

Get Digital

Scotland



Get Connected Pilot

Digital access for people experiencing homelessness during and beyond COVID-19

getdigitalscotland.org





Sharon



Jerzy



Craig

Changing lives through digital



Robert



Neal



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Executive summary

Connecting people and delivering results during and beyond COVID-19

This pilot was funded by Simon Community Scotland and delivered by Get Digital as a response to the coronavirus pandemic. It was designed to support people facing multiple exclusion and complex needs homelessness.

We gave 36 people using our Housing Support service in Edinburgh a smartphone with unlimited calls, texts and data. These people are all living in temporary accommodation (e.g. BnBs, and other council provision) and all face the most extreme forms of homelessness. To help people get online, we also provided one-to-one remote personalised support based around a digital skills framework, and delivered by our staff team who are trained in digital inclusion. After 3 weeks we asked people how this initiative had changed their lives.

The positive impact of this pilot has been overwhelming. Each person who received a device and the accompanying support has moved from a place of digital exclusion towards digital inclusion. They have been able to take multiple steps that have positively benefited their lives – including reducing their isolation, increasing their confidence and making it easier for people to get the support they need. This report explains what we did in this pilot and the impact it has had.

What they said

“The best thing is access to all the Apps – for example to learn English, communicate with friends and family.”

Participant

“The best thing has been knowing I can get online OK and get hold of my worker and friends, with no worry of having no data.”

Participant

“I feel amazing! I am now applying job updating my CV and keeping contact with my worker during this hard time.”

Participant

“I feel wonderful and part of the community now, able to go online.”

Participant

“I’ve been surprised how quickly and how well the smartphones have changed and opened up service users lives and connectivity.”

Digital Champion

Get Digital Scotland’s integrated approach to digital inclusion

Simon Community Scotland funded pilot May 2020

Prior to the pilot **0%** of people who participated had easy access to a connected device with sufficient data to use all digital tools



We gave everyone a smartphone and unlimited data

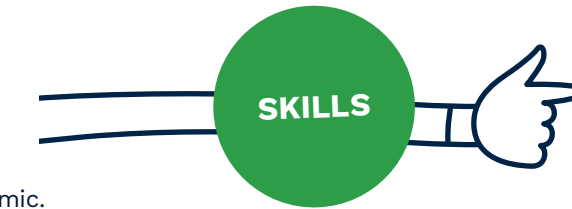
so that everyone had instant and easy access to the online world.



100%
of people were given easy access to a connected device

We streamlined the existing Get Digital Framework, into a ‘Quick Wins’ framework

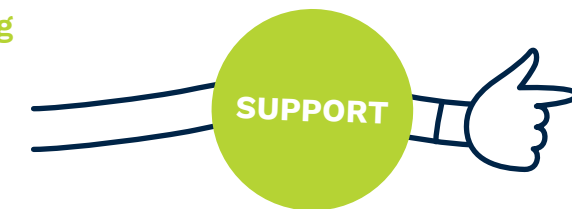
to ensure people could quickly use the online tools most useful and relevant to their situation during the COVID-19 pandemic.



97%
of people were inspired to learn more

Rapid Digital Champion training enabled us to support people at a distance with unboxing, setup and ‘Quick Wins’

to help build people’s confidence, trust and motivation.



100%
of people found digital champion support helpful

Making digital inclusion possible

The combination of Get Digital providing access, skills and support delivered immediate, positive outcomes for the people in this pilot.

100%
positively affected my life

84%
feel more confident being online

90%
place more value on digital

100%
will continue to use digital



1. Introduction

Refocusing digital inclusion support to people facing the most extreme forms of homelessness during a pandemic.

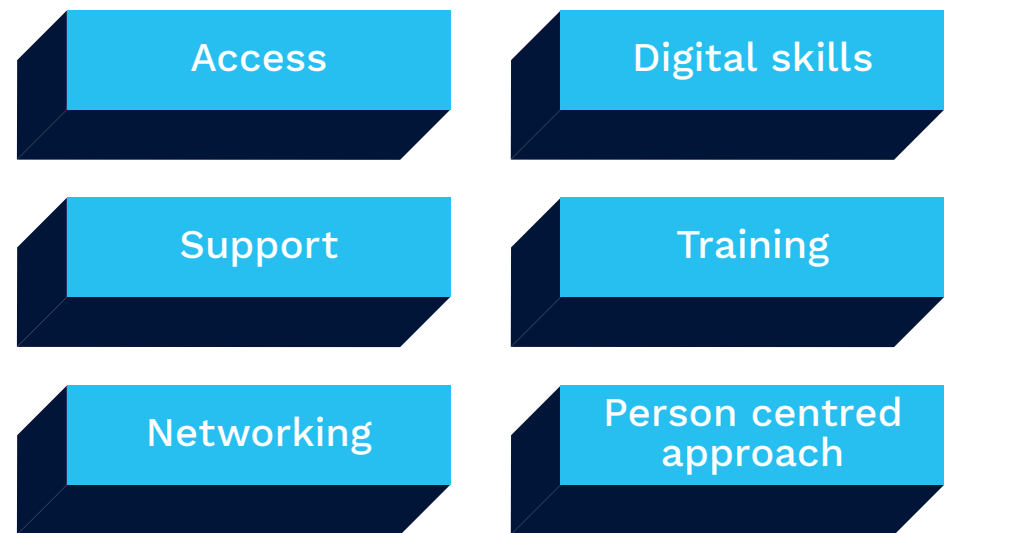
Background

The growth of digital technology and the internet has brought many advantages to individuals and communities. For many people it is second nature to go online to look up an address, contact a friend, watch a video or purchase an item. However, some people do not have the essential digital skills, confidence, motivation or the tools (i.e. access) to benefit from the digital world. Vulnerable groups, including people who experience homelessness, are among the most digitally excluded in our society.

