

IT Support Scheme Report – March 2021

Background

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic frontline teams working to support people affected by Covid-19 situation quickly began to identify people who were unable to access self help and support services because they do not have access to a telephone or internet access. At the same time Customer Services and Revenues and Benefits services identified that closure of council and community buildings would cause particular difficulty for those without internet access to be able to apply for benefits and discretionary support available through the council.

As a result of these concerns, funding was allocated and provision set up to enable residents to apply for smart mobile phone and wi-fi hot spots to enable internet access.

Once this provision was in place it became apparent, through resulting conversations, that access to computer devices was also needed.

Building on existing relationships with York Community Furniture Store (CFS), through the York Financial Assistance Scheme contract, we discussed setting up a computer reuse scheme for the City. This resulted in establishing a working group to take the ideas forward. The working group involved Customer Services, Digital City, York Community Furniture Store, Local Area Coordinators, York Learning, Age UK York, York Cares, JRF, plus community volunteers who had been working with local schools to reuse equipment.

Mobile phone & wi-fi hot spots

The Digital City team were able to set up provision for smart mobile phones and wi-fi hot spots with a local provider. A budget of £10,000 was allocated to the project, for an estimated 80 devices.

Support for the provision of a mobile phone is available for people affected by the current Covid-19 situation

- Who do not have either a landline or mobile phone?
- Another member of their household does not have a mobile phone
- They have health conditions or other additional factors which mean they are unable to access the support they need at this time without access to a telephone.

Support for the provision of internet is available for people affected by the current Covid-19 situation

- Who do not have access to the internet in their home
- They have health conditions or other additional factors which mean they are unable to access the support they need at this time without access to the internet.

Anyone needing support is referred for advice and support to maximise income and identify the most appropriate support. If this assessment identifies mobile phone or internet access as a priority an application can be made to the scheme by the support worker.

The mobile phone package includes a

- Alcatel One 5033x 4G handset
- 5GB of data with unlimited UK calls & SMS for 3 months.

The internet Package includes

- Huawei E5783B wi-fi hotspot
- Unlimited UK data usage for 3 months

The phone or wi-fi hot spot is owned by the customer. At the end of the 3 months the calls & data package will stop, unless an application is made to extend the calls and data package. At this time to continue to use the phone/wi-fi hot spot customer will need to purchase a new sim card to, either pay-as-you-go or set up a contract.

Nearing the end of the data package notification is sent to the customer and their support worker, with information on how to choose a new package.

A number of packages were due to end in December when the further lockdown was announced, therefore these calls and data packages were extended to end of February.

Applications

- 40 support workers have made applications on behalf of their clients
- 86 applications have been received
- 55 mobile phones have been awarded
- 25 wi-fi hot spots have been awarded

IT reuse scheme

The York IT reuse scheme project has developed as a result of the joint work of organisations and services in the City who work across a wide spectrum of areas, all have identified lack of digital access as a barrier to people with complex needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. The covid-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the inequalities in our society, front and centre of those has been digital exclusion.

The outline aims of the project were to set up a scheme to collect and clean used computers/laptops and distribute these to people on low income.

- Undertake a coordinated campaign to solicit donations of suitable equipment to the scheme from businesses and residents.
- Promote the scheme to residents and support workers to ensure as many people as possible are able to access support.
- Explore the best way to provide cost effective internet broadband with CYC Digital City team, linking with the City's digital strategy.
- Liaise with York Learning and York Explore, along with other partners, to provide support to customers to make sure they have the skills and confidence to use the equipment.

We agreed York Community Furniture (CFS) would be the lead partner for the collection of used equipment, clean and check equipment as well as setting it up for future use. Whilst the application process for equipment would be set up and run by other partner organisation/s.

CFS initially recruited a team of volunteers to support the work and explored the legal and licensing requirements for the scheme.

The application for equipment was included as part of the application process for the mobile phone and wi-fi hot spot scheme.

A soft launch to request donations for equipment was made by York Cares and through the working group's networks.

This enabled the scheme to begin on a small scale.

Once the model was established funding bids were made to secure resources for staff and running costs to up scale the scheme. A bid was made to the Build Back Better Fund through Two Ridings Community Foundation. As a result of this CFS was able to secure funding for a scheme coordinator for 12 months and we were able to develop a partnership with Changing Lives to provide and develop the administration of applications for digital support. See appendix 2 for more information.

CFS appointed the coordinator in January enabling wider publicity to ask for donations of IT devices. This has been successful and they have received an increasing number of donations.

The working group is now being developed into the steering group for the project and a task group is being set up to develop the application process in partnership with Changing Lives.

54 people have so far received refurbished computer devices through the scheme. The devices will come with the standard running software for access and running of the internet, communication and or Google Classroom apps if needed for education. These devices will belong to the customer and will become their responsibility.

A number of those receiving computer devices have also received wi-fi hot spot packages to provide internet access for their device.

