

Let's Get Digital Snapshot Report

01/01/2020 to 01/04/2022

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Executive Summary

	Methodology	Highlights
Impact on People with a learning disability	Online Sessions:	<i>"This project was a lifeline. Without the tablets and the skills to help people use them we would be looking at a very different profile for our organisation now. We've heard from parents and carers that it really did save the day".</i>
	Participant Skills:	94% of groups reported that their members have, or 'partially' have the skills to access online activities.

	Inclusion:	57% of groups reported that 'all' or 'most' of their members felt more included after taking part in the project and a further 27% reported that this was the case for 'some' of their members.
	Reduced loneliness:	47% of groups reported that 'all' or 'most' of their members felt less lonely after taking part in the project and a further 25% reported that this was the case for 'some' of their members.
	Happiness:	67% of the groups reported that 'most' or 'all' of their members were happier after taking part in the project and further 24% reported that this was the case for 'some' members.
	Digital Safety:	46% of the groups reported that 'most' or 'all' of their members feel safer online and a further 34% reported that this was the case for 'some' of their members.
Impact on Families and Carers	Families and Carers:	<i>"At the start people said they didn't know how to do digital- it was something their parents helped them with - now they do it themselves".</i>
Impact on Digital Champions	Digital Champions with a learning disability	Digital Champions with a learning disability have been; <i>"Promoting digital amongst peers, encouraging people to join in, positive role models, an approachable friendly face which people can trust [and at] the centre of ideas to develop the project".</i>
Impact on Organisation	Organisation and staff/volunteer skills	At the end of the project 43% of the groups felt that they have the right skills as an organisation to support online provision for their members and a further 56% felt that they now 'partially' had these skills.
	Role of Digital Investment and Future Digital Provision	88% of the groups improved their scores for their overall digital offer increasing to an average of from 4.8/10 to 7.3/10 (where 1 = not important and 10 = very important).
	Digital Presence Connection Between Groups and the Community	On average, groups have rated themselves 7.1/10 in terms of using social media/digital platforms as an organisation (where 1 = not important and 10 = very important).
	Impact of Let's Grow Digital Funding	98% of groups that successfully applied for with the additional Let's Grow Digital funding have been able to or have partially been able to achieve what they aimed for.

Introduction

The Let's Get Digital project has supported people with a learning disability through the provision of devices, data and basic digital skills support. Roll out of the project was split into 2 cohorts with cohort 1 running from December 2020 to March 2022 and cohort 2 running from June 2021 to March 2022. This provided flexibility for different groups to join and fully engage in the project at different times: as a result, some groups have been part of the Let's Get Digital project for over a year whilst others have joined much later with the final groups



engaging in January/February 2022. This has staggered the impact achieved by different groups from the project as each has started their Let's Get Digital 'journey' at different times and from different levels of existing experience whereby staff, family members/supporters, carers, and people with a learning disability all had differing experience.

During the 16-month programme, funded by Pears Foundation and DCMS, the project worked with 103 community organisations (groups), supporting them to build their digital capability and support more people with a learning disability to 'get digital'.

Over 2,500 devices, digital equipment, and software purchases have been funded, to support groups. The project also provided 270 Digital Champions further training and support and by the end of the programme they had completed 1,470 courses between them.

This report explores the impact of Let's Get Digital focusing in on the different outcome areas for the project through the analysis of evaluation data collected from the baseline and endline surveys as detailed in the methodology.

Methodology

A snapshot model involving baseline and endline surveys was used to evaluate the project. In addition, 7 focus groups were conducted with participants and a further 5 sessions were run with Digital Champions earlier in the project. These have been analysed and reported on in the quarterly reports and therefore do not feature in this report. The snapshot survey was designed for the project leads to complete on behalf of their organisation and their members. The survey consisted of a mixture of multiple-choice questions, rating questions and free text questions. A large number of the open text boxes were arranged to give individuals opportunities to explain their answer.

This format was chosen to enable the evaluation to capture some of the complexity of the group's answers. There was some variation between each of the groups, in terms of their size, how they interacted with their members and the differing levels of learning disabilities and support needs across their membership. It was also clear that some groups were experiencing issues caused by the pandemic and staffing and volunteer shortages so this method was chosen so it would not be a time burden for group staff.

In addition, for the endline survey the group's staff members were given the option to complete the survey as part of an interview with a member of the programme's team inputting the information into the relevant questions and 40 interviews were carried out in this way. This was to reduce 'survey fatigue' and make sure the data could be collected from the groups in the easiest way possible for them. In at least four of these interview-based responses a Digital Champion with a learning disability also contributed.

This method also allowed for a very high response rate with a total of 103 baseline and 94 endline responses from groups being collected. In order to draw an accurate comparison between the baseline and endline, this number was reduced to 93 fully matched baseline and endline responses. However, where data was collected solely in the baseline or endline surveys with no need for comparison, all responses were included in the analysis.

Results

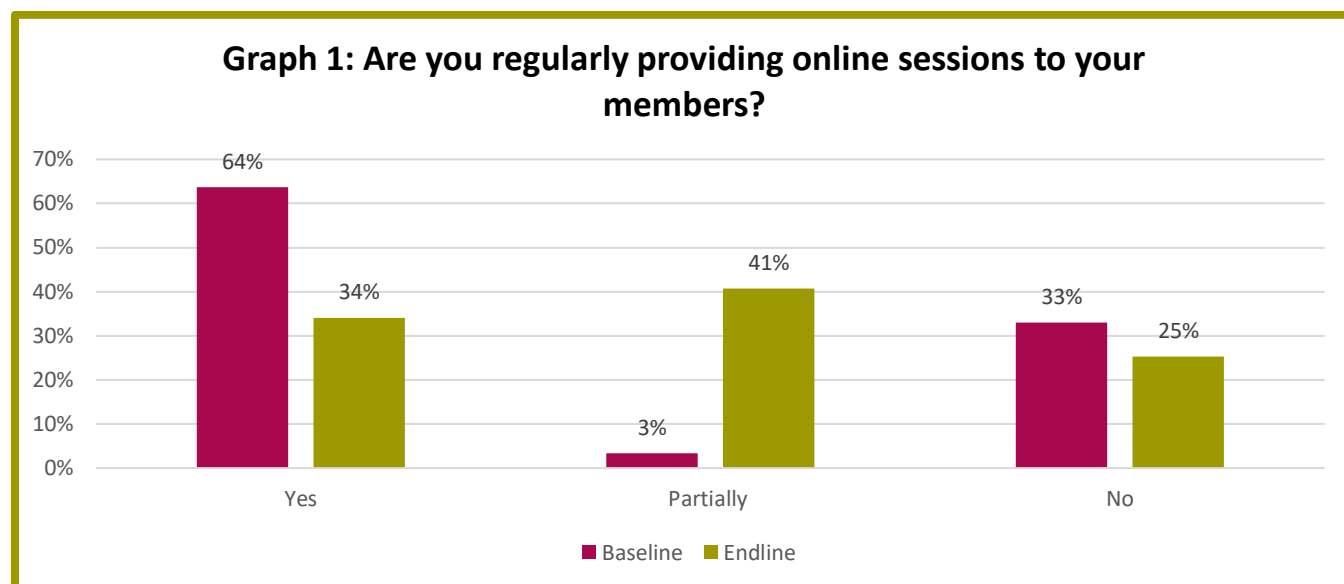
1. Impact on the wellbeing and skills of people with a learning disability

1.1 Online Sessions:

Let's Get Digital has provided groups with both the equipment and support to regularly run online sessions in response to the Covid 19 pandemic, and this proved crucial for many groups in their efforts to continue supporting members through the series of lockdowns we have faced. This was reflected by one group who described how *"This project was a lifeline. Without the tablets and the skills to help people use them we would*

be looking at a very different profile for our organisation now. We've heard from parents and carers that it really did save the day".

However, when asked if groups are still running online sessions for their members many groups reported a reduction or that they are only partially running these sessions in the endline survey (see graph 1). It is clear from the explanations of this answer that this is a result of the end of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions which have enabled groups to re-start running sessions in person where they look at digital collectively as a group as opposed to remaining in contact through online meetings.



