

'Mind the Gap' Project: Final Report Digital Pioneers Progress Fund

Equipping Saheliya Language Support Staff with essential digital skills to be Digital Champions to support their professional development and ability to assist the women (from refugee and asylum-seeking background) they serve in navigating digital tools.

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Executive Summary

Mind the Gap project was a digital inclusion initiative delivered in partnership with Saheliya and Mhor Collective, under the Digital Pioneers Progress Fund. This project funded by the Digital Pioneers Progress Fund from the Scottish Government, supported by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and Technology Enabled Care (TEC) Scotland. The project was designed to address the digital inequalities faced by refugee, asylum-seeking, and ethnic minority women by first building the digital capacity of the language support staff, often the first point of contact for these women.

The project took a flexible, person-centred approach to deliver a training programme focused on equipping Saheliya's language support staff with essential digital skills to help others access and navigate everyday digital tools or platforms. These included accessing health services through NHS Inform, NHS 24 and Near Me, using local support directories like ALISS (A local Information System for Scotland), email setup and management, improving online safety and exploring AI tools to support communication and learning.

Training was delivered in person at the Saheliya office twice weekly, with one-on-one and group sessions tailored to the availability and needs of staff. The project directly responded to the urgent need for inclusive and accessible digital support, especially in the context of social, healthcare and wellbeing.

The project produced several **key outcomes**, including:

- Language support staff progressed from digital familiarity to digital confidence and competence.
- Through hands-on digital workshops, service users were successfully introduced to digital health platforms in their own languages with assistance from language support staff.
- A peer mentorship emerged organically where staff support one another and led digital inclusion workshops for service users.

The project also raised **key challenges**, including:

- Language and literacy barriers made some aspects of digital training inaccessible without translated and simplified resources.
- Outdated and limited access to digital devices disrupted learning and impacted day-to-day accessibility for both staff and service users.
- Time constraints and workload pressures limited training availability for staff.
- The short-term funding limited depth and pace of training.
- Systemic and structural barriers including economic instability, inaccessible platform design, lack of cultural and linguistic representation, discrimination, gender-based roles and immigration status emerged as underlying challenges

that exclude marginalised women from engaging with essential digital services.

Building on the successes and insights of Mind the Gap, here are some **recommendations for next steps** to ensure sustainability, deepen impact and expand reach:

- Co-design a flexible digital training curriculum tailored to Saheliya's context.
- Develop multilingual, multimedia learning resources accessible to both staff and service users.
- Expand training to include service users and build community partnerships.
- Formalise the peer mentorship and participatory training model for digital inclusion to support continuous learning.
- Secure long-term funding to embed digital inclusion into Saheliya's core service delivery.
- Advocate for digital platforms that are inclusive, accessible, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive.

Mind the Gap project proves that digital inclusion is not just about training, it is about empowerment. It is about giving staff and service users the tools, confidence, and culturally appropriate support they need to engage with a digital world that's often inaccessible to them. This initiative has shown that how community-rooted solutions can bridge the digital divide and promote equity, resilience, and autonomy to women often left behind.

Project Background and Rationale

The *Mind the Gap* project was developed in response to the growing need for digital inclusion in health and social care access, particularly among marginalised communities. Supported by the Digital Pioneers Progress Fund, the initiative is part of a wider effort to embed digital inclusion as a core part of service delivery. The fund's goal is to enable people to develop the digital skills and confidence they need to access services and support that meet their health and wellbeing needs.

This project was delivered in partnership between Saheliya, a specialist mental health and wellbeing support organisation for Black, Asian, and ethnic minority women, and Mhor Collective, a leading digital inclusion organisation. Saheliya language support staff—many of whom are multilingual and embedded within communities they support—play a vital role in bridging the gap between public services and service users. The service users who visit Saheliya often face challenges when digital tasks are required, such as accessing information, booking appointments, completing online forms or where to find support/resources online.

The primary goal of the *Mind the Gap* project was to equip these frontline staff with essential digital skills so they could become Digital Champions who support service users to navigate digital tools safely, independently, and effectively.

