

Online Today final evaluation

R N I B

See differently





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Foreword

We want a truly inclusive society where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed in their everyday life - and for lots of people this means fully embracing technology. Technology is changing fast and will continue to develop. We're here to make sure blind and partially sighted people can take part and we want to ensure our local partners and technology companies are providing the training, products and services to make this possible.

Online Today has been an amazing opportunity for us to work with programme partners who provide support to people with hearing and dual sensory loss, demonstrating what a vital role technology plays in making society genuinely inclusive of people with sensory loss.

Eleanor Southwood, Chair



Introduction

The internet and new digital technology has the potential to transform lives of people with sensory loss, enabling many to gain access to information more easily, stay connected to others, save money or benefit from new online services.

However, many of these people are at significant risk from being excluded from the benefits digital technology can offer. The UK government's Digital Inclusion Strategy [1] identified key groups who are most likely to be digitally excluded:

- those in social housing [2]
- those on lower wages, or unemployed [3]
- those with disabilities [4]
- older people [5].

People with sensory loss are highly likely to be included in at least the last three of these categories; a conclusion that is strongly supported by our RNIB My Voice [6] research, which found that:

- Just one in three people with sight loss felt able to make the most of new technology. This was linked to age, with only 25 per cent of those aged 75 and over reporting that they felt able to make the most of new technology. Sight loss can also be an age-related condition.
- Only 22 per cent of blind and partially sighted people of working age were in paid employment, and there was a connection between levels of vision and employment status – people with poorer functional vision were much less likely to be in employment.
- One in five blind and partially sighted people said they have some or great difficulty in making ends meet.

In response to this, RNIB launched the UK-wide project, Online Today, with £5.8 million investment from the Big Lottery Fund and support from programme partners: Action on Hearing Loss, Sense and Guide Dogs.

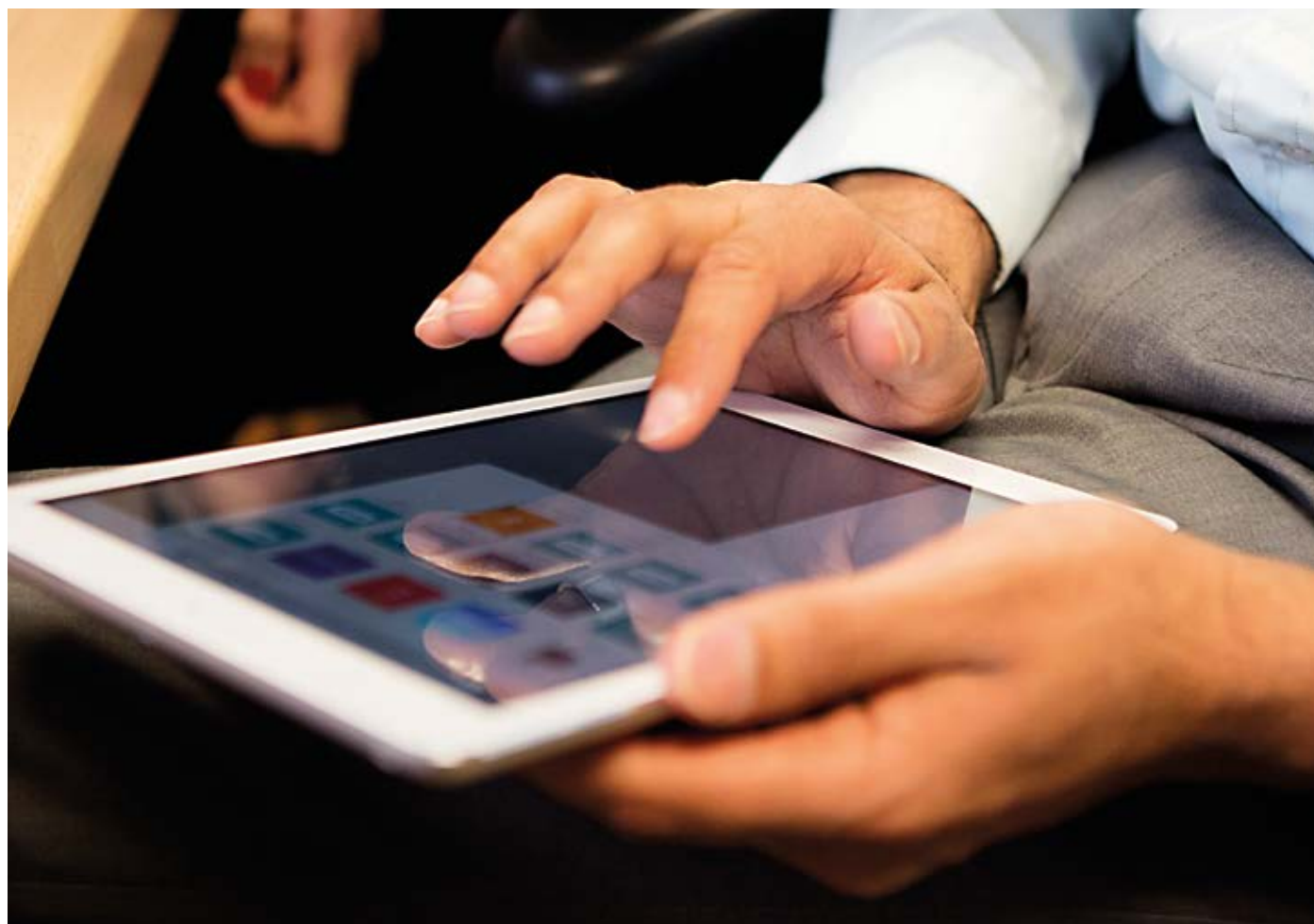


Originally designed around a four-stage customer journey (get interested, acquire the solutions, get started, enjoy the benefits), Online Today aimed to deliver long-term impact for people with sensory loss in terms of improved quality of life. By delivering interventions to increase skills and confidence at each stage of the customer journey, Online Today would deliver the following outcomes:

- Increase the number of people with sensory loss who receive information about getting online.
- Increase the number of people with sensory loss who report positive movement towards being online, improving their quality of life.
- Increasing the number of volunteers as digital champions for people with sensory loss.

