

Connecting with Digital

By Natasha Munoz

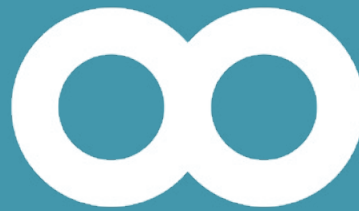
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Good Things
Foundation



for better mental health



homeless link



COMMUNITY
FUND

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1. Executive summary

Our Community Connector programme evaluated the capacity building effect of investing in individuals to work with front line workers to support the progression of people with mental health issues, or who are experiencing homelessness as part of our Reboot UK programme, which aimed to improve people's digital skills and in turn their wellbeing.

Background

Community Connectors were: either beneficiaries with lived experience of the issues faced by other beneficiaries, or people who are committed to co-production with people with lived experience. Community Connectors then went on to recruit Digital Champions, who were frontline workers and volunteers in local organisations which are part of the Mind and Homeless Link networks.

The programme helped organisations to recruit these Community Connectors, and once they were in post, provided support to them - as well as attempting to drive systemic change in the organisations they were operating in by improving understanding of digital, and building capacity.

A number of key successes emerged from the programme:

- 15 Community Connector roles created, appointed, trained and active as a network across community-based organisations in England and Wales.
- 259 Digital Champions trained. These were specialists in Mental Health and Homelessness services working across 74 community organisations.
- 2,507 Service Users supported within the two target groups (people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and those with mental health problems) to develop digital skills through embedded one to one support and drop in / peer support sessions.
- Community Connectors were most successful when they created new relationships within their sector. The collaborations and partnerships developed through this approach were often reflective of either existing local resources or the specific interests or skills of the Community Connector promoting them, which meant they were more likely to be sustainable.
- Both Community Connectors, and the Digital Champions they worked with gained new skills by being part of the programme.
- The Community Connector role also helped organisations to understand the importance of digital inclusion, and to embed it into the delivery of existing services.
- Digital Champions in particular were empowered by their role, improving their confidence and in turn their employment prospects and reported an increased sense of purpose in their roles. Both Community Connectors and Digital Champions have also gone on to empower others within their own organisations.
- Community Connectors developed new and different ways to embed digital into their service offer, and to create new opportunities, making innovation crucial to the role.

Service users have also benefited from the Community Connectors, having been able to undertake a number of specific digital interactions, and to take part in specific sessions.

The following benefits have been reported by service users:

- A sense of independence
- Support with loneliness and isolation issues
- Increased confidence
- Increased relaxation and calm
- Better financial management
- Greater knowledge of local service

Community Connectors programmes were delivered through two approaches:

- **The Structured Approach**, where relationships and partnerships were identified before the beginning of the project, and with the support of senior management within organisations.
- **The Organic Approach**, where the Community Connector had lived experience, and built on existing partnerships. Delivery is less regular and structured, for example through one to one sessions and drop ins.

Both approaches were successful, depending on the individual community connector, and their approach.

However, a number of challenges were identified, particularly in recruitment and retention of Community Connectors, and ensuring Connectors had enough time to deliver the project effectively.

Connectors themselves encountered challenges, including:

Resistance to digital, from within organisations, and from service users themselves
Practical engagement, with challenges engaging individuals, who had often had very challenging lives
Lack of capacity and resources, including IT equipment, turnover of staff, and lack of time for delivery.



Helen Milner, Chief Executive of Good Things Foundation:

“ The Community Connectors programme – part of our wider Reboot UK work – shows the huge impact individuals can have on driving change for individuals, and for organisations. Both the Community Connectors and the Digital Champions involved in this project were instrumental in helping to change people’s lives through digital.

However, systemic change is crucial to ensure organisations can realise the long term benefits of digital – for their service users, and for their organisations as well. The learnings we have taken from this project will help us to develop new approaches to working with organisations looking to embed digital, in order to have an even greater impact.

