

# A framework for thinking about the practice of supporting people with learning disabilities to use technology





This framework has been written by Jane Seale with contributions from Creating Connections members.

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If you are interested in trialling the framework and associated toolkits in your own homes, organisations or contexts please contact the author at [jane.seale@open.ac.uk](mailto:jane.seale@open.ac.uk).

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# Introduction

We think it would be helpful to focus on two key components that influence support practices:

- 1. Beliefs**
- 2. Knowledge and understanding.**

## Beliefs

A belief is a statement or argument that a supporter holds true or acceptable. In the context of the toolkit for supporting people with learning disabilities to use technologies we are focusing on beliefs that are actively thought about (core beliefs) rather than beliefs that we might say we have if we are asked; but have never previously thought about (dispositional beliefs). We think that beliefs are important because they influence what supporters do. They underpin support practice, including support to use technology:

*"I think beliefs around inclusion are vital – this then encompasses everything around technology, to reduce exclusion"* (Participant of Seale 2020 study).

On pages 6-17 we describe and explain five core beliefs that we think should guide how we support people with learning disabilities to use technology.

## Knowledge and Understanding

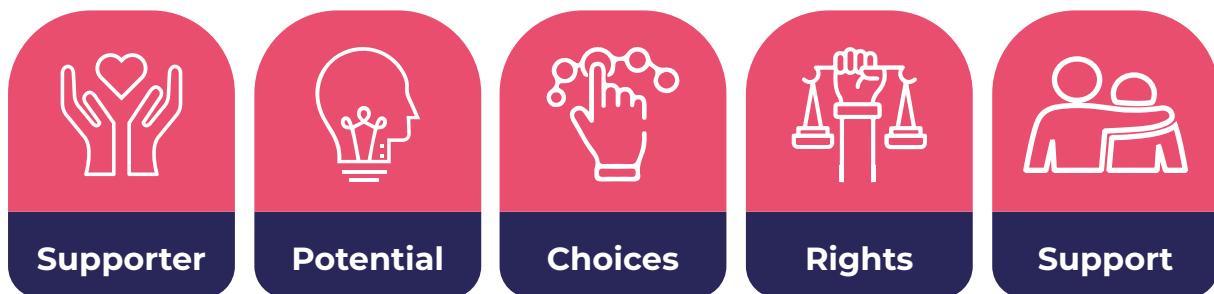
In the context of the toolkits for supporting people with learning disabilities to use technologies we are defining knowledge and understanding as the information and skills that a supporter has gained either through experience or education.

When people talk about improving the quality of support that people with learning disabilities receive, they often talk about how supporters need more or better training. Although we agree that training is needed to improve the support that people with learning disabilities have to access and use technologies, we also argue that training is not enough. In order to change or influence beliefs, training needs to be combined with an organisational culture that reinforces what is covered in the training through everything that it does in normal everyday practice. In addition, we would argue that training should not be seen as a one-time thing that happens and can be ticked-off as done. It should be continuous and responsive to the everyday issues that supporters and people with learning disabilities experience when they are trying to use technology. With this in mind, we have developed the toolkit for supporting people

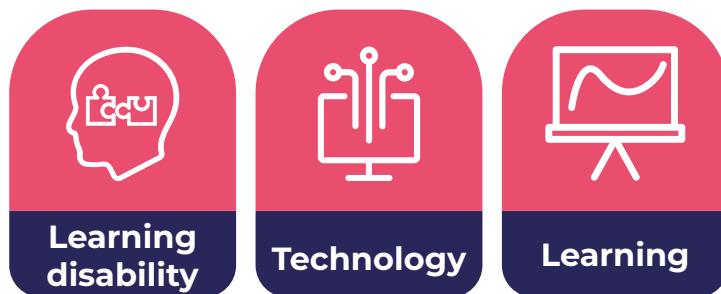
with learning disabilities to use technology in the hope that it will help all those involved in supporting people with learning disabilities to identify a whole range of things that they can do to improve and develop their technology related support practices, of which providing or participating in training is just one aspect.

On pages 18-26 we describe and explain three areas of knowledge and understanding that we think should guide how we support people with learning disabilities to use technology.

