## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOREWORD</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSIGHT 01</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSIGHT 02</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELEVANCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSIGHT 03</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSIGHT 04</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTIVATION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSIGHT 05</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFIDENCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSIGHT 06</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO, WHAT’S NEXT?</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE...</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At Social Tech Trust we believe that if lives are transformed by tech, they should be transformed for the better. For that to happen, all people – and particularly young people – need to have the opportunity to use, own and create tech. We understand the negative impact of being left behind in a digital world. With an increasingly tech-driven job market, ‘digital by default’ public services, and myriad opportunities to save time and money by transacting online, it’s crucial that young people are equipped with the digital skills and confidence they need to thrive.

Our belief is increasingly shared by others. We welcome the Government’s work with the private and voluntary sectors to ensure that the UK’s thriving tech economy delivers for people and organisations. But there is still much work to be done to ensure it delivers for all of them.

In 2017, we launched Digital Reach to support the UK’s efforts to increase digital skills among some of our nation’s most disadvantaged young people. Harnessing the expertise of organisations that have trusted relationships with vulnerable young people, we awarded over £600,000 to six pilot projects with a mission to engage the hardest-to-reach young people with digital skills.

Over the past year, our six Digital Reach pilots have been gathering insights. The aim of this report is to share what we’ve learned, helping to ensure that those experiencing some of the most critical social challenges in the UK are empowered to use the most transformative tools we have at our fingertips to tackle them. As Nominet Trust evolves into Social Tech Trust, our outlook is optimistic. Collaborative, user-centred solutions can demonstrably support the skills growth of underserved young people, enabling them to become active contributors to the UK’s digital economy.

Vicki Hearn
Director, Social Tech Trust
June 2018
Our vision is a world where social transformation is the driving force behind tech. This means changing the status quo about who creates tech, why they create it and who benefits from it. And this means doing things differently.

Digital Reach was developed as a fresh approach to help break the cycle of social and economic disadvantage. We wanted to create an environment for the UK’s most digitally disadvantaged young people to use tech confidently to achieve their life goals.

In 2017, the Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index found that there were still 300,000 young people in the UK without basic digital skills. Our own research showed that a combination of personal, circumstantial and systemic barriers were preventing them from accessing digital skills training and support through education and work – even through special digital skills providers, such as libraries.

We had uncovered a paradox: those most in need of digital skills were least likely to access digital skills training. Young people who face multiple disadvantages have been called ‘hard-to-reach’ for a reason: they are not likely, or able, to seek out support services. Many of the young people who participated in Digital Reach had adverse experiences of education, work and public services. Some were experiencing homelessness or joblessness, raising their own children, taking care of sick relatives, dealing with mental health issues, or navigating UK systems in a second language.

Digital Reach flipped the prevailing model of digital skills provision on its head: don’t expect young people to come to you, bring digital skills to them.

We built the programme with support from human-centred design agency Snook to help us understand the lives of young people and how their experiences affected digital skill levels. We worked with world-leading experts at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) who helped us create a testable logic model and evaluation framework to ensure the skills the pilots delivered were inextricably linked to positive outcomes for young people. Based on this, LSE also developed a detailed survey for Digital Reach participants to give us a deeper understanding of how young people interact with digital technologies.
We awarded over £600,000 in funding to support six Digital Reach pilots, involving 12 partner organisations. Each pilot trialled a unique approach to providing digital skills training that was developed around the aspirations of the young people they worked with.

1. **Action for Children** digitised their current paper-based content across three employability programmes in severely deprived urban areas in Scotland. Building digital skills became a by-product of gaining a coveted qualification and work placement.

2. **Carers Trust** partnered with **Good Things Foundation** to develop an e-learning resource for young adult carers as an extension to Learn My Way (the most widely used tool for digital skills delivered through libraries and community organisations). Thirteen Carers Trust Network Partners used the resource to help young adult carers gain the basic digital skills they need to achieve their aspirations.

3. **Home-Start UK and #techmums** created inspirational #techmumsTV. This was broadcast live from Facebook HQ in London into the homes of some of the most socially isolated young mums, helping them to build a community of digital support through a Facebook group. Home-Start deepened the experience with group viewing parties for mums and their children, where they could further build their digital confidence among their peers.

