

Include-IT Mersey



CASE STUDIES: INCLUDE-IT MERSEY PROJECT EVALUATION JUNE 2023



Case Studies: Include-IT Mersey Project Evaluation, June 2023

Introduction

This case study booklet relates to Section 5 of the evaluation report: Learners' Digital Journeys & Voices. Its purpose is to amplify the voices and lived experience of learners who engaged with the project - one of the key aims of the evaluation process - providing real-life stories of the wider impacts of their participation; and an in-depth insight into the complex elements of their digital journeys.

1. Digital Journeys: Learners' Course Motivations & Related Impacts

a. A Rapid Pathway to Jobs and Training

Mr S (senior) and Mr S (junior), recent father and son learners - Speke Training & Education Centre

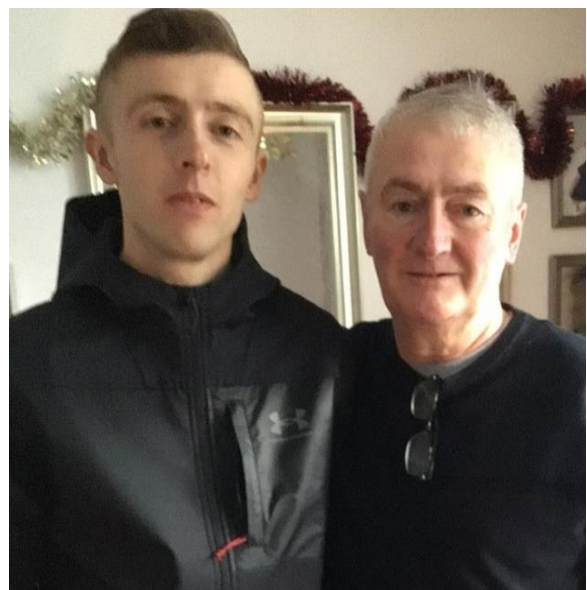
Mr. S (senior), aged 61, and his son aged 24, enrolled on the course with STEC in March 2022. Mr S. (junior) had struggled in the recent lockdown periods and was looking for an activity to build his confidence. They live locally to STEC and were signposted to the IT course by the centre's team. Mr S. (junior) was nervous when he enrolled and so his father also signed up to give his son moral support.

When they engaged with the course, both were supported in identifying opportunities that developing their IT skills could open up and both were interested in training to become taxi drivers as a way to earn income through self-employment. Both participants described how much the course had helped them in gaining the confidence and proficiency to complete the online courses required for their taxi driver training, which was delivered through the trade union, Unite. Following completion of the IT course, they went on to pass their taxi exams and are now fully qualified and in full-time self-employment. Father and son both stated that this wouldn't have been possible without the Include-IT course. They also cited how useful the training has been in the practicalities of their employment day to day; whether that be using PDAs (Personal Digital Assistant devices) in their vehicles, using their Satnav for navigation or even using spreadsheets to track their income.

In addition to the skills they developed on the course that have helped with employment, they

both described how useful the training has been in their personal lives as they now feel confident with online banking and shopping and engaging in online social activities such as fantasy football leagues. Mr S. (senior) was grateful for the tablet he was given and stated that this had been invaluable in enabling continuous learning outside of the course and to keep his skills up to date through practice.

"It's ok for people who use IT every day in their work or have grown up with it. But I have always been involved in hard engineering, that was my work for years, so I never used any of it. The course has changed all that for me and opened up other opportunities. I was reluctant at first but it worked out really well for both of us" - Mr S. (Senior)



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Ms H, 54 - Torus, St Helens

Ms H, 54, is a Torus resident and has not worked for 9 years due to an accident. She had previously worked in the retail, care and factory sectors for a total of 26 years.

She described herself as 'very rusty' in terms of skills and wanted to be able to show employers that she is keen to learn.

She attended a jobs fair at St Helens town hall in Autumn 2022 and chatted with the team from St Helens Chamber, as she wanted to get a get back into work and knew she needed some new skills. Ms H is very active - a runner and also walks everywhere – and knew she wanted an active job where she is moving and not stuck at a desk. She was keen to work at the local recycling centre, wanting to work full time and be super active (be removed from previous situation as a carer). She wants to have a real focus in her work and wants to be able to move on now. Chatting with the team at the jobs fair she realised she needed to get some basic digital IT skills and was told about the Include-IT course which was running not far from her home, only 5 mins walk away.

They linked her up with the Include-IT team at Torus and shortly after, enrolled on the course. She has found the support from both the IT tutor, James and the employability tutor, Ruby extremely good:

'I can't sing Ruby's praises enough – she has been really supportive. She's helped me to fill in online job applications and acted as a referee, as I've not worked for so long.'

As the weeks of support have progressed, her confidence has increased. She has learned to be more security-aware online and how to use email properly:

'The course is mindful – it's about mental health as well as learning new skills. I'm very satisfied with it and would give it 10 out of 10.'

