



Power Up Independent Evaluation: Summary Report

November 2021

Authored by



Financially supported by

J.P.Morgan

Delivered by



The Power Up programme

Power Up was an 18-month programme funded by J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation. The programme was delivered by Good Things Foundation working with 15 grantee organisations, each delivering their own projects, located in Bournemouth, East London, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The programme aimed to help people seeking jobs or job progression (Jobs and Skills theme), those managing money on low incomes (Financial Health theme) and sole traders or owners of micro-businesses (Small Businesses theme) develop digital skills so that they could improve their lives, communities and businesses.

The programme's aims and approach to creating a step change in the way that support for individuals, businesses and communities is designed and delivered was expressed in its framework for local action: **Powering Up People, Powering Up Provision, Powering Up Places.**

The programme was implemented between 2019-2021. Its delivery largely coincided with the global COVID-19 pandemic.

This report is a summary of an independent, external evaluation conducted by Chrysalis Research during the final 6 months of the programme.

POWER UP: PHASE ONE IMPACT



FEBRUARY 2020 - JUNE 2021*

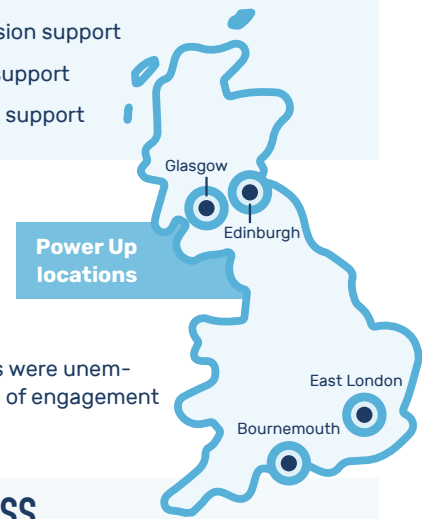
Power Up is a pioneering initiative, run by Good Things Foundation with the financial support of J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation. Working with community-based grantees, Power Up is driving economic inclusion by embedding digital skills into employability, financial inclusion and small business support.

POWER UP IN NUMBERS



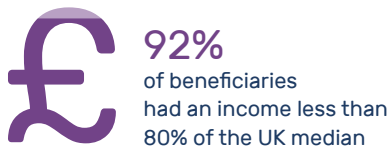
Projects delivered either

- £ Financial inclusion support
- 📁 Employability support
- 🏠 Small business support



DEMOGRAPHICS

INCOME



EMPLOYMENT



DIGITAL SKILLS OUTCOMES

96% of beneficiaries supported by Power Up reported gaining digital skills.**

76%

Learned to stay safe online and reduce risks



76%

Learned how to search for information to solve a problem



67%

Learned how to use online money saving tools



SMALL BUSINESS



GOALS OF THOSE ACCESSING SUPPORT

98%

Promoting business using online tools

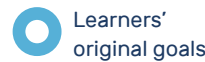
90%

Selling online

74%

Increase customer base

OUTCOMES People supported by Power Up achieved a range of outcomes.



EMPLOYABILITY GOALS AND OUTCOMES



Start informal learning



Gain work experience

FINANCIAL HEALTH GOALS AND OUTCOMES



Budget more effectively



Manage or reduce debt



Save more money

*This phase of Power Up took place during the coronavirus pandemic. **Data collected from 1766 beneficiaries who completed impact surveys.

The programme reach

Approximately 2,330 people were supported through the Power Up programme.

Most people involved in the Jobs and Skills and Financial Health projects were vulnerable or living in challenging circumstances:

- > **The majority** (71 per cent¹) were from households with annual income of £14,500 or less
- > **More than three quarters** were either unemployed (43 per cent), or not working due to their caring commitments or looking after their child/ren (12 per cent), or unable to work due to ill-health or disability (16 per cent)
- > **More than a third** (42 per cent) of participants had one or more disabilities or health conditions affecting their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Through its Small Businesses projects, the programme also supported 98 sole traders and micro businesses owners. A noticeable proportion of them (43 per cent) were people who were thinking of starting their own business or in the process of setting it up. A further 19 per cent were in their first year of operation. Only around a third (34 per cent) represented established businesses, operating for more than a year.