About Get Digital Scotland

Get Digital is the Simon Community's digital inclusion programme for Scotland's homelessness sector. It is funded by the Scottish Government and has been operating since March 2019. We want people affected by or working in homelessness to experience an improved quality of life by benefiting from the digital world. We help to increase access to the digital world by providing digital champion support which is based around the Get Digital Framework – 20 digital skills needed to get online and get things done. We have also set up a Digital Zone – with access to computers – in one of our drop-in services. We are currently working with homelessness service providers across Scotland, covering Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth and Aberdeen, with plans for expansion into other areas. We support the training of digital champions and the integration of digital inclusion into service delivery.

What Get Digital Scotland does



Digital Access Pilot: Making something good happen

The coronavirus pandemic has increased our reliance on digital tools. Due to social distancing and self isolation, for many people digital has become a lifeline. In this context, it is essential that people affected by homelessness have access to a device, data and the support they need. We launched this pilot to see how this could be done.

Prior to this pilot, access to the internet for people we support was made possible through our Digital Zone (computers and free WiFi). People could also access what was available in public spaces (e.g. computers in libraries, free WiFi/data on buses). Providing smartphones with unlimited data, along with our usual support, was a new direction for us. It was catalysed by COVID-19 restrictions, but has ramifications for ongoing digital inclusion beyond this particular crisis.

GET DIGITAL APPROACH (within the service selected for this pilot)

Barriers to digital inclusion	PRE-COVID – what we provided	DURING COVID – what we provided
Access to a device	Staff devices and computers in the Digital Zone at a drop-in Hub	Smartphone given to service users
Access to connectivity	Free WiFi at Hub	Unlimited data, calls & texts
Digital skills	Get Digital Framework	Existing Get Digital Framework streamlined and tailored into a Framework for a COVID-19 context
Trust, confidence and motivation	Digital Champion Support: (typically delivered face to face) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Digital safeguarding ● Encouragement and support ● Skills development ● Education on benefits 	Digital Champion Support (see left) – now delivered remotely

Rapid design and implementation

We designed and implemented this pilot within 2 weeks. During this time we:

- Engaged with the Housing Support team in Edinburgh who have existing relationships with people affected by the most extreme forms of homelessness. All team members had already been trained as Get Digital Champions
- Identified 36 people willing and able to participate in this pilot
- Procured devices and unlimited data package (for 2 months) from 'DB Comms' taking care to ensure the devices had good battery life, decent screen size and an unmodified android operating system¹
- Created the Quick Wins Digital Skills framework (for life during COVID-19 pandemic)
- Developed and delivered training on the new framework for our digital champions
- Setup the 36 devices and sim cards

- In collaboration with each participant, we created an email address and registered it to a device for each service user (including Google Account – giving access to all Google digital tools)

Over a 3 week period we:

- We delivered devices to people
- Our digital champions provided device training to users (at a distance) and supported ongoing skills development using the Quick Wins framework
- We monitored and evaluated the impact of the pilot

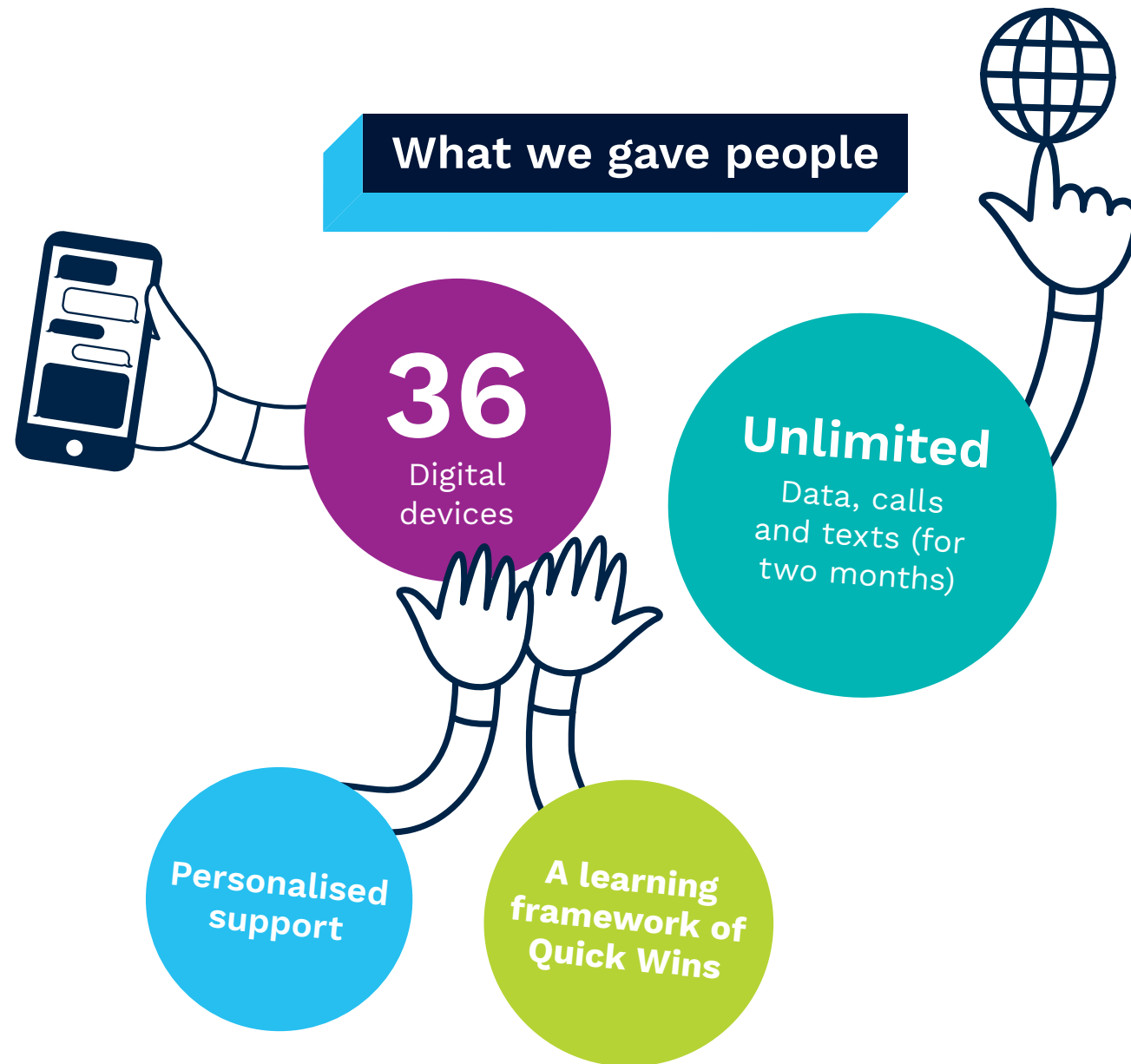
See section 2 and 3 for more detail.