- Partners, that have directly supported the local delivery of Online Today, demonstrate a better understanding of the accessibility options to support people with sensory loss to get online.

Delivery of Online Today has brought together a wide range of voluntary and public-sector partners, sharing expertise to reach, engage and empower thousands of people with sensory loss. Online Today has supported people who were or are at risk of digital exclusion and of being marginalised from mainstream services to develop the skills and the confidence they need to get, stay and do more online.



Key Findings

Delivering digital inclusion at scale

The factors that enabled Online Today to increase the digital skills, knowledge and confidence of its beneficiaries at scale were:

- Relationships with delivery partners – Online Today could not have achieved the scale of delivery without partners providing people, places, promotion and opportunities to deliver locally.
- Flexibility – we developed and tested a range of delivery models to help the digital progression of people with sensory loss, and embedded digital technology support within existing frontline services.

Key learning points for sustainability

Early learning indicates these factors are necessary for the sustainability of the project:

- Working with delivery partners to support their continued development and capacity building.
- Successful engagement and retention of volunteers to reach and support people with sensory loss.
- An increased profile of technology within RNIB, Programme Partners and the wider sensory loss sector has started to shape how technology can be integrated into services and the need for growth.

Evaluation

This summary report presents the findings from the three-year evaluation undertaken between February 2016 and May 2018. It measures how Online Today

has progressed towards its programme outcomes and identifies changes brought about by the programme. It also presents learnings that can be used to shape RNIB's and their partners' future digital inclusion activities, and presents a range of recommendations for consideration.

Although Online Today supported people with sensory loss across the UK, most beneficiaries were people with sight loss. Furthermore, this summary evaluation paper needs to be read in conjunction with several briefing papers, available from RNIB:

1. Delivering Online Today
2. Experiences of Online Today beneficiaries and the impact digital technology can have
3. Online Today and its work with delivery partners
4. Engaging volunteers in Online Today

Appendix 1 provides a summary of progress against each of the outcomes and their respective indicators.

Endnotes

- [1] Government Digital Inclusion Strategy. Dec 2014
- [2] Doing Digital Inclusion: Social Housing Handbook. Good Things Foundation, 2015
- [3] Employment and the internet. Nominet Trust, 2012
- [4] Internet Access Quarterly Update. ONS Q2, 2013
- [5] Media Literacy: Understanding Digital Capabilities follow-up. Ipsos MORI BBC Digital Capabilities Update, 2013
- [6] My Voice (2015) rnib.org.uk/knowledge-and-research-hub-research-reports-general-research/my-voice

Delivering and managing Online Today

Online Today has provided solutions for people with sensory loss, increasing their engagement with digital technology. Key enablers, such as tailored activity with opportunities for people to try out devices and assistive technology and ongoing learning processes, have been important in helping people to progress.

Motivations to get online

Interviews with beneficiaries show that **learning about assistive technology** and developing skills and knowledge to use devices were key motivators for their participation in the programme.

"I wanted to learn how to use the iPad, because I started to find it difficult to read books. At least on the iPad I could then have the magnification on. And I could also source books through libraries."

With lapsed users (people who had been online but are not at the moment) and those already online, their primary motivations were either to **improve their confidence and skills** to get back online, or to do more online by developing skills in using assistive technology.

"I have found over the last year that I have stopped using the computer because my sight has got really bad. I was forced to use my handheld magnifier to see some of the things on the screen – and my confidence to use the computer was getting less and less."

In-depth interviews with beneficiaries suggest that **deterioration in sight,**

without knowledge of assistive technology to support their use of technology, can lead people to lose confidence in their ability to use technology to get online.

"I had been on a computer when I had good vision, but then my sight was getting worse and I was stopped from driving and found myself isolated. I was trying to use an ordinary computer and the magnification on there. I was so confused on the page and found that it was not the page I wanted – I was losing confidence rapidly."

The Online Today beneficiary baseline survey supports this, showing that 68 per cent of respondents said a motivation for participating in Online Today was to **increase their knowledge** about accessibility features and technology, to help them get online. This reasoning is likely to differ to the general population who do not necessarily need assistive technology to get online. This highlights the unique offer that Online Today has provided people with sensory loss.

"I knew absolutely nothing about accessible technology. I never had any reason to use it. I knew they existed, like Siri. I was set back to zero after losing my sight. In fact, it was worse because I knew what I wanted to do but couldn't. I had no knowledge of the apps whatsoever... before meeting [Online Today digital skills officer]."

Delivery models and activity

Early learnings told us that people do not necessarily progress through the four stages towards being online and enjoying the benefits originally proposed, in a linear way. Each beneficiary is different with particular circumstances and needs, and different starting points on the journey.

Big Lottery funding of Online Today has enabled RNIB and programme partners to develop and test a range of delivery models to help the digital progression of people with sensory loss. Both RNIB and programme partners have engaged in a process of learning, which has actively shaped the digital inclusion models and activities delivered through Online Today and helped form the vision for the future of digital technology skills development across the sensory loss sector.