We are also working with others, such as York Learning and York Explore, to provide wrap around support on how to use the device safely after delivery.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the IT support scheme has been undertaken with those whose data packages are coming to an end. We have received 6 completed evaluation forms and a number of additional comments.

The overall feedback is this support has made a big difference to people. See appendix 1. It has been a lifeline for people, both in relation to health and finances.

Susan Wood

Welfare Benefits Strategic Partnership Manager

March 2021

Appendix 1.

Mobile phone / wi-fi hot spot / computer device evaluation

1. *How was the process of getting the phone?*

- Easy.
- Not easy but worth it, No charger in the wi-fi box came separately. It's broken nearly I think I need to order another.
- Very easy through my advocate.
- Support Worker sorted it all out for me! I would not have been aware of such a thing if not for him.
- It was a bit complicated as it was delivered to the wrong address, and I had to request a new sim card, but after this it was okay.
- Good it arrived very promptly

2. *When you got it were you able to set it up?*

- Yes easy to set up.
- No
- Yes
- I was able to set it up once I got the new sim card through
- Yes set up was very easy.

a. *If you needed help, did you get this?*

- Yes – Ari came to my flat to set it up
- I have not needed any.
- I received help with getting the new sim card and installing this
- Never has one of these phones so a friend helped me.

b. *How easy was it to get help? Who helped you?*

- Support worker came to my flat
- My advocate was always available.
- If needed I would have seen my support worker.
- My housing support worker who applied for the scheme on my behalf helped me with this
- I had a friend across the road who I could ask to help me.

3. *What difference has having the phone and internet made to you?*

- A lot of difference, it has helped us get in touch and keep in touch with people on the internet. My daughter has been able to stay in touch with friends and getting food shopping.
- Big difference. Really kept me in touch with important essential services & government departments. Able to order food clothes etc.

- Was able to access my DWP journal. Apply for jobs, which was successful & keep in touch with family.
- Some difference - It made it easier to access the internet, especially after I got my laptop. I could stream shows more easily.
- Big difference – Huge difference, my son lives in Finland so I have been able to keep in contact with messaging, videos and pictures.
- Allowed me to keep in touch with friends and groups on social media. It has helped me to get info I needed from the internet.
- It has been an absolute essential. I am very grateful.

a. *Has it made a difference to your financial situation? If yes how?*

- Yes it has enable me to order cheaper food, clothes and look at 2nd hand websites for household and personal items.
- I was able to do bills and sort mortgage holiday.
- Yes, it has saved me money on paying for it from my own finances, and has helped me to access online banking (with the help of my support worker)
- Hard to quantify as I just wouldn't have been able to do this myself as cannot afford.

b. *Has it made a difference to your mental health? If yes how?*

- Hard to say but I could solve more problems having the internet.
- Yes, very much I have been able to stay in touch with friends and I have YouTube for music, entertainment, etc.
- Yes because it's provided a distraction, when I have to stay at home all day in lock down
- Allowed me to maintain control over issues through lockdown.
- Yes, also a huge difference related to my earlier answer about my son
- Without it I would not have got internet, and would have been very bored.

- Yes absolutely I can keep in touch with others, I can play music and am in contact with the world,

c. *Has it made a difference to your physical health? If yes how?*

- Yes it has enabled me to stay in more and rest, when i would have struggled to get my shopping, etc.
- By getting a job, I have now lost 2 stone.
- Also big yes because I can pop the unit in my pocket and send my son pictures, videos from out and about and I have peace of mind he can always reach me.

d. *Has it had any other impact/made any other differences to situation? If yes how?*

- I have been able to send photos of letters to my Financial Coach as she has not been able to meet with me, I have been able to keep in touch with work.
- It will from Monday as I have a course starting that is now being run remotely. Vital for this!
- It's helped with morale and my independence during lockdown. I'm very grateful for this.
- Was able to stay in touch with my advocate.
- Well... the above course may become very difficult to complete I cannot afford more data personally.

4. *What would you have done without it?*

- Gone mental!!
- I would've been unhappy, no communication or food deliveries, etc.
- Sank without a trace.
- Contact with my son would have been minimal & that would definitely made me depressed. It is still hard being away from him.
- No idea! I was totally isolated in lockdown so would have had no contact with anyone at all in lockdown and no way of getting hold of support networks.

5. *What would have happened to you and your circumstances without getting the phone?*

- Lost my house, still been unemployed.
- I can't imagine to be honest.

6. *What have you used the phone for - please tick*

- 4 Making phone calls
- 4 Family /Friends
- 4 Support
- 1 Household issues/affairs/bills etc.

What have you used the internet for?

- 6 Getting information
- 3 Shopping online
- 5 Entertainment
- 5 Contact
- 4 Claiming benefits
- 4 Other support
- 5 Other Internet banking

7. *What will you do now with the phone?*

a. *Will you be able to pay for the service yourself?*

- I presume give the unit back to you guys. I can't afford it.
- I will top up the dongle myself
- I will keep it and put my own credit on.
- Don't know I haven't looked at the deals yet
- Not a chance!