Participating sole traders and micro business owners represented a wide range of businesses. Creative, media and publishing was the most prominent business category, with a quarter of the programme beneficiaries operating in that sector.

71%

were from households with annual income of £14,500 or less

More than three quarters

were either unemployed, not working due to their caring commitments or unable to work due to ill-health or disability

42%

of participants had one or more disabilities or health conditions affecting their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities

¹ Of the people who provided their income information, i.e. excluding those who stated 'Prefer not to say' and 'Don't know' (Base 575)

The programme impact

Impact on people involved in the Jobs and Skills and Financial Health projects

Within the programme context, 'powering up people' meant helping people develop digital skills and confidence, so that they were motivated to learn and keep on learning, and apply digital skills in their lives, businesses and at work.

The vast majority (96 per cent) of beneficiaries noted improvements in their **digital skills**.

The vast majority (93 per cent) of people who stated that they received support to help improve their **employability**, noted positive changes in this area of the programme impact.

For example:

- > **Two thirds (65 per cent)** reported undertaking work experience or volunteering, starting a qualification or informal learning to help their career.
- > **Around two thirds (64 per cent)** of the people who had been unemployed and looking for work at the point of their engagement with the programme, and received support to improve their employability, reported that they got back into work or found work for the first time, as a result of their engagement with Power Up.

Powering up people: A case study

One Power Up grantee delivered programmes incorporating specialist digital, employability and personal finance skills to young people looking to secure jobs in the technology sector. As a result of being involved, the project beneficiaries achieved digital skills certification (e.g. in cloud computing) as well as learning a range of transferable skills which helped improve their employability. For example, many had salary increases and some reported a greater range of career opportunities available to them, directly linked to their involvement in Power Up. Virtually all participants felt better prepared for the world of work and were more confident about their future.

Employers were very impressed with the candidates who had been involved in Power Up, rating their performance as 'better or much better', compared to an average entry-level employee. In particular, they praised the programme participants' technical ability as well as their transferrable skills and attitudes, such as being keen to learn and improve, and their resilience in the workplace.

" The programme has provided us with an excellent candidate who is always eager to learn and to contribute to ongoing work. I would recommend this programme to anyone looking for a bright mind, that with some training and mentoring has the potential to become an exceptional IT professional."

Employer

There was evidence of impact for the majority (89 per cent) of people who reported receiving support to improve their **financial situation** and personal finance skills through Power Up. Nine outcome measures were used to gauge impact on people’s financial health and on average the programme participants noted improvements in at least two of them.

- > For example, **65 per cent** of reported they were able to either reduce or manage debt, claim new benefits or save more, thus indicating they **were tangibly better off financially** as a result of their engagement with the programme.

There was also evidence of improved **beneficiary mental and emotional wellbeing** as a result of the holistic support they had received through the programme. The evidence referred to people feeling supported and less isolated, feeling positive and optimistic about the future. Some noted reduced stress, due to specific worries removed or crises averted. Greater self-esteem, enjoyment and a sense of purpose were also observed by grantees for their beneficiaries who, through their engagement in Power Up, were able to find and pursue an interest or hobby, or start learning. This was particularly important for example for people with disabilities or serious health conditions as an indicator of improved quality of life for these beneficiaries.

Impact on people involved in the Small Businesses projects

Sole traders and micro-business owners learnt how digital can help their business, for example by using the internet and social media to promote their business, including building websites and learning about search engine optimisation; using digital to communicate with their customers, suppliers and prospective partners, and digitising their accounting processes and payments from customers.