Although delivery models differ, their activities can be ranked into three distinct categories of intensity:

- **Low** (6 per cent of beneficiaries) – Awareness-raising events and large group sessions (10 – 40 people).
- **Medium** (51 per cent of beneficiaries) – Small group sessions (7-12 people), short one-to-one sessions (15 to 30 minutes). This includes drop-ins, one-off and progressive telephone support sessions.
- **High** (49 per cent of beneficiaries) – Face-to-face, one-to-one activity (1-2 hours) and progressive follow-on sessions, including drop-in provision.

Regardless of the digital technology intervention people participated in, all beneficiaries received support on similar topics.

Over three quarters of people told us they:

- talked about what skills they needed to get online (82 per cent)
- found out about the different devices available, e.g. smartphones and tablets (83 per cent)
- found out about accessible technology and the benefits of using it, e.g. voice assistance and magnification (82 per cent).

By testing multiple models and activities, the programme could:

- test the effectiveness of a range of interventions and share learning
- adapt models to local contexts such as the local network of partners
- engage volunteers in a variety of ways best meeting the needs of beneficiaries
- transform front-line services to include a digital technology focus and reach beneficiaries at scale.

Having multiple models did present some challenges. These included finding the right training solutions for staff, monitoring activity across a diverse range of services and delivery models and difficulties in promoting the Online Today offer through a UK-wide media campaign.

Some challenges were model-specific. For example, there were long waiting lists for support if the offer was based on intensive support within a set number of sessions, or insufficient time for individuals to practice with one-to-one support in larger group sessions.

Other issues were linked with different locations: although partnership working was adopted in all delivery models to support reach, referrals and delivery, this approach was more challenging where there are fewer or no active sight loss charities.

Relationships with delivery partners were key to the success of many delivery models, increasing opportunities to deliver activity locally and reach people at scale.

Lessons learned

For more information on the lessons learned from delivering Online Today, please refer to the Delivering Online Today briefing paper.

Challenging assumptions on what activities lead to the best outcome

Online Today delivery models have achieved clear outcomes for beneficiaries across all types of activity. When comparing models, the most intensive activity does not always equate to the best outcomes for beneficiaries.

Finding the right balance of pressure to encourage, yet not stifle innovation

By comparing delivery models, we can see that allocated resources and beneficiary reach targets have influenced the extent to which models have delivered the most intensive activities. This has led to innovative ideas to reach and support beneficiaries, and flexibility around targets developed in year 3. In response to partner and beneficiary feedback, follow-on sessions were introduced.



Transforming business

Embedding digital technology within existing frontline services helped to raise the profile of digital technology and its importance for people with sensory loss, across RNIB and programme partners. In some instances, this initiated long-lasting change. It also helped the programme to engage and reach beneficiaries at scale.

The new RNIB Technology for Life Service, implemented in Summer 2018, has taken the most successful aspects of all delivery models to create a beneficiary offer that will suit people with a variety of needs and experience.

This includes:

- Regional digital inclusion teams working as part of multidisciplinary teams within RNIB Networks.
- Digital inclusion activity, which is tailored to beneficiaries' needs and offers a range of solutions.
- Working with delivery partners to support continued development and capacity building.
- Local management, coordination and training of volunteers.
- The provision of information, resources and online material, to support the ongoing development of beneficiaries, delivery partners and volunteers.



Key enablers supporting people with sensory loss to progress digitally

Evidence gathered in interviews with beneficiaries, delivery partners and digital skills officers has helped us to understand and map beneficiaries' digital progression across different Online Today activities.

Enablers that might support people with sensory loss to progress digitally include:

- Tailored activity that focuses on beneficiaries' needs and what they want to do online.

"We then looked at magnification... how to navigate a magnified screen...She [digital skills officer] asked me about the programs and websites that I use. She showed me how to adjust the magnifier to make sure it doesn't distort the image or writing."

- Opportunity to try assistive technology and devices as part of a session.

"Started really basic – intro to iPad – showed us the on switch – showed us magnification and VoiceOver – the next session we covered that again and then progressed – now onto specific apps and what you can do with those."

Ongoing learning, which gives beneficiaries the space and time to "practice" away from the learning environment and gain knowledge and confidence to use a device or the internet.

- Encouraging beneficiaries to self-direct their learning, signposting them to online resources and support that is available locally, as well as providing information and resources to support continued learning following interventions.

"I was provided with all the notes on what was covered in each session so I could then refer back to them. And the trainer also made CDs for me, which was really great. Because I felt I really needed the back up after the sessions! And I have later referred back to my notes at home."

- Being trained or supported by professionals with sight loss provides beneficiaries with a positive role model, which helped people to believe they could use technology like everybody else.

"I know this is going to sound weird, but they can talk blind. They know how to explain it. And they know what is possible for you and what isn't. They have a greater degree of empathy. I think sometimes sighted people find it difficult to explain things to a person who can't see."

Beneficiary engagement – what worked

Online Today delivery teams devised a range of local engagement strategies, building local professional networks and referral pathways to promote their services and reach beneficiaries. Most staff interviewed agreed that local delivery partners and professional networks are the most effective way of promoting Online Today to potential beneficiaries.

“Only thing that works reasonably well is the resource of the local organisations and services that we are working with... and word of mouth between people we support.”

In-depth interviews with beneficiaries appear to support this claim, as most tended to hear about Online Today through a local service or organisation.

“We basically get a lot of professionals that get in touch after listening to one of our talks at various local organisations. And those events are not always just about sight loss. It can be about finding out about various types of disabilities and what’s available for people.”



Outcomes for beneficiaries

Online Today has provided the solutions for beneficiaries to start their journey to get online, get back online, maintain their online participation or do more online. Learning about assistive technology, and developing the skills to use it, has been pivotal within this.