She still has reservations about banking online and is not confident enough to use Apps on her phone yet, but she is doing more online shopping now. She would use the computer more but the device she owns is very slow and needs updating.

Ms H has been very actively looking for work. She had her first interview in 9.5 years and was offered two jobs with St Helens Council as a lunchtime assistant and cleaning work shifts in a school. She then also had another interview on as a recycling officer in local Recycling Centre – which she was very keen to pursue – she got offered this job and is about to start there in Spring 2023.

Mr J, 50 - Everton Development Trust

Mr J hadn't worked since 2010 but was desperate to get back into employment having worked for 23 years prior to this. His main experience was in construction and warehouse work where he didn't have any need to use any digital/IT kit at all. He started the Include-IT Mersey course at Everton Development Trust (EDT) in 2018, aged 45, to improve his IT skills in order to be able to apply for office-based work – as heavy, manual work was becoming difficult for him due to severe back problems.

Following completion of the Include-IT Mersey course, he went on to complete a Level 2 European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course with EDT. Mr J's confidence was very low when he first enrolled, but this increased as the courses progressed. Despite COVID lockdown, when he had to adapt to learning remotely, he continued to complete practice tasks at home, with support from his tutor, Peter, making the most of his time throughout a difficult situation.

Following his successful completion of the ECDL course, Mr J found full-time employment at HS Barrier Coatings (a subcontractor based at Cammell Lairds shipyard).

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At the time he commented: *This course has been a great help, as I hadn't worked for years. After getting help from the staff at EDT and improving my CV, I have finally got a job again!*

In February 2023, when the evaluation team re-connected with him, now aged 50 and still at HS Barrier Coatings, Mr J reflected on his journey since completing the Include-IT course. When starting in his new job, he purchased a laptop (having never owned one before) and was able to submit his timesheets and process forms and documents required for his salary through the company's online systems. He also set up the Barclays Bank app and as a result, is now banking online and paying his household bills by direct debit – none of which he had previously been

able to do. He also regularly uses online cost comparison sites, especially for utilities, as well as using apps for parking meter payments, the NHS app to get his COVID pass for travelling, and even paying for drinks when he's out!

Getting involved with the Include-IT course was his first step to this transformation, as he says: *That course was my first step – I needed someone to show me the basics – my grown up kids had been pushing me about it and they made me realise I really needed to do that. It's unbelievable how fast things have changed in everyday life: I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't got more computer savvy when I did. I would recommend the course to anyone.*

Mr C, 49 - Torus, St Helens

Mr C, a recent learner, has found the course to be of real benefit as he has never used a computer before and it has been a great stepping-stone in his ambition of becoming self-employed, establishing himself in buying and selling motorbikes – his lifelong passion!

He has a serious spinal injury and whilst waiting for surgery, he wants to develop his idea for the new business but knew his lack of IT skills related were a barrier to doing this.

Due to health issues, he has been out of work for 2 years after working as a forklift truck driver for 15 years. He heard about the course through Jobcentre Plus and he has also been involved with the RESTART programme. He found the course tutor and Digital Champion very understanding of the constraints of his back condition from the off – with the format of the course suiting him: *'It's relaxed, once you've joined you don't feel nervous, you don't feel anxious. James, the tutor said to me just do what you can manage. To have someone that understanding about my spinal injury has been a big boost.'*

He has worked at his own speed through the Learn My Way training package, taking frequent breaks from sitting at the desk as he required. He

completed the course by attending for a couple of hours a week for almost three months:

'It's amazing – the fact that I have come so far in such a short space of time. To be put in an environment where I know nothing and to retrain my brain – at first it was a bit of a head scramble but the way James explains it makes

it easy. My brain looks at technology and says 'no thank you' but James makes it simple – he explains it, shows you, lets you do it yourself and then comes back and checks it – and you've done it!

Mr C now feels far more confident in his IT skills especially in relation to word processing, creating documents and using the internet to research. His tutor has customised some of the practice tasks to his interests in relation to his aim of becoming self-employed, including guidance in setting up templates for advertising flyers. He has also been signed-posted by his employability tutor at St Helens Chamber for support about moving into self-employment.

Before coming here, I knew nothing – now I have all the people in the right places to help me to set up the company – I know I can go out there and make a success of it. I'm happier, more confident and so I'm more optimistic and I've got a light at the end of the tunnel.

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b. Online Access to Information and Services

Ms W – Age UK Wirral

Ms W had no previous IT experience or qualifications before she started the course.

She is a Special Guardian for her great nephew (aged 7) and had to give up her previous job in a café about 3 years ago to care for him full-time. Lockdown motivated Ms W to enrol on the Include-IT course with Age UK Wirral, which she heard about through Jobcentre Plus. She was already enrolled on the RESTART programme which provides job guidance and support.