This work is especially important given the increasing digitalisation of essential services in the UK and globally. According to the [Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index and Essential Digital Skills report 2024](#)¹, around 12.1 million in the UK have very low digital capabilities, with those affected more likely to be older (70+), living in poverty or from ethnic minority backgrounds. In addition, the [Good Things Foundation](#)² highlights that digital exclusion often overlaps with other forms of exclusion, such as language barriers, limited income, or low literacy levels—all common challenges faced by the women supported at Saheliya.

Furthermore, the [PRIME \(Protecting Minority Ethnic Communities Online\)](#)³ research reveals a direct correlation between digital inequalities and inequalities with health and housing. The PRIME report also highlights on concerns evident within the project around 'digital precarity' where individuals can only use digital services when they have access to essential resources, such as the internet, an adequate digital device or the presence of relatives or volunteers minimise participation and withdrawal from services. Individuals with limited digital access and literacy often experience worse health outcomes due to reduced access to timely and accurate information or essential digital services like NHS Inform, NHS 24.

For many of Saheliya's service users, even basic digital tasks can be overwhelming without culturally sensitive, language-appropriate support. This project responded to that need by not only improving staff confidence and capacity in digital tools but also embedding peer-led digital learning as a relational, trusted approach to care.

By “meeting people where they are at”—both physically in trusted community settings and in terms of their digital journey—the *Mind the Gap* project aimed to reduce barriers, empower individuals, and ensure that digital transformation does not leave the most vulnerable behind.

Project Summary

Vision and Mission

The *Mind the Gap* project was developed with a clear vision: to bridge the digital divide for refugee and asylum-seeking women by equipping frontline language support staff with essential digital skills. These staff members serve as critical links between service users and the broader community and are often the first point of contact for women navigating unfamiliar systems as they settle in the UK.

The mission of this project is to empower Saheliya’s language support staff to become Digital Champions—individuals who are not only confident in their own digital capabilities but are also able to pass on these skills to others. The project aims to enhance staff’s professional development and enable them to offer informed, hands-on digital support to the women they work with. By doing so, the project supports long-term goals of inclusion, independence, and resilience within the refugee and asylum-seeking community.

This aligns with broader efforts to promote equitable access to essential services, online information, education, and community support, particularly for marginalised women with limited English proficiency and low digital literacy.

Target Audience and Reach

The primary target audience for the *Mind the Gap* project was Saheliya language support staff, many of whom come from migrant or refugee backgrounds themselves. These staff members often assist women with multiple vulnerabilities such as trauma, financial challenges, domestic abuse or limited literacy, who rely on Saheliya for holistic support. By focusing on staff, the project took a train-the-trainer approach. Once staff were equipped with digital skills, they could support a much wider group of refugee and asylum-seeking women in their communities. This multiplier effect extended the project’s reach beyond individual participants to many of the service users who can then have better access to essential online resources through trusted intermediaries.

Over the course of the project:

- All participating staff underwent hands-on digital skills assessments and training. Five (5) language support staff were engaged in this project.
- Some staff-led workshops were organised for service users, covering health and other access tools like NHS Inform, Near Me and ALISS. Service users who participated were 21 women. We held 5 workshop sessions.
- Ongoing support was provided to help service users set up emails, book GP appointments online, use translation tools and access community resources.

Project Objectives

The *Mind the Gap* project was designed with a clear focus on bridging digital inequalities by equipping frontline staff at Saheliya with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to support the digital inclusion of the refugee, asylum-seeking, and ethnic minority women they serve. Grounded in a community-centred approach, the project sought to embed digital skills training within the everyday operations of support services, recognising that digital literacy is now essential for accessing health, wellbeing, social care and other essential services.

The specific objectives of the project were:

- **To equip support staff with essential digital skills.**
Through hands-on training sessions, language support staff gained foundational knowledge in navigating online platforms, and accessing essential tools such as email communications, online safety, navigating health websites and using AI platforms.
- **To promote digital confidence and professional development.**
By building digital competencies, the project contributed to the personal growth and professional development of staff, increasing their ability to provide more comprehensive support and enhancing their job satisfaction.
- **To facilitate access to essential services.**
The project ensured that both staff and service users could confidently use digital platforms to book GP appointments, attend virtual consultations via Near Me, and find local support resources through ALISS.
- **To develop Digital Champions within the organisation and enhance support for service users.**
Staff were trained not just for their own benefit but to support others. The project empowers selected staff to take on a Digital Champion role—acting as trusted guides and peer mentors to share their learning with colleagues and service users in a culturally sensitive and accessible way.

