



Delivery framework

September 2025

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Background

In 2022, [Hohepa Canterbury](#) (a disability support and service provider) was granted funding by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) to develop a framework that safeguards and supports intellectually disabled young people (referred to as intellectually disabled people in this document), alongside their whanau and their support workers, to become successful digital citizens; people who can use technology in a way that is safe and supports their wellbeing.

The need for this piece of work was identified out of Hohepa's support model diversifying to provision of residential care to intellectually disabled rangatahi.

One of the needs identified with supporting young people was to support their use of digital technology in a way that mirrored those of their neurotypical peers, enabling self-determination. However, we could find little in the way of guidelines, frameworks and educational tools that acknowledged neuro diverse learners and their specific needs.

The MSD funding application was borne out of a desire for something that supported and promoted intellectually disabled rangatahi in a digital world and for them to be able to participate safely and kindly, all in all enabling them to be good digital citizens.

We viewed this initiative as something that would directly support intellectually disabled youth to access the usual support networks that positively contribute to wellbeing.

Through the development of this piece of work, it became apparent that it was relevant to all intellectually disabled people (tāngata whaikaha)– rather than just youth. The scope was therefore broadened.

This framework should be seen as just that – the scaffolding around which people with an intellectual disability (tāngata whaikaha) can be supported to be successful digital citizens. Its implementation and supporting tools will vary depending on those using it and the needs of the young person.

Our initial aim identified through the residential support lens has shifted over the development of this framework. There has been a realisation that this could be used to support anyone with an intellectual disability. As such, Hohepa has recognised the need for disabled voice through this process, to ensure “nothing about us, without us”. This will be an ongoing process of consultation, with initial conversations underway with [PeopleFirst](#).

What is a digital citizen?

A widely accepted definition of digital citizenship is outlined by Netsafe, New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation, providing online safety support, expertise and education to people in New Zealand.

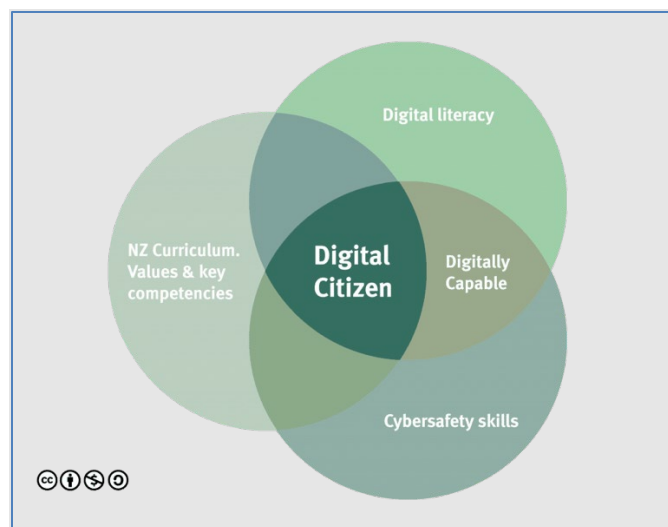
As [outlined here](#), Netsafe have defined a successful digital citizen as someone who:

- is a confident and capable user of ICT
- uses technologies to participate in educational, cultural, and economic activities
- uses and develops critical thinking skills in cyberspace
- is literate in the language, symbols, and texts of digital technologies
- is aware of ICT challenges and can manage them effectively
- uses ICT to relate to others in positive, meaningful ways
- demonstrates honesty and integrity and ethical behaviour in their use of ICT
- respects the concepts of privacy and freedom of speech in a digital world
- contributes and actively promotes the values of digital citizenship

Furthermore, they suggest that “Digital literacy is what is required for us to understand, take part in and get the most from our digitally enabled society. Digital literacy is a fundamental aspect of digital

citizenship. “Being digitally literate is not just learning about or even with digital technologies but is being able to participate fully in a digitally enabled [society]. Like literacy and numeracy initiatives which provide people with the skills to participate in the work force, digital literacy has become an essential skill to be a confident, connected, and actively involved lifelong learner.

The diagram below shows the connection and overlaps between all these factors:



Framework Goal

The intention of this framework is to provide the basis for which to **support, educate and empower** intellectually disabled people (their whanau and their support workers) to **thrive** and become successful digital citizens; a person who can use technology in a way that is safe and supports their wellbeing.

