DOING DIGITAL TOGETHER

Open Data Manchester

What does digital exclusion look like in Manchester?

December 2023

MANCHESTER'S DIGITAL STRATEGY

Contents

Executive Summary

This report explores digital exclusion in Manchester, based on interviews and observations with support providers and residents. Alongside the Digital Exclusion Risk Index, it can provide a snapshot of what digital exclusion currently looks like in Manchester.

From our research, we were able to categorise barriers to digital inclusion as follows:

- Practical - Lack of devices, internet access, costs.
- Individual - Low incomes, education/skills, isolation, age gap with technology.
- Attitudinal - Low confidence, fear of technology, distrust in institutions.

Support is focused on digital literacy for life admin needs like forms, though social uses are increasing. Age shapes access; older adults face unfamiliarity barriers and prefer tablets while younger ones have smartphones but require PCs for complex tasks.

Language is important; providers promote "digital inclusion" and highlight gains over losses. Case studies showcase exclusion impacts including healthcare access, youth education, and entrepreneurship.

While findings provide early insight, digital divides will affect Manchester's communities differently. The snapshot presented could be expanded through deeper research into demographic differences. Still, it reveals an urgent need to prioritise equitable tech capacity and training.

This report details the context and methodology used for our research, before exploring each of the three categories in the more detail. It ends with six case studies of real-life stories detailing the barriers faced, support received and key takeaways.

Background

Bridging the online divide is vital for providing equitable opportunities in our increasingly online world. The COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted internet access as a necessity – not just for accessing vital services but also for making online purchases and maintaining social relationships. However, people living in 25% of neighbourhoods in Manchester are considered to be at high risk of being digitally excluded[1].

Manchester City Council continues to provide a range of support for helping residents and businesses to get online and participate in the digital world. Programmes such as Eastserve, Manchester HOST, Women's Electronic Village Hall, are examples of this effort. There is also a diverse ecosystem of libraries, community centres and other organisations that offer digital inclusion programmes, many of which the Council support through donations of devices, or training and funding opportunities.

This report is part of a larger programme of work on digital inclusion in Manchester which is split into three strands:

1. Examining what digital exclusion in Manchester looks like.
2. Understanding the motivations, and support needed, for the volunteers who are helping people get online.
3. Supporting community organisations to develop a user-centred approach their work.

This report describes findings from the second strand. It provides a snapshot of what digital exclusion currently looks like in Manchester, and suggests ways in which it might be measured more effectively.

Manchester City Council created their Digital Exclusion Risk Index[2] (DERI) as an important part of how digital exclusion is measured within the city. This report makes use of workshops, interviews and observations with both those who run digital support services and those who attend them to provide a wider perspective.

Methodology

In early 2023, we conducted in-depth interviews with five people who provide digital inclusion support as part of their job. We also drew insights from two workshops with 20 volunteers who provide this support, which were held in June 2022. These workshops also informed strand

[1] https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/500002/council_policies_and_strategies/8356/manchester_digital_strategy_2021_%E2%80%93_2026/3

[2] https://mcr-council.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/3468b8d7f09b43bfbb018899a9aed393 (Accessed July 2023.) It should be noted that this differs from the DERI used by Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

one of this programme. In Autumn 2023, we attended and observed a number of digital support sessions, carrying out conversations with local residents using the service.

As part of the in-depth interviews, we discussed the existing DERI indicators, as well as inviting participants to share their views on barriers to digital inclusion in a more open-ended way. We focussed on answering three main questions:

1. What are the reasons people attend digital support services?
2. What are the barriers to this access?
3. What is the best way to talk about 'digital exclusion'?

For each of these questions we identified these common themes, which will expanded upon in the following sections:

1. Practical barriers, such as lack of devices, internet access, costs.
2. Individual circumstances, such as low income, education level, language skills, social isolation.
3. Attitudinal barriers, including low confidence, fear or mistrust.

