

Middlesbrough's Digital Inclusion Offer

Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel

Supporting independence, prevention and access through digital inclusion

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Why digital inclusion matters to Adult Social Care

Digital exclusion is not simply a technology issue. For many residents it affects their ability to manage everyday life, remain independent, and access the support they need.

For adults who require support, digital exclusion can create barriers to:

- accessing health, housing and council services
- shopping, banking and managing finances
- maintaining social contact and wellbeing
- completing day-to-day tasks independently

For Adult Social Care, digital inclusion is therefore a **prevention issue**. It can help people remain independent for longer, reduce isolation, improve access to services, and reduce reliance on others for everyday tasks.

Digital inclusion is an enabler of independence, prevention and access.

What is Rekindle?

Rekindle is Middlesbrough Council's Digital Inclusion Service within **Middlesbrough Independent Living Services (MILS)**.

Launched in **2019** following a successful **LGA Digital Inclusion Programme** bid, Rekindle is now delivered in-house by Middlesbrough Council as part of the wider Adult Social Care prevention offer.

Rekindle was developed to:

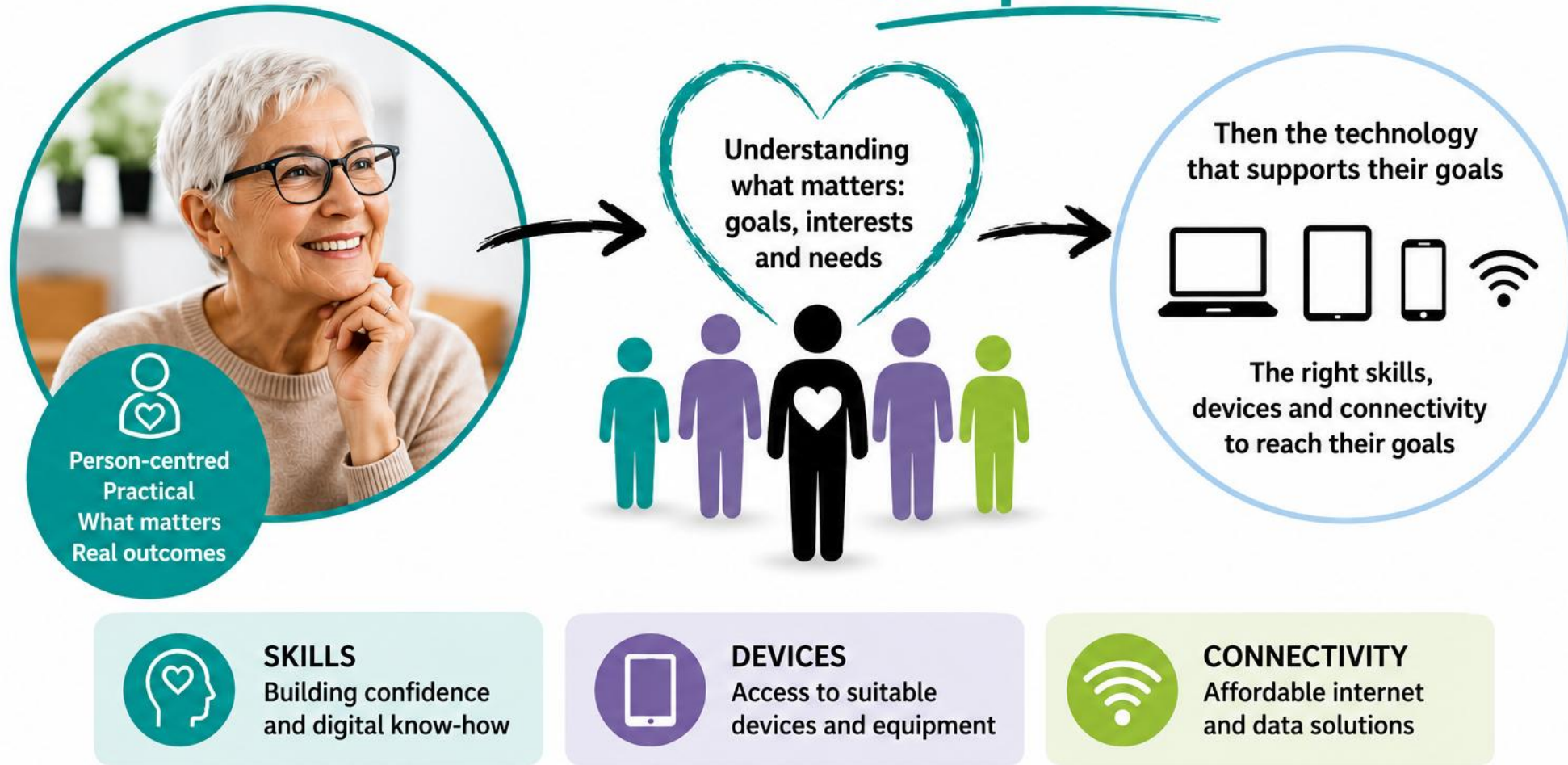
- tackle digital inequality
- support prevention and early help
- improve independence and self-management
- reduce social isolation
- improve access to information, services and support



Rekindle is not just about devices or IT support. It is about helping people stay connected, independent and able to manage everyday life.

How Rekindle Works

We don't start with technology; we start with the person.



What Rekindle delivers in practice

Rekindle provides a mix of **direct support**, **community-based activity** and **preventative interventions**.

