

Digital Inclusion for Older Isolated people

A How To Guide for digital inclusion
in health

March 2019



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Introduction

Older people are big users of health care services, but many aren't currently making efficient use of them, or feeling in control of their health or health treatment plans.

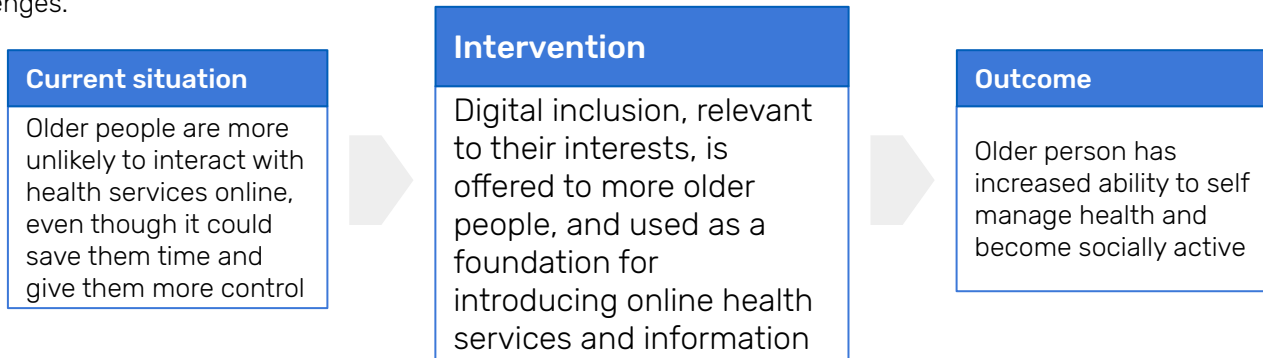
The Sunderland Pathfinder set out to see whether digital inclusion could be a foundation for giving older people the skills and confidence they need to engage with digital health, manage and take control of their health.

The potential benefits of digital health for older people include increased visibility of health records and easier access to make and change appointments. But many older people face mobility, memory and confidence challenges.

Attending digital skills classes, to learn things they are interested in, near to their home or in their home, helped.

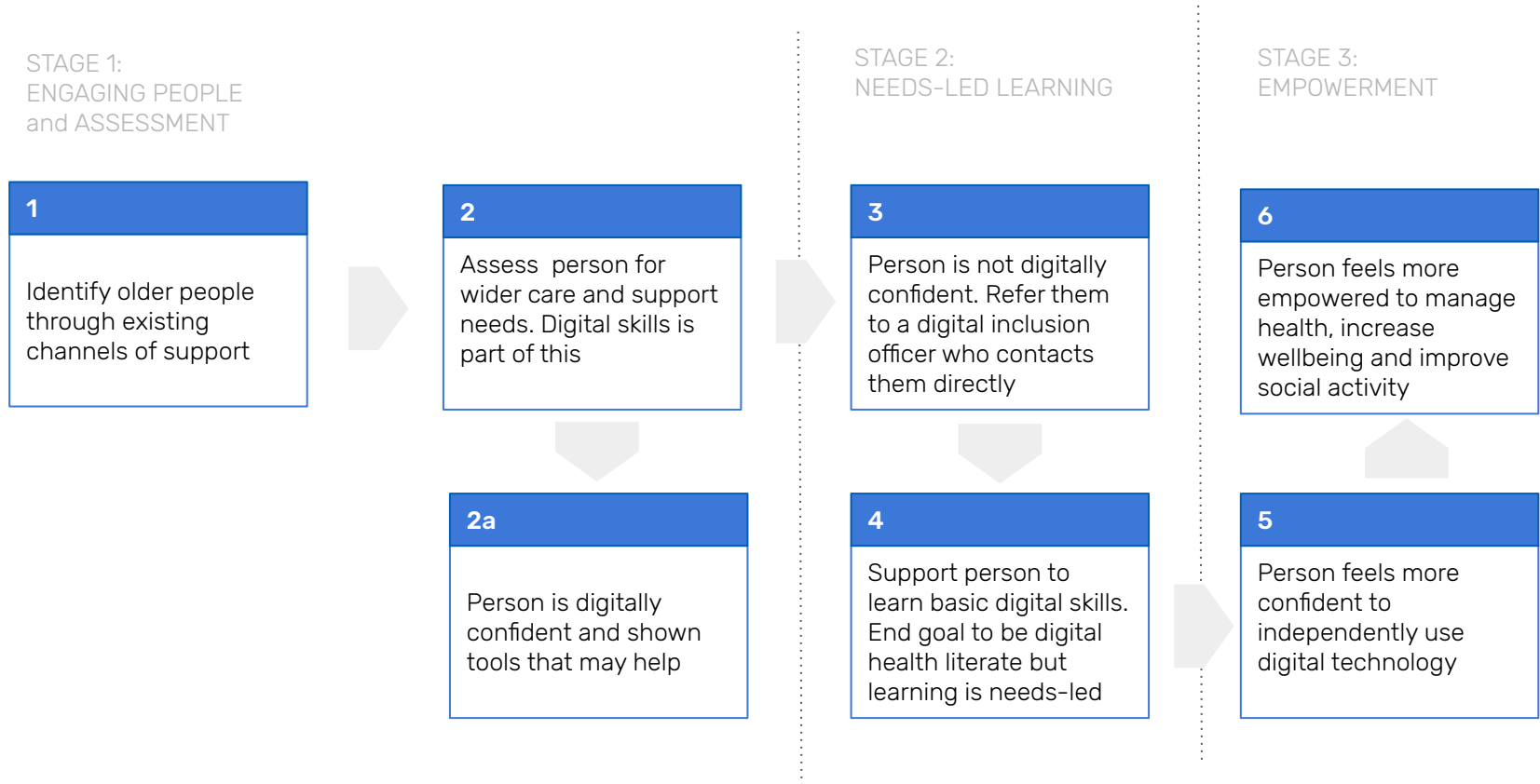
We worked with Age UK in Sunderland to test a partnership with Sunderland City Council, to see if more isolated older people could be reached and supported to improve their health and wellbeing outcomes.