There was also some evidence of longer-term changes, for example some participating micro-businesses owners were able to grow their customer base and reported greater efficiency and productivity.



Impact on provision

'Powering up provision' referred to embedding digital into existing programmes and equipping local organisations with the capacity and resources they need to help the people they work with adopt and apply digital skills.

The extent to which taking part in Power Up has enabled grantees to develop their provision, differed considerably between the participating organisations:

- > Some put **new provision** in place, incorporating elements of digital/skills development into their other services and support.
- > Others developed **new standalone courses, content or resources**, including those aimed at particular groups or targeting specific gaps in the existing provision.

- > Others developed **complex and sophisticated programmes**, comprising multiple elements and delivery models (e.g. combining group and 1-to-1 support, and drawing on a variety of (specialist) staff, volunteer and peer support). This helped them to be efficient and effective in engaging beneficiaries and helping them to progress in their learning.

For many grantees, switching their support and services to digital, in order to respond to the situation created by COVID-19, was one of the most noticeable changes to their provision.

There was also extensive evidence of the participating organisations expanding their capacity, particularly around staff skills and expertise, as a result of their involvement in Power Up. This considerably exceeded the scope and boundaries of their Power Up provision, including having positive effects at the level of the entire organisation (see Organisational impact within the Additional impact section below).

Impact on place

'Powering up place' meant connecting local organisations, service providers and others to provide individuals, businesses and communities with the joined-up support they need to thrive.

Some of the key dimensions where impact on place was visible included:

- > Grantees putting in place *local or even regional provision*, supported by multiple organisations, rather than being dependent on a single one. This led to greater reach, improved awareness of support available amongst the local people, new or better signposting and referrals mechanisms, multiple and different opportunities for local people to learn new skills and improve their employability and financial situation, and improved progression pathways.
- > Greater *prioritisation of digital, digital skills and digital inclusion* at the local area level, as well as increased demand for the relevant expertise.

Powering up provision: A case study

Before Power Up, one of its grantee partners, a housing association, had no digital skills provision in place.

"Prior to participating in the Power Up project, we had never offered digital provision in the community. Whilst this provision was very much out with our comfort zone, it was a challenge we were only too happy to engage with.

Getting involved in Power Up was the grantee partner's response to the findings of local consultations and tenant satisfaction surveys, as well as staff feedback, which were all suggesting that many tenants needed support with their digital skills, and that there was a gap in the local support offer.

"...our tenancy support officers, money advisors, financial capability officers... [were] reporting back how people were struggling to make even a universal credit claim or a claim for school uniforms or free school meals because everything's moving online.

With their Power Up grant funding, the grantee, working with their partner organisations specialising in training and development, put in place a new digital provision offer at their community hub, comprising:

- > A job club
- > A structured course
- > A 'basic' digital drop-in
- > 1:1 digital support slots

The start of the global COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 meant that few things were implemented as they were planned. For some time, all digital support had to be delivered remotely and the breadth of the offer was reduced, but gradually the provision was adapted to have both online and in-person delivery vehicles.

Due to Covid-19, the grantee and its partner organisations also had to add additional layers to their provision and support offer. These included greater attention to enabling access to devices and data, particularly where people were isolated and vulnerable, and creating digital resources (e.g. short animations teaching people how to shop online, find accurate information or keep themselves safe online) which could be used by people on their own during the national lockdown. Another priority was to grow capacity to deliver digital skills provision and broader organisational development. This involved offering digital skills training to the housing association's staff and also to volunteers, so that they were ready to help people with their essential digital skills, digital finance and digital employability, as well as developing respective training content and resources.

"[Without Power Up] we wouldn't be playing a role in digital provision within the community. ...There was a need there that we wouldn't have been able to address in any form. We are doing our bit because that's what we do, as our community anchor organisation, that's what we're there to do. It's about more than just housing and it's meeting people's other needs, and I think we would've been missing out on doing something really positive and worthwhile.

