



VCS Emergencies
Partnership

Digital Inclusion:

Subject Liaison Lead Report for
the London Region,
July 2021

By Superhighways,
a project of Kingston Voluntary Action





Background

Along with the other regional Digital Inclusion Subject Liaison Leads, we carried out Digital Inclusion in London research under the Mapping, Connecting and Networking themes, with an overall objective to draw local insights to influence national thinking. As well as this report, we are also in the process of adding findings to our project website – [Digital Inclusion in London](#).

The website will form the basis for continuation of this work beyond the VCSEP funded period and enable us to further share and engage other partners and stakeholders in London.

1. Mapping

Our aim was to increase intelligence around what is happening at a local level in London regarding Digital Inclusion activity by the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE). Instead of undertaking a new mapping exercise from scratch, we joined with an

existing mapping initiative undertaken by the London Office for Technology and Innovation (LOTI), capturing digital inclusion activity in the capital – [read more in their blog here](#).

At the time there were circa 40 completions mainly from local authorities. We decided to promote the LOTI Mapping Form to ensure that the wealth and breadth of local activity undertaken by the VCSE – both infrastructure and frontline organisations was visible to policy makers in London. LOTI are leading on the London Recovery Board's Mission 3 – Digital Access for All by 2025, along with the GLA. We were involved in hosting a Community Conversation in 2020 to input into this Mission and felt that continuing to raise the profile of VCSE activity – both the successes and challenges, was crucial. By joining up with the LOTI mapping we had to make some compromises e.g. the questions had already been set, but we felt the benefits far outweighed any issues, particularly at a time when the sector is experiencing survey fatigue.

We devoted a lot of time championing the mapping exercise asking infrastructure partners, including contacting each CVS in London individually, to promote in their own geographical areas or communities of interest to increase the number of VCSE activity happening locally, along with adding anything they were involved in directly. We also sent out information about the mapping form encouraging organisations to 'put their work on the map' via the London Plus eNews and Twitter.

We also carried out desk research ourselves – searching for local initiatives, success stories and targeting areas where we had less information about what was being delivered. In June we invited CVSs to join us for a session to look at what had been captured at that stage, spot gaps and discuss ideas for future collaboration.

By July 2021, there are now just over 100 digital inclusion activities in London captured via the LOTI mapping form. [You can see the public view of this data here](#) and filter on various e.g. Third sector or Type of initiative.

| | Organisations involved | Sector | Location | A single or collection of ... | Type of initiative | Name and description o... | Problem it solves |
|---|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1 | DG Cities, The Royal Borough of Greenwich | Public Private Third | Royal Borough of Greenwich | Part of a collection of dif... | Identifying digital exclud... Provision of devices | Greenwich Community Champions Digital Inclusio... | Several communi... the Royal Boroug |
| 2 | Royal Borough of Kingston, Kingston Library Services, ... | Public Third Private | Royal Borough of Kingston | Part of a collection of dif... | Identifying digital exclud... Provision of devices | The plan is to use Connected Kingston to be the central ... | Engaging with inc... and groups who r |
| 3 | Hounslow Council | Public | Hounslow | Part of a collection of dif... | Identifying digital exclud... Provision of devices | LBH has set up a digital inclusion group (DIG), whic... | Devices, connecti... skills |
| 4 | London Borough of Redbridge, Work Redbridge... | Public Third Private | Redbridge | Part of a collection of dif... | Identifying digital exclud... Provision of devices | Our 'Connecting Redbridge' partnership brings the ... | Digital Exclusion |
| 5 | London Borough of Camden | Public | Camden | Single initiative / project | Provision of devices Provision of connectivity ... | Digital Inclusion for Job Seekers in Camden... | Digital exclusion f... especially promin |
| 6 | Merton Libraries | Public | Merton libraries and remotely | Single initiative / project | Provision of devices Provision of connectivity ... | Connecting Merton Merton Library and Heritag... | The way the world... how we live and v |
| 7 | Waltham Forest | Third | Digital Unite | Single initiative / project | Provision of skills and tra... | Digital Champions Network is a web-based learning ... | Digital Champion... is now a resourc |
| 8 | London Borough of Hounslow | Public Third | Hounslow | Part of a collection of dif... | Identifying digital exclud... Provision of connectivity ... | Provide old refurbished council devices to residents and ... | Lack of access to |

Of the 101 entries as of early July 2021, 71 involve the Third sector working in partnership with either the Private or Public sector and 35 of the initiatives listed are solely Third sector delivered.