This guide is the result of a 12 month co-designed Pathfinder. Here is the theory of change for the Pathfinder:



Intervention model

Model: Digital inclusion for older isolated people

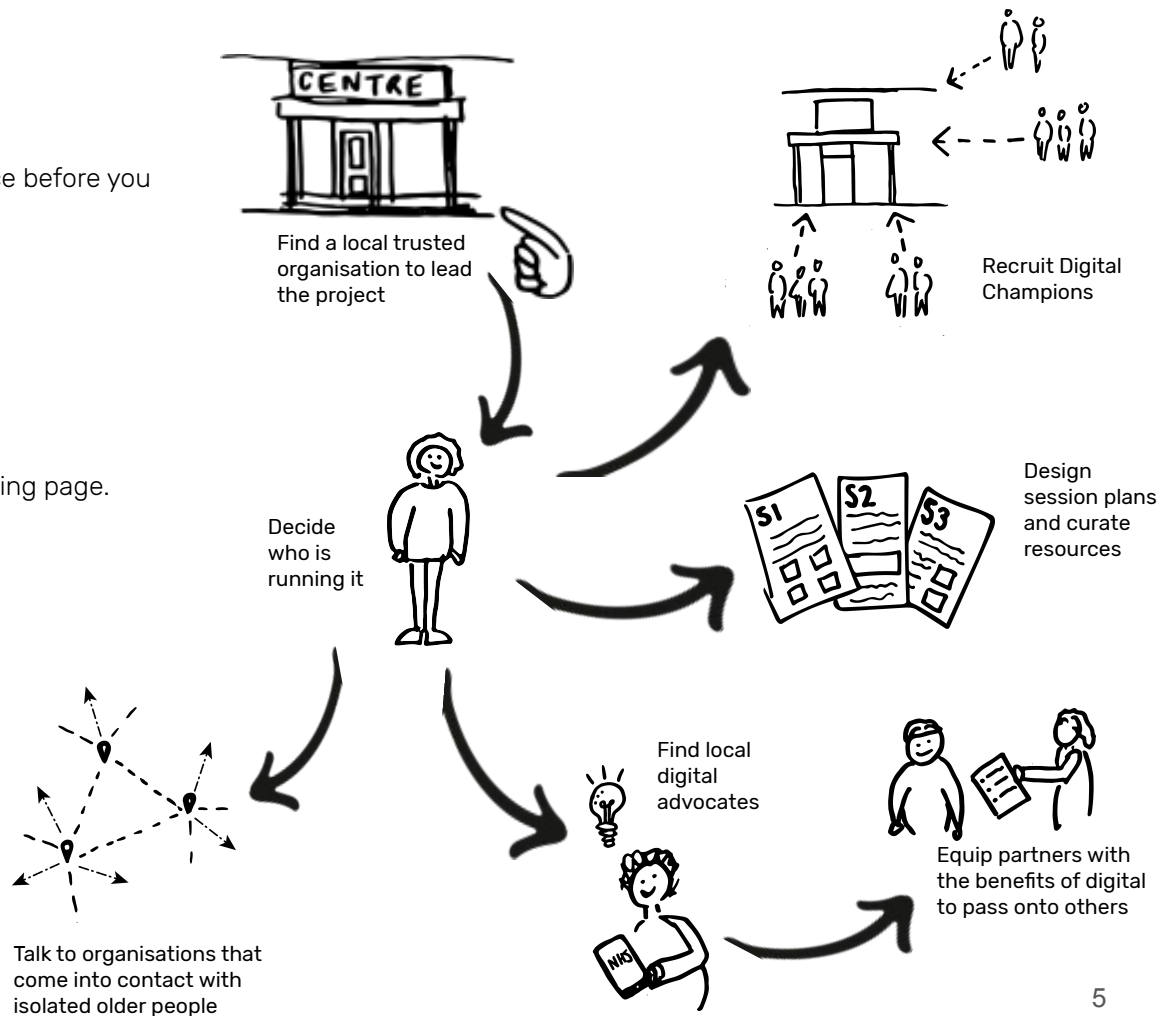


Before you start

This section describes the things to do and put in place before you start. Broadly they cover the following things:

- Where and how to find people
- Who to involve in your team
- Partners
- Resources

These steps are described in more detail on the following page.

