

Digital Pioneers Fund

Impact Report
June 2023-June 2024

The Fund

The Scottish Government's Digital Health and Care Division programme, delivered in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), focused on digital inclusion in mental health and housing.

The programme aimed to develop, test and implement a range of digital inclusion models that enable people to access mental health and housing support services (and wider support services) and feel empowered, digitally confident and experience improved wellbeing through the wider opportunities and connections to communities that digital inclusion brings.

Digital Pioneers offered two funds, a mental health themed fund and a housing themed fund, which aimed to work with organisations to consolidate learning towards identifying best practice models for delivering digital inclusion that could be implemented and scaled across mental health and/or housing.

Organisations were invited to apply for up to £50,000 to support existing digital inclusion work over a 12 month period and to participate in a Community of Learning (COL) to explore sustainable and best practice models for digital inclusion. Awarded organisations received a £5,000 contribution to support engagement within the required COL. The maximum grant award available was therefore £55,000.

This report provides a summary of the impact of the funding across both fund themes: The Digital Pioneers Mental Health Fund and the Digital Pioneers Housing Fund.



Illustration credit: Tessa Mackenzie

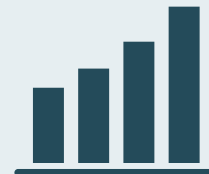
Funded Projects

Thirteen projects were supported through the funds, totalling £650,325.



Total Amount
Awarded

£650,325



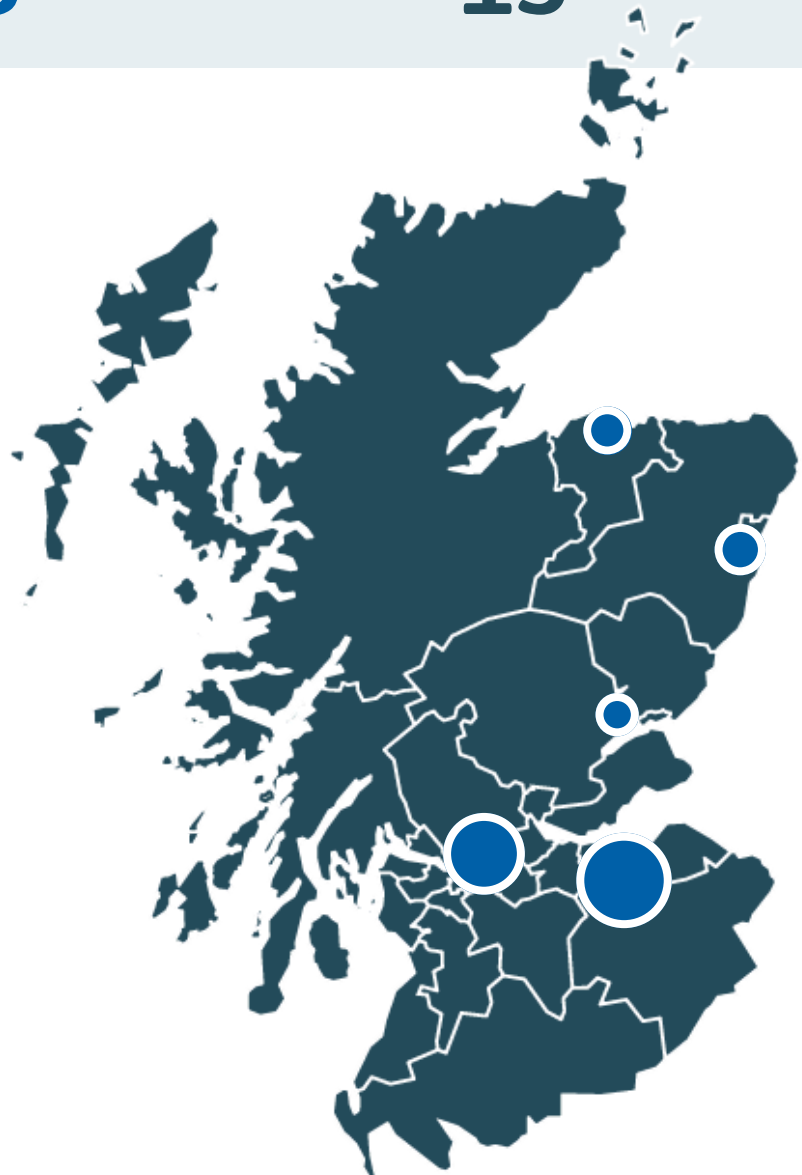
Projects
Funded

13

Project Delivery

In total, 13 of the funded projects delivered across 17 local authority areas in Scotland.

[Find out about each funded project in our interactive Google map here](#)



Beneficiaries and Device Distribution

Projects began delivering from July 2023 with organisations reporting back to the Funding Team on their progress at quarterly intervals until 30th June 2024.

Overall 13 projects reported that 238 staff and volunteers have supported over 1800 people with digital inclusion activities. In total, 112 Digital Champions have been trained via funded projects and 470 devices and 351 connectivity packages provided to support people to be digitally included across mental health and housing.