The programme has performed well in relation to achieving outcomes for beneficiaries. More detail can be found Appendix A.

Increased online engagement

The beneficiary survey showed the programme has increased the online engagement of Online Today customer groups.

- The number of people who had “never been online” reduced from 15 per cent to eight per cent following their participation in the programme.
- The number of “lapsed users” (been online but are not at the moment) reduced from 19 per cent to 10 per cent.

Furthermore, interviews with stakeholders across the programme suggest that for the largest group of beneficiaries, those who were “currently online”, the programme has acted as a preventative measure, which has stopped people from disengaging with the internet due to deteriorating sensory loss.

Increased beneficiaries' knowledge

Responses to the beneficiary survey showed that 55 per cent of beneficiaries increased their knowledge in using assistive technology and 48 per cent increased their knowledge in using devices to go online. The next largest proportion of people stayed the same in regards to their knowledge of devices (38 per cent) and assistive technology (32 per cent). This was due to the fact that many of them came to the programme with prior knowledge of technology and needed more practical support and help to develop skills.

“I know how to put VoiceOver on and off and how to tap to make things bigger. I use it all now quite a bit. It's made things a lot easier.”

“I have since purchased an iPad. And I learnt how to link it up with my iPhone. So that if I can't see anything on my phone, I could now look at in on my iPad... and I can even connect my iPad to the TV if I couldn't see something properly and then it would be twice as big.”

The number of people who are “currently online” grew from 65 per cent to

82%

Increased beneficiaries' confidence

Over half (55 per cent) of beneficiaries increased their confidence in the use of assistive technology, and 48 per cent increased their confidence in using devices to go online. The next largest proportion of people stayed the same regarding their confidence in using devices (39 per cent) and assistive technology (34 per cent). This was because many people felt confident about using technology but needed Online Today to develop some additional skills to use devices or resolve specific problems.

55%

of beneficiaries increased their confidence in the use of assistive technology



Increased beneficiaries' ability

Fifty-eight per cent of beneficiaries increased their ability to use assistive technology and 53 per cent increased their ability to use devices to go online. The next largest proportion of people stayed the same regarding their ability to use devices (32 per cent) and assistive technology (28 per cent). This was because many people had skills to use technology but needed Online Today to answer a particular query and build their knowledge.

"I can now use cursors... I can change that into different colours and sizes depending on the websites. She showed me how to use the magnifier and how to turn it on and off... I know I can't break anything."

"I am using the internet nearly at the level I was before – I can almost do everything again."

45%

reported increased access to leisure activities

Positive impact on the lives of people with sensory loss

Beneficiaries that increased their engagement with technology and online activity, as a result of engaging in the programme, experienced a number of positive outcomes.

Communication and accessing information

Beneficiaries reported that they could communicate with others and access information more easily as a result of the skills they learnt from Online Today, enabling them to feel "more connected" with the wider world and involved in "mainstream technologies".

They also reported being less reliant on family or friends to support them in their communication with others.

"I am able to communicate by writing letters, emails, FaceTime, and text – I could never text before, but with the iPhone I can now text with the reader [Siri]."

Opportunities for leisure time

Online Today has increased beneficiaries' access to leisure activities and enhanced leisure time. Almost half of Online Today beneficiaries (45 per cent) reported increased access to leisure activities as a result of being online. Interviews with beneficiaries strongly support this, with the majority explaining that getting online or doing more online has opened many new opportunities for their free time. Several beneficiaries reported they were now able to use the internet to pursue hobbies such as reading, listening to music, playing games, watching films and TV, and researching things of interest.

"Being able to access music is fantastic."

"I go to the cinema more often now. And restaurants and that. It sort of gives you a different routine. Widens your social feed. It's nearly taken over my life!"

"My youngest boy has just moved to Dubai from Singapore – I know more about Dubai than he does!"

"I can now book holidays, and other things. I went to Belgium four weeks ago. Also able to book gigs, for music events, and also sporting events. Again the most basic things, to be able to make calls to arrange nights out with friends or to attend a sporting event."

Saved money or helped to manage money

The support provided by Online Today has helped some beneficiaries to save money. Findings from the beneficiary follow-up survey show over half of participants (52 per cent) indicated that they had saved money as a result of being online. During interviews, beneficiaries explained that they have been able to save money online through utilising websites such as Groupon and Money Supermarket, accessing deals while doing online shopping and comparing prices.

"I use telephone banking... I have used the internet twice recently to transfer large sums of money. Also I got around to doing my Christmas shopping online on Amazon this year – and I've already sorted it all out!"

"I do all of my market research online... so compared prices. I do a spreadsheet which manages my money and I keep a track of the electric and gas on my spreadsheet. Balance my account against bank statements. I was an accountant so did this sort of thing daily ... I am back on track now with my spreadsheets and am more in control."

Improved health and wellbeing

Participation in Online Today has helped enhance some beneficiaries' health. Forty-eight per cent reported that they had found information online that had helped improve their health. In-depth interviews support this, suggesting that getting online and doing more online had made it easier for beneficiaries to source information about their health, and keep track of hospital appointments via automated texts from the hospital and using the calendar on their device/s.

