

Libraries Delivering Digital Inclusion

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About Good Things Foundation's Library Online Centres Network

In recognition that libraries make up over half of the Online Centres Network, Good Things Foundation conducted a piece of focussed work between September 2015 to December 2016 in order to develop a deeper understanding of public libraries and how we can better work with them to help tackle digital exclusion.

This summary provides findings from Good Things Foundation's '*Libraries Delivering Digital Inclusion*' event held in September 2016 and outlines key research and insight undertaken with Good Things Foundation's Library Online Centres Network. It also follows the recent publication of [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021](#) produced by the Libraries Taskforce.

About Good Things Foundation

[Good Things Foundation](#) (formerly Tinder Foundation) is a national charity which supports digitally and socially excluded people to improve their lives through digital. We bring together thousands of community partners to make up the Online Centres Network, reaching deep into disadvantaged communities to help people across the UK gain the support and skills they need to change their lives and overcome social challenges.

Our online learning platforms [Learn My Way](#) and [English My Way](#) - used in centres throughout the network - help thousands of people each year to gain basic digital skills, English language skills, and to progress to further learning, volunteering and employment.

Key Stats¹

There are currently **2,931** libraries in the Online Centres Network. Between April 2015 and March 2016, **22,150** library learners registered on Learn My Way across **857** libraries in the network, and completed **78,761** courses. As a result, **11,619** learners gained basic digital skills in libraries, with potential national channel shift savings of **£2,697,827** and a potential cumulative wider economic benefit of **£5,087,793**.²

Libraries Delivering Digital Inclusion

The following stats are taken from questionnaires completed by 85 library stakeholders attending Good Things Foundation's Libraries Delivering Digital Inclusion event held in September 2016:

76% of library stakeholders reported that the demand for basic digital skills support in libraries is increasing and **92%** reported high demand from job seekers to use computers in libraries. Yet only **55%** agreed their library has support from its local authority in relation to delivering digital inclusion - which highlights how local authorities need to make more effective use of library services as a resource to provide essential support services for local people.

For **98%**, working in partnership with local community organisations was seen as important for enabling effective digital inclusion activities in libraries. Yet only **19%** said they currently deliver outreach classes at another location. Respondents suggested more digital sessions should be delivered through outreach in the community in places such as schools, colleges, and Children's Centres, to build stronger links with local digitally and socially excluded groups.

72% saw providing digital health support as important for effective digital inclusion activities in libraries. A number of respondents suggested libraries should work more closely with local health organisations such as GP surgeries, health centres, dentists and opticians as outreach partners for digital inclusion.

92% felt there is a need for more training for library staff at all levels to deliver basic digital skills, to help embed digital inclusion activities across library services.

95% agreed it is important to be able to evidence the impact of digital inclusion activities in libraries, to build the case for libraries as a national digital inclusion resource, demonstrate their continued relevance, and to create a robust body of compelling statistics on library digital inclusion activities.

¹ Stats collated as of September 2016, summarising Library Online Centres Network activity between April 2015 and March 2016.

² Savings calculated using Good Things Foundation's Economic Benefits, Channel Shift and ROI Calculator 2016.



What libraries told us

Library stakeholders shared their thoughts on how they could better support people to become digitally included. We propose these top five suggestions be considered for inclusion in the benchmarking framework described in the [Libraries Deliver: Ambition report](#).

1. **Raise awareness** of the vital role libraries play in supporting digital inclusion at a national level by providing clear guidelines for local authorities and national organisations such as Jobcentre Plus on what libraries can do. This should set out clear and realistic expectations of the support provided.
2. Invest in **digital champion and volunteer management training** for frontline staff and senior management to embed best practice, increase staff capacity, and to create sustainable delivery models.
3. **Organise outreach delivery** with more community organisations such as GP surgeries, opticians, schools, adult learning services, community learning organisations and local voluntary sector organisations to engage with hard to reach audiences.
4. **Invest in and use mobile technology** such as tablets, smartphones, WiFi and mobile hotspots to support delivery in libraries, outreach locations and at local events.
5. **Tailor support** to learner needs by offering a choice of group and one-to-one sessions, and **be prepared to adapt** support at short notice, for example, consider using resources such as [English My Way](#) when supporting learners whose native language is not English.