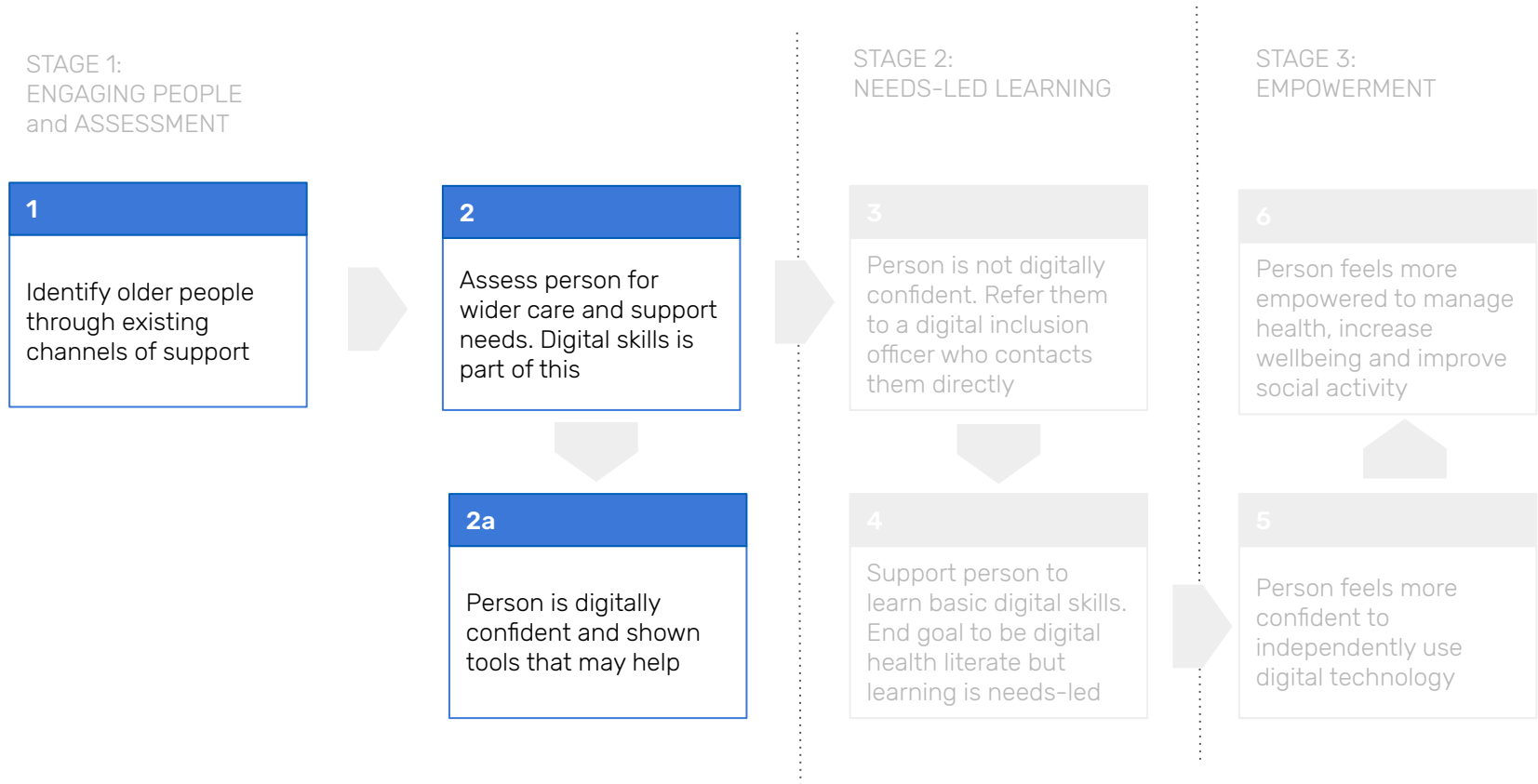


Before you start cont'd

1. Decide which organisation is leading the project. This should be one that works with older people, that has a venue and offers opportunities to learn. It was [Age UK](#) in this Pathfinder.
2. Decide who is running it. It will need a full-time coordinator that has organisational and delivery skills; is well connected and with experience of digital health projects.
3. Understand who is working with older people in your area, particularly those who come into contact with isolated older people. The bigger the reach, the better.
4. Find local digital advocates - people who understand the benefits of digital and can pass this onto their workforce. For us this was Emma Anderson, Service Manager for the Occupational Therapy, People Directorate at Sunderland City Council.
5. Talk to people who visit older people in their homes and produce a [script and referral form](#) they can use. Make sure they understand the benefits of digital so they can pass this onto others. The Council and the Independent Living Team is a good place to start. Don't make it an onerous part of their job. Give them leaflets about the service.
6. Tell colleagues about the service. Tell them what it entails and how to refer people to it.
7. Find venues in the community where you can hold classes. E.g. libraries and specialist organisations like those supporting people with dementia.
8. Recruit volunteer Digital Champions to help. This takes time, and they will need DBS checks. Ex IT tutors are often good.
9. Design session plans, [collate resources](#) and create new ones where necessary.