4. **The Children’s Society and City & Guilds Group** worked intensively with two groups of young people for whom digital skills are not only helpful, but critical. Vulnerable young people who are at risk of going missing from care learned to navigate the online world safely; and young refugees and migrants gained digital accreditation invaluable for living and working in the UK.

5. **UK Youth** used the investment to roll out the DigiKnow programme in 10 member hubs. This involved training youth workers and young people to become Digital Champions, also working with outreach partners to support the most isolated young people. The young people built the confidence to use tech to solve immediate problems in their lives and also to create content that was meaningful to them.

6. **Wales Co-operative Centre, YMCA Swansea, Llamau and GISDA** engaged 375 of the hardest-to-reach young people across Wales through a series of aspirational workshops. These enabled young people to produce music, videos, video games and more, and also incorporated digital literacy into existing life skills programmes.

**Together, we fulfilled our aim of engaging over 3,500 of the hardest-to-reach young people in basic digital skills training.**
To make sure that we reached young people who were most in need of digital skills, Digital Reach partners ran their pilots in some of the most digitally excluded areas of the UK.

- Action for Children
- Wales Co-operative
- UK Youth
- Home-Start & Techmums
- Carers Trust
- The Children’s Society

3,564

young people between the ages of 16 and 24 participated in Digital Reach

1,270 young people were facing multiple disadvantage*
441 young adult carers
955 young mums
49 young people who routinely go missing from home or care
259 young refugees and migrants
645 young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

* including family breakup, homelessness, poverty and mental health issues
We've gained some valuable insights over the past 12 months, from the variety of approaches the pilots took, from our partners’ frontline experiences – and, most importantly, from the young people who participated.

From across six very different pilots, six key insights have emerged. These were largely insights drawn from our partners’ shared experiences of delivering Digital Reach across the pilots, and they are also informed by survey data from our evaluation partners at LSE. Their survey aimed to understand what type of digital skills participants had, how they were using them, and if they were successful in achieving what they wanted to do with digital.

The survey was entirely voluntary and about 100 young people participated. The survey findings complemented and deepened our partners’ reflections.

We’ve made recommendations about how to incorporate these insights into future digital skills agendas and programmes. We hope the readers of this report will take them on board, to help every young person gain the digital skills they need to achieve their goals.

---

**INSIGHTS**

01 **TRUST**

If we had to pick just one key ingredient for success across the pilots, it would be trust. Trusted relationships are the gateway to digital inclusion for the hardest-to-reach young people.

02 **RELEVANCE**

Any digital skills programme for disadvantaged young people needs to start with a common understanding of what digital skills are and why they are relevant. Together we need to paint a picture of a digital world for everyone.

03 **ACCESS**

To develop digital skills, young people need easy, unrestricted access to the internet through computers as well as phones.

04 **MOTIVATION**

Successful activities put young people – not tech – at the centre of programme design, drawing on their motivation to achieve the goals that are important to them.

05 **CONFIDENCE**

Young people gain the confidence they need to learn and grow new digital skills when the people around them are digitally confident too.

06 **TIME**

It takes time to build trust, time to spark motivation, time to build confidence. Digital skills programmes need to build in flexible time – and lots of it.
INSIGHT 01

TRUST

THE GATEWAY TO DIGITAL INCLUSION

Trust was the core design component of Digital Reach. Though we piloted a variety of models, they all hinged on the belief that digitally excluded young people could be reached through trusted relationships. As leading youth organisations, all of our partners had years of experience in building and maintaining trust with young people as a model for service delivery.

Trusted relationships may be even more critical for supporting digital skills and inclusion. Our survey found that young people with lower digital skill levels felt less trust in people online (see DIGITAL REACH IN DATA, page 11).

All of our partners affirmed the critical role of the trusted relationship in the success of their pilot. This was particularly true for building the confidence of the most hard-to-reach young people, to the point where they could engage with a group.

Delivering the pilots through youth workers and digital champions that the young people trusted helped to create the confidence needed to engage in the first place, and to get past the embarrassment of lacking digital skills and having to ask for support.

