Digital Inclusion Programme

DIGITAL HORIZONS

Jan 2024 - Sept 2025

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about Digital Horizons

The UK Partner of Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT)
Digital Horizons is youth-led. We co-design our programmes with our users and are steered by young people with lived experience.

Our Vision

A world where young people belong, lead, and connect through local and global networks to drive inclusive and lasting change.

Our Mission

To equip youth with the skills needed to lead impactful initiatives, foster innovation, and build inclusive communities. Through structured leadership pathways, and peer-to-peer mentorship, we empower young people to transition from learners to leaders of grass-root and local impact.

Guiding Principles

Inclusion & Equity – Every young person, regardless of background, identity, or ability, must have equal access to opportunities, resources, and leadership roles.

Youth-Led & Peer-Driven – Programmes must be designed, led, and driven by youth, ensuring young people are at the forefront of decision-making, advocacy and mentorship.

Mental Health & Well-being – A commitment to integrating well-being, resilience, and emotional support into all initiatives, recognising that thriving youth lead to thriving communities.

What we do

Our programme areas empower youth to create sustainable, inclusive, and transformative change in their communities. Our learning pathways are built on proven curricula to support our impact in the following areas:

Digital Inclusion

Providing essential digital and future-focused skills through youth-led courses and community-based learning.

Climate Action

Supporting young people to lead local climate action using leadership training, climate knowledge and digital skills.

Transition to Work

As Delivery Partner for EqualReach in the UK, we bridge learning to employment by connecting participants with work experience, apprenticeships, and roles at major employers.

This impact report focuses on our achievements within one key area: the **Digital Inclusion Programme**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Project

The Digital Inclusion North East (DI NE) project aims to comprehensively understand and address the needs and challenges faced by displaced youth (age 18 to 35) in the North East of England, in acquiring digital skills and integrating into the digital culture. Conducted by Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) UK in partnership with Good Things Foundation, the initiative seeks to identify and help fill the gaps in mainstream support, highlighting the importance of tailored assistance for displaced youth integration in the region.

Key Findings

1. Existing Support Ecosystem:

The research project mapped and identified displaced youth support organisations, revealing a nuanced landscape of organisational services in the North East which includes those offering housing, English language services, asylum seekers case support, refugee integration services, and business and enterprise training.

2. Ecosystem Gap:

Despite the diverse array of services available in the North East, there is a notable gap in terms of organisations offering digital skills training for entrepreneurship, remote work and employability, to prepare displaced youth for successful transition and integration into the competitive workforce. This gap underscores the need for a collaborative, ecosystem approach to pool resources and expertise to foster an integrated, synergistic environment that amplifies collective impact.

3. Challenges Faced by Displaced Youth (to acquire digital skills):

Mental health disclosure, language barriers, limited access to devices, and connectivity issues emerged as significant hurdles for displaced youth to access and unlock essential digital skills.

4. Challenges Faced by Organizations Supporting Displaced Youth:

Competition for funding stifles collaboration and partnership, negatively affecting the holistic development of displaced people.

Introduction to our *Project*

The project equips displaced youth with digital skills for work. Co-designed with youth themselves and guided by a <u>Youth Leadership Advisory Board</u> with lived experience, the programme takes the learners through different digital learning pathways based on their interests to enable them to grow their foundational Digital Skills. The project plugged a gap which was identified during research and codesign, that despite the diverse array of services available in the North East, there is a notable gap in terms of organisations offering digital skills training for entrepreneurship, remote work and employability, to prepare displaced youth for successful transition.

To address this, we offered DOT's foundational courses to enable youth to learn:
Digital Communication
- Module 1: G-Suite
- Module 2: Work Ethics
- Module 3: Career Planning & Self Marketing

Digital Marketing
- Module 1: Introduction to digital marketing
- Module 2: Building your Online Strategy
- Module 3: Social media Platforms & branding
- Module 4: Digital Marketing Trends

Internet Browsing
- Module 1: Internet and World Wide Web
- Module 2: Email
- Module 3: Data Storage and Cloud

We also offered learners Good Things Foundation 'Learn My Way' courses and provided data from the National Data Bank through the provision of SIM cards. The National Data Bank was used to equip people going through the programme with access to the internet, enabling them to do the learning programme.

We collaborated with Partners in the North East to embed our work at a grassroots level, with strong ties to the local community; UK & UA in Sunderland, Sunderland College, ICOS, Young Asian Voices (YAV) and FODI.

The impact we *created*

- **Youth Leadership:** 2 new YLAB members from the North East joined for leadership and outreach partnership development.
- **Digital Skilling:** 279 learners registered on Learn My Way and completed at least one course, totalling 1,179 topic completions.
- **Advanced Learning:** 62 learners completed one or more DOT LMS modules; 17 earned DOT certificates.
  - Internet Browsing (6)
  - Digital Communications (4)
  - Digital Marketing (7)
- **Connectivity:** 87 SIM cards distributed via the National Databank to enable online learning.
- **Motivational Project:** Provided vouchers of up to £150 to learners who completed the highest number of topics and earned certificates, as a way to encourage continued learning and engagement.