A significant number also discussed having a hybrid model, with some sessions being offered online and some in-person. *"At present, we are focusing on re-engaging our members back into small groups onsite with a digital offer still available for those not ready to return in full."* This was highlighted as particularly useful for those groups situated in more rural communities meaning that members are geographically dispersed or when there are other difficulties or challenges with traveling to and from in-person sessions.

1.2 Participant Skills:

As a result of the project, 94% of groups reported that their members have, or 'partially' have the skills to access online activities. Whilst this is positive, just over half (58%) of groups answered that members only "partially" have the skills in both their baseline and endline responses suggesting that there has been only limited improvement amongst members in relation to skills. However, analysis of the explanations for this question revealed that the groups who reported members 'partially' having the skills have still made significant improvements. One group explained how in relation to improved skills, *"it depends on the complexity of the person's disability, but I would say the majority yes but perhaps with support"*. These responses also reflected how group members have varying skills dependent on a variety of other factors. These include their previous experience of using digital, their carer and family member's digital knowledge and their age. One group reflected: *"We are working closely with all our members to ensure they have the correct skills to get online. We have varying levels of skills with our members, and we are working with members to identify the best support that suits their needs."* It was similarly highlighted by another group that *"Some people live with elderly parents/carers and haven't had the opportunity to engage with digital"* which left them at times disadvantaged because of a lack of digital skills in their household.

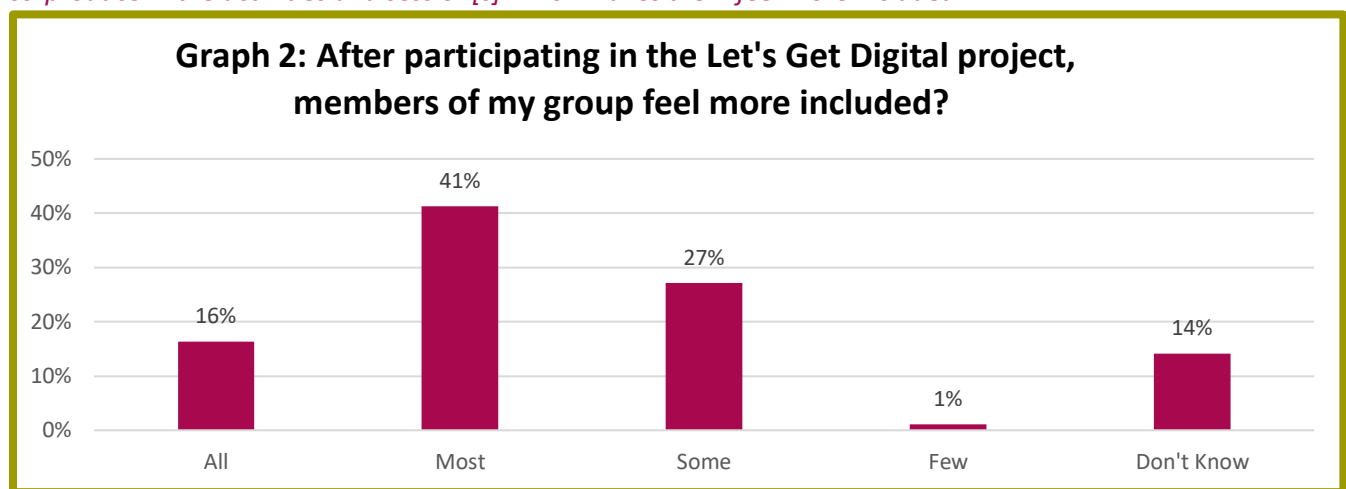
A small number of groups also referenced how some of their members were reluctant or not interested in gaining the digital skills. One group explained: *"We have a wide range of ages and abilities and a wide range of personalities ranging from those with excellent digital skills to those who have no interest whatsoever in anything digital."* Another agreed, detailing that *"70-80% [of the group are] really enthusiastic and have the skills. Some just not interested."*

1.3 Inclusion:

Inclusion here refers to people with a learning disability being a meaningful part of different groups and structures. These could be social groups as well as any sort of decision-making structures within the organisations that support them.

When considering the increased inclusion that Let's Get Digital has provided for members, groups have reported significant improvements, stating how *"The inclusivity [the project] has provided has been the most important thing."*

As shown in graph 2, the majority of groups said their members felt more included after the Let's Get Digital project with 57% reporting that 'all' or 'most' have felt more included, and a further 27% reporting that 'some' felt more included. In their explanations for this answer, groups discussed the greater communication and connection with others including friends and support workers, that being digitally active offers. Some also referenced how members were better able to choose activities, illustrated in a quote from one group which highlighted the improvements in *"Confidence and access, [as] all the beneficiaries are better able to engage and co-produce in the activities and session[s] which makes them feel more included."*



When asked about the further impact of the project one group reflected that the provision of digital has meant that *"People who can't speak can use the iPads to tell us how they are feeling"* and as a result, *"Digital allows people to communicate their choices."*

The groups that said they 'didn't know', mainly referenced that they hadn't been on the project long enough to be able to make a comment, again reflecting that many groups are at different stages in their process of becoming more digital.

One group summarised the increased inclusion by stating: *"The members have been talking with each other and other people about the project outside of the service. It has had a positive impact on the members and the people around them. It has built confidence in members, and they feel proud about what they have achieved and will continue to do so."*

A different group reported how *"it's helped to engage our members with our wider organisation. They've come to use Zoom and have then joined in with different things like campaign meetings, self-advocacy groups online etc."*

1.4 Reduced loneliness:

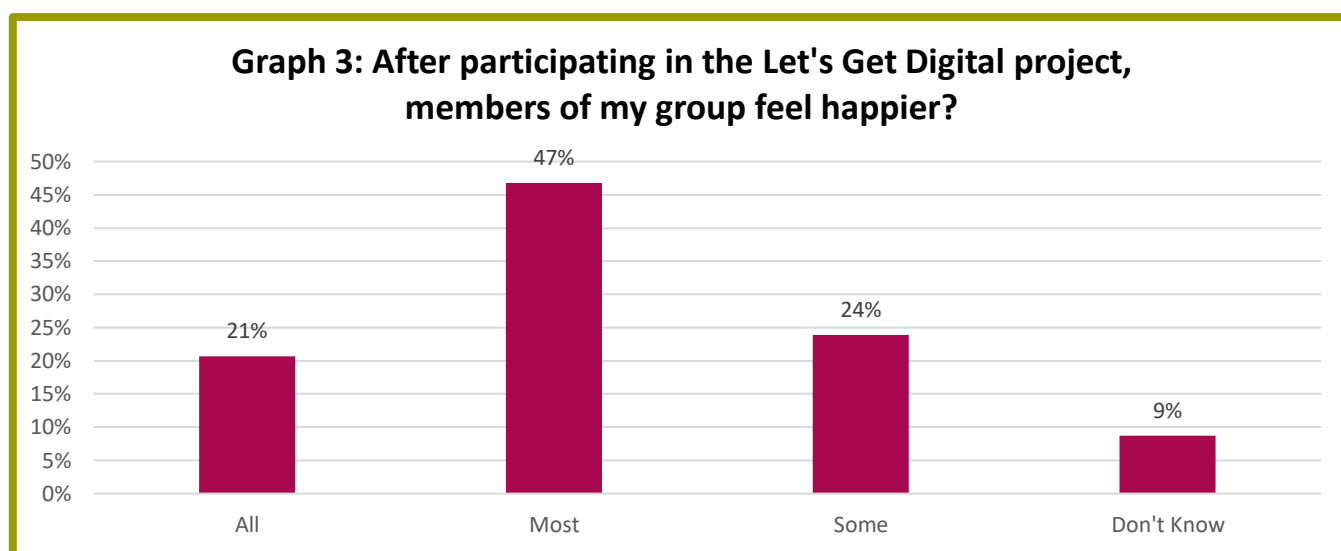
Similarly, when asked if the members felt less lonely after participating in Let's Get Digital 47% of groups reported that 'all' or 'most' feel less lonely and a further 25% reported that this was the case for 'some' of their members. In the explanation for their answers, many groups were extremely positive about how the devices helped to connect remote individuals. One such group highlighted that *"It was a huge shock when we had to stop face to face contact - it was a huge worry [but] we could see the worry melt away when we first went online"*

- they became themselves again through the connection” and added that their “Members regularly post in the private Facebook group if they are feeling isolated and interact with each other”.