Powering up place: A case study

The Edinburgh Collective was formed in December 2019, when six Edinburgh-based Power Up grantee partners all came together of their own initiative, to map out what digital support provision was being delivered across the city and to facilitate referral pathways between each other.

Although these organisations had not been commissioned to set up a collective as part of their grant, the value of a concerted approach became apparent when COVID-19 struck in March 2020, and the demand for digital support increased exponentially across the city. The Collective identified a need for a comprehensive Digital Inclusion Strategy for Edinburgh, and with the help of Good Things Foundation and Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council, organised a series of meetings with Edinburgh City Council and other agencies to outline what this strategy might look like. In addition, the Collective collated a directory of digital support provision to be published on the Edinburgh City Council website and campaigned for the Council to nominate a Digital Lead for the city.

Despite being unable to achieve their goal of having a digital strategy in place for the city of Edinburgh by the time of reporting, grantee organisations that were part of the Edinburgh Collective highlighted their meetings with the local council as important stepping-stones and steps in the right direction.

" The fact that we have got these open communication networks and that we are sharing, we're talking, we're getting to know each other better and a better understanding of all the different services, that is ultimately trickling down to the beneficiary because we know where to signpost people. We know who's doing what. We have named contacts in different organisations. That is definitely benefitting the communities that we're supporting. We're also learning from each other every time we get together because we're coming up with problems we've encountered and solutions and suggestions. It ultimately is strengthening the provision and getting us a lot more confident in what we're doing as well.

Being part of the Edinburgh Collective has offered opportunities to both contribute and receive learning from other Edinburgh grantees. It has also enabled the project to benefit from being part of broader discussions around digital inclusion in Edinburgh through the Digital Inclusion Strategy meetings facilitated by The Good Things Foundation. This has been useful not only in being able to have input into the discussions, but in finding out more about the council's approach and priorities around this theme."

Grantees involved in the Edinburgh collective

Additional impact of Power Up

Organisational impact

Organisational impact has emerged as one of the strongest dimensions where the programme has made a real difference. In addition to developing their provision (see above), examples of key improvements and developments for the participating organisations included:

- > Improved understanding and prioritisation of digital, digital skills and digital inclusion
- > Staff skills and organisational expertise, including having a pool of trained volunteers
- > New and improved systems
- > Extended reach (geographical, sector, beneficiary types)
- > New and/or stronger partnerships
- > Access to new and additional funding
- > Ability to continue delivering their services and support for beneficiaries when face-to-face is not possible or when digital/blended is a better way of reaching people.

Impact on volunteers

Across the majority of Power Up projects, there was evidence that members of local communities who were involved in the programme as volunteers benefitted from improving their confidence and sense of self-worth as well as knowledge and skills including working with people, communication, and data protection, and in some cases also their own digital skills. For many people, volunteering offered the experience they needed to get back into work and helped them improve their employability.

" Power Up has been fabulous for us. [Two years ago, as we joined the programme] we had a team of volunteers, who just doggedly kept doing this and keeping it alive. We'd not attracted any funding, because no one quite got us. And they [Good Things Foundation] got us, and we have grown and developed the service in so many ways. We've managed to leverage other funding and then the pandemic came along and we couldn't have been in a better position to respond to that, and I can track that all back to Power Up. You'll hear more from us, because we've got lots of plans going forward. And we now have a lot of support too, new funding streams, exciting new projects in the pipeline, so that we can change things for people in our community..."

CEO, grantee organisation

Even though affected by the pandemic, the programme has achieved its aims and even exceeded some of its desired outcomes. **Positive outcomes were achieved for 99 percent** of the beneficiaries supported through the programme.



Sustainability and legacy

All grantees reported that the **provision** that they developed over the course of their Power Up projects, particularly the various resources that have been sourced, put together or created to enable and embed digital skills delivery in their organisations and partnerships, would remain in place after the end of the funding period.