This will be done through:

1. **Introducing** the ideas outlined in the framework, with the aim of shared understanding
2. **Assessing** digital competency, gaps, and opportunities for ongoing support
3. **Supporting** intellectually disabled people using strategies, policies, and procedures that support the healthy use of digital technology
4. Developing and delivering **ongoing education opportunities** to support intellectually disabled people (their whanau and their support workers) on their journey to being successful digital citizens
5. **Empowering** all involved to **thrive** through the consistent use of success measures of a person’s journey to being a successful digital citizen

A “try, learn, adjust” approach to implementation will be encouraged – this is discussed more in the implementation section.

The challenges

The fast-moving digital landscape

The speed with which the digital and technological landscape is changing is nothing short of insane! This poses its own challenges, as even those deeply embedded in all things tech acknowledge the exponential rates of change and growth.

As such, this framework aims to be less in the detail of the actual technology, and more focused on ensuring the scaffolding, measures, and supports are explicit. This will hopefully ensure it flexes with the changing technological landscape.

Cyber safety, risk, and exposure

Online safety is about knowing how to use online spaces in a safe, secure, age-appropriate way, as well as being able to detect and prevent cyber security issues. This can be increasingly complex for neuro diverse people, who may not be able to obviously “see” this risk or have cognitive disabilities that mean they do not understand risky behaviours.

Differing digital competency and literacy

Different people use technology in different ways. This is often (but not always) tied to generational differences in the role of technology in day to day lives.

This can pose significant challenges when whanau/support teams are trying to support and “keep up” with people’s use of technology. They may not have the skills, knowledge, experience, and exposure to provide the support required. Learning opportunities should be identified for whanau and support team/s alongside the needs of the intellectually disabled people through this process.

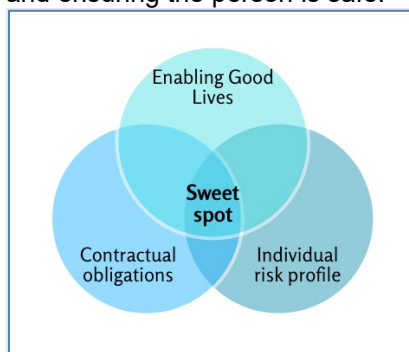
Lack of suitable educational tools

There is a real gap in educational tools and resources designed for intellectually disabled people around the use of digital technology. This, coupled with the challenges of potentially being taught by “old people” means thought needs to be given the design **and delivery** of appropriate educational tools. Peer to peer, easy read, easy access tools should be top of mind.

Support delivery constraints

For those in residential support, where there are contractual obligations that need to be considered there are additional tensions in play that need to be acknowledged.

The diagram below shows the interaction between these tensions, and where the framework aims to operate “in the sweet spot”. This ensures EGL principles are upheld, alongside contractual requirements, and ensuring the person is safe.



Framework development process

The following process was followed in the creation of this framework, and its supporting resources.

Literature review

The literature reviews aim was to identify how young people with learning disabilities are currently

using digital technology (particularly social media), and what programmes and supports have been demonstrated to assist them to do so as good digital citizens. This has been included in the appendices – a summary of the conclusion is below:

The review identified that there is little research on the topic of developing digital citizenship with young people with intellectual disabilities. What is evidenced, however, can be summarised as follows:

- *Many people with learning disabilities have access to a range of devices but often lack skills to use these, and use these less than their non-disabled peers*
- *Risks (such as grooming, cyber-bullying, radicalisation, being scammed) are perceived to be higher due to cognitive impairment, but there is no actual evidence of this.*
- *Most people with learning disabilities have had little ICT education*
- *There are no disability-specific available programs or comprehensive tools to teach digital literacy to young people with learning disabilities, though the research encourages the development of these.*

Consultation

Due to time, funding and privacy constraints, the framework has been informed by a small sample size of interviewees. However, feedback gathered has been consistent with the literature review findings, and with those behaviours, issues and opportunities seen in neurotypical youth.