Rick Henderson, Chief Executive of Homeless Link:

“ Digital literacy can help to grow people’s confidence and independence, and become an incredibly empowering influence on their lives. Reboot UK is doing important work in improving the way the homelessness sector delivers digital skills support, using co-production and creativity to embed digital into service delivery. Valuable learning from the project will enable more people to develop their digital competence, and has highlighted the areas where we can continue to improve our practice.

Keith Anderson, Head of Network Investment. Mind:

“ With an increasing focus on digital, with recent changes to the benefit claims system presenting a prime example, there is a significant risk that those people most in need of support will get left behind. However, as funders we are often so focussed on achieving an impact for the end user that we don’t think about the needs of frontline delivery staff, who are vital in securing a positive outcome for the people that they are supporting.

This phase of Reboot UK gave us an opportunity to invest in the development of frontline staff, and consider the barriers they may have to encouraging the take up of digital solutions.

We know through earlier phases of the programme that providing digital skills training courses/interventions, whilst hugely beneficial for those taking part, often do not reach those who are most excluded, and so we wanted to test an approach where digital solutions are ‘normalised’, and introduced as part of a core support offer, helping people see the value in small, digestible exposures, and ensuring at all times that this is relevant to their needs and abilities.

The model that we have adopted has also enabled us to explore partnership working, and how to embed good practice across multiple organisations. Of course, partnership working is never as straightforward as we think it will be, and so this programme gave us a valuable opportunity to test what does and doesn’t work when trying to create change within not only your own organisation, but across a raft of partners.

This phase of the programme has generated important learning, and reaffirmed Mind’s commitment to harnessing and developing digital skills at all levels in order to build sustainability across our network and provide integrated support for those who are most at risk of being excluded.



SOUTH SIDE

Thank you
for your
support

2. Introduction

The Community Connector project was the third phase of the four year Reboot UK programme - a significant programme undertaken by Good Things Foundation and partners Mind, Homeless Link and Family Fund, with investment by the National Lottery Community Fund to explore the best ways to support vulnerable people to improve their lives through digital.

The evaluation of the first two phases of Reboot UK¹ identified two key learnings:

- The embedding of digital skills support within specialist (non digital) services can be highly effective in creating positive outcomes for individuals.
- Peer mentoring is a powerful vehicle to support vulnerable people to develop digital skills.

As a result of these learnings, the third phase of Reboot UK introduced a new focus, aimed at formalising the key learnings into the provision of a dedicated Community Connector role.

2.1 Background

For the purposes of this programme, Community Connectors were defined by the Reboot model as - either service users with lived experience of the issues faced by other service users, or people who are committed to co-production with people with lived experience. They will engage local Mind and Homeless Link partners and support them to embed digital skills in frontline delivery. The Community Connectors would recruit a number of Digital Champions who were identified as - frontline workers and volunteers working in local organisations which are part of the Mind and Homeless Link networks. They will be trained by Community Connectors to offer digital skills support to service users.

Community Connectors have been a relatively recent role within wider strategies that look to build more connected communities, particularly within the health and social care sectors. By identifying local networks of support and individuals that can integrate and signpost within their own communities, community connectors provide the bridge between people and services, whilst creating new opportunities and empowering individuals with specific support needs. This way of working can be best seen in the social prescribing models operated by many Health Authorities within the primary care

sector. In this sector, link workers are employed to support the pathway to wellbeing for people with complex needs². Local Authorities delivering on the Government's Integrated Communities Green Paper (2018) have also developed the Community Connector model to address local challenges within their local integration strategies³.

Reboot UK's Community Connector model worked in partnership with Mind and Homeless Link to engage local partners and host the Community Connector role within existing local projects. Whilst the focus of the programme was to embed digital skill support into the service delivery, the method by which this would be achieved was subject to the hyper-local systems and resources available within each area and sector.

This report covers the period of the direct project delivery, with a focus on the latter stages as the projects consolidated models of working. It aims to identify the variety of approaches in which Community Connectors and their Digital Champions have approached the models, and provides recommendations and solutions to some of the challenges they have encountered.

