Digital inclusion during COVID 19 – identifying gaps and bridging the digital divide(s).

About TED

Talk, Eat, Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged 50 and over to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

Ageing Better learning nation-wide has captured the fast moving and unprecedented nature of the COVID 19 pandemic. TED in East Lindsey have been adapting and reviewing the programme's service offer to fulfil its original aims and objectives, building both relationships and communities. During COVID 19, digital skills and 'digital inclusion' have frequently been cited as integral mechanisms for keeping relationships connected and people resilient both in the 'here and now', as well as facilitating future recovery from the pandemic and progression. These issues are also reflected in learning activity in the East Lindsey District, including a TED in East Lindsey resilience and recovery themed conference, National Ageing Better reports, academic research and briefing papers.

A recent TED in East Lindsey learning report featured four thematic areas on relationships which indicate and facilitate resilience in our communities. They are:

- Reaching out not 'hard to reach': Flexible, person-centred work in building relationships

- Exploring the role of activity in creating collaborative community resource

- Local awareness, credibility and social networks

- Resilience through 'digital inclusion'

These also enable understandings of 'digital inclusion' within ageing populations in the District. In this learning report we reflect on existing learning and three themes are highlighted to present ways in which to understand, incentivise and support 'digital inclusion' in people aged 50 and over.

Better ageing through 'digital inclusion'?

Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, TED in East Lindsey completed a learning report on digital skills with ageing populations, featuring a case study of the work of Lincs Digital. Lincs Digital were commissioned as a dedicated TED in East Lindsey delivery partner before COVID 19. TED in East Lindsey and Lincs Digital identified issues relating to 'digital inclusion' in rural and semi-rural (ageing) populations. Lincs Digital's aims are:

"to develop the capacity and digital skills of the local communities of Lincolnshire in such a way that they are better able to identify, and help meet their needs and to participate more fully in society … [and to] advance the education of the residents of Lincolnshire in essential digital skills by providing classes, hands on training, workshops and drop in sessions at local community venues"

This case study identified essential services were already being characterised as 'digital by default'. This earlier report, along with the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2019) highlight the increasing role of 'digital inclusion' in how people interact with their families, communities, public authorities and services. For ageing populations examples of the latter can be found in:

- Internet banking

- Job searching and applications

- Access to finance, benefit and debt information including pension credits, the Government Gateway, and Universal Credit (with the online 'journal' function of Universal Credit being a key tool in evidencing work search commitments and communicating with work coaches)

- Bus pass applications

- Prescription ordering and delivery

- Booking of GP and medical appointments and online consultation

- The growth of online shopping

During COVID 19, Lincs Digital and the TED in East Lindsey programme diversified their approaches to provide 'blended' delivery. This comprised of one-to-one and group support, use of web resources, hard copy 'how to' guides and work with people remotely (through telephone support, and online meeting platforms).

Given the experiences of shielding/isolation and distancing, digital skills and access to devices have gained added importance. Yet prior to the pandemic strategic emphasis was being placed on 'digital inclusion' in both service providers and users. The NHS Long Term Plan (2019) features digital innovation in the management of 'personalised health' and at a county level the Lincolnshire Sustainability and Transformation Plan (NHS, 2017) and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Lincolnshire County Council, 2018) focused on harnessing digital potential. The latter strategy envisaged the development of a Care Portal whereby patients will be able to 'interact' with their healthcare records, contributing to their own health and wellbeing. Relating to this, a Jisc Building Digital Capability Blog, which focusses on digital skills and inclusion in further and higher education, explored conceptualisations of 'digital wellbeing', providing a refined definition:

"Digital wellbeing considers the impact of technologies and digital services on people's mental, physical and emotional health" (Shah, 2019)

The University of York goes further identifying capabilities essential for 'digital wellbeing':

1. Looking after personal health, safety, relationships and work-life balance in digital settings

2. Use of digital tools in pursuit of personal goals (e.g. health and fitness) and to participate in social and community activities

3. Acting safely and responsibly in digital environments

4. Negotiating and resolving conflict

5. Managing digital workload, overload and distraction

6. Acting with concern for the human and natural environment

'Digital wellbeing' has direct relevance to the lives of ageing communities in East Lindsey. Despite the benefits 'digital inclusion' can have for peoples' wellbeing, research has highlighted the complex, sometimes problematic, nature of this relationship.

For example, age has been documented as one of a range of socio-demographic characteristics that interact with access to, and use of, the internet for health information and health-related purposes:

"Socio-demographic characteristics particularly age, education, income, perceived health and social isolation also predict internet access. Thus in addition to widening access, the movement towards digitisation of health information and services should also consider digital skills development to enable people to utilise digital technology more effectively, especially among traditionally hard to reach communities...those who are in the greatest need of health information are least likely to have access to new technologies" (Estacio, Whittle and Protheroe, 2019: 1668-1669)

Importantly, 'digital inclusion' is not only influential in meeting needs. It can fulfil the wants and preferences of ageing populations. Entertainment and enjoyment through widening membership and participation in communities of interest can intersect with wider community engagement locally, nationally and even globally. This learning report adds to existing research and Ageing Better partners' work, showing that entertainment and enjoyment are significant attractants motivating the development of peoples' digital skills.

Once obtained, skills and devices provide important gateways for meeting needs, facilitating protective factors across the short and long term. Chappell and Welsh (2020) show 'digital inclusion' can be a cornerstone of resilience in 'older peoples' lives, enabling intergenerational relationships with family, friends and other networks. This provides: some replication of 'place-based' interaction and 'face-to-face' relationships through social media and apps (e.g. such as video calls, Skype, Zoom and What's App); maintaining community connections over distance; and facilitating reciprocal relationships and wider social inclusion.

