Schedule

1. 12:00 – *Welcome and introduction*

2. 12:10 – *Research findings*

3. 12:25 – *Reflections from practice*

4. 12:35 – *Q&A about the research*

5. 12:45 – *Key issues and experiences*

6. 12:55 – *Next steps* - ***Wednesday 18th June, 12:30-14:00(GMT)***

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How do community organisations use technology to deliver services to adults with learning disabilities and autism?

May 2025
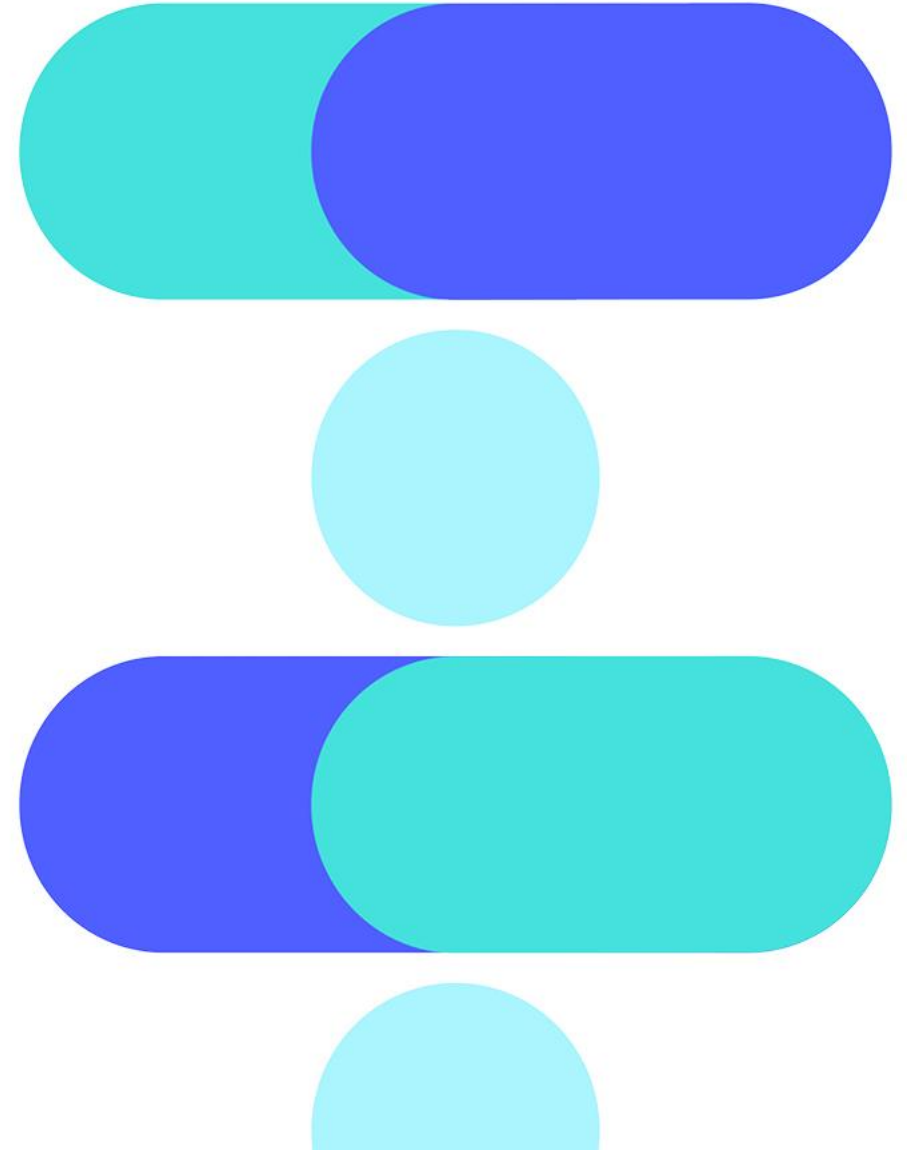
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'ALaDDIN'
Autism and Learning Disabilities Digital Inclusion Network

Amy Hearn,
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ALaDDIN consultation group