2.2 Objectives of Community Connector programme

The objectives of the Community Connector Programme were to:

- Engage individuals who would otherwise remain digitally excluded and support their social inclusion through digital technology
- Support frontline workers to embed digital skills in their service offer
- Create systemic and cultural change by increasing the digital capability and capacity of the civil society sector from the grassroots up, led by people with lived experience of social and digital exclusion
- Sustain cultural change through the development of specialist networks

¹Reboot UK final evaluation

²Social prescribing and community-based support - Summary guide

³Connecting Communities Strategy



3. Methodology

The evaluation of the programme comprised primarily qualitative research methods derived from a number of sources:

- Partners in the programme have produced quarterly reporting briefings outlining the development of each project including numbers and case studies.
- Materials produced as a result of two exploratory co-design workshops with partners and Community Connectors (March / October 2018)
- Outcomes from a self-evaluation workshop with Community Connectors and their digital champions (July 2019)
- One visit and observations at a center delivering the Community Connector programme
- Seven individual interviews with Community Connectors and Digital Champions
- Two interviews with partner delivery managers





4. Findings

4.1 Project Impact

Reach and outcomes

On average, the Community Connector projects have run for an average of 10 months and achieved numerous impacts despite the short period of project delivery time.

A series of co-design workshops were held with Mind and Homeless Link to map out the best model for embedding digital skills support for their service users as well as an evaluation workshop to reflect on and share best practice

To date, the programme has created:

- 15 Community Connector roles created, appointed, trained and active as a network across community-based organisations in England and Wales.

- 259 Digital Champions trained. These were specialists in Mental Health and Homelessness services working across 74 community organisations.
- 2,507 Service Users supported within the two target groups (people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and those with mental health problems) to develop digital skills through embedded one to one support and drop in / peer support sessions.

A further breakdown of project activity and impact is detailed in Table 1 below

Community Connectors (1 designated lead in each organisation)	Partners	Digital	Service Users	Duration of project (months) Duration of project (months)
Mind				
Mind Aberystwyth	5	23	262	11
Mind in Salford	4	15	153	10
Merthyr and the Valleys Mind	5	16	222	11
Mind BLMK (Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes)	3	10	44	10
West Kent Mind	3	15	230	11
South East and Central Essex Mind	3	23	110	12
Homeless Link				
Evolve Housing	4	10	94	12
St Mungos	6	14	579	11
Elim Connect	10	16	180	12
Seaview Hastings	4	66	233	12
Inspiring Change Manchester	6	4	74	12
The Foxton Centre	5	7	37	12
CoLab Exeter	6	8	64	6
The Connection at St Martins	5	17	176	
Other				
Sheffield Flourish	5	15	49	
Totals	74	259	2,507	

Table 1: Breakdown of Project Activity and Impact

Community Connector Impacts

The impacts that the Community Connectors have achieved are broken down thematically and include those that focus on the organisations within which they are based, as well as those that lead to broader personal and project change.

Theme 1: Collaboration and partnerships

Community Connectors have created new relationships within their own sectors, as well as wider partnerships with local organisations where none had previously existed. This collaborative approach has enhanced communications as well as networking opportunities within and outside the sectors in which the Connectors are based.

The collaborations and partnerships developed through this approach are often reflective of either existing local resources or the specific interests or skills of the Community Connector promoting them:

Practice focus: Mind in Salford

Mind in Salford have been providing services for local people since 1972. They have recently started offering Mental Health First Aid England training, an evidence-based internationally recognised training, which teaches people how to spot the signs and symptoms of mental ill health and to provide initial help and support.

The Community Connector at Mind in Salford has embedded digital elements into Mental Health First Aid training sessions and Mental Health Awareness workshops. These sessions are primarily delivered to other voluntary and community sector organisations and organisations within the education sector.

The opportunities for networking, peer support and the sharing of resources offered by the workshops developed for the Community Connectors have also supported this collaborative approach. Community Connectors saw the workshops as positive events that supported them in generating ideas and finding shared solutions to problems.

Theme 2: Development of new skills and resources

The Community Connectors and their Digital Champions comprise of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience, and whilst some come from a professional background, many are also volunteers and service users with lived experience in their sectors.