Library stakeholders provided us with ideas on how library services could work better in partnership with other organisations. Here are their top five suggestions:

1. **Better coordination and advocacy** of digital inclusion partnership work, with more support and direction from **local and national government**.
2. Develop a **collaborative approach** to digital inclusion activities across library services, rather than working in silos, and share best practice between library services and local authority departments.
3. **Designate library** and local authority staff with the right skillset to **actively develop**, build and maintain networks and **partnerships** through regular meetings and communications - such as with health practitioners and local educational institutions.
4. **Assign specific library staff to manage digital inclusion activities** and projects in outreach and library settings, to ensure that delivery is consistent, joined-up, sustainable and quality assured.
5. **Work in partnership rather than in competition** with organisations who share the same agendas as libraries, such as Jobcentres, FE colleges and other Online Centres, to better achieve shared agendas, aims and objectives, and to better support communities.

Discussion group feedback

Good Things Foundation's Libraries Delivering Digital Inclusion event involved eight discussion groups. Below is a brief summary of those discussions:



Volunteer management and recruitment

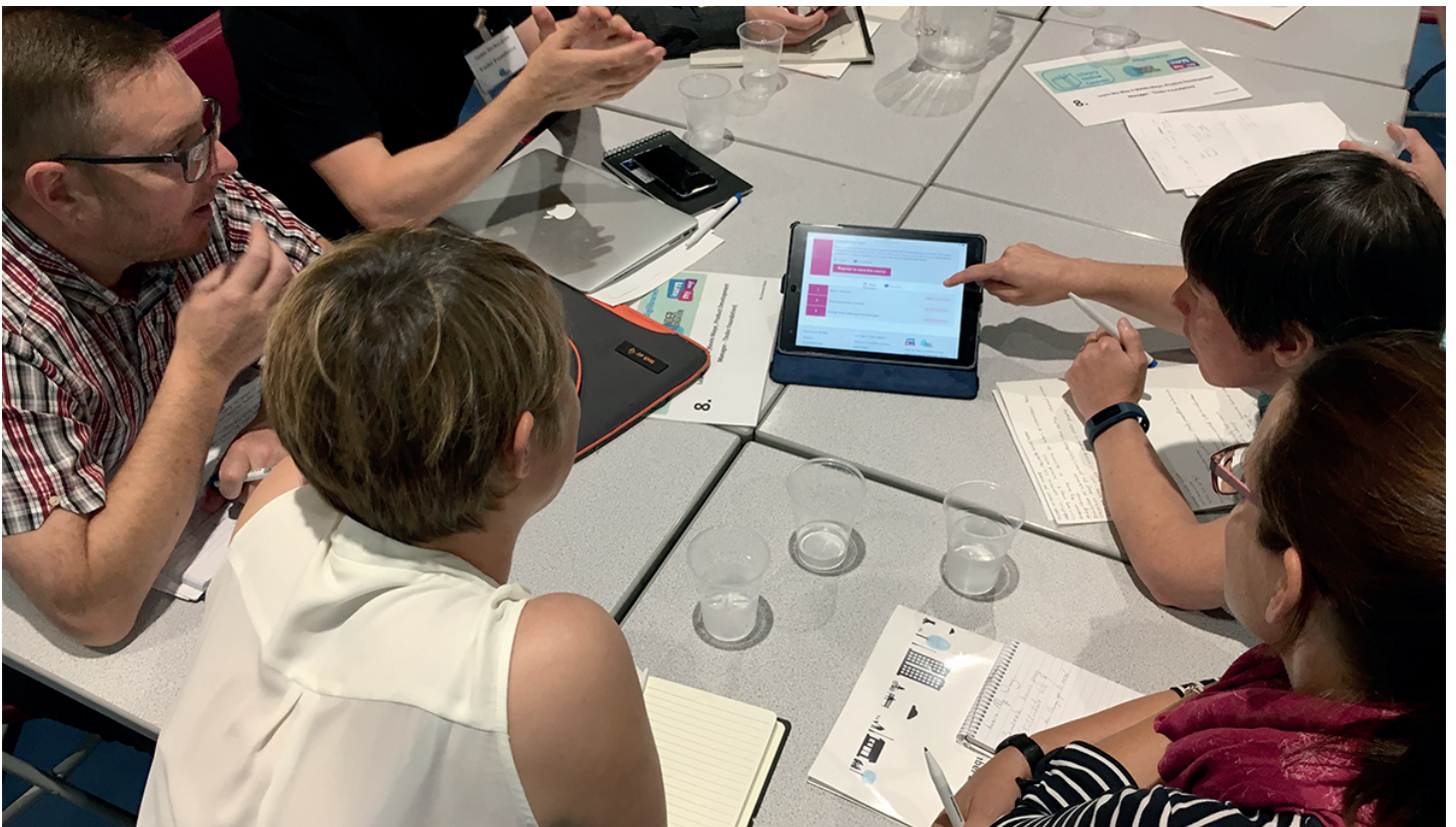
Some library stakeholders expressed concerns over the increased use of volunteers and the replacement of paid library staff in some instances. In addition, some delegates saw the use of volunteers as problematic and time consuming due to, for example, the lack of commitment from volunteers and their need for training.