Examples of support include:



1:1 digital support
with everyday tasks
and confidence
building



**Online shopping
support**
to improve
independence



**Digital health
support**
including online
appointments, apps
and health information



Housing support
including Tees Valley
Home Finder
applications and
bidding



**Device and
SIM/data support**
helping people access
the right technology
and stay connected



**Drop-ins, groups
and community
activity**
that build confidence
and reduce isolation



This means Rekindle supports both
practical day-to-day independence
and wider **wellbeing, confidence**
and **connection**.



Digital Champions

The Digital Champions Programme helps extend digital inclusion beyond the core Rekindle team by training staff and volunteers to offer light-touch digital support in places residents already use and trust.

What Digital Champions do

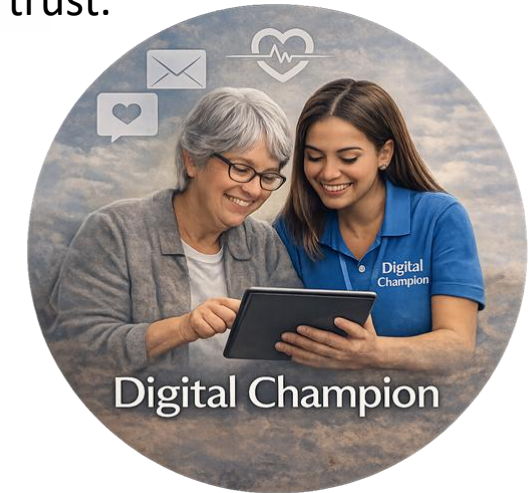
Digital Champions provide support with simple everyday digital tasks, such as:

- getting started with devices and basic digital confidence
- helping people access online information and services
- offering encouragement and practical support in community settings
- identifying when somebody may need more structured help

How this links to Rekindle

Digital Champions do not replace Rekindle caseworkers. Their role is to provide earlier, lighter-touch support and to refer into Rekindle where somebody needs more in-depth or ongoing digital support.

This helps build wider capacity across services and community settings, while ensuring residents can still access specialist support when needed.



Partnerships, devices and connectivity

Rekindle works through partnership because digital exclusion cannot be addressed by one service alone.

Key partners include:

- **FurbD IT** – refurbished devices and wider digital inclusion support
- **Libraries and Community Hubs** – trusted venues for support, Digital Champions and drop-ins
- **Adult Social Care teams** – referrals and joined-up support
- **Housing and Community Interventions teams** – including support around homelessness and Tees Valley Home Finder
- **Public Health and wider VCS partners**

Devices and connectivity

For some residents, access to a suitable device and internet connection is the difference between being connected to support or being completely excluded.

Across the last 12 months (**Up to 31st May 2026**) Rekindle had supported the distribution of:

- **59 devices**
- **40 Data Bank SIMs**
including support for residents who were street homeless / no fixed abode.

Innovation and community-based support

Rekindle goes beyond basic IT support and uses creative, community-based and co-produced approaches to build digital confidence.

Examples include:

- **Digital QR Walks** and virtual Google Earth tours
- **Ancestry groups**
- **Photo Adventures** and digital projects with people with learning disabilities
- **Weekly online quizzes** for people who struggle to leave home
- **Digital storytelling**, life stories and wider community digital activity

These approaches help build:

- digital confidence
- motivation and engagement
- social connection
- skills through hobbies and interests

This makes digital inclusion more meaningful and accessible for people who may not engage with formal learning.

Impact and examples of value

Rekindle is delivering practical support and preventative value across Adult Social Care and community settings.

Core service activity (Across 12 months)



137 referrals for 1:1 support



59 devices distributed



40 Data Bank SIMs provided



Plus support with:-

- Housing
- Tees Valley Home Finder support

Digital Champions impact (Since Oct 2025)



32 Digital Champions trained



269 courses completed



457 people supported



146 hours of support delivered

Prevention example – online shopping

Rekindle has supported residents to develop the skills to shop online for food and essentials, helping reduce reliance on others and in some cases avoid care support.

Reporting has identified:

- **33 people supported**
- **£1,560 actual annual savings**
- **£72,800 preventative annual savings**

Recognition and wider contribution



Alongside day-to-day delivery, Rekindle has also contributed to wider digital inclusion learning and has received external recognition.

Good Things Foundation / DSIT



Middlesbrough was one of only 3 areas nationally selected to work with Good Things Foundation through the DSIT Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund, alongside Barnsley and Cornwall Councils.

The work undertaken in Middlesbrough contributed directly to Good Things Foundation's **2026** report, ***Strengthening a Place-Based Approach to Digital Inclusion***, which highlighted Middlesbrough's strengths in community delivery, partnership working and accessible support, while also identifying opportunities to strengthen a wider place-based approach to digital inclusion.

National recognition



In 2022, Rekindle was nominated and commended at the Local Government Chronicle Awards in the category of Best Digital Impact.

Research and innovation



In 2024, Rekindle contributed to co-production and research activity exploring digital care technologies for older adults through work linked to the NIHR HTA Development Award.

What's new and next



New support resources

- practical online guides for service users, including apps, online shopping and Tees Valley Home Finder

New partnerships and outreach

- support for parents, grandparents and families through community and school-based activity
- a pilot with the Methodist Asylum Project and Neighbourhood Team to provide connectivity solutions in 25 homes for asylum-seeking families with young children

Developing the offer

- AI-focused workshops and learning, including support to understand AI safely and use it creatively
- working with TVCA and regional partners on a more joined-up Tees-wide digital inclusion approach

Voices of Rekindle

The impact of Rekindle is best understood through the voices of the people it supports.

To close, this short video shares the experiences of residents who have been supported through Rekindle and highlights the difference digital inclusion can make to confidence, connection and independence.



Middlesbrough Independent Living Service – Rekindle Vlog

[Watch the Rekindle video](#)