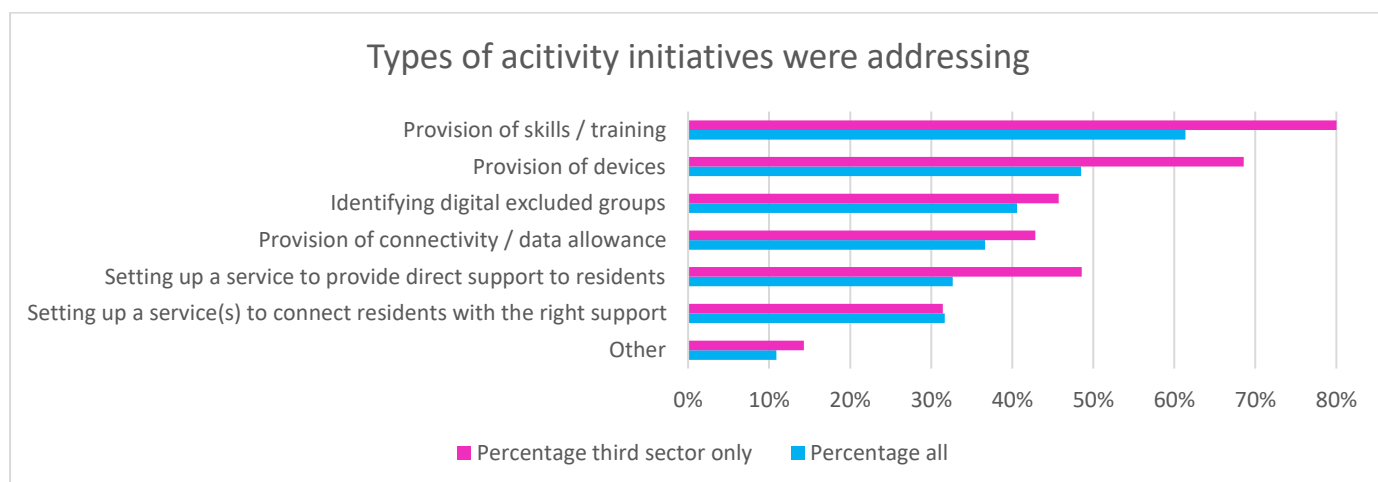
Due to our extensive promotion there are now 30 London boroughs covered, with just Sutton, Enfield & Barking & Dagenham lacking any entries. We will follow up with CVSs in these boroughs to encourage further publicity and where there are initiatives happening, ensure they are added.

Boroughs with higher numbers of initiatives listed include Barnet, Camden, Croydon, Newham, Richmond, Southwark and Tower Hamlets.

The 71 initiatives involving the Third sector cover 28 boroughs – with Bromley & Haringey not showing any listings in addition to the three boroughs above.

The majority – 86% of initiatives are happening at borough level or below e.g. including on a number of specific estates. 60% are part of a collection of initiatives and 40% single initiatives.

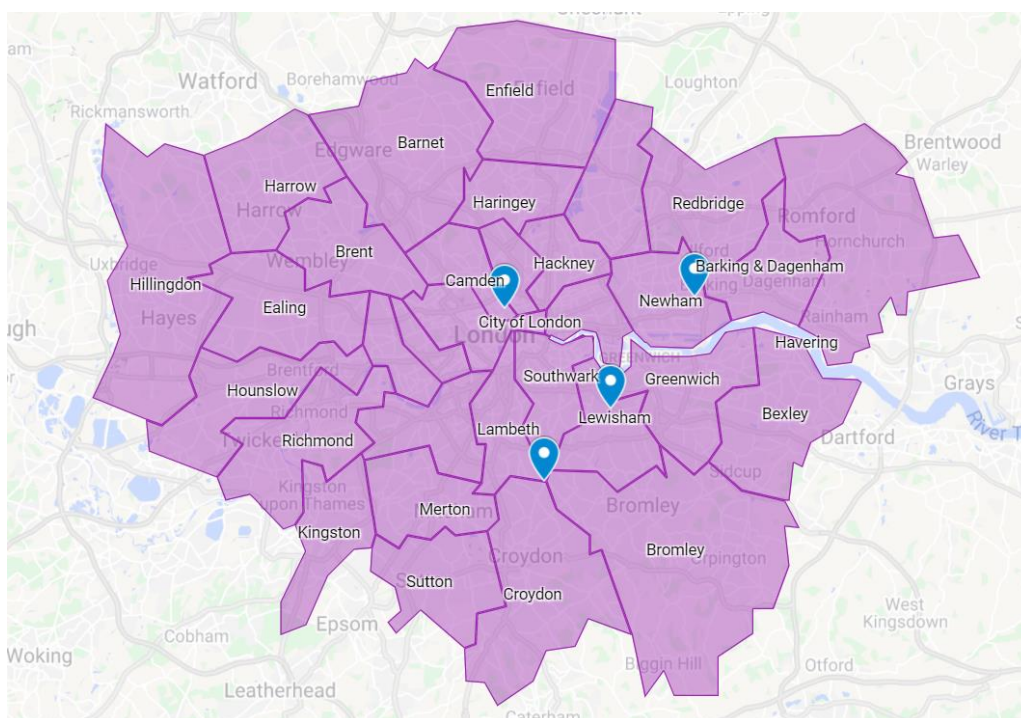
Types of activity delivered can be seen below.