¹Our training programmes have been developed for this operating system. Three manufacturers use this system (Nokia, Motorola and Google) – so this ensures project scalability and provides flexibility when making bulk purchases.

2. What we did

Providing digital access along with support

Access – a device and data – is just one of the things that people need to get online. To ensure people have the confidence and skills to get the most out of these devices, we also provided personalised support – from a team of staff confident and trained in delivering digital inclusion – and a flexible framework for learning digital skills.



Access – device and connectivity

People who don't have a device or the means to connect to the internet typically need to go to extra lengths to get online – e.g. ask to use someone else's device, visit a library or sit on a bus for hours in order to access the free WiFi. They simply cannot connect easily with other people or services. This is a severe disadvantage in life. Giving everyone free access to a smartphone with unlimited calls, texts and data meant that everyone in this pilot had instant, easy access at all times – right in their pocket.

Skills and tools – Quick Wins for life during coronavirus

It can take a long time to learn the broad range of skills that are covered in the full Get Digital Framework and they are not specifically designed for life during lockdown. For this pilot we developed a Quick Wins Framework – i.e. a streamlined version of the Get Digital Framework. We wanted to ensure our digital champions could deliver the digital skills which would have a powerful and immediate impact during lockdown. (For example – by setting someone up with WhatsApp they can easily connect with their family and friends through text, audio, video and photos, or contact their support worker at any time. This is a quick win!). This Framework had four categories:

- Communicating (i.e. connecting with people and organisations)
- Accessing Reliable Information
- Money Matters
- Leisure and Entertainment

Support – delivering digital skills at a distance

Due to the coronavirus restrictions, staff could not deliver skills (or usual support!) sitting side-by-side with service users. This means that the digital champion support had to be delivered from a distance – for example over the phone or on a video call, or meeting up with someone (e.g. in a park) and delivering support from a few meters away.

Training – Digital Champion Training Programme

Working with our partners Mhor Collective we created a training programme for our digital champions which covered the essentials for someone getting started on a new device: unboxing their device, setting up the sim card, registering with a Google account, installing essential apps and the 'Quick Wins' framework. The training also covered how to deliver digital support 'at a distance' and discussion on key digital safeguarding / privacy issues. Staff were ready to get people using digital tools immediately.

Assessing impact

After 3 weeks we asked everyone who had participated in the pilot to provide feedback through a questionnaire.

In total, 31 of the 36 people who received a digital device completed the service user questionnaire. It explored:

- Levels of access prior to the pilot (device, data etc)
- People's experience of using the smartphone and how it had affected their lives
- Outcomes from the categories within the Quick Wins Framework (i.e. Communicating; Accessing Reliable Information; Money Matters and Entertainment)

13 Digital Champions responded to the survey which included asking for their impressions about:

- How the pilot had affected people's lives
- If access to support increased
- The benefits and challenges
- Key issues for future work
- What surprised them about the pilot

"I feel someone is willing to give me a chance in life to prove myself."

Participant

"It's amazing, I'm really thankful to have this."

Participant

3. What we discovered

How we made a difference: An overview

The combination of free devices and unlimited data, a structured learning framework and personal support from a digital champion has delivered astounding results in a very short period of time.

With people we support	Within the staff team
Instant benefits and digital inclusion for everyone who participated	Support workers have become stronger advocates for digital inclusion
Huge sense gratitude – heartfelt thanks and appreciation given to the team	Support workers amazed at the gratitude of people getting devices
Celebration of autonomy, confidence and willingness to learn	Staff surprised to see how quickly people have adapted to new technology and how easily they have learned new skills
Concern about the possibility of data ending after 2 months	Staff impressed by the speed the pilot was implemented and how quickly we could get people connected

“I have been learning new things keeping in contact.”
Participant

“It’s amazing, I’m really thankful to have this.”
Participant

“It’s reassuring – a security – that I can use the phone anytime. I’m still getting used to it and have recently used Facetime with my partner.”
Participant

“It’s great being able to look at things without asking someone else to do it for me. Not having to wait to find out things.”
Participant

How it made a difference

Pre pilot – very little access



With the pilot – unlimited access and huge benefits

100%

positively improved life

What participants said:

84%

feel more confident being online

97%

inspired to learn more

90%

place more value on digital

100%

will continue to use digital

81%

increased used of digital tools

100%

found digital champion support helpful

What Digital Champions said:

100%

Felt the pilot benefited service users

86%

Increased communication between staff and services users

“I have been learning new things keeping in contact.”
Participant

“I feel more confident, have access to everything.”
Participant

Reflections from service users (participants)

Benefits



Connection with people and organisations

People were able to connect with family and friends, and access support at the Simon Community as well as other essential services (e.g. for benefits, DWP, JobCentre Plus). 97% feel more connected (i.e. this reduced social isolation).