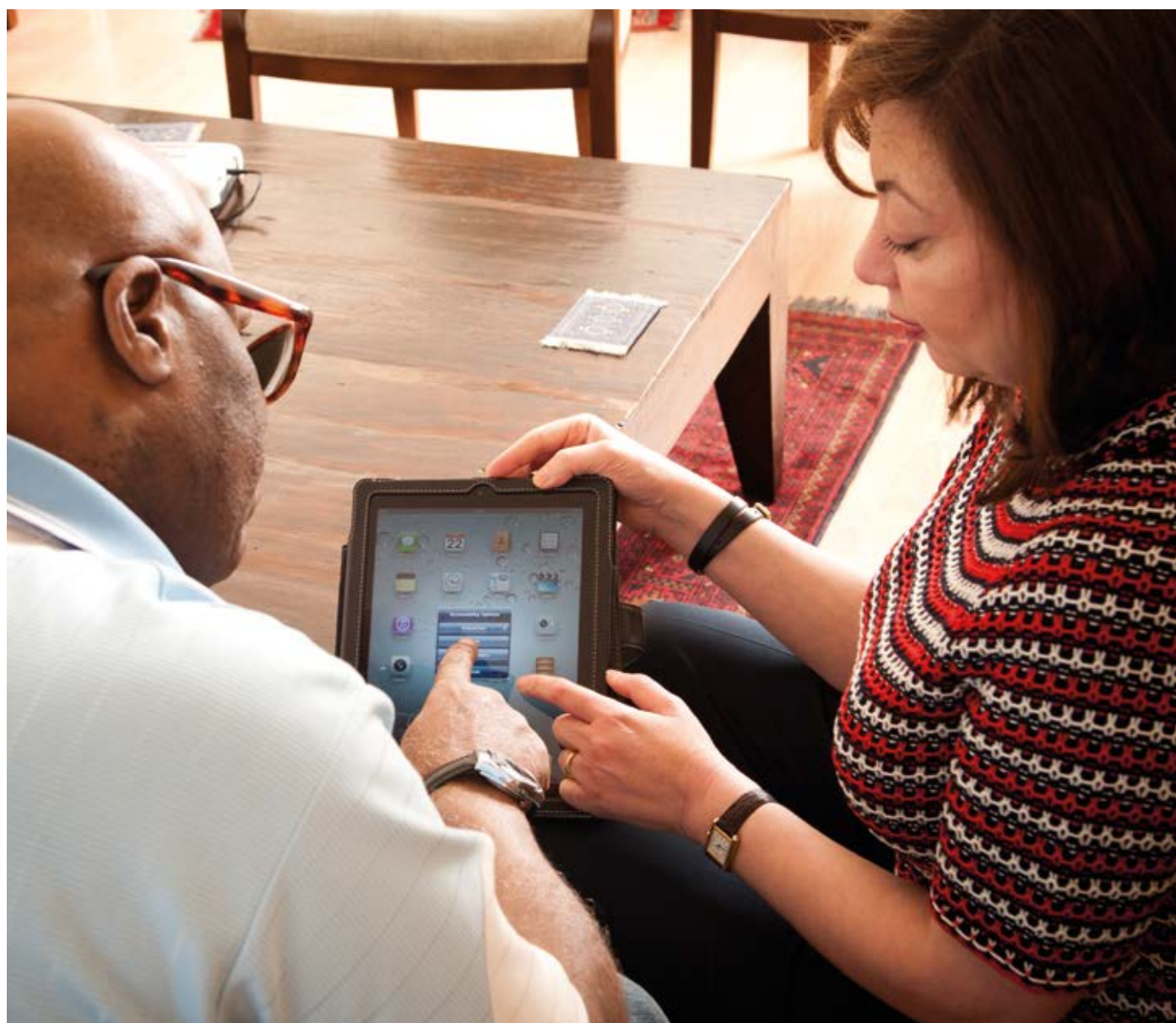


"There's a thing called Triage – it's an app. It tells you about the human body. It has a model of a body – a man or a woman and you can click parts of it to find out more about that body part. You can also find out about different medications and symptoms for stuff. So I've used that."

"It has made a vast difference to my mental health – even times when I am by myself – have the phone if I need help off somebody. I have close contacts in my phone and can ask google to ring them for me. It has lightened my mood and I don't feel isolated as what I was."

Interviews with beneficiaries and frontline teams also suggest some beneficiaries felt their health had improved as a result of being online or back online, as it helped them feel less isolated and took their mind off problems.

"[using my computer] it's just much easier now – reduced my frustration levels... this has had to improve my health. I feel happier!"



Increased overall independence and confidence

Evidence from interviews with front line staff and beneficiaries suggests Online Today has helped support people's independence.

Responses to the beneficiary survey showed a nine per cent increase (84 to 93 per cent) in people who felt very independent or independent. There was also an eight per cent increase (43 to 51 per cent) in people who felt confident either all the time or often.

Several beneficiaries felt they were now able to communicate with others, read and access information, manage their money and do online shopping independently, which had made them feel more "independent" and "less reliant" on friends and family.

"There was loads of things I didn't think I'd be able to do. Like social media, I do that now. I do my own CV rather than relying on other people [to help]."

"...the embarrassment to ask people 'could you read this for me?'- it was male pride I guess. Having people read your own text messages for you... and now even though something else is reading back my messages to me, and it's still not me, at least it's just me and my phone. Me and my technology. That's independence."



Customer case study: Mike's Story

Mike was a professional sportsman until three years ago when he awoke one morning and was blind in one eye and shortly afterwards he went blind in his other eye. After surgery on both eyes failed to restore any of his vision, he is now registered blind.

Initially he felt frustrated and low about all of the things he could no longer do. He said he mourned the loss of his independence. However, earlier this year he attended an Online Today event.

The Digital Skills Officer taught him how to use a smartphone and its in-built speech activation to call, text and email family and friends. He also learned about the various applications, which are available to support reading.

As a result, he can now go to a restaurant and choose his own food independently with the use of his phone. He uses the phone to take a photo of the menu and the KNFB eReader reads the information in the picture back to him.