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Definitions…

Intellectual disability – a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday tasks that affects someone for their whole life

Autism – a spectrum of developmental conditions that affects the way people communicate and experience the world around them

Digital exclusion – not able to use digital technologies in a way that enables full participation in modern society – lack of access, skills, confidence, motivation

Voluntary and community sector organisations (VCSOs) – non-profit groups focused on social impact, independent of government and the private sector

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Background…

- Digital technology is seen as a way to improve health and social care services

- Technology enabled VCSOs to keep supporting adults with learning disabilities and/autism

- However…also highlighted the challenges

- Little evidence about/guidance for VCSOs using technology to delivery services…what worked well??

- Concerns that technology will proliferate at the expense of quality
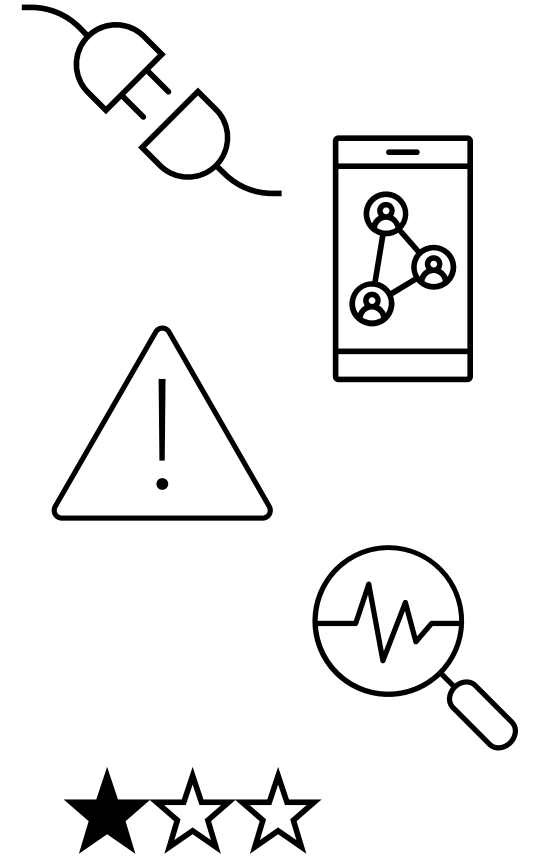
Aim…

To explore how VCSOs can appropriately use digital technologies alongside or instead of in-person activity (hybrid delivery) to provide social care services to different adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autism

Research questions…

1. How have VCSOs carried out hybrid service delivery to adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autism?
2. What has and has not worked well, for whom, and in what circumstances?
3. What are the barriers and enabling factors to hybrid delivery?
4. What does 'good' hybrid delivery look like and what should be the criteria for assessing the quality of hybrid VCSO delivery?

