

Digital inclusion in a pandemic - How one housing provider switched up their Digital Champion support



Hexagon

21st October 2021

For [Hexagon Housing](#), digital inclusion has been on the agenda for a decade, forming a vital part of their community investment work.

They have an established way of providing digital skills support through trainers and Digital Champions and have been members of our [Digital Champions Network](#) since 2018.

But about a fifth of their residents still remained offline, and when the pandemic hit, these residents were especially vulnerable. Hexagon quickly redesigned their digital inclusion service, using paid Digital Champions both to identify people at severe risk of exclusion and to give one-to-one remote support to help them access services online.

Adapting their Digital Champion model

"We knew we needed to give intensive, consistent, one-to-one support from people our residents knew and trusted"

Hexagon firstly began a screening process to identify the most vulnerable residents in lockdown, so they could offer a programme of proactive support. Around a third of the residents contacted at the start of the pandemic needed help with digital. Some needed the loan of a wifi dongle, tablet or a laptop, many needed a Digital Champion to help them get going.

The Hexagon logo, featuring the word "Hexagon" in a teal, sans-serif font. The letter "o" is replaced by a green hexagon.

The Digital Champion's first task was usually to set the person up with a new device, either over the phone or using WhatsApp video-calling. Once set up, the nature of the support was led by the learner.:

- Online shopping, dealing with GPs online, setting up and accessing Universal Credit, communicating with friends and family.
- For those looking for work, the tasks supported tend to be online job searching, doing job interviews online, and basic workplace software.

Digital Champions are an essential element

The personalised nature of the support they offered was a vital part of its success with 5 Digital Champions supporting 118 residents between April 2020 and August 2021, Digital Champions supported 118 residents. At any given time, five active champions are helping between 20 and 30 residents, each typically delivering 25 to 50 hours of support per month.

The enforced switch to remote support has also paid efficiency dividends for Hexagon. Their Digital Champion service is no longer constrained by geographical limitations, and travel costs are reduced or eliminated, meaning more residents can be supported.

The Digital Champions themselves speak of many benefits to the role. These include learning new knowledge and skills, including increased digital knowledge but also soft skills such as active listening and mentoring: *"I have really learnt to be patient, to deal with different types of people, to repeat things as often as is needed and not to rush"*, **Digital Champion Hannah.**

Such was the impact and responsiveness of the Digital Champion support that Hexagon will be continuing with a hybrid approach. Their Digital Champions have become an essential part of making this work and their role is recognised across the organisation and at senior levels.

"Digital communities can have a crucial role to play in reducing social isolation. Digital Champions are the key to helping these emerging communities grow." **Nicky Hazelwood, Community Investment Manager, Hexagon Housing Association**

[Read more about Hexagon's story and the learnings they've gained about digital inclusion and their Digital Champion approach](#)

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Digital Unite

[0800 228 9272](tel:08002289272)

du@digitalunite.com

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