There is a huge range of VCSE provision showing great creativity and commitment to local communities, particularly during the pandemic, to overcome the issue of digital exclusion and the consequences this was having.

We have started to add these initiatives to a map and will categorise based on the Type of activity categories used in the LOTI mapping form.

- Provision of skills / training
- Provision of devices
- Identifying digital excluded groups
- Provision of connectivity / data allowance
- Setting up a service to provide direct support to residents
- Setting up a service/s to connect residents with the right support
- Other



360 Giving research

In addition to the LOTI mapping, we also carried out some searches on the 360 Giving Grant Nav platform – looking at grants awarded for digital inclusion / exclusion work, alongside grants being given for general ‘digital’ work. We looked at both Covid 19 Crisis grants and normal programme grants, and looked at trends from 2015 to 2021. See Appendix 1 for further details.

It is evident that a larger than usual number of grants have been awarded and it is unclear about the sustainability or opportunity for growth of some of the digital inclusion activity, once this funding ends.

Role of local infrastructure

Across the mapping we saw examples of CVSs being involved in both strategic partnership working, proactive connecting and co-ordinating, and also hands on direct digital inclusion activities. Here are a few examples to illustrate the range of activity:

Partnering & representing

Most partnerships were with the local authority, but wider strategic partnerships also involved the CVSs as in the example below.

Our Connect Redbridge partnership – London Borough of Redbridge, Work Redbridge, DWP, Vision, RCVS, Redbridge Institute, New City College, Chamber of Commerce; brings the knowledge and resources of Redbridge organisations to tackle digital exclusion. We aim to deliver a sustainable framework that delivers long term to ensure everyone who wants to can use digital technology. We are looking at Data and Behaviour, Infrastructure, Skills, Funding and Campaigns.

Connecting and convening

Kingston Voluntary Action's Superhighways project made contact with the Keep Kids Connected initiatives. Their model was to link and take referrals from schools and Achieving for Children (the borough's Children's Services provider), but they agreed for us to connect them with frontline charities and community groups working in need of devices for their users. A call with Oxygen – a local youth charity as part of research into Digital Exclusion in the borough led to a referral to the Keep Kids Connected initiative.

Keep Kids Connected have been brilliant and managed to secure us 10 laptops and routers for young people. We delivered our first laptop and router to a young person who has been unable to go online throughout the pandemic last week and he was absolutely over the moon. This has enabled us to begin working remotely with him so he has youth worker support and engage with education.

Oxygen, Jan 2021

Wandsworth Digital is a collection of VCSE organisations including the infrastructure delivery organisation Wandsworth Care Alliance, and led by a local Settlement organisation, alongside statutory partners. They have an ambitious strategy, with monthly meetings and a website coming soon, with the aim to connect, co-ordinate and share delivery and resources, to maximise digital inclusion impact in the borough.

Building digital inclusion skills in frontline VCSEs

Different models exist to build digital inclusion skills in frontline VCSE organisations.

Croydon Voluntary Action partnered with CALAT – the borough Adult Education service to provide digital inclusion training to local voluntary sector groups including Advanced Zoom sessions.

One Newham, Enfield Voluntary Action and Kingston Voluntary Action asked us at Superhighways to run our Taking your services and activities online session for organisations in their boroughs, and we offered 1:1 sessions e.g. to give frontline staff confidence in running activities online using Zoom, and importantly, support their beneficiaries to access these sessions.

Brent CVS held a Digital Tools for the Future event for sector groups with different organisations running short taster workshops.

This builds on the recognition that local voluntary and community groups have a key role to cascade digital inclusion including basic digital skills within their own communities, as found in our own research and a roundtable with London VCSE organisations and the National Lottery Community Fund in November 2020. Read our blog [How micro charities and grassroots organisations went digital: lessons from a pandemic](#). where a key theme drawn was that: **Community organisations are crucial to embed basic digital skills in communities.**

An ongoing need, the [Kingston Digital Exclusion survey](#) found that 19 out of 25 VCSE organisations saw themselves playing a role in enabling service users / communities to be more digitally included. 16 of these reported their staff and volunteers need help to embed digital support within their programmes / activities for service users going forwards and were interested in joining a network of likeminded organisations tackling digital inclusion in the borough (with a further 7 unsure at this stage).