When partners were not successful in engaging the hardest-to-reach young people, one of the most common reasons was that they didn’t have the time they needed to build trust before the pilot started (see Insight 6 – TIME).

“It’s trust and perseverance: ‘We’re not going to give up on you’ and ‘We’re not going anywhere’ and ‘It’s a safe space’.”

Lisa, Team Leader, Llamau Learning for Life

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Trust is a prerequisite for any programme that wants to serve the hardest-to-reach young people. Systems need to value trusted relationships, and the time it takes to build them needs to be protected as the first step towards digital inclusion.

• Youth organisations can reach digitally excluded young people through trusted relationships. They have a critical role to play in making sure that all young people have digital skills and confidence. They should also play a bigger role in setting national and local agendas for digital skills and inclusion.

• Young people with few digital skills are also likely to have low levels of trust in people online and in online services. Programmes need to take an approach to digital skills building which addresses their concerns, and values their safety – but does not make them fearful of online engagement.
CASE STUDY
TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE AND OFFLINE

Trust in the organisations and individuals delivering a programme affects young people’s confidence to participate.

To build a trusting online community around #techmumsTV, the #MumsConnected pilot, delivered by Home-Start UK and #techmums, set up a closed Facebook group. Viewers of the shows were invited to join the group and all new members were vetted.

Members were able to share their stories and make connections with one another – building a trusting community over the course of the TV series.

Although the pilot was promoted online and through local partners and other services, the mums who engaged in person were those with a pre-existing, offline trusted relationship with Home-Start volunteers.

One Home-Start practitioner remarked:
“It takes a very confident person to read something on social media and turn up somewhere, or even leave a comment from home”.

Offline trusted relationships also help young mums to build the confidence to trust online.

DIGITAL REACH IN DATA
WHAT DID THE SURVEY SAY ABOUT TRUST?

The young people surveyed turned to those in their immediate social networks when they needed help with a tech-related issue. The top four sources of support were:

- 54% friends
- 25% co-workers and fellow students
- 18% partners
- 18% parents or caregivers

48% of the young people surveyed thought that people online could not be trusted.

Young people with lower levels of skills were also less trusting of people online.
INSIGHT 02
RELEVANCE
A DIGITAL WORLD FOR EVERYONE

What are digital skills? We weren’t far into the pilots before discovering that programme designers, youth workers and young people all had different ideas about what ‘digital skills’ are and what they are for. Youth workers suggested things like ‘CV building’, while young people were thinking about ‘becoming a YouTuber’.

This caused challenges almost immediately. If programme leads couldn’t articulate to youth workers what digital skills are and why they’re important, youth workers couldn’t entice young people to participate in the pilots.

Without a common understanding of the huge range of digital skills and the associated benefits, some young people reported that they were digitally proficient at the start of the programme. After all, they could use tech for their everyday needs – like using phones for social media and consoles for gaming.

But many of the same young people couldn’t type, email, or use a laptop or a spreadsheet. More importantly, they didn’t recognise these skills as relevant to their own lives. As one DigiKnow participant explained, those kinds of skills are “only important in a tech job...”.

“Media has a role to play in making the digital world appealing and accessible to everyone. We need to shatter the idea that digital skills are just needed for tech jobs. We need a wider understanding of the digital possibilities for this generation.”

Christina Watson, Head of Programmes, UK Youth

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Telling young people they’re at risk of being left behind in an increasingly digital world is not enough. We need to help them picture themselves in the digital world by giving them aspirational and relevant reasons to be a part of it.

• We need a common, shared language around digital skills. Young people and youth organisations have a role to play in continuing to refine the ‘basic digital skills framework’ to connect to the outcomes that are relevant to them.
CASE STUDY
ACCESS ISN’T ALL ABOUT SMARTPHONES

The activities delivered through Wales Co-operative partners YMCA Swansea, Llamau and GISDA were relevant to young people, because they were built around young people’s ideas about what they wanted to do with their lives – not what they should do. Activities included photography, video creation, website design, music production, blogging, designing and selling items.