The breadth and nature of the programme as well as the variety of people it is working with has challenged the Connectors and their Champions to both develop new skills (for example in project management) as well as realise their already existing skills (by for example teaching new skills to others). These new skills have developed the personal resources of the individuals, in some cases by directly providing work experience, but also by directly increasing their digital knowledge and confidence.

The Community Connector role has been instrumental in developing organisational awareness of the need for digital inclusion and of embedding digital in the service offer. This has been demonstrated by a reported general improvement in internal (organisational) knowledge of digital inclusion. The impact across delivery and management staff has included new, improved signposting knowledge as well as the development of new schemes, such as peer mentoring.

The resources developed by the Connector role have supported the organisations within which they have been working, as they have provided training and resources for front line staff, and in some cases re-allocated funds to provide much needed equipment such as dedicated laptops. Where Community Connectors have identified and developed dedicated (often volunteer) Digital Champions, these have increased the organisational capacity to support a variety of needs.

Practice focus: Mind Aberystwyth

Mind Aberystwyth works across the coastal county of Ceredigion. The Connector has linked Reboot in with two Wales-wide programmes: Side by Side Cymru, a community peer support initiative, and My Generation, a resilience and wellbeing programme for over 50s. The Connector has attended meetings and sessions run under these programmes and spoken about digital literacy, garnering a good level of interest from service users who may not otherwise have engaged with the project.

Theme 3: Empowerment

The increase in self esteem and confidence developed as a result of participating in the programme has been particularly evident with the Digital Champions who have improved their employment prospects and reported an increased sense of purpose in their roles. Three of the Champions, previously volunteers, have entered into full-time employment during the course of their work with the project, and a number of service users have also seen their employment prospects improve.

Project highlight: ST Mungos

St Mungos are a national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. The Mare Street Hostel (Hackney, East London) is for single homeless people with medium to high support needs.

Gerry has combined his role as a Digital Champion with being a project volunteer, supporting project workers at the Mare Street Hostel. A couple of months ago he was offered paid work as a locum worker for one day a week, this has helped him tremendously to get back into the world of work.

“Being a Digital Champion has helped me gain confidence and get my self esteem back as well, as I have been interacting with clients and helping clients out - just having structured days again..”

He has been running digital drop-ins with a client group that is particularly difficult to engage with.

He has also been embedding IT and digital skills assessments into the referral process - screening people when they first come into the project. Gerry developed the idea to tie the assessment into a little contract that says they have to do the assessment within 4 weeks of moving in to the hostel - this has been helping with client engagement, they are less likely to go ‘under the radar’

After Christmas, there will be a full-time project worker post available at the place where he works - Gerry has been strongly encouraged to apply for it. He never thought he could ever have the type of job that he is doing, as his life experience is not dissimilar to that of his clients. With his change in circumstances, he feels that he is giving something back.

“I am now the happiest that I have been for a long time, my wellbeing and confidence and my mental health is hugely improved” A legacy of the project is not only how Community Connectors and Digital Champions have felt empowered by their participation in the programme, but also how they report that they have empowered others across the service, from the support workers and volunteers to the service users. This has created supportive relationships within and across organisational structures, in which both staff and volunteers feel that they can have an impact by for example, facilitating new supportive environments.

Organisationally, the projects have reported improved staff skills and day to day productivity, particularly where additional resources have been made available. The remit for opportunities and ideas have also been enhanced, as local connections have been forged with organisations and individuals.

Theme 4: Innovation

The nature of the Community Connector programme calls for flexibility and innovation, as the Connectors and their Champions identify ways of embedding digital into the existing service offer and create new opportunities. In all projects, this has taken place with limited resources and so has necessitated new and different approaches to working both within and outside the organisations in which they are based, as well as directly with service users.

Practice Highlight: Mind Aberystwyth

Alistair is a Digital Champion at Mind Aberystwyth. He works intensively on a one to one basis with a small number of users who suffer from a variety of Mental Health issues. He has one particularly isolated user who suffers from anxiety and who finds it very difficult to both leave the house and interact with people. Alistair found that his customer was interested in gaming, and suggested that they play Pokemon Go - an augmented reality game that takes people outdoors to find, catch and train virtual creatures as they appear on their mobile app. Alistair and his customer started to regularly get outdoors to play the game. On one occasion, whilst in the park, they met some other players where, despite his difficulties with social interaction - Alistair's service user proceeded to have a lengthy conversation with one of the other players. Alistair believes that this particular use of digital to support his service user has been a leading factor in enabling him to get out of the house and interacting with people - benefitting both his physical and mental health.