Animation:
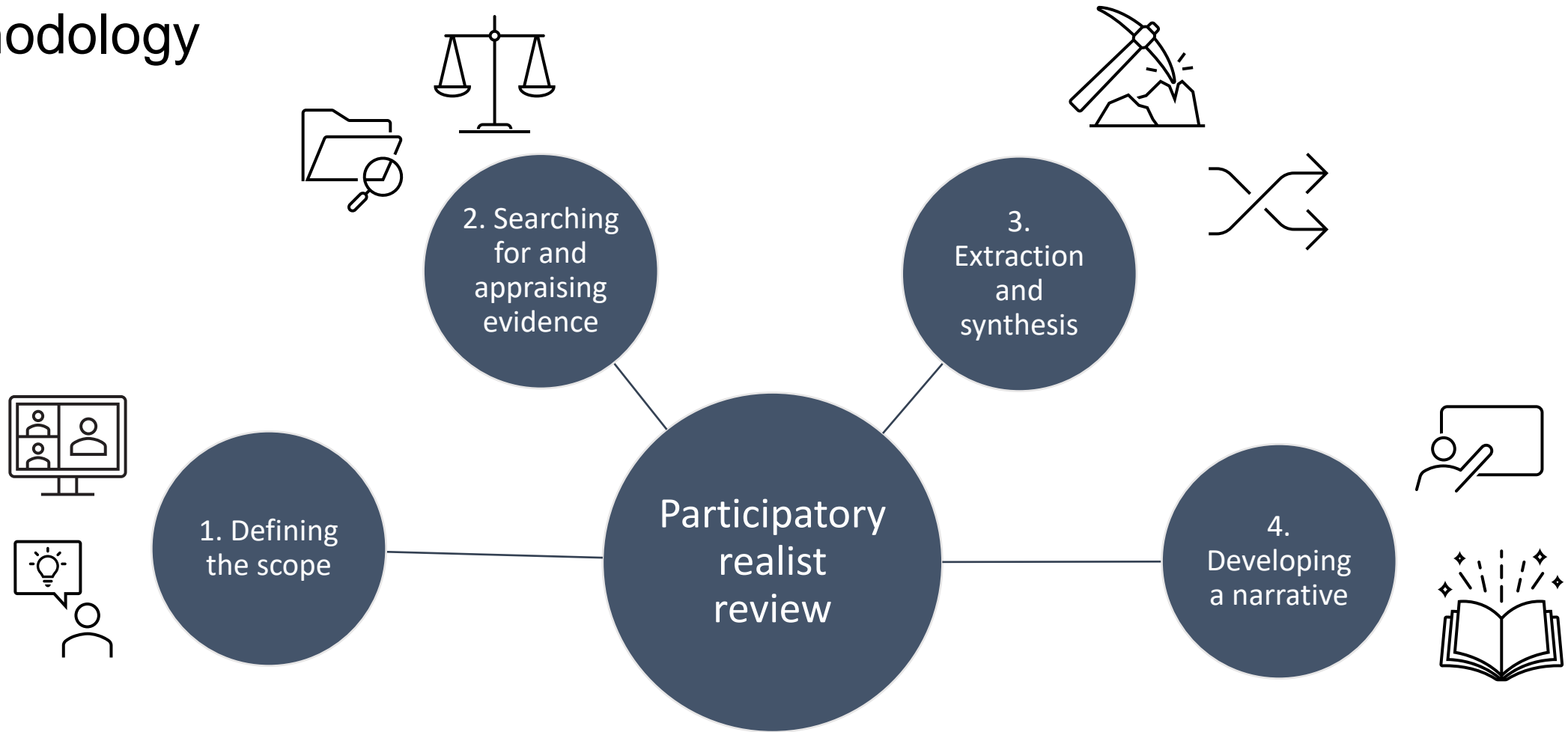*How can voluntary sector organisations use technology to support everyone best?*
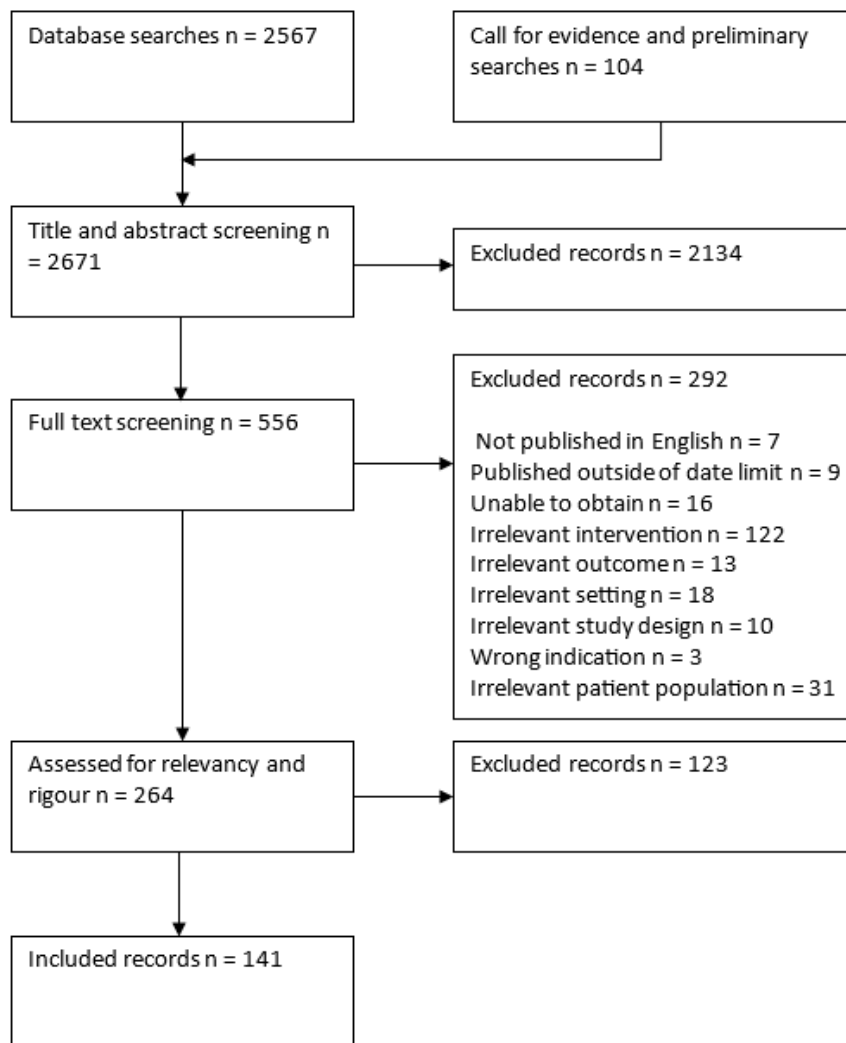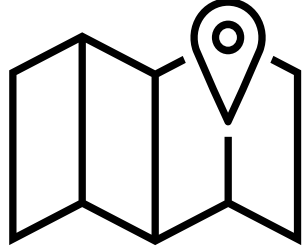
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Methodology