However some good examples were shared of working with volunteers to increase staff capacity during a period of sustained library cuts. For example, college students studying Health & Social Care volunteered as part of their course to enable them to gain relevant experience whilst supporting learners with digital skills. In this instance, volunteers were managed by library staff in partnership with the students' college tutor.

Suggestions to help with the recruitment and retention of volunteers included financial incentives such as the reimbursement of travel costs, thank you events, and training and development. Developing partnerships with local organisations was also seen as a good source of securing volunteers.

Learn My Way

Feedback on Learn My Way was overwhelmingly positive. Most libraries reported using it on an unfunded basis due its quality and usability. Delivery models for using Learn My Way ranged from mainly unsupported provision with ad hoc support due to limited staff capacity, through to semi-supported drop-in sessions and fully structured lessons over several weeks, tailored for different audiences using a blended learning approach. The dominance of unsupported delivery reported at our Libraries Delivering Digital Inclusion event highlights how Learn My Way enables libraries, particularly those which have had to cut back on frontline staff, to better support digital inclusion activities using expert, freely available content.



Delegates were enthusiastic about the new design of Learn My Way, especially on mobile devices. However some key functions and courses on Learn My Way were not known about or understood. Good Things Foundation is in the process of producing resources that will help libraries understand all the benefits that Learn My Way can bring such as the usefulness of Learn My Way Management Information (MI) functionality and key resources such as Universal Jobmatch guide. The Digital Champion training module on Learn My Way was highlighted as a useful training tool for staff and volunteers supporting library users with basic digital skills.

Libraries and equipment loan schemes

Delegates reported an increase in the loaning of digital equipment, in particular mobile devices, to access library services and the internet. They discussed considerations for setting up a scheme of this nature, such as the need for loan agreements and time periods; what equipment to use (considering cost and usability); corporate IT support; and the need for staff and volunteer training to build confidence and familiarity with using mobile technology. A range of approaches to equipment loan schemes were discussed from charging for use, pop-up libraries, and lending tablet devices internally and externally.

Some delegates reported they felt the approach to loaning equipment was dictated by cost; risk appetite; technical restrictions of equipment; internet service reliability; staff digital skills and capacity, and library customer needs.



