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Chan, L. et al. 2002. Budapest Open Access Initiative. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Accessed: 18 November 2015].

Digital literacy and digital inclusion TeachMeets in London and Leeds

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The CILIP Information Literacy Group (ILG) and the Tinder Foundation share the principle that access to information is a fundamental right for all. The Tinder Foundation is a charity which aims to help those who are “digitally and socially excluded” (<http://www.tinderfoundation.org/about>), so its work dovetails well with the work of the ILG. The Foundation addresses this issue by bringing learners and providers together in UK online centres. Public libraries are part of this network of centres as well as other third sector providers.

In February 2016 two TeachMeets were arranged in London and Leeds for higher and further education and public librarians to discuss the work that is happening within each sector and to share ideas about how they could work together. The overarching theme was the promotion of digital literacy and digital inclusion. This is a key theme for public libraries with the government agenda of ‘digital by default’. The TeachMeet format was new to most of the attendees from the Tinder Foundation and public libraries; however it worked well and sparked a lot of discussion. At each event, six speakers gave short presentations, after which the attendees had the opportunity to share ideas on the key themes:

- Basic digital skills for the over 50s
- Using social media effectively
- Use of volunteers for digital sessions
- Welfare reform – digital by default support by library staff
- Using different digital devices
- Keeping staff up to date with new apps and digital services.

Everyone had the opportunity to move round to glean and share as much information as they could, while the key points were noted by facilitators. These contributed to a report, which can be found on the Tinder Foundation website at <http://www.tinderfoundation.org/our-thinking/research-publications/what-place-does-digital-inclusion-have-digital-literacy>. The main points highlighted were:

Basic digital skills for the over 50s

The “final fifth” who are digitally excluded are likely to fall into this age bracket and often need a reason to learn digital skills. They require the most up skilling in terms of job seeking, communication with family, online services, access to health information and online banking and shopping. However, there has been a change in recent years from learners using library computers to learners bringing in their own device and requiring help to use it effectively. “I got this for my birthday/Christmas from the family and I don’t know how to use it, can you help?” is a common request in libraries. A real concern for public libraries is therefore keeping staff confident and their skills up to date in the ever changing world of digital devices.

Using social media effectively

Many libraries use social media as a method of marketing and promoting their services. They target library users, learners and stakeholders as well as partners and so are viewed as an essential tool, not an ‘optional extra’. There can be challenges when using social media, however, such as understanding the impact of using social media; privacy and security; time and capacity issues for staff; engaging with users who have English as a second language; social media policies of institutions/local authorities and acceptable use of social media. Two library authorities who use

social media effectively are Solihull Libraries (<https://www.facebook.com/solihulllibraries/>) and Orkney Library and Archive (<https://twitter.com/OrkneyLibrary>).

Use of volunteers for digital sessions

Volunteers are used in lots of different ways within libraries, so in this context we were specifically looking at using volunteers who provide a value added service rather than core services. For instance, where local staff do not have time to provide digital services, a volunteer could provide a session for one person or a group of learners. This enlarges the provision where it would not be possible with current staffing levels. There are challenges, however, such as: appointing and coordination of volunteers; training; commitment and reliability; data protection and keeping up to date with changes in technologies. The Tinder Foundation has put together a list of organisations who are able to provide help with a lot of these issues.

Welfare reform – digital by default support by library staff

Welfare reform is a specific area which will continue to see the biggest increase in people using libraries for digital services. The changes to benefits and the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) require job seekers and those in receipt of UC to communicate through email with the Department of Work and Pensions. Staff in Jobcentres regularly send claimants to libraries to use library computers, with few having the necessary skills to make and complete a claim online initially. Job seekers are also required to apply for jobs online, which again is a challenge for some. This has created an increase in demand for computers in libraries and support at a time when resources are dwindling. In answer to this, a number of partnerships with organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, other council services and third sector agencies have been created.

Using different digital devices / Keeping staff up to date with new apps and digital services

It is almost impossible for library services and staff to keep up to date with new digital devices. This has an impact on staff skills and confidence in providing support. Partnerships with Barclays Digital Eagles and ‘technology petting zoos’ (a collection of devices that can be used in hands-on sessions) are seen as two methods which can counter these barriers. Digital skills also need to be embedded into job descriptions for recruiting of new staff.



Over 30 people attended the event at the University of Liverpool London campus and over 35 attended at Leeds Central Library, which was at capacity. If the learning and enjoyment were measured by the number of ideas shared and how hard it was to stop the participants talking, then each day was a great success.

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More information about digital inclusion and digital literacy can be found at the Tinder Foundation Digital Hub [<http://digitallibrarieshub.ning.com>].