



**Doing digital
inclusion with the
most excluded:
Low income
families**



Good Things
Foundation

TalkTalk

Good Things Foundation ran a project in partnership with TalkTalk focused on helping people to get started and stay safe online. 23 Digital Inclusion Hubs tried out new activities in order to reach people who are the most digitally excluded in the UK. People over 65, those on low incomes, and disabled people make up a large segment of the population who remain digitally excluded and therefore unable to benefit fully from all the opportunities that the internet and technology can provide.

Hubs worked hard to reach these excluded learners. When we evaluated the project, we spoke to a number of hubs to capture their experiences. This research has enabled us to produce three informal guides to doing digital inclusion with highly digitally excluded people. This one focuses on engaging with low income families. It is intended for small organisations who want to do more to reach the most digitally excluded people in the UK.

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Who do we mean by low income families?

The government defines households as being 'low income' when they earn 60% of the national median household income or less. A couple with no children would be in low income with an annual household income of up to £17,100 before housing costs and £14,800 after housing costs.

Why is important to engage low income families in digital inclusion?

- Many families with children living at home have devices in the household already - including those on the lowest incomes. But whilst 77% of working-age adults in the lowest socioeconomic group use a smartphone, this group is **less likely to feel like confident internet users** compared to those on higher incomes. They are also more **limited in their internet use**.
- Families on low incomes are affected by the **poverty premium**. This means that poorer people end up paying more for basic goods and services. Digital skills are a powerful way to tackle the poverty premium.
- Adults who lack the confidence or skills to use their own devices safely or proficiently are **less able to supervise their children's device usage**. This problem is growing as more children access the internet using **portable devices** when their parents aren't around.
- **This leaves both parents and children open to risks in their internet and device usage.**
- Parents who are more confident in their own ability to carry out online tasks are more likely to have discussions with their children around online safety - **so helping parents with their own confidence and skill levels can have direct effects on children's online behaviour.**



What have Digital Inclusion Hubs learnt about doing digital inclusion in people with low income families?

Starting the conversation:

Parents' motivation to address online safety issues is often related to their children's online exposure. Addressing and appealing to children's safety can be a good way to engage parents to think about their own potentially unsafe digital behaviours whilst online shopping, emailing or using social media.

Evidence shows that parents look mainly to schools for information on how to keep children safe online. This can make partnerships with schools extremely valuable. Many schools also welcome the opportunity to bring parents onto school premises, as it helps to build trust and the quality of relationships between staff and families.

Actions

- **Talk to a few parents about their problems and experiences related to keeping their children safe online.** It's likely that their stories are not unusual. What activities are they worried about? Are there particular sites or apps that are causing them concern? Research these and build them into any information sessions or workshops that you run.
- **Think about other services that work with families in your area, such as nurseries, food banks, healthcare centres or libraries.** Do they have facilities or premises that would be appropriate for running sessions with families' own tablets or smartphones? Can you run a drop-in during a toddler group? Many hubs have found that working in the places where learners already spend time can be very effective in engaging them. If this isn't possible, try to engage these locations or organisations as signposting partners.



Session formats:

- **Group-based learning and exploration works well for low income families.** Because parents often already have some experience of devices, they are less likely to need one-to-one digital support. Rather, they are likely to get value from the opportunity for discussion with peers and tutors. Encouraging parents to share their concerns and experiences with each other outside of 'taught' time can help to remove the sense of feeling silly, and create a sense for learners that there are other people in their situation. Parents can learn strategies from each other - and as a tutor you can listen in, provide guidance, or put on a session for specific issues that parents bring up.
- **Base your activities around Safety and security online,** a subject on our online learning platform Learn My Way. It introduces the knowledge and skills needed to stay safe online with particular focus on the safe sharing of personal information and how to spot scams.
- **Contact your local school's Family Liaison Coordinator** (or Officer) to let them know that you do work around digital skills. Find out if the school could provide an IT suite from which to base workshops or classes.
- **Working with schools also makes it more possible to bring parents and kids together during the same sessions.** They can give parents and children a neutral space outside of the home which they can use to explore what each other does online, and learn things together which they can refer to at a later date.
- **If there are several schools in your area, find out which of them receive Pupil Premiums (England), Pupil Equity Funding (Scotland) or Pupil Deprivation Grants (Wales).** These schemes provide additional financial support to schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. This gives an indication of which schools have a higher proportion of parents in the lowest income brackets, who are less likely to feel digitally confident.
- **If you're not running sessions in schools or other institutions, flexibility in schedule is key in enabling parents to access digital inclusion.** Childcare responsibilities and part-time working schedules mean it can be difficult for parents to find the time to attend sessions. Offering sessions at a range of times gives parents with hectic routines more chance to find one that suits them.



Potential challenges:

- **Parents may be unaware that their own behaviour is not safe or secure.** If parents use devices frequently with no apparent ill effect, they may not see the need to build their skills - even if their usage is limited or risky. To tackle this, focus on emphasising common concerns that parents might have about their children's online activity. This might be about protecting personal data online or keeping safe on social media - refer to conversations you've had with low income parents, in whatever context.
- **Families may show little interest in 'courses' that can imply several weeks of commitment.** Try running and advertising 'sessions' or 'workshops' which emphasise a less hierarchical environment and which parents can drop into as and when they're available.
- **Maintaining attendance can be a struggle.** Life is often chaotic and unpredictable for young families, especially those on limited budgets. Even if a parent says he/she will come in at a particular date or time, they may not be able to stick to this commitment if they have problems with ill children, unreliable public transport, or demanding employers. Stay patient and reassure people that they can come again when they find the time.

Real experiences

"I have a new-found confidence and enjoy the look on my son's face when he realises I know more about some of the things he is talking about [...] My new-found internet safety skills have come in handy with shopping around for better deals. I didn't realise how much of a price difference there can be in some items."

Parent at a hub

"There's a lot that you can pass on to not only the younger ones but also the older generation, who don't use the internet as much as we do [...] Being able to inform members of my family - both the younger and the older generations... I think it has been helpful in that manner."

Parent at a hub

Useful resources

Keeping children safe online - NSPCC guide for parents with information on the apps that children use

ThinkUKnow - A suite of websites with games and information for staying safe online, aimed at children (from 5 to 14+)

If you decide to do digital inclusion for safety and security with low income families, let us know how you get on! We're always available at hello@goodthingsfoundation.org, or tweet us [@NDI_Network](https://twitter.com/NDI_Network). We'd love to hear from you.