She found the course very enjoyable: both in terms of learning IT skills for the first time and also in making new friends whom she has stayed in contact with since completing the course in 2022. Her new IT skills include basic word processing, emailing and registration with online job-search websites. It's improved her skills and raised her confidence and self-esteem,

commenting: *I can actually use a laptop now, that's down to the course tutors at Age UK Wirral.*

Ms W also registered with Wirral Council's Reach Out service to continue her learning journey. Since completing the course, she has started part-time work at a local primary school as a Midday Assistant and is volunteering at school as well. She is using her new digital skills at work and in her role as a Special Guardian – being able to complete a range of online training courses such as Safeguarding and online forms for NHS hospital appointments.

If I hadn't done the course after Lockdown, I would have been left behind – I wasn't really bothered about technology – if I didn't have to use it I wouldn't – I was a bit old school. But everyone has to now. It's massively opened up everything for me.'

Ms S - Age UK Wirral

Ms S, in her 60s, completed the Include-IT training in 2021. She was made redundant from her long-term employment as a hospital hairdresser, a job which she loved, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. After engaging with Job Centre Plus to look for work, she was referred to the course at Age UK Wirral. Before completing the course, Ms. S said she 'knew nothing about computers' and had always thought she was too old to start learning digital skills at her stage in life. Upon agreeing to sign up, Ms. S described feeling apprehensive and doubtful about whether she would be able to keep up with the teaching and complete the programme. However, she was reassured by the tutors on enrolment, who were friendly and welcoming, and the training venue at Pacific Road was a bright and vibrant environment which she looked forward to returning to weekly.

With regards to her experience of the training, Ms. S described the Learn My Way course content

and level of support she received from the tutors as excellent. She expressed her gratitude for the patience and kindness shown to her to support her own pace of learning. This was especially valued by her as she referenced her previous attempts to use the internet by asking family members to show her. This had always proved unsuccessful, as she felt like a burden, or they would become frustrated when she didn't understand the most basic functions of her Smartphone or computer. Ms S. described how the Include-IT course changed that for her and how she had gained confidence and independence that had opened up a range of opportunities in her everyday life.

After completing the course, she felt confident enough to go on and complete further IT training including a 'Getting the Most Out of Microsoft' qualification, which she received a certificate for, something she is extremely proud of. The skills and knowledge learned as a result of Include-IT have also helped her gain employment and

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enabled her to confidently engage in digital processes required of her at work; including using email, accessing hyperlinks and completing her timesheets online. Ms S also started using her laptop day to day in her personal life, using search engines to find information about local services and recently purchasing flowers and creating a personalised card for a friend using a popular gifting website. Ms S says these are things that she never would have been able to do without the Include-IT training and she continues to feel

incredibly positive about being able to use the internet and her IT skills in all of these various ways. She also described sharing her knowledge with friends (also in their 60s), going to the local library so she could teach one how to insert images into a Word document, something she had learnt as part of the course.

I would advise anyone to go on the course. I really hope you keep it going for other people as it has been amazing for me!

Mr M, 61 - Age UK Wirral (COVID)

Mr M (now 61) worked with Airbus for 20 years before being made redundant. He had 'very basic' IT skills and wished to improve these to find employment and was advised about the Include-IT course at Age UK Wirral by his Job Centre work coach.

The course was delivered remotely due to COVID restrictions. They provided him with a pre-loaded laptop with suitable software already installed. The tutor supported Mr M on the phone and Zoom to guide him through the Learn My Way programme. Delivered entirely through the first lockdown period, this was challenging: not least due to a poor WIFI connection at home, which hampered Zoom communications. He persevered with the excellent, mainly one-to-one support from his tutor, John and successfully managed to get through it. Although he would have much preferred face-to-face contact, he understood this wasn't possible, commenting of his experience:

'It was very difficult through COVID lockdown doing the course remotely – but I got a lot out of it. I had very few IT skills – the tutor would talk me through things. I was made up to go on it! I worked through the exercises on Learn My Way. It really helped me sort out a CV and the team

were always on hand to help. It worked really well – in helping me! It kept me busy in lockdown. I applied for a job online which I wouldn't have been able to before – and got it!'

Straight after completing the course, Mr M found part-time employment as a handyman at a local care home and received a tablet which he is still using. Unfortunately, his role was made redundant in autumn 2022 due to a take-over of the business, but Mr M is still using his digital skills in looking for work online, in a similar role. He is also looking to do a more advanced IT training course to develop his skills, as he realises that so many daily tasks require them:

'Everything nowadays is online – I'm interested in another course and want to update my CV. I'm looking for a part-time job online. I'm also volunteering at my local church in Rock Ferry a day a week, as the health and safety officer. We were audited recently and I was able to communicate with the Diocesan lead officer on email and complete online forms and email them back – I feel more confident doing that after doing the course. And now I'm more in the loop with emails about health and safety. I feel more confident generally, it helped to get that job – it's totally helped me!'

