

# Thematic Bulletin 3. Championing 'digital inclusion'



# T.E.D.

Ageing Better  
in East Lindsey

## Digital inclusion

This is the third thematic bulletin from a more detailed learning report on Digital Inclusion during COVID 19 from the TED Programme. Other thematic bulletins include:

- 'Virtually' together? Replicating place-based provision?
- The role of enjoyment in digital upskilling and inclusion

A recent Centre for Ageing Better Briefing Report (2020: 2) 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, Wi-Fi 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."



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TED is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is managed by Community Lincs, part of YMCA Lincolnshire

## 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 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 resilience and recovery themed conference, National Ageing Better reports, academic research and briefing papers.

A recent TED 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. **This thematic bulletin focuses specifically on the role of 'champions' in engaging people aged 50 and over in upskilling and 'digital inclusion'.**

## Background

**Championing 'digital inclusion' can take many forms.** On the TED 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 Wellcome 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 to 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’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. Through connecting digitally, beneficiaries and providers are able to sustain reciprocity, 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.



# About East Lindsey



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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](http://www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk) or start a conversation and share your views online: Twitter: [@ted\\_EastLindsey](https://twitter.com/ted_EastLindsey)



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