Intervention model - Engaging People and Assessment

Model: Digital inclusion for older isolated people



STAGE 1: Engaging People and Assessment

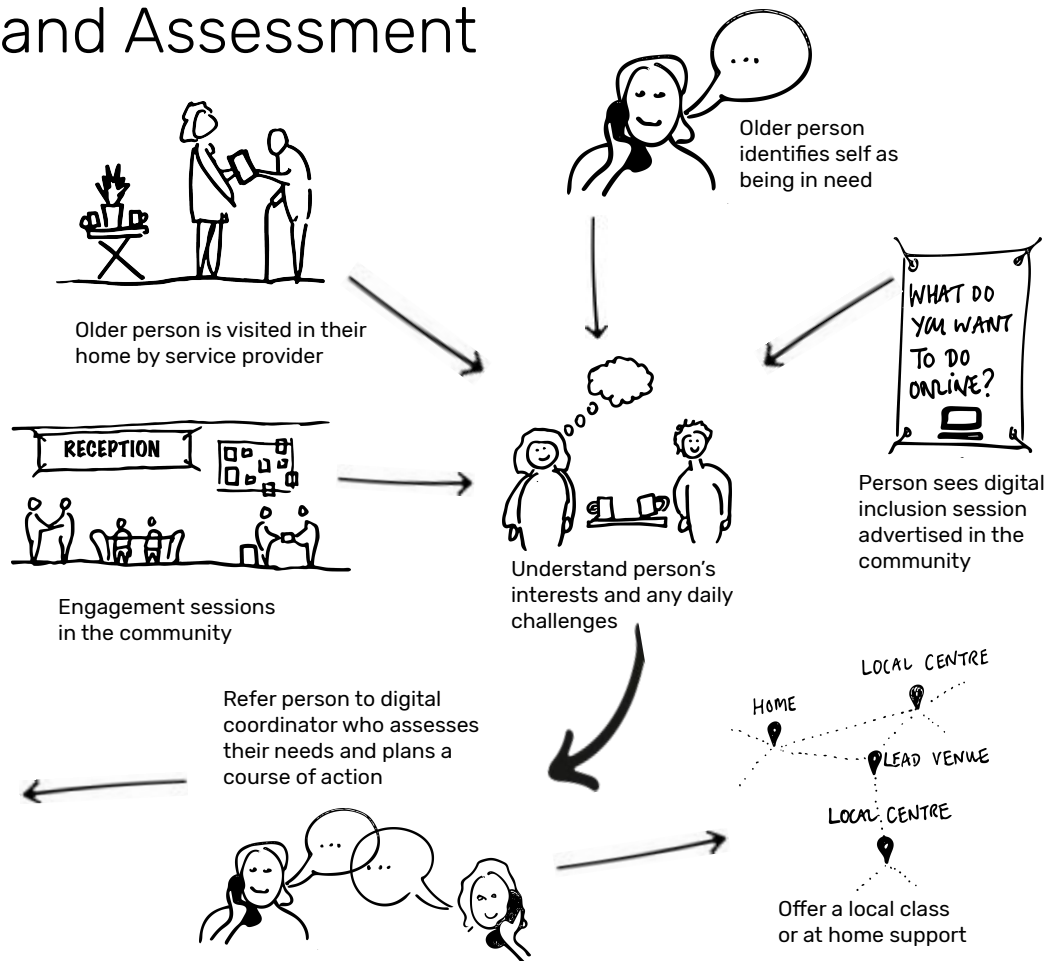
This section describes the things to do to engage older people and assess their needs. Broadly they cover the following things:

- How to find people
- How they can find you
- How to assess their needs
- How to refer people
- Finding a location that suits them

These steps are described in more detail on the following page.



Refer person to other services if not interested/in need



STAGE 1: Engaging People and Assessment cont'd

1. Try patient engagement sessions in the community - at GP practices and [supermarkets](#) (but the latter can be challenging) Ask patients about their use of digital and whether they're signed up to online prescriptions and appointments etc. If they're interested, tell them about the digital inclusion service.
2. Having already informed colleagues and partners, they can assess older people's needs and offer them the service where appropriate. Think about what the person is interested in and the challenges they face, offering digital as a solution.
3. In the case of this Pathfinder, the older person rings Sunderland City Council Customer Service Centre and is referred to the Community Therapy Team. The Community Therapy Service worker then visits the older person in their home, assess their needs and offers them the digital inclusion service where appropriate.
4. After initial engagement and confirmed interest, pass older person's details onto Coordinator who gives them a call, assesses their needs and plans a course of action. If they're not interested they can be referred to other services. If they are interested, offer them a class near them or home visits.

STAGE 1: Engaging People and Assessment

People who are needed

Project Coordinator at lead organisation, in this case a Digital Inclusion Officer: who can oversee everything, be the main contact for partners, recruit and manage Digital Champions, design and deliver sessions.

Senior sponsor at lead organisation: to give strategic direction and support project coordinator

Digital Advocate: Heads of Service/sponsors in partner organisations who can advocate for importance of digital and drive staff to promote service to their clients

Social Workers (or equivalents): who can offer the service to people they visit in their homes

Heads of community venues: to organise and timetable sessions and commit to promoting to clients

General Practice Managers: who can get you space and time in their surgery to promote your service, hopefully get GPs on board too.

Resources that are needed

Funding for the Digital Inclusion Officer as it will take dedicated resource to get things up and running and build the trust needed to engage people.

Referral mechanisms, including forms for things like Home Risk Assessments and engagement scripts for partners

Digital skills surveys for community engagement events

Marketing: Leaflets to advertise offer, including case studies on how people are benefitting

Community venues to deliver sessions as close as possible to where the need is

Protocols to send General Practice Managers about what the project involves and how it might benefit them

Think about **public liability insurance** if doing events at supermarkets

STAGE 1: Engaging People and Assessment

Don't:

- Just offer digital inclusion or basic IT classes and presume people will be interested
- Assume partners and colleagues are advocates for digital and know how to assess skills and understand the motivations of older people

Do:

- Find out about people first, what they're interested in. Taking time to understand people's lives and their other needs.
- Make sure people offering the service are confident and understand the benefits of digital. Whether they are in people's homes, in supermarkets or GP surgeries. Keep in contact and reflect on partnership and referrals and iterate as you go.