- **To build a foundation for sustainable digital support.**

Establish peer-to-peer learning models that positions digital inclusion as an ongoing, embedded part of support, not a one-off initiative. The project laid the groundwork for continued learning and skill-sharing beyond the life of the project.

Alignment with Saheliya's Mission

The *Mind the Gap* project aligns with Saheliya's core mission to promote the health and wellbeing of Black, minority ethnic, asylum-seeking, and refugee women in a culturally sensitive and inclusive environment. Saheliya has long recognised that the women it serves face multiple layers of marginalisation, often at the intersection of race, migration status, language, trauma, and poverty. Digital exclusion further compounds these challenges, especially when it restricts access to healthcare, education, employment opportunities, and social connection.

By focusing on digital empowerment, *Mind the Gap* supports Saheliya's commitment to:

- Reducing inequalities by enhancing access to digital services and information.
- Empowering women through trusted relationships with staff who can guide them using shared cultural understanding and language.
- Strengthening community capacity by investing in the skills of frontline workers who are deeply embedded in the lives of the women they support.
- Promoting independence and confidence, enabling women to navigate services and advocate for their own needs in a rapidly digitising world.

Methodology and Delivery Approach

The *Mind the Gap* project was delivered through a flexible, participatory, and hands-on training model designed to meet the real-life needs and working patterns of Saheliya's language support staff. The approach was intentionally community-led, recognising that meaningful digital inclusion can only happen through collaboration, flexibility and cultural sensitivity.

Participatory Training Model

At the core of the project was a Participatory Training Model, which positions staff not merely as recipients of knowledge, but as co-creators in the learning process. This approach valued their lived experiences, diverse backgrounds and existing skills, encouraged open dialogue, and prioritised relationship-building and trust. The daily routines of staff were observed to identify digital skills most relevant to their

roles rather than a one-size-fits-all delivery. Sessions were delivered in a conversational style that is culturally and linguistically sensitive allowing staff to learn at their own pace, ask questions freely, and held in a safe, non-judgemental space.

The participatory model emphasised peer-to-peer learning and mutual exchange of knowledge. Staff build confidence through practice and encouraged to support each other, sharing tips, exploring new tools together and reflecting on how digital skills could be applied to real world challenges they face in their roles.

Training Schedule and Format

Training was delivered twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays, with sessions held in person at the Saheliya office from September 2024 to March 2025. This schedule was intentionally chosen to offer flexibility, considering the unpredictability and demanding nature of staff responsibilities as they support service users. Depending on how busy the office was, training was delivered either as small group workshops or one-on-one sessions.

The training was interactive, hands-on practice, using a combination of laptops and mobile phones with internet access, and where appropriate, a projector and screen for step-by-step demonstrations. The informal, flexible environment help reduce anxiety and build confidence around using unfamiliar digital tools.

Assessment Tools and Feedback Mechanisms

To measure progress and tailor the training to individual needs, the project began with an Essential Digital Skills Assessment. The initial, informal assessment helped identify each staff member's strengths and areas of improvement. Ongoing observations helped to monitor engagement, progress and insight into practical understanding. Staff were encouraged to give real-time feedback on what was working, what they needed more help with, and how confident they felt using different tools. Feedback and emerging themes were recorded to inform this final report, to assess overall impact and suggest improvement for future initiatives.

Training Modules Covered

The *Mind the Gap* project delivered a series of targeted training modules, carefully selected to address the digital literacy needs of Saheliya's language support staff. Each module focused on equipping staff with practical, transferable skills that enhance both their personal and professional digital skills while empowering them to support refugee and asylum-seeking women effectively.

Essential Digital Skills Assessment

The training began with an assessment to understand each staff's existing digital capabilities. This baseline helped identify individual needs and tailor the delivery approach. It also identified priority areas for development such as email use, online safety, or identifying digital resources. The assessment was a starting point and a reference to track progress. Full report of the assessment is available in Appendix.

