



Innovating in Trusted Spaces: Learning Report

March 2026



WSA Community Consultants

**Team: Leila Baker, Yvonne Prendergast
& Wendy Sugarman**

WSA Community

info@wsacommunity.co.uk

www.wsacommunity.co.uk

Contents

Executive Summary	5
Introduction: Project aims and outcomes	7
About the project	7
Aims and outcomes.....	7
Project partners	8
About this report	8
Evaluation methodology	8
1. Embedding effective AI literacy support.....	10
Interventions and innovations	10
Group learning	10
Good Practice: Supporting older people in a familiar setting	10
One-to-one learning.....	11
Good Practice: Engaging customers through an exhibition	12
What made interventions successful.....	13
Good Practice: Developing an interactive 'Intro to AI' session that supported peer learning	14
Innovative systems and resources.....	15
Enablers and barriers.....	17
Good Practice: Running an NHS app session in a library co-located with health services	18
2. Sharing new learning in an active community of practice	21
Interventions and innovations	21
Enablers	22
3. Improving confidence of library staff.....	24
Interventions and innovations	25
Innovations.....	26
Good Practice: Learning alongside customers	27
Enablers and barriers.....	30
4. Increasing customer confidence and digital inclusion	31
Understanding relevance and benefits of AI	32
Customer Story: "It made me want to find out more about AI"	33
Allaying fears and increasing confidence	33

Customer Story: "It should be rolled out to loads of groups".....	34
Ensuring support is inclusive and responsive to customers' needs	35
Customer Story: "This allowed me to learn at my own pace"	35
Customer Story: "I'll use the tools, but I'll check the information"	36
Enablers and barriers.....	37
Conclusion: Learning and legacy	39
Learning.....	39
Test and learn	39
Role of frontline staff.....	39
AI and trust.....	39
Customer appetite	39
Legacy	39
At national level.....	40
At county and local authority level.....	40
At local level	40
Appendix: Theory of Change co-created with partners	41

Executive Summary

The Innovating in Trusted Spaces project

- The project explored the role public libraries play in ensuring communities aren't left behind as AI technology and applications evolve. It was delivered in two rapid sprints between November 2025 and March 2026.
- It aimed to identify how libraries can support AI and media literacy, develop tried and tested ways of embedding support into library services and increase library staff's confidence to help customers understand the possibilities and dangers of AI and stay safe online.
- The project was delivered by a consortium led by Libraries Connected, and including Good Things Foundation, WSA Community and Newcastle Libraries, Northumberland Libraries, Nottingham City Libraries and Nottinghamshire (Inspire). WSA Community was responsible for the evaluation and learning process which was designed with the partners.

Project approach and culture

- A test-and-learn approach enabled project partners to work at speed to design and test experimental solutions, learn from what worked or didn't and then refine their offer. This gave frontline staff permission to try things out. In some cases customers appreciated being invited to help test AI and media literacy interventions.
- A culture of collaboration and openness enabled staff to share knowledge, resources and information on what was and wasn't working. This included bringing together staff with varied skills and experience and trusting teams to try out new ideas without fear of failure.

What libraries did

- Library services experimented with a range of ways to introduce AI and media literacy, including bookable skills sessions open to anyone, sessions tailored to specific groups, ad hoc one-to-one sessions and exhibitions or pop-up learning opportunities.
- New systems helped embed these offers into the wider library service. These included flow charts that guided customers to resources or learning offers, digital enquiries logs and briefings for helpdesk staff.

Outcomes

- Staff members from all four library services felt valued and gained confidence, skills and satisfaction from being involved. This confidence came from being part of a national project, the freedom to experiment and the sharing of skills by partners across and within library services.

- A wide range of customers benefited from gaining knowledge of AI and media literacy, finding out how to use AI and internet resources, and understanding what steps to work through to check information and minimise risks. For people who initially felt fearful, frustrated, left behind or lost, identifying ways they might use AI and other digital resources and share what they'd learned with others, was a profound learning experience.
- A community of practice involving project partners and wider library services enabled sharing of ideas, challenges and good practice, which sparked learning. This was enhanced by learning from co-creation workshops, online collaboration and a culture that valued experimentation.
- The project created a suite of practical resources and tested interventions that libraries can use going forward and left a legacy of learning at national, regional and local levels.

Insights and learning

- Working in a consortium with and having the support of national partners allowed library services to focus on project delivery and the development of staff members.
- Collaboration between library-based staff from different branches, between frontline and service development staff, and with national partners brought diverse perspectives to the project, while motivating staff and creating development opportunities for them.
- Involving frontline staff from the outset meant they were best placed to roll out learning in their branches. They also shared information with other colleagues, which boosted interest in the project.
- Marketing the offer was resource intensive. However, working with groups staff had existing relationships with, or running sessions in a library co-located with health and welfare services, created opportunities to reach customers.
- While library staff initially raised concerns about introducing customers to a technology that could potentially be untrustworthy, their own confidence in the role of libraries as trusted spaces grew as the project progressed and their own knowledge and confidence grew.
- Library staff's trusted status meant customers regarded them as reliable sources of information, which encouraged customers to explore AI and develop media literacy skills.
- Some customers required support with basic digital skills. Where libraries had a separate support offer for this, staff could redirect these customers.
- Even short interventions led to changes in customers' confidence and awareness of AI and media literacy.
- Having a range of tried and tested delivery options to choose from gave library staff the flexibility to respond to customers' needs, while mixed learning materials, like hardcopy quizzes, images and tablet-based activities, satisfied a range of learning styles.

- Learn My Way and the AI Gateway, two online resources developed by Good Things Foundation, were popular with both staff and customers. Staff viewed them as go-to resources for information about AI and media literacy.

Legacy

- The project has created practically useful and useable resources, tools and information, tested interventions, equipment and session plans and funded procurement of suitable devices.
- The community of practice will be taken forward by Libraries Connected Digital Universal Offer Group drawing on wider experience of the libraries sector.
- Library services aligned their digital offer with county and local authority digital strategies and developed plans with frontline staff to cascade the learning and skills to other colleagues.

Introduction: Project aims and outcomes

This report sets out learning and insights from the *Innovating in Trusted Spaces: Libraries Advancing the Digital Inclusion Action Plan* project. It is a partner document to ***How Libraries can support AI and media literacy: good practice from the innovating in trusted spaced project***, which sets out good practice around developing AI literacy.

About the project

Delivered as part of the Government's Digital Inclusion Fund, Innovating in Trusted Spaces focused on AI and media literacy and the role libraries play in ensuring communities are not left behind as AI technology and applications evolve.

While libraries have been providing digital inclusion support for at least 25 years, the technology, tools, required skills and dangers people experience online are changing more rapidly than ever. With an ever more complex picture of AI and media literacy, library services and frontline staff struggle to keep pace with the support library customers need and how to provide it.

Aims and outcomes

Innovating in Trusted Spaces was designed to address this challenging context. Delivered in two rapid sprints between November 2025 and March 2026, the key aims of the project were to:

- progress how libraries can support AI and media literacy,
- leave library staff with increased confidence and tested methods they could use to support customers to understand the possibilities and dangers of AI and methods for staying safe online, and
- arrive at a tested set of interventions to inform libraries about different ways of embedding AI and media literacy into their service offers.

While the project was open to all library customers, it captured learning about how interventions might be tailored to specific target groups, such as older people, low-income families and people with disabilities.

Project partners decided to adopt a test-and-learn methodology throughout the project. Test and learn is an approach to service delivery where experimental solutions are designed, tested, improved and tested again, within a continuous learning loop.

The project worked towards five outcomes, which were co-produced by project partners:

1. More effective and relevant digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy offered to the public through the public library network.
2. Active and sustained community of practice focused on bringing together new learning about digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy.
3. Improved confidence in library staff delivering digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy.
4. Public more confident in having a go in using AI and working out what to trust online.

5. Digital inclusion support more inclusive and responsive to the needs of the identified target groups.

Project partners

The project was co-created and delivered by a consortium of partners led by Libraries Connected and made up of Good Things Foundation as a leading digital inclusion charity, WSA Community as learning partner and four library services. The library services were Newcastle, Northumberland, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire (Inspire).

About this report

This report sets out the findings from an evaluation of the project, which was conducted by WSA Community. It is structured around the intended outcomes, with Section 1 focusing on outcome one and so on. The impact on customers (outcomes four and five) is covered together in Section 4.

The findings are presented as a synthesis of what participants said. Where the findings came from a specific group, the report makes that clear. We use the following descriptors to indicate different stakeholders in the project:

- **Customer:** members of the public who engaged with the project locally.
- **Library staff member:** people who delivered the project locally.
- **Participant:** all those who took part in the evaluation, including customers.
- **Partner:** the national organisations and library service leads that shaped and led the project.