Social inclusion through digital skills?

The ONS (2019) cites the Tech Partnership Basic Digital Skills framework developed prior to COVID 19. This framework identified five activities which demonstrates peoples' basic digital skills and also relate to digital wellbeing. These are: managing information (for instance using a search engine); communicating (email or online messaging); transacting (buying items/services online); problem solving (using digital devices or help online) and creating (completing an online application form or working with images, music or video). The ONS (2019: 4) also highlight research by The Centre for Economic and Business Research (CEBR) which summarises five key benefits of having basic digital skills:

1. Earnings benefits, related to increased earnings of between 3% and 10%

2. Employability benefits, notably improved opportunities to find work

3. Retail transaction benefits (for example, shopping online has been reported as being potentially 13% cheaper when compared with shopping in-store)

4. Communication benefits, where communicating with family, friends and the community can be up to 14% more frequent; and

5. Time savings, with reports of accessing government services and banking online saving up to 30 minutes per transaction

Greater independence and enhanced living standards have been forecasted as a result of wider technological innovations. Examples include automated 'self-driven' transport connecting people unable to drive or access public transport, and advancements in assistive technology so people (notably ageing populations) can undertake meaningful, purposeful work and activities that also contribute to continued engagement in civic society (Dixon, 2020).

Significant issues remain despite the potential of 'digital inclusion'. The Good Things Foundation (2020) report significant barriers still exist to 'digital inclusion'. 3.8 million people in the UK are currently "almost completely 'offline'" and whilst more people are 'digitally engaged' there are still 1.9 million households not having access to the internet (through connectivity issues or not owning devices). This report has touched on 'digital inclusion', but what does this mean and what are the implications for ageing populations in the East Lindsey and nationally?
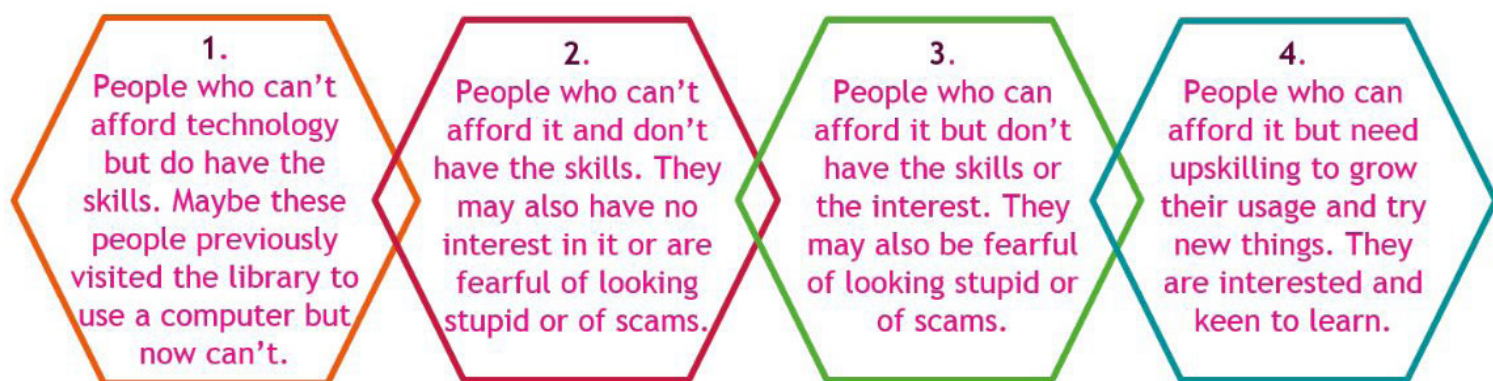
Defining 'digital inclusion'

A recent Centre for Ageing Better Briefing Report gives a useful starting point for understanding 'digital inclusion':

"Digital inclusion is about ensuring people are able to use the internet and online technologies to meet their needs." This includes:

- Infrastructure – being able to afford or have access to a device (whether a mobile phone, tablet or computer), as well as being able to afford or have access to the internet through broadband, WiFi or mobile data.
- Skills – having the ability, confidence and digital skills to use digital devices and the internet.
- Accessibility – having access to services that are designed to meet users' needs, including for individuals with disabilities that require assistive technology to get online." (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020: 2)

There are clear overlaps with this definition and a spectrum of digital skills and attitudes devised by Ageing Better Camden, as shown in the diagram below:

1. People who can't afford technology but do have the skills. Maybe these people previously visited the library to use a computer but now can't.

2. People who can't afford it and don't have the skills. They may also have no interest in it or are fearful of looking stupid or of scams.

3. People who can afford it but don't have the skills or the interest. They may also be fearful of looking stupid or of scams.

4. People who can afford it but need upskilling to grow their usage and try new things. They are interested and keen to learn.

The spectrum aids appreciation of 'digital inclusion' for communities in East Lindsey too, as well as informing and challenging perceptions of a 'digital divide' which is conveyed primarily by reference to 'old age'. People aged 75 and over especially are reportedly more likely to be digitally excluded than younger age groups. However nationally, as well as in East Lindsey, age is not omnipresent in understanding peoples' exclusion from developing digital skills and the wider barriers to 'digital inclusion'. This mirrors social exclusion in ageing populations, as being multi-faceted and intersectional phenomena.