Participatory realist review

1. Defining the scope
2. Searching for and appraising evidence
3. Extraction and synthesis
4. Developing a narrative

Results (i)

Results (ii)

27 USA,
24 UK
12 Australia
8 Spain
6 Canada
3 Hong Kong
3 The Netherlands
2 Austria
2 France
2 Germany

2 Ireland
2 Norway
2 Qatar
23 not clear
9 'international' studies.
1 China, Croatia, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, and Taiwan
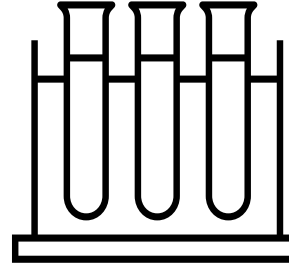
42 qualitative studies (e.g. interview studies or focus groups)
45 reviews
26 quantitative studies (e.g. cross sectional, RCT)
8 surveys
8 evaluations or case studies
3 were mixed methods
Remaining reports/grey literature

64 about people with intellectual disabilities
42 autistic people
5 people with intellectual disabilities and/or autism.

29 physical disabilities, vulnerable populations or the general population

Results (iii)

14 proposition statements about digital service delivery (DSD) and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism (LDA) were scrutinised

1. ***If DSDs were designed with input from LDA they would be more accessible, suitable and effective**.*
Co-producing DSDs with LDA is important for ensuring they are fit for purpose. Involvement also enables participants to learn new skills. However, involved is often limited to the design and development phases.

2. ***If VCSO offered more DSD, LDA would like and benefit from this.***
DSD can have many potential benefits for LDA – social, health, psychological, skills development. DSD can be an enjoyable experience. However, DSD places an additional responsibility on caregivers and supporters and is beyond the capacity of some VCSOs.

3. ***If VCSOs offered LDA appropriate DSD from they could gain online peer-support (emotional and informational)***
LDA can feel more connected to their peers through DSD. However, LDA can feel pushed to use technology for emotional and information support when they do not want to.

Results (iv)

4. If VCSOs offered LDA appropriate DSD they could gain improved cognitive skills and knowledge
DSD can positively impact skills development and knowledge, particularly for education, cognitive, and emotional skills. However, while some people may prefer using DSD, the efficacy of technology is not always clear.