“The way I saw it from day one... was flooding [the young] people with different experiences, different workshops, from cooking using digital video, from writing music digitally, from recording using high-tech equipment to their own phones, to experiencing VR to absolutely anything I could get my hands on... Rather than it being walking into a classroom, learning how to use Excel. We can implement skills for that in a different way... There's more to it than sitting down and showing them how to use different applications on a computer – you need to get a spark there that you can work with...”

Twm, the lead staff member from GISDA in charge of delivering the My Digital Life sessions

DIGITAL REACH IN DATA
WHAT DID THE SURVEY SAY ABOUT RELEVANCE?

The young people surveyed were not going online to access services that youth workers or programme leaders might deem ‘relevant’:

- 63% had not tried to find out about schools
- 61% had not contacted GPs or healthcare professionals online
- 57% had not tried to find out about housing
- 46% had not tried to find out about benefits or grants
- 35% had not tried to post or update a CV online
- 35% had not tried to pay bills
INSIGHT 03
ACCESS
MORE THAN JUST A SMARTPHONE

On the surface, most Digital Reach participants appeared to be highly connected, with smartphone in hand. But access to the internet was more complex than it appeared.

Our survey showed that achieving basic digital skills requires access beyond a smartphone. Firstly, it requires online access through devices, including computers (and don’t forget the wifi or data). Secondly, access should allow young people to experiment in their own time. Looking at access in these ways, we found that most participants didn’t have what they needed to build digital skills.

Of course, there are the obvious issues of expense and infrastructure. Of the participants we surveyed, 82% had a smartphone, but still ranked the expense of devices, wifi and data as the number one reason for not accessing the internet more.

Access issues extend beyond devices and wifi. Transport costs, especially for young people in rural areas, were a big barrier to accessing computers, wifi and youth centre support. Without access to broadband in rural areas, and no money to travel to town, these young people were some of the most digitally, and socially, isolated.

Even when participants had access to a computer and the internet in their homes or care homes, they weren’t always allowed to use them freely or independently. The Children’s Society found that young people’s devices were confiscated by parents or caregivers worried about the risks of being online.

These young people took part in the pilot to get the online access they weren’t allowed at home, and to prove that they had the digital skills needed to safely navigate the online world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Fund access to hardware. Sponsor wifi and broadband. Young people facing disadvantage need free access to a range of devices – laptops as well as phones.

• Donated tech needs to be up to date, allowing young people to use current apps. This would enable access to practical services such as banking and budgeting, as well as more exciting, innovative software for video editing and music production, for example.

• Young people should have independent access to devices so they can build confidence in navigating the internet on their own. Instead of restricting access to certain websites – so-called ‘digital mollycoddling’ – work with young people to agree safe and acceptable use policies and practices, and work with their families to help ease digital tensions at home.
CASE STUDY
ACCESS ISN’T ALL ABOUT SMARTPHONES

Even with a smartphone in hand, a young person can still face many barriers to accessing the information and services they need. The case of Alum, a refugee living in the Midlands with a foster family, who participated in The Children’s Society’s My Place pilot, highlights some of these invisible barriers:

“When we arrive at the youth club, Alum is one of a group of young people on their phones with their headphones in their ears. It is a smartphone, but he needs wifi to access the internet and has to top up for calls and texts. His social worker bought him the phone but he did not know how to use it; his interpreter helped him to learn. He finds it very difficult to use it because everything requires him to use English.”

Alum says that all his peers at school asked him if he had something on his phone, but he did not know what it was. We suggest maybe Snapchat? He says, ‘Yes! That’s it!’ However, he does not have it and says that he does not know what it does.”

Helen Maitland, Youth Engagement Lead, The Children’s Society

DIGITAL REACH IN DATA
WHAT DID THE SURVEY SAY ABOUT ACCESS?

The young people surveyed who had better access to the internet had higher level digital skills. This is how they suggest their access could be improved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56%</td>
<td>less expensive internet/data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54%</td>
<td>less expensive devices (mobile phones, computers, tablets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>better signal where I live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>more interesting or useful things for me online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>feeling safer using devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>devices easier to use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INSIGHT 04

MOTIVATION

PEOPLE LEAD, TECH FOLLOWS

Young people were most engaged in the pilots when youth workers put them – not the tech – at the forefront of the activities, making digital skills the means to achieve their goals. Luckily, finding out what interests young people have and using these to motivate them to achieve their goals is one of the core principles of youth work.