He also uses the internet more widely for banking, which has helped him to manage his money and has expanded his leisure pursuits, such as booking holidays. Mike now feels like his world has expanded and uses the internet as frequently as he did before his sight loss.



Persistent barriers to being online

Online Today has worked to positively move beneficiaries towards being online and has helped people to stay and do more online.

Nevertheless, beneficiaries still face a range of barriers which continue to prevent them from progressing digitally.

These include:

- worries about safety and their ability to protect themselves online
- sensory loss
- lack of knowledge, confidence and ability to use devices and assistive technology to help them progress
- inaccessibility of websites and applications
- cost of devices and access to the internet
- availability, accessibility and expertise of mainstream technology providers.



Working with delivery partners

Working with delivery partners has been an essential part of Online Today and key to the success of delivering local digital inclusion activities at scale. Partners have provided a place from which to deliver Online Today sessions, helped establish local referral pathways, promoted the programme and engaged beneficiaries in sessions.

Over its lifetime, the programme has successfully worked with 457 individual delivery partners, who broadly fall into three types of organisation: local government services, local charities and national charities.

Findings, from interviews with partners and the partnership surveys, revealed that delivery partners were motivated to work with us as many lacked the capacity to deliver digital skills interventions themselves. Initial misunderstanding about the Online Today offer was overcome with good ongoing communication. This led to most delivery partners being satisfied with their relationship with Online Today.

Some delivery partners felt that they invested more resources than they expected, and that working with Online Today was resource-intensive. Plus, changes in Online Today personnel meant we had to work harder at maintaining relationships with some partners.

Online Today could not have achieved the scale of delivery without partners providing people, places and promotion.

“We all know there is a massive potential for technology to enhance the lives of people with sight loss. People just want to be online... people are far more savvy about technology now. The challenge is how to meet this demand... lack of local opportunities and skills to teach it... what does exist can be hit and miss... that’s why working with Online Today was a no brainer.”

What difference has Online Today made to partners?

Online Today has met its agreed programme outcomes for working with partners.

Partners felt they had a better understanding about accessibility options available and about identifying solutions to support people with sensory loss.

- 83 per cent felt Online Today had increased their understanding of the barriers people with sensory loss face in getting online.
- 72 per cent of partners felt Online Today had influenced the way they deliver digital skills activities for people with sensory loss.

“It has increased [understanding of barriers] dramatically... has opened up a greater awareness of what is possible in regard to supporting blind and partially sighted people getting online.”

In response to the Online Today interim evaluation findings (year 2), which evidenced a lack of knowledge, confidence and skills amongst delivery partners to provide their own digital technology interventions, the programme developed a delivery partner Capacity Building Course (CBC).

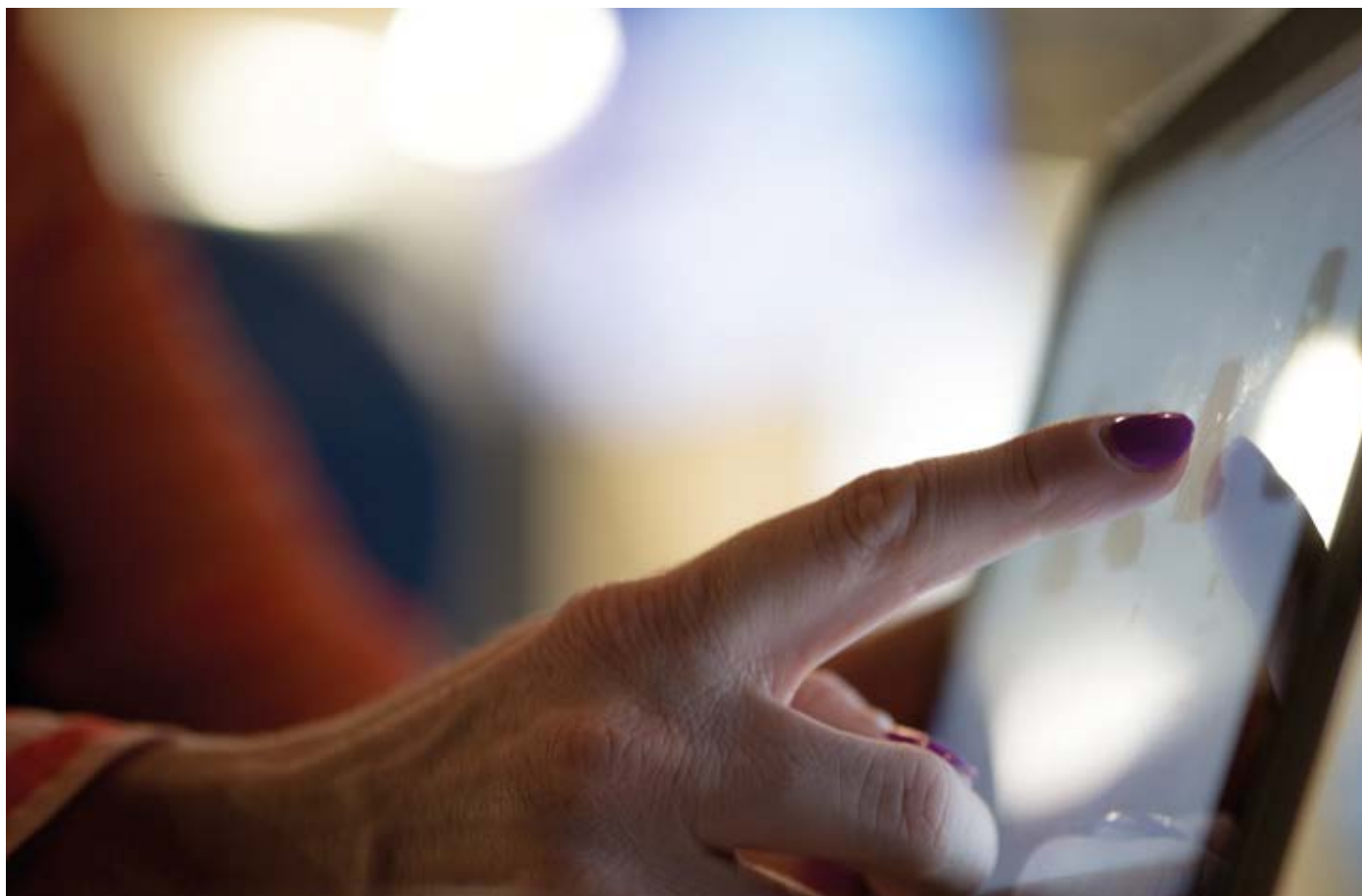
Feedback shows that:

