



**Starting
Point**

Starting Point Digital Champion Hub Final Report 2026

CLARA JONES & NICOLA WALLACE DEAN

Digital Support Sessions across Stockport



- Chelwood food banks**
Brinnington
Cheadle
- Signpost**
Heald Green
Cheadle
Heaton Moor
Marple
Romiley
- Dementia Disco**
Cheadle Hulme
Heaton Mersey
- Friendly Fridays**
Cheadle Heath
- Cornerstone / Veterans food project / Age UK Stockport**
Stockport Central
- York Street Community Centre**
Edgeley
- Starting Point**
Woodley
- Bredbury Library**
Bredbury
- Offerton Library**
Offerton
- Bramhall Library**
Bramhall



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Our Aim

The Digital Champions and Volunteer Hub project aimed to create a community of local digital champions connected through Starting Point's training and support over three years. This contributed to our organisation's mission, as Digital Champions use their relationships and networks to support one another to reduce the number of people experiencing digital exclusion throughout Stockport.

How We Were Funded

The Digital Champions and Volunteer Hub project was funded by The National Lottery Community Fund for three years, from mid-October 2023 to mid-October 2026.

The funding enabled Starting Point to employ a full-time Volunteering Lead, providing dedicated capacity to develop the policies, processes and infrastructure needed to recruit, support and manage our growing network of volunteers and Digital Champions. It also allowed us to invest significantly in volunteer development and training, including creating and maintaining an online training platform, delivering regular face-to-face training sessions, and producing weekly practical guides to keep volunteers' knowledge and digital skills up to date. This investment has helped us build a more consistent, skilled and supported volunteer network, better equipped to respond to the changing digital needs of people in our communities.

**Bringing informal
learning
to communities**





Mohammed joined Starting Point as a Digital Champion in June 2025. He brought significant experience with him, including 25 years of university teaching, strong digital skills and Arabic language skills.

Having recently moved to the UK, Mohammed wanted to use those skills to contribute to his new community, while also improving his spoken English, building his confidence and gaining experience that could support his longer-term ambition to return to teaching.

Volunteering gave Mohammed regular opportunities to talk to and support people with everyday digital tasks. Within just a few weeks, he could see a difference in his confidence and began to recognise that his English was stronger than he had thought.

At the same time, Starting Point was able to benefit from the considerable skills and experience he already had to offer. He also completed our digital skills for work training, including learning how AI could support CV writing, before moving on to full-time study as another step towards his future goals.

“It made me feel better, people were so happy with my help, it was very wonderful!”

Mohammed's experience captures the two-way value of volunteering. Communities benefit from the knowledge, experience and time volunteers bring, while volunteering can provide people with opportunities to practise skills, build confidence, make connections and take steps towards their own ambitions. For us, developing volunteers is therefore about recognising what someone can contribute today, while also supporting where they want to go next.

