

Case study

Learning Disability Wales

Learning Disability Wales and Digital Communities Wales have joined together to create a new course that makes it easier for people with learning disabilities to get – and have fun – online.



Learning Disability Wales (LDW) is a national charity supporting people with learning disabilities to live, learn and work. Rather than providing frontline or direct services to those with learning disabilities, they support other organisations that do, whether that's promoting good practice, influencing government policies, or providing advice, information and training courses.

LDW is also involved in a range of projects with like-minded organisations. One example is coordinating a large-scale, all-Wales employment project, that supports employers to provide paid placements for autistic people and people with learning disabilities. Another is a befriending scheme that brings people with common interests together, supporting those with learning disabilities to form new relationships. They also provide an accessible information service, that transforms information into documents that are easier for people with learning disabilities to read.

Simon Rose, Training and Events Manager at LDW, explains:

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Businesses and organisations give us a document, which we then transform into an easy-read format that makes the information clearer for people with learning disabilities to read and understand.

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LDW has been working with Digital Communities Wales (DCW) to create a new course that supports people with learning disabilities to communicate online. This new course brings together LDW's expertise in accessible information and advocacy with DCW's work in helping local communities to get online.

Simon said:



It was a combination of the best of their skillset – supporting people to use digital technologies – and our skillset of communicating well with people with a learning disability.

The programme isn't aimed directly at people with learning disabilities, but the people that support them – family members, carers, key workers, etc – so they can help the people they support to get online.



The project had been in consideration for a while, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the need to get online became more vital than ever.



It became apparent immediately that COVID-19 was making everyone more isolated, but especially those with learning disabilities. This group was already excluded digitally – there have always been barriers to getting people with a learning disability online – but the pandemic magnified these inequalities.

We and DCW had to act rapidly to get this course up and running, using our combined expertise, and the result has been really unique. We thought hard about how we could make sure people with learning disabilities could stay in touch with their friends and family, as well as care and support, and the voices and opinions of people with learning disabilities and their carers were key in how we addressed issues. It seems to have benefitted people hugely during the pandemic and we've had great feedback from it.



A common barrier that people with learning disabilities face when accessing the internet is overprotection by well-meaning parents and carers, who are concerned about their loved one being exploited online. This new course includes tips and tricks for staying safe online to give parents and carers peace of mind, but they hope to develop this further. Another issue is the way technology is designed isn't always intuitive to people with a learning disability, and the programme includes how to support someone to use technology themselves. This could include checking what language you are using, not assuming that someone already knows how a piece of technology works, to making the process of learning as enjoyable as possible. The next issue that LDW and DCW are hoping to address is poverty and not being able to afford technology, and how it makes it more difficult for people with learning disabilities to get online.

Simon continued:



We're not going to stop developing this course, because these issues were always there – COVID-19 just highlighted these problems – and there's still more work to be done.

It's about human connection. During the pandemic, people with learning disabilities were more isolated than ever. By getting more people with learning disabilities online, we're preventing loneliness, but also just allowing them to have fun. I would encourage organisations to think about how they'd feel if they had to jump through hoops to communicate online, and this course is helping us to approach this issue in a person-centred way.



Three top tips from Learning Disability Wales:

1. The voices of the people you serve is important
2. Never underestimate the importance of human connection
3. Sometimes, fun is enough of a reason to do something!



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