Innovation has the needs of the service user foremost in mind, and identifies the appropriate place in their journey where digital skills can be introduced or developed. This increased

awareness is also extended to colleagues and their roles. The innovation and flexibility of the Community Connectors and their Champions comprises of a broad set of approaches that can range from simply providing inspiration, ideas and resources to the more complex innovation of events and partnerships that promote and connect people to digital. This has led to greater interpretation of digital technology and promoted different ways of organisational working.

Practice focus: Mind Aberystwyth

Llanelli Mind are in the process of setting up a befriending service and, as a result of the Community Connector project, are integrating digital elements within their service development process. For example, service users are able to Skype into group meeting and borrow tablets that their befriending volunteers will assist them with using.

Service User Impacts

Service user engagement with the projects has been challenging to measure due to the fluctuating nature of contact. However from case study information reports we can see that it has taken two main forms:

1. Those who have benefitted from digital engagement as an embedded feature of service delivery, for example: interactions with Digital Champions carrying tablets on outreach sessions who can support with immediate support and information needs.
2. Those who have taken part in specific events or initiatives to promote the use of digital, for example: specific sessions delivered to peer support groups that promote the use of digital.

The specific activities that service users have been undertaking as a result of the interaction with the project include:

- Identifying online platforms that list local community activities and events
- Accessing music and videos using YouTube
- Using the internet and booking websites to research and arrange holidays
- Taking and sharing photographs using smartphones
- Setting alarms and reminders for appointments and taking medicine
- Using word processing software to put together CVs and the internet to job-search
- Using the internet to research recipes and sites to learn new techniques and ideas about cooking and meal planning

Which have resulted in service users reporting the following benefits:

- A sense of independence

- Support with loneliness and isolation issues
- Increased confidence
- Increased relaxation and calm
- Better financial management
- Greater knowledge of local services
- Greater confidence using technology

4.2 Project Models

Two dominant models of working emerged from the Community Connector programme, these were reflective of the lead organisation within which they were based and of the user groups to whom services were directed. The models are not mutually exclusive, the Connector role can bridge both perspectives through a creative approach - they serve as an indication of what can work within a particular eco-system of service provision.

A structured and organic approach would typically follow the following pathway:

Structured approach



Upper management buy in



Network development



Digital Champion development



Resource development



Characteristics:

- Few open access forums
- Digital Champions are primarily front line staff

Characteristics:

- Availability of open access forums
- Digital Champions are a mix of staff and volunteers



Direct delivery



Resource development



Digital Champion development



Network development



Organic Approach

Model 1: The Structured Approach

The background that defines this approach is one in which partnerships were identified at the application stage. The remit within which the Community Connector would be working in was therefore pre-determined. The aim of this approach was to have relationships in place before the recruitment of the Community Connector, thus speeding up project delivery time.

The main feature of the Structured approach is the focus on project endorsement and approval from higher levels of management as the first port of call for the Community Connectors, from the CEO to line managers.

Management approval and support enables the Community Connectors to interact with frontline staff, individuals and groups within the organisation that they would not otherwise have access to. This approach is particularly effective in the case where local partners are separate (federated) entities and there are few to no open access forums for service users.

The user focus of this model is one where most service contact occurs on an individual (one to one) basis and where group sessions tend to be closed in their format and attendance is regular. The Connector role is therefore primarily focussed on Network relationships and the development of Digital Champions, with little direct contact with service users.

Model 2: The Organic Approach

The background to this approach is one where the focus was on recruitment of a Community Connector with lived experience and where the role would build on and develop existing organisational partnerships, many of which were undefined.