Virtually all grantees felt that the changes to their **organisational capacity and systems** and **partnerships** (partnership working models), developed and strengthened through Power Up, were two important dimensions of their Power Up work that would remain with them and something that would help them build on their successes in their future activity.

More than half of the Power Up grantees reported that they planned to continue supporting their clients and beneficiaries with **access to devices and data**.

Power Up grantees also worked to **extend** their digital inclusion work and use digital as an additional lever and vehicle for supporting their clients and people in their communities after the end of the funding period. They further **built on the achievements of Power Up** by:

- > **Taking their provision, delivery models and learning from their Power Up work into new geographical areas and regional and national programmes and projects**

One of the grantees secured backing from an impressive coalition of funders, including Blackrock, Verizon, Microsoft, and McKinsey, to scale up delivery of several of its programmes enabling people facing disadvantage or inequality to move into jobs in the technology sector. Another grantee was funded to deliver two loneliness and isolation reduction projects, using digital as a way to upskill and connect people and communities. One more grantee has won a contract from the Money and Pensions service to run the Money Guiders England network, which supports people offering money advice to clients and beneficiaries as part of their work. The grantee reported that their Power Up achievements and learning would

be embedded in this work and thus taken to a national scale.

- > **Continuing the strategic and organisational development work they had started within Power Up**

Examples of the former include the Edinburgh Collective's ambition to put in place a digital inclusion and skills strategy for their city or one grantee's plans to continue leading their national campaign, called Connectivity Now, which promotes the 'idea that data and connectivity has become a basic human right, and without it, beneficiaries and people in general are not reaching all the opportunities available to them'.

Whilst on a smaller scale, other grantees' plans to continue working on embedding digital within their own organisations were equally impressive. This was particularly true for those who were in the early stages of this organisational development journey due to starting from a very low baseline, for whom Power Up resulted in realising just how much they needed to do to make digital an integral part of their work and their beneficiaries' experiences and outcomes, and how important this was for their beneficiaries and local communities.

Programme learning – system level impact

Key learnings related to Powering up People, Provision and Places and implications for practice and policy

Powering up people

- > An in-depth, current, and evidence-based understanding of the beneficiary needs, priorities and motivations is highly important.
 - Where evidence is present, and there is no need to dedicate a lot of time to convincing people about the value of digital, it is possible and important to move straight into digital learning.
 - Where people lack digital skills, have no motivation to develop them, and are unaware of their digital skills needs and how they could be addressed, extensive preliminary work is required to encourage people to engage in digital learning.
- > Organisations working with the latter group (and those funding such work) need to dedicate time and effort to find a 'hook' to engage such beneficiaries in digital skills development. The following worked well within Power Up:
 - Developing trusting relationships - once these were in place, beneficiaries were willing to listen and give learning a go, because they could see that grantees had their needs and best interests at heart and that they could make learning work for them.
 - Understanding what matters to the people and helping people address an immediate need through digital – this led to immediate positive outcomes but also sparked people's motivation to learn and do more through technology, to make further, long-term positive changes to the quality of their lives.
- > Removing barriers to engagement with digital learning was another important prerequisite to people being able to start developing their skills. This required time and resources.
 - Within Power Up, two barriers were particularly important to address, where they were relevant for the beneficiaries being supported:
 - Lack of confidence/fear associated with using technology and/or learning
 - Lack of access to devices and data.
 - The following worked well within Power Up:
 - Developing trusting relationships with beneficiaries and treating people's concerns and anxieties around technology or learning seriously, including addressing them through changes to provision – this helped address the lack of confidence barrier
 - Working closely with a wide range of partners within and outside of Power Up in order to provide devices on loan, or source and gift devices – this helped address the concerns around digital exclusion due to absence of devices and data.