Read more about Mohammed's story here



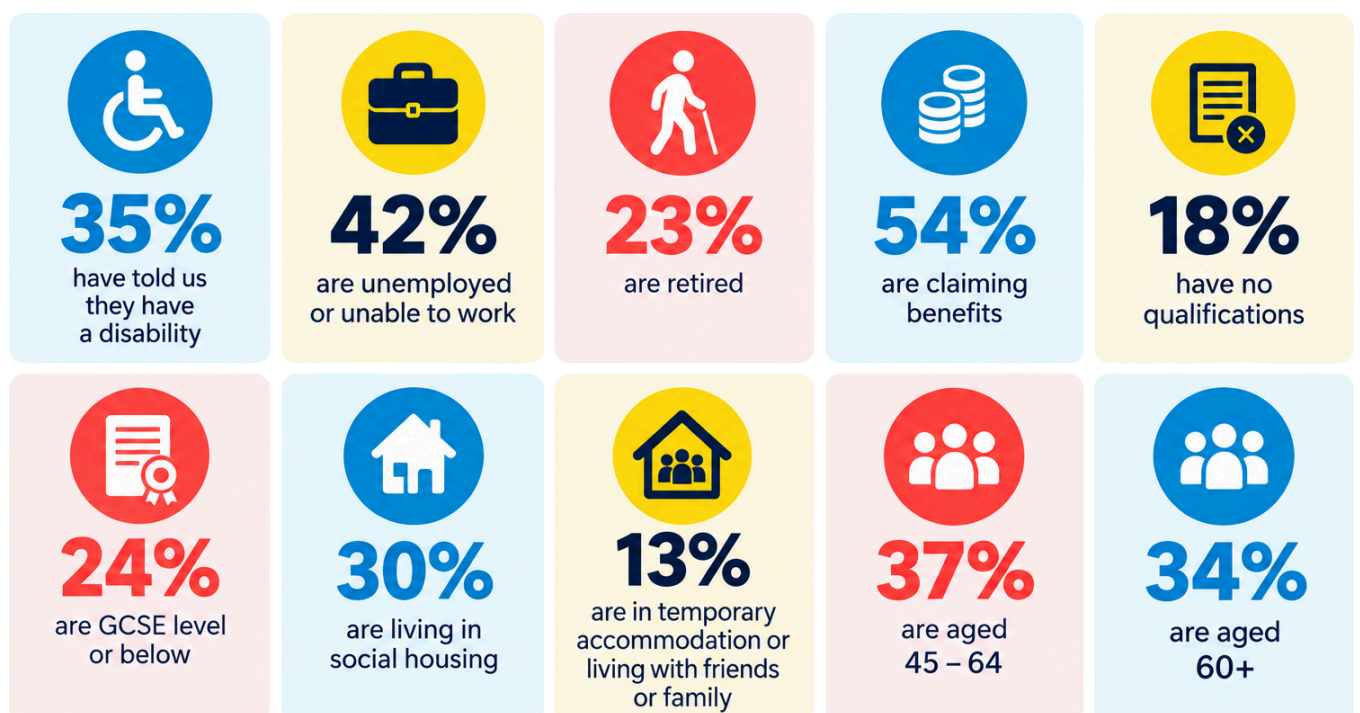
Three years in numbers

Over three years, the project grew from an ambition to build a network of Digital Champions into a much broader community approach to digital volunteering.

In total, 387 people were trained as digital volunteers, supporting people both through organised community activity and through the everyday relationships they already had with friends, family, neighbours and service users.

The project reached 30 community venues, worked with 13 organisations hosting Digital Champions, and generated more than 6,000 hours of volunteering.

These numbers show more than the scale of the project. They show how digital support became distributed across communities, building skills and confidence in local people and organisations so that help could be available in the places and relationships where people already turn for support.



What three years taught us

Three years of delivery gave us the opportunity to test, adapt and strengthen our approach to digital volunteering. One of the clearest lessons was that there is no single type of digital volunteer. People have different motivations, levels of confidence and amounts of time available, and communities seek digital help in different ways.

This learning led to the development of two complementary roles. Digital Champions provide regular support through public-facing groups and drop-in sessions, while Digital Friends use their understanding of digital exclusion to help service users, friends, family and neighbours or connect them with appropriate support.

We also learned that training someone is only the beginning. Volunteers need opportunities to keep their knowledge current, remain connected and continue developing. Over the project we built a support pathway around them: initial training → LearnWorlds → weekly guides → Tea & Tech → newsletters → peer support → steering group → ongoing development.

The project also demonstrated the value of building capacity beyond Starting Point itself. Digital volunteering reached 30 community venues and 13 host organisations, and by the end of the project all eight current host organisations were continuing digital volunteering beyond Lottery funding.

The biggest lesson: Effective digital volunteering is not simply about recruiting more volunteers. It is about creating different ways for people to contribute, giving them the support to develop, and embedding that knowledge within the communities and organisations where people already seek help.

How we developed our volunteering model and offer

Starting Point

Digital Champions

Regular, public-facing digital volunteers



Support people through organised group and drop-in sessions



Usually volunteer as part of a regular rota



Help people solve problems and develop their digital skills

387
trained digital
volunteers

130 Digital Champions
+ 257 Digital Friends

Digital Friends

Community-based digital volunteers



Support people through their existing relationships and roles



May help service users, friends, family or neighbours



Recognise digital exclusion, help where they can and connect people to further support when needed

A development pathway, not just a training course

We build a journey that supports volunteers at every stage – from initial training to ongoing development and real-world impact.



