



Supporting independence through digital inclusion

Dr Sarah Alden, April 2024



Enhance



Introduction

Enhance is funded by [Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust](#) (LCH) and managed by [Leeds Older People's Forum](#) on behalf of [Forum Central](#). Enhance brings together 13 third sector delivery partners with LCH teams across the city. Enhance provides person-centred, community-based support to individuals to help avoid delayed hospital discharges and readmissions, and to enhance capacity throughout the health system. This short thematic report draws on learning from the second year of Enhance delivery.

How can support around digital access improve people's health and support LCH?

Digital is a dimension of inequality, and support to facilitate equitable access to digital can empower people to manage their own health and care needs – supporting them to age in place, which in turn can ease pressure on LCHs and the wider health and care system. As one delivery partner highlighted – it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate social from digital exclusion as digital increasingly becomes a part of everyday life.

Approach taken by Enhance

Some delivery partners incorporated digital directly into the one to one support offer including: provision of equipment for participants to try out during visits; advice and support to help people access a cheap provider; supporting WiFi set up; and help to identify reasonably priced equipment (such as reconditioned devices). Within this staff supported or navigated people to accessibility support, such as getting a text to speech reader and help with practising reading for those with low literacy skills.

Digital support was also provided through referring people across to wider community services, ranging from free skills training and support (one delivery partner ran a free 'IT breakfast club'), to attending activities which leave tablets on tables for people to have a go at their own pace.

Outcomes and impact for participants

People reported building skills and confidence to use digital to help them maintain independence. Examples included ordering meal deliveries, shopping for food, sourcing local food banks, setting up the NHS app to keep tabs on appointments and order repeat prescriptions. People were also supported to go online to apply for benefits, blue badges, or confirm health appointments – and shown how to do this independently. Someone with agoraphobia, who had not left their house for 4 years was supported to learn skills on their laptop and they are now able to do online shopping.

One described being encouraged to try out Alexa – and were using this to set reminders to take medication. Digital also reportedly reduced social isolation as Enhance staff supported people to set up video communication so they could Facetime family.

Impact and outcomes for the LCH role

Neighbourhood Team and social care staff provided examples of where supporting people to get online helped them to self-manage elements of their health and care needs – such as setting reminders to: change dressings, take medication, attend appointments. One referred to voice activated devices (such as Alexa) as a useful tool for people to ask for help in the event of a fall.

Reflections

Participants provided feedback on how learning digital had a positive change to their lives. Whilst choice should always take priority – and indeed some participants reported that digital was not for them – there was a sense that some Enhance staff did not give regard to the role digital could play in achieving Enhance outcomes. In a few cases, the evaluation picked up an assumption that digital is less suited or wanted by the very old in particular, and it was unclear if people had been asked if this was in fact the case.

Further reading

Please visit the [resources section of the Leeds Older People's Forum website](#) to read more short thematic reports sharing learning from the evaluation of the second year of Enhance delivery, and to access the full range of Enhance reports and briefings.