We have also created a number of short case studies based on conversations with those who were attending digital support sessions. Whilst the stories are presented as told to us, we have changed the names for protection of personal privacy.

We hope that this report will provide useful insight into the lived experience of those who are actively using digital support sessions within Manchester.

When used alongside the DERI, understanding the barriers to using digital technology may in turn may help predict who may be digitally excluded. While there were clear patterns in the barriers faced, some people providing support with digital inclusion were keen to stress the variety amongst those needing their help:

> *"It's quite a wide spectrum of different needs and different communities and different people".*

We believe the findings in this report offer valuable insight into digital exclusion in Manchester but recommend allocating further resources to investigate this issue further. While these findings provide an informative snapshot, we recognise that digital divide impacts communities differently. Further research could explore exclusion differences across different demographics, allow deeper community outreach and capture more stories to support the use of the DERI.

The Language of Digital Exclusion

Originally we aimed to start to build a common understanding around the language and experience of digital exclusion. However, it became evident that the 'language' element is complex, needing more analysis that this report allows.

Due to this complexity, we shifted to spotlight lived experiences and human stories, which are included throughout this report and in the six case studies. However, some common themes emerged on how people discuss exclusion.

Firstly, in discussing 'digital exclusion,' support providers have expressed reservations about using this as a term. They underscore the need to avoid jargon when communicating with individuals seeking assistance in the digital realm, viewing 'digital exclusion' as an example of such terminology.

Instead, these providers advocate for a positive approach, using terms like 'digital inclusion,' 'digital education,' or 'digital support.' The intention is to foster an environment that encourages participation without labelling individuals as digitally excluded, a term that may evoke a sense of victimhood and hinder some from seeking help.

Secondly, support providers focus on highlighting the positive aspects of learning and participating in classes. They actively promote the benefits and joy of acquiring new skills, showcasing common interests like learning WhatsApp and Facebook, or simply meeting to have a coffee and a chat, in order to attract residents. When advertising their services, real-life examples, coupled with images of individuals who have benefited, are used to help residents envision themselves engaging in these activities. As one community organiser told us:

> *"...we address social isolation and loneliness...rather than saying, 'Are you sad or lonely, come and join our group,' we present it as 'we've organised these fantastic events, which we're sure you'd enjoy'..."*

Throughout this report we may refer to digital exclusion as a negative, but our focus is on the use of positive and inclusion language. When referring to support given to residents, we may use a number of terms interchangabley such as “digital inclusion” or “digital support”.

Practical Barriers

Practical barriers to digital inclusion can include things like lack of devices, internet access or cost. Many residents who attend digital support sessions don't have suitable devices or rely on public computer access. Affordability of devices and data is a key issue. Internet connectivity itself poses challenges around awareness of options, including social tariffs, as well as varying speeds and ongoing costs.

Access to devices

We found that not having a device was a barrier for many residents in being digitally supported, and support providers are giving these out as part of their work. The cost of devices was seen as an important issue for getting access, particularly for households needing multiple devices for each person. However, it was stressed that those needing support often had devices but didn't know how to use them:

> *"A lot of the time people have something. But a lot of the time they don't know how to use it."*

Having the right device was also important. Sometimes older people were being given devices by their children that were different to those they had learned on, so they couldn't use them. To avoid this, those providing digital support were keen to give residents the devices they'd learned on to take away.

There was evidence of older people generally preferring to use tablets, which they found more comfortable than laptops or smartphones. Unfortunately these are more restrictive than laptops, and often the forms they needed help with were hard to complete on these devices. Younger people in contrast appeared to value laptops as you can do more with them:

> *"Older people like to almost, if you imagine how you would use a newspaper, they like the tablet as the newspaper. So it's on their lap... But filling in a form, it's a lot easier on the laptop."*

It was not only older people that lacked access to suitable devices. At one digital support session, we observed younger residents comfortably using smartphones for basic communication, but needing computer access for more complex tasks.