RECRUIT

Attract people from across our communities



TRAIN

Digital Champion or Digital Friend



CONNECT

With other volunteers, Starting Point and host organisations



DEVELOP

LearnWorlds, weekly guides, Tea & Tech and specialist training



PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

In community venues, groups and everyday relationships



SHARE IT FURTHER

Learners, service users, friends, family, neighbours and other communities

Our volunteer support infrastructure



LearnWorlds learning platform



127 practical guides



20 interactive courses



45+ development sessions (face-to-face or hybrid)



Weekly newsletter and resources



Volunteer handbook, tools and peer support

From volunteering for Starting Point to building community capacity

Digital Champions became embedded in libraries, foodbanks, community organisations and other local settings. Many volunteers have also gone on to use their skills in new roles, in their workplaces and within their own communities.

30

community
venues reached

6,000+

hours of digital
volunteering
across Stockport



What difference did it make?

At the start of the project, we identified five outcomes that we wanted our investment in digital volunteering to contribute towards.

Together, they reflected an ambition not simply to recruit more volunteers, but to use volunteering to make digital support more accessible, more personal and more connected to communities.

Over the following three years, these outcomes provided the framework for our work. How we delivered them evolved as we learned more about our volunteers, our communities and the different ways people need and want digital support.

Our original outcomes:

Outcome 1

More people got the support they needed to get online and stay safe online

Outcome 2

More people with barriers to mainstream learning accessed the support they needed

Outcome 3

More people learned the skills they wanted to learn

Outcome 4

More people received long-term support from a friendly volunteer, building local connections and relationships

Outcome 5

More volunteers were created, developed and retained

The following pages look at each outcome in more detail: what we did, what changed, and what we learned along the way.



Outcome 1

More people got the support they needed to get online and stay safe online



More people got the support they needed to get online and stay safe online

The project increased the availability of digital support by developing people who could provide help within their own communities. Over the three years, 387 people were trained as digital volunteers, including 130 Digital Champions and 257 Digital Friends. Digital Champions provided regular support through public-facing group and drop-in sessions, while Digital Friends used their understanding of digital exclusion to support service users, friends, family and neighbours or help them find appropriate support.

This support was embedded across the borough rather than being limited to Starting Point.

Digital volunteering reached 30 community venues, with 13 organisations hosting Digital Champions, helping to make support available through places and organisations people already used.

Across the project, volunteers contributed more than 6,000 hours of their time with more than 12,700 individual visits for support over the full 3 years.

As the project developed, we recognised that people did not always need formal digital skills training. Sometimes they needed someone nearby who understood the problem, could offer practical help or knew where to find further support.

This learning helped shape the distinction between Digital Champions and Digital Friends and enabled digital support to happen both within organised sessions and through people's existing relationships and networks.

Sarah helped by the team at local libraries

Library Digital Champions have supported Sarah to feel more confident using her device. Some sessions she has a one-off concern, but she also comes in regularly to build on her skills using a smart phone. Sarah says: "The Digital Champions have been so helpful, most importantly they are not patronising. I'm glad that this service is there for me and it's invaluable to me. What haven't we done? We've covered quite a few things, phone contacts, how to deal with notifications, permanently deleted some spam messages, learned to use Whats app, which is essential as my family use it all the time, and it can be quite confusing. For me it's been essential, this help has given me more confidence."



Outcome 2

More people with barriers to mainstream learning accessed the support they needed

Starting Point

More people with barriers to mainstream learning accessed the support they needed

A key part of the project was taking digital support into communities rather than expecting people to find and access traditional learning opportunities. Over the three years, digital volunteering reached 30 community venues, with 13 organisations hosting Digital Champions. This created opportunities for people to access help through familiar local organisations and community settings.

The development of the Digital Friend model also broadened how support could be provided. Digital Friends were people who understood digital exclusion and used that knowledge to help service users, friends, family and neighbours overcome barriers or find appropriate support. This meant that help did not always depend on someone attending a formal course or even a Digital Champion session.

Over the course of the project, we learned that people's motivations, confidence, available time and the ways in which communities seek help vary considerably. The model evolved in response, creating different ways for people to give and receive digital support rather than relying on a single approach.