With rangatahi

6 intellectually disabled and 3 mainstream youth were interviewed, to inform our approach. The key themes identified were:

- Although there is a theoretical understanding of what is “safe” online this is not replicated in practice
- A lot of young people DONT think they need help -- “I know what I am doing”
- Education being delivered in an informal peer-led approach (and incentivised) is preferable
- Young people will be more open with people they TRUST – they don’t want to get into trouble

With stakeholders

6 stakeholders were interviewed, mainly from the disability sector. The key themes identified were:

- that an inconsistent application of support is problematic – organisations are not thinking holistically
- most interventions are “bottom of the cliff” or restrictive
- One interviewee summed the opportunity up very well: “Have an agreed understanding of what type of individualized support a young person needs to keep practicing making the right decisions to improve their digital knowledge, experience, and application to the life they want to live. This is then supported by all the settings which they touch”

Expert advice

- [John Parsons](#), Cyber Safety and Risk Assessment Consultant was engaged for expert advice,
 - John works with education, health, and private sectors, providing specialist advice and direction on the safe and ethical use of Digital Communication Technology.
- [Mel Bleach](#), clinical psychologist, advised us on key challenges faced by youth with intellectual disabilities.
- [NetSafe](#), New Zealand’s independent, non-profit online safety charity.
- [People First](#), as a disabled people’s organisation.
- [Make it Easy](#), as a provider of EasyRead documentation.

Framework and tools drafted

- The framework, assessment tool and supporting documents were drafted.
- The framework is designed to be the scaffolding for a process that will support intellectually disabled people journey's to being successful digital citizens.
- The Assessment tool aim to complement and align to the key framework areas.

Pilot

- The draft framework was tested in a variety of real-life situations. These included provider settings, education settings and whanau settings. The pilot included:
 - Te Pukenga, Cashmere High School
 - Fairhaven High School
 - Hohepa Canterbury
 - Brackenridge
 - Netsafe
 - Explore
 - A handful of disabled people and their whanau, connected via NZ Down Syndrome Association
- The voice of the disabled rangatahi was critical through the pilot, with the team ensuring alignment to EGL principles through each stage.
- The pilot was intentionally small due to funding and time limitations.
- Feedback on ease of use, identified gaps and fit for purpose was gathered.

Framework and phase 1 tools finalised

- Updates to the framework, assessment tool and supporting documents were made, based on feedback.
- This included splitting supporting documents into two versions, to support easy implementation:
 - An educator version
 - A whanau/support team version
- Preparation for creation of EasyRead versions of the documents
- All documents are intended to be living documents, hence being referred to as Phase 1. It is the hope that subsequent funding will be secured to help continue the ongoing development of resources to support those on their digital citizenship journey

Share

- Hohepa Canterbury will look to the MSD for assistance with dissemination.
- Netsafe has indicated a willingness to assist with sharing the framework and associated documents.
- We will also use our connections in the disability sector to ensure the broadest reach possible.

Guiding principles

This framework has been developed to align with the following principles.

Enabling Good Lives

The [Enabling Good Lives principles](#) have been developed to inform the delivery of services to people with disabilities. The 8 guiding principles are:

- **Self-determination:** Disabled people are in control of their lives.
- **Beginning early:** Invest early in families and whānau to support them; to be aspirational for their disabled child; to build community and natural support; and to support disabled children to become independent, rather than waiting for a crisis before support is available.
- **Person-centred:** Disabled people have supports that are tailored to their individual needs and goals, and that take a whole life approach rather than being split across programmes.
- **Ordinary life outcomes:** Disabled people are supported to live an everyday life in everyday places; and are regarded as citizens with opportunities for learning, employment, having a home and family, and social participation - like others at similar stages of life.
- **Mainstream first:** Disabled people are supported to access mainstream services before specialist disability services.
- **Mana enhancing:** The abilities and contributions of disabled people and their families are recognised and respected.
- **Easy to use:** Disabled people have supports that are simple to use and flexible.
- **Relationship building:** Supports build and strengthen relationships between disabled people, their whānau and community.

All 8 principles should be considered when supporting intellectually disabled people to become citizens that use technology in way that is safe and supports their wellbeing.

United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (UNCRPD)

The Convention gives guidance on how to implement the rights of disabled people and requires our government to report regularly to a special UN Committee. You can [read more about this here](#).

Specific to children, the convention states the right of disabled children to full human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children. This includes:

- the right to express views freely on all matters affecting the young person
- and for these views to be given due weight according to age and maturity,
- and the right to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)

[UNCROC](#) gives children and young people up to the age of 18 the right to:

- life, survival, and development
- the Government making sure that the best interests of the child are considered when making decisions about the child
- access to education and health care
- grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding
- protection from discrimination of any sort
- develop their personalities, abilities, and talents
- protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and economic exploitation

- special measures to protect those that conflict with the law
- an opinion and for that opinion to be heard
- be informed about and participate in achieving their rights
- special measures to protect those belonging to minority groups.