### Icons for core values:



### Icons for knowledge and understanding:



# **Core beliefs that should guide how we support people with learning disabilities to use technology**

Our research and experience suggests there are five core beliefs that a supporter needs to effectively support people with learning disabilities to use technology. We provide an overview of these beliefs in the table below and then explain each belief in more detail.

<b>Core Belief</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. Supporter role	An important part of a supporter's role is to help people with learning disabilities use technology, if they decide they want to use it.
2. Potential of people with learning disabilities	With the right support, people with learning disabilities have the potential to use technology successfully.
3. Informed choices	People with learning disabilities should be supported to understand the possible benefits of using technology and the opportunity to express their interest (or lack of interest) in using technology.
4. Rights	People with learning disabilities have a right to use technology if they want to. If people with learning disabilities want to use technology, they should be supported to use it.
5. Person-centred support	Support to use technology should be customised to ensure that all of the technology needs of a person with learning disabilities are met.



Supporter

# Core Belief 1: The supporter role

## Description

Support is effective when supporters believe that an important part of their role is to help people with learning disabilities to use technology if they want to.

## Explanation

When supporters (including self-advocates) who were using technology to support people with learning disabilities to use technology were interviewed during the covid-19 lockdowns in 2020, many of them shared how they had struggled to get other supporters to do the same (Seale, 2020). When asked why they thought some supporters were unwilling to help people with learning disabilities use technologies, one common answer was that they did not seem to think that it was a part of the caring or support role. There was a sense that typical or traditional caring and support work was about helping people with learning disabilities to do things like wash, dress, travel into town, go shopping and cook meals. The supporters in the study however were clear however that times had changed. Because technology was becoming a bigger part of everyone's 'normal' or ordinary lives, it was also the role of supporters to facilitate access and use of technology. In addition, several argued that some supporters had an outdated conception of what 'caring' means, failing to understand the importance of empowering people with learning disabilities to be active agents in their own lives:

*"They have that caring but they don't have that forward-thinking element".*

Members from the Creating Connections project shared similar thoughts and experiences:

*"I had a phone-call with someone who was supporting someone in a shared house and I said can you help them get online and they said "Oh no we are an old-fashioned house here; we don't do technology".*

## **Case Study Example 1**

### **Creating Connections Online Hubs**

As part of the Creating Connections project, new online hubs have been set up. This involves weekly zoom sessions which are themed each week, including show and tell weeks where people bring objects that mean a lot to them to tell others about, music sessions where members share their favourite music, comedy sessions where members talk about their favourite comedy musicians, as well as shared art sessions and shared reading sessions. Feedback from members indicates that during the lockdowns they have valued this opportunity to share their experiences during an intense period of isolation. For example, one member shares: "The events and projects we have taken part in have helped bring a little closer and make us talk about other subjects less negative and eased tension by allowing us to share things, items or events that hold meaning and make us more positive and confident in using unfamiliar technology".

## **Case Study Example 2**

### **With support, Ajay has been able to use his technology skills to get a job**

I finished my college in 1999 and then I was looking for a job. I joined Job Centre Plus and they asked me what I liked and what I didn't like. But they couldn't find a computer job for me, so I moved to Employment Services - a different area. They gave me training, advice, helped me out. I told them I wanted to do computers. They gave me CV advice and interview help.

It was quite easy and most fun. I went to two places for work experience and training. One was in Stratford and I was using the computer to design and print certificates. The other was at MacIntyre Care in Milton Keynes, doing illustrations. They saw my drawings and they gave me a job opportunity. I was doing transition illustrations on the computer. I worked there for one day a week. I drew pictures of telephones, email address books, cooking dinner, supporting, helping, communication, like language bubbles telling stories. When I finished my drawings, I put them on a CD.

I asked my supporter at Employment services if he had heard of the Rix Centre. He said No. So we went to the Rix Centre and I gave my presentation and talked about my transition illustrations. I explained about my job and my skills. I talked through that and they gave me a job. First of all for two weeks voluntary work, working as an illustrator, then as a technical supporter, making sure the multimedia equipment is working fine.

Sources: [dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467](http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467)



Potential

## Core Belief 2: The potential of people with learning disabilities

### Description

Support is effective when supporters believe that people with learning disabilities have the potential to use technology successfully.