Of the people our digital champions have supported:

- 35% have told us they have a disability
- 23% are retired
- 34% are over 60
- 18% have no formal qualifications
- 30% live in social housing

Stuart's story of familiar faces and space

Stuart's experience shows why taking digital support into familiar, accessible community spaces matters. Stuart is blind and hard of hearing, and received support at his local library, somewhere he described as familiar, welcoming and easy to reach. The team helped resolve an issue connecting his hearing aids to his phone, removing a digital barrier that was directly affecting his everyday life. Importantly, the support did not stop with Stuart: a Digital Champion was shown how to provide the same support in future, building local knowledge and capacity so that other people facing similar barriers can be helped too.

Read more about Stuart's story here





Outcome 3

More people learned the skills they wanted to learn

More people learned the skills they wanted to learn

The project created a network of people able to help others develop their digital skills in ways that were practical and relevant to them. Rather than digital learning being confined to formal courses, Digital Champions provided regular support through public-facing groups and drop-in sessions, giving people opportunities to ask questions, practise skills and access support within community settings.

This capacity grew substantially over the three years.

- 387 people were trained as digital volunteers - 130 Digital Champions and 257 Digital Friends
- digital volunteering reaching 30 community venues
- more than 6,000 hours of volunteer time contributed.

The project also recognised that learning does not only happen in organised sessions. Digital Friends used their knowledge to help service users, friends, family and neighbours overcome digital barriers or find appropriate support.

This extended opportunities for people to develop their skills through everyday relationships as well as through formal volunteering activity.

Over three years, the model evolved as we learned more about people's motivations, confidence, available time and the different ways communities seek help. This helped us develop a more flexible approach to digital learning and support, rather than assuming that everyone wanted or needed the same route.

Trish helped by Makayla

Makayla has built up a friendly relationship with Trish over time, supporting her with using her devices, and learning new skills at Cornerstone.

Trish said "One example - I needed support to get my i-phone to speak to my home Wifi, I got lost in the process of it. Well, we went over it a few times and how to use the keyboard on the phone and I practised on my notes app. It was just the right pace for me and Makayla was right, I really just needed to practise. I think she should write a book for the real beginners like me. Makayla has been an absolute godsend." Trish has even gone on to recommended looking at Starting Point's guide to other learners, which led to another learner being introduced to Learnworlds resources.



Outcome 4

More people received long-term support from a friendly volunteer, building local connections and relationships



More people received long-term support from a friendly volunteer, building local connections and relationships

The project was designed to build a community of local Digital Champions, connected through Starting Point's training and support, who could use their own relationships and networks to help reduce digital exclusion across Stockport. Over three years, this developed into a network of 387 trained digital volunteers, contributing more than 6,000 hours of volunteering.

Digital Champions provided regular support through public-facing groups and drop-in sessions, creating opportunities for people to return for help rather than digital support being a one-off intervention. The project also developed the Digital Friend model, recognising that trusted support often happens through existing relationships with service users, friends, family and neighbours.

This helped build digital support into local communities and relationships rather than locating it solely within Starting Point. By the end of the project, digital volunteering had reached 30 community venues and 13 organisations had hosted Digital Champions. Importantly, all eight of the project's current host organisations were continuing digital volunteering beyond the end of the Lottery funding, providing evidence that relationships and local capacity developed through the project would continue.

A good example of this ongoing, relationship-based support came from one of our Digital Champions, Ian, at a community drop-in.

A learner arrived visibly anxious after receiving a letter telling him he needed to move to Universal Credit. He had only recently got a smartphone and told us,

“I don’t know anything about computers... I’ve no idea how to use it.”

Ian supported him to create his online account, helped him understand what information he would need to complete his claim and, importantly, arranged to continue supporting him at the next session.

This demonstrates the value of having a familiar volunteer available in a community setting: support does not have to end when one immediate task is completed; people can return, build confidence and work through the next step with someone they know.



Outcome 5

More volunteers were created, developed and retained



More volunteers were created, developed and retained

Volunteer development was at the heart of the project. Over three years, 387 people were trained as digital volunteers, including 130 Digital Champions and 257 Digital Friends.