The concept of 'digital poverty' has been referred to as a lack of ICT that can be a feature in segments of the population which may be 'economically poor' or not. The themes identified in this learning report interplay within and between individuals and groups, and also infrastructure, industry and structural inequalities and diversities. The Centre for Ageing Better (2020) reports that whilst internet use has grown rapidly in people aged 65-74 to 8 in 10 in 2019, 4 million people have never used the internet and of these 3.7 million were aged 55 and over. Age is a core factor but:

"Those who are not online are not just older, they are also likely to be in worse health, poorer and less well educated than their peers: 71% of those offline have no more than a secondary education, and nearly half (47%) are from low-income households." (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020)

Being economically inactive or having a low income, having a disability, living alone in a household and belonging to a certain ethnic group have been attributed to lower levels of internet access and use (ONS, 2019). It is notable that the majority of people asked to explain not having internet access in their household in 2017 (64%) reported that they simply did not need it.
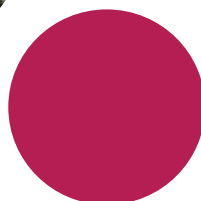
National Ageing Better learning and TED in East Lindsey have identified inhibitors in the form of expenses incurred through purchasing devices and broadband packages as well as the development of skills. This includes (mis)perceptions of expense as barriers in moving from being 'offline' to 'online'. Being seen as 'inept', feeling embarrassed through lacking skills, or fears relating to insecurity (through scams, viruses or being unable to resolve technological issues) are also salient factors. On their own or collectively these may underlie or explain self-reports that devices and skills are simply 'not needed' or desired. This takes place within a wider context. For example, a recent baseline assessment e-survey on the Age-friendliness of the East Lindsey District (2020) by the Age-friendly Principal Officer for YMCA Lincolnshire and East Lindsey District Council, provides further context to perceptions regarding 'digital inclusion' in ageing populations. Of 37 professionals who took part, this survey found:

- Just over 59% said there was an assumption that everyone will access information through the internet either most or all of the time

- Over 48% of professionals responded that people aged 50 to 65 years access information through the internet either most or all of the time

- Nearly 46% said there was enough opportunity to access information in ways other than digitally, while just over 35% said there was not either all or most of the time

Over the pandemic, and focussing on a post-COVID 19 society, it is possible that government measures may contribute further to these results.

Despite clear benefits of 'digital inclusion', the Good Things Foundation (2020b) predicts that in 10 years-time almost 7 million adults in the UK (12% of the population) will still be left behind as a result of digital exclusion:

"With more and more services moving to digital platforms to save money, the digital literacy needed to use these services is not keeping pace. Those without digital skills are likely to be the most vulnerable and excluded... Providing everyone in the UK with the essential digital skills they need by 2028 will lead to a benefit of £15 for every £1 invested, and a net present value of £21.9 billion"

The rural/coastal and urban differential

The rural/coastal make up of East Lindsey has differential experiences compared with urban areas (even within wider Lincolnshire). Business Lincolnshire (2019) reports in Greater Lincolnshire the digital tech economy is comparatively smaller than other areas and although employment in tech and value of the sector as a whole is increasing, this is populated differently across locations. The bulk of tech industry and employment is concentrated in Greater Lincoln and other urban areas.

East Lindsey District shares experiences that chime with those described in Rural England's (2019) 'State of Rural Services 2018 report'. Declining public services (such as transport, closure of local shops and post offices) and poor(er) quality internet connectivity and speed along with mobile phone signal in sparsely populated rural and coastal areas remain major issues, notwithstanding improvements (see also Ofcom's (2020) 'Connected Nations Report 2019 UK Report'). Recent reports by Rose Regeneration (2020), economic regeneration and community development specialists, cite that in the move to working from home during COVID 19, businesses in East Lindsey have too reported deficiencies in broadband supply and mobile signals.

Our communities in coastal areas (such as the towns of Mablethorpe and Skegness) also have a high reliance on industries most affected by COVID 19 – including tourism and hospitality. Both towns have been marked as most likely to experience negative economic and social consequences as a result of the pandemic (Centre for Towns, 2020). In recognition, coastal areas in the District have been recently awarded £1.2 million Accelerated Funding through the Town's Fund as part of the Government's £5bn investment in capital projects to support jobs and economic recovery from the pandemic. The TED in East Lindsey team have been involved in a mapping exercise of resilience and recovery in the county, part of which included surveying people aged 50 and over, funded by Lincolnshire Community Foundation.

This also included findings from survey work by Rose Regeneration on businesses in East Lindsey and TED in East Lindsey Age-friendly Business Award holders specifically. Findings showed businesses were extremely resilient and independent, perhaps reflecting their 'close-knit' small/'family' nature and the hospitality, tourism, restaurant and bar trade focus of significant numbers of businesses. There was little, if any change to the majority of supply chains and adaptations to trade featured 'remote'/socially distanced services and the expansion of home delivery. These findings may be partly attributed to businesses having to be independent during other times of impact and austerity (Centre for Towns, 2020). However, the nature of the businesses also reflects 'personable' contact: networking in reaching consumers that is in (partial) contrast to 'online' enterprises.

This is in-keeping with the 'community spirit' of the Age-friendly Business Award. Notwithstanding the issues raised, different patterns of digital behaviour have been explained by reference to age, even when 'older' people have digital skills and access to devices. For example:

"The ways in which the internet is accessed also varies with age. In 2018, 77% of adults in Great Britain reported accessing the internet "on the go" (which refers to accessing the internet away from home or work, for example via a smartphone or tablet). However, this declines with age, with only 69% of those aged 55 to 64 years and 39% of those over the age of 65 years reporting it" (ONS, 2019: 12)

The Centre for Ageing Better (2020) have also shown that having digital skills and access to devices does not necessarily lead to whole-scale 'digital inclusion'. Having the right skills at the right time and right place and for the right task are key. With this is the ability to adapt to future technological innovations. There is a 'residual core' who will not either be able or wanting to become more digitally aware or make the transition to being 'online'. Barriers and enablers identified by the Centre also include: further context to perceptions regarding 'digital inclusion' in ageing populations.