### Explanation

When supporters (including self-advocates) who were using technology to support people with learning disabilities to use technology were interviewed during the covid-19 lockdowns in 2020, many of them shared how they had struggled to get other supporters to do the same. When asked why they thought some supporters were unwilling to help people with technologies use technology, many concluded that it was because they did not think the person with a learning disability would be able to use technology (Seale, 2020). For some people with learning disabilities this may be true, but for many, our research and experience indicates that with the right support many people with learning disabilities can use technologies and are pleased and proud of what they can achieve through their use of technology.

Members from the Creating Connections project have similar experiences. For example one person with a learning disability said:

*"In the beginning I was nervous about using a tablet and Zoom. But now I am a 'whizz' on it and I even interviewed an OT team from my kitchen".*

Others shared examples where because a person is not currently using technology, supporters assume that it is because they cannot use it and therefore will never be able to use it in the future. They argue that this is not necessarily true. What somebody can or cannot do now, does not necessarily mean that they are might not be able to do it in the future.

*"It is about future potential, more than current capabilities. A few years ago, who knew that my brother would be able to Facetime and do various things on the iPad, but now he can. So it is about forward-thinking".*

## Case Study Example 3

### Daymian can use DJ computer equipment

I went to College when I was 18. I remember using computers (PCs and laptops). I wanted to do it.

In 2002 I did a course on how to use the Internet. I passed the European Computer Driving License course. I got 94%.

In 2004 I was part of the Newsletter team and we used the computer to produce a newsletter.

Now I am a DJ. I started off playing CDs, then I used a computer to play my tunes. I Dj'd with a friend and we went 'Live Me' on Facebook. That was cool and wicked.

I'm on Facebook now. I went live on Facebook every Saturday and Sunday to practice my set.

I used DJ computer equipment in the DJ workshop on Tuesday afternoon. That was wicked. I am the best there is.

I talk to my sister on Skype.

Source: [dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467](http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467)



## Case Study Example 4

### Owen can use computers at work

Owen has successfully graduated from an employment initiative run by HfT that works to equip people with learning disabilities with everything they need to secure their first jobs.

Owen began with a placement at a leisure centre, but it was during his second rotation at Flintshire County Council that he really came into his own. During his time at the council offices, Owen took on a range of duties, including data inputting on a computer and photocopying, and was able to develop his customer service skills.

Owen's work during his placement was so impressive that, since graduating from the programme, he's been offered full-time paid employment – which he was delighted to accept! Owen now works 37 hours a week at a council-run warehouse distributing PPE.

Owen said: "I really enjoyed the work experience, it helped me decide what I wanted to do and I made lots of new friends. I'm really proud of myself for getting this job. I'm really enjoying it. I am now more independent because I have learnt to catch the bus to work. Being paid means that I can treat myself, and my family. I am learning to spend my money wisely."

Source: [instagram.com/p/CGaL4Dgj2Qe](https://www.instagram.com/p/CGaL4Dgj2Qe)





# Core Belief 3: The rights of people with learning disabilities to make informed choices

## Description

Support is effective when supporters believe in the rights of people with learning disabilities to make informed choices about their technology use and therefore support them to understand the possible benefits of using technology and provide them the opportunity to express their interest (or lack of interest) in using technology.

## Explanation

In 2001, the UK government published “Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century”. One of the four principles underpinning this strategy was ‘Choice’. The strategy recognised that like other people, people with learning disabilities want a real say in where they live, what work they should do and who looks after them. It stated: “We believe that everyone should be able to make choices. This includes people with severe and profound disabilities who, with the right help and support, can make important choices and express preferences about their day to day lives.”.

In more recent times, learning disability groups have also recognised that being able to use technology also offers people with learning disabilities more choices about they can do. For example, in June 2019, The Wales Personalised Technology Community of Practice developed an ethical toolkit for personalised technology. In this toolkit they argue that:

*“Technology is being used throughout the population to make life easier, safer, more fun and interesting as well as increasing choice, control and independence. Disabled people and those receiving support from service providers should not be excluded from these gains.”*

Some people with learning disabilities need support to make informed choices. This is why it is important that people with learning disabilities and their supporters engage in a shared decision-making process in which both the benefits and risks of using technology are considered (Seale, 2014).