Digital Health Access: NHS Inform, NHS 24, Near Me, and GP appointment

One of the key focuses of the project was improving staff capacity to support service users in navigating digital health platforms. This training was first introduced to staff and later the staff supported service users in several workshops using their phones. The training included how to navigate NHS Inform for multilingual health information, understanding how and when to use NHS 24 for urgent health queries, using Near Me to attend virtual GP appointments, how to order prescriptions, scheduling appointments and using translation tools. [A full report of this training can be found here](#)

Local Support: ALISS (A Local Information System for Scotland)

Staff and service users were trained on using ALISS to find local services for community support, health, wellbeing, support networks, support for children, and other practical needs. They explored how to search based on location and category.

Email Set-up and Management

This module focused on creating, accessing, and using email accounts effectively. Staff learned how to set up Gmail accounts, best practices for composing, sending and replying to emails, attaching files, forwarding emails, and spam filters. Email skills also supported staff in their own administrative tasks and helping service users.

Privacy and Security: Passwords and Two-Step Verification

Online safety is critical for protecting staff and service users online. This module covered on how to create strong and memorable passwords, using password managers, setting up two-step verification, recognising suspicious links and protecting personal information.

Using AI Tools: Grammarly and ChatGPT

Staff were introduced to AI tools that can assist with communication and productivity. The training included sessions on Grammarly to check spelling, grammar and clarity with written English for sending emails and preparing documentation. Also, ChatGPT was explored to support staff in drafting content and translating sentences.

Google Maps

Training in Google maps focused on supporting independence and confidence in navigating new or familiar areas and how to protect their privacy and safety.

Understanding Misinformation and Fake News

This session equipped staff with tools to assess the reliability of online information, especially related to immigration, health, news and events. They explored fact-checking websites, common signs of misinformation and how misinformation spreads on digital platforms.

Technology-Facilitated Abuse

This module raised awareness about how technology can be misused to control, monitor or harm women, especially in abusive relationships. Staff were trained to identify signs of digital stalking or surveillance, risks of shared passwords, location sharing, compromised accounts and providing resources and helplines for women experiencing technology-facilitated abuse. Staff mentioned this is an important topic and service users will need training for it. During the time of this project, several service users came with cases of digital stalking, cyber harassment, and disinformation.

Key Outcomes and Impact

The *Mind the Gap* project has made a meaningful impact on both staff and service users involved at Saheliya. The flexible, participatory and culturally sensitive training model ensured that participants not only developed digital skills but also grew in confidence, agency, and stronger community-based digital inclusion.

Staff Confidence and Capacity Building

One of the most significant outcomes of the project was the boost in digital confidence and capabilities among Saheliya's language support staff. Many staff members began with limited or hesitant digital skills, particularly around areas such as email communication, online health services, and internet security. Through

regular, hands-on sessions and one-on-one guidance, staff developed a range of practical skills they could apply in their daily roles. Staff also developed a broader awareness of digital safety and privacy, becoming more mindful about secure password management, fake news, and how to protect themselves and their service users from online threats. Many staff initially expressed uncertainty around using digital tools, particularly in front of others or in professional contexts.

The training approach helped shift this mindset by creating a safe, non-judgmental space where learning was encouraged, and mistakes were seen as part of the process. The delivery of individualised and small-group sessions respected different learning styles and levels of experience. Staff were empowered to see themselves as capable digital users and educators, able to support others and troubleshoot issues independently with time. Several staff expressed enthusiasm about continuing to build on what they've learned and sharing that knowledge with others in the team.

Service User Engagement and Empowerment

By training staff to act as Digital Champions, the project directly enhanced the digital inclusion of refugee, asylum-seeking, and ethnic minority women who rely on Saheliya's services. Service users were supported in setting up email accounts, booking GP appointments, accessing NHS Inform, and locating local services via ALISS. Crucially, many of these tasks were previously difficult or impossible for them to complete without one-on-one assistance. The presence of trained, trusted support staff made these interactions comfortable and empowering for service users. As staff explained digital tools in familiar languages and through culturally relevant examples, women felt more confident engaging with technology and taking control of their digital health journeys. This empowerment was particularly evident during follow-up workshops, where service users expressed greater trust in digital services and a willingness to learn more.

