, data and wifi, the set up of equipment and commonly used platforms, skills training and confidence building.
 - Offer 1:1 IT support as well as written guides, telephone support and group sessions through volunteers and paid staff.
 - Use the un-capped potential of digital to offer new experiences that re-connect people with their passions and each other.

3. How can we work well with Digital?

- Expanding and co-designing the digital offer allows people who are housebound and socially isolated to be a more active participant in groups and activities. This is particularly significant for people with physical and mental health challenges, caring responsibilities and in areas with inaccessible venues and transport links.
- Social Prescribers and Connectors can use digital to support people to access places and people they were previously excluded from; online events, galleries and talks.
- By taking a person centred approach to digital service design, you can build confidence and create opportunities for people to connect in a way that is meaningful to them.