Learning

The device has been a catalyst for learning new digital skills. It also enabled learning languages and some people accessed formal learning institutions (e.g. doing their college work or making a college application).



Accessing more support

The connected device allowed service users to contact support workers easily as well as other significant support agencies (e.g. the NHS or local council).



Confidence and self belief

Service users showed increasing confidence throughout the pilot. The more people learned, the more confident they became in their own ability to learn new things.

“I have been learning new things keeping in contact.”

Participant

“With internet access in privacy of my home, I have been able to do work for college and order online shopping.”

Participant

“I feel amazing. Such an amazing device. I now have communication with (my) children in this situation.”

Participant

Easy access to data

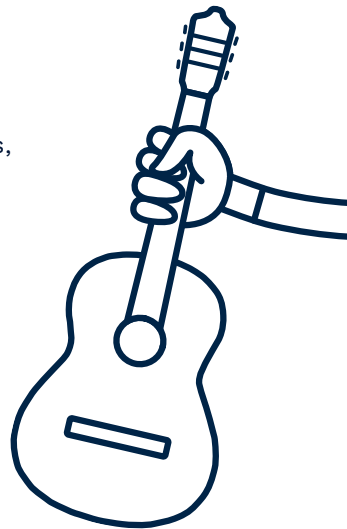
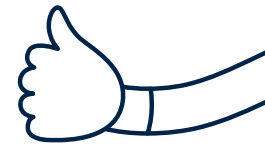
Unlimited data allowed full usage of all tools without ever having to worry about data limits. This removed the need to travel to a library or sit on a bus for hours to get online.

Autonomy and independence

Access to the connected device empowered people to do things on their own. They no longer felt dependent on people to help them – they could do things for themselves.

Entertainment

Online leisure activities including listening to music, watching videos, reading and playing games, all contributed to an increased sense of wellbeing and an enjoyable use of free time.



Challenges

Unfamiliarity

Using new technology can be quite challenging at first. Despite these challenges, everyone worked to overcome them, many doing this independently.

Learning process

Service users highlighted that they are aware that learning takes time and that developing digital skills is an ongoing process. While challenging, immediate benefits were being recognised and all were keen to keep going.

Confidence

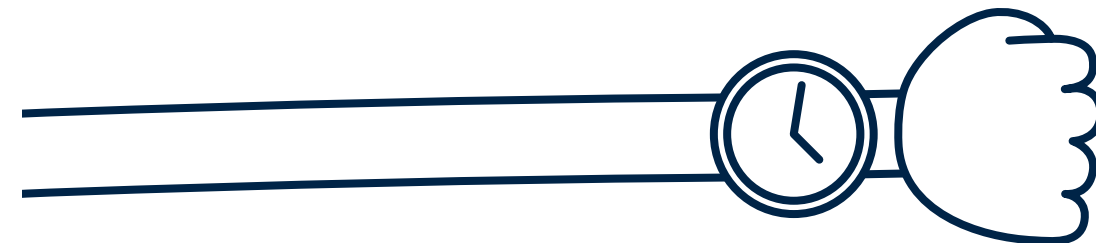
Despite a reported lack of confidence, 100% of service users have said that they are committed to continuing their digital journey. With support from digital champions we expect confidence will increase.

“I found it difficult installing the apps but my children have helped me.”

Participant

“I am taking my time to get used to all the different functions and apps on the phone. Baby steps is how I am taking it.”

Participant



Reflections from staff (Digital Champions)

Positives

Increased engagement in support

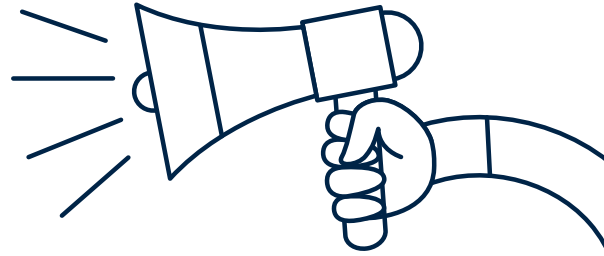
There was a noticeable increase in support workers' ability to reach service users to provide support, as well as service users initiating contact with Simon Community staff and other agencies.

Gratitude

Staff reflected how genuinely thankful service users were to be part of the project. This made staff feel highly valued as they were delivering powerful and immediate impact.

Overwhelmingly positive

Staff feedback was overwhelmingly positive, even from those staff members who thought that service users would struggle using a digital device.



Language

English is a significant obstacle for many service users. Use of translation apps (Google Translate) and language learning tools (DuoLingo) was a huge benefit and helped staff members and service users to communication.

Speed of learning

People learned how to use digital tools very quickly – even those with very low levels of digital skill and confidence. Staff felt it was ownership of a connected device that was the catalyst for rapid learning.

“The gratitude. That’s what’s surprised me the most about this pilot.”

Digital Champion

“Service users have been motivated and grateful to be given the phones. They are keen to learn and have better connections.”

Digital Champion

“It’s been such a great experience being able to give them to clients and watch them become confident and excited.”

Digital Champion

“The service users became more confident in using technology – before, they were reluctant to use technology.”

Digital Champion

I’ve been surprised how easy the process was to allocate the phones to the clients.”

Digital Champion

“I’ve been amazed how quickly clients started to work the phones.”

Digital Champion

Concerns

Addressing data poverty

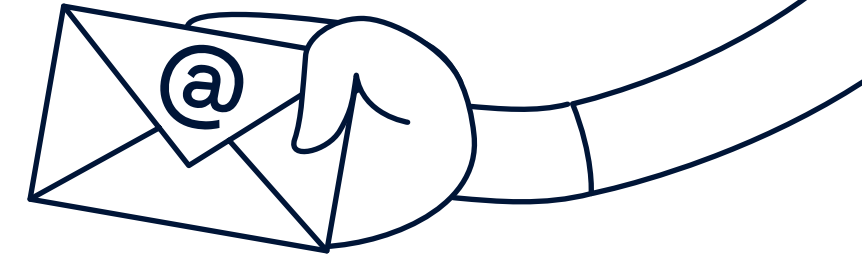
Staff noted that access to a connected device was essential for digital skills development, it also enables support workers a stable way of offering ongoing support and increases autonomy for service users. Yet beyond the pilot, accessing data will again become an issue – as most people we support are unable to afford unlimited data.