Don't:

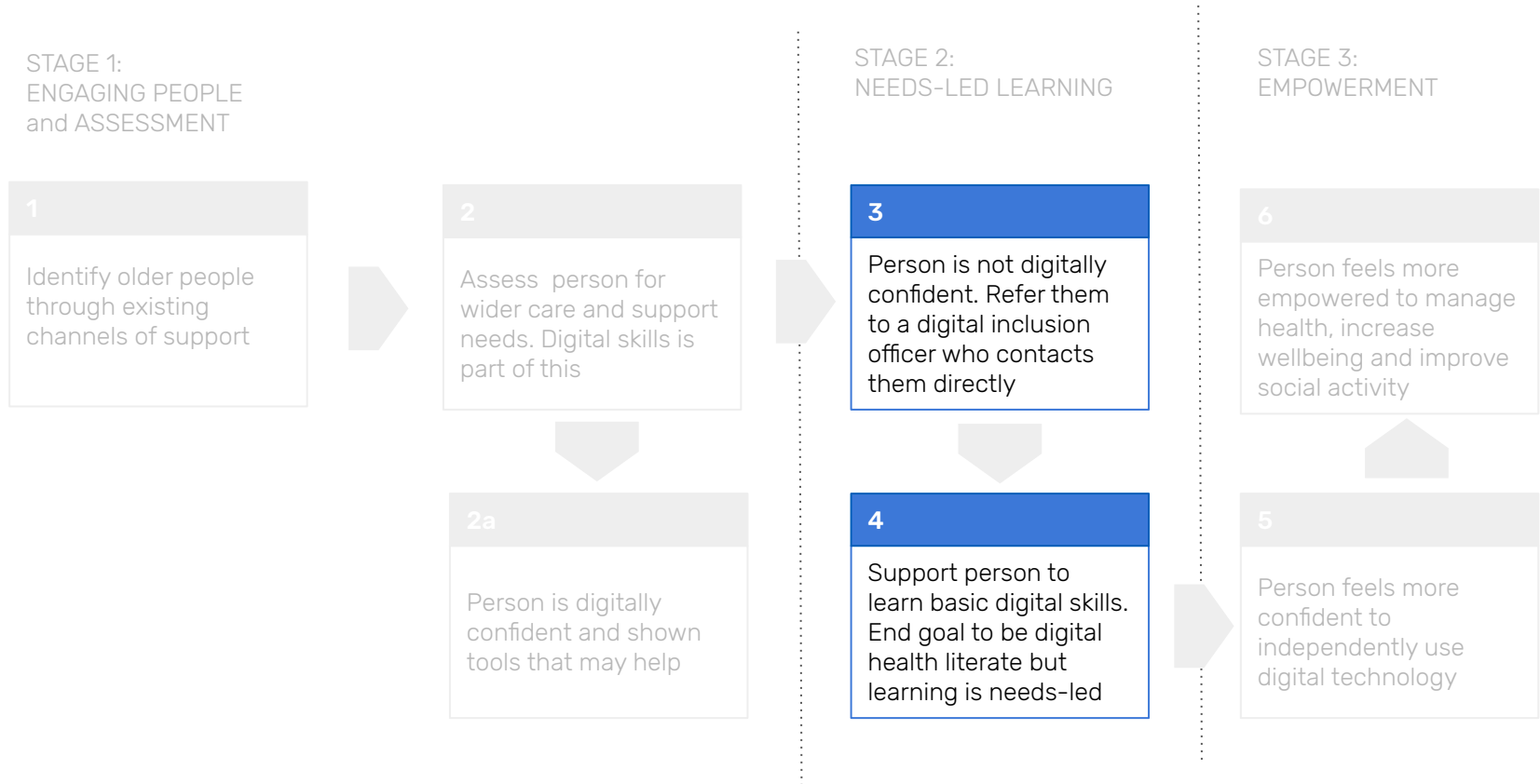
- Narrow the hooks in your marketing materials.
- Narrow where interest can come from.

Do:

- Think about all the things people can benefit from online
- Offer the service to existing clients. Put posters up and be open to engagement via relatives, neighbours or friends on clients' behalf.
- Think about how to engage unpaid carers. They will make it easier to engage and support the people they care for, and they could benefit hugely themselves