A smaller number also referenced how Let’s Get Digital helped members to know exactly what was happening and encourage them to go to more activities and try new things. One group summarised Let’s Get Digital as a *“Great project - it helped us keep in touch. We needed the tablets to be together during Covid. This connected people who already had tablets with those who got the new tablets. Some people thought they didn't need to be digital, but they have been able to try things out. We ran craft sessions online and held an Art exhibition online during Covid which raised people's self-esteem.”*

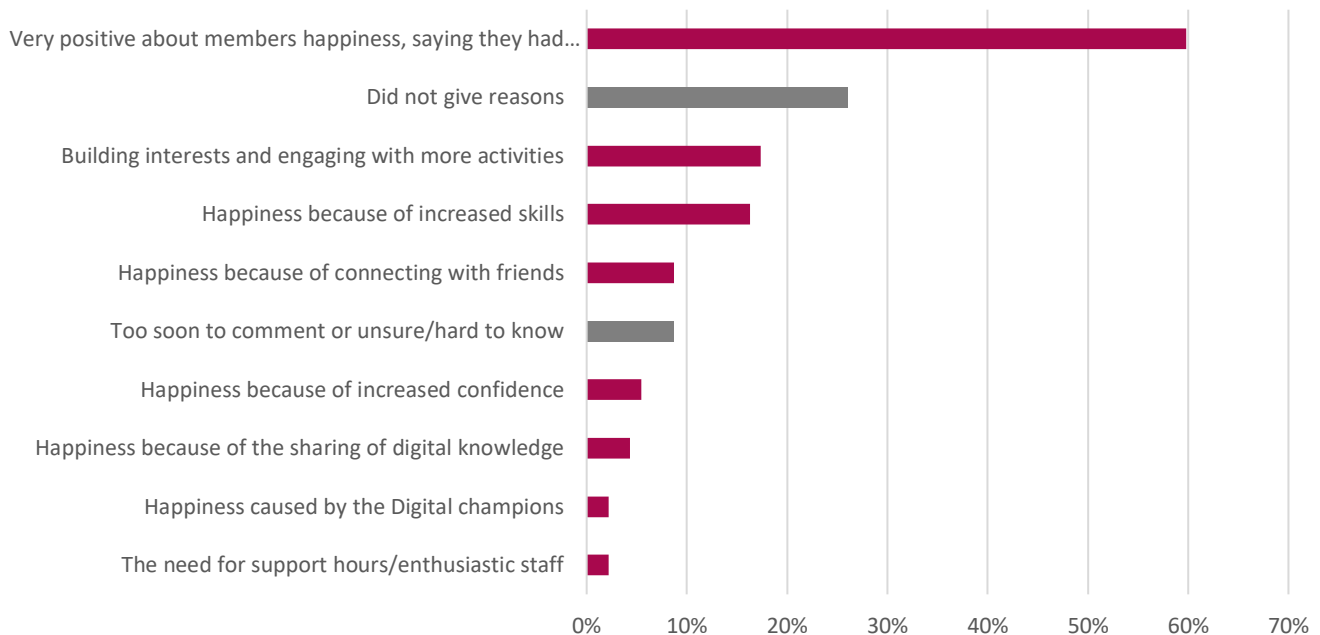
1.5 Happiness:

When asked about members happiness as a result of Let’s Get Digital (as seen in graph 3), we again received positive results. Here, all but 9% of the groups reported at least ‘some’ members were happier with 67% saying ‘most’ or ‘all’ and no groups selecting the ‘none’ option for this question, which is an encouraging result. In the open-ended follow up comments groups frequently reference the positive effects Let’s Get Digital has had on their members with one group detailing *“The joy when we pass someone an iPad to use is unbelievable - I only wish we had had some years ago!”*



Graph 4 shows the key themes that were discussed in the explanation for this answer and highlights that the majority were very positive about the project's effects on the member’s happiness. *“We have photographs of people looking nothing less than joyous!”* Groups referenced a range of different reasons, including building interests and confidence, connecting with friends, and learning and sharing new skills all playing a role in improved happiness. One group explained how *“being able to connect with friends during the online sessions really helped lift everyone's spirits during lockdown [and that] learning new skills and feeling a sense of achievement and being able to help each other out”* was also really important.

Graph 4: Common themes discussed in the explanation of "After participating in the Let's Get Digital project, members of my group feel happier".



Graph 4 Note: in the coding of open-ended questions there is some variation in how respondents chose to answer, with some groups only discussing one or two things they considered most relevant, whilst others were more thorough.

The variation in how the project had affected individuals in different ways was also referenced in this question. For example, one response described a decrease in anxiety in an individual who preferred connecting with others online, whereas another group shared how using an iPad had caused a sensory overload for one member.

However, whilst digital did not suit all participants, for most members digital was highlighted as a positive addition. *"X loves to draw but suffers from anxiety and frustration when he makes mistakes - as part of this project he has discovered he can use free drawing apps, which means he can 'undo' his mistakes. He uses these regularly at home now, and shares what he finds with others [in the group]. It enables him to express himself and keep calm doing something he loves."*

A limitation with this question was that a lot of groups did not provide an explanation for their answer, or did not go into detail, even if the answer was very positive. This could have been because the happiness of their members clearly can be a complex issue with too many aspects to list out in one answer or difficult to generalise about. This may have skewed the data towards those who listed reasons for their selection.

1.6 Impact of Let's Get Digital on Families and Carers:

It was clear from responses throughout the survey that involvement from parents and carers was needed to support people at home, to have a greater impact. This is especially true because of the impact of Covid 19 restrictions, limiting staff and volunteers being able to support people.

When groups were asked on the baseline 'How confident are you that members, have the right support from parents, carers at home to get digital', 45% said 'some but not all were confident'. With explanations including statements like: *"Some of our members live with family that support them well with their digital endeavours, but most need a lot of ongoing support."*

Despite these challenges, some positive impacts were found that had a beneficial effect on the experience of families and carers:

- As in previous sections, groups reported a high increase in confidence and independence in some individuals as a result of the project. When asked about any further impacts: *“At the start people said they didn't know how to do digital- it was something their parents helped them with - now they do it themselves”*.
- One key benefit of the Let's Get Digital project was the increased ability for organisations to run online sessions particularly during the pandemic providing some respite for family and carers. *“This project has enabled us to keep running our sessions for those we support when we are unable to facilitate sessions face to face. We have been able to continue to build relationships and work to understand, on an individual basis how each person is communicating.”* This group also remarked how these online sessions reduced anxiety and therefore reduced the challenges involved in caring for these individuals.
- It was also reported that individuals have used digital to expand the number of activities and engagement in these activities, that they do at home. *“X loves listening to music - he has downloaded music apps and done research into his favourite as part of the "Next Step" group sessions and now uses these independently at home”*.
- Multiple groups reported how Let's Get Digital made it easier for some individuals to communicate with families and carers. *“We're including learning using Makaton online which has helped people's communication”*, and that *“One of the main benefits for everyone in our service was the ability to connect with their families and friends. They have been given the confidence to use communication and continue to use this.”*
- As well as this, it was reported in some cases that the families and carers had benefited themselves from the digital training provided. One group outlined how *“some people have become really enthusiastic about technology and digital and there is far less reluctance from people, including parents. One member with older parents hadn't used anything digital before and now he has shown them what he can do. His parents underestimated his ability, and he has demonstrated skills and bought himself a smart phone!”* another group explained *“Support/Carers/family also benefitted from the information we provided to help with their IT skill levels.”*
- Finally, as detailed in section 3.3, The increased use of social media and websites has made it easier for families and carers to know what is on offer from these organisations. Additionally, some groups reported increased use of digital communication channels between family and carer groups. *“As we become more digital savvy, we are setting up group chats with parents of those with more complex needs to include them in daily discussions/planning and have seen a significant improvement in consistency and a reduction in anxieties.”*

Our evaluation clearly identified families and carers as a key group that has benefited from this project and a number of these points are expanded upon in other sections.