Additional learning resources

Staff requested additional resources to aid with digital skills learning (e.g. developing an online training platform, having extra time to solve technical issues; and resources in different languages).

Supporting at a distance

Providing support with digital skills during social distancing was challenging and took time, but staff also reflected how much service users had engaged independently with their own learning and moved forward quickly.



“We must find a way to give people data to keep people connected.”

Digital Champion



STOP PRESS:
Simon Community Scotland will be funding unlimited data, calls and texts for an additional 12 months for everyone who participated in this pilot.

Learning and personal development with the device

One of the huge positives from this pilot has been around learning and self development. Both people who received a device and digital champions highlighted a keen appetite to learn! Every service user indicated that they felt inspired to learn more about what the smartphone can do.

“Felt hard to work at first!”

Participant

“I’m still learning, so there are few things I’m still trying to work out, but need more time.”

Participant

100%
inspired to learn

“Getting used to how it works, but this will be worth it in the end.”

Participant

“I am able to learn in my own time and not have to go to a class with other people. I’ve always wanted to learn how to use computers and stuff but because of my anxiety I couldn’t go. This has let me do it in my own house with no pressure.”

Participant

Changing staff perceptions: The importance of digital

This pilot has catalysed a shift in how staff perceive the value of digital inclusion activity. This builds on the digital champion training we have been doing alongside staff over the past 2 years.

In the past, digital has been seen as a ‘nice to have, but not essential’ for people experiencing homelessness. Among some members of staff there was a feeling that there is ‘no time’ to work on digital skills when people have other pressing issues – like finding accommodation, applying for jobs or managing benefits.

Through this pilot, we have seen a dramatic shift in our culture. Staff have become extremely positive and enthusiastic about digital – they are realising just how powerful digital inclusion can be.

Support workers in this pilot have first hand experience of what can happen when people have access to a connected device and the support and confidence to navigate the online world. Digital is now being seen as a fundamental tool to achieve goals such as applying for jobs and accommodation, connecting with family and achieving greater wellbeing. It is delivering huge benefits to the people we support.



“I totally get it now – I can see the difference it makes. It can help people so much: it’s not just a phone, it opens up all the ways we want to help people.”

Digital Champion

Key area 1

Four key areas – Quick Wins

These four key areas reflect the structure of our ‘quick wins’ framework for supporting digital learning during COVID lockdown. In this section we highlight how people used and benefited from different tools.

Connecting with people and organisations

Using ready made digital communication tools to help people stay in touch during the coronavirus lockdown.

I used communication tools during pilot	100%
I feel more connected	97%
Who did people connect with?	
Friends and family	83%
Support worker	87%
Government services	53%
Which tools were used:	
Email	65%
Messaging	87%
Video calls	58%
Social media	58%



“I’ve been able to WhatsApp my mum during lockdown.”
Participant

“My life has improved as now I have the freedom of making phone calls – allows me to speak to someone in case I need help.”
Participant

Key area 2

Accessing reliable information

Accessing accurate, up-to-date and reliable information is essential.

I accessed reliable information sources during pilot	74%
Which information sources were used:	
Government	65%
Local Council	57%
NHS	48%
Reliable news outlet	57%

“I’m just learning and I have contacted college which felt wonderful to arrange my admission details for August 2020.”
Participant



Key area 3

Money matters

Managing money, accessing benefits and purchasing things online during lockdown.

Note: 90% of people in the pilot have a bank account.

I used finance tools during pilot
(of those with bank accounts) **50%**

I feel more in control of my finances
(of those who have used tools) **100%**

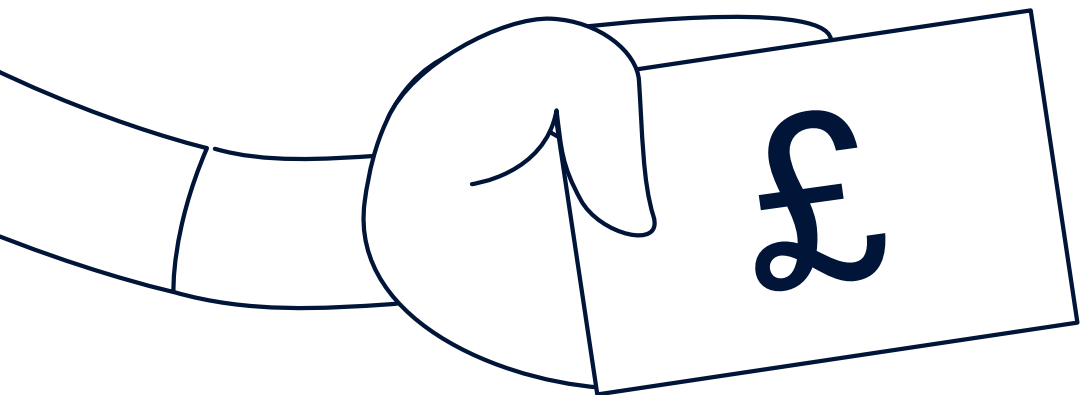
Which tools were used:

Online banking **36%**

Paypal **7%**

Managing benefits **21%**

Online purchasing **29%**



“It’s been a life saver, it saved me a lot of money.”
Participant

Key area 4

Entertainment, leisure and learning

Accessing a range of online tools and apps for enjoyment and learning.