Evaluation methodology

The qualitative methodology for the evaluation and learning process was designed to enable a collaborative, proportionate and iterative approach capable of driving learning back into project delivery in real time. The intention was to capture the perspectives of the national partners, the four library services partners, local library staff and customers.

A theory of change, co-created with partners at the outset (see Appendix), was used to structure the process. This was intended to be used during the fast-paced project and into its immediate legacy period.

The evaluation and learning process was broken into four phases as illustrated in Figure 1 below which also summarises the activities that were carried out.

The project timeframe placed some practical limitations on the evaluation and learning process. These were fairly well mitigated by project partners' commitment to the test-and-learn approach they had chosen. This enabled evaluation to take place throughout the project. Sprint one focused on gearing up and trying things out. In-depth fieldwork in libraries took place early in Sprint two.

Fig 1: Evaluation and learning phases and activity summary

Set up	Sprint one	Sprint two	Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online interviews with all four library-service leads • Theory of change workshop with 11 partners • Working theory of change co-produced with partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two co-creation workshops with library services and partners in Nottingham and Newcastle • Online check-in interviews with all four library-service leads • Reflection workshop with 20 partners • Observation of one Community of Practice meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two co-creation workshops with library services and partners in Nottingham and Newcastle • 30 interviews with library services project delivery staff • 16 interviews with library customers • Observation of 5 project sessions • Observation of two Community of Practice meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth interviews with four national partners and 4 library service leads • Full analysis to inform Learning Report and Good Practice guide • Reflection workshop with 20 partners leading to final report

1. Embedding effective AI and media literacy support

This section discusses the processes that were important for developing a more effective and relevant AI and media literacy offer. It brings together and consolidates learning from the range of interventions that were tested during the project and draws out innovative ways to embed AI and media literacy in libraries' work.

Key points

- The test-and-learn approach to project delivery made sense to all those involved, including customers, who welcomed being invited to help library services develop a new AI and media literacy offer.
- Marketing the sessions and offer was a challenge. This was in part due to a tight timeline and limited lead-in time for sessions. However, there was also a need to develop skills and relationships that would facilitate greater and more intensive outreach.
- Small bursts of support made a big difference to some customers, who reported changes in their understanding and attitudes around AI and media literacy following even short interventions.

Interventions and innovations

Library services experimented with a range of ways to introduce AI and media literacy, refining their offer as they went along. Some of these interventions are described in depth in Section 4, which looks at outcomes for customers. Broadly, they split into group and one-to-one sessions, as summarised below.

Group learning

Group learning was offered in two formats, which both had potential to use existing relationships to help with marketing and session design. These were:

- **Bookable skills and learning sessions open to anyone.** Typically one-off, these covered topics like generative AI, Google Lens or the NHS App. Some, like the NHS App, were promoted to health-service partners or via existing groups, such as a U3A group, whose members then attended.
- **Tailored sessions developed for (and sometimes collaboratively with) existing groups.** For example, a Friendly Friday social group for older people agreed to trial AI and media literacy tools, while an ESOL community hub was interested in Google Lens. Where staff knew groups had a specific interest like, for instance, craft, they offered sessions to explore how AI could enhance these, while improving people's safety online. Otherwise, they began by canvassing members about their interests so they could tailor support to them.

Good Practice: Supporting older people in a familiar setting

As part of a wider set of interventions designed to raise awareness of AI and its benefits among older people, one library service ran group sessions at 'Friendly Friday' meet-ups in a local library.

What happened

1. A staff member visited the group in advance to request their help in testing AI.
2. Group members completed a form that led to conversations about their current internet use and understanding of AI.
3. Looking at printed sheets of real and fake images prompted a lively discussion and sparked interest in exploring AI on tablets.
4. Everyone worked through elements of Learn My Way and the AI Gateway, discussing mis- and dis-information.
5. Group members then followed their own interests. One explored walking routes using ChatGPT. Another researched objects around the library using Google Lens.

"They loved using the library tablets and trying things out for themselves."

Learning

- Working with an existing library social group enabled the service to reach older people in a familiar setting. Participants were used to chatting together over refreshments and to welcoming guest speakers. However, it was still important to visit in advance, explain the aim of the session and gain buy-in. When some members chose not to engage there was no pressure to get involved.
- Using printed images and quizzes helped to generate discussion and provided an accessible route into exploring AI on a tablet.

"At first, people were saying: 'I don't need the tablet. I'll have a look at the paperwork'. But by the end ... one had used the tablet and downloaded [the] ChatGPT app to his phone."

Top tip

"Take it very slowly. If you jump in about AI, they get this look of terror and go 'Sorry, that's not for me ...' Start off chatting about basic things they can use it for and making them aware that there's no pressure."

One-to-one learning

One-to-one learning was offered in three formats depending on individual need and each library's footfall. These were:

- **Bookable one-to-one sessions.** These usually followed a group session or took place with known customers. While staff felt it was important to offer this service, uptake was generally low.

- **Ad hoc one-to-one sessions.** Smaller libraries, with only one or two staff present, typically ran these, since their availability and capacity was unpredictable.
- **Exhibitions and pop-up learning opportunities.** These were held in libraries with a high footfall, where proactive staff encouraged the public to engage. One successful pop-up session offered immediate engagement with AI by introducing customers to Google Lens using their own phones. In another library, an exhibition used interactive elements to support customers to engage.

Some libraries used group and one-to-one sessions in combination, while others focused on just one approach.

Good Practice: Engaging customers through an exhibition

One library service developed an exhibition about AI to start conversations and give customers the opportunity to think about AI in more depth. While anyone could visit, it was predominantly aimed at customers over 65.

What happened

1. The idea was suggested by a Library Customer Service Assistant.
2. The library service worked with Good Things Foundation to gain permission to use AI Gateway text and activities in an exhibition format.
3. A 12-panel exhibition was developed, including sections on 'AI: Myths and Misconceptions', 'AI Everyday Uses', 'AI Accuracy and Bias' and 'Useful AI Tools'.
4. Interactive activities included a true/false quiz, a spot-the-AI-picture challenge, sticker voting and an iPad-based survey.
5. During the project, the exhibition was displayed in two different library branches.
6. The exhibition was then incorporated into the service's suite of touring exhibitions that are available for other libraries to book.

"It's a really good opener ... because you're trying to get us all interested."

Learning

- Customers felt confident exploring the exhibition because of the library's trusted voice.
- The optimum level of information shouldn't overwhelm, but needs to offer enough for customers to decide whether they want to explore the topic further.
- Putting the images quiz in an eye-catching position attracted attention and worked as a conversation starter. Including images

that relate to local sites, activities or communities would increase relatability.

- Inviting customers attending a Places of Welcome group in the library boosted attendance. Guided tours or a panel event might also attract people to the exhibit.
- Older people found the larger panels easier to read than others.

"I would possibly have it all sort of that size [pointing to larger panel]."

Top tip

"I mean short and sweet, because if you do too much, then people lose interest."

What made interventions successful

Four key factors made interventions effective and relevant: offering learning in short bursts, building on trusted relationships, working with a range of options and the availability of basic digital skills support. Each factor is explored below.

Offering learning in short bursts

Offering learning in short bursts with the offer of a next step was more effective than trying to sustain the momentum of, for example, a three-session course.

One library service reported that the test-and-learn approach prompted them to reduce their one-to-one intervention from three sessions to just one, after they assessed customer needs and interests during a pre-session phone call.

Building on trusted relationships

Some staff, particularly in smaller libraries, already knew their customers well. More generally, library staff members talked about relationship-building and good communication skills as part of their professionalism. This ensured that learning was calibrated to the needs and real-life problems or interests of the customer or group.

The relational approach also showed up in the supportive, conversational style of delivery used by library staff. It was especially helpful where library staff knew customers or were directly involved in supporting the groups involved in sessions.

Working with a range of options

Library staff equipped with a range of options were able to work flexibly and responsively with customers.

For example, one library service followed a standard format to present the basics around AI and media literacy and then introduced customers to a range of tools, such as Google Lens, ChatGPT and Copilot. Staff shared examples of how these tools could be used, for example to write a letter, and then supported customers to try them out. Google Lens and activities involving spotting or discussing real vs fake images proved particularly popular.

Having a mix of learning materials, including quizzes and images as printed copies, worked well to satisfy a mix of learning styles. While making tablets and laptops available was important, supporting customers to learn using their own phones worked well.

"I'd printed out two quizzes about our local area, one generated through an AI engine ... They really enjoyed it being interactive and something that they could win at!" (Library staff member)

Good Practice: Developing an interactive 'Intro to AI' session that supported peer learning

One library service developed a two-hour interactive session as part of a week-long cluster of activities to generate momentum around AI.