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c. Personal Wellbeing, Empowerment and Social Connection

Ms D, 48 – WEA, Knowsley

Ms D completed the course with WEA at the Northwood Community Centre in January 2021. She had previously been working long-term as a hairdresser but described how her whole world turned upside down when she lost her partner suddenly early in 2020. Aged 47, he died unexpectedly from a heart attack just prior to the first lockdown, which had a devastating impact on her. Due to the impact of bereavement and subsequent effect of the pandemic, she remained out of work, unable to carry out her voluntary role at the community centre and her wellbeing rapidly deteriorated.



Ms D explained how the course came at a good time for her and whilst that she recognised a need to improve her IT capabilities, it was able to offer her a route back to participating more fully in life after her bereavement - *“It wasn’t just that I needed to educate myself, it was so much more than that. It was to give me a purpose”*. Ms D was particularly appreciative of the support she received from her tutor (Linda), stating that she was made to feel comfortable and at ease from the point of enrolment onwards - *“right away after speaking to Linda she just made me dead calm and comfortable”*. Ms D also highlighted her additional learning needs as someone who is dyslexic and praised the tutor in how she adapted

the teaching and support to ensure learning outcomes were met:

“She is a very, very calming influence. Hands on because she teaches you well, she’s there and you’re learning from her and then if you can’t understand something, she’ll explain it in a different way that suits your needs”. Ms D described how valuable she found the in-person learning environment and adds that whilst the course gave her the confidence to explore further training online, she has realised that the face-to-face support was what made her participation in the course so successful.

Ms D had some limited, prior experience of IT and reported how the course content and teaching introduced new techniques to her as well as building on previous knowledge. As a result of the course, she has regained the confidence to return to her voluntary administration role at the community centre where she has the opportunity to utilise and apply her improved digital skills. She is now at the point where she feels able to consider returning to paid employment and her previous career as a hairdresser. Whilst the improvement in her IT capabilities was clearly a positive outcome for Ms D, it was overwhelmingly clear that participating in the course had a significant impact on her personal wellbeing at a time of acute need and that this was undoubtedly the most valuable aspect for her.

“This is why I tell people that she [the tutor, Linda] gave me my mojo back, because she physically helped me and mentally helped me as well to be honest with you. I ended up coming out of a very dark place that I had ended up in and because of Linda I have stepped back into myself again. That was over a year ago and I always say how humble I am to her because I don’t think she realises how much she genuinely helped me as a person”.

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Ms M, 62, current learner - Speke Training & Education Centre

Ms M is a current learner nearing completion of the course at STEC in Speke. She had a career in the catering and hospitality industry for 18 years but was unfortunately made redundant from her role at a hotel in November 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms M has developed a number of health issues including arthritis and sciatica which have prevented her from returning to work in catering due to its physical demands and has therefore found herself in a position where retraining is necessary to return to the job market.

"A lot of jobs now need IT so it was either come up to the level of at least getting the basics or stay on the dole. And I didn't want that. I'm not that person. This is the longest I've ever been out of a job. I either come up to do the course or I just wallow away sitting at home and doing nothing and not going out".

Prior to participating in the course Ms M had previously been referred to STEC by her Job Centre Work Coach during lockdown. She attempted the course but found that independent online delivery did not support her

learning needs and she was unable to complete. Since re-starting the course in-person she has found the wrap-around support, classroom environment and group learning dynamic to be hugely beneficial and crucial to her ability to progress through the training. She rated the course and delivery as excellent and described how the training had got her to the level where she is confidently applying for jobs online and applying her newfound IT skills in multiple aspects of her personal life.

A significant outcome of the course for Ms M was the ways in which it has supported her wellbeing following a difficult time for her personally, following the isolation of lockdown and her loss of employment:

"My mum is 86 now, we lost my dad and my sister last year. I'm on my own and she's a widow so we've been looking after each other. And she's said that since I've been doing the course, on those days when I go home there's a little bit of a bounce in me and because I've been applying for jobs now, it does give you that boost."

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2. Digital Journeys: Lived Experience and Learner Voices

Neurodiverse Learners:

Mr R, 27 - Independence Initiative, Bootle

Mr R started attending the course at 'The Indy' in December 2022, after finishing at Hugh Baird FE college at the age of 25, where he completed a Learn for Life course and Maths and English. Mr R lives in shared supported accommodation, and at first attended the course near his home with assistance from his personal assistant. Although he has volunteered previously, Mr R has never worked and until starting the course has not been an independent traveller.

He wanted to join the course as he wanted to learn how to use a laptop. He already used a mobile phone and games console but was keen to learn more as he was disappointed that he had to leave college, which he enjoyed and had a circle of friends. When he joined the Include-IT course he was very quiet and lacking in confidence after being out of training for some time.

