



Linking Local was an 18-month project to strengthen community-based social connections. The project was designed around people affected by dementia but worked for lots of other people too.

Digital Connections

For the first half of the project we supported people to strengthen their digital connections. This meant that they were able to stay in touch with the people, places, and activities that mattered to them.

We were able to supply iPad and Mi-Fi devices through Connecting Scotland.

This summary shares some of our learning and top tips.

I was able to keep going to my exercise class online and I've even started doing video calls with my friends and family

Internet Access

We were surprised at how many people already had internet access in the rural communities we were working in. Lots of people we supported had internet as part of a television or telephone package but didn't have a tablet or smart phone so didn't browse the internet. There are different ways to get an internet connection:

- **Broadband** - Internet can be installed in your home. This means getting a small device called a router put in your house which is connected to the internet network via a phone line. Lots of telephone and television packages come with broadband included.
- **Mobile Internet** - You can get a data sim card which will allow you to use mobile internet. These sim cards fit into your mobile phone and some tablets so you can get internet when you're out and about.
- **Mi-Fi Hotspot** - You can use a device called a mobile hotspot (also called a mi-fi or portable hotspot) to get internet on tablets and smart phones. They also work for devices without a sim card slot, such as a laptop or PC.

There are more ways to get the internet. We have linked some resources that go into more detail: **[Connecting to the Internet – Choices and Options](https://otbds.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/10/4634635_A4_3.pdf)**
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Devices

The choice of devices can be overwhelming. We worked with Apple iPads and Samsung Galaxy tablets. Lots of people used their own smart phone, like iPhones, too. Some people had a laptop given to them by a friend or family member and just needed a bit of help getting it set-up. Here are a few things to consider when choosing your own device:

- **Cost** – This can vary hugely with iPads tending to be more expensive, Samsung Galaxy Tablets were more affordable. Lots of organisations and community groups can offer support to find a device for you.
- **Size and Weight** – Some people found the screen size of a phone too small and preferred the larger screen on a tablet. Most people found the tablets comfortable to hold without them getting too heavy. Laptops are heavier and can sometimes be difficult to open.
- **Internet Connection** – All smart phones will accept a sim card but not all tablets do. We found the tablets that accept a sim card to be slightly most expensive. If you don't have broadband/ Wi-Fi at home a tablet with a SIM card is a great option.

Buddies and Support

We learned from the Digital Buddies project based in the Scottish Borders. The approach matches a person with someone already in their social circle. This could be family, a friend, or a neighbour. It doesn't have to be someone who is a digital expert – just someone with a bit of time and patience.

During lockdown this was hard to do over the phone but lots of people managed to sort things out on the doorstep. We also matched people with buddies through local Time Banks and volunteer groups which also helped to build their social connections even further.



There are national organisations like AbilityNet who have their own team of volunteers. Find them at www.abilitynet.org.uk

The Digital Buddies project has now produced some helpful resources found here - www.otbds.org/projects/digital-buddies/

Accessibility Settings

We found most modern mobile phones and tablets had great accessibility features which you access in the settings of your device. They let you adapt your device to make it work better for your own vision, touch, and hearing preferences.

There are so many options it can be a bit overwhelming. It can take time to work out what works best for you. Some of the most popular features were increasing contrast, enlarging text size and slowing the 'scroll' speed. We heard about other people connecting their iPhone to their hearing aid device.

More details can be found in the - [Digital Buddies Accessibility Settings Guide for Samsung Galaxy Tablets](#)

QUICK TIPS

- **One step at a time.** The choices for digital activities can be overwhelming. We found that introducing only one or two activities helped make the process feel less overwhelming. This might be making a video call or looking up local information.
- **Keep it relevant.** Build digital learning around the things you already enjoy or things that could make life easier. People enjoyed joining their online church service or finding out how to get their weekly food shop delivered.
- **Accessibility.** Most devices like laptops, tablets and smart phones will have options to make it more accessible and easier to use. Each brand and model will offer slightly different settings.
- **Written Guides.** Some people who have dementia said they like having a written step-by-step guide for their digital activities. These can be simple hand-written instructions but some people find images alongside the written instructions helpful. We have an example easy-read guide on our [Linking Local web page](#).
- **Getting the right support.** Support from family, friends, or neighbours made a big difference. The digital buddy role can be shared by a couple of people.
- **Little and often.** People told us that they found it quite tiring. Frequent support for a short amount of time helped more than, for example, a three-hour slot once a week. It's easy to forget new skills but doing it regularly builds confidence and familiarity.