What happened

1. Staff members wanted the small group session to generate greater understanding of AI and its uses.
2. They advertised sessions openly, including inviting regular customers and emphasising their role in helping the library test information about the pros and cons of AI.
3. Using the AI Gateway as a base, they designed a two-hour session that focused on informal peer to peer discussions.
4. The session was delivered by two staff members in an equipped IT suite. It featured videos and information interspersed with examples, questions and lively discussion.

"It was more like a conversation than a class."

Learning

- Quizzes on spotting fake images were particularly effective at sparking interest.
- Demonstrations of AI tools motivated customers to try these out and explore their own interests.
- Showing an array of surprising useful applications sparked customers' interest and enabled them to spot how AI might make their life easier or support their passions.
- Delivery by a diverse team of trusted and approachable staff, who took a relaxed approach, enabled customers to share their thoughts and fears.
- Staff members saying they weren't experts, and sharing their mistakes, encouraged customers to learn together.

Top tip

"[Having] a team with different experience of how AI has influenced them, so customers have different experiences to relate to ... makes it less scary."

Availability of basic digital skills support

Having a basic digital skills offer alongside AI and media literacy interventions was critical. This enabled staff to divert customers needing basic skills towards this support, while remaining focused on the AI and media literacy sessions. Where a distinct basic digital skills offer had previously been offered but was no longer available, staff hoped to reinstate it. Until that point, they blended basic skills in with their AI and media literacy work.

Innovative systems and resources

Library services developed innovative ways of working that built on the trust and professionalism of library staff to embed AI and media literacy within their wider digital offer.

Figure 2 below offers a snapshot of the kinds of new and innovative systems and processes library services developed and introduced during the project. Not all were tested during the lifetime of the project, but each was seen as a positive outcome from it.

"I think that's what the flow chart really illustrated ... We've got people coming in to do some printing, or to use the computers, and we can say ... 'if you're interested in finding out about these things, why don't you have a look at AI gateway' or, 'Oh, you you'd like to learn, but you prefer to do that in person, then we need to get you onto a learning course.'" (Library staff member)

In terms of resources, two websites developed by Good Things Foundation were widely tested and promoted to customers at the end of sessions. These were:

- **Learn My Way**, a website offering free online learning to support beginners developing digital skills.
- **AI Gateway**, a free online resource that aims to demystify AI and build a better understanding of what it can do.

Both aligned well with the approach being taken to introduce AI and media literacy and each proved popular with staff and customers alike.

"I'm using the AI Gateway quiz, just the one where it's like a real image or not real image and I'm signing them up to Learn My Way at the end, to sort of give them, like, further learning. Then also just doing it myself in the meetings and all that has been helpful." (Library staff member)

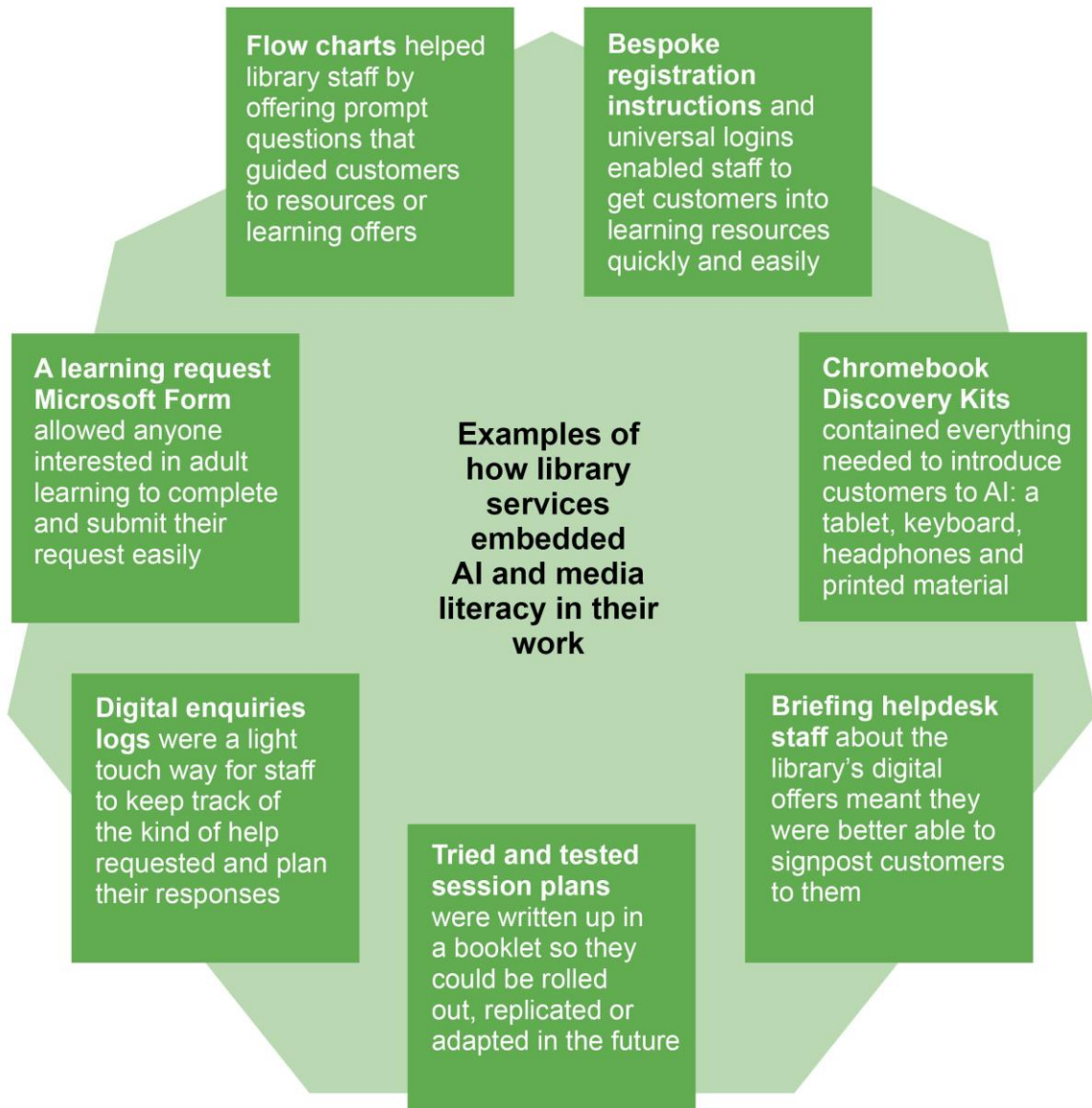


Fig 2: Embedding AI and media literacy in library services

Learn My Way

Though Learn My Way was already available in libraries, and some were already using the resource with their customers, other libraries had previously only used it to help train their staff. The project therefore served as a reminder that it existed.

"With Learn My Way I know it's been on one of our core guides for a while, but I've never really sort of looked at it. And, you know, [we] have all signed up to that since then in our library cluster, and it's been really good." (Library staff member)

During the project, Learn My Way was seen as a go-to practical resource and was used to support teams before they ran sessions for customers. Library staff liked the checklist-style guidance and felt it enabled staff to support and move customers on, signposting them to it as a way of helping them continue their learning.

AI Gateway

All staff spent time on the AI Gateway, which acted as their main reference around AI. Material from it was repurposed for one library service's exhibition and it also served as a resource for customers who wanted to explore AI independently. The main positives were the interactive quizzes and visuals, which some teams printed out to take to sessions. All found it accessible and structured, with little negative feedback.

"The [AI] Gateway is really comprehensive, has clear, consistent messaging and isn't patronising." (Library staff member)

Some staff who learned a great deal from the AI Gateway themselves felt they needed more help to use that learning to support others. There were also concerns around how to present a balanced view of AI. Some staff thought the tone was too supportive of adopting AI and not quite critical enough. There was also concern that the coverage of misinformation was quite general and might underplay how hard it really is to tell real from fake. Finally, some participants felt that there was limited reference to ethics, economics or monetisation of AI (for example, who funds it and how results might become manipulated).

Overall, library staff raised questions around how they will use both resources in the long term. Critically, they wanted to know whether the resources would be updated to keep up with this fast-moving field. They shared detailed feedback based on their experience of using and promoting both resources and were keen to understand how much scope there might be for revision.

Enablers and barriers

Participants identified five key enablers of an effective and relevant AI and media literacy offer. These were:

- **Test-and-learn iterations.** Participants welcomed taking an iterative approach and understood the benefits of having permission to try things out and make mistakes. This included participants who felt that the pace of the project had been a challenge. Customers also responded well to being invited to help test and learn AI and media literacy interventions.
- **Consortium structure.** Participants felt the consortium approach had worked well, citing a range of reasons. These included national partners taking responsibility for managing the funder, providing learning resources and supporting the library services through the test-and-learn process.
- **Trusted relationships.** Library staff were trusted and often known to customers, who therefore felt comfortable learning with them, especially when they felt anxious about the topic or left behind.
- **Co-locating services.** A community library co-located with health services was able to carry out outreach with individual practitioners and promote learning opportunities to them directly.
- **Leading from the frontline.** Participants felt that because project delivery was developed by and with frontline staff from different libraries, they were better placed to roll out the learning.