Our Co-design methodology

The DOT UK Learning Management System (LMS) was launched following co-design sessions with the Youth Leadership Advisory Board (YLAB). Three foundational courses shaped by insights from earlier research were offered.

- **Pilot cohort:** 62 participants were recruited through partner organisations, with YLAB's support. They registered on the LMS, completed a pre-assessment to establish baseline skills, and then undertook a four-week, self-paced hybrid programme. A WhatsApp group provided peer support and connection.
- **Engagement**: All 62 learners completed at least one module; 17 earned course certificates.
- **Key insight:** YLAB advised that learners benefit from taking bite-sized Learn My Way courses first, before progressing to the more advanced DOT UK content.
- **Feedback:** Participant feedback was very positive, and many expressed interest in further learning opportunities.

These findings validate the co-design approach and will inform the next iteration of the LMS.

"I am currently studying at the DOT courses. This is a great opportunity for me to gain new skills and recall the forgotten ones. For me, this training is not difficult, but quite informative. A lot of information that I have not faced before in my previous work. Thank you DOT for the new experience and the opportunity to develop." - **Daria Nehreba**

The impact we *created*

Leadership Opportunities

The DINE project was led by young people with lived experience. On the ground, two community leaders were engaged to run the project in person and joined our newly launched Youth Leadership Advisory Board (YLAB) which offered a meaningful opportunity for young people to foster their leadership skills in a real-life scenario. The YLAB was established through a 3 part co-design process and their thought leadership informed our research phase and created an action plan around the purpose and vision of displaced youth integration. As well as leading on this project, the YLAB play an important role in guiding the work of Digital Horizons including:

- **Strategic Advisory:** Providing input to the research working group, influencing adaptations and narratives for a Digital Horizons baseline survey, and analysis of digital skills among refugee communities.
- **Digital Advocacy:** Leadership training and delivering basic digital literacy and modern skills within their communities, assisting in recruitment through their networks.
- **Recruiting New Members:** Engaging peer groups to join research and co-design activities during inception and implementation phases.
- **Job opportunities:** With partners such as Equal reach, YLAB is offering mentorship for candidates recommended for remote work and internship opportunities.

"By having young displaced people at the centre of the decision-making process, it ensures that their voices and needs are heard and acted upon. This helps to create a more inclusive and effective environment that directly meets the needs of the community." **Nirmeet Kaur Baweja, YLAB Chair**

"Coming to the UK from somewhere from Africa it has been quite quite challenging finding myself in a new environment where sometimes you find yourself isolated with a lot of stereotypes with the discrimination and chance but DOT UK have been able to make me find myself again and I just can't imagine emotionally how this group has actually impacted me so much. I want to express my thanks and gratitude to DOT and global DOT UK and the entire members of trustees who have actually been able to support people from displaced backgrounds and I'll say and I'll forever say that I will recommend DOT UK to whatever group of people because the impact the support and the experience have actually been quite immense." **Morlai Kargbo, YLAB Member**

Next steps and
thanks

The project, whilst a success, generated a lot of learnings for the Digital Horizons team. Through this testing phase, a number of insights were gathered which will feed into future iterations of the programme. Digital Horizons thanks our YLAB Members and facilitators, Morlai and Iryna for their hard work. The learnings and actions are as follows:

1. YLAB Members should be recruited locally, ideally from the community that future programmes are seeking to serve. This will enable closer contact with young people and a direct link for the YLAB to the communities the programme is provided for.
2. Registering learners to Learn My Way has the potential to increase the foundational digital learning outcomes of the participants depending on their interests and develop even more skills for them to utilise in the future.
3. Onboarding to DOT UK's LMS should be made easier, to encourage quick and frictionless sign up, making the process more inviting for participants when they first interact. Digital Horizons has plans to implement automatic elements to streamline and simplify the onboarding process.
4. In person support should be offered more. The 12 in person sessions to support participants in whatever way was needed were effective, whether it be for participants using the LMS, LMW or support with data and SIM cards or just gathering to discuss digital learning.
5. Strict onboarding by cohort doesn't work. It's better to have a rolling registration to accommodate some participants better. This coupled with a greater emphasis on developing joint initiatives between the outreach partners and Digital Horizons to foster a better understanding and collaboration.
6. The hybrid learning approach was best supported by a peer to peer support model. Interactive tools like WhatsApp groups regulated and run by a YLAB member.
7. Language accessibility can be improved. The course's English level needs to be assessed so it can be made easier for learners i.e.. suitable for Level 1, 2 or 3. Digital Horizons is exploring the use of translation AI solutions to support learners, successfully implemented with our Ukrainian group.
8. The project achieved a good balance of gender and will continue to focus on young women and build out this peer group.
9. A full-time Project Officer position dedicated to outreach will increase the effectiveness and impact of the project.

Through our work and further surveys with learners, we are looking forward to increasing our learning offering. This includes co-designing more modules with young people at their request, those mentioned were financial literacy, leadership skills, getting ready for work, climate change, graphic design and excel.

Digital Horizons is committed to increasing the digital inclusion of displaced youth in the North East of England and beyond.

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