• Awareness of the benefits and risks

• Employment history and background

• Perceptions of cognitive ability – which may be informed by ageism and stereotyping

• Perceptions of value and relevance and associations with lack of exposure to the internet

• Family influence

• Access and affordability (which is also commented on earlier in this paper)

The briefing paper from the Centre for Ageing Better also considers what can be done practically to support people in getting from 'offline' to 'online', and echoes findings from reports by Ageing Better Programme areas. Service providers can engage ageing populations further through 8 principles:

1. Be flexible and have relevance

2. Work at the right pace

3. Repeat and reflect – give opportunities and space for both of these activities

4. Use the right language – something that has been reported on in a prior TED in East Lindsey learning report on communication with ageing populations

5. Have options of one-to-one support based on strong relationships

6. Take time to build relationships

7. Give ongoing support – respond to questions and problems – leaving the door to support open

8. Co-design services with the principle in mind to shape the design of support by listening and working with communities

Notwithstanding the 'residual core', COVID 19 has accelerated and grown the move to digital skills, device ownership, and service provision, and is instrumental in facilitating wider social inclusion. Aside from the benefits outlined in this learning report, online apps, platforms and websites continue to provide a source of information on the pandemic and measures associated with infection management.

Evidence from East Lindsey is in-keeping with other sources. People who (stereotypically and traditionally) would not have shown an interest in moving to being 'online' and use apps and devices have been motivated to do so. COVID 19 has also increased the speed at which ageing populations, who already have an interest in becoming more digitally included, have taken pragmatic steps through ownership of devices, seeking out skills training and considering internet access (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020). Through offering 'online' options as part of a 'blended' approach that includes remote contact and telephone engagement as well as a mix of digital/non-digital engagement, services working during distancing and isolation have identified and worked with stakeholders not 'reached' by place-based or face-to-face methods alone. Adaptation of services has been achieved rapidly, also drawing attention to previously 'hidden' ageing people and their associated 'needs' and preferences. These optimistic findings relating to take up and use of digital skills and devices also raise questions of what a post-COVID 19 landscape of delivery will look like. In short, will this mean a scaling-back of more costly, but for some people, more suitable, effective (and appreciated), face to face/place-based delivery?

TED in East Lindsey: Themes from the frontline and grassroots engagement

Given the trends, likely challenges and perceived benefits relating to 'digital inclusion' a variety of sources inform our thematic understanding relating to ageing populations in the District during the pandemic. These include existing learning reports, project case studies, good news stories from delivery partners, interviews and focus groups, surveys with friendship groups, mapping work in the wider county undertaken by YMCA Lincolnshire, and TED in East Lindsey contract monitoring data. The three themes frequently intersect and overlap. They inform practical and strategic approaches to 'what works'. They are:

- 'Virtually' together? Replicating place-based provision?

- The role of enjoyment in digital upskilling and inclusion

- Championing digital inclusion

The first theme explores how during shielding and distancing ways of providing services 'digitally' (in-part) replicated aspects of traditionally 'place-based' and 'face-to-face' group interaction.

'Virtually' together? Replicating place-based provision?

"Older people prefer face to face – many older people who I have worked with would prefer seeing someone face to face as they feel they can explain their situation easier. I have seen this in the past when telephoning and signposting clients to other services and they would rather see someone than speak on the phone" (Citizens Advice Lindsey, project case study)

"The best thing is to see them, it's difficult not to see them" (Friendship group chair, inland market town)

"(People) prefer calls, not all have got computers or laptops... prefer to have a chat, that bit more personal... once it's all settled down, relatively normal, we'll go back to what we are doing – not deserted overnight" (Friendship group volunteer, coastal town)

The preference for face-to-face/place-based services was not necessarily restricted to people belonging to a 'residual core', unable or unwilling to develop digital skills or use devices. Our telephone interviews with key friendship group members early in the pandemic highlighted how groups were hoping to re-convene (and celebrate) in person and not draw on platforms for virtual meetings. More recent feedback exercises by the TED in East Lindsey Friendship Officer still reflected many group members do not have the skills or devices to meet virtually and replicate coffee mornings or other group activities. Even when online methods are possible (such as Zoom), preferences remain for socially distanced catch-ups and informal telephone calls.

Whilst providers and people were experiencing a sense of loss through restrictions as a result of government measures relating to the pandemic, our research highlighted examples of services and ageing populations adapting to generate and embrace togetherness and support. Essential needs formed part of this, such as ordering prescriptions and arranging for delivery, online banking, food shopping and home delivery:

"(We) continue to phone our users and check what support/help they need. Many are grateful for the call and are feeling more isolated than ever. We have a chat and see who else they know within the area to put them in touch with. One of our volunteers is excellent at connecting people together and is supporting us in this vital work. Continue to Facetime/Skype/Zoom support to individuals as needed/signposted to us. More people are finding us as they hear we have helped a friend etc and connecting with us for support and help. Richard (from Lincs Digital) is helping with more FaceTime setups of printers/phones/computers " (Lincs Digital, monitoring data)

Meeting 'essential needs' and the 'wants' or preferences of ageing populations blur. At least in-part, 'digital inclusion' was, and is, instrumental in replacing and replicating pre-COVID 19 activities and ensuring 'needs' were, and still are, being met. Digital communication has a key role in creating and maintaining interpersonal contact with families, friends, peers and others.