I used entertainment tools during pilot **100%**

My spare time was more enjoyable **97%**

Which tools were used:

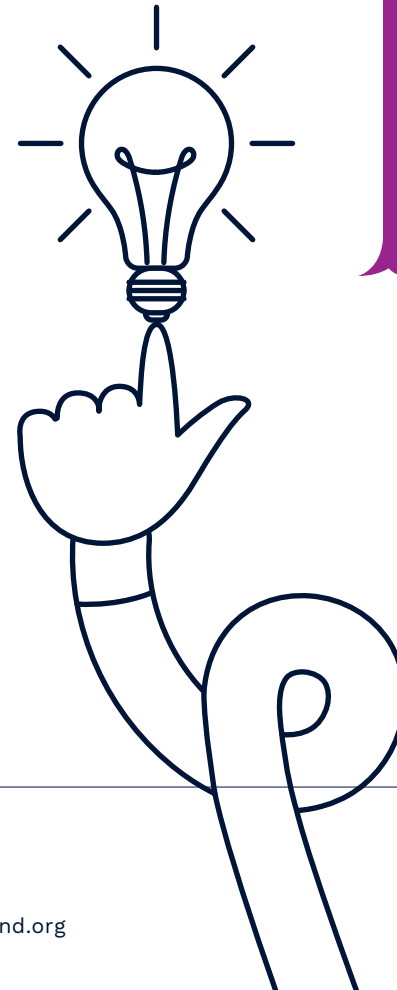
Video streaming **80%**

Audio streaming **37%**

Reading and learning **37%**

News and updates **67%**

Online gaming **23%**



“I am playing about with Google and Facebook. I like YouTube and to hear the music. It keeps me from being lonely.”
Participant



Case studies: Get Connected Pilot

Each person's experience of homelessness is unique. These stories show how powerful digital inclusion can be.

SUSAN

Learning

Susan has been affected by homelessness since she was sixteen years old. As a carer for her mum, who has a long term condition, she often finds it difficult to get out and about. The last couple of years have been challenging, but she has big plans, and hopes to retrain as a hairdresser, with a wee business of her own.

Susan received a phone through the Get Connected Project just a few days ago, and has immediately thrown herself into sorting out college – the next big step on her journey. 'I'm just learning with the phone and I have contacted college. It felt wonderful to arrange my admission details for August 2020.'

In addition to sorting out her place at college, Susan has also been watching YouTube videos to build up her skills with the scissors, learning something new every day. She's particularly loving how much she can do for herself, even without support.

EILIDH

Connecting with others

The lockdown resulting from COVID-19 has been particularly tough for Eilidh, who lives alone. **Eilidh has first hand experience of homelessness.** She has long-term health conditions and addiction issues, and so being stuck at home has really impacted on her wellbeing, and she has felt really alone.

Eilidh has an old laptop under her bed, but she couldn't afford internet connection, and she never quite got to grips with it. It just always felt alien to her, and so she wasn't sure if the Get Connected Project would help.

Eilidh received a phone last week, with unlimited data, and she couldn't be more excited about it. While she just couldn't get along with the old laptop, the phone feels immediately familiar to her, and she has taken to it instantly. The first thing she did was contact her parents on WhatsApp, and was thrilled to see them. 'It's been so brilliant to WhatsApp my parents down on England- it's been so great to actually see them. The phone has been an absolute lifesaver'. She's in touch with them almost daily now, which is making lockdown much easier to cope with.

Roz, Eilidh's support worker, can also see the huge difference the phone is making. 'I know Eilidh is a real people person, and she has often been really isolated as a result of her condition. The phone is changing her life. It seems like such a small thing, but the difference it's making is so huge.'

COLIN

Making a contribution

Colin is recovering from homelessness. Although he has had a phone in the past, he has found it financially really difficult to maintain a contract, and so the phone was never a reliable way for him to get in touch with other people, or for them to reach him.

But the phone he's received through the Get Connected Project has changed all that. The phone has unlimited data, calls, and texts – so he's been very reachable indeed! He's a volunteer with the charity Fare Share which redistributes food from restaurants and shops which would otherwise go to waste. And during lockdown, Colin's never been busier and he has been regularly delivering food across Glasgow. Staff at Fare Share are able to get hold of him easily, in a way they couldn't before, and so he's been able to really help make a difference during the pandemic.

As well as supporting Fare Share, Colin also finds time to follow his beloved Hearts Football Club, and he's been making the most of his data to watch old games, and follow fan information, so he's up to speed when games start back again.

CRAIG

Autonomy and connection

Having been in and out of prison over the last years, Craig has never had the opportunity to develop his digital skills. Up until recently, he relied on what he refers to as a 'burner' – a cheap, basic phone which can only be used for calls. He changed his burner regularly, and so he never had a stable number, which made getting in touch with him tricky.

Kelly, his support worker, often had to act as an in-between when people needed to get in touch with Craig, for instance, his social worker and his lawyer. But everything has changed since Craig received his smartphone through the Get Connected Pilot. He is now able to receive these calls himself, which is making a huge difference.

Kelly explained: 'It used to be so hard to get hold of Craig, as his number changed all the time, and I was having to speak to social work, and then track Craig down so he could use my phone to call them. But it's all different now. He's speaking to them himself, and he contacts me regularly. I get a wee text every day, with Craig just checking in and saying hello. It's amazing.' Craig is also using the phone to manage his universal credit on his own: again, this used to be Kelly working through it with him but now he only asks for advice when he gets stuck.

But his smartphone is also opening up something even more personal for Craig. During his time in the justice system, Craig lost contact with his daughter, which has been very upsetting for him. While he still won't be able to see her in real life, the social work team has suggested that he use the video calling function of his new phone to see her, and so he's quickly focussing on the skills he needs to do this in the very near future. He has also used the phone to see photos shared by grandparents, and can't wait to see his daughter and be able to hear her voice.