The Beneficiaries



1838

Direct beneficiaries have
been supported



238

Staff and volunteers have
been supported



112

Digital Champions have
been trained

Devices Distributed



183

Phones



138

Laptops



149

Tablets



351

Connectivity

Digital Pioneers Mental Health Fund

The fund's purpose was to support organisations delivering impactful digital inclusion work with people living with moderate to severe and enduring mental health conditions to achieve the following outcomes:

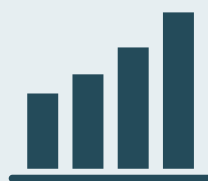
- People will have improved access to mental health support and wider services.
- People have improved digital skills and feel more digitally confident.
- People will have improved wellbeing and increased connections as a result of digital inclusion work.
- People who provide support or work in a mental health context will have improved skills and confidence to engage and support people to be digitally included.
- Digital Pioneer organisations will contribute to developing a sustainable model of digital inclusion, at scale, in the mental health context.

Overall, six projects were supported through the fund, totalling £306,165.



Funded
projects

6



Total amount
awarded

£306,165



Average amount
awarded

£51,027



Organisations Supported: Mental Health Fund

The Fund was open to organisations who had been delivering services in Scotland for at least one year. The majority of funded organisations are either Registered Charities or SCIOs with one Community Interest Company awarded. The table below provides a project summary and awarded amounts per project.

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Carr Gomm	Carr Gomm's Connected Lives project builds on the learning from their previous Digital Inclusion Research Project (DIRP). Funding allowed them to expand their digital inclusion support across Glasgow's Integrated Services and enhance support through establishing a safe, online peer network to facilitate improved wellbeing through meaningful community connections. The project supported 53 people, 40 staff and volunteers and trained 9 digital champions.	£54,667
Saheliya	Saheliya Digital Pioneers project works with marginalised New Scots women in Edinburgh and Glasgow to increase their digital skills and confidence. Funding allowed them to continue to deliver digital inclusion and language sessions to improve skills and confidence to access further supports and services to improve mental health and wellbeing. The project supported 54 people, 5 staff and volunteers and trained 5 digital champions.	£54,773
Moray Wellbeing Hub CIC	Moray Wellbeing Hub's Digital Mental Health Capacity Building project established a digital mental health hub to improve digital skills and access to services in Moray. Funding allowed them to build on current work with Health and Social Care Partnership Moray to offer online and in person digital support to improve digital skills and confidence and social connections. The project supported 729 people, 26 staff and volunteers and trained 31 digital champions.	£54,982

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Scottish Action For Mental Health	The Scottish Action for Mental Health's Enduring Digital Accessibility project works with people in supported living settings to enhance their digital skills and confidence. Funding allowed them to expand and formalise their existing digital inclusion activities in Edinburgh, Perth and Glasgow and increase access to online supports and services. The project also enhanced staff and participants' access to their care management system to improve peoples' engagement within their individual care plans. The project supported 22 people, 30 staff and volunteers and trained 7 digital champions.	£51,270
Cyrenians	Cyrenians Digital Inclusion project works with people facing long term unemployment, transitioning from hospital care and living in residential care. Funding allowed them to expand their current digital inclusion activities and provide a digital hub at their Farm, one to one support and in-depth digital skills support in Edinburgh and West Lothian. The project supported 34 people and 7 staff and volunteers.	£36,244
Just Bee Productions	Just Bee's Just Breath project works with people to reduce mental health inequalities, assessments and waiting times to access services. Funding allowed them to deliver a variety of digital inclusion activities with people in crisis to improve their digital skills and confidence to access services and supports to support their Mental Health. The project supported 93 people, 4 staff and volunteers and trained 1 digital champion.	£54,229
		£306,165



Impact Insights : Mental Health Fund

Overall projects reported that 112 staff and volunteers have supported over 900 people with digital inclusion activities. In total, 53 Digital Champions have been trained via funded projects and 142 devices and 134 connectivity packages provided to support people experiencing moderate to severe and enduring mental health conditions facing digital exclusion.

The Beneficiaries



985

Direct beneficiaries have
been supported



112

Staff and volunteers have
been supported



53

Digital Champions have
been trained

Devices Distributed



28

Phones



31

Laptops



83

Tablets



134

Connectivity

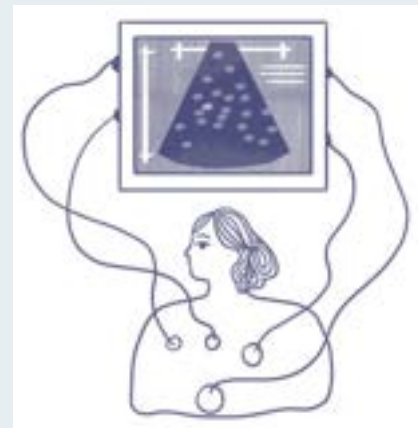
Project Insights

Funded projects have reported many successes throughout delivery. These include improving support for people in crisis with digital tools and forming new partnerships to broaden access to digital inclusion support. Projects helped people manage daily life and improved engagement by combining digital learning with literacy skills. By offering personalised support, the projects have also reduced isolation, improved connections, and made it easier for people to access services that support their health and wellbeing.