This, was not, however, solely driven by essential 'needs'. It was also driven by both the need and preference to be part of a community:

"Our garden group kept in contact with each other through WhatsApp… Magna Vitae, (a TED Delivery Partner) who ran our exercise and nutrition friendship group has worked really hard regularly contacting us, letting us know what was online that we could access. Really felt that it was very helpful" (Lincolnshire Resilience Mapping, 50 and over strand)

TED in East Lindsey continues to innovate. Whilst being mindful of Government guidance, digital 'arms' of service delivery were combined with other aspects. 'Blended delivery' gives a means of fulfilling the original aims and objectives of TED in East Lindsey (and Ageing Better nationally) in addition to reflect on and re-enact elements of pre-COVID 19 provision. Components include socially distanced visits, work with people on a one-to-one and/or group basis through telephone support and online provision. A multi-pronged approach is important, not only in terms of reaching people and showcasing the adaptations of providers and users, it also guides strategies at motivating people to engage digitally. Carers First, a TED in East Lindsey delivery partner who facilitate the 'Men Do' project, which works with male care-givers, reported on this approach early in the pandemic measures:

"We have been contacting each individual beneficiary, 'checking in' in terms of their wellbeing at this difficult time and offering individualised information advice and support where needed – including signposting to organisations: providing delivery of food and groceries, local information hubs, Online support etc. and we will continue to check in on beneficiaries throughout this period. Whilst chatting to the beneficiaries, I have managed to gain verbal consent for their inclusion into a Men Do… Chat Directory… The Directory will include the beneficiaries name, age, town and a short profile about them including their interests or hobbies. Along with the Directory we will be sending a simple guide to downloading and using WhatsApp to increase their connectivity with one another. We will also be sending out other useful documents including a directory that lists all supporting services in their area... This new offer will go out on Facebook and all Carers First communications, which covers a database of 10,000." (Men Do, monitoring data)

For Men Do, 'digital' provision replicated aspects of peer-to-peer support experienced as part of their original 'pre-COVID 19' group breakfasts and innovative place-based events (for example, snooker masterclasses, brewery trips and air rifle shooting). This also indicates ways in which the pandemic has led to service diversification – including positive impacts with people beyond the project's original remit. As featured later in this full report on 'digital inclusion', we see how the importance of joy and activities engage people with communities, even if the digital aspect of delivery is managed by a third party.
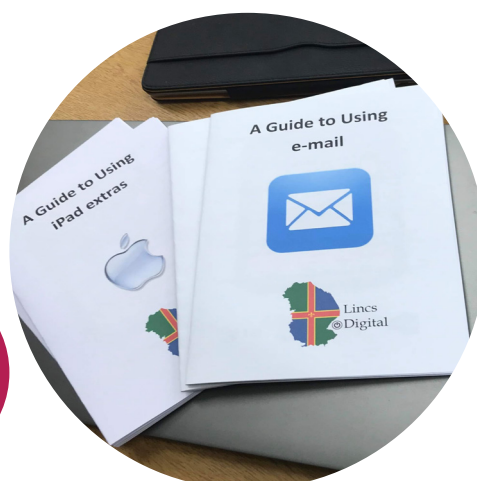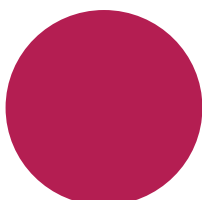
'Digital inclusion' has a significant role in the replication of relationships, activities and communities, and this takes place alongside the role of 'partnership work' in promoting 'digital inclusion' and 'community engagement':

"Learners without devices were experiencing a sense of loss and deep unsureness of the current situation and how they would cope without being able to go out. We were able to connect them with partner services that we already work with, or we looked into what services were available within their area… Most of the groups that suddenly arose out of COVID 19 had made community groups on Facebook and these proved to be very useful in the very early days of lockdown. As the weeks have gone on, resources online have been put together by our working partners Magna Vitae and East Lindsey (District Council) which not only are an excellent resource for ourselves, but we are able to direct our learners to them and advertise them on our website and all our social media sites… Social media has proved to be invaluable during COVID 19, both for finding information to share with others and to share our own information with others" (Lincs Digital, monitoring data)

Collaborative work and the integration of a digital aspect specifically has also enabled greater reach into communities to foster relationships. Fitness, Food and Friends – a project run by Magna Vitae, a commissioned partner – reflected on this in their case study:

"All but 3 of the 34 participants have been able to provide an email address, either their own or one of their family members or friends, so that contact can be made this way…The new ways of working has increased partnership working, for example we are working with Arthritis Action and have introduced 6 participants to online resources (with) which they can engage to increase their knowledge and self-help around their Arthritis. In the long term this will help them manage their condition, improve their pain levels and help to reduce GP appointments and use of medication. These people have also been introduced to Zoom so they have learned new IT skills" (Magna Vitae, Fitness, Food and Friends project case study)

TED in East Lindsey continues to share resources, including online information and cross-posting on social media. In relation to partnership work and the programme delivery this 'reach' has included finding ways of upskilling ageing populations that builds on the aforementioned content. National Ageing Better learning has referred to the 'hook' – a way of conceptualising how to attract and maintain the interest of (ageing) populations in digital skills and inclusion. In the context of TED in East Lindsey a core feature of the 'hook' is not purely about necessity or fulfilling essential needs, but predominantly engaging people in upskilling and digital inclusion through enjoyment, curiosity and fulfilment – aspects of the original service offer.