Kelly said: 'This is the longest Craig has ever stayed out of prison, and he's come such a long way. I'm so proud of all he's done and the phone has been totally brilliant for him, in ways we never expected. That social work has suggested video calling is so great, and I'm really excited for him.'



CATIE

Education, managing money and connection

Catie is a single mum who lives with her fourteen year old daughter. They have been facing the most extreme forms of homelessness and have just managed to secure a tenancy for the first time.

She works part time in a local supermarket and is also studying Counselling at Glasgow Clyde College. The outbreak of COVID-19 has been a challenging time for Catie. She's classed as an essential worker and has been really busy with work, and was doing her best to keep on top of college work, which had all moved online, but her tablet was broken and she doesn't have broadband at home as the costs are a lot to manage.

The phone came just at the right time. Catie was able to use it to get in touch with her tutors at College to explain her situation and she's now begun to catch up on course work. This means that when colleges do go back to normal, she'll be able to carry on with her peers.

Kelly, Catie's support worker, also mentioned other positives the smartphone has brought. 'We recently managed to get a wee grant to help Catie and her daughter financially. They've been able to use the internet to shop online and get all the things they need, and then just send me on all the links so we can sort out the payment through the grant. That's made everything much easier.'

Kelly added 'It's also been really nice to see Catie on video calls. She can sometimes get a bit low and while phone calls are okay, video calls are so much better. We can both actually see each other, and this makes a big difference. I was recently able to help her when she'd been having a bit of trouble with her neighbours, and talking it through, face to face, really helped.'

Catie's daughter has also been a fantastic help in supporting her mum's learning with the phone. She's able to share her digital skills, meaning Catie has a digital champion living at home with her! In many ways the journey with digital is just beginning.

"It's also been really nice to see Catie on video calls. She can sometimes get a bit low and while phone calls are okay, video calls are so much better. We can both actually see each other, and this makes a big difference. I was recently able to help her when she'd been having a bit of trouble with her neighbours, and talking it through, face to face, really helped."

Digital Champion



STAFF MEMBER: GILLIAN

Gillian is a much-appreciated member of the Simon Community team delivering visiting housing support, and makes an incredible difference to the people she works with, providing brilliant, hands-on help whenever needed.

Gillian always saw digital as a sideline to her work, and always felt there were other, more pressing issues both for herself as a frontline worker, and for people trying to sustain fragile tenancies. She didn't think digital was a priority in the scheme of things.

But the lockdown resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19 and the Get Connected Project has changed her view entirely.

I feel so lucky to have a digital workplace in our current situation. I've watched friends in other organisations who still use old paper forms, who don't have laptops, and their work has ground to a halt – they can't help anyone right now, even though people need help more than ever. Whereas we're all set up to work from home – we have the Chromebook, and we can carry on providing support.

And the Get Connected Project is just amazing. Now that people have a smartphone, and data, I'm using WhatsApp a lot to stay in touch, using the video calling. It's just more human than a phonecall, and we can see each other. It's more than just this though. The people I support are doing amazing things on their own – learning new skills, seeking out help and support, managing their money.

One man I work with always wanted to learn how to use a computer but group settings like the library are hard for him, and so it never worked out. But now, he's using the phone, finding music from way back on YouTube, and sharing that with me. He's more animated when he talks to me about his music, and so much more confident – it's really helping him open up. I'm so chuffed for him, and I'd never have thought a phone could make this kind of change.

Now I realise how valuable connectivity is for all of us, and how important digital inclusion work is, what a difference it can make, I really wonder how we even survived before.'

Gillian is now embedding digital skills support in everything she does, and is so pleased to see the impact on those she supports, and especially the ways in which it increases confidence, independence and agency.

'I'm also supporting someone who has a background of abuse and coercive control, and she's never had her own phone. Instead, she's always had to ask her partner or another family member to 'borrow' a phone to make calls – and this was never private. It was limiting for her, and she wasn't in charge of when she could use it or what she could use it for, and she'd have to give it back. But now that she has this phone, she's able to phone whenever she wants. She says she's going out for a walk, and can call me. I only used to hear from her sporadically, but now she's in regular contact which is a big deal. She's also used it to contact her family in Motherwell – and again, these connections are so important for her.'

'I totally get it now. I used to think it was just another 'agenda thing', but now I can see the difference it makes. It can help people so much: it's not just a phone, it opens up all the ways we want to help people. I couldn't ever go back.'

"I'd never have thought a phone could make this kind of change. Now I realise how valuable connectivity is for all of us, and how important digital inclusion work is, what a difference it can make."

Digital Champion

4. What happens now?

Mainstreaming the pilot

This pilot has been a huge success and every single person who received the connected devices has moved from a place of digital exclusion towards digital inclusion. The strong foundations built by the Get Digital programme were critical to the success achieved, with confident and trained Digital Champions and a development framework already in place.

People are amazing! We are so very proud of the people we support and our digital champions.

Through their hard work and flexibility, people we support have been able to get online and access the benefits of the digital world.