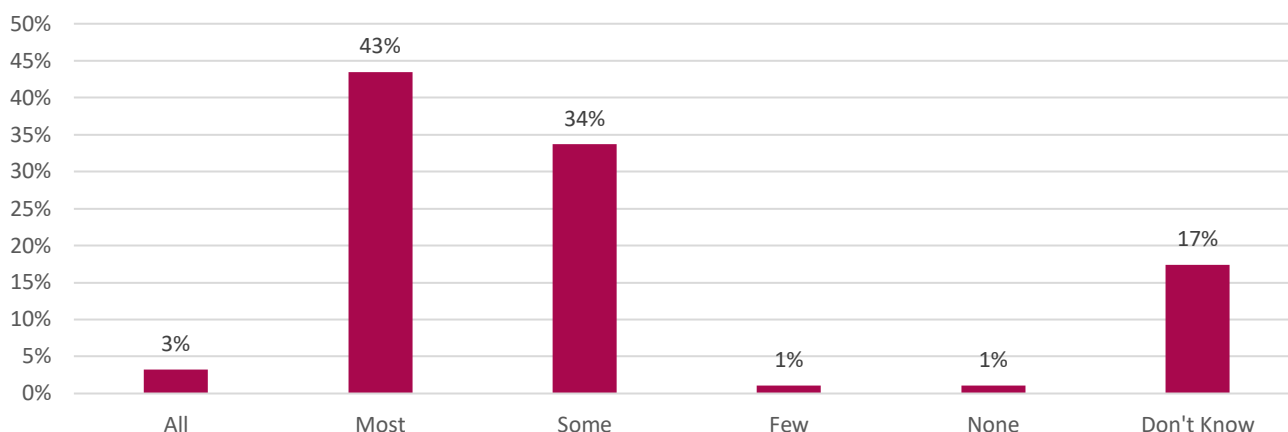
As referenced in section 3.3 a challenge that was identified in this area was the amount of time in staff/carer hours some digital activities take people with learning disabilities to learn and become comfortable in doing. One re-occurring theme within a small number of groups was how their aspirations to do more digitally were being held back by staffing issues including their capacity but also in some cases, a lack of digital knowledge. This was reflected in one group's comment in relation to online safety that explained: *“We have invested in online safety training but lack the resources to provide the level of regular support and input needed to be fully confident that we can support all members to be safe online all the time.”*

1.7 Digital Safety:

When asked about participants ability to remain safe whilst using digital, 81% of the groups reported that there has been at least 'some' increase in members feeling safer online demonstrating improved knowledge and awareness of online safety amongst members (see graph 5). Only one group felt that 'none' of their members

feel safer online however they explained that they have *“not yet delivered this aspect”* implying that this will happen in the future.

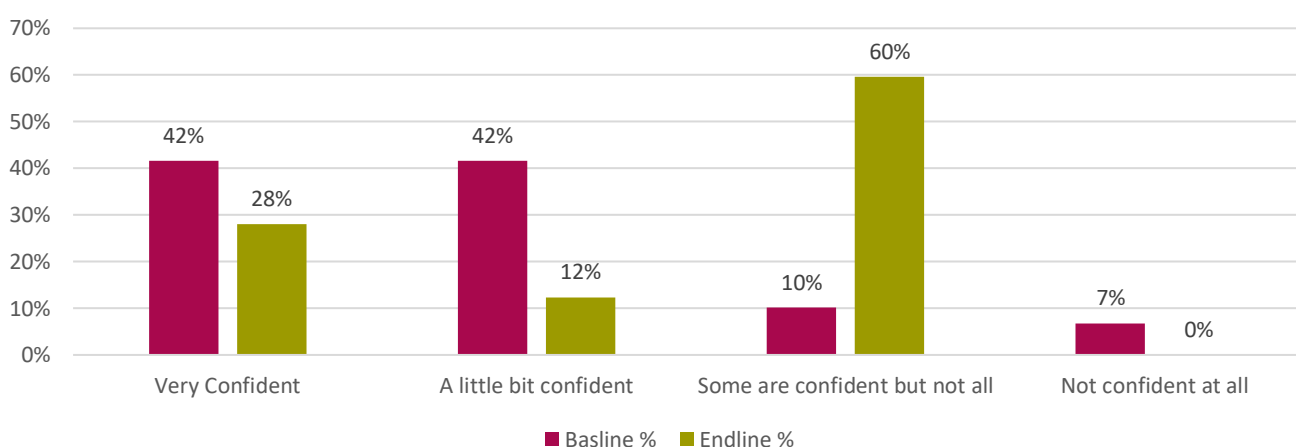
Graph 5: After participating in the Let's Get Digital project, members of my group feel safer online?



Reviewing the open-ended follow-up responses for this question highlighted that many groups had the procedures regarding online safety to support participants in place if they were needed as a result of the project with one group detailing, *“We have a new online safeguarding policy and we all follow this”*. Another group explained *“We do continue to stress caution and walk the line of empowering people but reminding them of this, people can get anxious, but we always ask people to contact us if they are not sure.”*

Additionally, through training and regular discussions many participants have gained some confidence in remaining safe: *“The Let's Get Digital project has given staff members access to resources that can help to improve the overall knowledge and confidence of members.”* It was however still highlighted that *“some [members] are still a little unsure and one felt less secure after learning about the dangers”* and that *“Some members are still worried about doing things online as they hear lots of stories of people being scammed online.”*

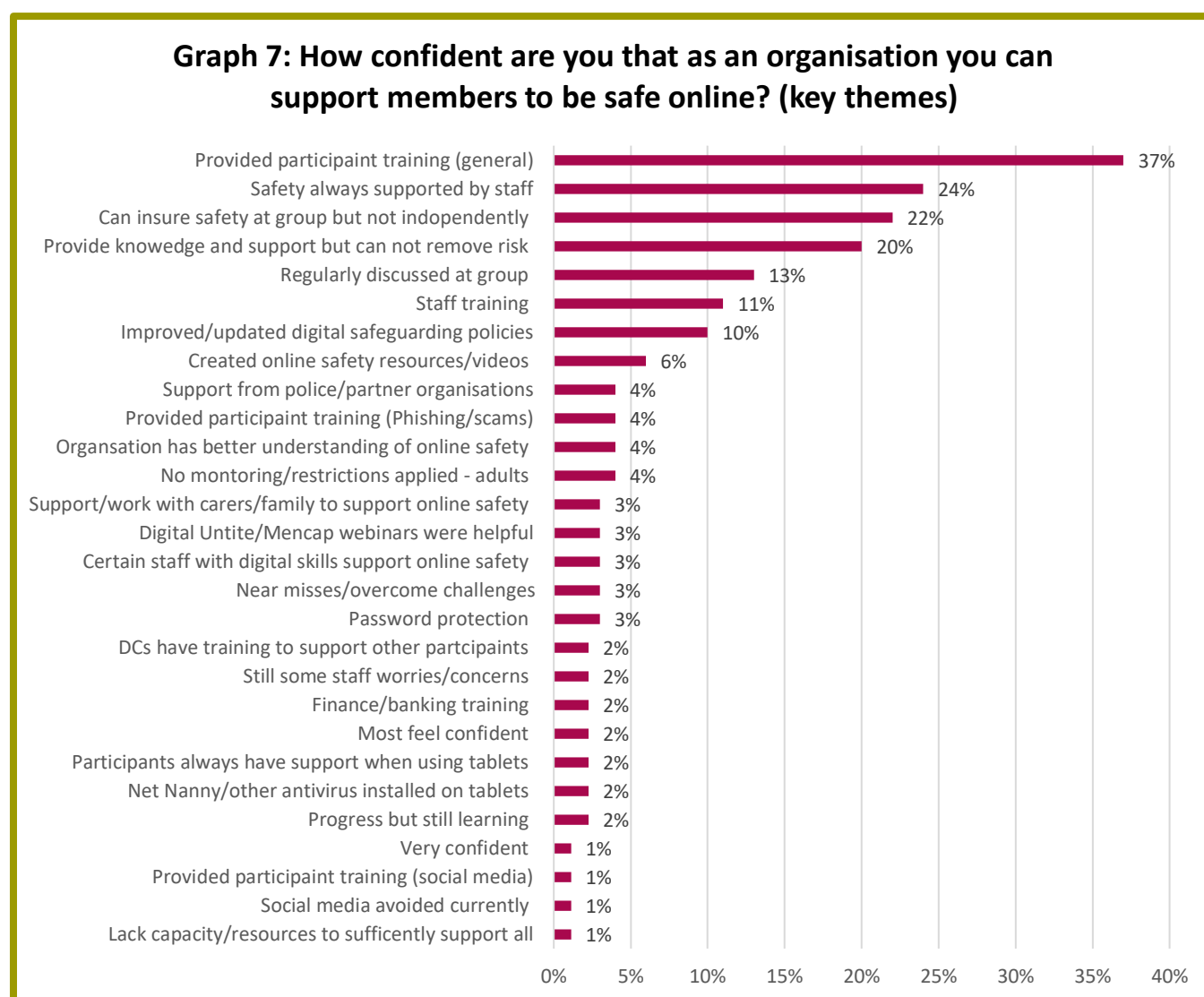
Graph 6: How confident are you that as an organisation you can support members to be safe online?