How will you do this?

- i) Pay as go 4
- ii) Contract

8. *Any other comments*

- Thank you!!
- Thank you so much for extending this service into a third lockdown it brought me a tremendous amount of pleasure and reassurance in isolation. Kindest regards.
- I can't thank you enough for providing me with the phone it was a life saver.
- Thank you so much for this service! It has been a lifeline for me & I will mourn its passing!!
- I see the ad's for EE doing data for school kids who need it but what about folk like me? No chance of finding work or support without such a thing.
- I am incredibly grateful for this phone through lockdown. It came at just the right time for me.
- It was extremely helpful for me to not be isolated both family who also had to shield n my support network on social media
- Thank you
The wi-fi has been very useful to have for these 3 months to access the internet, especially as internet charges are so high in my area and I would've had to pay a large installation fee.
- Feedback from recipients is that the phones arrived very quickly and work well for everything they need. R in particular was very thankful that he was able to see his son and father on video over Christmas, as otherwise he would have had very limited contact. For S it has enabled him to access the internet while in his own property, and having very limited contact with others due to the lockdown otherwise. We're able to help them if they need to learn how to use these, as is the case with an older tenant.
- Some more feedback I've heard from several of them is that while the data and minutes are much appreciated, it would be a great improvement if it was possible to have a top up available for their own sim, so they could keep using their own number for texts and calls rather than using a new sim for three months.
- The smartphone offers me a lot more independence now. The search for possible places for a voluntary or courses offered by York Learning is

now possible without having to ask the keyworkers to log me in at one of the pcs in the hostel with the contract's included 5 GB. Most helpful are the free phone calls and SMS within the UK included in the contract as well. As it has all the important features of a smartphone I can also write my CV to prepare me to seek for a job. Also processes that require a mobile number like signing up for a bank account or the Universal Credit are now possible. I appreciate very much having received it and I'm using it a lot, thank you very much!

- Just thought I would share these videos of M connecting with his drama group that he loves so much. Took a little time to get his internet sorted but it was all worth it, he gets a couple of hours support to help him set it up etc., as he has a learning disability. He loves the laptop.

- I am very appreciative that I received a laptop recently. Having a laptop provides me with the opportunity to be productive. I am at present studying Personal Training and Counselling at level 3. By having a laptop it has allowed me to access Microsoft Teams. Prior to that I was having to travel to college and with the present circumstances of Covid, the college would have been closed and I would have problems to continue with studying. I am able to continue the course with the laptop and become more organised. The laptop serves a great purpose in recreational activities, movies, music and social media such as Facebook. By using these features it often encourages better mood and is beneficial for my mental health. I have recently set up Savvey Social Health and Fitness, by having a laptop it allows me to develop the venture further. I am trying to create and maintain a sustainable service for the people of York. This is to support and influence an improved sense of wellbeing in people. Included in this is the whole holistic approach, body and mind in social, health and fitness aspects. Thank you!

Appendix 2

Build Back Better Fund – Digital Inclusion Overview

| IT Reuse Scheme - Delivered by Community Furniture Store | Client digital inclusion - Delivered by Changing Lives | Digital service development - Delivered by Changing Lives |
|---|---|---|
| Development post 22.5/week | Digital inclusion coordinator post F/T | |
| <p>Collect and receive: We will develop facilities and a campaign to collect IT equipment donated by local people and through partnerships with businesses, schools, universities and other organisations.</p> <p>Refurbishment: We will inspect and classify all donations before preparing them for reuse. All data will be eradicated before operating systems and core apps are reinstalled. Devices will be setup to meet the needs of particular user groups. This process will provide volunteering opportunities for people to learn new skills.</p> <p>Reusing it: Refurbished devices distributed to deliver social benefit. We will work collaboratively to identify those who would most benefit from the scheme.</p> <p>Volunteer placements: Recruit, train and support a volunteer team. Including providing training and volunteer placements for Changing Lives clients.</p> | <p>Coproduce a scheme to allocate equipment from the reuse scheme to people who are digitally excluded. Including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Application process for equipment from advice and support services across the City. - Receive and process applications and liaise with Community Furniture Store to identify and provide suitable devices. <p>Work collaboratively to identify those who would most benefit from the scheme and promote the scheme across the city.</p> <p>Work with partners to develop affordable internet connectivity, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing funding allocation to provide connection/data packages - Gathering knowledge and links, signposting and referral routes with organisations providing low cost packages or funding. <p>Work with partners to ensure people have access to support and training to use devices effectively. Gathering knowledge and develop signposting and referral routes with support and training providers, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CYC volunteers - Digital champions - York Learning - York Explore | <p>Respond and build on the shift to delivery of services through digital channels by developing Changing Lives digital offer. Improve digital content, connectivity and communication with service users and stakeholders.</p> <p>Sharing good practice and learning to provide strategic and practical support not only for CL's services but to local partners around communication, social media digital service delivery</p> |