All pilots were co-designed with young people, and the activities were designed around making digital deliver outcomes they wanted for their lives. These were usually a mix of practical needs and aspirational dreams. Most pilots helped young people to access essential services online, such as banking, budgeting, health, wellbeing and jobs.

But young people also wanted activities that were exciting, even innovative; they found motivation in creating the products that they also enjoyed consuming, such as music, movies and video games.

What’s more, the partners worked to empower their staff not just to deliver set activities, but to ‘embed’ digital skills learning into all kinds of activities, flexibly – and even spontaneously (see Insight 5 – CONFIDENCE for the importance of digitally confident staff in this approach).

Some elements of the programmes weren’t introduced by popular demand. Instead they were informed by a deep understanding of young people, the challenges they face, and of course by care for them and their welfare. For this reason all partners committed to making online safety a fundamental part of the pilot.

However, many partners found that young people were really worried about online safety (see Insight 1 – TRUST), and wanted to make sure that they were confident about being online without being at risk of harm.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Develop materials for building digital skills that are lean and flexible, and can be embedded into multiple programme areas. These will allow youth workers to do what they do best: put the young person, their wants, needs and creativity at the forefront. They will also build youth workers’ own digital savviness in finding organic opportunities to use tech to support different outcomes.

- ‘Combined with flexible materials to develop skills, youth workers can identify digital exclusion by developing a simple, observational diagnostic tool. In combination with flexible materials, youth workers can then support young people with additional digital needs, no matter what activity they’re engaged in.’

“What’s good is the Wales Co-op have given us the freedom to deliver what we feel is best for our service users rather than what often happens, [which] is you’re prescribed what you do with people and how to deliver it. That’s been really good – as a pilot should be.”

Gethin, Youth Worker, GISDA
Survey participants’ attitudes towards digital are more important than their skills for achieving positive outcomes:

83% survey participants with a positive attitude towards tech, enjoyed 83% higher achievement of online outcomes, e.g. finding a job.

13% survey participants with more advanced digital skills, only had 13% higher achievement of online outcomes.

CASE STUDY
MOTIVATION
BY STEALTH

Action for Children piloted an ‘embedded’ approach to digital skills building. By digitising their work, young people picked up new digital skills as they worked towards their main goals of gaining a qualification and work placement. Participants were motivated to get past their digital fears to gain a construction qualification – even picking up skills they previously found intimidating, like word processing and uploading documents.

“The growth and development that we’ve seen in young people through this programme has been absolutely fantastic. They’ve started at a point where they’re quite intimidated by what they’re going to learn. [They were] Almost reluctant to be in those kind of situations, but their confidence has grown.”

Maria Williamson, Children’s Services Manager, Action for Children

“I think my future is bright, and I can work hard and make a life for myself. Move about, work hard, and move up in the world. Have a good career.”

Levi, participant

DIGITAL REACH IN DATA
WHAT DID THE SURVEY SAY ABOUT MOTIVATION?

What Did the Survey Say About Motivation?

83% survey participants with a positive attitude towards tech, enjoyed 83% higher achievement of online outcomes, e.g. finding a job.

13% survey participants with more advanced digital skills, only had 13% higher achievement of online outcomes.
In affirming that trust is a key ingredient for successfully building young people’s digital confidence, the pilots also uncovered a conundrum: what if the youth workers young people trust aren’t digitally confident themselves?

Every pilot cited this as a challenge, and spent a good deal of resource upskilling staff and building their digital confidence. But their efforts were an investment. As we’ve seen in Insight 4 - MOTIVATION, youth workers who are digitally confident themselves will find creative, organic opportunities to build young people’s digital confidence.

Action for Children found that by training staff to help young people use their new digital employment platform, they were also building their staff’s own digital skills and confidence. Youth workers in UK Youth’s DigiKnow pilot didn’t feel digitally savvy initially, but learning alongside the young people they were ‘training’ was a brilliant way of building confidence together.