In these cases, to complete their tasks they needed larger screens, specialised software, or deeper processing power. For example, some home-schooled students lacked home computers to work on assignments. In another case, a woman in her 30s used the public computers and printer to design and produce marketing materials for her small business.

The need for access to devices spans age groups, with many of school or working age are also dependent on public computer facilities. This highlights that practical barriers exist across generations when it comes to ownership of devices meeting more advanced digital activity needs. Younger residents may have basic smartphones but still rely on shared community access points for key elements of education, livelihoods, and opportunity.

Internet access

As with devices, support services were making data packages available to those without them. Though there was a suggestion that this is more complicated than the one-off process of offering a device. As with devices, the affordability of data was as an important issue, particularly as it is an ongoing cost.

Getting access to the internet is partly about practical know-how, such as teaching people that if you don't have minutes or texts left on your phone contract, you can still use WhatsApp through Wi-Fi, or that mobile phones can used as an internet hotspot to allow other devices to access the internet.

Speed of connection is important to some, not simply whether there is internet access or not, such as, young people valuing higher speeds for gaming, whereas this was less important for older residents.

"Knock-on" effects of digital exclusion

Being digitally excluded can have further consequences, often imposing additional time and money costs. These range from fees for paper billing to needing to pay for public transport to visit a centre in person. Such "knock-on effects" can go unaccounted for in measuring digital divides.

For example, one resident spoken to, who lacked home internet access, visited a support centre to set up a new broadband package provided to him on a social tarrif. Switching between providers required installing a new router, but delivery issues left him offline just as his old service ended. Regaining connectivity demanded intensive troubleshooting help for a number of issues including confirming his account, resetting passwords, and navigating the delivery company's website.

Thankfully in-person assistance facilitated solving each hurdle. But without internet or phone access at home and without readily available support, the cascade of obstacles resulting from the initial delivery problem could have left this resident disconnected for an extended duration. Such complex "knock-on effects" exacerbate exclusion for those already struggling to participate online. Accounting for these added burdens is essential for accurately capturing the real-life impacts of digital marginalisation.

Individual Barriers

In this section, we will focus on the barriers relating to the individual, and the needs specific to their situation beyond the practical side of simply having access to a device or the internet.

Those accessing support needed help with relatively straightforward parts of using digital technology like email, social media, joining a video call, or the basics of using a laptop or smartphone:

> *"...for digital inclusion, you don't really need to be an absolute tech wizard, because most of the problems that were coming through the door were things that a lot of us take for granted…"*

In sessions that we observed, we saw volunteer supporters help people with things like changing the font in a Word document, using the Search Bar on a web browser or using basic photo editing software. But there are further factors which relate to the individual beyond simple access to the right device or digital literacy. However, many are interrelated.

Support with 'the admin of life'

Most residents coming to drop-ins want help with specific tasks. Mostly, they want help with what one person called 'the admin of life', the forms and applications that often now have to be filled in online:

> *"It does tend to be the very basics really, the admin of life, the doctors forms, the bank forms, the council tax type forms, the housing forms, the benefit forms. All of those seem to be things that people find really difficult and challenging online."*

In one case during the COVID-19 pandemic, an 80-year-old man who was recently bereaved and was very isolated, found his biggest challenge was his gas and electric company insisting on dealing with him online. This resulted in him receiving increasingly "...red coloured and litigious looking letters..." as his bills not being paid. These processes can be intimidating, even without digital barriers.

A wariness about institutions, like the Council or doctor, was sometimes part of people's hesitancy. There was a suggestion that some of these processes may be harder than they need to be. For example, we heard about people having to help someone convert a form from a PDF before filling it in, or spending a lot of time on a complicated form only to find they lacked some of the information needed and would have to come back to complete it.