5. If VCSOs offered LDA appropriate DSD it could help decrease their isolation and loneliness and increase virtual and real-world social interaction.
DSD can provide LDA opportunities for social connections and to develop social skills. DSD reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. If VCSOs offered LDA appropriate DSD they could have more opportunities to gain greater self-determination, self-advocacy and empowerment
DSD empowered LDA to make decisions and control their daily lives more, including accessing health services, online banking, dating apps and online shopping. However, many LDA remained excluded or were not allowed access without supervision, limiting their independence.

Results (v)

7. If VCSOs offered LDA appropriate DSD it could help improve their life skills and opportunities
DSD provided can provide comparable opportunities to in-person services for gaining a range of life skills. Acquiring skills through DSD was linked with opportunities to contribute to society.

8. If VCSOs offered LDA appropriate DSD it could help improve their motor skills and increase opportunities for better health
DSD has helped reduce stress and anxiety and self-harming behaviour, increase physical activity, and improve functional tasks. Moving activities online helped LDA develop digital skills and confidence, while still accessing health and wellbeing activities.

9. If LDA can't access DSD they cannot be full members of society or exercise their free choice and human rights
Full citizenship now includes access to digital technology and online participation. However, LDA face multiple barriers to using digital technologies. Services have often failed LDA by not implementing appropriate digital solutions or not promoting digital inclusion.

Results (vi)

10. If VCSOs offered LDA appropriate DSD then they could develop an independent private life
DSD can provide opportunities for self-determination and for being more independent. However, the technology needs to be appropriate to personal need and skills. Many LDA remain excluded from certain technologies.

11. If VCSOs, family and supporters had competency, training and positive individual and organisational attitudes towards digital technology then they would not prevent or undermine LDA from accessing DSD
VCSOs, family, and supporters had mixed attitudes towards, and competency using, digital technology. Some struggled with technology. Minimal training can be sufficient to change hearts and minds.

12. If VCSOs have sufficient/appropriate infrastructure to deliver DSD then LDA will not be prevented or discouraged from accessing them.
LDA require support and education to access DSD. Lack of capacity and skills among staff and supporters is a barrier.

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Results (vii)

13. If LDA access DSD then they are more than averagely at risk of problematic use of the internet (PUI) or problematic media use (PMU) and victimisation online
LDA may be at increased risk of interpersonal conflicts, cyber-bullying, financial scams, identity theft, misinformation, and unwanted sexual experiences using digital technology. Actual or perceived risks discourage use.
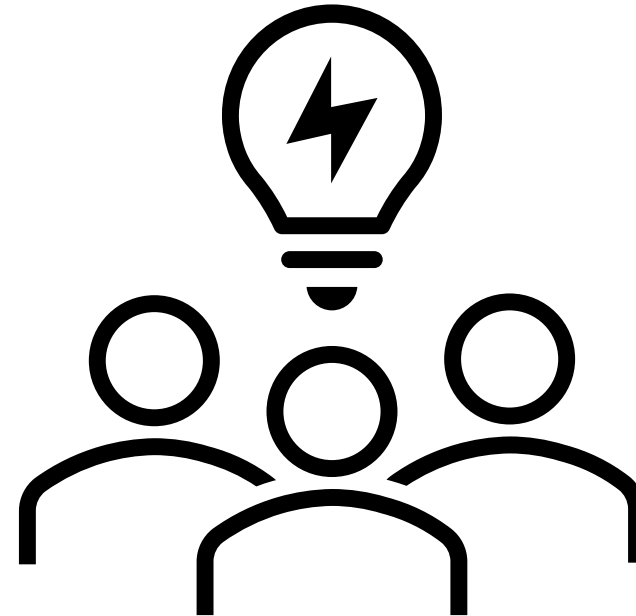
14. If LDA access DSD then this can trigger negative responses, emotional disturbances and anxieties
Using digital technology can be overwhelming and unpleasant for some LDA. While digital technology have personal and social benefits, it is not always an appropriate substitution for in-person activities.
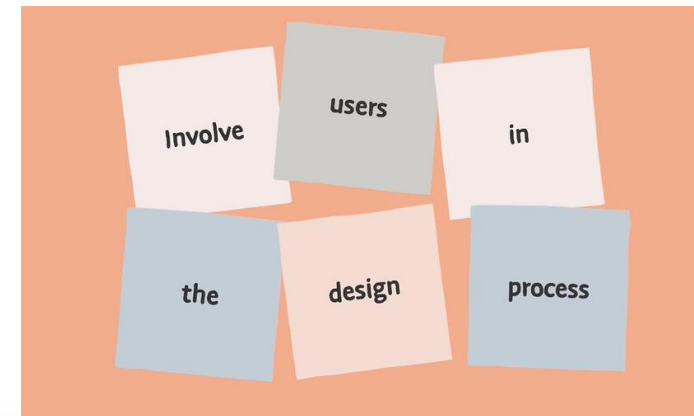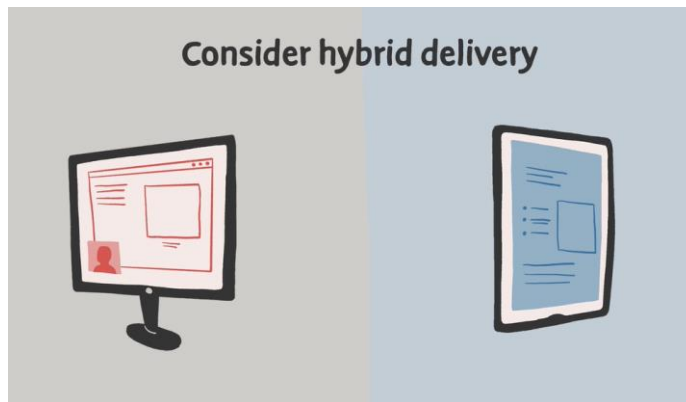
Conclusions