Peer-to-Peer Learning and Community Impact

One of the most effective aspects of the project was the peer-to-peer learning model that naturally emerged throughout the training. As staff progressed through the training, they naturally began supporting one another sharing tips, troubleshooting together, and modelling new skills for colleagues. Beyond the organisation, the impact extended to the wider community. As staff became more confident, they helped service users not only access services but also begin to participate more fully in digital society, whether by attending online health appointments, navigating online maps, or engaging with written communication using AI tools. This approach not only supported staff development but also built a sense of community ownership over digital knowledge. The trust and empathy cultivated through this process has lasting

implications for how digital inclusion is embedded in frontline support work going forward.

Case Studies and Stories of Change

The success of the *Mind the Gap* project was not just about delivering digital skills but also about creating real-world impact through a staff-led initiative that brought digital skills to life for service users in meaningful and empowering ways. A focused workshop on using NHS Inform provided invaluable insights into the digital literacy needs of participants, the barriers they face, and the progress made through the Digital Champions model. The following stories and feedback reflect the journey from digital exclusion to digital awareness and empowerment.

Case Study 1: Discovering Digital Health for the First Time

Most participants came to the session without prior knowledge of NHS Inform or other digital health services. One service user shared that she always relied on her daughter to explain health issues or translate online information. One service user also came with her adult daughters to learn together. After attending the workshop, staff and service users were able to access information in their preferred language and identified that the NHS Inform contained useful information and services they wanted to use.

One service user shared:

“This website is very important for me because I can find what I need in my language. Before, I didn't know anything like this was there.”

Case Study 2: Breaking Barriers and Need for Continued Support

While all participants were impressed by the availability of health information in multiple languages, some languages are not available. The majority of participants were unable to find content in formats that suit them, such as audio and video to cater for their varying literacy levels. Many participants needed support in finding and using translation tools, navigating different features and understanding how to explain health problems digitally. These challenges were obvious with staff when navigating other digital platforms like AI tools, two-step verification and creating and managing accounts with emails.

Feedback from one participant included:

"I can read in my language, but the screen has too many words. I need something like a voice or video to help understand. I want a paper with pictures to follow next time."

This feedback highlighted the importance of multiformat and suggest that future training should include simplified printouts, audiovisual instructions.

Case Study 3: A Pathway to Independence

For women who had previously relied on others to access digital platforms, one experience of successful navigation is a beginning of digital independence.

One participant said:

"I didn't know before I can do this on my phone. We need to learn more with laptops. I want to learn more. More training will be good."

Why These Stories Matter

These stories of change demonstrate that digital inclusion is not just about technology - it's about people, trust, and access to knowledge in the right format and language. It shows that when given the right tools and support, marginalised women can and will engage with digital resources. It also shows that simple design, translated content and culturally sensitive facilitation are key to building digital confidence. With continued investment, accessible design, and community leadership, more women like those in this workshop can move from digital exclusion to empowerment.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

While the *Mind the Gap* project achieved notable successes, it also revealed important structural, cultural, and logistical challenges that must be addressed to improve the long-term impact of digital inclusion efforts. These challenges offer valuable insights into what is required to scale and sustain digital inclusion efforts meaningfully across Saheliya and similar community settings.

Language Barriers and Literacy Levels

A significant challenge was the diverse language needs and varying levels of literacy among both staff and service users. While Saheliya staff are multilingual and culturally fluent, many have limited written English literacy or are more accustomed to verbal communication. This made written instructions, digital prompts, and

interfaces more difficult to navigate. For service users, the challenge was even greater. Some service users who visit Saheliya rely on spoken communication and struggle to read even in their own languages. Many women are unfamiliar with the digital and technical language used on websites like NHS Inform. Some of them found it difficult to understand icons, menu labels, or interpret website navigation cues. Digital inclusion resources must go beyond translation, they must be culturally appropriate, easy to understand, and available in different formats (e.g., voice, video, infographics).