Connecting with others

Social isolation appeared to be an important part of why some people are less likely to be online, though experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic may somewhat have shaped this picture. Isolation also seemed to be part of the reason that some people take up digital support, particularly where this is delivered in a group setting. There were examples of residents regularly coming to sessions primarily for the social side, or using one-to-one sessions mainly to talk about what was going on in their lives:

> *"...most people that I deal with, are so lonely at home, and they've got no interaction. So when they come in to see me, I'll just say to them, is there anything specific you want to talk about? No, I'm just here just to offload. Okay, then offload. So I listen to them for about 25 minutes."*

Lots of residents are seeking support with digital tools to help them connect with other people. This was particularly true during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for older people. Examples included learning how to talk to family members on Facebook, how to send emails to relatives abroad, and how to use WhatsApp on a mobile phone. Many of those wanting help with social connection had relatives who lived abroad. Some also wanted to learn how to take part in social activities online, such as joining a bridge club. Another older person wanted to find out about activities near them, but didn't know how before getting support.

Age

There were also a lot of stories of people helping out older relatives. Those who have lived much of their lives in a pre-digital world are likely to be less familiar with digital technologies. Often this unfamiliarity was linked with some amount of apprehension or fear:

> *"...in effect, we've lived through a new industrial revolution, the internet has been the seismic change in people's behaviours...older people...the vast majority of their life, and possibly working life, the internet didn't exist. So this is a new thing to them."*

> *"...perhaps they didn't grow up in a world as digital as this and therefore it's unfamiliar. And therefore it just feels a bit unsafe."*

Some participants emphasised that age should be combined with other factors to better predict digital exclusion. It was felt that older people who have largely worked in manual roles (who may not have formal qualifications) were more likely to lack familiarity with digital technology:

> *"…somebody who did have qualifications would possibly be office based. So even at the basics, they would have used the keyboard, be familiar with that premise...they've got a level of familiarity already, that somebody who had a manual or processing job didn't..."*

In one case we heard of an 80-year-old man, described earlier, who was hounded by energy companies for unpaid bills but only given the option of interacting with them online. Someone who had supported him at the time remembered his words vividly and they'd encouraged her to help others:

> *"It honestly feels like the world is moving on without me love."*

Education and improving employability

It was observed that digital support services are often used by school-age children, with some making use of computers to help with school assignments and others more regularly as part of their home-schooling.

Those delivering digital training did talk about the positive effect that digital skills have on residents' employment prospects. For example, volunteers sharing success stories of digital support talked about residents who came for training, then in turn became volunteers and then moved into paid work. One support provider was also offering work experience to young people, which included improving their digital skills.

Language barriers and cultural factors

Many recognised that language barriers could be problematic for accessing digital support, describing experiences of trying to work out what someone needs using Google Translate in libraries or relying on someone's child to act as a translator while delivering training in digital skills.

There was also a recognition that residents who face these barriers often have much to gain from digital access. For example, connecting with family abroad, or accessing online translation services:

> *"… as long as they understand how to switch the phone and how to add the picture on, they'll probably use it more…WhatsApp can enable them to phone family at home..."*

It was recognised that cultural differences could sometimes present barriers to accessing support. One person delivering support was conscious that having female trainers was important for opening up their services to women from some communities. It was also suggested that different cultural attitudes around accessing support, including health and wellbeing services, may affect uptake.

Cost of living

Deprivation was seen as a barrier for affording devices and data, both of which can be expensive. Whilst social tariffs are seen as a useful provision, many feel that the cost is still

too high, and in at least one case we saw instances of upselling and issues with getting services activated. Having enough devices within larger households was seen as an important part of this issue, with schooling often requiring students to use devices at home. People who are homeless or unemployed were also among those accessing digital support:

> *"I think it becomes around priorities. If you're worried that you've not got enough food in the house, you're not worried about Wi-Fi."*

Lending or providing devices and providing SIM cards with free data via “Data Banks” was seen as a vital provision alongside public access points.