The role of enjoyment in upskilling and digital inclusion

Prior learning from TED in East Lindsey illustrates the crucial role of activities in engaging people and enhancing resilience. This second theme intersects with our theme on 'Virtually Together? Replicating place-based provision'. Digital skills are an integral, but not finite, part of transitioning to 'digital inclusion'. Our fieldwork activities reveal 'upskilling' is not the compelling factor in attracting people to become 'digitally included'. This was the case prior to COVID 19, yet the pandemic has had knock on effects. The move to use of digital devices and being 'online' by people who otherwise would not have taken up this offer has been attributed to people seeking to replicate aspects of life enjoyed before the pandemic as well as addressing 'essential needs'. As we have seen with traditionally place-based and group provision, entertainment and enjoyment are core features, the 'draw' of people to groups, events and activities. One volunteer captured this essence when asked if they had any tips for starting a friendship group:

"Good sense of humour, not all serious stuff, jolly stuff" (Coastal friendship group volunteer)

The revised offer of TED in East Lindsey programme services has featured a strong digital presence, part of a 'blended' approach to delivery and maintaining enjoyment. As indicated at the start of this theme, upskilling for the sake of simply accumulating new skills does not give ageing populations a rationale alone for moving towards 'digital inclusion'. In the contexts of fast-changing landscapes of delivery making digital skills relevant and desirable remain key:

"Digital has proven to the older communities to be a lifeline where they have the provision within their lives and even those that were more reluctant are now asking if they can attend classes once our day to day classes resume" (Lincs Digital, project case study)

'Digital upskilling' and ownership/consumption has been taken up not just through relevance to necessity. In line with our research theme 'Virtually Together? Replicating place-based provision', in rural areas with poor transport links and restrictions on movement (due to mobility and/or COVID 19 restrictions) the maintenance and learning of new skills have been incentivised by enjoyment through replicating aspects of social and interpersonal interaction with friends and family members. Chappell and Welsh (2020) have similarly highlighted the role of social media, apps and other online communication forms as facilitating reciprocal relationships. This is especially relevant in intergenerational relationships between ageing family members and relatives (children, grandchildren). Our survey activity between the 5th June and the 23rd June 2020 with people aged 50 and over highlighted a similar trend:

"Neighbours set up a WhatsApp to get shopping, organise quizzes, V.E. Day Celebration. Vicar set up community support group. Local shop helped people get specific items. Amazing community spirit" (Lincolnshire Resilience Mapping, 50 and over strand)

Lincs Digital, a charity working across the county, as well as being a delivery partner in the TED in East Lindsey programme, were responding to this demand in digital uptake:

"We have been asked by organisations if they may share our 'how to zoom guide' with their teams as it is the best guide they have seen" (Lincs Digital, project case study)

A range of guides have been produced to date, and are available to beneficiaries and other delivery partners as well as featuring on the TED in East Lindsey website. Lincs Digital responded by changing their service offer to include bespoke support via the telephone and volunteers, mentoring people in I.T. start-up. This frequently formed part of wider friendships.

"Our group of learners all had very different needs, we were finding talking with them, those without devices wanted friendship and had very different needs to those with devices who were keen to try and connect with their families and friends and wanted to try and be self-sufficient" (Lincs Digital, project case study)

As part of a wider project funded by the Good Things Foundation, Lincs Digital have been able to provide tablet devices to some TED in East Lindsey members who are not online. Even where some beneficiaries are not online or possess I.T. skills, the use of conference calls has provided a means to connect and take part in quizzes facilitated by Magna Vitae.

Entertainment, communities of interest and enjoyment are not purely factors motivating ageing populations to participate and develop skills, they are also influential in informing approaches to designing (and co-designing) services for their stakeholders, particularly those experiencing shielding and physical isolation.

Men Do is an example of this, a project that has membership of men who provide care for others and is run by Carers First. Carers First is a UK registered charity working with unpaid carers to provide practical information and advice. They have expertise in understanding the challenges unpaid carers face and offer services designed to make it easier for them to continue living their lives to the fullest.

Men Do have been able to intertwine different aspects of their project with digital skills and social media to entertain project members. A summary of their approach is highlighted below:

Lean on Me? Integrating digital entertainment as part of blended activity

Men Do originally provided group placed-based activities that included breakfast meetings in various locations in East Lindsey and events like Comedy Nights, Lincoln v Coventry Football Match, Archery, Pint and Pub Games evening, Boston River Cruise. Since inception, the project has maintained strong peer to peer relationships and during COVID 19 this has continued to be the case – through a dynamic service offer. In addition to developing their Chat Directory – featuring the names, contact details and hobbies and interests of men –this included delivery of a care package made up of the directory, donations of Batemans bottled beer (a local brewery) and Pipers Crisps. Pocklington's Plum Bread (provided at cost price) and traditional bags of sweets, playing cards and groovy patterned socks.

"We decided that rather than postal delivery, our participants, would get more benefit from a face to face, albeit socially distanced delivery and chat. So, during the final week of April, we set out to deliver 80 care packages by hand. Some as far down to the bottom of East Lindsey as Bennington, some to Holton-le-clay at the very top of the district, as far west as Ludford, all down the East Coast and everywhere in-between" (Men Do, project case study)

Importantly, gifts also included a Ukulele complete with beginners guide – replicating activity focused aspects of their original service offer. While all members do not have access to devices or are able to use online platforms, Carers First and Men Do were able to coordinate a group via Zoom to play Bill Wither's song 'Lean on Me'.

This then featured on Carer's First Facebook page, promoting the service, the personable nature of the project and their camaraderie to a wider network. The sense of fun, togetherness and dynamic nature of the projects relationships are featured below:

"We were keen to also include something that would provide more longevity and something to improve their mental wellbeing, giving them a focus and aim." (Men Do, project case study)

Integrating the personable, person-centred and collaborative nature of the project with digital components further extended the reach of Men Do during 'lock down'.

Through replicating aspects of the original service offer which focused on activities, members of communities that could be conceived of as being hitherto 'hard to reach' maintained contact with the project and influenced others to join. This was also featured in other aspects of TED provision, providing key learning for motivating people to have some form of digital inclusion or upskilling.