When asked about how confident the groups were in their ability to support members to remain safe online, a significant shift was seen from baseline to endline with the majority of groups feeling ‘very confident’ or ‘a little bit confident’ in the baseline to being confident about ‘some but not all’ in the endline (as seen in graph 6). Whilst this is initially concerning, analysis of the explanations provided alongside this question in both the baseline and endline highlight that this reduction largely reflects the group’s inability to protect against all of the

potential harms of using the internet. Furthermore, as participants became more digitally active over the course of the project, more potential risks became apparent, and the groups enhanced digital knowledge meant that they were more aware of these risks when it came to endline reporting.

In fact (as seen in graph 7), 22% of groups explicitly referenced that they were confident about ensuring the safety of members whilst at the group but were unsure when their members use digital independently: *“Most people involved in the project are confident but there is no guarantee. If we're with them we are confident but when they are on their own it's difficult to safeguard”*. A further 20% detailed their ability to provide the knowledge and support around online safety but accepted that they could not remove all the risks. One group explained this stating how they are *“Confident that we could support people to get online, understand the risks and how to manage them but it is difficult to promise 100% safety”*. 42% of groups detailed their provision of online safety training to members and it was also frequently noted that online safety was a regular point of discussion at sessions. The full list of identified themes can be seen in graph 7 below.



Graph 7 Note: in the coding of open-ended questions there is some variation in how respondents chose to answer, with some groups only discussing one or two things they considered most relevant, whilst others were more thorough.

Comments from the groups also highlight how there is awareness from groups that building up confidence around online safety takes time, especially when so many groups support members with more complex support needs. The majority (69%) of groups reported supporting at least some members with people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

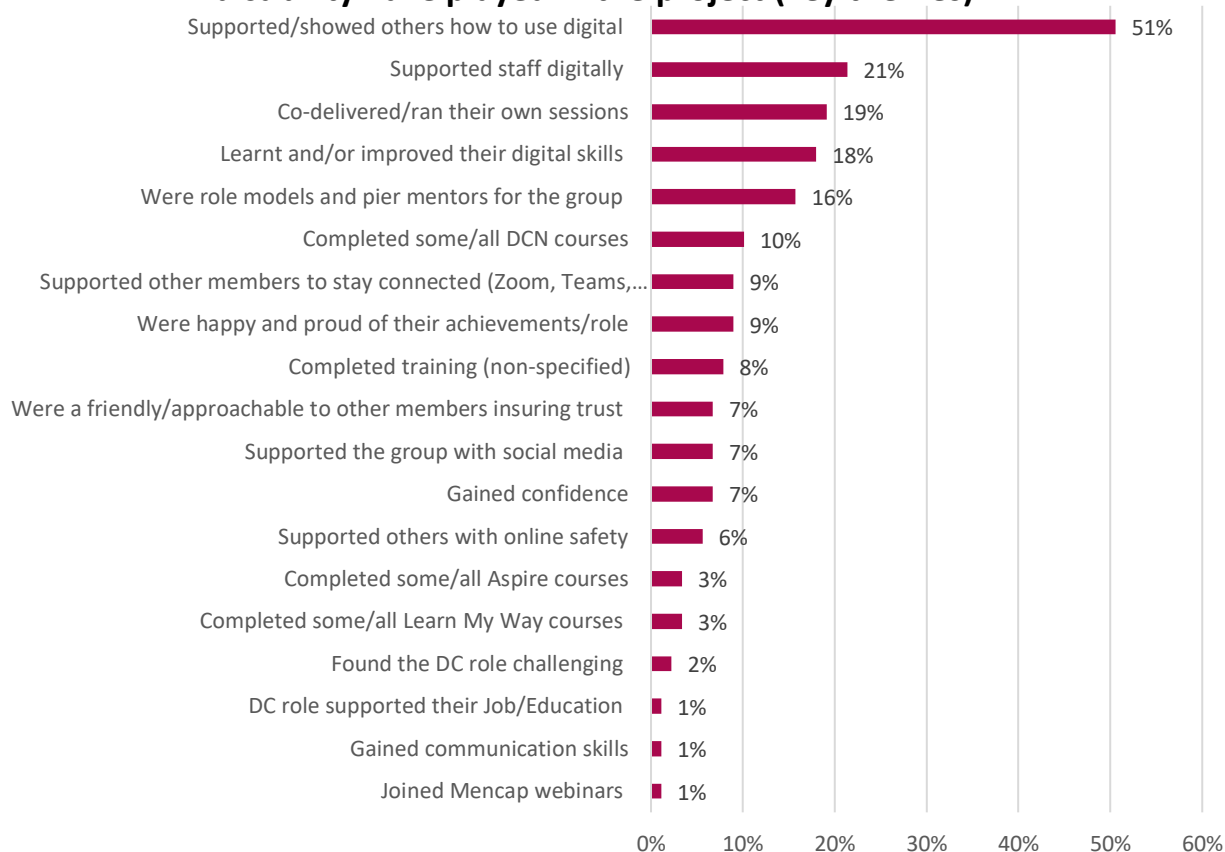
This point is illustrated by one group that explained how *“33% can't get online independently and would need some support. 25% didn't even understand the concept of "online" a year ago. They will need a continued safe space to explore and try things with support.”*

2. Impact on Digital Champions

The Role of Digital Champions with Learning Disabilities

Digital Champions played a fundamental role in supporting their groups to become more digitally active across the project. On the Digital Champions Network, there were 270 registered members at the end of the project, of which 13% (34) were known to have a learning disability. However, in the endline survey groups reported having over 307 Digital Champions, of which 38% (118) have a learning disability and 62% (189) did not. The variation in these numbers can be accounted for as result of many groups having ‘unofficial’ Digital Champions who took on the same role but were not registered on the network.

Graph 8: Please outline what role Digital Champions with a Learning disability have played in the project (key themes):



Graph 8 Note: in the coding of open-ended questions there is some variation in how respondents chose to answer, with some groups only discussing one or two things they considered most relevant, whilst others were more thorough.

When asked about the role Digital Champions with a learning disability had played, groups identified a range of different areas. Most frequently, groups reported that Digital Champions with a learning disability supported others in the group by showing them how to use digital but as seen in graph 8, they also played a number of other roles ranging from co-delivering or running their own sessions, supporting staff and volunteers in the group with websites and social media and being a primary contact regarding online safety. One group explained how *“we have held a series of digital drop-ins where our Digital Champions have supported people to use their own tech or use ours to learn how to do new things or just to chat about using technology and where it fits into their lives”*. Another group explained how their Digital Champions with a learning disability have been;

"Promoting digital amongst peers, encouraging people to join in, positive role models, an approachable friendly face which people can trust [and at] the centre of ideas to develop the project".

Digital Champions with a learning disability also gained a lot of skills from their role with many taking on a variety of the training opportunities available and in turn building both social and communication skills as well as improving their own confidence from their roles as Digital Champions in the project. One group explained how their Digital Champions *"have been upskilled working alongside the other Digital Champion, gaining confidence in their IT/digital knowledge and their ability to communicate to others how to use basic functions."* Another detailed that the *"Digital Champions themselves have become more confident and taken great pride in their responsibility"*. One Digital Champion was even able to show their *"friend [who] has high level needs and gets very agitated and goes to her for support [how to use] online relaxation exercises."*

Digital Champions that did not have learning disabilities also significantly benefited from the training and support made available as reflected by one individual: *"As a Digital Champion, I have found the online training very beneficial and will continue to use the online guidance for future training sessions. I have found my knowledge has increased within specific areas such as online safety and I feel very confident supporting both [group] members and staff moving forwards."* Staff and volunteer benefits are further explored in section 3.1.

