10 top tips on keeping remote digital skills support safe

healthwatch
Islington

Healthwatch Islington supports people who use health and social care services in Islington. Before the pandemic, their Digital Champions were actively helping local communities with digital skills through regular drop-in sessions. When lockdown started and everything moved online, they could see people were feeling excluded from services and finding it harder to access them.

As they moved their drop-in sessions online, the team realised that the digital skills gap was even bigger than anticipated. Many of their learners were complete beginners with no experience of everyday web-based tasks such as sending an email, filing out forms or organising shopping or banking. This prompted the team to start providing one to one Digital Champion support over Zoom and on the telephone.

Keeping these remote sessions safe, both for the Champions and their learners, was crucial. In the past year, Healthwatch Islington has successfully adapted their teaching approaches and volunteer training to safeguard everyone involved. And it's meant that they have been able to help dozens of people with digital skills, knowing they have the confidence and trust of learners and Champions alike.

> As Jeni from Healthwatch Islington describes, "*12 months ago, we didn't think we could support people with digital skills remotely – but it can be done. We've learnt a huge amount and had to make lots of changes along the way but we receive fantastic feedback from the people we're helping and we know our work is making an important difference.*"

Helpful
Tips

Last month, over 80 people devoured Jeni's learnings and top tips in our safeguarding webinar. With so many golden nuggets to share, we thought we'd gather them up here too:

1. **Safeguarding starts at volunteer recruitment** – "Due to this remote process and our commitment to safer recruitment, we refined our application form and interview questions. We made them more thorough, asking more questions about sensitive subjects and working with vulnerable people. This gave us a good understanding of who are Champions were. All successful candidates provide two references, get an enhanced DBS check and attend our three induction training sessions, including one on safeguarding."

If a learner wants to cover something that wasn't agreed then that can be carried over to the next session. It prevents sessions going on longer than they should or a Champion being diverted into other areas or conversations."

4. **Strictly no out-of-hours.** "We don't expect our Champions to be available to learners outside of their scheduled sessions and advise Champions to not answer the phone or follow up if a learner is contacting them outside of the session. Learners have asked Digital Champions to contact someone on their behalf and that can raise other issues."

5. **Always maintain confidentiality** – "A Digital Champion doesn't always know who is in the room with their learner but they do know who is in the room with them. We talk a lot to our Champions about maintaining confidentiality while volunteering from home – using headphones, working in a private space and thinking about what is open on their screen if they are screen-sharing. They shouldn't have personal emails open or family pictures on show. We ask our Champions to consider how much they want people to know about them."

6. **Protect information** – "Working remotely means sharing more personal information via email so we only share necessary information about learners with our Digital Champions ie first name only and contact details. And these are always in a password protected file."

7. **Centralise your systems – "**Our Digital Champions don't use personal email addresses, phone numbers or Zoom accounts. We provide them with a sim card and we have a centralized volunteer email address and zoom account that are monitored by staff. That helps to ensure personal details are kept personal and anything shared publicly is safe and monitored."

8. **Three's a good crowd -** "For their first few sessions with a learner, a Digital Champion is teamed up with a staff member or a more experienced Champion in a three-way call or a three way zoom. This give us confidence in that individual and their support and manner is appropriate and the Champion also has the confidence and reassurance they're not alone."

9. **Channel feedback** - "Both our learners and our Digital Champions complete feedback forms at the end of each session. These record the learning that took place and any other issues that might have cropped up. A named staff member is always available during sessions and can be contacted immediately afterwards. We are also setting up a Digital Forum to bring everyone together every month and encourage peer support."

10. **Put the plain English in your policies and procedures –** "On top of our existing policies and procedures which we've updated to include remote working, we have developed some simple dos and don'ts documents for our Digital Champions and learners. This helps to communicate this important information in a much more accessible way."

Find out more about Healthwatch Islington: [Healthwatch Islington | Your spotlight on health and social care services](#)

To hear more from Jeni and for a full webinar replay head over to our website here: [Remote Digital Champions: safeguarding and online safety | Digital Unite](#)