Good Practice: Running an NHS app session in a library co-located with health services

One library service developed a session on the NHS app, which ran in a community-based library that was co-located with health and welfare services.

What happened

1. The session was marketed through posters and outreach, including making contact with a wide range of health and welfare professionals.
2. The session ran for two hours and used customers' own devices or library laptops.
3. Alongside their knowledge, library staff contributed patience, listening and problem-solving to the experience.
4. Thanks to running this session, the library made contact with a local CIC that had been commissioned to provide a range of frontline public health services. This opened up new opportunities for partnering around digital inclusion.

Learning

- A short timeline made promoting the session challenging, but staff developed new marketing channels that could be more effective in the future.
- Running the service in a space co-located with health providers opened up promotion opportunities. While attendance was low, staff felt the location would enable them to build interest in regular drop-in sessions.
- Many customers who attended needed help with basic digital skills or did not have access to devices. This affected the extent to which AI and media literacy could be addressed.
- Access to NHS support escalation routes would have been helpful, since library staff had no way of checking which services were available in the NHS app.

"We think this is something that could be run again, particularly in our community libraries that are co-located with health centres."

Top tip

"I went and spoke to everyone in the building – the pharmacy, the GPs, the children's centre. I put up posters as well, but I went out and spoke to everyone too."

Four key barriers to successful delivery arose during the project. The first was specific to the speed of working. The remainder focused on marketing resource, digital skills and issues around trust. Each is explored below.

Rapid timeframe

All participants acknowledged that the pace of the project had been a challenge. While this was stressful for many parties in Sprint one, in Sprint two some found the pace energising and a source of positive momentum.

"One good thing about the short timeframe is it forces you to innovate, evaluate things quickly and change tack – that's not something that you would necessarily do." (Library staff member)

In a longer project it might have been possible to second or recruit staff full-time to deliver the project. Instead, frontline staff were either offered extra hours on top of their part-time contracts or the library service leads worked to find cover to free up their time. One benefit of this approach was the formation of teams of interested, motivated staff from across different libraries. However, this created extra administrative work for library service leads, who had to work out shifts, and posed a significant challenge to project delivery.

Limited marketing resources

Library services used a range of approaches to market and promote their AI and media literacy offer. While every approach was somewhat successful, they learned that marketing needed to be intensified. Leaflets and posters to promote sessions had to be produced and circulated well in advance, as well as online posts for those libraries using social media.

Although outreach through community and local government partner agencies benefited from in-person calls and conversations, this was resource intensive. It worked best in a library co-located with other services or when library staff had existing links.

One library service attracted considerable attention and coverage from local media. This drew in people needing basic digital skills as well as those with needs more aligned with this project.

Though there was potential to make greater use of library footfall to drive people to sessions or view an exhibition, this would require work to inform front desk and frontline staff not involved with the project.

Distracted by digital skills needs

It is unsurprising that some sessions attracted people who lacked basic digital skills. While these needs were ably and sensitively addressed by staff, this did pull some support interventions away from AI and media literacy.

Libraries that offered a separate basic digital skills support service were able to keep the project focused on AI and media literacy by referring customers to the basic offer.

This scenario was replicated with footfall in the library too. In one service, most enquiries came from people who were coming to the library specifically needing help with printing. They therefore didn't want to engage in wider offers.

Challenging library staff's trusted status

Library staff took their role as trusted professionals seriously. They spent a lot of time in Sprint one discussing the tension that arose from introducing customers to a technology that could potentially be untrustworthy.

This tension abated as library staff developed greater confidence around AI and media literacy. They seemed less worried when they became better equipped to help customers understand issues around real and fake images, decoding sources and online safety.

2. Sharing new learning in an active community of practice

This section discusses the Innovating in Trusted Spaces community of practice. It highlights how the community of practice was underpinned by a collaborative approach to all aspects of delivery.

Key points

- The community of practice was enhanced by building on learning from co-creation workshops, collaboration through Basecamp and a programme culture that valued experimentation, openness and collaboration.
- The involvement of both library services and national partners provided opportunities for colleagues with complementary skills, knowledge and insights to learn from one another.
- The community of practice is young and currently quite reliant on the four library services that took part in the project. As it develops, it's hoped that it will be a catalyst to hear from the experiences of other services.

Interventions and innovations

The Innovating in Trusted Spaces community of practice that was set up in Sprint one, involved project partners and wider library services. Members of the community of practice shared and discussed emerging ideas, challenges and good practice in delivering AI and media literacy interventions. Sharing experiences from the project generated questions and discussions, sparking learning and interest in developing interventions.

Members of the community of practice from the wider library sector valued open sharing of resources and hearing about interventions and how challenges had been overcome. Library services staff appreciated the opportunity to be involved at a national level and the questions that surfaced as more library services joined the community of practice.

"Great idea exchange and practical thoughts too – can't wait to see all the outcomes." (Library staff member who attended a community of practice meeting)

Community of practice meetings drew on learning that emerged from a wide range of collaborative spaces and events where partners shared what was and wasn't working, solved problems and tested ideas. These included:

- **Theory of Change workshop.** This session in the project set-up phase enabled partners to come together and co-create what change could look like for the project.

"It's felt very collaborative and truly a space where all voices and perspectives are equal. I feel we made great progress on all aspects of the project!" (Partner)

- **Face-to-face co-creation workshops.** These workshops were highly valued, particularly for the opportunities they gave all project members to meet in

person, away from work distractions. They exchanged ideas and benefited from "fresh external eyes" highlighting aspects staff hadn't previously considered.

"The environment of sharing information in the co-creation workshops, hearing what other people have done, has led to us adapting what we were doing." (Library staff member)

"I loved the face-to-face collaboration sessions because seeing what others are doing, hearing what didn't work and bouncing ideas off each other, we can make something that is better for our customers." (Library staff member)

Staff members highlighted that the workshops also enabled them to develop one-to-one relationships, which they built on throughout the project in order to gain support, problem-solve and share resources.

- **Reflection workshops.** These workshops involved national partners, library service leads and staff members who were key in delivering innovations. They offered an opportunity to collectively explore and reflect on what was happening on the ground and surface strategic insights.
- **Basecamp platform.** This accessible communication and collaboration platform became a highly valued tool where partners asked questions, exchanged ideas and advice, gained inspiration and shared tailored resources, like session plans and materials.

"Basecamp was useful in terms of accessing a wider variety of information and sources." (Library staff member)

"It's been really, really excellent, because it's so nice to be able to ask a question to another library person who understands the context and has the same issues." (Library staff member)

- **National webinars.** These offered opportunities for partners to present project approaches and amplify learning across the library sector. The community of practice events built on these, offering a more exploratory and conversational space for library services to share experiences and generate questions, interest and discussion.

Enablers

Three key enablers influenced the success of the community of practice. These were:

- **A project culture of collaboration and openness.** The community of practice benefited from members' generosity in sharing knowledge, resources and information on what was and wasn't working. This culture was underpinned by teams being trusted and supported to try out new ideas without fear of failure. Participants' response to this approach varied, from those who immediately embraced the autonomy to those who initially struggled, feeling that the approach was not clearly explained or wanting to be given a clear delivery plan.

- **Diverse skills and experiences.** Collaboration between people with varied skills and experience, and the mix of people within and outside the project, brought diverse perspectives and ideas to the group, which enabled additional layers of learning. Staff members expected this learning benefit to continue if more library services joined the community in the future.

*"It will be good to maintain the community [of] practice as new library services join, broadening the field of experience. They'll introduce new ideas and will have tried different variations."
(Library staff member)*

- **Incorporating on-the-ground learning.** The community of practice benefited from learning generated from on-the-ground opportunities, such as Basecamp and co-creation events, which enabled library services and national partners to collaborate and exchange both ideas and practical resources. Some staff members found the later workshops more useful than those at the beginning, because they had a clearer idea of what they were doing and felt more able to engage in discussion.

3. Improving confidence of library staff

This section explores the factors that led to library staff feeling more confident in delivering AI and media literacy interventions. It considers how staff organised themselves, how they shared knowledge and skills and the role project culture played in raising their awareness of, and confidence with, AI and media literacy.

Key points

- The mix of staff within each service gave people development opportunities that contributed to staff morale and motivation and provided a sense of value and belonging.
- Staff had opportunities that stretched them by participating in a national project and working outside of their usual roles.
- Including library-based staff in the core library service teams enabled them to act as catalysts for innovation in their own teams, while feeling like they were part of the change, rather than responding to a top-down directive.
- Many staff members valued the test-and-learn approach. Though it was new to many, test and learn enabled them to feel valued, motivated and satisfied at contributing to a project from beginning to end.
- Staff appreciated the skills sharing, buddying and growth and development opportunities that were integral to test and learn.