3. Impact on Organisation

3.1 Organisation and staff/volunteer skills:

From the outset, a fundamental element of the Let's Get Digital project has been to upskill staff, volunteers, and the organisation in general so they can better support their members to use technology.

At the end of the project 43% of the groups felt that they have the right skills as an organisation to support online provision for their members. Whilst this is really positive, the majority of these groups (56%) still considered that they only 'partially' have the right skills to provide online provision for members at the end of the project. Analysis of the open-ended responses related to this question highlight that whilst many feel that they only partially have the right skills, they still have made massive progress but feel there is still room for improvement with one group acknowledging how *"Staff have adapted and developed skills to support clients, but that knowledge can always be built on"*. Other groups have recognised that disparity in skill levels across different staff members explaining how *"Some staff have the right skill set whereas some staff require more training"* and *"We recognise that there are some skills gaps in our organisation and that has led us to reach out to other organisations that can help in areas that we cannot deliver upon."*

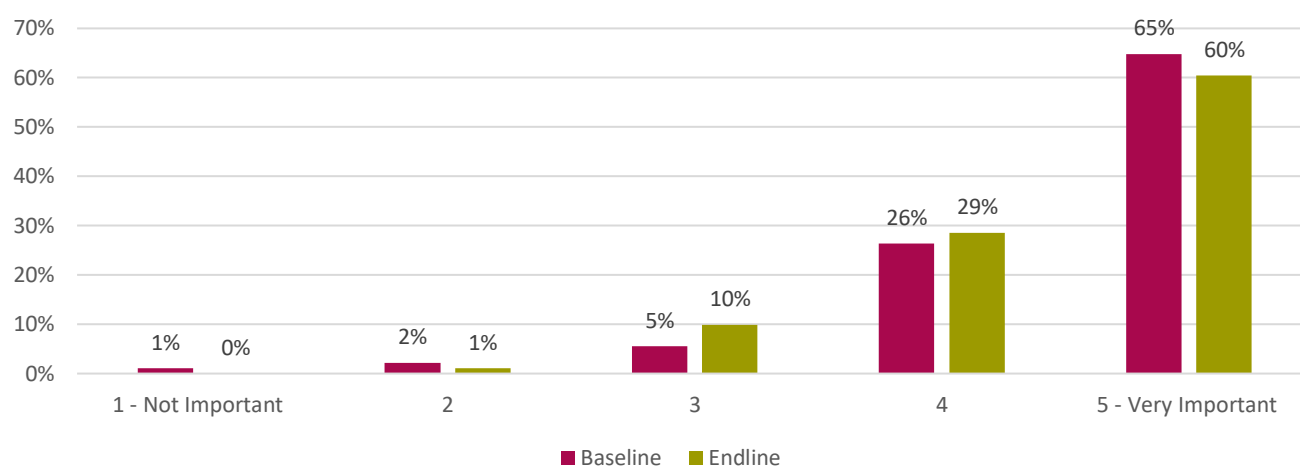
The variety of skill levels and confidence to use digital amongst staff and volunteers was similarly highlighted in further questions in the survey. When asked about the confidence of the staff team in using technology, 63% reported that some but not all members of staff are confident at the end of the project. Similarly, 54% of groups felt that some but not all volunteers are confident in using technology to facilitate digital provision. The disparity of staff and volunteer confidence was reflected in the open-ended responses from groups that frequently detailed how *"Some people are a whizz [but] others are still learning"*. This is reflective of staff (just like group members) starting at different levels of experience and how learning something as diverse and complex as digital is a process which takes time. Similarly, attitudinal changes are important to embrace technology and it was reflected by one group that the *"staff perceptions have changed over time [whilst] realising people's capabilities"*.

3.2 Role of Digital Investment and Future Digital Provision:

When asked about their commitment to digital investment many groups felt that this was crucial at the start of the project with 91% rating it 4/5 or 5/5 for importance as seen in graph 9. This high baseline score has meant that we have seen a small reduction in the importance of digital investment at the end of the project with 89% responding 4/5 or 5/5 in the endline survey. Analysis of the following responses however, highlight that this reduction was a reflection of groups placing significant importance on the need to invest digitally at the start of the project as a reaction to the Covid 19 pandemic and supporting their members remotely through lockdown with 59% of groups highlighting this in their comments. One group explained: *"The pandemic has made digital*

provision and investment vital for the delivery of our core services” when explaining their 5/5 answer. In addition to this many of the baseline comments spoke about the importance of digital investment as they had not yet achieved this, illustrated through comments such as *“Improving accessibility of our digital offer is crucial.”*

Graph 9: How important is continuing digital investment and focusing on digital provision in the running of your organisation?



In the endline comments regarding digital investment the need had reduced for many groups as they now felt they have the equipment and resources necessary as a result of the Let’s Get Digital project and that digital investment is still extremely important but that *“it’s now blended in more with what we do day to day rather than the crucial urgency back in Nov 2020”*.

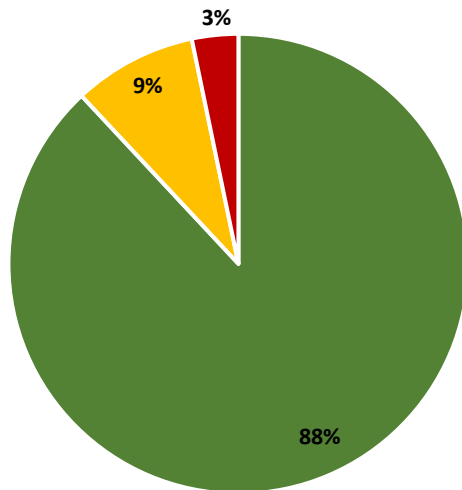
When asked about the importance of digital provision in the future for their group, 97% of groups said that this was part of, or partially part of their core plan. One detailed how *“We don’t separate it out - it’s integral and embedded”* whilst another reported how *“It was minimal whereas now it is a much, much bigger focus”*. When investigating the 3 groups that said ‘no’ in the endline, it is clear that digital is very important from their comments, for example one stated: *“I’m not sure I’d describe it as core, though it plays a part. Digital provision is used as a tool to support, supplement, and enhance our core business/offer.”*

When asked to rate where they feel they are now as an organisation in terms of their overall digital offer (as seen in graph 10), we saw significant improvement comparing results from the start and end of the project with 88% of the group’s scores increasing to an average of 7.3/10 (where 1 = not important and 10 = very important) from 4.8/10. Furthermore, just over half of those groups who reported an increase saw their score rise by 3/10 or over. One group whose score rose from 3/10 to 8/10 as a result of the project reflected massive changes to their digital offer explaining how *“We’ve given service users a voice and choice through using the iPads with Communication Apps installed. We now have an Alexa in every room, and I don’t know how we managed without them before - we use them for medication reminders, asking for information regarding cooking etc. [and that] people have bought their own because they enjoy using them so much in the centre.”*

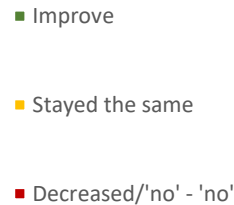
3.3 Digital Presence Connection Between Groups and the Community:

A significant part of the Let’s Get Digital project has been helping groups to improve the way they communicate better digitally. This is vital as the members become more digitally active alongside wider society.

Groups use a variety of different ways to connect with each other and their members, one of these is through their website. Around 93% of groups said they had a website on the endline survey, and one group explained how they had used the funding to make their first website: *“This is exciting for us and long overdue! We have added text and photos and then after a little more work on it, the website will be ready for approval by our Trustees. Once we are published this will be amazing as we can display our achievements and provide online information for potential new users.”*



Graph 10: Please rate where you feel you are now as an organisation in terms of your overall digital offer.