Confidence and Digital Familiarity

Lack of confidence in using digital tools was a barrier across both staff and service users, particularly at the beginning of the project, resulting in hesitation to engage with digital tools. A recurring theme was fear of getting it wrong or exposing personal information. This was tied not only to skill gaps, but to past experiences, hearsay or fear of exposing their “weakness” to others. Some staff needed repeated exposure to new platforms and one-on-one guidance. It was evident that confidence-building needs to be a core part of training design. Support needs to be in safe, non-judgemental learning environments that foster encouragement, repetition, patience and opportunities to celebrate small wins.

Resource Constraints

While devices were made available for training, many of the staff's day-to-day work devices were outdated, slow, or in need of repair, affecting both training efficiency and ongoing digital practice. Also, the delay in the delivery of new digital equipment affected continuity and engagement. This underlines the importance of ongoing investment in up-to-date equipment and adequate resource planning as a foundation for any digital inclusion programme.

Time Constraints and Staff Workload

Saheliya's language support staff are highly dedicated and often overextended, juggling multiple responsibilities to support service users. Finding consistent time for training proved challenging due to their existing workload and the unpredictable needs of service users. Attendance at sessions varied depending on the day's workload or emergencies. Staff occasionally had to leave mid-session to respond to service users' urgent needs. The project took a flexible and adaptive approach, with the facilitator present in the office throughout the day to deliver one-on-one or small group sessions based on availability. However, this also meant that training progress varied among staff, and some topics were covered in less depth than planned.

Future programmes will benefit from designated time blocks, one-on-one coaching options, and clearer integration of digital training into staff development plans.

Digital Tools and Platforms are not designed to be Inclusive

One of the recurring insights that emerged throughout the project is that most mainstream digital platforms are not designed with inclusivity in mind, particularly for women from migrant, refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds. The digital landscape often assumes a level of literacy, familiarity, and language proficiency that many of these women do not have. These platforms do not require us simply to learn a skill, but rather require a daily compromise with systems that are inaccessible and confusing to these women. There is still a significant lack of culturally appropriate, multilingual, and user-friendly resources for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women. Most digital platforms, especially those related to health and essential services, are designed for the general audience with minimal consideration for language diversity, literacy levels, trauma-informed design and cultural sensitivity. Women often rely on word-of-mouth, family members, or frontline staff to help navigate these tools.

Complex Navigation and Technical Language

Many digital platforms have complicated layouts and technical jargon that are difficult to follow, even for experienced users. Throughout the project, staff and service users alike reported difficulties navigating multi-step processes such as registering for services, booking appointments. Interpreting platform layouts that rely heavily on icons, abbreviations or labels create anxiety around “pressing the wrong thing.” The interface of platforms varies based on different phones and laptops which made it confusing during training. The content on digital platforms is written in formal, jargon-heavy English that is difficult for people with limited literacy to understand. Locating the language translation function are often buried deep within a dropdown menu. The quality of translation options available is often inconsistent, lacking the cultural and contextual tone needed for better understanding. These design barriers lead to frustration, discourage engagement and sometimes avoidance of digital services.

Short-Term Funding and Need for Continuity

The limited duration of the project placed pressure on the delivery of content and did not allow enough time for deep, sustained learning or the rollout of a structured programme for staff. Topics had to be covered quickly, without much time for deep engagement. Staff and service users who participated expressed interest in continued training and more time to explore the tools in depth. Long-term funding is

essential to sustain the development of Digital Champions, expand the training model to service users that aligns with their evolving needs and digital capabilities.

The constant digitisation of public health and social care services, including the Digital Front Door and the NHS App, requires not only stability in the funding landscape for public, third and private sectors to ensure that everyone in Scotland has the support required to access digital services but also clear commitment to work to minimise the impact of digital inequality.

Leadership Engagement and Project Buy-In

There is a need for early-stage engagement with managers and project coordinators to ensure shared understanding of the project goals, relevance to service delivery, and long-term organisational benefits. Future projects would benefit from an introductory orientation session for leadership and staff, clarifying expectations, co-developing training goals, and securing top-down support.