- Diverse use of technology

- Technology can improve (some) services and outcomes (social skills, health and employment)

- Choice is important – co-production!!

- Support and training essential, particularly for supporters and carers

- Further research!

'6 Top Tips'
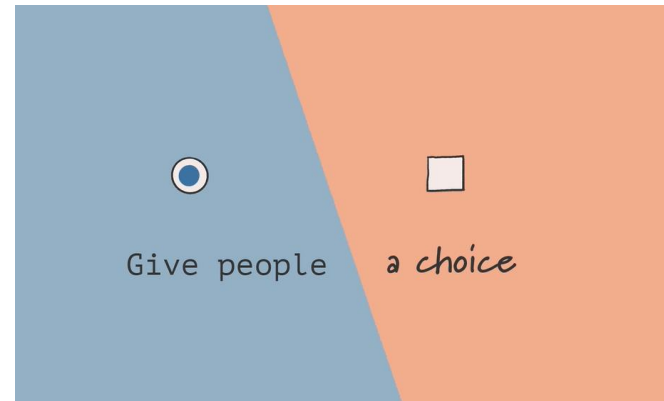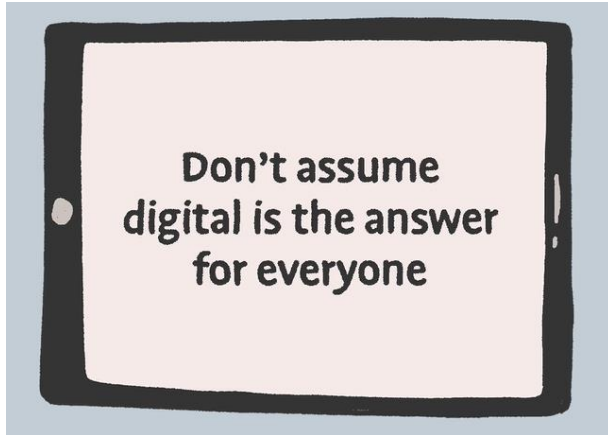
Don't assume digital is the answer for everyone

Give people a choice

PERSONALISE

Consider hybrid delivery

Support goes beyond just tech training

Involve users in the design process

100% Digital Leeds

Why is digital inclusion important?