Benefits to staff

Staff members from all four library services, spoke of how they felt valued and gained confidence, skills and satisfaction from being involved in the project. Participants recognised increases in confidence between Sprint one and Sprint two and some wished there was another sprint to further hone their learning.

"I was beginning to think I'm getting left behind ... I really, really enjoyed it and actually think I'm quite good at working one-to-one with people, which is something that I didn't know." (Library staff member)

"I'm proud of the impact that I can see with learners." (Library staff member)

This view was supported by two staff surveys undertaken by Libraries Connected, one at the start of the project and one towards the end. At the start almost a third of the 25 respondents said they had not used tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot or Google Lens in either their work or personal life. In addition, a fifth of respondents didn't feel confident demonstrating AI tools to library users. By the end of the project 86 per cent of the 22 staff who responded to the survey reported that they felt more confident responding to library users' questions about AI. While 9 per cent felt "about the same", no one reported a drop in confidence.

Some participants considered the change to be an attitudinal shift, which boosted confidence while realising that getting involved with AI wouldn't erode their trusted status.

"The biggest impact of the project will be staff confidence and people realising they don't have to be the expert especially around AI, where staff were saying 'I don't know enough, so how can I help?'" (Partner)

"I feel able to say that I am not an expert, but that I am happy to learn together. I feel this puts the learner at ease, knowing I won't be using technical language or confusing them with advanced information. I have more confidence in my ability to help because I have more knowledge and have practised skills." (Library Staff Member)

Interventions and innovations

Every library service formed teams that mixed frontline staff from different libraries with service development staff. Development staff across library services spanned a range of specialisms, from communications to learning. This approach was, to some extent, pragmatic, since it provided the best way to deliver the project within a short timeframe. However, it led to multiple positive outcomes, including:

- Library-based staff had opportunities to work with different colleagues and contribute to a wider initiative within the service. In particular, junior and senior staff worked together, built more connection and created a wider sense of ownership.
- Library-based staff were able to relay information about the project to other colleagues based in their own branches. This created a ripple effect that built engagement and increased interest in the project.
- All staff, but particularly those in more junior roles, had the opportunity to develop their own skills and contribute to service development.
- Library services created a legacy with an already engaged core group of staff, who could then support others to deliver interventions.
- Collaboration between colleagues from different functions and branches enabled the development of a wide range of interventions drawing on interests, examples, hooks and perspectives to engage customers. This was particularly the case in one library service where having learning and library staff working together resulted in richer resources.

"Sometimes you get roles, and you're at the bottom and that's where you stay, whereas the opportunity to work with people on something like this, which is not just useful for us, but for other libraries and services, feels pretty special. It's really nice to feel that I've got value to add." (Library staff member)

In some services all digital inclusion projects had previously fallen on one staff member, so the project provided a real opportunity to widen the team. This reduced isolation for those members of staff, while giving digital inclusion gravitas and momentum within the library service.

"It's been good having a mix of colleagues, been good working with frontline colleagues and learning from their knowledge and experience and enabling them to have ownership and leadership of

the project ... It's helped build connections between different areas of the service. That will help with the roll out because frontline staff have been involved from the start." (Partner)

The opportunities this approach presented had a positive effect on confidence, motivation and morale as well as staff members' sense of connection.

"Made me more confident with chatting to customers and, yeah, chatting to staff, because since I kind of know more, I think there's more I can talk about, and especially with the meetings and stuff, I kind of know what goes on, so I feel more connected in that way." (Library staff member)

Staff talked about being part of a team involved across all services and enjoyed the opportunity to contribute to planning meetings. Overall, the sense of being part of something bigger impacted on staff members informing wider library teams about the project.

"I think it's just sort of advocating for it and talking to all the members of staff as well. That's got staff I know in my libraries, sort of more involved in it that we've all talked about it, and sort of been excited by doing this project. It just gives a bit more, bit more job satisfaction, really." (Library staff member)

Innovations

A number of innovations helped to support staff and build their confidence, including being part of a national initiative, adopting a test-and-learn approach and skills sharing. Each is explored below.

Being part of a national project

Staff enjoyed being part of a national project and some felt this was the only way they would have the opportunity to develop AI and media literacy programmes. With Libraries Connected leading on bid-writing and overall management, staff appreciated being able to focus on project delivery and the development of staff members whilst also feeling they were part of a wider movement of change.

Working with national partners was new to many library staff, who found the experience motivating and confidence building.

"Small group planning at the workshops was useful – we gathered ideas and organised thoughts and were helped to think outside the box." (Library staff member)

Adopting a test-and-learn approach

Test and learn was received extremely positively by staff, especially once they understood they had permission to try things out and even fail. Staff enjoyed the freedom and confidence this approach gave them and they attempted things they'd never done before, for example, speaking in front of a group or developing a new AI session.

*"It's really good to not be frightened to try something and if it doesn't work you've learned that that doesn't work. So, let's try again."
(Library staff member)*

*"I've liked the freedom to use our initiative – we are constantly feeding everything back to each other and it doesn't feel like there's any wrong or right. I've got a real, genuine, valuable input and investment."
(Library staff member)*

Library staff weren't pitching themselves as experts. Instead, they viewed themselves as learning alongside customers. They ensured they had something to offer in sessions by familiarising themselves with the resources beforehand, but came at the issue from the perspective of someone just a little bit further ahead than customers.

*"We've found that by explicitly saying 'we're not experts', and learning at the same time as participants, it gets a positive reaction."
(Library staff member)*

*"Being open that we are not experts and we are learning to take them along on the journey with us."
(Library staff member)*

There was a very positive observation of this in one library service, where a group session showed how learning took place at all levels in a supportive way.

Good Practice: Learning alongside customers

In one small-group AI awareness session, library staff and customers learned alongside one another, with everyone taking something useful away.

What happened

- Two staff who hadn't delivered a group session before designed an intervention called 'What is AI and how can it help you?' using resources from Learn My Way and the AI Gateway.
- Staff were asked to attend in order to raise awareness of the project and AI.
- Overall, four customers and four library staff attended.
- Everyone sat around a large table, with drinks and cakes.
- The facilitators began by telling the group it was the first time they had run the session.

Learning

- Being open about the fact that this session hadn't run before immediately created an atmosphere of shared learning.
- In comparison with staff training, library staff found it interesting to share the experience with customers. They said the set up raised their awareness of older people and their perspectives and needs.

- One customer said she liked the experience of "learning together" because it showed librarians didn't have all the answers.
- Staff experienced a number of 'aha' moments, which helped to upskill staff who could then offer initial support and signposting to customers.

"I can't believe I've not been on ChatGPT!" (Library staff member)

"I always thought I had to pay." (Library staff member on Google Lens)

Top tip

Set the tone at the start by removing any expectation that library staff are 'experts'.

Skills sharing

Skills sharing was an important aspect for all library services. This took place in two broad contexts: between library services and Good Things Foundation and within library services themselves. Each are explored below.

Sharing skills between library services and Good Things Foundation

The nationwide offer for all library services to receive support from Good Things Foundation was well used, with library services sending in plenty of requests. These included asking for advice on approaches to assess digital skills, sourcing resources for learning sessions, developing a brochure and obtaining text from Learn My Way and the AI Gateway to use in exhibitions.

This process gathered additional momentum in Sprint two. This was partly because library staff felt more confident, but also because Good Things Foundation offered each library service seven hours of direct support. This was a more structured approach than the open offer in Sprint one, which gave library services greater clarity.

"We've had help from [Good Things Foundation] if we are missing resources or with lesson plans, session planning or anything ... When I was worried about dealing with sensitive information to keep both people learning and teaching safe [Good Things Foundation] drafted something immediately and came back." (Library Staff member)

There was some feedback that this support was mainly accessed through project leads in library services and it would have been good to involve more of the staff members forming the wider teams in each service. However, this varied between services with some Library staff saying they did receive direct support from Good Things Foundation.

Alongside sourcing bespoke advice from Good Things Foundation, staff also used the Learn My Way and AI Gateway resources during project roll-out. Though some staff weren't aware of the resources before the project, they were appreciated as

useful resources to help staff members prepare sessions. More detail on these resources can be found in Section 1.

"Working through [Learn My Way] and the AI Gateway and doing my own research: I was using AI without realising it!" (Library staff member)

Sharing skills within library services

This included:

- **Buddy learning.** In one library service staff discovered a colleague's interests and then, using AI, they built their confidence by, for instance finding a recipe for a keen baker.
- **Mentoring / skills sharing from the learning team to the customer service team in another library.** This enabled team members to receive feedback on a session plan and how to present and teach the session. As a result, staff felt they understood how to set learning objectives or how to deliver more interactive sessions.
- **Modelling facilitation.** In one library service the mixed team of development workers and library assistants developed an Intro to AI session together. The development worker took the lead initially, which helped to build confidence across the team. This resulted in the library assistants then going on to develop more focused Google Lens and Generative AI sessions.

