Project

Go Digital Newcastle: connecting our city

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1. Background

In August 2014, the residents' support element of Newcastle City Council's Digital programme was awarded a research bursary of £6,000 by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Information Literacy Group (ILG) for its 'outstanding' project proposal: 'Go Digital Newcastle: Connecting Our City'. The aim of this project is to act as a hub for digital inclusion activity across the city, disseminating information, upskilling key workforces, mapping and promoting existing opportunities and addressing gaps in the provision. It works with, and for, local people to understand more about the existing barriers to digital inclusion, and to demonstrate how the acquisition of basic online information seeking and transactional skills can overcome negative preconceptions and enhance self-efficacy.

2. Strong, city-wide partnerships

The increasing digitisation of information in life-critical areas such as careers and job seeking, health, finance and benefits is creating a 'digital divide': leaving those without the means or skills to access such platforms at risk of digital, and thus financial and social exclusion (Cabinet Office 2014). By 2017, Newcastle City Council will make 'online' the primary and 'preferred' option for the city's 280,000 residents to contact and transact with them. Yet just last year the Office for National Statistics estimated that 13.9% of adults on Tyneside had never used the internet (Office for National Statistics 2014).

Older Person's Day 2014: 'Techy Tea Party'
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'Go Digital' provides relevant, local opportunities for those who feel digitally excluded to develop their information literacy skills in preferred formats and environments. In 2013-14, the project developed a network of over 90 partners (including Newcastle Libraries, Age UK Newcastle and Go ON UK) and worked with them to deliver face-to-face support to over 9,000 people. In 2014-15, it has initiated new courses and workshops, engaged Digital Champions, taken part in national campaigns (such as Be Online 2015) and actively sought funding to enhance information skills provision in the city.

The project team have delivered training to disparate groups, brokered partnerships between local skills providers and people in need of support (Opportunity UK – Belsay Hospital Unit), championed information literacy at community events (Alcohol Awareness, World Mental Health Day, Carers Day), fostered links with local support organisations (Friends Action North East, Ways to Wellness) and worked with the Council's social housing provider, Your Homes Newcastle, to install 'rest room' PCs for employees at a supported local business.

3. Maps, tweets, blogs and more…

Since receiving the ILG Bursary in 2014, the team have developed the project brand: commissioning a new logo 'Go Digital Newcastle: Getting Everyone Online' which has now been adopted by the wider Council to support their 'Digital Vision'; establishing a social media presence @GetOnlineNCL; distributing a 'Digital Inclusion' newsletter and launching an online map of free and low cost IT access and support which can be used by organisations to refer their clients to appropriate, local facilities (Go Digital Newcastle 2015).

4. Finding the right tools

Ongoing research into information literacy skills and learning preferences (feedback loops, evaluation forms and a 'pop-up' survey on People's Network PCs: see Appendix A-C) has enabled us to develop our provision according to residents' needs, resulting in an increase in iPad/tablet sessions, home visits and workshops in community venues.

We continue to work closely with Jobcentre Plus and the wider Council to improve workplace information skills and with Northumbria University on a pilot study to test and remodel a Digital Awareness Online Learning (LMS) Module designed to prepare public sector employees for the wholesale digitisation of council services (Cole 2015).

5. Conclusion

Between January and April 2015, Newcastle Libraries alone assisted their customers with over 23,000 IT support queries. As more services and particularly those in life-critical areas move online, we expect this number to rise and the work of this project to become ever more crucial. In the next six months, Go Digital will continue to disseminate information literacy skills and promote digital inclusion at community events across the city. We will support residents and colleagues through the transition to 'Digital by Choice' and the introduction of Universal Credit in Newcastle. The project team, who presented a paper at the Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) 2015, will also present at the CILIP and i3 Conferences.