Attitudinal Barriers

In some cases, perceived barriers to digital inclusion go beyond having the right support on hand. We spoke to some people and observed in a few sessions instances where residents, despite having access to devices and support, were still held back by having a cautious or apprehensive attitude towards technology. There may be a number of reasons for this, but below are some that surfaced in our research:

Fear and apprehension

Often there were stories of people – usually older residents - being too scared to touch anything related to computers for fear of breaking something:

> *“...fear is a huge, huge factor. I helped one person who wanted to join her bridge group online. She just needed to press reset on her router but she didn’t want to press anything in case she broke it.”*

Alongside this were fears about the very real risks that lurk online. Fears around scammers or getting hacked often came up, and training is being provided to help people navigate these dangers. One research participant who was supporting older people to get online described these fears, and the trade-off residents make between convenience and risk:

> *"... the barrier to getting on the internet is that, you know, they're going to take all their money, they're going to do this, they're going to download all this porn or whatever. So they're wary of the internet...sometimes justifiably worried, because the scammers are out there..."*

> *"It will stop some. But at the end of the day, people like convenience, so if something's convenient, and easy, then they'll do it... If something is a phaff, and they've got to worry, then that's the barrier that will stop them."*

Social media, and protecting personal data, were another source of fear, particularly for older people. Not knowing how these services work was an important part of this. One person delivering digital training described this fear and the work they were doing to build confidence:

> *"...a lot of the fear is that once you sign up, and put a profile on [social media], it's there in the internet forever. So you don't know where that information goes.”*

> *"... how do we build confidence…to ensure the security and data protection...getting them to understand that you can decline cookies, for example, you don't have to share your data."*

Mistrust of institutions

A mistrust of institutions was part of this picture of fear for some people, making them wary about sharing data with official bodies:

> *"...a lot of it now is about accessing a lot of government services online. So again, people may not want to disclose all their personal information, not knowing where that data is going… how it may be used against you kind of thing."*

These attitudes were seen as potential barriers to accessing support and barriers to trusting in online services run by these bodies:

> *"...in certain demographics within society there is resistance to anything that looks like it's been designed or is being delivered by anything too clinical, or like the council..."*

Not recognising the necessity

It was recognised that some residents simply don't want to be online. Yet, because so many services are online, digital access may be considered a part of life. There was a concern that people facing digital exclusion don't always recognise the importance of using digital tools:

> *"...there are just some people that, all the help in the world could be offered, but they just don't like it. They don't like online. They don't like being on a screen… I think a lot of people do it because they have to do it. But they can't wait to get off there, access something more tangible and more real."*

> *"...I think people's attitude will be changing as they recognise that it's going to be a requisite for more and more areas of their lives. So whereas maybe a few years ago, the attitude is: 'Why do I need to learn this?' I think as time goes on the altitude may be changing where it's going to become more of an essential. So yeah, that might be one way of ascertaining their attitude, based on how much now this has impacted on their lives."*

Case Studies

Overcoming Communication Barriers and Finding Support

Introduction:

This case study explores the challenges faced by Vincent, a customer who encountered multiple barriers while setting up NowTV, receiving a Post Office delivery, and arranging home hub installation. The lack of communication and support from the companies involved added to Vincent's frustration. However, with the assistance of a volunteer, Vincent was able to navigate through the obstacles and find a resolution.

Background:

Vincent experienced a series of events that led to a chain of complications. His phone had been disconnected for a few days, followed by a delay in his home hub delivery. To arrange a pick-up at the post office, Vincent needed to access his emails but faced difficulty due to a password reset. Throughout this time, Vincent was unable to be contacted, causing concern among his family members.

Barriers Faced:

1. Disconnected Phone: Vincent's inability to use his phone hindered his communication and access to important information.

2. Delayed Home Hub Delivery: The delay in receiving the home hub disrupted Vincent's plans for setting up his NowTV service.