"I've really enjoyed working in a different way, working with my colleagues, who are normally on the library floor, because they've got to see the project from start to finish, and they have more input with creative ideas." (Library staff member)

"There was a kind of alchemy of the five of them working together. It's allowed them to do things they wouldn't usually do." (Partner)

The outcome of these approaches has been a major upswing in staff skillsets and confidence.

"It has been useful to ... just get me to talk to people more and feel more confident about doing that in front of the group." (Library staff member)

"If the library ever wants to put on any presentations about certain topics going forward, I would have the skills and capabilities to be able to do that as well." (Library staff member)

As a result of the test-and-learn approach, in one library service small groups formed to share planning for delivery and support one another during sessions. These groups were seen as supportive and insightful, while helping team members form relationships with people from other libraries.

"I do think, like, sometimes you get a bit self-contained just within your own team. So, it was really good to work with [name of colleague] and for us to go to each other's libraries." (Library staff member)

Even staff who were already the 'go-to' people for all things digital at their libraries felt they extended their skills further, which increased their confidence.

"I'm already the go-to at my library ... I've got much better language to explain [AI and media literacy] and got more places to direct people to." (Library staff member)

Enablers and barriers

The key enablers around increasing staff confidence included:

- **Autonomy in different ways of working.** while staff were apprehensive at first, in Sprint two they demonstrated more autonomy with a wide range of delivery and reported increased confidence while developing a sense of ownership.
- **Staff resource.** The fact that library staff were paid for work on this project made staff feel appreciated and ensured the appropriate level of staff resource was in place.
- **Strong leadership.** Staff were supported and encouraged to try new things by project leads. This was an enabler across services in ensuring staff felt valued and included.
- **National programme.** Being part of something bigger than their own library or service drove momentum and provided new opportunities for many staff.

There were also barriers to staff increasing confidence, including:

- **Staff time.** As highlighted in Section 1, a project lifetime of a few months doesn't allow time for project-staff recruitment. Instead, in some cases, staff juggled multiple roles or were offered extra hours. This created some challenges around freeing up the right staff member at given times.
- **Timescales.** Even with additional resources, some services struggled to find time to do as much planning as they would have liked. This put pressure on some staff.
- **Fear of AI.** When thinking about a wider roll out of the programme, and engaging more staff, it's important to acknowledge that some staff teams' fear of AI could affect how confident they feel engaging customers in the topic.

On a positive note, one staff member reflected that barriers could also be seen as opportunities.

"Having a completely open plan of something means you can direct it and it is a great way of working ... The vagueness has turned into a real benefit of this. And I think the timescales have also meant that we've been very focused and had to just try things." (Library staff member)

4. Increasing customer confidence and digital inclusion

This section explores the ways that customers benefited from the project, their learning and how they planned to use it and the changes in their understanding about the relevance and benefits of AI. It considers the enablers and barriers to achieving customer confidence including the importance of building on existing trust and adapting to customers' needs in order to achieve these benefits.

Key points

- Customers who engaged in different interventions had fun, gained confidence, discovered surprising ways that AI could benefit them and identified simple and straightforward steps to check the reliability of information. Some went on to share their new skills with others and to use their learning around AI and media literacy in their lives.
- While many customers were wary, even fearful, of AI, staff members' patient, friendly approach, and the care they took to explore these fears and share easy steps to stay safe and verify information, often enabled wary customers to consider exploring AI and online information.
- Connecting with groups and organisations whom library staff had trusted relationships with was an effective engagement strategy, which also enabled services to reach some of the people who would most benefit from these interventions.
- Identifying and responding to specific needs and preferences of customers, alongside a patient, friendly and interactive approach, helped to ensure that disabled customers and those with specific learning needs engaged fully.

Customer benefits and learning

Customers and staff members shared a wealth of ways in which customers benefited from the sessions. These included:

- understanding the benefits and limitations of AI and online information,
- appreciating how AI and understanding disinformation and misinformation could benefit them,
- trying out tools to explore their interests or needs,
- identifying ways to check the reliability of information, and
- using AI and media literacy safely.

In combination, these new skills enabled customers to feel more confident. Some had fears allayed, while others felt a greater sense of control and independence. Some were simply delighted at discovering fun or useful purposes of AI and the accuracy of online information.

This view was supported by a Libraries Connected survey of 93 customers that took part in this project, in which 81 per cent of respondents said they felt more confident about AI or online information after engaging with their library. In addition, 88 per cent said they would recommend learning about AI or online information at their local library. In the specific context of trusting online material, almost half of respondents (48 per cent) said they would now think more carefully about what they read online.

Overall, gaining knowledge about AI and media literacy, finding out how to use it and understanding what steps to work through to check information and minimise risks benefited a wide range of customers, while sometimes countering stereotypes of AI being a technology for young people. For people who initially felt fearful, frustrated, left behind or lost, identifying ways they might use AI and share what they'd learned with others, was a profound learning experience.

"We've engaged customers in their 90s that are very switched on and really want to stay engaged with technology ... most people would assume that by 90 they're not interested anymore ... It's been a real success and really lovely." (Library staff member)

Understanding relevance and benefits of AI and media literacy

Many customers were surprised to discover how AI was already impacting their lives or that they might be using it without realising. Group sessions were particularly effective for bouncing ideas around and enabling rich conversations that revealed how AI was used in, for instance, online shopping, job applications, Facebook and Netflix.

Most customers learned about a wide range of ways in which they could benefit from using AI. For example, a woman with some basic knowledge of AI was a keen crafter. When she engaged in an AI session at her local crafting group, she realised she'd never thought about using AI in that context.

Another customer, who was fascinated by what he learned, said he'd recommend that other people get involved.

"I'd say to someone, think of something you don't know or want an answer to and go to the course, ask the question and be gobsmacked by the answer!" (Customer)

There were clear ways in which customers shared their learning. One staff member described how, during a one-to-one session, a customer who volunteered in her local park was "absolutely thrilled" to learn how to use Google Lens. She intended to talk to other volunteers about how to incorporate the tool into their projects with children, for instance as a tool for identifying flowers and birds. At a session at an ESOL Culture Café, where participants were very engaged, they immediately passed on learning by sharing Google Lens during the session.

"We had a bit of a coffee break, and then one of the learners that we'd sat with was then showing all her friends, Oh, look at this. You can download this, and it's really good. And so, she was sort of passing on that knowledge already in front of us that we could see it was having an impact." (Library staff member)

The range of ways in which customers planned to use AI included:

- A woman who travels regularly, and was initially very nervous about AI, left a group session with plans to use ChatGPT to research places to visit. She thought it was a good "starter tool" to give her ideas and said she would top

this up with her own research. Though she still felt cautious, she said she'd try AI out more and use her judgment.

- A man in his 90s tried out Copilot, saying it "looks promising". He left planning to try it out in his own writing and was keen to attend another session to explore it further.
- A woman who thought she would have to pay to use AI tools, experimented with Copilot and Google Lens. She planned to try out Google Lens to identify plants on walks and use Copilot to plan walks and foreign trips.

Customer Story: "It made me want to find out more about AI"

A man in his 60s, who was aware that AI was *"impacting everything"*, wanted more in-depth knowledge about different tools. He attended several group sessions on various aspects of AI, describing them as, *"very well presented by nice people who helped to show AI didn't have to be scary"*.

Though he had used Google Lens before, he discovered how powerful it was when trying it out on photos and a foreign language poem he had brought alongside other items. He enjoyed *"playing around with storytelling, coming up with a very, very good 200-word story"* and tried writing letters and making plans.

He described a detailed plan to de-clutter his home as *"a lifesaver"* and later reported that he was using the plan at home. He loved the level of detail, structure and tips and explained that the plan included humour and human elements, which meant it didn't feel overwhelming.

Overall, despite arriving with some prior knowledge, this customer identified many new ways in which he could use AI.

Allaying fears and increasing confidence

Staff explained the extent to which many customers had fears about AI and online information. Some felt a general sense of unease. Others, who were scared by it or wary of being scammed, were not interested in using it.

During a one-to-one session, a customer that a staff member described as being "worried that everything seemed to be false" found out how to check when AI was being used and how to verify information. Giving him a greater sense of agency allayed his fears somewhat.

A woman in her 90s, who had said during a group session, "I'm not sure of the point of it if you have to check everything" later she said she was more aware of the signs to look for in faked content.

Staff members introduced AI or media literacy alongside other digital needs and used activities like real-or-fake facts and image quizzes to generate discussion, amazement and learning.