Powering up provision

- > Experimenting with the delivery approaches and refining them in the light of beneficiary feedback, levels of engagement and learning outcomes, was a crucial part of Power Up and led to some impressive blended models, tailored to achieving good short and long term outcomes in the most cost-effective and sustainable ways.
- > At the same time, there were instances where it was difficult for the participating organisations to move away from their standard approaches, in order to try something new. There were also cases where lack of prior experience of delivering online learning meant that initial results of experimentation with provision development were disappointing for the participating organisations and sometimes put them off from trying to innovate again.
- > Difficulties around making substantial changes to provision, such as the ones that Power Up grantees as well as many other organisations had to make due to COVID-19, should not be underestimated. Where such changes are desired and expected, support should be offered to explicitly encourage experimentation and risk-taking as well as enable the participating organisations to draw on the relevant pre-existing expertise.

Powering up places

- > Place-level impact requires time, long-term strategic focus and commitment and partnership-working but each of these alone is by no means a guarantee that the desired changes are achieved.
- > Evidence from Power Up suggests that to achieve step-level and sustainable change at the level of a locality, cross-sector partnership and collaboration is crucial.
 - Developing productive and positive working relationships between the government/local authority and third sector organisations is often challenging due to often significant differences in their ways of working and this should not be underestimated.
 - Explicitly recognising other partners' expertise as well as looking for alignment in participating organisations' strategic priorities emerged as important in developing positive cross-sector working relationships.



Embedding digital skills and digital inclusion

Three broad ways of defining 'embedding digital' emerged within the programme evidence:

- > Organisational/local partner perspective on the place of and systems for beneficiary digital skills development in its offer of support to beneficiaries (=organisational or place-based view of embedding digital)
- > Beneficiary perspective of their learning or support experience and the place of digital skills development within it (=beneficiary view of embedding digital)
- > Organisation's own ways of working and how it delivers its provision (= digitisation)

Within the organisational or place-based view of embedding digital, which was particularly important for Power Up, the following aspects were visible in grantees' descriptions of their work and can be viewed as **indicators of digital skills and inclusion being embedded in an organisation**:

- > *Mechanisms for effective digital needs identification within services and support provision as well as mechanisms for addressing them.* In most instances, grantees working within this definition of 'embedding digital' were able to put both elements in place
- > (Closely linked with the above) *staff expertise in identifying and addressing digital skills needs.* This was a clear area of strength, with staff development, including frontline colleagues, being carried out by almost all grantee organisations

- > *The new mechanisms and staffing needed to support digital inclusion and skills development, being sustainable and supported through various funding streams and approaches to resourcing.* There was a considerable degree of variation with regards to this aspect, with specialist staff recruited to provide digital skills training and expertise being particularly at risk where it relied on Power Up funding only, as the programme was approaching its final stages
- > *Digital inclusion work, explicitly focused on skills development, being transferred to other parts of the organisation(s)* (not directly involved in the project delivery), including changes to the entire organisations or their branches. Whilst there were multiple examples of the Power Up practice beginning to 'spill over' to other departments and teams in the participating organisations, instances of attempting and achieving whole-organisation or large-scale organisational change were rare. Where they happened, the project teams were able to build on their previous (pre-Power Up) successful digital inclusion work and had clarity about what it entailed when joining the programme. They joined Power Up with the explicit aim of achieving such organisational or place-level change. There was also evidence of consistent support and buy-in (or direct involvement) from the senior leadership teams and similar stakeholders in their organisations.

Factors that contributed to the programme success


A number of factors emerged as key to the success of the programme, as well as its activities being possible in the first place. Some of them were directly linked to COVID-19, others were important regardless of it. These included:

- > The participating organisations' exceptional commitment and willingness to go the extra mile to ensure their beneficiaries have access to devices and data
- > Grantee organisations' creativity and resourcefulness, willingness to learn and adapt, when working on changing their provision from almost exclusively face-to-face to online
- > The flexibility of Good Things Foundation, visible in particular when it came to considering changes to their delivery as a result of the pandemic
- > Open and trusting relationships that the grant manager and others within Good Things Foundation developed with grantees, which made monitoring and challenge possible alongside providing support.