Another delivery partner, Magna Vitae, were able to provide online services, including their Sporting Memories quiz, nutritional and exercise information via their online platform developed with East Lindsey District Council. Sporting Memories gives opportunities for men to share their stories online through the quiz facilitator. Even where men do not have the skills, devices or desire to be 'online', Magna Vitae use a variety of approaches including written newsletters, conference calls with small numbers of men and online platforms. 'Digital' being a core component in a multiple-pronged approach. Promoting enjoyment is core to gaining beneficiaries' interests in digital service offers and extending their networks and communities. Roger's experience gives another example of this, even though he does not directly use digital devices.

Communities of interest – building networks through sharing Sporting Memories

Roger* initially came to the ConnecTED befriending service via a social prescribing link worker. The TED Learning and Evaluation Officer initially made the follow-up phone call. Roger is in his late 80's, currently living on his own but has some mobility issues. Apart from seeing his son each week he was receiving visitors who were in the majority females providing support to him. When Roger spoke to the Learning and Evaluation Officer, it became apparent that he would like some peer to peer contact with men who had similar interests in sports. Magna Vitae were approached with a view to linking him up with the Sporting Memories Quiz. Roger was not 'online' and Magna Vitae gave him a call and mailed the weekly Sporting Pinks newsletter. Roger was included on the weekly conference calls with a small group of men:

"I wasn't sure how he would engage on the conference phone sessions, but he seemed to come alive and when he realised there was an 84 year old also originally from Sheffield it gave lots to talk about. Each question in the quiz acts like a memory trigger and he was sharing several stories which the group enjoyed hearing about. He would often come out with some amazing fact or come out with names and places from years ago. He told me the sessions were enjoyable and he looked forward to them each week. During our chats I found out he had played for the youth side of Sheffield United which was called Oak Folds, which would have been around 1947. He told me how they would play in the old football shirts" (Magna Vitae)

Through doing some research Magna Vitae were able to link him with somebody who was in the same youth side, and who later on became a professional footballer. Whilst Roger was not online, there were options to share his experiences via social media also – extending his networks and communities of interest.

"I went over to meet the gentleman (with social distancing) which he really appreciated, and I completed a short video interview with him of his sporting memories. This is something we may use in our 'throwback Thursdays' on our Facebook community site as part of our sporting memories sessions… Although he isn't getting out for these sessions he is benefitting from this regular input… He tells me it has been a big help to him and prevents him from just thinking about being lonely. He said the questions and conversations bring up some great memories and the positive effect lasts for days" (Magna Vitae)

*A pseudonym

The themes of ''Virtually' together? Replicating placed-based provision?' along with this theme, provide key learning in how we can engage, design and work with ageing communities. Whilst TED in East Lindsey does show COVID 19 has motivated people to 'digital inclusion' through necessity, dynamic approaches to service delivery are crucial in assisting meaningful participation. Acquiring digital skills and devices have long term implications: not just for service users as consumers, but also service providers and project design:

"I.T. benefits are sustainable as for some this is a lifestyle change which has been 'forced' on them but they are learning new ways of communicating and new skills… There is the benefit of upskilling people to use I.T. solutions for their daily activities, for example finding recipes and using online exercise activities when needed, but we feel that this isn't always a replacement for face to face delivery. The virtual way of delivery with the Tasty Tuesday, Nutrition Bites on Facebook have had good feedback and people will still look out for these once face to face sessions continue." (Magna Vitae, Fitness, Food and Friends project case study).

This blended service landscape has implications far beyond working with people aged 50 and over. TED in East Lindsey has also run social media correspondence through twitter and Facebook accounts. The TED team at YMCA Lincolnshire have also contributed to a 'TED is Us' blog during the pandemic, giving updates on staff hobbies and interests. Virtual delivery may be utilised in a post-COVID 19 society, to provide online services for people who are not able to attend place-based activities. 'Out of hours' provision can draw on digital components, making services accessible during public holidays and also for workers with varied shift patterns.

Providers in our case studies and monitoring data have reinforced that COVID 19 has also created learning legacies for future 'emergency' situations and virus control. In short, 'digital inclusion' continues to have an essential role going forward. The third and final theme of this full report on COVID 19 and 'digital inclusion' details another core mechanism for engaging people aged 50 and over. It explores the role of what can broadly be referred to as championing 'digital inclusion'.

Championing 'digital inclusion'

Championing 'digital inclusion' can take many forms. On the TED in East Lindsey Programme, Lincs Digital, a commissioned delivery partner, works with volunteers from the community who champion 'digital inclusion' through peer support and advocacy. Their volunteers provide holistic support to learners and the wider community. During COVID 19 this has been especially relevant in making contact with people aged 50 and over, providing friendship and a point of contact as well as linking to support with digital devices and learning.

Peer-to-peer support has demonstrated benefits in shared experience and removing boundaries in people's participation. Peer work has a strong presence in substance use services, mental health (as 'experts from experience' or 'navigators' of mental health systems), wider Public and Patient Participation in the NHS and peer work in criminal justice (in the form of Samaritans-trained 'listeners' or 'buddies').

'Peer researchers' have also been used to access communities in criminal justice research and a recent Welcome Trust-funded project, 'Ethical Issues in Self-funded Care', has co-produced knowledge with older people. Similarly, the overarching factor defining a champion is their understanding of 'lived experience', as featured in the case study below. John is an example of the power volunteers bring to the lives of individuals and communities, and how Lincs Digital recognise this value:

The power of champions as converts.

Before the pandemic John* attended his first session at Lincs Digital. Recently he had taken over the role of treasurer at a local community organisation but was finding his laptop and software were outdated for the role. Lincs Digital's first job was to point him towards a new computer and printer that would allow him to fulfil the needs of his new role. John then arrived at the second session armed with his new hardware and they were able to set it up for him and show him how everything worked. Lincs Digital also connected him to the online portal for his group.