An organic approach occurs when services have a variety of open access forums and the Community Connector tends to be integrated within the local eco-system of provision, either as a service user or as a volunteer. The focus in this approach is on the service user directly, often by providing direct support and embedding digital into this offer or by developing a specialist service that service users can attend.

The user focus of this model is one where service contact tends to be less regular and structured. Whilst service provision addresses needs in a variety of formats, for example drop-ins and outreach, the nature of the service and the users means that there is often little regularity of contact and more of a focus on crisis intervention.

4.3 Project case studies

The Structured Approach

Kirsten in Southeast and Central Essex Mind

The Community Connector in this project identified very early on that the members of staff that had been identified for the role of Digital Champions were not quite suited for the task, mostly because they were either not correctly placed in the organisation to deliver on the service, or because they were reluctant to take on the role. The initial task was therefore to get to know and understand the workings of the five local partners that had been recruited to the programme and then re-framing the role of the Digital Champion in order to get maximum buy-in.

She did this by starting from the top of each organisation, gaining support and access to enable her to promote and recruit the best people to take on the role. This took some time, as each organisation had different service types, delivery models and facilities, but by identifying needs, developing and sharing resources and providing personal support and training, she was able to recruit 23 Digital Champions over the course of the programme reaching 110 service users.

The Connector running this project has been highly organised and structured in her approach - producing a series of resources including a presentation, a service user assessment form, publicity materials and a dropbox of open-source materials that range from meditation apps to podcasts as well as plans for sessions on digital skills to be used in peer support groups. These she makes available to all the Digital Champions to incorporate into their service delivery as they see best.

One of the Digital Champions in this project is a Counsellor who has embedded the use of meditation and various other apps into her sessions as a resource that her users can take away.

As a result of spending the time identifying those organisational needs, the Connector was able to address some of the more immediate necessities, for example, one of the drop-in rooms now has a dedicated laptop, so that users can access digital information during the course of their appointments.

The Connector in this project has also been asked to develop a digital skills module for an e-learning package that will be used to train potentially over 100 volunteers for 'Essex Befriends', a county-wide partnership programme led by Mind in West Essex.

The Organic Approach

Chloe - Elim Connect Centre in Wells in Somerset.

The Community Connector in this project is based both at a community centre and at a farm which is also a direct access hostel. Her time is split between the two locations, mainly engaged in one to one support, but she also spends time developing digital events centered around the arts that engage with service users.

The approach to the Connector role started with a multi-media exhibition early on in the project where both volunteers and service users showcased their artwork, most of which was through digital mediums such as photography and recordings of poetry. The event was very successful and gained a lot of local exposure, this was then used to kickstart a 'Creative Connections' drop in, which now runs every month. The drop in has many functions including a digital drop in and digital arts.

A person-centered approach has been the defining feature of this particular model. The breadth of the scope of the Community Connector programme has enabled the design of a project that has been unique and tailored to the community in which it is based. Working with eight partners and reaching 180 service users.

The connector in this project is embedded within the outreach team, and whilst the tensions of crisis management necessarily puts digital inclusion in second place, the space which has been opened up by creative connections feels like a sustainable resource to which both staff and users are receptive.



5. Challenges and Solutions

The recruitment and retainment of the Community Connectors for this programme has been challenging in some cases. The part-time nature of the role means that the Connectors are typically delivering more than one project.

The challenges are primarily at the start of the programme and relate to the time and resources required to understand what will motivate partners and Digital Champions to engage with the project – a number of Community Connectors have been unable to elicit meaningful engagement from their partner organisations and so have not been able to achieve the targets for the recruitment of their Digital Champions. However, this has not necessarily detracted from the overall achievements of the individual projects.

The retention of Digital Champions has been another key challenge in this programme. As the role relies on staff and volunteers embedding the digital perspective in to their service offer, this has often fallen within the remit of part-time staff and volunteers – both of which tend to have a greater turnover than other roles.