"They'll come to the session with something in mind that's difficult. it's usually a confidence thing and it's about tuning in on that. So, if you can offer that, then that's job done and introduce little other bits that they haven't thought about." (Library staff member)

"I was really taken by [name of library staff member] explaining to us how we can find out what is true and what isn't." (Customer)

Customer Story: "It should be rolled out to loads of groups"

A woman in her 80s who attended a session on mis- and dis-information explained that, though she was fairly confident online, she wanted to be more able to spot fake information, so she would be less reliant on her son.

She found the session interesting and it helped to improve her skills and confidence in checking whether information was true. Because she was concerned about friends who believed misleading health information online, she quickly passed on what she had learned.

"I've told two friends about it, how to find out whether information is true ... One friend had fallen for a post about how a hedgehog got saved, and she was telling me about it because she's into the Hedgehog Preservation Society. I said to her, 'well, you can actually find out whether this story is true or not' ... So, I showed her, and she was quite shocked to find out that it was not true."

This customer felt that the session was important and should be replicated at community events like coffee mornings to spread awareness.

A recurrent theme in customers' experiences was the extent to which their sense of the library as a trusted space, and its staff as trustworthy, underpinned their willingness to engage in sessions and openness to alter their views on AI and online information.

One customer explained that she thought library staff would give an unbiased view in comparison with "companies that would have their own agendas". She initially thought AI was "scary" because businesses might use it against people. After she had "a play with it" she realised it was "fun" and came up with what she described as "a perfectly reasonable recipe".

"They were library staff. I didn't realise they weren't IT staff ... but this meant they were doing something outside their comfort zone"

and showing AI isn't the frightening monster checking on you."
(Customer)

Ensuring support is inclusive and responsive to customers' needs

Library services worked with a broad range of customers and specifically aimed to include groups who might be less likely to access and benefit from AI and media literacy initiatives. These included older people, those living on low-incomes and disabled people.

Feedback from staff and customers identified three principles for ensuring meaningful engagement with library services' AI and media literacy interventions: accessibility, safeguarding and independence. Each is explored below.

Adapting to customers' access needs

Staff members highlighted ways in which they responded to customers' needs to ensure they could engage fully. For instance, for customers with limited memory or short attention spans, library staff took care to present information in small chunks. If they felt someone had reached their limit for learning, they slowed down the pace of delivery.

"You have to get the time you spend with someone right – you can tell when someone's had enough and not taking anything in."
(Library staff member)

For customers with visual and hearing impairments, library staff adapted their delivery and choice of devices. In one library, staff supported a customer with low literacy to learn how to use a mouse by focusing on visual webpages.

When working with older customers, staff used both printed and digital resources. Hard copies worked well as a starter that sparked interest and motivated customers to go online.

Customer Story: "This allowed me to learn at my own pace"

A man who has English as a second language wanted to learn more about ChatGPT and Copilot so that he could use them for reading, creative writing and, possibly, future study.

"I realised I could use AI to better myself. I'm an avid reader but was only reading in English. Now I can translate in real time. I learned how to write better prompts and come up with my own questions. I wrote a short story using positive quotes that I'm going to give to people and I'm going to write a funny story using jokes.

I think I might be able to use AI to get into formal study ... I have a curious mind, but I get distracted. This allowed me to learn at my own pace ... be driven by my curiosity and to simplify complex subjects."

Customers spoke of staff members in glowing terms. They appreciated their technical skills but also described them as approachable, friendly, helpful and trustworthy.

"I didn't realise I was being taught ... she was very helpful, professional and patient ... You know the staff are there for you ... at other places they think you're gaga once you get to 60." (Customer)

Building-in safeguarding

Knowing that some customers were vulnerable, library staff recognised the need to embed safeguarding. Those who regularly supported vulnerable people highlighted the risk that some vulnerable customers might release sensitive information or try to hand over their phones and passwords to staff. Staff members worked hard to set boundaries and build the capacity of vulnerable customers to use their phones safely.

In one library, a staff member requested advice from Good Things Foundation regarding older customers who were inclined to share sensitive information. Because these customers trusted library staff so much, they sometimes wanted to reveal passwords. Good Things Foundation provided a checklist that could be used to protect both customers and staff.

"It's the flip side of the trusted space as people can maybe have a little bit too much trust sometimes." (Library staff member)

Fostering independence

Many customers described feeling left behind or having to rely on others to carry out tasks online. This gave them a sense of missing out, which affected their confidence and sense of self. Library staff therefore introduced customers to new digital skills at their own pace, offering plenty of encouragement and making the experience enjoyable. Customers were supported to do things for themselves and work out what next steps they might take to continue learning and building their confidence.

Customer Story: "I'll use the tools, but I'll check the information"

A woman in her 50s, with English as her second language, wanted to improve her employability skills. She explained she was *"a bit scared of AI"* and wanted to be better informed.

"I go to the library because it's free and secure to use the internet and I trust it ... It's tricky when you are on your own ... I want to be more independent. The world is changing and everything is online so I must learn it. I can't always depend on my children.

[Library staff member] paused to explain ... made me feel comfortable and [it] wasn't formal.

... I learned everything and will use it all ... I'll use Google Lens for translation because it gives me more detail and background on different words ... It's given me confidence because I was going with the myths ... I'll use the tools, but I'll check the information."

Enablers and barriers

Enablers that helped customers build confidence and knowledge included:

- **Building on existing trust with library staff.** Trusted relationships with staff members enabled customers to engage in myriad ways. This included staff inviting and encouraging individual customers that they knew, recruiting customers through groups they worked with and delivering activities at existing groups within libraries. Customers' trust meant they regarded library staff as reliable sources of information and this helped customers to consider exploring AI.
- **Identifying customers' needs and interests.** By identifying customers' interests, AI and media literacy issues and access needs in advance, staff were able to tailor sessions so customers could engage confidently and easily spot connections between AI and online information and their own lives.
- **Staff members learning alongside customers.** Staff explaining that they were not AI and media literacy experts, and being open when they didn't know an answer, created relaxed environments that encouraged customers to ask questions, share discoveries and gain confidence.
- **Sharing a range of contexts and examples where AI and media literacy can be of use.** Involving a diverse team in planning sessions led to an array of fun, surprising, useful applications that enabled customers to spot how AI might be relevant to them. This sparked their interest in finding out more.
- **Making sessions interactive.** Using short videos and quizzes, encouraging discussions and guiding customers to try out tools kept customers engaged (and sometimes engrossed). They also thought critically about AI and identified ways in which AI and online information could make their life easier or support their hobbies and passions.

Barriers that stood in the way of building customer confidence included:

- **Fear of AI and digital media.** Worries about AI and digital media sometimes made customers reluctant to engage. However, when staff shared ready answers, such as how they or their family already engaged with AI, this could pique interest. Introducing the session as a safe place to explore AI and highlighting potential benefits also enabled engagement.
- **Disconnection between AI, media literacy and motivations.** Members of one group known to the library were resistant to engage with a planned session because they felt anxious about new technology and the topic didn't align with their motivation for attending, which was to relax. One solution to

this, which worked well with other groups, was for staff to visit in advance and gain buy-in.

- **Limited community engagement contacts and experience.** In some situations, library staff were unable to include customers from their intended target groups in interventions. While they readily identified that they could have begun contacting these groups earlier, this will always be a challenge if staff do not have existing relationships with their intended beneficiaries.
- **Access needs.** There were some situations where interventions did not meet customers' needs, for example, those with hearing impairments. This therefore limited their engagement. However, staff members promptly identified steps to ensure situations like this did not arise again. This included requesting information from customers in advance about factors that might affect their engagement and planning ways to best meet their needs.

Conclusion: Learning and legacy

The Innovating in Trusted Spaces project grew out of an awareness that AI and media literacy were evolving at pace and leaving digitally excluded citizens at even greater risk of being left behind. The project looked at the role libraries can play in addressing that trend. The final part of this report analyses the learning from the evaluation and considers the legacy of the project.

Learning

Test and learn

The digital context in which the project was developed is constantly evolving. Library services therefore needed to find ways to develop offers that would be capable of adapting, responding and flexing to this changing context.

Test and learn proved to be a popular and suitable approach to developing a responsive and flexible offer. In particular, it gave frontline library staff permission to try things out, to admit when things didn't go to plan and to make changes. This greatly enhanced the extent of project learning over a short period of time.

Role of frontline staff

Frontline library staff were at the heart of the project. Their collaboration and willingness to collaborate and share candid insights and learning helped shine a light on how the wider library workforce could become more confident around AI and media literacy.

AI and trust

The project saw an attitudinal shift among some staff. The public sees libraries and librarians as trustworthy and, while some staff were motivated and excited to be supporting AI literacy, others were initially concerned about 'promoting' a technology widely perceived as untrustworthy. However, staff realised that they had an important role to play in allaying customers' fears and libraries found that they could use the public's trust in them to share ways of staying safe online.