Following this, he engaged in a programme of learning tailored towards his needs, helping him understand how to use Word and Excel to keep his records up to date. John also developed the digital skills to use Facebook, allowing him to stay connected with friends and family around the world. Working with John has been a great success for Lincs Digital, with the added bonus of him also contributing to another local organisation. He has since stayed involved with the programme and is a Lincs Digital, Digital Champion – promoting the work of the charity and benefits of 'digital inclusion' to others.

*A pseudonym

Digital champions like John continue to provide compelling advocacy: challenging and changing attitudes to upskilling and the use of devices through demonstrating personal benefits of being 'online' and digitally engaged.

During the early stages of the pandemic, champions and volunteers were especially attuned to stakeholders in communities:

"We connected with one of our volunteers near the coast and she identified a group of learners that she would connect with on a weekly basis… We would support her with calls three times a week. We quickly had to put together resource information on where foodbanks were in different areas, what services were running so we could direct our learners to these services, or get in touch with the service for them. This service has continued and been a lifeline to many; we have also connected with other services because of this and have grown our wider networking resources." (Lincs Digital, project case study)

However, in this theme, the role of championing goes further than individuals who identify with volunteer or champion status. Informal networks, families and friends as well as wider networks can promote 'digital inclusion' utilising the understanding they have of individuals and matching them with the most relevant benefits digital engagement will have for them:

"Age isn't the main factor in people using IT. Many of the men we speak to who are older can often be very sharp with their IT skills and of course the opposite can also be true. It has been good to hear quite a number who said they now go back online and some who have used apps for the first time like Zoom." (Magna Vitae, monitoring data)

The Fitness, Food and Friends project managed by Magna Vitae shows how service cross-promotion reaches different parts of the community and those with different interests:

"I was able to have a chat with the media officer for (a social landlord) this week with regards to what our project is doing and how it could be of benefit to (their) tenants. This was really positive and has led sharing items from our community Facebook page and the live quiz MV are doing this week. The new MV webpage on 'looking after ourselves and others' during the lock down period has also been sent out to all participants on email which has been met really positively. I've had encouraging comments that it's great to have all the information in one place." (Magna Vitae, monitoring data)

TED in East Lindsey's involvement in mapping resilience and recovery in Lincolnshire also identified the role of informal networks in promoting use of online resources and sharing digital skills with their networks. Promoting digital skills is influential in maintaining feedback between service developments and beneficiaries as well as to celebrate 'good news stories', community strengths and capture individual resourcefulness. While individual preferences regarding being 'online' and 'digital inclusion' should be respected, through connecting digitally, beneficiaries and providers are able to sustain reciprocity. This is a key feature of resilience in local networks and relationships that can be applied to wider communities of interests, as well as continuing to advance developments in technology, devices and skills into the future.

Key Learning Points

- TED in East Lindsey and stakeholders have adjusted to pandemic circumstances rapidly – service offers revised in line with a 'test and learn' ethos, quickly recognising the ongoing 'needs' and preferences of people age 50 and over. Digital has a prominent role in this landscape

- COVID 19 has motivated more people to take up digital skills and ownership of devices – accelerating a pre-COVID 19 trend, but also engaging with stereotypically 'disinterested' people. This is attributed to necessity, but also widening peoples options, interests and entertainment

- Replicating aspects of pre-COVID 19 delivery through telephone and 'virtual' provision can provide a major incentive in motivating people to become 'digitally included'

- 'Digital inclusion' in rural/coastal and semi-rural locations can be a core part of 'blended' delivery – reaching people who would not engage with place-based or group approaches, inspiring interaction

- Enjoyment is a core factor – perhaps the core factor – in people aged 50 and over making moves to 'digital inclusion'. Upskilling for the sake of gaining new skills is not the primary motivation

- The benefits of 'digital inclusion' are numerous and varied. It is important that the most relevant benefits are explored and promoted. This requires 'bespoke' approaches that reach out to people and is reflected in service design and delivery. This can involve third party involvement for those who do not have skills or devices

- 'Champions' and 'converts' are essential gatekeepers in getting ageing populations to realise the benefits of 'digital inclusion'. Like peer support in other sectors, they are instrumental in removing barriers to working with people aged 50 and over.

- 'Champions' can be diverse – ranging from formal volunteers to family and friends. Their 'lived experience' appreciates the roles of communication, connectedness and issues preventing people from accessing services. They not only promote 'upskilling' and ownership of digital devices, but also provide great potential to shape service design through coproduction

- Rural, coastal and semi-rural areas have particular challenges relating to 'digital inclusion'. These include issues regarding connectivity and broadband speed, areas without significant 'tech' industry demand and literacy issues. 'Digital poverty' and structural inequalities are significant barriers

- A 'residual core' will remain in East Lindsey, as with other areas. Services will continue to have 'blended provision' so 'digitally poor' and 'excluded' people are not left behind. This not only relates to skills deficits, but also to preferences for face to face services.

About East Lindsey

East Lindsey is a large, sparsely populated district within the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the popular coastal seaside towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe.

East Lindsey has a higher than average ageing population with 29% of people aged 65 and over. High numbers of older people move to East Lindsey in their retirement years and many have multiple chronic health conditions and few social and familial connections in the region. Public transport across East Lindsey is poor and therefore accessing services can be challenging, especially for older adults.

The overarching aims of the TED Programme are to:

- Reduce social isolation and loneliness

- Help older people to become better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities

- Provide opportunities for older people to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of both the services and businesses available to them

We currently have 1700 registered TED members, 100 businesses across East Lindsey hold an Age-friendly Business Award, and 516 volunteers have contributed 8,156 hours to the TED programme between April 2018 and December 2019 .

Further information...
To find out more about TED or to get involved visit our website www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk or start a conversation and share your views online: Twitter: @ted_EastLindsey