In addition, these further two features of Good Things Foundation's approach to managing the programme and working with grantees emerged as important during our analysis of the programme evidence:

- > Bespoke working with each grantee organisation, challenging each to achieve the best possible outcomes in their specific context
- > Spotting opportunities for influence and impact at local area and system level, mobilising others and directing expertise and resources to it to achieve greater impact, beyond the original 'plan'.





The programme has shown that **helping people who are digitally excluded to access technology and learn to use it to improve their lives is possible** and leads to many benefits, and that embedding digital learning within people's other support needs works well.

Conclusions

With its focus on digital skills development and using digital as an enabler to help people 'improve their lives, businesses and communities', the Power Up programme, whose delivery broadly coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, could not have been more timely.

Even though affected by the pandemic, the programme has achieved its aims and even exceeded some of its desired outcomes. Dual or multiple (digital skills plus other, e.g. employability, financial health) positive outcomes were achieved for the vast majority, over 99 per cent, of the beneficiaries supported through the programme. But perhaps most impressive were its achievements in supporting participating organisations' development, including but not limited to their provision.

As well as its intended outcomes, the programme also achieved additional impact, where positive effects considerably exceeded the boundaries of the project delivery work carried out as part of Power Up. This was most visible at the level of the participating organisations:

- > There was evidence of the grantees expanding their organisation's capacity and reach, refining their systems and ways of working. This meant some grantee partners became more established and resilient as organisations.
- > There was evidence of greater prioritisation of digital, digital skills and digital inclusion within grantee organisations, and in some cases, also their partner organisations.
- > Being able to switch their provision and operations to digital enabled grantee organisations to continue delivering their services and support for beneficiaries when face-to-face was not possible, something which became a significant barrier for many of their third sector counterparts during the pandemic.

Through Power Up, grantees had found effective ways of operating and supporting their beneficiaries and communities during the pandemic-related lockdowns and restrictions but also in the post-COVID world.

At the same time, it is important to note that whilst the programme as a whole achieved impact at multiple levels, including strategic, there was notable variation in the extent to which individual grantees were able to achieve or indeed aimed to achieve the latter. There was also a considerable degree of variation in the extent to which Power Up work penetrated organisational and local systems and ways of working, as well as the extent to which any new organisational or local developments were likely to be sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme. This is hardly surprising as, similar to their beneficiaries, Power Up grantees joined the programme at different points of their journey of embracing digital, digital skills and inclusion in their work and they had different aspirations for their involvement in Power Up.

Where grantees had considerable prior expertise of offering holistic support, comprising digital skills development, to their beneficiaries and were explicitly seeking to transfer that expertise into other parts of their organisation as their aim for getting involved in Power Up, they were able to achieve a lot more in terms of embedding digital across their settings, compared to those who were new to the idea of such holistic support at the point of them joining the programme.

Similarly, where grantees already had strong partnerships in place at the point of joining the programme and particularly where they applied as consortia, with each partner having a clear role to play, these grantees were more likely to achieve place-based impact and ensure they not only developed provision at the local area level but also took steps to make those developments sustainable beyond the lifetime of the programme.

Yet, it was those who were new to the idea of embedding digital or had limited prior experience of working with local partners at the time of joining the programme that often travelled the greatest journey of their own team's or organisation's development, and it is highly important to acknowledge that too as the programme's success.

Focus on 'embedding digital' was key to many of the programme's successes:

- > It was essential in engaging and effectively supporting digital learning of people who up to that point had been digitally excluded.
- > It was crucial in helping organisations working with vulnerable people to fully understand why digital matters in their work and enable them to become more inclusive, adopting a more holistic and long-term view rather than offering short-term fixes.
- > The programme was also able to provide greater clarity about what 'embedding digital' actually means, and identified three models used by grantees to embed digital skills and inclusion within their organisations.