Try, learn, adjust

The approach adopted by [Mana Whaikaha](#) – the disability support system offering disabled people and whānau more choice and control over their supports. As outlined on their site “There will be several learning cycles with the 'try, learn, adjust' approach. Each cycle involves asking: What are we developing? So how well are things working? Now what does this mean for what we do next?” This approach is also applicable as we work with intellectually disabled people on their digital citizenship journey and has heavily informed the implementation process.

Supporting principles

New Zealand Disability strategy

The New Zealand Disability Strategy guides the work of government agencies on disability issues from 2016 to 2026 and can also be used by any individual or organisation who wants to learn more about, and make the best decisions on, things that are important to disabled people.

Specifically,:

- Priority 9: Increase government services' responsiveness to disabled people
- 9 G: Investigate opportunities for technology to increase disabled people's participation in work, community, and political life, including through both assistive and access to mainstream technology.

Education

The right to an inclusive education is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). This is reinforced by the New Zealand Disability Strategy whose education outcome is ensuring young people get an excellent education and achieve potential throughout their lives.

Oranga Tamariki

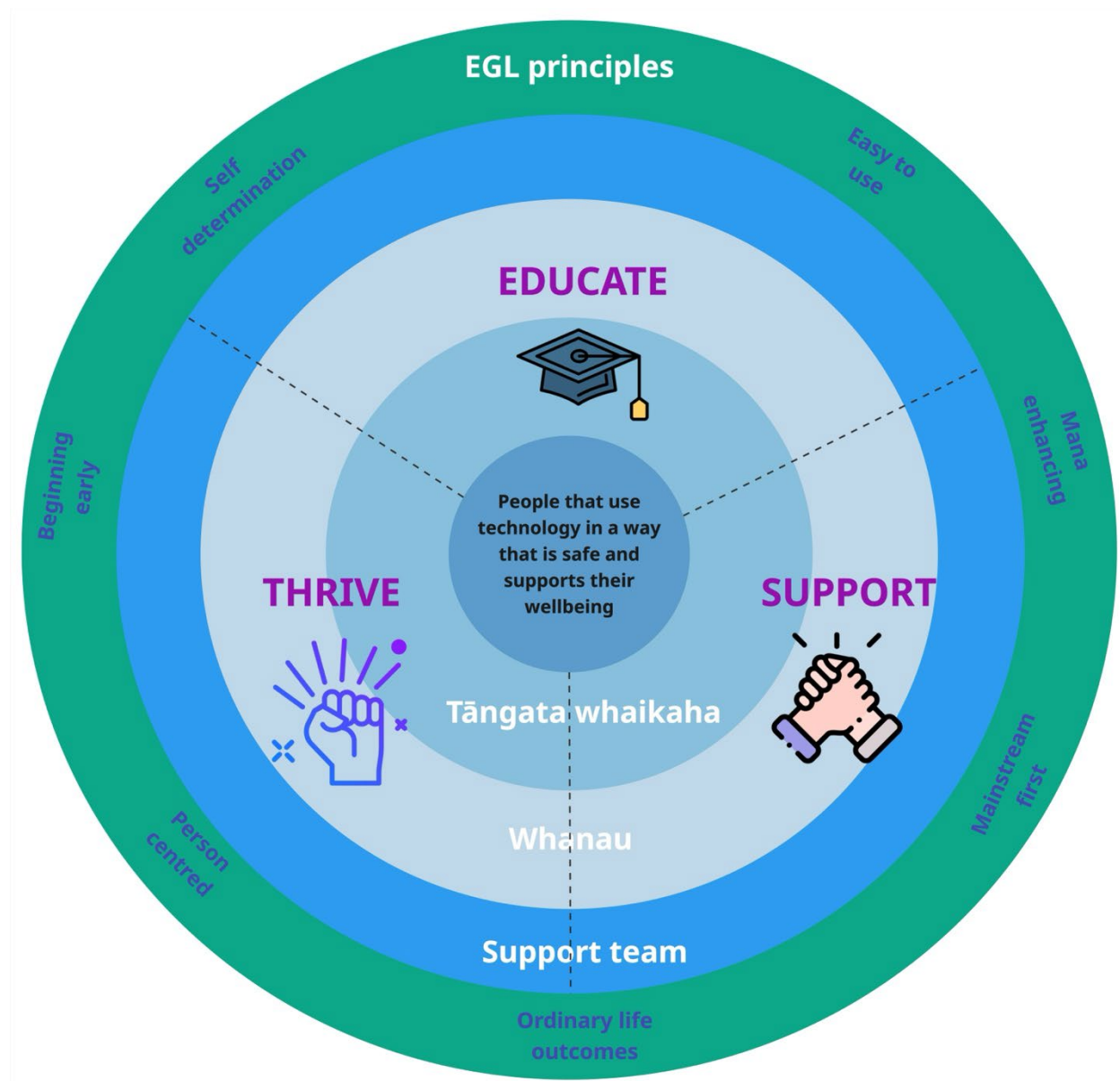
Oranga Tamariki (OT), (the Ministry for Children) may be welfare guardians for some intellectually disabled rangatahi. As such, OT provides clear success measures for successful delivery of support as outlined in their [Quality Assurance framework](#).