3. Email Access Issues: Vincent's inability to access his emails due to a password reset created further complications in managing his appointments and deliveries.

4. Lack of Support: Vincent found that the companies he interacted with only offered cheap tariffs without providing adequate support for resolving issues like his.

Support Received:

Fortunately, Vincent received assistance from a volunteer who guided him through each step of the process. The volunteer helped Vincent overcome the barriers he faced by providing the following support:

1. Communication Alternatives: The volunteer suggested alternative methods of communication, such as using a different device or reaching out to the companies via social media.

2. Problem-Solving Guidance: The volunteer assisted Vincent in troubleshooting the delayed home hub delivery and provided suggestions for expediting the process.

3. Email Password Reset Assistance: The volunteer walked Vincent through the steps of resetting his email password, enabling him to regain access to his account.

4. Emotional Support: Throughout the ordeal, the volunteer provided emotional support to Vincent, reassuring him and alleviating his concerns.

Key Takeaways:

Vincent's experience highlights the importance of effective communication and support when facing challenges with service providers. Despite encountering various barriers, Vincent was able to overcome them with the help of a dedicated volunteer. This case study emphasizes the significance of offering comprehensive support alongside affordable services to ensure a positive customer experience.

Empowering Older Adults to Acquire Digital Skills

Introduction:

This case study explores the journey of an older woman who embarked on a mission to learn new digital skills, specifically word processing. By undertaking a digital skills course and the support of a volunteer, she overcame challenges and gained confidence in using technology.

Background:

Ellen, a woman in her late 60s, recognised the importance of acquiring digital skills in today's technology-driven world. She identified word processing as a valuable skill and set out to learn it. Her motivation stemmed from the desire to enhance her communication abilities, access online resources, and stay connected with her family and friends.

Barriers Faced:

1. Limited familiarity with technology: Ellen had minimal experience with computers and lacked knowledge about basic functions such as right-clicking, opening/saving files, and spell-checking documents.

2. Overcoming fear and uncertainty: The unfamiliarity with technology created a sense of apprehension and self-doubt, leading to the need for reassurance and encouragement.

3. Complexity : Ellen struggled to understand advanced features like headers, footers, and ribbons within word processing software.

Support received:

1. Finding a digital literacy course: Ellen visited her local community centre, which runs regular drop-in sessions offering digital literacy courses and support.

2. Utilizing written instructions: To supplement her learning process, Ellen used printed instructions that provided step-by-step guidance on various word processing tasks.

3. Volunteer support: When needing additional help, Ellen reached out to a volunteer who was able to answer her questions and provide further assistance.

Key Takeaways:

This case study highlights the transformative power of learning new digital skills for older adults. By utilising locally available digital literacy courses, and the assistance of a volunteer, Ellen successfully acquired word processing skills. This journey not only improved her ability to navigate the digital landscape but also enhanced her overall confidence and independence. It serves as an example for other older adults seeking to embrace technology and unlock its potential.

Overcoming Barriers to Online Travel Booking

Introduction

This case study looks at the obstacles faced by older adults when attempting to book travel online, using the example of one man's frustrating experience trying to purchase airline tickets. It highlights the need for guidance and safer environments tailored to seniors.

Background

John, a 72-year old retiree, wanted to book economy seats for an upcoming trip to visit his grandchildren using a low cost airline website. While John did own a smartphone, he avoided entering sensitive financial information due to distrust in mobile security and privacy protections. He also felt overwhelmed by confusing website design elements aimed at up-selling.

Barriers Face

1. Complex seat selection process
2. Persistent pop-ups and ads encouraging additional purchases
3. Lack of senior-friendly guidance on site.
4. Reluctance to input payment data without reassurance

Support Received

Fortunately, a volunteer from John's local community centre was available to provide personalised assistance. The volunteer helped John understand the seat selection process, navigate through up-sell pop-ups, and complete his ticket purchase using the community centre's computer for added payment security. Moving forward, John felt more confident to book travel online with future guidance.