Intervention model - Needs-led learning

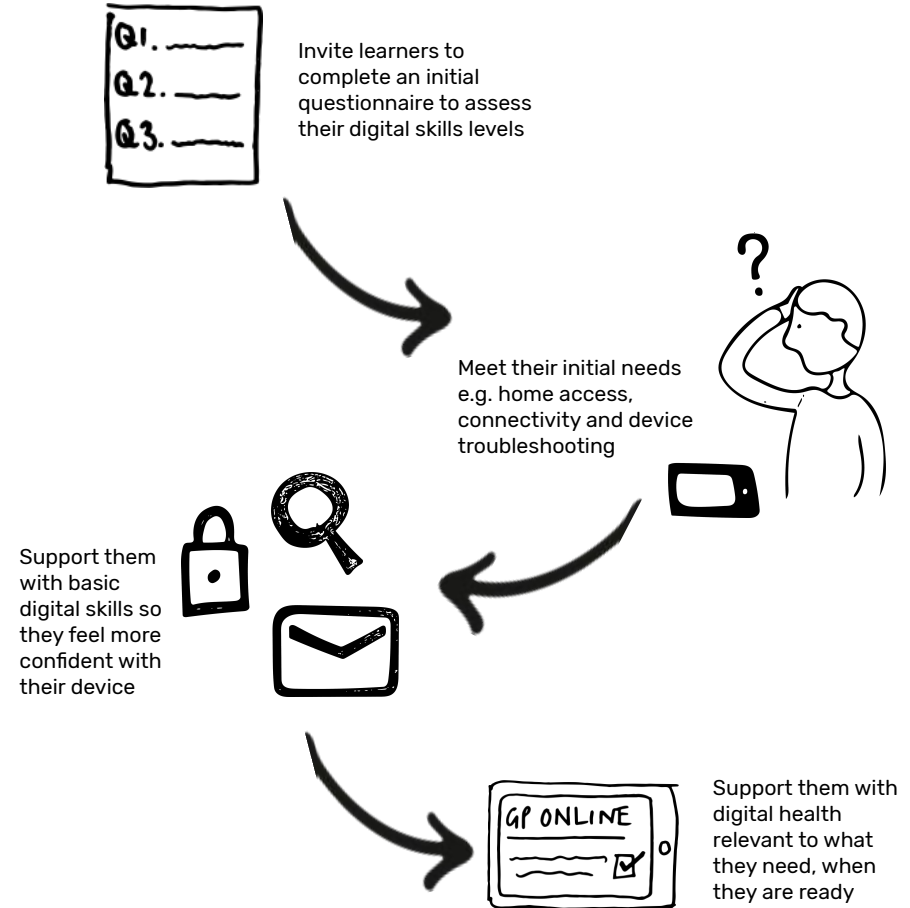
Model: Digital inclusion for older isolated people



STAGE 2: Needs-led learning

From the list of things to do online, we found that some people were attracted by digital health, but they needed to know the basics. For those that just wanted to know the basics, we supported them to find out more about digital health anyway. Here's what we found works:

1. Establish current digital understanding of learners.
2. Teach the basics first including how to use a device, security and internet basics. Age UK offered 6x1.5 hours.
3. When people are ready, support them with digital health such as online GP registration and appointments, health tools, repeat prescriptions, accessing health records and a healthy lifestyle. Sunderland offered 2x1.5 hours on this.
4. Put on regular sessions. Sunderland supported people for 12-15 hours.
5. Find the right resources. [Learn My Way](#) provides consistency and a structure for people with no teaching experience, but bespoke learning resources may also need to be created. Talk people through Learn My Way, sharing your experiences. Do things for real and in theory. Support people in small groups with the chance for one to one support too.



STAGE 2: Needs-led learning

People who are needed

Project Coordinator at lead organisation, in this case a Digital Inclusion Officer: who can manage Digital Champions, design and deliver sessions.

Digital Champions: who can support the project coordinator to deliver sessions and give clients 1:1 support but not necessarily lead sessions.

Resources that are needed

Learn My Way and project lead's own bespoke resources suitable for learners

Session plans

Devices. In the case of Sunderland we used tablets. Some people will have their own, some will need to borrow a device.

Tools:

- [NHS Choices](#) - symptoms, treatment, things to do yourself, A-Z of medications (instantly easier to read than standard leaflets that come with medication due to size of font/print)
- [Patient Access UK](#)
- Condition specific websites like [British Heart Foundation](#), [Diabetes UK](#), [Parkinson's UK](#)
- [patient.info](#)

STAGE 2: Needs-led learning

Don't:

- Introduce digital health too early
- Assume that just because someone is digitally excluded, they're not savvy
- Put too much pressure on volunteers
- Stop talking to project partners

Do:

- Make sure the kit works
- Use Learn My Way to help provide a learning structure for volunteers with no teaching experience
- Have someone coordinating the activity - for reliability and continuity
- Make sure volunteers are ready, and be flexible just in case you lose some volunteers
- Think about how to reach people who can't afford technology. Signpost them to the library and other local venues
- Keep nudging project partners to remind them the project exists

Don't:

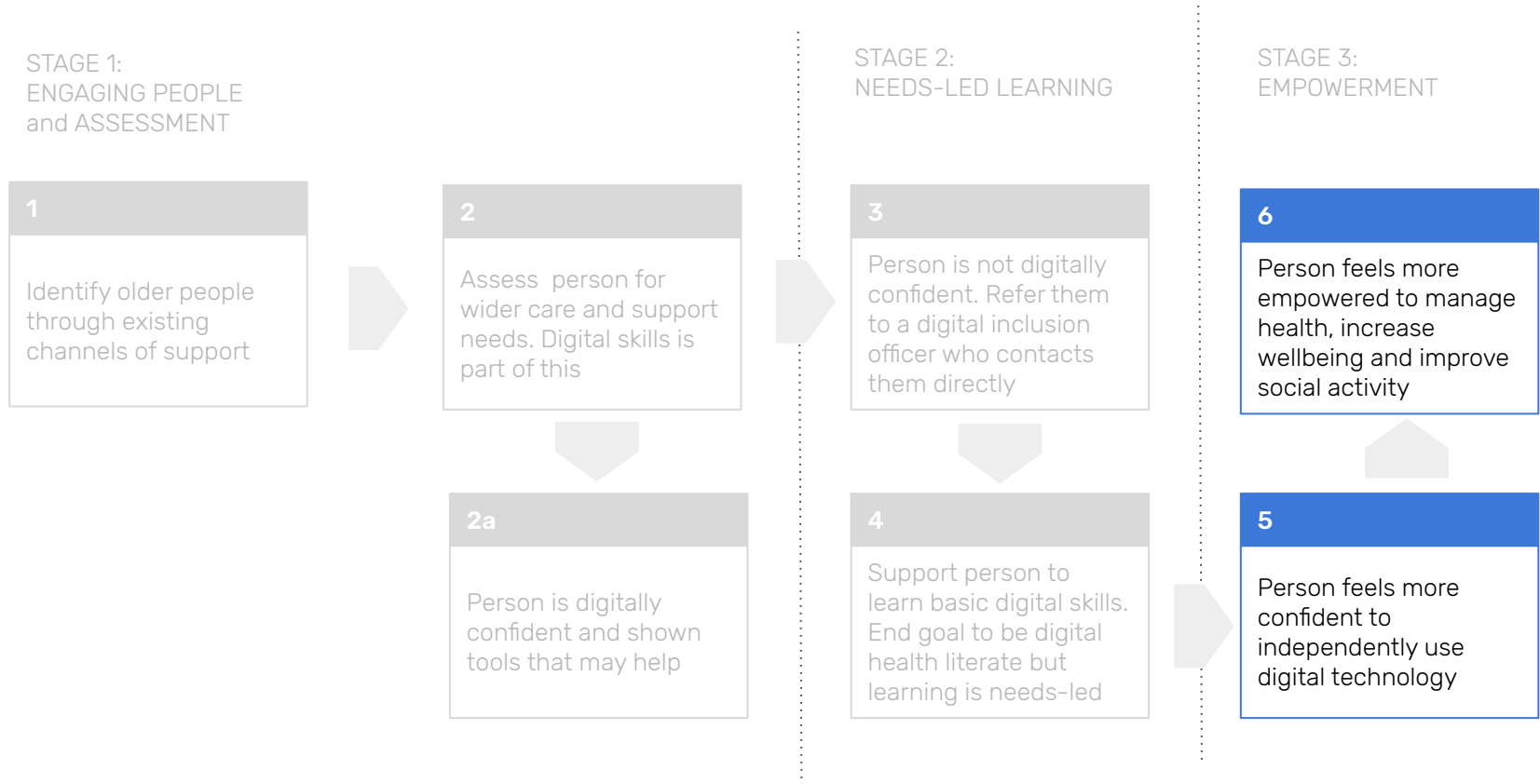
- Keep things the same if they're not working
- Be too technical. It's important to have a degree of technical expertise with different devices but keep it simple and in plain English.

Do:

- Think about learners with low confidence and how to retain them. Offer people home support if classes aren't working, and offer classes as people become more confident
- Support volunteers to realise it's about problem solving together, rather than technical skills per se
- Be prepared to give unbiased advice on equipment and connectivity

Intervention model - Empowerment

Model: Digital inclusion for older isolated people



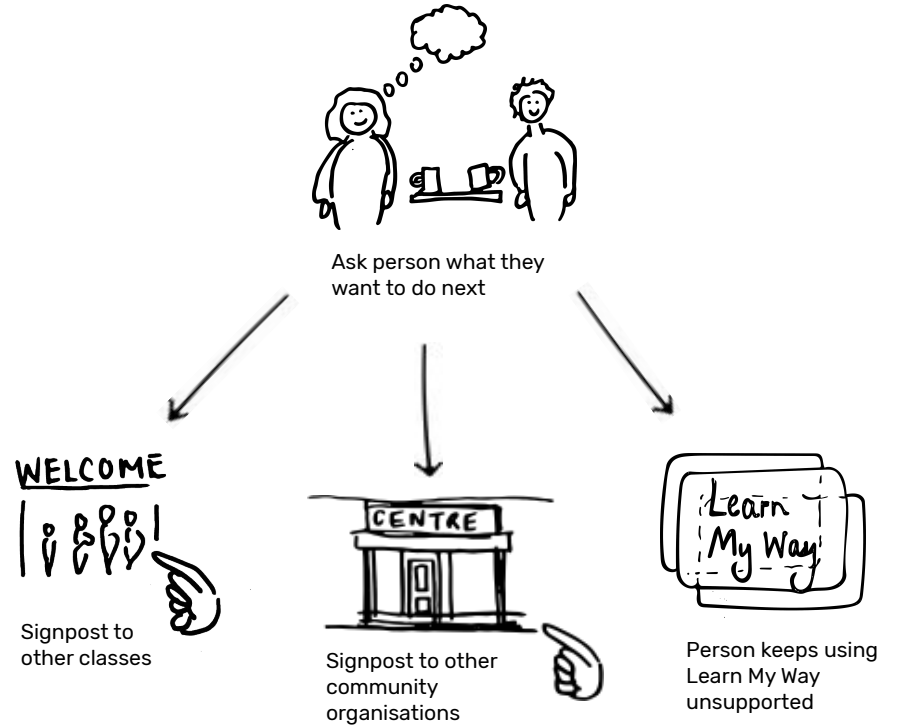
STAGE 3: Empowerment

By following the stages in the previous sections, it's hoped you will start to see the following outcomes in individual learners:

1. Person feels more confident to independently use digital technology
2. Person feels more empowered to manage health, increase wellbeing and improve social activity

It's important to think about sustaining the person's skills so it's a good time to plan next steps with each learner. Next steps could include: referrals to other classes to carry on learning, and/or carrying on accessing Learn My Way independently if they want to.