Peer learning could also be effective. Our survey found that over half of participants (54%) looked first to their friends for digital support, followed by family members and partners. Peer digital role models were another way of encouraging learning.

Parents and carers were also influential. When lacking digital confidence, they were hesitant to allow young people to go online. The Children’s Society proposed an interesting path forward – delivering ‘good digital citizenship’ training, helping social services, schools, parents, carers and professionals to feel more comfortable about young people exploring digital spaces.

Digital Reach partners shone when their own digital confidence allowed them to use tech to help build young people’s confidence. For young people who aren’t native English speakers or who have learning difficulties, partners used Google Translate, voice dictation and spellcheck to help them get over their embarrassment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- If we want a digital future where no one is left behind, we have to support the digital transformation of charities. When charities are digitally confident and capable, from the board to the frontline, we’ll see fewer cases of digital exclusion.
- Develop a digital component to youth worker qualifications. Help youth workers develop the digital confidence they need to become digital role models for young people.
- Mobilise young people’s networks. In addition to 1-2-1 support and co-learning with youth workers, peer learning, peer role models and family/caregiver involvement were all found to be effective, especially for confidence building.
When our survey participants wanted to engage with online services, their skill levels weren’t necessarily high enough to enable them to achieve a positive outcome. This affects confidence and makes it more unlikely that they will try again, or put in the time they need to improve their skills.

**DIGITAL REACH IN DATA**

**WHAT DID THE SURVEY SAY ABOUT CONFIDENCE?**

- **12%** of young people surveyed had not tried to use the internet to find a job.
- **46%** of those young people who did look for a job were unsuccessful in finding one.
- **33%** of young people surveyed who tried to upload a CV were unsuccessful.

**CASE STUDY**

**BUILDING CONFIDENCE WITH DIGITAL ROLE MODELS**

UK Youth used a unique approach to building young people’s digital confidence. They asked digitally savvy young people to become ‘Digital Champions’ and take on a leadership role with their peers. Digital Champions looked for organic opportunities to build young people’s digital confidence outside of the DigiKnow sessions.

At Waterside Community Youth Centre, Digital Champion Sagar even saw a broken PlayStation as an opportunity for the kind of playful digital experimentation and problem solving that is critical for digital skills development:

“We increased their digital skills through necessity – they wanted the PlayStation to work, so we worked together to fix it!”

Digital Champions were able to build on their existing rapport with young people to bring up digital skills in different contexts and focus on transferable skills. It helped young people not to feel threatened, and meant they were more likely to see their new skills as ‘want to have’, not ‘ought to have’ (see Insight 4 - MOTIVATION). For the future, UK Youth is exploring training Digital Champions alongside youth workers as a way to encourage mutual learning and confidence.
Building trust takes time. Finding out what outcomes are relevant for young people, and designing ways to motivate them to achieve those outcomes, takes time. Building confidence and building a community? That also takes time.

It takes time to deliver programmes, and that amount of time varies from person to person. Many of the young people who participated in the pilots had complex learning needs and adverse experiences of education. For young people who are socially isolated, it might take weeks just to engage in a group setting.

Digital Reach partners found that time was too short on nearly every front – particularly for building trusted relationships before delivery, and also allowing time within delivery for practice and building confidence through repetition and ongoing support.

"We had just got started and now it’s ended." Youth Worker, My Digital Life pilot.

UK Youth gave themselves a target of spending six hours with each young person who engaged, and realised that outcomes varied greatly. Going forward, they suggest measuring success in terms of outcomes – not time spent.

All the Digital Reach partners stressed that the young people they were trying to reach had time constraints. These included chaotic lifestyles or pressing time commitments that did not allow them to engage regularly. This made it even more important to make the most of the time they had together.

"With many of the individuals having had limited access to mainstream education, learning difficulties and challenges need to be factored in, especially the time needed to expect progress or improvement. Low levels of literacy and numeracy have a direct impact on their daily lives, coupled with unstable or disruptive home lives and a lack of an adult support network for guidance. This makes engagement, trust and progress very slow."