Sustainability and Recommendations

The success of the *Mind the Gap* project demonstrated that digital inclusion, when delivered with cultural sensitivity, community trust, and flexibility, can create meaningful and lasting change. To sustain and scale the impact, the following strategies have been identified as essential components of the next phase of the programme.

Developing a Co-Designed Training Curriculum

A key learning from this project is the need for a structured yet flexible curriculum, co-designed with the staff and reflective of their lived experiences, work routines, and cultural contexts. Rather than using only a generic digital skills framework, future training should be tailored to the real-world needs of language support staff and the communities they support.

- This co-designed curriculum should be organised into progressive modules, from foundational skills to more advanced or role-specific competencies.
- It should incorporate practical application scenarios such as helping a service user complete an online form, using examples drawn from everyday 'transactions' required in health and social care.
- The curriculum should be trauma-informed and co-created with staff to ensure ownership, engagement, and inclusion of the cultural, social and migration experiences of learners. This is especially important in the context of Health

and Social care to ensure that barriers and risks are both identified and addressed.

Multilingual, Multimedia, and Print Learning Resources

One of the key insights was the diverse literacy levels, language needs and learning styles of staff and service users who participated.

- To ensure accessibility, digital learning content should include audio instructions and voiceover videos with key community languages where possible.
- Future training should include step-by-step print guides with visuals and simple language.
- It should also consist of interactive tools like quizzes, flashcards, or a translated glossary of common digital or cultural terms.
- Using WhatsApp-style formats, such as short voice notes and instructional clips, allows for independent practice.

Many of these insights transfer directly to the space of Health and Social Care: resources produced for people, including health information and digital health and social care tools, should ensure accessibility as outlined above, and focus on mixed formats, including short-form audio and audio, with print visuals and community languages.

Peer Mentorship and Ongoing Support

The peer-to-peer support and participatory training model proved invaluable during the project. As staff grew more confident, they began supporting each other informally, sharing strategies and troubleshooting together. Key elements of a peer mentorship model could include:

- Digital Champions among staff who take on informal coaching roles
- Regular drop-in digital clinics or open learning days, where digital champions (staff) can support and explore new tools with service users.
- A physical or digital space/ group for staff to share tips, ask questions and celebrate small wins.

This approach will reinforce learning, foster a sense of community and shared responsibility for digital inclusion.

As previously, these insights can be transferred specifically to spaces within Health and Social Care. Peer Mentoring models can effect change for service users, especially when Peers are drawn from those with lived and living experience. This is also highlighted in our wider research.

Expanding to Service Users and Community Partnerships

While *Mind the Gap* focused on staff development, the next phase should include structured digital inclusion workshops for service users delivered by trained staff in a culturally sensitive and language-accessible way. To reach more women, maximise impact and to support engagement with digital health and social care it is necessary to:

- Use the train the trainer model where staff will pass on their skills to service users.
- Centre those with lived experience in peer-support models
- Partner with local libraries, digital inclusion networks, public agencies and grassroots organisations to extend resources, share best practices, and access funding or devices.
- Co-design community-led sessions to hear from service users and to teach and learn from each other.

Long-Term Vision for Digital Inclusion

The long-term vision is to create a digitally confident, inclusive, and resilient community, where both staff and service users are empowered to engage with online services, advocate for their needs, and access opportunities for growth and wellbeing.

To realise this vision, here are some suggestions:

- Establish ongoing digital inclusion programming as a core part of Saheliya's work and not a one-off project.
- Secure multi-year funding to support curriculum development, training delivery, mentorship, and up-to-date technology access.
- Integrate digital skills training into staff induction and professional development pathways.
- Build a digital inclusion framework that informs how Saheliya delivers its services, communicates with service users, and collaborates with external agencies.
- Advocate for inclusive digital design in external platforms (like NHS websites, social housing, universal credit, Home Office), ensuring the voices of refugee and asylum-seeking women are reflected in service delivery.

Conclusion

The *Mind the Gap* project has proven that with the right support, environment, and approach, digital inclusion can be a powerful tool for transformation. It is one that builds confidence, expands access to vital services, and strengthens community resilience. While this project began as a skills development initiative for staff, it has evolved into a wider movement of empowerment, learning, and connection.