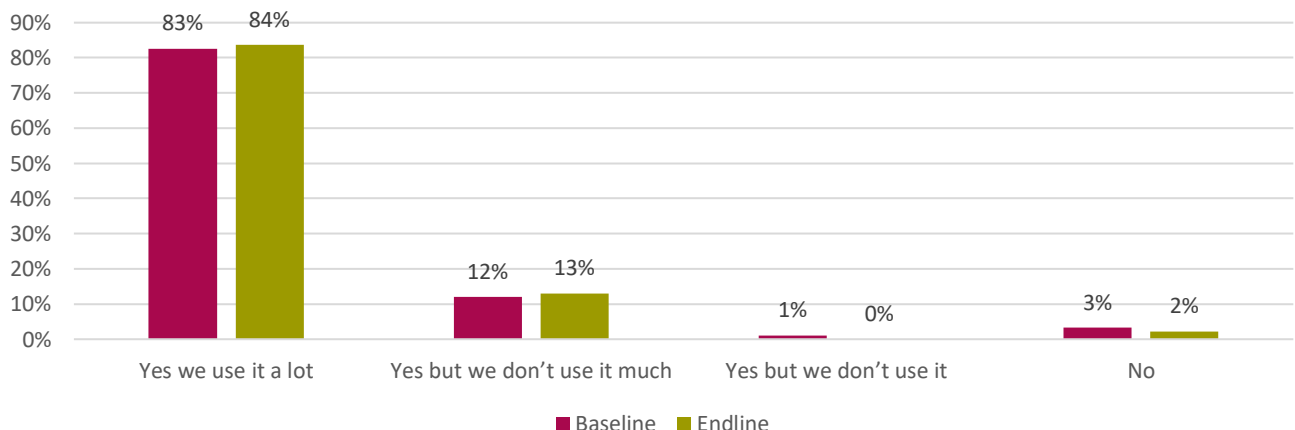


When groups were asked if they had been able to improve their website based on their involvement in the Let's Get Digital project, a large number discussed using the skills gained in the project to improve their website (with some referencing making it more accessible). 8% also referenced how their members with a learning disability were involved in the design of the website with one explaining that *"Beneficiaries and staff are better able and more eager to create and drive content for our website."* This is encouraging as it suggests an increase in the inclusion of people with a learning disability in decision-making within these organisations.

A proportion of those who said 'no' to this question did not explain their answer, but of those who did, the most common reason provided was that the grant was not used for this purpose. Some groups explained that they thought their website was good already, whilst others (10%) discussed a desire to improve their website in the future. A number also discussed how they are using social media pages more than their website. This again reflects the difficulty in measuring the impact between different organisations with different amounts of digital budget, knowledge, and staff members.

When the groups were asked specifically whether they have used and if so, how much, they use different social media platforms, around 1/3 said they used Instagram and Twitter a lot at the baseline, and this number slightly increased at the endline. However, the most widely used was the platform Facebook. Graph 11 shows how 84% of groups said they use it a lot. It is, however, unclear from this question if the usage has increased during the project as such a high number gave the highest response possible on the baseline leaving no room to report improvement.

Graph 11: Facebook use



However, when groups were asked to detail further social media platforms used and to elaborate on any changes in group's use of these social media platforms, the majority of groups discussed how social media and other online platforms had been used a lot more now than before the project. A significant number of groups discussed how the Let's Get Digital project had helped their members to better engage in social media and their website. *"People have taken pride in demonstrating their achievements. [There is a] much wider impact than just the equipment [and from] sharing these things on social media etc. for families and local community to see, people have felt more included".*

Additionally, video content through platforms such as Facebook and YouTube was recognised as more accessible for people with a learning disability and one group detailed that *"As a result of this project, we now have more members using these platforms and some [are] now taking responsibility for managing them."*

A number of groups also discussed, using messaging functions on WhatsApp and Facebook to keep in touch with both other members and their families. One explained: *"We have created WhatsApp groups for all the people we support. This has greatly improved communication. We use Facebook to showcase our successes, achievements and abilities through our photos and videos."* Some also said they were better able to showcase and provide information on activities through social media as a result of the project and others highlighted that this was especially important during the pandemic. Also, in the final question on the survey about further impacts described one group explained how digital communication was being used to reduce stigma and increase confidence. *"It's allowed us to have and create a more positive community. People aren't insular - we get out more now doing podcasts and radio shows and [it] affords us to have a presence. We had 6 exhibitions in town in March; working in the local community. We are challenging social perceptions about people with a learning disability which has really raised the self-esteem of our members."*

This variety of positive outcomes is very encouraging and does touch on the other outcomes of the project to do with reduced loneliness (section 1.4) and supporting families/carers section (1.6).

Whilst use of social media has significantly increased and been beneficial for many groups, some groups discussed how they felt they didn't have sufficient staffing to properly utilise social media. One group explained: *"We are starting to use WhatsApp more with volunteers, we've tried using it with members but that takes a lot of time to monitor"*. This similarly links to the challenge of some members requiring a lot of staff capacity to be fully supported as detailed in section 1.6.

Finally, to summarise this section the groups were asked to rate how they felt on a scale of 1 to 10 where they felt they were now as an organisation in terms of using social media/digital platforms. Here the average score rose significantly from 5.7/10 on the baseline to 7.1/10 on the endline (where 1 = not important and 10 = very important). This significant increase suggests that although some uses vary, there is a trend of improvement in this area across the groups engaged with the project.

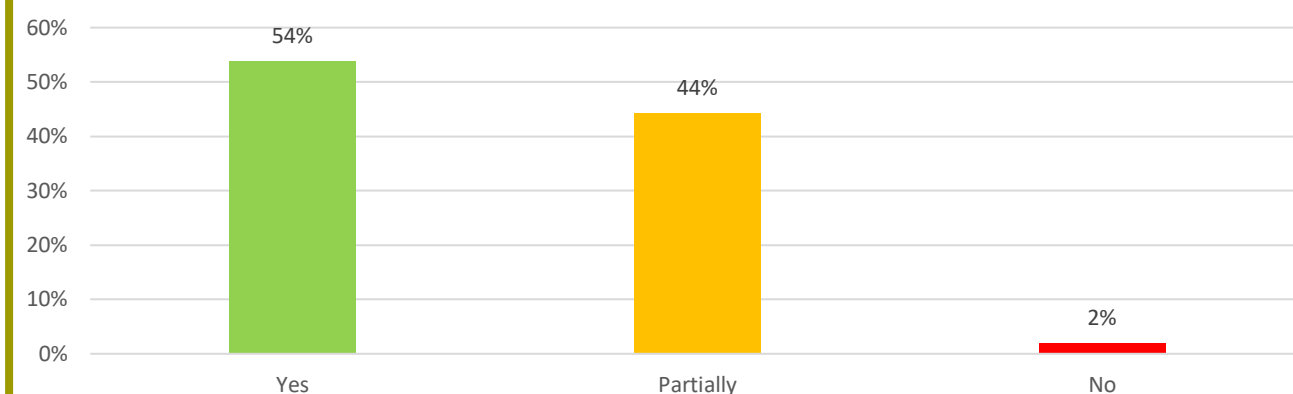
4. Impact of Let's Grow Digital Funding

As an extension of the Let's Get Digital project, in October 2021 groups were offered the opportunity to apply for additional funding that could be used more flexibly to further expand on their digital provision for members. In total, 52 groups successfully applied for the additional funding. Initially, the project also planned to fund groups to support others through mentoring and sharing of expertise. However, as the project developed this happened informally for example, through webinars and over Facebook pages, without budget allocation. With so many organisations struggling with capacity for their own organisation, formalising this through funding was not considered to be the right approach. Therefore, this allocation was invested entirely into Let's Grow Digital.

In the endline survey these groups were asked if they have been able to achieve what they aimed for with the additional Let's Grow Digital funding, asking them to detail any challenges faced if they had not yet been able to do so. As graph 12 shows, the majority of groups said they had achieved their goals. A large number of these groups discussed buying extra equipment with the additional funding, in particular video equipment and

audio recording equipment. One group reflected that *“People have really enjoyed making films - really positive self-actualisation; seeing themselves and having control over this has been great”*. Some groups also discussed buying accessible equipment as well as more training opportunities for staff: *“We focussed on what we had learnt from the tablets and were able to invest in what we knew would work. We bought accessible kit like big buttons and echo dots so people could control technology using their voices.”* This is very encouraging as discussed in section 1.3 and it is clear that using the funding to buy equipment for aiding communication has had a positive impact on the member’s life in so many different ways.

Graph 12: Have you been able to achieve what you aimed for with the additional Let's Grow Digital funding? If not, what challenges did you face?