Members from the Creating Connections project explain what being able to make informed choices about technology means to them:

*"There is no point in asking people with learning disabilities if they want to use technology if they don't know what technology there is and what it can do".*

## Case Study Example 5

### Rachael understands what technology can offer her

I do go on my iPad a lot. I watch video clips on YouTube. Some are about the Prime Minister because I like them. I've also got photos on my iPad of my family and of Jessie Wallace and Shane Ritchie from EastEnders. It makes me smile when I look up my favourite people on my iPad.

My mum and dad bought my iPad for me. I told my mum and dad that I wanted an iPad to play games, photos, making notes and timesheets for my supporter as well.

The mini iPad is nice to carry around. The big one, the one I don't like, it too big really. That is why I chose the small one. The big one is too hard to carry.

I like the iPhone. I'm going to get a new one for my birthday - iPhone 7. I've also got a laptop at home. It has two photographs on it. One is Alan Rickman from Harry Potter.

My hearing aids are Bluetooth. They can link to my phone and my watch. The music on my phone links to my hearing aid and I can hear it. It is really clever.

Source: [dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467](http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467)





Rights

# Core Belief 4: The rights of people with learning disabilities to use technology

## Description

Support is effective when supporters believe that people with learning disabilities have a right to use technology if they want to and that if they want to use technology, they should be supported to use it.

## Explanation

When supporters (including self-advocates) who were using technology to support people with learning disabilities to use technology were interviewed during the covid-19 lockdowns in 2020, many of them shared their beliefs that people with learning disability had a right to use technology (Seale, 2020):

*"And you learn something about people being institutionalised within care homes in their home, because you'll ring them up and you'll say oh I've come to help you today. And then they've said to me oh I'm really sorry but I think I've got a problem. And you're like what's the problem? Well I think I've got online. They're apologising for doing something that's so simple. You think well why are you apologising because this is your right?"*

Some supporters who are employed by service providers also shared how everyone in their service believed in this right:

*"We had that from very early on in the lockdown, you know especially from our directors, I think that everybody has the right to internet. And that is just something that's been like - we voice quite a lot. That - so yeah from the top down everybody's kind of feeling the same, that it should be a human right."*

Members from the Creating Connections project shared similar examples:

*"People have a right to access technology if they want to. It is important for people to know their rights".*

## Case Study Example 6

### Chris exercises his right to use his money to buy an iPad

My iPad is special to me because I can use it when I get frustrated and angry with people. It takes my mind off it. I get some space.

I am happiest using technology when I can play a game and forget the rest of the world. It takes your mind off everything. But when the Internet doesn't work, I get really annoyed.

I play games and watch films on my iPad.

I've got a folder called 'Games' and in there are games like Cake Swap, Crazy Kitchen, Yummy Gummy, 8 Ball Pool and Star Wars Puzzle.

My favourite game is the Star Wars Puzzle. I am a big fan of Star Wars. It's a Puzzle game. You have got to match the same colours and get a line. You get three stars and then you go up a level.

I got my iPad from John Lewis. I didn't need any help choosing it. I had to get permission from supported living though to get it through. Because supported living look after my money, I had to fill out a form to get the money out.

Before I had the iPad, I had a Samsung Tablet, but it was getting on my nerves because it wasn't always working properly.

I've also got Bluetooth headphones, a PS4, a laptop and an iPod Touch. I've got Windows 7 Or 8 on the laptop, but I don't use it very much. I've got wireless Bluetooth speakers as well. I've got a smart TV as well at home. I can catch up on the things I've missed. I don't have a printer at home.

I go on YouTube and watch videos to see if they (technologies) are any good, if they are, I go and get it. YouTube shows you everything.

People say to me - do you realise this costs money. I'm not stupid!

Normally I can sort technical problems out myself.

Nobody tells me I am using my iPad too much. Nobody should tell you what to do. If you are an adult, you can do what you want.

Source: [dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467](http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467)





Support

## Core Belief 5: Person-centred support

### Description

Support to use technology should be customised to ensure that all of the technology needs of a person with learning disabilities are met.