Together they contributed more than 6,000 hours of volunteering, with digital volunteering reaching 30 community venues and 13 organisations hosting Digital Champions.

Lottery funding enabled Starting Point to put dedicated infrastructure around those volunteers. A full-time Volunteering Lead provided capacity to develop the policies, processes and systems needed to recruit, support and manage the growing network. Investment in development included an online training platform, regular face-to-face training and weekly practical guides designed to keep volunteers' knowledge and digital skills up to date.

As the project developed, this support grew into a wider volunteer development offer, including initial training, LearnWorlds, weekly guides, Tea & Tech, newsletters, peer support, a steering group and ongoing development. This created a structure through which volunteers could continue learning and remain connected rather than their involvement ending after their initial training.

The project also learned that volunteering needed to accommodate different motivations, levels of confidence and amounts of time people could give. The distinction between Digital Champions, providing regular public-facing support, and Digital Friends, using their knowledge through existing relationships and communities, developed from that learning. There are encouraging signs of that capacity continuing beyond the project: with trained volunteers continuing to use their digital volunteering skills in other roles and communities, and all eight current host organisations planned to continue digital volunteering beyond the Lottery funding.

Starting
Point

Qiushi's Story

Creating community connection





Starting Point

When Qiushi became a Digital Champion, he already brought technical skills with him. With a background in electronics engineering and a strong sense of community, he saw volunteering as an opportunity to put those skills to use while making connections with people locally.

“It’s an excellent opportunity to use my skills.... while building meaningful connections with people around me.”

But his experience as a Digital Champion taught him that good digital support is about much more than knowing how technology works. One experience particularly stayed with him. A woman came to a session frustrated because the screen on her smartwatch would not turn off. Rather than simply fixing the problem for her, Qiushi reassured her that technology can be difficult for anyone and encouraged her to work through the settings herself. As she did, she spotted the solution.

For Qiushi, what initially appeared to be a simple technical problem became an important lesson about confidence, emotions and how we help people to help themselves.

“I realised how important it is to acknowledge people’s emotions; sometimes, our emotions get in the way of resolving the issue.”

He recognised that his role was not necessarily to have all the answers or to take over someone's device. By helping the learner find the right direction, he had enabled her to solve the problem herself, and potentially deal with similar problems independently in the future.

Qiushi's experience also demonstrates that the impact of volunteering does not end when somebody leaves their Digital Champion role.

As he prepared to move on to university, Qiushi reflected on how volunteering had developed his understanding of people's different needs and the importance of communicating with respect. He plans to move into teaching and believes the experience he gained through volunteering will help him in that next stage.

“This will greatly help me understand the diverse needs of different people, and how to communicate with genuine help and respect.”

For Starting Point, this is an important part of the legacy of the project. Digital Champions don't just develop digital knowledge. They develop confidence, communication skills and a deeper understanding of how to support people. The best Digital Champions don't simply fix technology for people, they create the conditions where people can solve problems for themselves. We also love that Qiushi has stayed in touch with the friends he made whilst volunteering.

Did we deliver what we promised?

Although the way we delivered it evolved over the three years as we learned what effective digital volunteering looked like in practice.

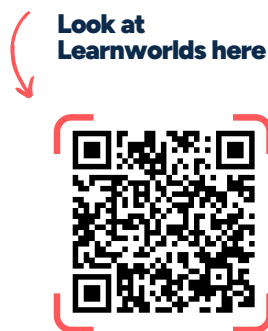
The original ambition was to create a community of local Digital Champions, connected through Starting Point's training and support, who could use their relationships and networks to help reduce digital exclusion across Stockport.

By the end of the project, 387 people had been trained as digital volunteers, volunteering had reached 30 community venues, 13 organisations had hosted Digital Champions, and volunteers had contributed more than 6,000 hours.

What changed was our understanding of what being a digital volunteer could look like. We developed two distinct ways for people to contribute: Digital Champions provided regular support to others through public-facing group and drop-in sessions. Digital Friends understood digital exclusion and used that knowledge to help service users, friends, family and neighbours overcome barriers or find appropriate support.

This distinction emerged from what we learned about people's motivations, confidence, available time and the different ways communities seek help. Rather than expecting every volunteer to make the same commitment or support people in the same way, the model became more flexible.