- 72 per cent (45 respondents) felt Online Today had increased their organisation's skills or confidence to deliver digital skills activities for people with sensory loss.
- Following participation in Online Today capacity building courses, many participants rated their confidence to teach beneficiaries how to use devices and accessible technology as excellent (26 per cent, six respondents) or good (60 per cent, 14 respondents).

"Confidence, skills and knowledge to deliver digital skills development for blind and partially sighted people – I can do this now, before I might do more of an awareness raising session or refer on... I can do it now."

Developing, maintaining and managing mutually beneficial partnerships

Clear, regular and reliable communication, a good understanding of roles and responsibilities and a tailored partnership offer were identified as vital components of developing mutually beneficial partnerships.



Partner case study: Sandwell Visually Impaired

Sandwell Visually Impaired (SVI) have been working with Online Today supporting both their own beneficiaries and more recently, training their staff. Sandra Troth (SVI Development Worker) says:

“Both digital skills officers we have worked with have been excellent, with obviously very advanced technical knowledge. They had such a welcoming approach to their delivery, using easy-to-understand language in order not to scare people away and working with people at their own knowledge level. From the support we have had from Online Today we are putting

our new skills in to practice with our Appy Hour sessions. The Online Today programme was the perfect opportunity to start these sessions up. Previously, we maybe would not have had the confidence to do it ourselves – it’s been great timing! There is such a need for this type of work to continue, especially to encourage our older members to get involved. With help from the Online Today programme, we have also been upskilling our staff and ‘techy’ buddies to keep the momentum going within the visually impaired community. It’s been great, a really good project.”



Engaging volunteers in Online Today

The programme, with Big Lottery Funding, has helped RNIB and programme partners grow a team of volunteers to support people with sensory loss to become more digitally included. The scale of the volunteer resource has led to challenges with supporting volunteers across the UK and implementing training solutions.

The role of volunteers

We successfully engaged volunteers in the programme, which helped build the capacity of the project, supporting Online Today to reach and support people with sensory loss.

There are two broad categories of volunteer within the Online Today programme:

Home visiting volunteers

Home visiting volunteer roles grew from an existing RNIB service (Tech Squad) to providing one-to-one digital skills development training to people in their homes

Online Today technology volunteers

This group of volunteers support digital skills officers in the delivery of technology events across the programme. This was especially successful in the Action on Hearing Loss delivery model, who established a new team of volunteers to support their delivery across the UK. RNIB learned from Action on Hearing Loss approach and introduced this role towards the end of year 2, in response to beneficiary requests for more one-to-one support in group sessions, and volunteer requests for a closer relationship with the programme.

Responses to the volunteer survey (57) and beneficiary feedback forms (302) show that both beneficiaries and volunteers are highly satisfied with Online Today and the role of volunteers within the programme.

Almost all volunteers (91 per cent) felt they would like to continue volunteering with Online Today and three quarters (75 per cent) of volunteers felt the Online Today opportunity and role met their expectations.

In addition, home visiting beneficiary feedback forms show that:

- Most beneficiaries supported by volunteers (93 per cent) rated the support they received from their technology volunteer as "excellent" or "good".
- Most beneficiaries (87 per cent) were extremely satisfied or very satisfied with the service provided by the volunteer.

However, 39 per cent (19 responses) of volunteers working across the programme stated that they would have liked to do more or considerably more, which suggests improvements could have been made in this area.

Benefits for volunteers

The main benefit volunteers have gained from participating in Online Today was the fulfilment they get by helping people with sight loss. Survey responses strongly support this: most volunteers (89 per cent) felt that they had gained a sense of satisfaction from helping someone, or liked helping people to solve their problems (87 per cent).

“I didn’t think I would enjoy it as much and I didn’t think I would make as much of a difference. Every time, I come out with a fuzzy feeling. It’s so dramatic. They’re so happy. What more could you wish for people?”

Furthermore, the combination of central and local training, combined with on-the-job development, has helped volunteers to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence of devices and assistive technology.

Survey responses support this, showing that:

- 73 per cent of volunteers felt participation in Online Today had increased their digital technology skills
- and 69 per cent felt it had increased their understanding of assistive technology and how this enables people with sensory loss to get online.

Lessons from localising the coordination and management of volunteers

Responding to lessons from interim evaluation, the programme, where possible, encouraged delivery teams to localise the support of volunteers.

Key benefits of this include:

- Volunteers having closer contact with individual digital skills officers, making training and communication easier.
- Beneficiaries’ needs were easier to match with volunteer’s skills and knowledge.
- Volunteers felt more engaged and productive.



Volunteer case study: John Casley

I have worked in IT support for over 20 years and have gained numerous IT skills, project and team support experience. When I decided to volunteer, I had two thoughts: one was what skills did I have to offer and the second, which charity or non-profit organisation would I apply to.