Groups also used this funding to increase the number of digital-based sessions, boosting the overall number of people reached, although the specific numbers are unclear. One response also discussed how; *“Staff are now able to facilitate rather than support because people are more independent”*. The main challenges that were discussed were again delays caused by the pandemic and staff shortages as explained by one group that highlighted that the *“Challenges are time, and capacity - everything we have planned will still happen but it's taking more time”*.

The groups were then asked specifically how the extra funding had impacted the organisation. Here their responses were very encouraging, reiterating the exciting uses of the new equipment, the increased confidence of members and staff, as well as the ability to reach and support a greater number of people, in an accessible way. *“We were able to enhance our sessions and workshops with increased focus on podcasts and photography. The photography elements were particularly important to our members who are non-verbal.”* A small number also referenced how delivering things digitally can reduce costs and make operating more efficient.

Finally, the groups were asked how the Let’s Grow Digital funding had impacted their members. The responses were very positive, again mentioning increased confidence, self-esteem, independence, and reduced isolation among the members. Some also discussed how the use of more inclusive equipment gave people with a learning disability more of a say on their services activities and their lives. One group detailed how *“The Alexa has been brilliant, independence and choosing things with their voices has been great”* and added that their members now *“understand why digital matters”*.

The Let’s Grow Digital additional funding has clearly allowed groups to enhance the impact of the Let’s Get Digital project, with a number of groups referencing how they are using the knowledge and experience gained from the rest of the project to make informed choices about acquiring wider variety of digital equipment, software and accessible technology for their members. For further insight on the impact please refer to the 3 case studies provided in the March quarterly report.

Limitations

The baseline and endline snapshot survey method was chosen because it best fitted the limitations caused mainly by Covid 19 restrictions and the limited time available for staff during this difficult time when a number of organisations were experiencing different pressures including staffing shortages.

The limitations of this method are listed below:

- Although it was clear that the staff members responding drew direct examples and were very knowledgeable about the experiences of the member's/beneficiaries, only a very small number of the people benefiting were spoken to directly as part of this research.
- Because not all the responses were provided as part of an interview with a member of the programme's team, there were at times differences in how each question was interpreted and the amount of information that was expected. This was particularly true for certain questions that asked staff to "explain their answer". When responses were from interview, they were much more consistent.
- Although the style of the survey did give those responding ample opportunities to discuss the impacts in an open way, the complexity that is inherent with this area of research may not have been fully captured. With all research involving people with learning disabilities, there is a large amount of variation between these individuals and the size (breadth and depth) of the impact caused by a certain project.
- Limited information was analysed on the size and operational differences between the different organisations. If this was analysed there may have been correlations between different organisational factors and different levels of impact.
- Because of project logistics, some groups started on the project at different times and therefore may not be experiencing the same amount of impact yet as other organisations.

Conclusion

It is clear from this research that the Let's Get Digital project has had significant positive impacts and that a large number of organisations have massively increased their digital provision over a very challenging period.

- The project has allowed members to communicate and connect better with families, friends, and carers as well as the wider community; whether that be through innovative uses of technology for those who are non-verbal or being more able to run a greater number of online sessions between isolated groups.
- Members are more confident with digital technology and using this independently which has allowed them to build on their interests and activities. In addition, in some cases, this has reduced anxieties and reduced the caring challenges related to these individuals.
- The project has also created opportunities for better engagement and inclusion of people with learning disabilities. The variety of activities has meant they have more choice as well as more opportunities to engage and make decisions on things like the organisation's website and social media output.
- Improvements to both members and organisations general understanding around online safety have been achieved through the provision of training, the supporting of improved safeguarding procedures and having a supportive environment where members are encouraged to raise and discuss issues or concerns.
- Families and carers have also benefited from the project as it has provided more independence to members but also enhanced their own digital skills and awareness of technology. Also, the increased use of different digital and social media platforms has helped the groups better communicate with families and carers, with some setting up groups for these individuals to interact through. It has also enabled groups to better showcase the different activities that they have been doing and increase external exposure.

- The impact of Let's Get Digital on Digital Champions was two-fold:
 - Firstly, Digital Champions played a major role in supporting the group and their peers to become digitally able. This was achieved through Digital Champions work in demonstrating technology, supporting peers with questions and concerns, co-delivering and running their own digital sessions, providing encouragement and motivation to use digital, changing attitudes of peers and family/carers and generally supporting the development of their groups digital presence through helping with social media and websites.
 - Secondly, as a result of their role and all of the support they provided, Digital Champions with a learning disability significantly enhanced their digital skills and knowledge, confidence and communication skills as well as gaining satisfaction and pride from supporting and encouraging others.
- The Let's Grow Digital funding was hugely beneficial for those who applied, with a large number of the groups having already or making good progress towards achieving their goals. Multiple groups have bought extra equipment and training with the funding, with some referencing how they have used their increased digital knowledge and experience developed throughout the rest of the project to make more informed decisions on what their organisation and members both want and need moving forward.
- In particular, groups have invested in equipment to enhance the support they can provide to their members and build on their interests, allowing these organisations to be more inclusive, giving members more opportunities and choice as well as supporting members to have a greater input in making decisions.

Whilst Let's Get Digital has enabled for significant positive impacts (as listed above), it was clear that not all members, or groups experienced the same impact from the project. This variation was dependent on a complicated mix of factors which included:

- The differences in levels of support needs especially of those with profound and multiple learning disabilities.
- The size of each organisation, including number of staff members and distinction between staff and volunteers.
- The digital knowledge as well as the digital provision that may have already been in place.
- The way in which the organisations support their members, number of hours spent in sessions etc.
- The member's home environment and level of digital engagement and support available in other areas of their life.
- The inability of groups to control or safeguard against all the potential risk involved with using digital and being online.

Recommendations:

- Many of the Network Partners began lockdown with no digital provision/presence and have therefore come an extremely long way towards becoming digital. However, our evaluation highlights that over half of groups still only see themselves as 'partially' equipped with digital skills and confidence, despite their progress as part of the Let's Get Digital project. Therefore, ongoing support from Mencap/other organisations is still needed. This is especially important as with 'Digital' there are continually new pieces of software and technology being released meaning keeping up to date is crucial.
- Supporting people who are digitally excluded, including people with higher needs, to get digital and be online is an ongoing piece of work, that needs to continue within the local organisations beyond the length of the Let's Get Digital Project. Many groups are continuing to offer this support, however for some of the smaller voluntary run organisations, the return to face to face delivery has become the priority. The project and the impact of the pandemic has evidenced to many however, that being digital and having an online presence remains important.

- Support at home, for some members, was needed to allow them to be online independently of the group. Although some groups were able to upskill parents and carers, more work is needed to support this and better engage such groups in the future (despite family and carers often being a more challenging group to reach).
- Support to help people remain safe online, and those supporting them to feel that people are safe, is a continual need for local organisations and parents/carers. Whilst Mencap has and will continue to provide support to groups, including linking in with the Tizard centre's Safer Online Lives research, in future we see the need for further resources and guidance sessions/ webinars to support groups around online safety as this is a highly complex and ever-changing area.
- To truly embed the more inclusive approach, with people with a learning disability teaching others through becoming Digital Champions, more time is needed to support this across many of the organisations, especially considering the challenges incurred by many months of limited face to face contact.
- Building confidence was as important as building digital skills both within organisations and their members. This needs to be considered for future digital work with people with a learning disability and local organisations.
- Whilst upskilling a smaller sub-group of staff and members as Digital Champions has been an effective and more achievable way in supporting groups to become digital, more consideration is needed around ensuring those with this role work with others in their organisation to impart knowledge and skills to prevent the loss of progress if those individuals leave. Further support for the network of organisations within the project, could help support this, for example, through the Facebook Community of Practice and potential mentoring between organisations.
- The Let's Grow Digital funding being staggered later in the project timeline allowed groups to consider their digital needs, once the project had launched. Mencap should consider the 'two waves' of funding as a model for future work with Network Partners as it helped engagement, sharing of approaches across organisations and greater consultation with members on need.
- Some of the partners reported that the length of the project and the prioritisation around supporting members to get online meant that some organisational priorities were still aspirations, for example, online fundraising and using websites to recruit volunteers has not widely been achieved. With more time and support, possibly from other more digitally skilled organisations and Mencap, more organisations might be able to achieve these ambitions.