Digital Champions

A popular model to provide more tailored 1:1 support to individuals is setting up volunteer digital champions or buddies schemes.

Bexley CVS is working with partners LBB, NHS and voluntary sector services, to further develop a borough 'Digital Champion' approach to reduce digital exclusion for residents. 50 'Digital Champions' are being recruited, hosted by a number of different VCSE organisations and services, with Bexley CVS providing support and facilitating peer networking and learning, with digital champions having different focuses in different settings to meet diverse needs in the community.

An outcome of the VCSEP research has included Community Links Bromley asking Superhighways to run Digital Champion training for borough organisations – this is being arranged for September 2021.

There are national programmes including Good Things Foundation, Digital Unite and Citizens Online providing resources, networks or consultancy services to deliver at a local authority level and there were examples of CVSs linking with these initiatives too.

Direct delivery of support

There were also examples of CVSs being involved in direct delivery of services.

Examples include Croydon Voluntary Action's involvement in device distribution, and Merton Connected and Superhighways / Kingston Voluntary Action providing digital support to residents to be able to complete the Census 2021.

Generic digital capacity building

Redbridge, Brent and Tower Hamlets CVSs along with Superhighways at Kingston Voluntary Action, are providing support to VCSE organisations to better use digital to improve efficiencies and effectiveness.

These digital capacity building activities are key to raising confidence of using digital in the sector and can only put VCSE organisations in a better position to support their communities with digital inclusion in future.

LOTI's digital inclusion mapping findings

An interim report has been shared [and can be accessed here](#). Whilst understandably the focus is on local authority activities, lessons learned, future priorities and challenges – there is a recognition that a key success factor during the pandemic has been **working with the VCS to identify and reach digitally excluded residents**.

"Absolutely working through community organisations is what works. Funding organisations to be able to reach the people who are most excluded is crucial. You can't do this without the voluntary sector."

"We work through community organisations because they are the trusted faces in local places. They really know how to engage and support and build relationships with people who are often facing a multitude of challenges in their lives. They'll often turn up at a community organisation because they've faced a crisis."

We will continue to engage with LOTI and the GLA to ensure that VCSE involvement in future digital inclusion activity and investment at a London level.

2. Collecting

Another strand of our work was to discover and bookmark useful resources developed locally and nationally, to share expertise, knowledge and resources enabling wider access, resulting in avoidance of duplication of effort and reinventing the wheel.

National resources

We collaborated with other regional SLL leads to create a list of national digital inclusion resources and initiatives as this didn't seem to exist in one place, and we didn't want to duplicate effort. So we collectively added what we were finding to a shared Google sheet.

On 22nd June, Catalyst hosted [a panel event looking at Digital Inclusion](#). Superhighways were asked to be involved on the panel, but were unable to due to prior commitments, but other Digital Inclusion Subject Leads attended and shared that Catalyst were also

We therefore connected with Catalyst's Strategic Partnerships Manager and initiated merging of our two resources into one [publicly accessible Google sheet here](#), which has subsequently been shared more widely via The Catalyst's eNews.

We have had further conversations with Catalyst about ongoing future collaboration with VCSEP's Digital Inclusion Subject Liaison Leads to build on this recent work.

Local resources

As part of our mapping exercise, we also invited organisations in London to share resources they had developed. This might have been a Step by step guide on using Zoom, to a You Tube video talking through different webcam options for different scenarios.

We have made a start at sharing these [on our project website here](#), but will undertake future work to format and categorise so can more easily be searched and shared as we have found lots of really useful resources.



The image is a screenshot of a Twitter post from West London Mission (@wlm_uk). The post features a red profile picture icon, the name 'West London Mission', and the handle '@wlm_uk'. The main text of the tweet reads: 'Learn how to support people getting online with our new Digital #Volunteer Toolkit course! Accessing Zoom appointments, online classes & video job interviews has never been more important. Now you can help people in your community get access to the #digital world. @ClearCommunity'. Below the text is a promotional graphic for the 'DIGITAL VOLUNTEER TOOLKIT' course. The graphic is split into two sections: the left side shows three people (two men and one woman) looking at a laptop, with the WLM logo in the top left corner; the right side is a red background with a white speech bubble containing the text 'NEW COURSE'. Below this, two course options are listed: 'Course 1' (Mon 5 July, Wed 7 July, Mon 12 July & Wed 14 July | 10am-12 noon) and 'Course 2' (Mon 19 July, Wed 21 July, Mon 26 July & Wed 28 July | 2pm-4pm).