Acknowledgements

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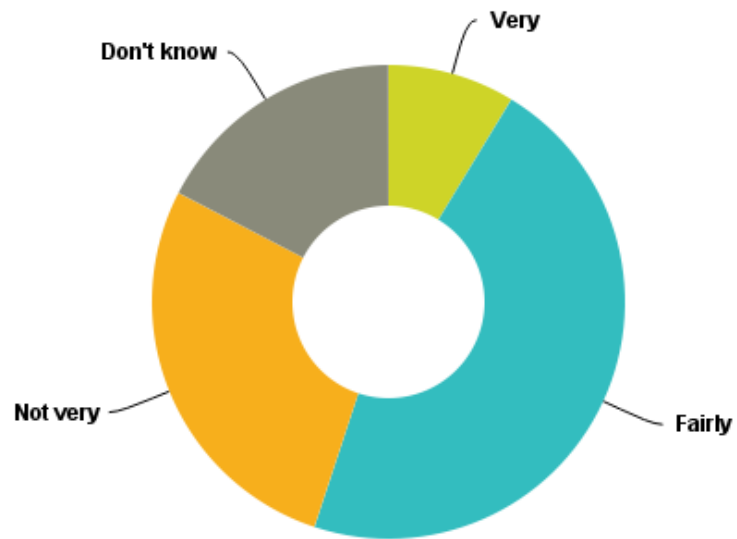
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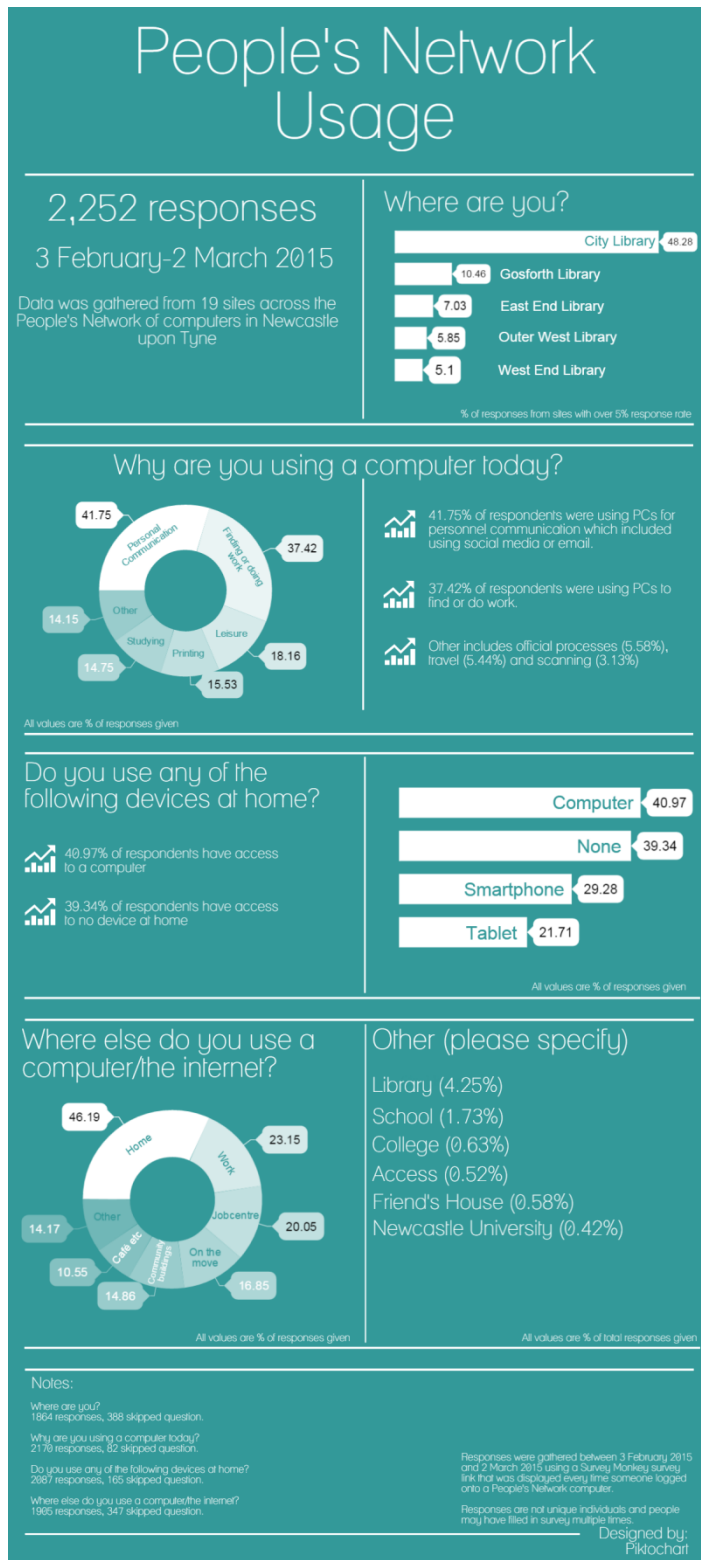
Appendix B

Online Confidence Chart, Newcastle Libraries, 2015

Q8 **How confident do you feel about judging the reliability of online information?**

Answered: 69   Skipped: 69

Appendix C

Preferred Learning Environments Chart, Newcastle Libraries, 2015

Q9 Where would you feel most comfortable learning IT skills?

Answered: 75   Skipped: 63