"I've used the library all my life, but when the walk became a bit too much I signed up to the Library At Home service. It's been great - and I feel absolutely honoured to be lent this iPad as part of the service."

Molly Hartman, Learner supported by Leeds Library at Home

How to engage learners and develop partnerships

Some useful examples were shared on how libraries can engage with library customers through digital inclusion activities by understanding their interests and personalising learning. Developing partnerships and networks in the community was seen as a great way to engage library customers, and establish mutually beneficial partnerships with organisations with shared goals such as Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice, community groups, the National Careers Service and housing associations. However, delegates repeatedly commented that due to limited resource they have little time to undertake this kind of engagement and partnership development.

Libraries supporting SME's to develop digital skills

Delegates felt that libraries already have a basic digital skills offer to Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), for example by providing access to computers, WiFi, printers, desk space, and a safe and trusted space, but felt libraries needed to market this offer more. Challenges highlighted in offering SME support included budget and resourcing issues, and a lack of awareness about the opportunity amongst SMEs. However it was recognised as an opportunity for development. It was agreed that overall, libraries can reach people that more traditional business support agencies can't, and that there was significant scope for libraries to support SMEs, especially with digital skills.



Library Governance Models & Digital Inclusion

Delegates represented libraries with a range of governance models from full local authority ownership to completely volunteer-run, and discussed the pros and cons of each. Specific disadvantages of local authority control included the service being at risk of council cuts, staff demotivated by continual changes, and the expectation to deliver more with less funding and resources. Restrictions on processes such as procurement and certifying IT equipment also meant that libraries couldn't always act quickly and responsively to develop new services such as digital inclusion.

Delegates discussed how libraries governed through charitable models have an autonomy which brings a number of benefits. Financial freedoms include the ability to apply for funding unavailable to local authority libraries; budget planning that can be undertaken outside political and council budget cycles; and spending decisions that are less restricted by bureaucracy such as procurement rules.

Along with these financial freedoms, libraries using governance models outside of local authority control felt more empowered to drive the business forward in innovative ways. This freedom also extended to the development of partnerships, where it was felt there was more ability to engage with other organisations to support delivery. However, governance outside of local authorities was also considered to have risks, the main one being that in some instances all risk would be borne by the library organisation itself, not a wider body. Their own IT system also must be robust enough to protect user data, and be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office.



"Our digital skills sessions have impacted people's lives in many different ways. One man who regularly bought magazines is now saving money by accessing them for free online through the library."

Catherine Clarke, Whitehaven Library

Digital inclusion and working with job seekers

An increasing number of library customers are being referred to libraries by Jobcentre Plus for help with the digital skills they need to find and apply for work. Attendees commented they consider this support a 'life critical service' for library customers with complex needs who require intensive and bespoke levels of support through one-to-one or specific drop-in sessions.

However it was commented that staff often don't have enough time to spend with jobseekers, and can only signpost them towards government websites such as Universal Jobmatch or Universal Credit, which take time to complete. It was felt there was a need to manage the expectations of library customers.

Partnerships with organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice, debt advice charities, and careers services were seen as essential to enable library services to help support people with complex needs such as jobseekers. The development of strategic and local level relationships with Jobcentre Plus and local authorities were seen as essential to ensuring there is the necessary support for libraries to deal with the increasing volume and complex nature of jobseekers' requests for support.



It was also felt that there is a clear need for training and support for staff and volunteers to ensure that they have both the basic digital skills themselves - as well as the necessary resources, further support and best practice to support jobseekers.

Libraries and management information (MI)

Delegates discussed how libraries are currently collecting MI in a variety of forms, but it was clear that this does not accurately reflect the breadth and depth of services that libraries deliver, and there is a need for libraries to get better at collecting, analysing and presenting data on the use of their services to assist service improvement, demonstrate impact, and advocate the work of libraries. This is particularly relevant as council and government services move to digital-by-default, creating additional pressures on library services.