After some research, I found RNIB and it appeared to be the perfect fit.

So in August 2016, I joined as a volunteer to support the project directly, the volunteer co-ordinator and three ATs or Assistive Technology trainers.

My role would be supporting the Online Today training events, to raise awareness of the benefits of digital inclusion to blind and partially sighted people.

To see the learning taking place and the positive change in people is just wonderful. Each person was valued for

their contribution, respected for who they are and what stage they were starting from, as we aimed to support them on their first steps to digital inclusion.

Volunteering has been and continues to be for me a fulfilling and rewarding experience. I have grown as a person and understand now that our current skills that we don't always appreciate can be transferred to new roles, and in my case, can make a real difference in people's lives and that in itself is just wonderful and an honour.

Since working as a volunteer at the RNIB, now just under two years, I have gained knowledge and experience and I would like in the future to apply for a permanent role teaching and supporting volunteers and service users in digital inclusion for people with visual impairment going forward.



Final recommendations

Outcomes for beneficiaries

1. When designing any future digital inclusion interventions, RNIB and programme partners should incorporate key enablers outlined in this paper, which help people with sensory loss to progress digitally. These include:
 - tailored interventions based on beneficiaries' assessed needs
 - access to and opportunities for ongoing learning
 - opportunities to try devices and assistive technology as part of an intervention
 - access and signposting to a range of accessible learning resources following an intervention
 - encouraging beneficiaries to self-direct their own learning
 - having trained professionals with sensory loss to support beneficiaries.
2. RNIB and programme partners should lead a cross-sector conversation about the important role the internet can play in the lives of people with sensory loss and the barriers people can face when learning about and using digital technology.
3. RNIB and programme partners have successfully supported people to progress in their online journey. However, barriers remain. Interventions need to continuously review and adapt to ensure they most effectively support people with sight loss to overcome barriers.

Working with delivery partners

1. From the outset, when working in partnership, RNIB and programme partners should agree with delivery partners what the expectations are, what delivery partners need to do, and what they should provide.
2. Post Online Today, RNIB should consider providing ongoing support for partners, to help them develop and deliver their local digital technology offer.
3. RNIB should maintain communication with delivery partners and support their transition into working with colleagues delivering RNIB new Technology for Life Service.
4. Given the effectiveness of partnership working, RNIB need to consider if support can be provided to help delivery partners grow and build capacity to provide local digital technology interventions.

Engaging volunteers

1. Strongly consider devolving the management of volunteers to local teams, to best meet the needs of people with sight loss looking to get online or do more online.
2. The new RNIB Technology for Life service should continue to play an important role in supporting teams, to ensure consistency of quality and minimal duplication of effort by developing a flexible training offer to volunteers.

Methodology

To evaluate Online Today, we used a range of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The evidence in this report is based on the following data sources:

Monitoring data collected by all delivery teams, which helped to assess and measure the progress the programme made towards reaching Online Today beneficiaries. It also helped us to understand the extent to which the various Online Today models worked in partnership and delivered activity.

In-depth interviews, with a range of programme stakeholders, were an essential component of the Online Today evaluation and helped us gain a deeper level of insight into the experiences of various stakeholders across the programme. Interviews were undertaken over the telephone and lasted for approximately an hour. The sample was stratified by Online Today delivery model and, where possible, activity type. Participants were randomly selected by the evaluation team from a list provided by the programme. Interviews were undertaken with a range of stakeholders which included:

- Beneficiaries (33 interviews)
- RNIB staff and management (14 interviews)
- Frontline delivery teams (19 interviews)
- Frontline delivery leads and managers (15 interviews)
- Programme partners (8 interviews)
- Volunteers (17 interviews)
- Delivery partners (16 interviews)

We also used evidence taken from the Online Today beneficiary survey (gathered between May 2016 – April 2018). The beneficiary baseline survey received 888 responses and was undertaken with beneficiaries prior to their participation in Online Today. The beneficiary follow-up survey received 359 responses and was undertaken four months after beneficiaries' involvement with the programme. The survey was developed in line with guidance received from Government Digital Service research group.

The beneficiary survey sample was stratified using Online Today delivery model's beneficiary reach allocations, as a guide for developing a sample size for each model. The largest group of people which Online Today attracted were those who were already online, so we can expect that there is potential for bias in this area, compared to the general population of people with sensory loss. This needs to be considered when considering the findings from the beneficiary survey within this report.

Learning was also taken from 106 responses to the programme's Capacity Building Courses feedback forms (November 2017 – April 2018) and 59 responses to a delivery partner survey, undertaken in years 2 and 3 of the programme.

We also drew upon evidence from 57 responses to our Online Today Volunteer Survey – sent to volunteers working across the programme between May 2017 and December 2017.

We used the findings from 320 beneficiary feedback forms (gathered between January 2016 – January 2018), which helped both the evaluation and Online Today to understand the immediate impact activities had on people with sensory loss.

In addition to this, we undertook desk-based research and analysed secondary data to help us evaluate the programme.

This included:

- prevalence of people registered blind or partially sighted (RNIB Sight Loss Data Tool)
- analysis of Home Visiting volunteer customer requests (December – August 2017).
- Year 2 and 3 Online Today financial accounts.



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A large part of the evaluation was centred on gathering views of people with sensory loss, through a large-scale beneficiary survey, and we would especially like to thank the Digital Skills Officers and the RNIB Telesales team for their hard work in helping us undertake this survey.

The way that the programme worked with volunteers and delivery partners was an important part of the evaluation, and we would like to thank partners and volunteers who committed their time to participate and help shape the programme.

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