The challenges of the role and the tools and solutions that Community Connectors have found helpful, have been broken down into three main areas:

1. Resistance to digital

The challenge of changing an organisational or personal culture that is resistant to digital is a very real and difficult task to undertake. The Community Connectors have found that there are many different varieties of resistance which hinge on three broad categories and apply to both staff, volunteers and service users;

- A lack of confidence and self-belief in own abilities
- Digital support is seen as a luxury and so not prioritised
- Safety and security concerns of working with digital

Through the course of the projects, Community Connectors have developed a variety of approaches that can help to mitigate against some of these perceptions and attitudes, which have been useful in moving the programme forward. Amongst the most successful were where;

- There was information and training available in a variety of formats
- Success stories were shared, even if these only constituted 'small wins'
- Support was person-centered, tailored specifically to the individual

2. Practical engagement

The Community Connectors are working within organisations and with individuals who are experiencing difficulties and who may have little to no resilience. This can sometimes make engagement particularly challenging, and progress seemingly difficult to achieve. Fluctuations in mental health and housing situations can mean that;

- Appointments are difficult to arrange and maintain
- Expectations and boundaries can seem unrealistic
- Systems and structures feel overwhelming and unsupportive

Reflecting on the challenges for their sectors, the Community Connectors identified that approaches that worked with the reality of the lived experience included:

- Focusing on small achievable goals that could be addressed in a single session
- Creating resources and support specific to the demographic of the target group
- Pacing the support to the needs of the individual

3. Lack of capacity and resources

The lack of resources and stretched capacity of most frontline organisations is a reality within the third sector. However, Community Connectors have the additional task of promoting the use of tools which may not be freely available, and developing front line staff who may already be overwhelmed with competing priorities. Amongst some of the most pressing challenges identified by the Connectors were:

- Lack of IT equipment and broadband access
- Turnover and capacity of staff and volunteers
- Lack of time to develop the service offer

Some Community Connectors have addressed a number of these challenges by looking to form partnerships with services that have better access to resources, and re-distributing their own resources to provide equipment. However, the only real solution identified by the Connectors to this lack of capacity and resources was to apply for and obtain more digital-specific funding, and there was a recognition that this would happen only when organisations build digital inclusion into their long-term plans.



What is

REBOOT?



Funders

BIG LOTTERY



funding body



(have own network.)

Coordinators



'LISA'

Organisations delivering digital inclusion

Delivery

The Connection



Chris! Community Connector.

5 PARTNERS.

1. Cardinal Hume

2. Marylebone Project

3. The Passage

4. Jesus Centre

5. W.L.M Seymour Place

Plus a cheeky 6th The Connection

Tutors

2 digital Champs each.



10 LEARNERS



10 LEARNERS



5. Legacy

The positive outcomes of the Community Connector programme show that developing digital skills can impact positively on those people that are socially excluded and the organisations that support them. However, where the Connector role has been dependant on the skills, approach and commitment of one individual, it is worth a consideration of the legacy of the programme with recommendations for the longevity of the Community Connector and Digital Champion role beyond the funding term for Reboot UK.

Community Connectors and Digital Champions have already created the groundwork for a lasting legacy in the organisations and communities within which they have worked by:

- Providing equipment and resources for organisational use
- Creating positive and cooperative relationships between organisations
- Establishing excellent peer support groups
- Embedding digital skills into some of the existing service offers
- Changing mindsets and culture to value and incorporate the digital offer

However, they also recognised that without some wider structures in place to maintain the digital offer as a priority, these efforts could be undermined without the time and money available to support them. The practice of embedding digital into service delivery has to be addressed at an organisational level through practices that, for example:

- Make digital inclusion a factor in all job descriptions
- Encourage and provide staff training in digital skills
- Produce toolkits, resources and signposting to digital skills support
- Partner with specialist resources that can support the service offer
- Approach digital exclusion work as part of a wider digital transformation agenda

Acknowledgements

Community Connectors and Digital Champions
at:

Mind

Mind Aberystwyth
Mind in Salford
Merthyr and the Valleys Mind
Mind BLMK (Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton
Keynes)
West Kent Mind
South East and Central Essex Mind

Homeless Link

Evolve Housing
St Mungos
Elim Connect
Seaview Hastings

Inspiring Change Manchester
The Foxton Centre
CoLab Exeter
The Connection at St Martins

And

Sheffield Flourish

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