There is the potential - and an increasing demand, including in the Libraries: Deliver Ambition document - for libraries to contribute to local authority strategies and objectives around digital inclusion and digital skills. Delegates discussed the need to demonstrate the impact on libraries of such issues as the digital skill requirements of jobseekers, as well as the contribution they make to tackling them. Libraries need to demonstrate outputs and outcomes to evidence and advocate their contribution to social issues.

Recommendations

In light of the findings from both the Libraries Delivering Digital Inclusion event, and Good Things Foundation's wider library research and insight over the past 18 months, we are aware that many libraries in the Online Centres Network are delivering great digital inclusion activities. We are also aware that libraries can do more to help tackle the digital divide at both local and national level. Good Things Foundation believes that libraries are essential in helping to tackle digital exclusion and the associated social challenges which can both be accentuated by digital exclusion, but importantly also tackled through digital inclusion.

The findings and the wider work of Good Things Foundation supports the Libraries Deliver: Ambition report and recognises that digital inclusion is fundamental to 21st century libraries. When digital inclusion activity is embedded in libraries it will underpin, enable and strengthen the 7 Outcomes identified in the report.

In a prolonged period of funding pressure to libraries, we believe they not only require further resources and support to deliver digital inclusion as well as other essential services for local people, but also innovation, recognition and advocacy. We aim to improve our support to libraries in order to help them deliver innovative digital inclusion activities in the communities they serve, and to advocate their impact at both a local and national level.

A number of areas of focus for future initiatives for both Good Things Foundation and the wider library sector are:

- **Delivery models** - there is no one size fits all for the delivery of digital inclusion or other activities. However, the Library Online Centres Network is full of innovation and best practice which should be shared through training and guidance for staff and volunteers.
- **Frontline service** - the move towards digital-by-default has resulted in an increased pressure on libraries for both access to, and the skills to navigate the internet - such as from jobseekers needing to use Universal Jobmatch. The extent of libraries acting as frontline services should be further understood - recorded, recognised and rewarded.



- **Research** - identify how Good Things Foundations data can secure research commissions which complement Libraries Deliver: Ambition report - helping library services to understand and evidence the seven Outcomes and their contribution to digital and social inclusion in relation to socioeconomic research across other sectors; public, private and third.
- **Management Information (MI)** - libraries need to improve their collection of data in order to be better at measuring, monitoring and reporting their impact, individually and collectively. For digital inclusion activity, [Learn My Way](#) and Capture IT provide a tried and tested way of tracking digital skills from individual learners up to the library service level. Good Things Foundation will continue to promote the adoption and use of aggregate library Learn My Way data across whole library services. Good Things Foundation's work with libraries to date has identified significant returns on investment and economic benefits from digital inclusion activity, focussed on potential channel shift savings to local and government services from learners completing basic digital skills training. More work should be undertaken to identify the economic benefits of teaching digital skills through libraries for central Government, local authorities and individuals.
- **Partnerships** - research and insight have shown that partnerships strengthen and maximise digital inclusion delivery, leading to mutual benefits for local organisations. Libraries should be supported to prioritise and resource the development of partnerships with local organisations, government agencies, local authority services, and other members of the Online Centres Network.
- **Advocacy** - libraries need support to get better at collecting and demonstrating their impact from the branch level, up to the library service level, and nationally. A strong co-ordinated national voice is needed to raise awareness of the positive impact and contribution libraries make to communities in the 21st century. This should be supported by a strong evidence base derived from MI data, outputs, outcomes and strong case studies.
- **National stakeholders** - partnership and coordination between national stakeholders is needed to consistently promote libraries, and to innovate and raise standards. Focussing on shared priorities will help raise awareness and advance digital inclusion activities across the library service.

For Further Information

[Library Online Centres](#) newsletter [Library Online Centres](#) research, resources, case studies [#digilibraries](#) Twitter, [digilibraries Infographic](#).

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