By equipping Saheliya's language support staff with essential digital skills, we enable them to become Digital Champions to improve their digital capabilities to become instrumental in supporting others. A flexible, participatory training model was adopted to deliver one-to-one and group sessions tailored to the daily realities and needs of frontline support workers. Training was delivered using a wide range of practical tools such as NHS Inform, ALISS, Gmail, Google Maps, AI platforms and online safety features. The project introduced a peer-to-peer learning model, where staff trained and supported each other and led sessions for service users.

The challenges we faced range from language and literacy barriers to limited training time and outdated devices were real and complex. However, these challenges also offered insight into the conditions needed for true digital inclusion to take effect: simplified tools, culturally relevant resources, peer-led learning, and ongoing investment in capacity building.

What emerged most clearly from this project is the importance of meeting people where they are, whether digitally, physically and emotionally. When digital literacy is taught with patience, empathy, and cultural understanding, it opens doors not only to health and social services but also to autonomy, confidence, and dignity.

Looking forward, the foundation has been laid for a scalable, sustainable model that can reach deeper into the community. With further funding, collaboration, and co-designed resources, we envision expanding this work to include service users more directly, building multilingual and multimedia learning tools, and strengthening partnerships that embed digital inclusion across the health and social care landscape.

As the project closes this chapter, it opens new possibilities when digital skills training is grounded in trust, relevance, and care. It has shown us that closing the digital divide is beyond technical task and deeply human-centred.

Acknowledgements

The success of the *Mind the Gap* project would not have been possible without the collective effort, collaboration, and commitment of numerous individuals and organisations who believed in the vision of digital inclusion and worked tirelessly to make it a reality.

First and foremost, we extend our deepest gratitude to the **Saheliya language support staff** who showed dedication, openness and enthusiasm throughout the training sessions. Your willingness to learn, adapt, and your unwavering commitment to the women you support was inspiring.

To the **women who participated in the service user workshops**, thank you for trusting us, for showing up even when it felt unfamiliar, and for reminding us of the power of community and resilience. Your feedback, questions, and stories provided essential insight that shaped the direction of this work in meaningful ways.

A special thank you to **Mhor Collective**, whose expertise in digital inclusion and person-centred facilitation ensured the training was tailored, trauma-informed, and rooted in community needs.

We extend our sincere appreciation to **Digital Pioneers Progress Fund** for funding this project. Your support demonstrates a shared belief in equity, access, and community-led solutions.

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Finally, we acknowledge the broader **community of learning, digital inclusion advocates, and health and social care partners** who continue to share best practices, offer encouragement that inspired and informed this work.

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3. Netto, G., et al., 2025. Protecting Minority Ethnic Communities Online (PRIME) Final Report. Link: <https://www.primecommunities.online/>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Essential Digital Skills Assessment Report

Full report available here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1s2Xo7WdaBCNW2mTazpabjHk9xlaYyIhif5_J7hskSk8/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix 2: NHS Inform Training for Language Support Team at Saheliya: Assessment Report

Full report available on the Mhor Collective website.

Link:

https://www.mhorcollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Saheliya-NHS-Inform-Report_New.pdf

Appendix 3: NHS Inform Workshop Handout

Full document available here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AwOvRQrfy3jUVHIU1IYFnKIBTXA4_Ix2/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102592474061847115312&rtpof=true&sd=true

About the Organisations

Mhor Collective

Mhor Collective is a facilitator of digital inclusion programmes aimed at empowering communities with the skills to use digital technology effectively. With a focus on social justice, Mhor Collective works with a range of organizations to deliver training and support in digital literacy, ensuring that underserved populations can access and benefit from the digital world.

Saheliya

Saheliya is a community-based organization that provides culturally sensitive services to women from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly those who have experienced mental health challenges, domestic abuse, or other forms of marginalization. Through its programmes, Saheliya aims to empower women to improve their wellbeing, build self-confidence, and access the support they need in a safe and supportive environment. For this project, we focused only on the Glasgow office.

Contact Information

For questions or comments relating to the survey, please contact us through:

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