### Explanation

Most supporters, particularly if they are employed by service providers will have heard of person-centred care or person-centred support. This is care or support that takes into account the needs, thoughts, concerns and opinions of the individual and consulting those within their personal network such as family and friends. Key aspects of person-centred support are that it is tailored to the needs of the person and looks at the person's life as a whole. Some organisations have identified that technology can be an important part of a person's life and therefore should be included as part of person-centred support. For example, The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence indicate that practitioners who are supporting people growing older with learning disabilities should include technology when they are planning future support. The All-Wales Personalised Technology Community of Practice advise that a person-centred approach must be taken to risk assessment which takes into account the wishes of the individual and the overall benefit of using the technology.

Members from the Creating Connections project offer the following advice in relation to the importance of person-centred support:

*"Every person with a learning disability will have different technology needs. What works for one person will not necessarily work for another".*

*"It is important that we don't offer 'blanket' support options, that we use technology in a way that works for each individual person."*

## Case Study Example 7

**Karen's supporter understood her interest in technology and encouraged her to develop this in a range of ways, offering tailored support when needed**

Karen met a youth worker when she joined an Outreach programme at seventeen years old. When she showed an interest in technology, the youth worker helped her to develop this interest. Karen says:

"I think I still would have been interested in technology if he hadn't taught me, but it might have taken ages."

The youth worker taught her how to programme a Commodore Vic 20. Karen says:

"I wasn't writing games; I was writing little tunes and things like that. These sorts of computers were basic because they were mostly a games console".

A few years later Karen joined a self-advocacy group and the supporter there, picked up on Karen's interest in technology and asked her if she wanted to be the Internet Officer. With the help of the supporter she did this role for ten years which involved checking emails and creating the web page. Karen says:

"I had to have everything written down. I knew how to switch the computer on, but I didn't know how to access the email. He wrote down how to switch on the computer, where to go, and I followed it, cos it had stages".

Thirty years later Karen is still a keen technology user. She has a laptop, iPad, a smart phone and a games console. She is happy that she does not need support to use her technology:

"My happiest memory is when I didn't have to ask people to set the computer up. Once I got the hang of it there was no stopping me. When I get a new laptop, I don't bother with the instructions. I just plug it all together, switch it on and off I go."

Nobody tells me I am using my iPad too much. Nobody should tell you what to do. If you are an adult, you can do what you want.

Source: [dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467](http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/6621/5467)



# **Key areas of knowledge that should guide how we support people with learning disabilities to use technology**

Our research and experience suggests that there are three key areas in which supporters need knowledge and understanding in order to effectively support people with learning disabilities to use technology. We provide an overview of these three areas in the table below and then explain each area in more detail.

<b>Knowledge and Understanding</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. The person with a learning disability who is being supported	It is important to understand why the person with a learning disability wants to use a particular technology and whether and how they might need support to use technology.
	It is important to know what technologies the person being supported currently uses and any additional technologies they might wish to use in the future.
2. Technology	It is important to know of the potential benefits that using technology might offer the person with a learning disability who is being supported.
	It is important to know how to use the technologies that the person with a learning disability is using or wants to use.
	It is important to know the typical difficulties that people with learning disabilities have in using technology and how they can be supported to overcome these difficulties.
3. Learning	It is important to know how to problem-solve when unexpected problems with technology happen.
	It is important to be able to learn from the positive and negative experiences of using technology and share what has been learnt with others.



Learning  
disability

# Knowledge and Understanding 1: The person with a learning disability who is being supported

## Description

Support is effective when supporters:

- Understand why the person with a learning disability wants to use a particular technology and whether and how they might need support to use technology.
- Know what technologies the person being supported currently uses and any additional technologies they might wish to use in the future.

## Explanation

When supporters (including self-advocates) who were using technology to support people with learning disabilities to use technology were interviewed during the covid-19 lockdowns in 2020, many of them shared how they took the time to find out what technologies people with learning disabilities had access to at home and what technologies they would prefer to use for keeping in touch. This often meant that they were able to tailor the support to the person's needs. For example, some supporters assumed that the best medium for staying in touch was the landline and were (pleasantly) surprised when the person with a learning disability suggested using WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. It was also clear that the supporters had a detailed knowledge of how the people with learning disabilities that they were supporting like to spend their time. For example, they understood that having regular activities to engage with was important and if these could not happen in face-to-face situations because of lockdown, they looked for ways to do these online. Hence all the fabulous Zoom sessions that offered Bingo, quiz nights, singalongs, yoga, cooking, drama and exercise classes. They also understood the importance to people with learning disabilities of staying connected with friends and family and looked for ways of using technology to maintain those connections during lockdown (Seale, 2020).