The tutor, Dea, commented on how far Mr R has grown in confidence. Fairly quickly he started to develop more self-confidence, chatting with others in the group as he learned how to use the internet safely. One of the first tasks the tutor

worked on with him was how to use train and bus timetables by using Google search. In a short time, Mr R started to travel independently to the course, without his PA, which was the first time he had managed to do this! He has since started to venture out on day trips to Southport and to Bootle Strand shopping centre near his home. This is a huge step forward for him!

He has worked through the modules of LMW at his own pace and, more recently, has been working with Ruby the Employability tutor from St Helens Chamber, who is providing support at the Indy. Mr R has now created a CV for the first time, for use in working towards another volunteering post. He is looking to find a post in a charity shop shortly. Mr R has also joined the Pantry at the Indy, where he is shopping weekly for himself. Mr R commented about his experience on the course:

I've missed college and all my mates there, but coming here has been good....it's made me learn how to be more independent.... I've not done that before. I want to do some volunteering in a charity shop in the future and some more training.

Ms MK, 56 – Speke Training & Education Centre

Ms MK, aged 56, enrolled on the Include-IT course with STEC in 2021. Earlier in life she had been involved in a car accident that had left her with disabilities, anxiety and difficulties with learning. Before enrolling on the training, she had recently completed her Driving Theory course at STEC and found the environment to be welcoming and supportive to her needs, and so was open to learning more skills that would help her in her everyday life. She described her confidence with computers and the internet as non-existent before the course and, despite being familiar with the learning environment at

STEC, she was still nervous and frightened about learning this new topic.

Ms MK said the support she received was excellent. She explained how the tutors took time to understand her learning difficulty, made her feel comfortable and even arranged alternative transport for her when she was experiencing challenges with the bus.

The tutors were amazing - so supportive. Tony was great as well, we had him for 2 weeks. They understood my learning difficulty, made me feel comfortable, welcome and relaxed. I didn't really know how to study properly, I was frightened but they were great! It is especially hard for me to mix with people but they were so supportive. I

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tried to get the bus in to the course but got confused with the route and felt anxious because there were not nice people on there. Mark at STEC sorted it straight away and arranged taxis so that I could get there and finish the course - that was amazing!

Ms MK said she would not have been able to continue with the course without this support. In terms of the skills and knowledge she developed, she now does multiple activities online including accessing services, shopping and looking for training.

She described how the tutor taught her how to enlarge texts and fonts so things are easier to

read, in her words the course had ‘opened up a new world for her’.

Ms MK expressed how much this positive learning experience meant to her and said that it has encouraged her to go to do more training and given her the confidence to sign up for a first aid course. She also said that she would like to be a part of the IT course in the future by sharing her story with other participants with similar difficulties, so they can see what is possible and support them with their learning: *“It gave me confidence and it gave me freedom. I only wish I had found them sooner. I want to do more now!”*

Older Learners:

Ms H, 60 – Everton Development Trust

With few IT skills, Ms H joined the Include-IT course at EDT in Spring 2019 after realising she needed to develop her IT skills for work and for her volunteering work with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). She found the course tutors at EDT supportive and patient, commenting:

I felt relaxed and comfortable attending. The tutors were very patient and having the one-to-one support was great, as I was able to work at my own pace. This approach was great for older people - it made me feel more confident, gave me more structure to my week. I have also met new people.’

Completing the course in late 2019, her involvement has made her feel more confident generally and in her IT capabilities. Ms H found COVID lockdown very socially isolating but she was able to purchase a laptop and started to use Zoom to contact both friends and fellow CND volunteers, which has continued to the present day. As a result of completing the course, she is now able to fully participate as a volunteer, through online NW branch meetings; through newsletter and press release preparation, uploading photographs and text; and also assisting with the design of posters. She is

confident in her use of search engines and has also been interviewed online for an administration job, which she undertook for a short time. The course has enabled her to get involved in many activities which were previously not possible – she told us recently:

‘I feel much more competent now with the computer than I did and obviously, the way things are going, everything is online. It started off with



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me getting the basic IT skills on the course and then I went on to do my EDCL. I've really encouraged others to do the course as well. Zoom has connected me with volunteers I wouldn't have met otherwise. I feel really confident with it – and I'm trying to encourage the other tech dinosaurs to get on to it as well! It takes a lot of courage,

certainly when you're older. Just being able to access information on the internet is so useful.'

Janette is keen to do further IT courses, especially to develop her skills in PowerPoint presentations and Excel.

Younger Learners:

Ms F – WEA, Widnes

Ms F was 18 when she completed the course, maximising the time she had before starting her hairdressing qualification at college. Although her vocational course is mainly practically-based, she described how the knowledge and skills she developed through the Include-IT training has helped her with completing assignments on

Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, meaning she is able to focus on the subject matter rather than having focus her energy on overcoming IT challenges. She has also benefitted from the social aspects of the course and explained how it has helped boost her confidence, which meant starting her hairdressing course was a lot less intimidating.