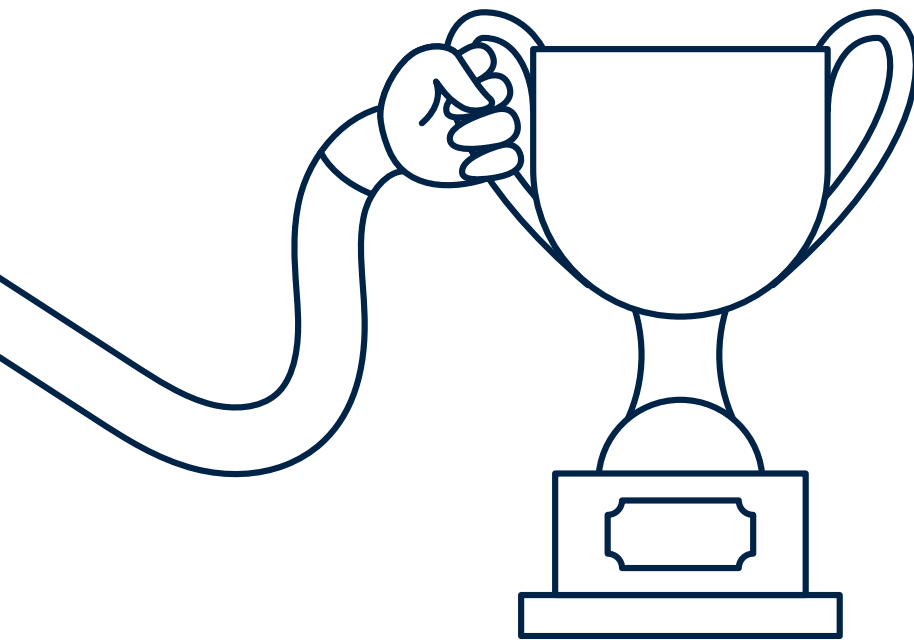
They have been able to connect with friends and family, stay informed on Coronavirus updates and other news, manage their finances, learn languages, access more support, contribute to helping others, progress their own learning, listen to music and enjoy games. All these things contribute towards an improved quality of life.

This pilot has demonstrated that, for a relatively small financial investment accompanied by trained digital champion support based around a structured digital skills framework, we can make an enormous difference to the people who use our services.

We will be using the learning and evidence from this pilot to support the integration of digital inclusion into the Rapid Rehousing Agenda.

The Simon Community is committed to finding ways to expand this Get Digital pilot so that more people experiencing homelessness throughout Scotland can benefit from digital connection.

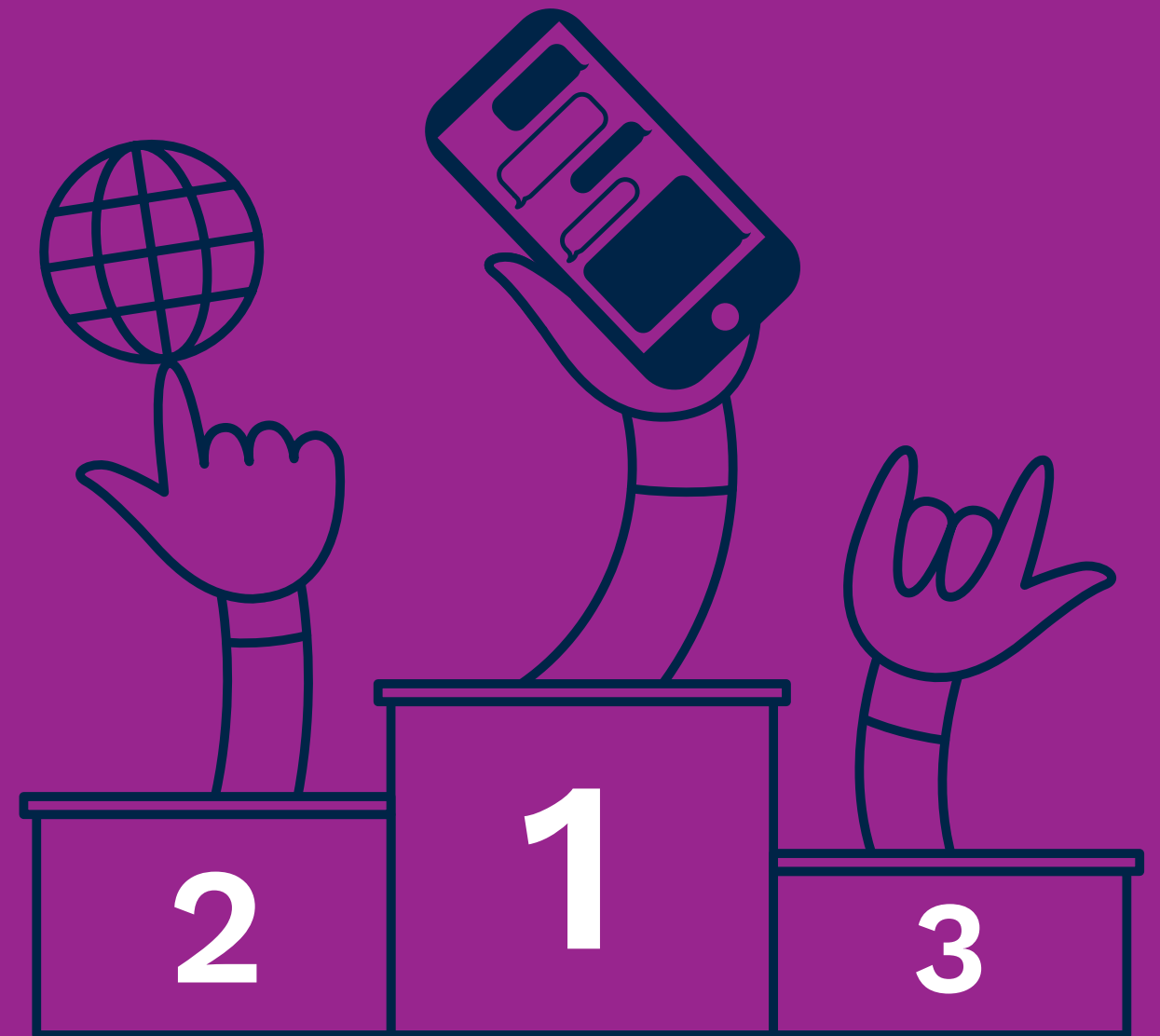
If you are interested in supporting the expansion of this project, please get in touch: getdigital@simonscotland.org



Thank you

This was all made possible by our incredible service users participating in this pilot, our skilled and compassionate Digital Champions and our friends Mhor Collective providing training and endless support.

mhor
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