The importance of knowing about the technology use, needs and aspirations of the person who is being supported is reinforced by members of the Creating Connections project:

*"My brother was given a basic tablet by his supported living provider. But they did not understand that he would have been better supported with an iPad, because all of his family use an iPad and so they know how to use an iPad and can help him use it. With the basic tablet he is struggling with things."*

## Case Study Example 8

### Supporting Edward to use technology to enable him to enjoy fitness and exercise activities

Edward was supported by Surrey Choices to visit a gym each Friday because he was interested in fitness and looking after his mental and physical health. He fell in love with exercise and became no stranger to the gym and going swimming with his Dad in his spare time. When lockdown came in 2020, it was important for Edward to find a way to maintain his physical health and consequently his mental health through fitness during the pandemic. Surrey Choices, through its digitiser project, supported Edward to find and take part in online fitness activities.

He Says: "I have always enjoyed exercise, particularly walking, swimming and attending the gym each Friday with Surrey Choices. Last year when we went into lockdown, exercise became even more of a priority for me. As a family, we walked each day, but then I started to do the Joe Wicks YouTube videos with my Dad. In September, I joined my Mum's Fitsteps dance class, which I incorporate into my Future Choices Wellbeing' Day.

Source: [health-and-wellbeing-with-edward/](#)



## Case Study Example 9

### Supporting Andrew to use technology to follow his passion for media

Andrew, who is supported by Surrey Choices, has been working on producing audio recordings with Choices Waves for the Surrey Choices website. The audio provides an alternative option for people accessing the website, which in turn improves the accessibility.

Andrew is really passionate about media, his work with Choices Waves means he is able to continue developing his knowledge in the media industry. Alongside Choices Waves, Andrew has been volunteering with Kane FM to support with writing some of their shows.

Andrew felt proud that his voice was being used for audio on the website. He has already started on the next project for the website which is exciting. Andrew said that making the website more accessible means a lot to him.

Source: [vocational-learning-with-andrew/](http://vocational-learning-with-andrew/)





## Technology

# Knowledge and Understanding 2: Technology

## Description

Support is effective when supporters:

- Know of the potential benefits that using technology might offer the person with a learning disability who is being supported.
- Know how to use the technologies that the person with a learning disability is using or wants to use.
- Know the typical difficulties that people with learning disabilities have in using technology and how they can be supported to overcome these difficulties.

## Explanation

When supporters (including self-advocates) who were using technology to support people with learning disabilities to use technology were interviewed during the covid-19 lockdowns in 2020, many of them shared how they learnt to overcome typical barriers to using technology such as remembering login passwords for devices and online accounts. It was also clear that the supporters were developing a valuable knowledge about the benefits of one technology over another. For example, why Zoom was easier for people with learning disabilities to use compared to Microsoft Teams. The supporters also shared how it was often difficult to get other supporters, particularly those working in care homes to use technology. They suggested many reasons for why supporters resisted using technology, one of which being that they did not know how to use it or lacked confidence in using technologies. (Seale 2020).

The importance of knowing about technologies and how to use them is reinforced by members of the Creating Connections project:

*"We had some tablets to give out and some people originally said, 'oh I don't want anything to do with it', but once they were shown what benefit they could get from it and how it could open up a whole new world, they changed their minds."*

*"We have certainly had hitches with getting people online, because we have had supporters who haven't had the knowledge to get online themselves, let alone help a person with learning disabilities get online".*

## Case Study Example 10

### Sara is supported to video call her mum through the provision of an iPad

In December 2020, The MacIntyre Charity took part in The Big Give Christmas Challenge for the first time to tackle digital exclusion among the people they support. They were able to raise £5,458 which they used to purchase several digital devices for people they support to enjoy. Some of the items purchased included video game consoles, iPads, cameras, smart speakers and TVs.

Many of the people they support have been shielding since the start of the pandemic and as a result, have been unable to see their loved ones over the past year, which has been incredibly tough. With the money raised, MacIntyre staff teams have purchased several iPads, which have been a lifeline for many families who are now able to see their loved ones through video calls. Not only this, but these devices have allowed teams to capture special moments and achievements for people they support, enabling the people to feel closer to their loved ones. For example, Sara, who MacIntyre support in Buckinghamshire, was delighted to receive her first iPad. With support from the team, she has been learning to develop her digital skills, finding joy in videos on YouTube and regularly video calling her mum.