Learning Disabled Learners:

Greenbank College, working with MENCAP Wirral

This partnership has proved productive for people with learning disabilities who have participated on the Wirral. Training sessions run twice a week and operate on a roll-on-roll off basis to cater for learners' varying complex needs, with one session tending to be for those with more complex needs. Learners work in a small group setting, often using headphones to enable them to work independently, with fit-for-purpose keyboards and screens in use to suit learners' needs.

The tutor liaises with learners' support workers and MENCAP staff – as many of the learners are also MENCAP members. Most learners are working towards voluntary work as their next step, or further training with MENCAP. Most members are also participating in other activities based at the centre, including arts, crafts and cookery classes. Tutor support is very much on a one-to-one basis and content and wrap-around exercises are tailored to learners' needs, as highlighted through learner interviews:

Mr A, 19, has recently completed the course. He stated that he knew he had IT skills, and participating was *'to prove to others that I have skills – and I have done that.'* He has many hobbies (F1, music and gaming) and the key motivation for him wanting to improve his IT skills was to enable him to be able to access the internet safely and be able to communicate with

others – and especially, to be able to use PowerPoint. He uses headphones when doing this, which works well for him. He has been supported to develop a CV and has interviews for a voluntary cookery role with MENCAP. He's pleased to have received a tablet at the end of the training.

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Mr P is 39 and is not able to work. He does have some basic IT skills and is comfortable using his own computer and tablet to use Amazon and Ebay. As a member of MENCAP, he is involved in a range of activities including cookery and Gateway, an activity-based programme focussing on areas of everyday life to help people experience new things, develop confidence, life skills and become more independent. He has almost completed the Include-IT course, which he has found helpful in learning more about how to access the internet

and also his tablet. For him, the most important outcome has been the way it has enabled him to manage his own life to a greater extent: through use of the NHS app, which he now uses to order his medication and manage health appointments and through researching information online. Most recently he was able to plan a surprise theatre trip to London for his wife: *'I'm now able to do things like buying tickets online on my own'*. He reported feeling more in control of his life as a result of completing the course.

Ethnic Minority Learners:

Ms M – Speke Training & Education Centre

Ms M has been living in Liverpool since arriving 6 months ago from Afghanistan. An English Language graduate in her 20s, she joined the Include-IT Mersey project in October 2022, wanting to improve her IT skills and also her English language skills. She is also attending



several other courses including Enterprise and Life in the UK and Level 1 Interpreting; and is also involved as a peer researcher with Refugee Action. Having received a tablet and data through the project, she has been pleased to be able to practice her new skills and press ahead with searching for a job. Ms M has found the employability element of the course particularly useful including CV drafting, job-search techniques and the IT elements related to spreadsheets and data management.

Through support from Include-IT Mersey, Ms M now has direction and a plan to develop her newfound skills as she is looking to access a Teaching Assistant training course and work in a school in the future. The course has not only been valuable in terms of IT and employability skills, but also to develop her language skills and to meet other learners on the course. She commented:

'I have been able to meet other people – to meet local people and to understand the accent a bit more – Liverpoolians speak so fast! This course has opened a door for my future. It works well for me – by joining this I have also expanded my own networks and learned so much more – especially how to get into training and search for jobs.'

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Roma community course - Granby Toxteth Development Trust

GTDT ran two courses specifically for Roma learners living in the Lodge Lane area of Liverpool in 2021. A large proportion of the Liverpool Roma community are from Tandarei in Romania and although many have lived in Liverpool for years, significant numbers still have very limited command of the English language. GTDT now directly employ a member of the Roma community as a Community Development Worker following her involvement as a translator for these two targeted courses.

The key hook to engage and involve Roma residents was that of public services access. The tutor used the learners' initial assessments (working with the translator) to better understand their key barriers to digital inclusion, to employment and also in accessing local services. Many of the learners had no knowledge or awareness of how to access health, education or benefits support – to make applications for GP/ health appointments, register a birth, or apply for school places. The translator worked with the tutor to help deliver the course, interpreting where required, with a heavy focus placed on the Public Services module. The team developed an accompanying booklet with pictures and translation of key terms relating to both digital skills and public services to enable them to better access services locally. This also provided them with a resource to use post-training.

There remains an ongoing need for this type of targeted, localised provision and co-ordination with language skills development is also still a big challenge in the community. Many in the Roma community want to access factory opportunities and for many, there remain public transport issues in accessing these positions across the city region.

Women:

Ms C, Domestic Abuse Survivor - Age UK Wirral

Ms C completed the Include-IT course in early 2020, pre-lockdown. At the time, she was experiencing domestic abuse and living with an extremely controlling partner. Participation in the course was life-changing for Ms C, as the tablet she was given gave her access to a

personal device that was not known to her partner and therefore not tracked. She used the tablet to access information on women's refuge support and contact people who could help her leave the situation she was in. Although not without challenges, she has now relocated to another part of the UK with her children, living independently and working in a job she enjoys.