Successful digital citizen's framework

The framework's goal is to support people with intellectual disabilities to be citizens that use technology in a way that is safe and supports their wellbeing – i.e., successful digital citizens.

They are supported by their whanau and support team in this journey.

EGL principles encircle the framework, ensuring that people are supported in a way that aligns to this principle-based approach.



Support

Successful delivery of planning for SUPPORT means we will achieve the following outcomes:

<p>Tāngata whaikaha:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel supported and nurtured in my journey to being a successful digital citizen • I have a digital plan that reflects what I need to feel supported/safe when I use digital technology • I understand my journey to being a successful digital citizen may mean some safeguards/supports are in place, to keep me safe • I understand why these safeguards/supports are in place, and understand we will try, learn, and adjust these as needed • I understand I can talk to anyone about these supports, at any time
<p>Whanau and/or support team/s:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We feel confident in supporting people in the use of digital technology • We help ensure relevant support and safeguards are in place to ensure a nurturing environment for people to learn to be successful digital citizens • We develop digital plans alongside our people with an intellectual disability • We seek assistance in our use of digital technology, so we are best positioned to support people with an intellectual disability to be successful digital citizens
<p>Support team/s</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We feel confident in supporting people with an intellectual disability in the use of digital technology. • We ensure relevant support and safeguards are in place to ensure a nurturing environment for people with an intellectual disability to learn to be successful digital citizens • We support people with an intellectual disability in a way that respects their rights and wellbeing, as well as our contractual and professional obligations.

How we will measure success is outlined in the table below:

Tāngata whaikaha	Whanau	Support team/s
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel supported on my journey to being a successful digital citizen • I will know who I can ask for, for help with being a good digital citizen • I understand supports are in place and why they are there • I can articulate my digital plan, and I can see my progress against this plan • I know it is ok to make mistakes • I know who to ask for support/help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We ensure supports and scaffolding are in place so intellectually disabled people can use technology in a positive way • We take a holistic approach to supporting intellectually disabled people to be great digital citizens, supporting their whole selves through the journey • We provide a safe space for intellectually disabled people to ask questions and make mistakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We co-create digital support plans with intellectually disabled people • We ensure we take a holistic approach to supporting intellectually disabled people to be successful digital citizens, supporting their whole selves through the journey • We ensure whanau understand how we are working to support their intellectually disabled people to become successful digital citizens

Tāngata whaikaha	Whanau	Support team/s
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We support intellectually disabled people when they make mistakes We support intellectually disabled people to thrive as successful digital citizens We will seek assistance if we need additional support in our use of digital technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We support intellectually disabled people in line with contractual and professional obligations and requirements We seek assistance in our use of digital technology to best support rangatahi

Educate

Successful delivery of planning for EDUCATE means we will achieve the following outcomes:

Tāngata whaikaha:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am someone who can use technology in a way that is safe and supports my wellbeing I am a lifelong learner and know who to talk to if I want to learn about digital technology I know about what is safe, and what is not online, and I know how to report any safety concerns
Whanau:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We feel confident in our use of digital technology and know we can support our intellectually disabled people in their journey to being a successful digital citizen We know to ask for help if we have education gaps in how to support intellectually disabled people to be successful digital citizens
Support team/s:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We feel confident in our use of digital technology. We support intellectually disabled people by identifying and connecting them to learning opportunities. We know to ask for help if we have education gaps in how to support intellectually disabled people to be successful digital citizens We support intellectually disabled people in a way that respects their rights and wellbeing, as well as our contractual and professional obligations We share resources and ideas that have positively impacted digital citizen journeys

How we will measure success is outlined in the table below:

Tāngata whaikaha	Whanau	Support team/s
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know the importance of education in my journey to being a successful digital citizen I understand the role of digital technology in my day-to-day life I understand the importance of valuing myself and my self-worth in this journey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We support intellectually disabled people in their education decisions and opportunities We use the principles of “try, learn, adjust” to support intellectually disabled people’s learning journey We know about what is safe, and what is not online, and we know 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We support intellectually disabled people in their education decisions and opportunities We adopt the principles of “try, learn, adjust” to support intellectually disabled people’s learning journey We know about what is safe, and what is not online, and know how to

Tāngata whaikaha	Whanau	Support team/s
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know how to “show up” online • I know how to use social networks safely • I know who to talk to if I don't feel safe online • I know who to ask if there is something I don't know about using digital technology • I know what to do if I feel unsafe, or see unsafe things when I use digital technology 	<p>how to report any safety concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We know the importance of our ongoing education in the use of digital technology • We know to ask for help if we have knowledge gaps which impact our ability to support intellectually disabled people • We adjust learning to match the needs of our intellectually disabled people • We know and implement cyber security practices, and teach intellectually disabled people to do the same 	<p>report any safety concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We seek out ongoing educational resources from appropriately skilled providers • We are committed to educating intellectually disabled people in our care, so they are digitally fluent • We seek assistance in our use of digital technology to best support intellectually disabled people We ensure intellectually disabled people are supported to learn at a pace that works for them • Whanau know how we are supporting intellectually disabled people to broaden their knowledge and understanding of digital technology

Thrive

Successful delivery of planning for THRIVE means we will achieve the following outcomes:

Intellectually disabled people:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am a thriving, self-determining digital citizen, who feels empowered to use technology in a way the is enabling, positive and safe • I am digitally capable and fluent • I am cyber safety aware • My values and attitudes in a digital world mirror those in the real world
Whanau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We feel empowered and understand how to be citizens who use digital technology in positive way • We support intellectually disabled people to thrive on their digital citizen journey
Support team:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We feel empowered and understand how to be citizens who use digital technology in positive way • We support intellectually disabled people in a way that respects their rights and wellbeing, as well as our contractual and professional obligations

How we will measure success is outlined in the table below:

Intellectually disabled people	Whanau	Support team/s
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I see growth and change through my journey to being a successful digital citizen • I celebrate successes • I am connected, capable and confident • I am engaged and want to know more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We empower intellectually disabled people to use digital technology in a way that ensures they are safe and that their wellbeing is supported • We walk alongside our intellectually disabled people on their digital journey • We celebrate successes with intellectually disabled people as they work to being successful digital citizens • We know what to do when we have concerns for intellectually disabled people in their use of digital technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We empower intellectually disabled people to use digital technology in a way that ensures they are safe and that their wellbeing is supported • We celebrate successes with intellectually disabled people as they work to being successful digital citizens • Whanau know their intellectually disabled people is thriving • We share our learnings with others, to help them thrive in a digital world
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Appendix 1: Definitions

The table below outlines key definitions used in this framework.

Phrase/word	Definition
Digital Citizen	<p>When we talk about supporting intellectually disabled youth to become citizens who can use technology in a way that safe and supports their wellbeing, we are adopting the Netsafe definition of a successful digital citizen. That is, someone who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a confident and capable user of ICT • uses technologies to participate in educational, cultural, and economic activities • uses and develops critical thinking skills in cyberspace • is literate in the language, symbols, and texts of digital technologies • is aware of ICT challenges and can manage them effectively • uses ICT to relate to others in positive, meaningful ways • demonstrates honesty and integrity and ethical behaviour in their use of ICT • respects the concepts of privacy and freedom of speech in a digital world • contributes and actively promotes the values of digital citizenship
Young person	This framework adopts the UNCROC definition of the child as any person under the age of 18.
Intellectual disability	This framework adopts the UN Disability Convention definition of “disabled people” as “people who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.
Whanau	The definition of “whanau” in this model is broader than the nuclear family structure. A whānau can include extended family members and close personal friends.
Support worker	Any people employed to support and provide day to day pastoral care of an intellectually disabled young person.
Disability provider	A service providing support and care for people with intellectual disabilities.
Te Tamaiti	We use the Māori word for child throughout this document.
Tamariki	We use the Māori word for children throughout this document.
Rangatahi	We use the Māori word for teenager or young adult throughout this document.
Tāngata whaikaha	We use the Māori word for a person with an intellectual disability throughout this document.
Oranga Tamariki	A NZ government department whose vision is to ensure all tamariki or children in Aotearoa New Zealand are in loving whānau or family and communities where oranga tamariki can be upheld.

Appendix 2: Literature review

Included as a separate document.