Source: [how-your-support-makes-a-difference](#)



## Case Study Example 11

### Dionne is supported to live independently and safely through the provision of personalised home-care technology

For many people with learning disabilities, personalised technology has made a huge difference to being able to live an independent life during the pandemic. They include Dionne from who took a trip away prior to lockdown restrictions last year, after which she had to self-isolate in her flat.

In order to provide Dionne with sensitive staff supervision around the clock, the Hft personalised technology team came up with an innovative solution that meant she was able to keep her independence and privacy, while ensuring her and her housemates' safety. The team recommended fitting a big button, allowing Dionne to call for support if needed, as well as a door sensor linked to a voice prompt on her flat door reminding her not to leave her flat. Recorded by Dionne's service manager, the voice prompt had a really positive impact on her mood during the isolation period. Dionne reported that the solution was "cool, useful and helpful!"

Source: [instagram.com/p/CKy7pcJooIN](https://instagram.com/p/CKy7pcJooIN)





Learning

# Knowledge and Understanding

## 3: How to learn

### Description

Support is effective when supporters:

- Know how to problem-solve when unexpected problems with technology happen.
- Are able to learn from the positive and negative experiences of using technology and share what has been learnt with others.

### Explanation

When supporters (including self-advocates) who were using technology to support people with learning disabilities to use technology were interviewed during the covid-19 lockdowns in 2020, many of them gave examples of practices that were shaped by a willingness to learn. Not just a willingness to learn new skills, but a willingness to figure out how to fix things when they didn't quite go to plan (Seale, 2020). Supporters often talked about 'learning on their feet' or experiencing a 'learning curve':

- The practice of many supporters evolved over time. For many this evolution was part of a learning process, where, through trial and error they tried out different technologies or different ways of using technology, learnt which worked best and adapted accordingly.
- For many this evolution of practice reflected a curiosity about what might be effective ways of engaging people with learning disabilities remotely or a culture of learning within their organisation.
- Some supporters applied or adapted what they had learnt about using technology in other situations to their work with people with learning disabilities.
- Some support practices were creative because they involved a large amount of persistent problem-solving, particularly when trying to remotely set up and install new technologies or work out why something did not work.

The ability to learn through experience is reinforced by members from the Creating Connections project:

*"Things come up as you are trying to do stuff and you have to deal with them as they come up - it's a learning curve."*

## **Case Study Example 12**

### **A Day Service Manager explains how she and her team learn from difficult situations**

“With Zoom we have had a few failures, but we have learnt ways to deal with them. We've had the technology failure - if you have got an account and one session over-runs and then another person starts a session - everybody gets kicked out of their session which is obviously very difficult for people who need to prepare for saying goodbye. We have people who have self-injurious behaviour and maybe they haven't had a supporter in the room and they have done that and that has been upsetting for other people. But we have learnt to use the break-out rooms so you can take people into a separate room and see if they are OK. So there are things emerging all the time which are really useful to us. We have had swearing and parents having arguments - so we have had to work out the muting and things like that. But we are not afraid of failure. As a team we are happy to try stuff. We always underestimate people who have a learning disability - their generosity in waiting and allowing people to not get it right and be patient - be really supportive in themselves. It is also important to work with everybody that is on there [Zoom] to create that feeling of: you are all in this together.”

Source: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/75127/>

## **Case Study Example 13**

### **An advocate working for an advocacy charity shares how as they learnt to do things, their confidence developed to do more**

“So because I had been on Zoom with yoga, and I just googled and downloaded Zoom, it just all seemed of so easy, and so we just kind of went with that. I suppose, because then I knew that I could do it. There were a couple of occasions where I was just talking to people on the phone, giving them a bit of tuition. I am not really an expert, but because it isn't difficult and I felt that I could do it, and I had done it, I felt I could talk someone through it. It does seem quite user-friendly. I attended some training last week and we went out into break-out rooms with a timer, and that all worked really well and we are thinking of doing our AGM online in September, so maybe we might be doing that - if we need to go into groups.”

Source: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/75127/>