

# The Dos and Don'ts of Digital Drop-ins

What is digital drop-in? (And what isn't...)

A digital drop-in (which might take many names), is a service where people can turn up and ask for support to **use a digital device** or **access digital services** in an informal and ad-hoc fashion. Some people might bring their own device, others might use the devices you have available.

Chris Blandford from Computer Friendly in St. Albans says that older people usually attend a drop-in when they come across a problem, for example:

Online services and forms

- "I need help filling in my PIP form"
- "My wife used to take care of this, can you help me to do it?"

New devices or apps

- "I don't understand my new tablet"

Specific tasks

- "How do I send these photos to my family in Canada?"

Online safety

- "Is this a scam?"

Problems with a device

- "Why is my tablet doing this?!"

Some of these problems will be really easy to solve but others will take longer and might be out of your remit. People often bring in broken devices expecting you to help fix their device, so it's important to make it clear that this isn't a repair shop.

## Digital Drop-in Dos and Don'ts

Do...

- Get the right people with the right skills. They don't need to be a digital expert; patience and communication skills are the two most important skills. Chris, from Computer Friendly, describes the "have a go-er" as someone who might not know all the answers, but is confident enough to solve problems with the other person.

- Remember to train your team on safeguarding and data protection. You will come across some vulnerable people who share personal information so the team needs to know how to respond to this correctly and safely.
- Make sure the location is accessible, friendly and has good transport links. It's also important to check the acoustics to make sure that it's accessible for the hard of hearing.
- Protect time before the session to set up the space, check the devices and connectivity are all working correctly.
- Promote your drop-in through flyers, posters, partnering with other services, and even putting adverts in the local newspaper. But word of mouth is always the most powerful way to advertise.

### Don't...

- Overpromise what you can do. It's important to manage expectations and make it clear what you can and can't support people with.
- Assume that the person you are supporting understands jargon or even understands the problem.
- Get frustrated if someone can't remember the instructions and come back over several weeks. Some people need lots of practice and repetition to learn new processes.
- Forget to have someone there to welcome people who are looking for support, if possible.

### Final thoughts

Drop-ins sound like quite a casual set up but require a lot of thought, preparation and skilled staff or volunteers. They can be a great way to help people with one-off problems like filling in forms, or fixing a set-up issue with their device, and they can also be a hook to engage people with other digital learning activities.

It's really important to be transparent about what you can and can't support people with to avoid disappointment. But remember, no matter how you advertise, you will always get some unusual requests.

### About Computer Friendly

Computer Friendly have run volunteer-led drop-ins in different locations around Hertfordshire for nearly 20 years. They aim to make devices that little bit friendlier for people with low digital skills and support many older people at their drop-ins and courses.

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