Having digital options makes life easier.

Digital inclusion is social inclusion.

Those who would most benefit tend to be those who are least likely to be online.
Everyone in Leeds should have equal opportunity to use digital tools, technology, and services in the right way for them.

Everyone should be able to make an informed choice. This means:

- **Connectivity:** Having access to the resources they need to get connected.
- **Skills:** Having access to the resources and support they need to be able to develop their digital skills.
- **Motivation:** Understanding the personal relevance of digital to their lives and how using digital tools, technology, and services can benefit them.
- **Confidence:** Feeling confident in their ability to engage with digital.

100% Digital Leeds

Taking a community-based approach

Strengthening the place to empower the person.

Interventions meet the needs of communities and enable partner priorities.

People get support at a place where they feel safe.

People are supported to do the things that are important to them.

People get support from someone they know and trust.

Community

People are supported to learn at the pace that's right for them.

People get support from someone who understands their situation.

People are supported to access the right equipment and connectivity.

Digital inclusion becomes part of partners' business as usual.
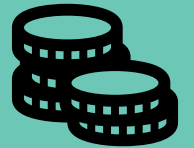
Link to model

Support from 100% Digital Leeds

Asset-based community development to support digital inclusion.

Advising on and supporting the development of partners' digital inclusion offers.

Supporting partners to access funding and resources.

Supporting partners to develop their digital skills and confidence so they can support others.

Supporting partners to understand digital inclusion and have positive conversations.

Forming strategic cross-sector partnerships to address specific digital inclusion issues.

Supporting digital inclusion to be embedded across council, city, and regional strategies.

100% Digital Leeds

The ALaDDIN Network

Creating a sector-wide infrastructure to boost digital inclusion.

100% Digital Leeds co-host networks with specialist sectoral insight and steering, work as a group to achieve shared objectives, discuss common challenges and best practice, and work on co-funding projects.

The Autism and Learning Disabilities Digital Inclusion Network was formed in 2020 to help solve the barriers to digital inclusion faced by people, and the organisations that support them.

Achieved funding to enhance the sector's digital offer and facilitated closer partnership working and sharing of resources and knowledge.

The success of the network led to the creation of the Autism and Learning Disability Digital Inclusion Coordinator post.
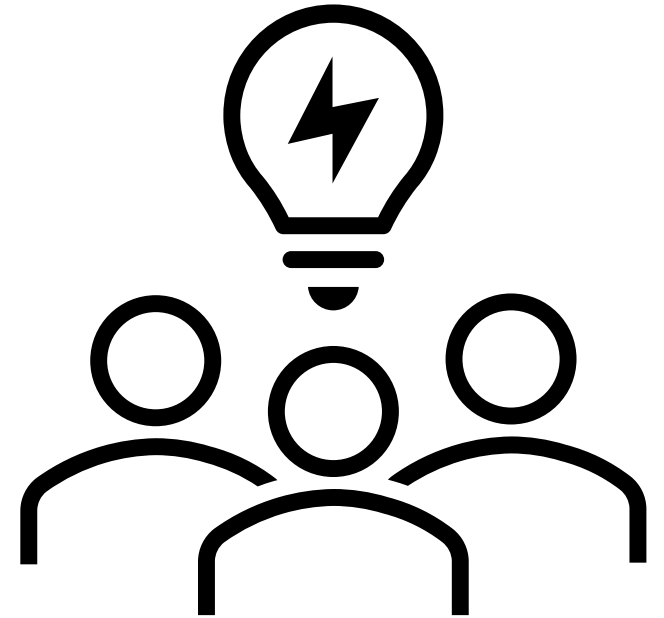
Thank you.
Any questions?

Key issues and priorities…

What are your experiences of the voluntary sector, learning disabilities and digital technology?

- Challenges
- What works well?
- Priorities

Next steps…

- **[Animation](#)**
- **Blog**
- **[Research protocol paper](#)**
- **[Research briefing](#)**
- **Academic paper (research findings)**

Webinar - Wednesday 18th June, 12:30-14:00
Priorities and future research

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