Marc Davies, Digital Communities Wales Project Manager, Wales Co-operative Centre

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Give any programme that’s addressing digital disadvantage at least two years to demonstrate impact. Set relevant target numbers and focus on outcomes – not time spent – to allow youth workers and young people to spend as much time as they need to build skills and confidence.
- Build programmes and activities that allow young people to engage in their own time, dropping in and out as needed. Digital tools can support this kind of flexible engagement.
CASE STUDY
WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR TIME

Carers Trust knows how precious free time is for young adult carers – but also how digital can open up flexible opportunities for young carers to make the most of their time. Take the example of Peter – Carers Trust helped him create more time to achieve his potential with digital:

Peter and his brother came to England after fleeing their birth country. Peter cares for his brother who has post-traumatic stress disorder, which presents itself through physical symptoms. He has very little time to himself and always puts his brother’s needs first.

Peter has been learning English for two years, and his overall goal is to pass his exams and improve his grammar. However, caring for his brother means he hasn’t been able to dedicate enough time to his studies.

Peter has internet access at home, though he was previously unaware that there were opportunities to study and learn online; he had only ever used the internet for communicating with family and friends through social media.

Carers Trust worked with Peter to help him study more flexibly by using online learning tools – like resources for learning English as a second language.

Peter has found that he’s becoming more confident online and is able to access resources that he didn’t know existed. He has been accessing support to manage his finances online and improve support for his brother.

He continues to attend college in the morning and is now practising his grammar online in the afternoons. This flexible way of learning allows him to fit in study time while he’s at home caring for his brother.

Peter has found that he’s becoming more confident online and is able to access resources that he didn’t know existed. He has been accessing support to manage his finances online and improve support for his brother.
The insights and experiences of the Digital Reach partners, combined with the design and analysis of the survey data from our partners at LSE, paint a complex – but also practical – picture of what young people need to develop and maintain digital skills in a digital world.

The Digital Reach pilots have made it clear that it’s not enough to tell young people that they’ll be left behind. They’ve made it clear that fear does not motivate young people to go out and get digital; in fact, fear of being left behind inhibits young people from engaging.

What the Digital Reach programme tells us is that to create a digital world that includes and benefits everyone, we need more examples than ever of the incredible generative and creative powers that tech can put at your fingertips.

These pilots have demonstrated the ways that tech can open up new, relevant opportunities for young people, from every walk of life.

If we want to shift young people’s attitudes towards tech, we need to take brave strides forward to make sure that tech delivers for young people – and makes a long-lasting impact on the critical challenges they face. This will only happen if we include these young people, not only in the conversation, but also in creating our shared tech future.

“*If we’re not careful, in 20 years’ time we’ll be picking up the pieces that others forgot about. We have a responsibility to include young people from all backgrounds in the conversation on how their future is being shaped through the advancement of technology.*”

Youth Worker, Bradford YMCA
The insights in this report are synthesised directly from our partners’ experiences.

However, the Digital Reach programme was built on the foundational work of many other organisations, work which nuances and deepens our insights. For a fuller picture of the challenges of delivering digital skills to the hardest-to-reach young people in the UK, we recommend delving into the following:

DiSTO: From digital skills to tangible outcomes – improving measures and models of digital engagement
The London School of Economics and Political Science
Framework for Essential Digital Skills
Tech Partnership
Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2018
Lloyds Bank
Slipping through the net: the most disadvantaged young people in Britain are getting digitally left behind
Prince’s Trust and The London School of Economics and Political Science
Learn My Way: Learn how to use the internet
Good Things Foundation
My Best Life: Priorities for Digital Technology in the Youth Sector
New Philanthropy Capital

And, of course, we recommend learning more about our Digital Reach partners:
Action for Children
Carers Trust
City & Guilds Group
GISDA
Good Things Foundation
Home-Start UK
Llamau
#techmums
The Children’s Society
UK Youth
Wales Co-operative Centre
YMCA Swansea
With special thanks to our research and evaluation partners:
Dr Ellen Helsper, Associate Professor and Svetlana Smirnova, PhD Researcher, Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science