3. Networking

The final strand of work involved identifying and taking forward opportunities to develop peer networks.

Unfortunately, the Digital Inclusion in London Network which formed during the pandemic in 2020 by the HEAR Network, supported by Superhighways, hasn't met during the period of this research due to staff illness.

Instead we targeted members via the HEAR Network's mailing list to encourage they add themselves to the mapping and raised awareness of this network with local initiatives we were discovering, suggesting they sign up to the mailing list so could engage once back up and running.

Discussions with CVSs also unearthed an appetite to set up a network for staff with an element of digital support for the sector in their role, to come together and share what they were doing, resources developed and discuss challenges and solutions. Superhighways will take this forward after the summer, in collaboration with London Plus. Similarly, CVS staff involved in supporting local Digital Champions, were keen to be connected.

We continued to engage and network with the GLA and LOTI to raise the profile of digital inclusion activity in the VCSE and learn from work they were carrying out e.g. the London borough digital inclusion peer networking and the Engagement collective's Digital Inclusion sprint.

Key findings

1. The VCSE is instrumental in delivering digital inclusion activities and reaching those with complex needs who need additional support, and were invaluable in stepping up and providing new support offers during the pandemic
2. There's a real appetite to network and share resources both at a local and regional level. VCSE infrastructure have an important convening role to play.
3. Digital inclusion is becoming a mainstream activity of frontline VCSEs and local infrastructure should look for opportunities to support their sector grow in skills and confidence to take this forward
4. Building relationships with regional policy makers looking at addressing digital exclusion is vital if VCSEs are to secure investment to sustain and scale their activities

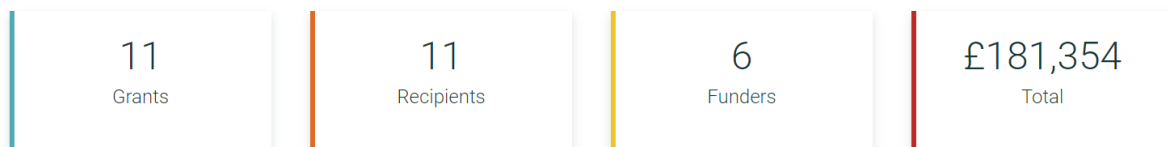
Next steps

1. Superhighways will continue to support HEAR Network to convene the Digital Inclusion in London Network as the key vehicle for peer support and engagement with statutory sectors
2. Superhighways will convene a new network for CVS development workers delivering digital capacity building and cascade to other CVSs, in partnership with London Plus
3. Superhighways will take forward the idea of another network (possibly linked to the above) for people co-ordinating digital champion programmes – both at CVSs and frontline projects, again in conjunction with London Plus

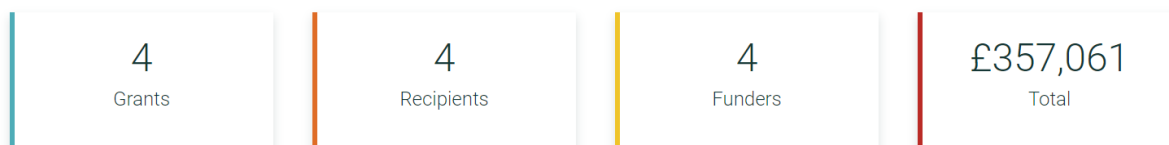
Appendix 1

Covid-19 Grants Tracker

Digital inclusion



Digital exclusion



Digital



Filter by funder... ▾

Filter by recipient... ▾

× Hounslow (193)
×

"digital"

360 Giving Grant Nav

Your search "digital inclusion" or "digital exclusion" returned 11 results in 'All grant fields'

Search summary

To explore this dataset in more detail, open in [360Insights](#)

Amount awarded

Date awarded

Total grants: 11

Total amount: £520,869

Funders: 4

Recipients: 11

[Show highlighted grants](#) ▼

- 2021 (3)
- 2020 (8)
- 2019 (2)
- 2018 (6)
- 2017 (3)
- 2016 (3)
- 2015 (3)

Your search 'digital' returned 200 results in 'Titles & Descriptions'

Search summary

To explore this dataset in more detail, open in [360Insights](#)

Amount awarded

Date awarded

Total grants: 200

Total amount: £10,697,006

Funders: 37

Recipients: 178

[Show highlighted grants](#) ▼

- 2021 (22)
- 2020 (178)
- 2019 (116)
- 2018 (98)
- 2017 (76)
- 2016 (45)
- 2015 (28)