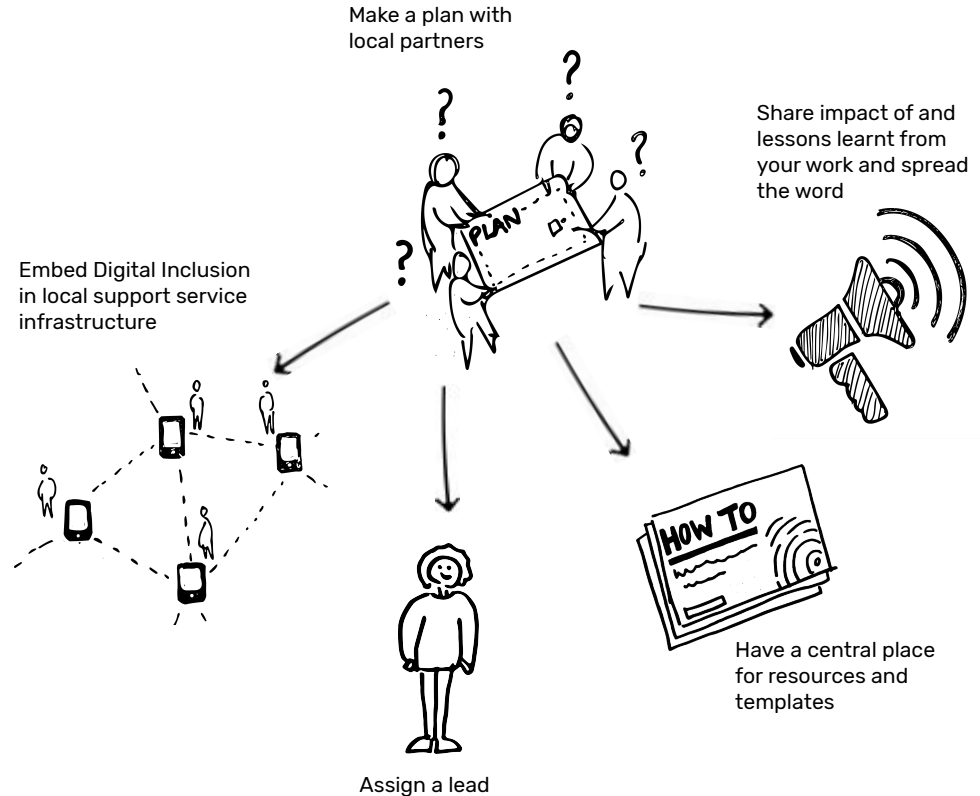
Think about where people can access other digital skills support such as at a local library or community hub. A lot of people will want to carry on with same teachers and volunteers, but this isn't always possible, which is especially difficult for people who have received home visits.



STAGE 3: Empowerment cont'd

It's also important to sustain the partnerships and referral paths that have been set up. Talk to partner organisations throughout the project about their ideas for keeping it going, and make sure you are clear who is leading the work, ensuring their time is properly resourced.

The thing you want to try and do is embed digital inclusion in local support infrastructure and get as many older people organisations to talk to their clients about digital inclusion as possible. Having impact data and knowledge to share about what works and what doesn't will help attract new partners, as would having a pool of [useful resources and templates](#) ready for people to use.



STAGE 3: Empowerment

Don't:

- Assume the project and work you've set up will keep going without a plan
- Rely on one partner organisation

Do:

- Meet regularly with partners and keep communication channels open, especially with local digital advocates
- Assign a lead to keep ownership clear
- Make the most of systems and processes you've put in place and continue working to embed digital inclusion in local service offers.
- Talk to other organisations that reach isolated older people and use impact data and stories to engage new partners. Promote the good work you've done.

Don't:

- Leave learners without an idea of what to do next
- Promise too much about long term support

Do:

- Manage learner expectations and be clear about how much support you can offer

STAGE 2: Empowerment

People who are needed

Heads of Service/sponsors in partner organisations: who can advocate for importance of digital and keep driving the project

Project Coordinator at lead organisation: who can keep leading the work started and maintain continuity and momentum

Senior sponsor at lead organisation: to give strategic direction and support project coordinator

Resources that are needed

Progression: a list of classes and community venues where learners can be referred to.

Impact data and case studies

Resources and templates: A central place to store all the resources developed

In your area

This is how we did it in Sunderland. We have tried to make the model as flexible as possible allowing for local context and local needs.

To embed this into another area we recommend;

- Finding a local digital advocate, in this case it was in Sunderland City Council's Independent Living Team
- Working closely with the local authority or another partner with a wide reach, to engage with as many isolated older people as possible

If you would like to discuss how you might be able to try something in your area please contact emily@goodthingsfoundation.org

Assets

[Case studies](#)

Design Workshop 1 - [Stakeholder Engagement](#)

Design Workshop 2 - [User Insight](#)

Design Workshop 3 - [Designing the model](#)

[Alpha review](#)

[NHS Choices](#) - symptoms, treatment, things to do yourself, A-Z of medications (instantly easier to read than standard leaflets that come with medication due to size of font/print)

[Patient Access UK](#)

Condition specific websites like

[British Heart Foundation](#), [Diabetes UK](#),

[Parkinson's UK](#)

[Patient.info](#)

[Age UK](#)

[Stoke Pathfinder: Taking digital health to where people are](#)

[Learn My Way](#)

[Collated Resources](#)