Key Takeaways

John's experience underscores the need for user-friendly booking platforms tailored to older generations. While John had a smartphone, its security features still left him uneasy. This highlights an opportunity for senior-specific assistance and protected payment portals. With compassionate guidance from both community members and better designed websites, older adults can confidently access online services.

Bridging the Digital Literacy Gap Across All Ages

Introduction

This case study examines an interaction between youth and senior community members at a digital support session for locals seeking technology guidance. It reveals differences in digital proficiency across generations and the value of peer learning.

Background

Alex, a 12-year old boy attended the session after finishing an exam. As a digital native, he wanted to watch soccer highlights of Manchester City's latest match online. However, Alex's use of insider terminology like "stream" left some older attendees confused. One elderly gentleman sought Alex's help to "watch the highlights" online too, but struggled to understand which website or browser to use.

Bridging the Gap

Recognising the knowledge gap, a volunteer stepped in to assist. They showed both Alex and the older attendee how to navigate to the football highlights simply and clearly. Rather than make assumptions about skill levels, the volunteer met each person at their level of understanding. They used plain language like "type here" instead of technical jargon, enabling both generations to achieve their goal of accessing the content they wanted.

Key Takeaways

This real-world case study demonstrates the need for digital literacy mentoring that serves community members across age groups and skill levels. Tech industry terms that seem intuitive to younger digital natives may feel unfamiliar and intimidating to others. Programs aiming to promote true digital inclusion can tailor their support for varying needs, from exam-taking pre-teens to mature adults seeking to get online.

Empowering Entrepreneurs Through Digital Access

Introduction

This case study looks at how digital barriers can impede entrepreneurship and economic mobility for disadvantaged groups. It tells the story of a young woman seeking to grow her business without home technology access.

Background

Jada, a smart and creative 30-year old, runs a house cleaning start-up. As the sole proprietor, she manages everything from services to marketing herself. Jada hoped to create professional flyers to promote her expanding clientele. However, lacking a personal computer and printer, executing her vision seemed out of reach.

Barriers Faced

1. No computer ownership due to expense
2. Lacked software and a printer to produce materials
3. Missing out on opportunities due to digital divide.

Finding Support

Fortunately, Jada learned of a free digital support session at her local community centre. Volunteers helped Jada use photo editing software to design flyers. Access to computers

and printers enabled Jada to output her materials with ease. The guidance she received proved invaluable in progressing her entrepreneurial journey.

Key Takeaways

Jada's story demonstrates how access to technology can exacerbate inequality. But it also shows that programs providing critical resources and digital support give businesses like Jada's the chance to succeed. For entrepreneurs from low-income backgrounds, digital limitations pose undue setbacks. Investing in equitable tech access and inclusive skills training grants them the tools to achieve their economic goals and make their visions reality on their own terms.

Bridging Learning Gaps Through Patient Digital Mentorship

Introduction

This case study examines how digital literacy barriers can impede home-schooling success and how community support centres can make a difference through compassionate guidance.

Background

Sarah, a 15-year-old home-schooled student, visited a local digital support centre to access a computer in order to work on an assignment.Though an eager learner, she struggled with Microsoft Word tools like headers, footers, and page numbering when attempting the task on her own.

Support received

Sarah was able to make use of an available computer and word processing software. A volunteer at the centre showed Sarah how to properly structure her document. They walked her through applying custom headers and footers, fixing the page orientation, and checking for spelling errors. Sarah felt supported rather than ashamed of any knowledge gaps.

Key Takeaways

Like Sarah, home-schooled students often confront digital literacy barriers without access to traditional IT support. As this case study demonstrates, community assistance centres can make all the difference by filling gaps and empowering independent learners. With more

patient digital mentorship, students like Sarah can gain confidence in vital skills needed for academic and lifelong success.