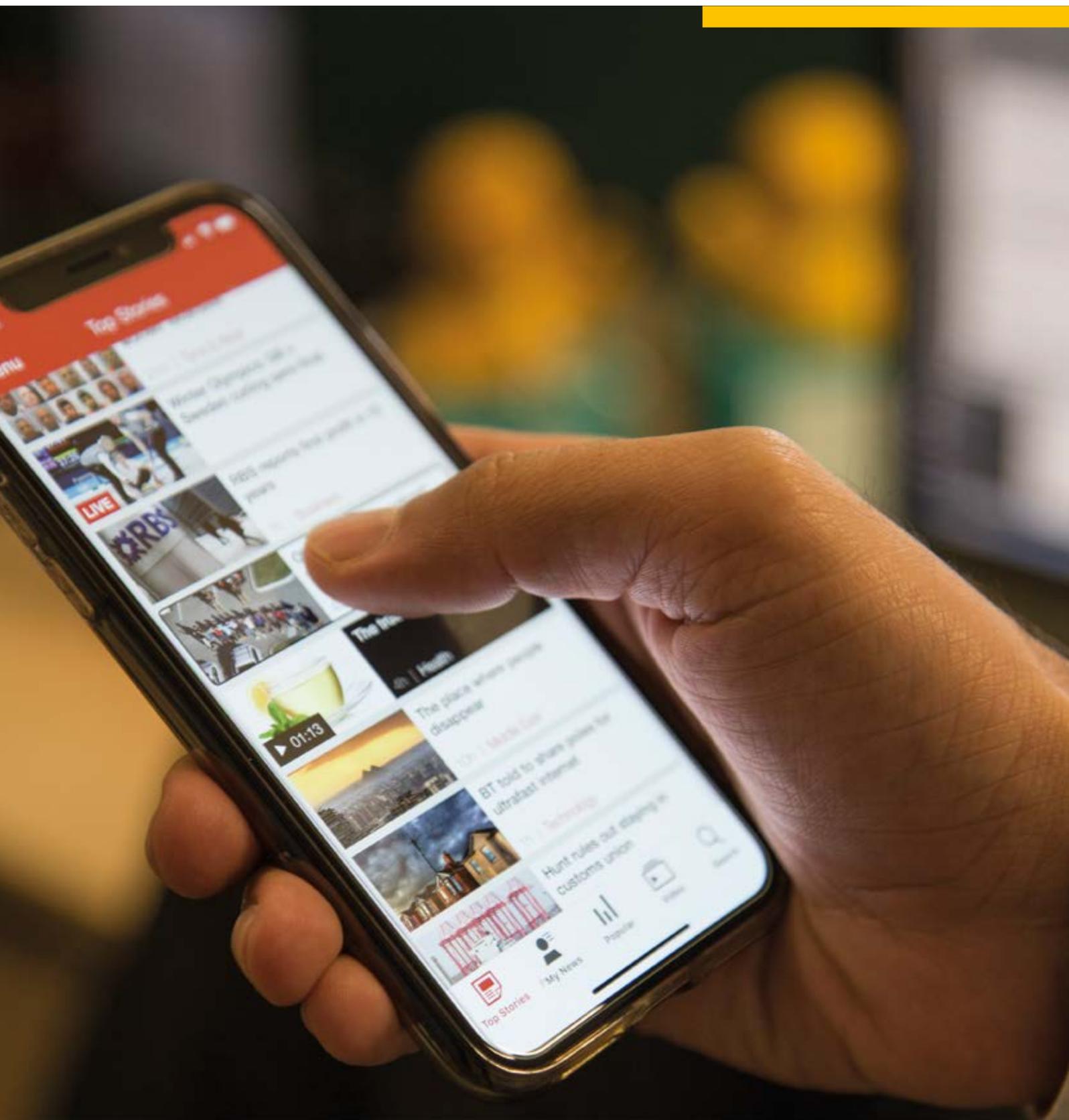


# Online Today evaluation briefing a summary

R N I B

See differently



# Introduction

People with sensory loss are at significant risk of being excluded from the benefits digital technology can offer. 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.

## Method

We undertook desk-based research and analysed secondary data to help us evaluate the programme. We drew on monitoring data collected by delivery teams and in-depth telephone interviews with beneficiaries, staff, volunteers and partners. We conducted surveys of beneficiaries before and after intervention and of volunteers and partners. We also reviewed feedback from beneficiaries to understand the immediate impact activities had on people with sensory loss.



# Key findings

## 1. Delivering digital inclusion at scale

The factors that enabled Online Today to increase beneficiary digital skills, knowledge and confidence 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.

## 2. Securing 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"

## 3. Learnings from delivery models and activity

Each beneficiary is different with particular circumstances and needs, and different starting points on the journey.

By testing multiple models and activities, the programme:

- tested the effectiveness of a range of interventions and shared learning amongst different stakeholders
- adapted models to local contexts such as the local network of partners
- engaged volunteers in a variety of ways best meeting the needs of beneficiaries
- transformed mainstream services to include a digital technology focus and reach beneficiaries at scale.

Some challenges were model-specific, for example long waiting lists if the offer was based on intensive support in 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. Partnership working was widely adopted to support reach, referrals and delivery. This was more challenging in locations 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.

## 4. Outcomes for beneficiaries

### 4.1 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.
- The number of people who are “currently online” grew from 65 per cent to 82 per cent.

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. Around half of all beneficiaries reported increased knowledge, confidence and skills in using assistive technology and devices to go online.

For lapsed users (people who had been online but are not at the moment) and those already online, primary motivations were to improve their confidence and skills to get back online or to do more online. For this group, the programme focused more on developing assistive technology skills and served to prevent people from disengaging with the internet due to deteriorating sensory loss.

### 4.2 Positive impact on quality of life

#### **Increased communication and access to 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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

### **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.

### **5. Persistent barriers to being online**

Some remaining barriers include:

- beneficiary 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.

### **6. Working with delivery partners was critical for success**

Delivery 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.

Delivery partners were motivated to work with us as many lacked the capacity to deliver digital skills interventions themselves. The programme responded by introducing a Capacity Building Course (CBC) to help build the confidence and skills of delivery partners who wished to develop and deliver their own digital inclusion interventions.

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.

Partners reported a better understanding of the barriers people face and solutions available to support people with sensory loss. Almost three quarters said Online Today had influenced the way they deliver digital skills activities for people with sensory loss.

Partners who participated in CBC (72 per cent, 45 respondents), said that Online Today had increased their organisation's skills or confidence to deliver digital skills activities for people with sensory loss.

## 7. 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.

Almost all volunteers (91 per cent) felt they would like to continue volunteering with Online Today. Volunteers said the main benefit they have gained was the fulfilment they get by helping people with sensory loss. 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.

Beneficiaries rate support from volunteers highly. For example, 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.

The scale of the volunteer resource has led to challenges with supporting volunteers across the UK and implementing training solutions. Although highly valued, home visiting volunteers are an underused resource across Online Today. To help reduce these challenges, programme staff encouraged delivery teams to localise the support of volunteers where possible.

## Conclusion

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 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.

## Further information

The full evaluation report can be downloaded from: [rnib.org.uk/online-today](https://rnib.org.uk/online-today)

There are also several briefing papers available at the same link:

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

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