Ms K – WEA, Halton

Ms K came out of lockdown (after caring for her three children and losing her mother) with severe anxiety and depression. She got to the point where she couldn't speak on the phone and lost much of her confidence. Claiming Universal Credit, with 2 children in primary school and another at senior school, Ms K is starting to consider ways of returning to work part-time, including the option of working from home. She heard about the course when attending the local VENUS course and saw a leaflet. In addition to coaching her through the various modules of the

training programme, tutors supported Ms K in a range of other ways, including fixing her computer and building her confidence.

"COVID did my head in! I was stressed out because there was only me and the kids. At the end of lockdown, we lost my mum. My anxiety was really bad - I saw this course and thought this will get me out of the house. The best bit of it was being able to refresh my brain about what to do on a computer. My sister asked for help on my computer the other day – I helped her with it and that felt good. My anxiety has calmed down now

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– I can go out in the car on my own, go to the shops and not be scared anymore.”

Prior to joining the project in 2021, Ms K did have some basic IT skills, but they were dated and she wanted to refresh them and develop her spreadsheets skills and be able to complete PDF and online forms. Ms K believes her involvement has significantly improved her wellbeing and moved her closer to the job market:

“I never used to be able to fill forms out on the computer – now I know how to sort most of

them. My skills have definitely improved. I’ve just used Apple Pay for the first time today! I feel better in myself having that on my phone. I’m starting to think about work and I’ve got the job site Indeed on my phone now too. I’m working with my adviser on the Households into Work programme now as well. All of these are building my confidence up – doing courses like Include-IT – I’ve loved it. I couldn’t even speak on the phone before I did that!”

People coping with mental health challenges:

Mr J, 63 – Granby Toxteth Development Trust

Mr J worked as a Learning Support Assistant at a college in Liverpool for many years until he was forced to leave due to chronic depression. An introvert, with very limited communication (out of choice) with anyone, including his family, he had never been particularly keen on using technology, including phones or the internet.

In COVID lockdown he reached a crisis point – and when he was contacted by his Social Landlord about rent arrears, the community police support team were alerted to his mental health circumstances. As a result, he was linked up with GTDT and supported with food parcels and encouraged to get involved with the community walks they led as a means of creating social contact throughout lockdown: *‘I began to trust people here’*.

As lockdown eased, Mr J had built up trust with GTDT and started to occasionally pop in to its base on Lodge Lane and volunteer with the community food bag project. He was invited to get involved with the Include-IT course, as a way to further build his confidence and learn a few new skills. He was impressed with the tutor’s skills and supportive manner in general, in the way in which she was able to encourage and assist learners, to empower them to learn new skills.

‘The venue and the people make this successful. What also makes it successful is the ease with

which you can do the course. It’s not overly complicated, there’s no jargon. I think it’s a real skill to explain something complicated in as simple a language as possible – and Erin the tutor here, although she is young, can do that.’

Mr J completed the course in 2021 and on managing to do so, he commented, *‘it has pushed me to want to do other things again.’*

Mr J has done a gardening course and now regularly volunteers with GTDT primarily in outdoor activities: on a joint community gardening project with a local homelessness charity and leading resident walking sessions in local parks. He also uses WhatsApp to keep in touch with his extended family and his friends and colleagues at GTDT, and when he chooses, he uses the internet to research his interests including films and creative writing. He is mindful that he needs the option to select how and when he uses these tools: he does not want to use them as a ‘crutch’ and knows that it’s important for his own mental health to get out and about and engage with people face-to-face in the community. He doesn’t have access to the internet at home and is happy to go into GTDT to access the computers there:

‘I’m more comfortable with technology now and I’m more comfortable with myself than I have been for 15 or 20 years – it’s there for me to use when I want to.’

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Ms W – Rotunda, North Liverpool

Ms W completed the course in May 2022 as she was looking to rebuild herself after a bad experience in her previous job. She encountered bullying and the circumstances she experienced meant she left employment and found herself with very low confidence after a time out of work. She did the course in the hope of learning something new and believing in herself again.

Since completing the training, she has undertaken volunteering work at Rotunda, and has recently been offered paid bank work.

"Because I was rock bottom, I really wanted to get myself back on track and that's when I came to Rotunda. It's opened quite a lot of doors for me, meeting new people, going on these courses and it's opened doors in other areas as well, which has all been good".

Carers:

Mr R, previous learner & Digital Champion volunteer – Torus, St Helens

Mr R is in his 50s and a full time carer for his parents. He was previously a heavy goods driver and was 'self-taught' in terms of IT skills and use of his laptop. He started as a learner on the course in 2019, mainly to learn how to use spreadsheets, and became a volunteer Digital Champion straight after completing, when his tutor invited him to get involved. Prior to lockdown, he was volunteering for 3 days per week. Mr R had never done any sort of coaching like this before, but found the course very well-organised and continues to be pleased to be involved.