An equally important piece of the programme learning was noticing that 'embedding digital' should not be viewed as a silver bullet or a crude approach that 'fits all', but one that should be applied thoughtfully, recognising the aims and context of the work but also what has already been achieved, not least because of the level of resourcing that it can require. For example, an embedded approach is crucial for specific groups of beneficiaries who are vulnerable, digitally excluded yet reluctant to engage in digital learning. Other approaches might be more appropriate when working with committed and motivated learners, wishing to develop specific and often narrow skills. Developing expertise of noticing the change in people's – and organisations' – development journeys as they embrace digital, and adapting the support accordingly would be an important priority for Power Up and similar future programmes.

So, what headline conclusions can we draw from Power Up?

The programme has shown that helping people who are digitally excluded to access technology and learn to use it to improve their lives is possible and leads to many benefits, and that embedding digital learning within people's other support needs works well.

This is highly encouraging, because the need for digital skills in order to access even the most basic services and support is growing rapidly, with the pandemic escalating the use of technology across all aspects of life of the society. In other words, those who lacked digital skills but could get by pre-pandemic, are getting left further and further behind as organisations across all sectors embrace digital. This trend is likely to continue in the context of the growing levels of awareness about changes needed to prevent climate change and seeking economic efficiencies as part of post-Covid economic recovery.

Challenge 1: Support those lacking the relevant skills to integrate and fully participate in the increasingly digitalised society.

Recommendation for policy and practice

- > Any organisations which completed or are considering switching access and use of their services and support to digital, should consider those for whom the efficient and convenient (for the majority of people) approaches and systems would mean becoming excluded. Wherever possible, rather than simply offering alternative arrangements for accessing support and service, people should also be supported to develop digital skills.

Supporting people who lack basic digital skills to develop them, especially where they also lack motivation to do so or are affected by various barriers, is often complex and time-consuming, and therefore resource-intensive for the organisations providing such learning. Offering 'quick-fix' solutions to people with significant digital skills development needs is rarely effective, it can also create problems with regards to beneficiaries' future engagement with learning and support. Those people respond well to holistic and embedded learning and support approaches. To deliver them, staff skills and expertise and provision development is often needed.

Challenge 2: Enable organisations across all sectors to develop expertise in supporting digital skills development for people who are vulnerable and digitally excluded, in ways that are meaningful to people and form an integral part of other support and services they access.

Recommendation for Good Things Foundation and Power Up

- > Good Things Foundation and Power Up should continue learning about what embedding digital looks like and communicate this to others working with people who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and digitally excluded. This should cover not only how to effectively support such beneficiaries but also how to develop the organisational capacity and expertise needed to put the relevant provision in place. Such expertise should also include clarity about when holistic and embedded approaches are essential and when other approaches to supporting people and their learning can and should be deployed.

Power Up has also demonstrated that whilst place-based change is achievable and is the best way of ensuring sustainability of approaches that enable people to develop digital skills alongside improving their employability and financial health, such change is very difficult to put in place. It was clear that place-based change remained a development priority for any future Power Up activity. Power Up has surfaced some of the 'ingredients' that help create place-based change. These are: long-term strategic focus and commitment, partnership-working and time.

Challenge 3: Continue the strategic focus on achieving place-based change across all or the bulk of any future Power Up activity, and learning about why and how it happens.

Recommendation for Good Things Foundation and Power Up

Good Things Foundation should make sure that:

- > Grantees involved in the next phase of Power Up are aware of and build on the learnings related to place-based change and partnership-working that emerged during its first phase.
- > All programme activity, from grantee selection through to support and monitoring mechanisms and tools, is as focused on and clear about its ambitions for place-based change it seeks to achieve, as it is about its aspirations for beneficiaries.



For more information
about the project, contact
Good Things Foundation on:

e: research@goodthingsfoundation.org
t: 0114 3491619

