

Empowering Mencap and their Partners to 'Get Digital'



Digital Unite has been enlisted by the UK's leading learning disability charity, Mencap, to help their independent affiliated Network Partners improve the way they use digital technology and create a better future for people with a learning disability.

Our work is part of Mencap's new digital inclusion project, *Let's Get Digital*, funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and Pears Foundation. We're empowering Mencap Network Partners to extend their own digital capability and embed better digital support within their local services. Our approach combines skills training, tailored action plans and a community of practice to develop sustainable strategies, with up to 100 Partners across England taking part.

Digital Champions can help organisations move forwards

With small teams, tight resources and competing priorities, embracing new digital ways of working can often feel challenging for local charities. Ensuring staff and volunteers feel confident and equipped to support others with using technology through a Digital Champion model can enable organisations to move forwards.

Over the next 12 months, we are working with Mencap and their affiliated Network Partners to:

- ***Understand what the specific digital skills needs for the Partners' local communities and how they can meet those needs.*** This will include tailored diagnostics and a Community of Practice led by Elizabeth Marsh at Digital Work Research as well as focused

workshops with subject matter experts and comprehensive toolkits.

- ***Developing Partners staff and volunteers into confident Digital Champions.*** The Partners will access our award-winning [Digital Champions Network](#), an online platform with standardised training and hundreds of digital skills resources. The e-learning will include supporting people with a learning disability to improve their skills and overcome specific accessibility barriers.
- ***Provide dedicated Digital Champion training for members with a learning disability.*** Becoming a Digital Champion can provide people with a learning disability with a vital stepping stone into work placements and volunteering opportunities. Our dedicated online training will improve the confidence and skills of Mencap's members from local charities and develop peer to peer support.

"Structured and consistent training"

Alison Pike, Country Director for England at Mencap said: "Many of the UK's 1.5 million people with a learning disability already face extreme levels of social isolation and loneliness - lockdown has only made this worse as face-to-face contact is reduced and we all have to spend more time online. Our Network Partners have been going above and beyond throughout the pandemic to provide support to people with a learning disability across the country, but many have told us that being more digital in their day to day services can feel like a challenge. Some have said their teams don't have the skills, confidence or courage to do more online and that their members do not have access to technology or support to be able to take part.

"Let's Get Digital will support Partners across the Mencap network to increase the digital skills of their staff and members, enabling them to increase the online support they give to people with a learning disability as well as develop digital strategies for the future. Digital Unite's training, tools and expertise is an integral part of our programme and gives us the ability to empower our partners right across England in a structured and consistent way – and create a better future for people with a learning disability."

Kathy Valdes, Programme Manager at Digital Unite said: "Digital is more than a channel, it's a culture, and the need to embrace it has never been more important. For charities, digital technology can open new ways to be more efficient and to fundraise and most importantly, to enhance the vital services and support they give their members. But to realise any change through digital you need to start with your people. We are excited to be part of Mencap's new digital inclusion programme and to help them realise the incredible Digital Champion power they have within their teams."

Ends

Notes to editors:

[About Digital Unite](#)

Digital Unite has been helping organisations with digital inclusion and digital skills since 1996. We are a social enterprise that specialises in vocational training and support for Digital Champions. Our award-winning Digital Champions Network is an online learning platform that enables housing providers, councils, health organisations and charities to achieve digital inclusion through peer-to-peer support

About Mencap

There are 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK. Mencap works to support people with a learning disability, their families and carers by fighting to change laws, improve services and access to education, employment and leisure facilities. Mencap supports thousands of people with a learning disability to live their lives the way they want. For advice and information about learning disability and Mencap services in your area, contact Mencap's Freephone [Learning Disability Helpline](tel:08088081111) on 0808 808 1111 (10am-3pm, Monday-Friday) or email helpline@mencap.org.uk.

What is a learning disability?

- A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability which can cause problems with everyday tasks – for example shopping and cooking, or travelling to new places – which affects someone for their whole life;
- Learning disability is **NOT** a mental illness or a learning difficulty, such as dyslexia. Very often the term 'learning difficulty' is wrongly used interchangeably with 'learning disability';
- People with a learning disability can take longer to learn new things and may need support to develop new skills, understand difficult information and engage with other people. The level of support someone needs is different with every individual. For example, someone with a severe learning disability might need much more support with daily tasks than someone with a mild learning disability.