At the same time, we built the infrastructure needed to support volunteers beyond their initial training. Lottery funding enabled a full-time Volunteering Lead and investment in policies and processes, an online training platform, regular face-to-face training and weekly practical guides. The wider development model included LearnWorlds, Tea & Tech, newsletters, peer support, a steering group and ongoing development.



Starting Point

Learnworlds Legacy



16
online
training courses



131
free
learner guides

We have developed an online learning platform (Learnworlds) designed to support Digital Champions, organisations and people developing their digital skills. The platform provides a central, accessible space where Digital Champions can develop their own knowledge and skills, while also accessing practical resources they can use when supporting others.

The platform includes a range of e-learning courses covering key areas of digital inclusion, alongside a growing library of free learner guides. These guides provide practical, easy-to-follow support with everyday digital tasks and can be used by Digital Champions during one-to-one support, digital drop-ins and community learning sessions.

A key part of the project has been co-creating resources with Digital Champions. Rather than developing resources in isolation, we have worked with Digital Champions to understand their experiences, challenges and the types of support they need when working with learners. Their feedback and knowledge have helped shape the content, format and approach of the resources, ensuring they are practical, accessible and relevant to real-world situations.

This approach has also helped us recognise that Digital Champions need ongoing support, rather than simply completing an initial training course. The platform gives them a place they can return to whenever they need to refresh their knowledge, find information or access resources for a particular learner and reduces the time they need to spend searching for information or creating their own materials. Therefore, allows them to focus more of their time on supporting learners.

We have established a sustainable learning hub that can continue to develop in response to changing digital needs, with new courses and resources added over time.

What will last?

The end of the Lottery funding does not mean the end of volunteering at Starting Point. One of the most important changes over the three years has been moving from volunteering being primarily managed through a dedicated Volunteering Lead to volunteer management becoming a skill and responsibility shared across the Starting Point team.

Our staff now have the experience and skills to involve, support and manage volunteers as part of their own areas of work. This means volunteering can be built into all of our community sessions and projects, rather than sitting alongside delivery as a separate activity.

We are therefore moving into the next stage without a dedicated Volunteering Lead, but not without volunteer infrastructure. The Lottery investment has given us the foundations we need: an established online learning portal, training and development resources, skilled staff, clear processes and an organisational commitment to volunteering. The project also developed a wider support pathway including initial training, LearnWorlds, weekly guides, Tea & Tech, newsletters, peer support and ongoing development.

There is also strong evidence that volunteering has become embedded beyond Starting Point. All eight of our current host organisations are continuing digital volunteering beyond the Lottery funding, and 42 people are known to be continuing to use their digital volunteering skills in other roles and communities.

The legacy of the project is therefore not the continuation of one post. It is that the knowledge, skills and infrastructure developed through that post now sit across Starting Point and our wider network.

We finish the project with a different model from the one we started with: one where volunteering can be incorporated into our wider delivery, supported by skilled staff and established resources, while Digital Champions and Digital Friends continue to use their skills within their own organisations and communities.

Final reflection

Three years ago, we set out to build a community of local Digital Champions who could help reduce digital exclusion across Stockport.

What developed was broader than we originally envisaged: 387 trained digital volunteers, more than 6,000 hours freely given, activity across 30 community venues and a model that recognises the many different ways people can help others with digital.

The project taught us that successful digital volunteering is not simply about recruiting and training people. Volunteers need different ways to contribute, continued opportunities to develop and the support and confidence to use their skills. This learning shaped the development of both Digital Champions and Digital Friends, alongside the training, resources and ongoing support that sit around them.

Perhaps the most important change is within Starting Point itself. Volunteering is no longer something that sits with one person or one funded project. Our staff have developed the skills to support and manage volunteers, enabling volunteering to become part of our wider community delivery.

As the dedicated Volunteering Lead role comes to an end, we do so with an established online learning portal, skilled staff, developed resources, experienced volunteers, community partnerships and a continued organisational commitment to volunteering.

The National Lottery Community Fund gave us three years to build, test and learn. The lasting value of that investment is that volunteering is now part of how Starting Point works and the skills developed through the project continue within the organisations, communities and relationships around us. Thank you.