With his caring responsibilities, he was unable to continue through lockdown but he has resumed since then, usually supporting the tutor every Friday. The sessions are only 2 hours in duration, but with his care responsibilities, Mr R is able to commit to this. The tutor is flexible and supportive, understanding these care commitments. Mr R continues to develop his own IT skills as well as supporting others and is pleased to be involved with this form of support in the community, commenting of it:

"When you go home after volunteering on a Friday, you think – oh I've done something to help someone: it makes me feel good and it helps them out. I'll definitely continue helping out as a volunteer."

Ms M, 60, Kensington – Greenbank

Ms M is 60 and was a long-term informal carer for a close family member for 7 years. Prior to that, she worked at a dispensing chemist, where she had limited involvement with printing labels for prescriptions using a computer. She describes herself as disinterested in tech generally and although she has a smartphone, she watches a very limited amount of TV and has only used her phone for voice calls, to play music and limited internet searches. Although she has inherited a laptop, she doesn't use it.

With the end of her informal caring role, she is now able to look for work and has recently completed a 4-week course in care. She is interested in domiciliary care roles and has started to make enquiries about possible opportunities. She heard about the Include-IT course when she was attending the Women's Group at Kensington Learning Centre at the end of last year and registered. Her key motivation is to improve her skills in using apps and her phone generally, so that she can apply for a care post. She has been told by employers that she needs to be conversant with using their comms systems daily to stay in touch whilst working out in the

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community, when moving from one client to another – all of this is done on apps and messaging on a smartphone.

She has enjoyed the course content and the social side in meeting others. She has found the app and spreadsheet elements of the course really valuable. She already had a CV sorted out prior to enrolment, so did not need a great deal of employability support.

Overall, Ms M is very satisfied with the course and the support received from her tutor.

Although declining the offer of a free tablet, as she thinks that her phone is sufficient for her needs, Ms M reported that she is now in a position to apply for job vacancies with local care providers and is attending a recruitment day very shortly.

‘The course has brought me out of my shell and got me out the house – I feel a lot happier and it’s put me in a much better position to apply for part-time care work and I’m attending a recruitment day at the weekend’.

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And finally, a story about one of our most committed volunteers...

George Shaw, previous learner & Digital Champion volunteer - WEA, Halton

Unemployed for 25 years, George attended one of the earlier Include-IT Mersey courses with the WEA back in 2018, at Castlefields Community Centre in Runcorn. He had struggled with anxiety and depression for years prior and when interviewed in 2019 he told the evaluation team:

"I could hardly talk when I first came along. I now feel like a human being on this course. On other courses if you got stuck, you've had it – but not here. It's been motivational and has got me fired up. This course has brought me back into life after 25 years out of work. My grandkids (aged 12 and 10) say to me "how do you know that grandad" - they are surprised at what I can do on the computer now - they were thinking old people can't learn anything."

In relation to the impact being an Include-IT learner has had, he said:

"I thought my life was over, but because of the discussions and interactions and dynamism on this course - I have come back into the human race. The morning we started, I and other learners said that we would stay until lunch time and if it was the same as the job centre courses we would leave and never come back. Fortunately, we were welcomed with open arms, and everyone could work at their own speed. We were given drinks and lunch, which when you have no money is a big help that kept us fortified during the twelve week course."

On completing the course, his WEA tutor Graham Barker suggested he got involved as a volunteer Digital Champion, to support other learners enrolling on the course:

"I've always done volunteering so when the tutor mentioned helping here on the Include IT course, I jumped at it. I am now on the volunteering course for digital champions and

as a result the job centre have put my job search on the back burner as I have made such good progress since I started on the Include-IT course. I am not frightened to see the Work Coach at the job centre anymore."

George volunteered across several Include-IT courses with Graham Barker and Jill Tollitt in Halton, Wirral and Knowsley and with James NG in St Helens. His nomination for WEA volunteer of the year was George's high point as a volunteer. George went on to take his GCSE English and Maths qualifications, a first aid course and, in 2019, registered for a teaching assistant course. His involvement in Include-IT as a learner and volunteer has massively opened up new options for him.

Shortly after however, George became seriously ill and since then has been challenged with ongoing health problems, which have severely restricted his involvement in further study and voluntary work - he is currently waiting for further surgery.

When contacted in early 2023 about the impact Include-IT Mersey has made for him over the years, he told the team:

"Children and grandchildren apart, the computer course you provided set me on a path I did not even know existed and was the most enjoyable thing I had done for twenty years. One lady I was assisting told me she was unable to read and write sufficiently; something she had not even told her husband. That is how liberating the course is, and it must continue long into the future!

I know money to fund courses is tight, but this course has brought people out of themselves and helped very unhappy people thrive, get jobs and stand up to the issues that had been holding them back for years."

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