Customer appetite

The project demonstrated that library customers had an appetite for learning about AI and media literacy. Customers spoke about feeling inspired to learn more (both independently at home and by attending other library-based sessions). They also wanted to share their newly gained knowledge around issues like reliability of information.

Legacy

It was a strength of the project and all those involved – national partners, library service leads and frontline library staff members – that the desire to embed learning and good practice was prioritised from the start.

The project has created practically useful and useable resources, tools and information, tested interventions, equipment and session plans. Critically, it has left a legacy of learning that's already embedded at national, regional and local levels. Examples of each are given below.

At national level

- The community of practice kick-started with the four library services was expected to be taken forward by Libraries Connected Digital Universal Offer Group with the aim of drawing on wider experience of the libraries sector and sharing learning with them.
- National partners planned to share good practice through their own conferences and workforce meetings.
- Good Things Foundation gathered feedback and insights about its AI and media literacy resources

At county and local authority level

- Senior library services staff worked strategically to align their digital offer with county and local authority digital strategies.
- Library services planned to develop their own policies around AI and disseminate project learning and good practice outputs, while rolling out training for wider staff and volunteers. This is intended to highlight what works and what doesn't in order to increase staff and volunteer confidence and capacity to deliver support around AI and media literacy in the future.

At local level

- In local libraries, library-based frontline staff planned to share their learning and skills with colleagues. This built on the skills sharing ethos so positively modelled as part of the project's test-and-learn approach.
- Library services obtained hardware that can be used across services. This will be supported by making tried and tested resources and session plans available to library staff.

Innovating in Trusted Spaces demonstrated that there is a need for, and interest in, support around AI and media literacy, and that library staff are well-placed to meet that need, with appropriate resourcing and training. The direction of travel around digital citizenship, digital poverty and AI suggests that need will only increase in the future.

Appendix: Theory of Change co-created with partners

What is a theory of change?

It's a roadmap that shows a project's direction of travel, the changes we hope to see and how we expect those to happen. We have found that partnerships like this one find it useful to work on a roadmap together because it helps them build their shared understanding and ownership of the work. The roadmap becomes a live document to come back to over the course of the project.

A 'sufficient' theory of change

This is a very short project. As such we have worked fast to get to a working theory of change that will be of practical utility during the lifetime of the project including its immediate plans for legacy. Longer programmes would take more time working iteratively to gradually refine a theory of change. Our recommendation is that the theory of change we have arrived at together is sufficient as a working document to guide us through the few months of the project.

Notes

In preparing the attached theory of change we have reviewed data from the theory of change workshop and both co-creation workshops; interviews with Library Service leads; and the Library Services' draft plans.

We realise that some of the hoped-for impact of the project will only take place after its completion. Therefore, we have included in the theory of change some 'legacy indicators' to describe what you may look for as you continue to work on the project outcomes after March 2026.

We have used 'the public' and 'customers' but recognise that some partners may also use 'members'.

Purpose and problem identification

The problem:

While libraries have been providing digital inclusion support at least since the people's network was rolled out a quarter of a century ago, the technology, tools, required skills and dangers people experience online are changing more rapidly than ever. With an ever more complex picture of digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy, library services and frontline staff struggle to keep pace with the support that library members need and how to provide it. This comes on top of problems with a lack of foundational digital skills. Taken together these will mean a widening digital divide, that will compound other inequalities.

The purpose:

- To make progress on how libraries can support digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy (the 3 don't exist in isolation but are interlinked)
- To leave library staff with increased confidence and some tested methods to support customers to understand the possibilities, dangers, and ways to stay safe online
- To arrive at a tested set of interventions that will inform libraries about different approaches to embed DI, AI and ML into their service offers
- To develop examples of tailored offers for specific groups that can be made available for learning across all Library Services

Legacy (From DSIT - *Long-lasting impacts beyond the funding period refers to how the expected outcomes of the proposal would continue to support digital inclusion in the local community after the fund ends on 31 March 2026. (Paragraph 12)*)

- Learning and evaluation findings of this project are promoted to Library Services so that they can decide where it sits within their Workforce Development Plans
- A co-creation process that can be repeated in future when new digital skills requirements, technologies, possibilities and dangers continue to change
- Learning from the project will be driven back into the Learn My Way and AI Gateway resources to help continue to develop them

In practice, the legacy will sit with the Libraries Connected Digital Universal Offer Group.

Project outcomes				
1. More effective and relevant digital literacy, media literacy, and AI literacy offered to the public through the public library network	2. Active and sustained community of practice focused on bringing together new learning about digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy.	3. Improved confidence in library staff delivering digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy	4. Public more confident in having a go in using AI and working out what to trust online	5. Digital inclusion support more inclusive and responsive to the needs of the identified target groups.
<p><i>Project indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LS have had the time and opportunity to explore and use Learn My Way Digital Media literacy module and AI Gateway ● LS have identified what hooks, interventions, resources and equipment they require in order to provide an offer that is practically feasible and relevant/relatable <p><i>Legacy indicator</i></p> <p>Learning in the form of a tested set of interventions</p>	<p><i>Project indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frontline staff attend webinar and take back practical learning to their services committing to make one change or try out just one thing ● Frontline staff, volunteers and champions have the opportunity to attend and learn from the project ● Project develops examples of which approaches and resources worked to build staff confidence 	<p><i>Project indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand what is digital literacy, media literacy, AI literacy ● Staff are aware of and have explored available resources and are more confident introducing public to them ● Each Library Services has a trained person or people ● Each Library Service has more staff who are willing to offer / lead sessions with members of the public 	<p><i>Project indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand positive ways to use/understand how this would benefit me ● Feel more confident to use ● Understand dangers and how to use safely ● Understand that not all information online may be true or trusted' ● Understand how to check sources of information online ● Customers have gone on to use what they have learned and/or tried something 	<p><i>Project indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tested a range of hooks or enablers to engage different groups ● Examples of what approaches / resources have worked to engage and increase confidence / ability of different groups ● Examples of how learning has benefited different target groups ● Members of target groups are able to suggest ways to make the digital inclusion offer more inclusive

<p>is available to all Library Services that will help them plan for a future digital offer</p>	<p>Legacy indicator</p> <p>Libraries Connected Digital Universal Offer Group develops Terms of Reference or similar to set out how they can embed the project legacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the possibilities and how to enjoy them, and the dangers and how to avoid them/stay safe. • And feel confident to support the public to understand them <p>Legacy indicator</p> <p>At least 50% of Library Services report improved confidence in library staff in a) understanding the possibilities, dangers and ways to stay safe; and b) being able to deliver to customers around digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy</p>	<p>themselves outside the library session</p> <p>Legacy indicator</p> <p>Customers have explained to someone else or encouraged someone else to try</p>	<p>and responsive to their group.</p> <p>Legacy indicator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of target groups are more likely to inquire about engaging online • Members of different target groups continue to discuss and share learning outside library sessions • Good Things has identified improvements that can be made to existing resources which would make them more inclusive and responsive to specific groups
---	---	--	--	---

Assumptions/rationale	Drivers/enablers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Digital literacy, media literacy and AI literacy don't exist in isolation (see Good Things Foundation Venn diagram) ● Libraries as trusted places ● Fast pace of change to the skills required, technology, equipment, possibilities and dangers and ways to stay safe ● Scale of digital exclusion and how new challenges are widening the divide and compounding inequalities making inclusive and responsive approaches even more important ● Dangers of AI driving people away/decreasing online confidence - (Good Things Foundation research findings) ● Media literacy is broader than mis and disinformation - includes personal information being collected by tech companies / websites, and this data is used to filtered info that people then see online. ● Assumptions about library services being able to use AI tools / have AI policies that enable them to use AI tools with members of the public <p>Supporting the public with digital/media/AI literacy requires the staff delivering the support to be familiar and confident about the subject matter and resources. This is different from digital skills offers where it has worked well for staff or digital champions and members of the public to be learning together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff have time to be curious and explore resources and reflect on them with peers ● Staff have enough familiarity and confidence with AI tools to engage members of the public in exploring the benefits and dangers ● Practical, relevant, regular ways for staff to build skills and be confident without having to do in-depth, lengthy training ● Have the infrastructure to promote the learning and resources from this project to Library Services so that they can decide where it sits within their Workforce Development Plans ● For roll out – workforce training and development plan, CoP embedded in Libraries Connected Digital Inclusion Service Offer ● Work with partner organisations that work with the target group; events to maximise visibility and connections with groups ● Build into everyday library activities ● Engage public through existing groups, and enjoyable, relevant interests and activities responding to their interests and public / individual needs and concerns ● Attractive marketing, including range of images depicting diverse audience ● Need devices, need Wi-Fi to be working ● Do the different library services all have AI policies in place / what 'conditions' are different across the services which might enable or restrict them from doing this? ● Use existing resources (from Good Things Foundation or other) i.e. don't attempt to develop new ones.