Just Bee

Theme: Exploring digital support for mental health

“The Pioneers Fund enabled us to successfully launch "Just Speak," our mental health podcast. The podcast has been a tremendous success, providing a platform for people to share their mental health success stories, discuss the challenges they've faced, and inspire others dealing with depression, anxiety, addiction, and trauma. The core objective of this project is to facilitate peer mentoring through digital means.



As part of our outreach, we distributed 25 mobile phones to people in crisis. Providing these phones has significantly reduced their isolation, enabling them to stay connected with family, friends, and community networks during challenging times. This initiative also allowed us to form stronger collaborations with partner organizations, enabling us to address specific client needs more effectively. The impact of this support has been another major success for the project.

In partnership with Dundee City Council's (DCC) Adult Literacy Team, we also conducted 40 digital literacy workshops, benefiting 74 people. Of these participants, 46% completed 10 weeks of digital learning, 24% completed 6 weeks, and 30% participated for 5 weeks or less. These workshops have helped people develop basic digital skills, with some using the internet for the first time. The group sessions equipped clients with the confidence and ability to manage tasks like housing issues, online banking, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) assessments, and job applications.”



[Check out the Just Speak podcasts on YouTube](#)

Carr Gomm

Theme: Digital as a trust builder



“Digital Ambassadors reported that the opportunity to provide devices and connectivity to people was a crucial means of showing people we support that we believe in them and their potential to grow. Digital Ambassadors shared that providing devices helped to establish a foundation of trust, strengthened the person’s overall engagement with support, and increased the person’s self-confidence.”

Cyrenians

Theme: Person Centred Support

“Our decision to work intensively with individuals is resource intensive. However we have learned that, for our clients, it is the best way to increase confidence and to embed transferable skills. Working entirely using the interests of each person means that every session has to be tailored which increases the workload of the tutors but the benefits are clear. Giving people the confidence to develop their own learning leads to sustainable outcomes for each person.”

Moray Wellbeing

Theme: Building partnerships and resources locally

“Local partnerships have been a success. We played a key role in establishing a local digital inclusion partnership that plans to meet every 6-8 weeks. Although this group is just beginning, it is a significant achievement for a rural community to come together to share resources and skills.”



Scottish Action for Mental Health

Theme: Digital inclusion and support plans

“A key benefit of the pilot project has been the introduction of tablets for staff, enabling a more inclusive support planning and review process by giving staff a platform to co-produce online support plans on our care planning software ACP. Tablets, with their larger screens, facilitate collaboration with service users, replacing the need for printouts and typed-up notes.

We’ve enhanced the ACP system to record instances of digital inclusion during support, providing in-built functionality to report on digital inclusion activities across all SAMH services.”

Saheliya

Theme: Language and Digital Learning



"Extending our sessions from 2 to 3 hours really made a difference, giving us more time to focus on learning. We found that supporting learners whose first language isn't English often takes double the time, so we combined language support with basic digital skills training. Providing devices and ensuring regular access to them was a real benefit for our participants. We set up additional drop-in sessions where women could use laptops to practice what they learned in class.

Our digital skills classes have really benefited from using a variety of tools and resources. We've found that extending our sessions to include tools like Windows 11, Microsoft Office, and Google services has been incredibly helpful. We use everything from Microsoft Forms for feedback to Twinkl and BBC Learning English for additional support.

Integrating ESOL techniques with digital skills training has been a game-changer. We use graded materials from sources like the British Council and Twinkl, which helps everyone, from beginners to more advanced learners. Peer support and Google Translate have been great for bridging language gaps, and the Typing.com website keeps advanced learners engaged.

Alongside providing digital skills classes for our participants, we also recognised that some of our staff had lower digital skills. To ensure we could better support the women, we received support from SCVO and Mhor Collective to build up staff digital skills, and we aim to embed this support into our model going forward.

We've also made sure to accommodate different needs, like using Windows' accessibility features for those with visual impairments. Plus, introducing students to platforms like Microsoft Office and Canvas has really set them up for success, especially for those looking to attend college. It's been amazing to see how these resources and supports have made such a positive impact."



The Challenges

The projects experienced several challenges, including reduced social care hours, varying motivation levels due to mental health conditions, concerns about online safety, staff training needs, different learning paces, and delays in establishing referral processes.

Carr Gomm

Theme: Barriers to engagement in social care



“Connected Lives exists within the context of ongoing pressures on adult social care. During the project, some people we support had their social care hours reduced which impacted on the time available to explore digital inclusion. This highlights the relationship between social exclusion and digital exclusion and the need for commissioners to recognise digital inclusion support as an important means through which vulnerable people can be meaningfully connected to their networks and communities.

The people we support often struggle with demotivation due to enduring mental health conditions. Building digital skills and confidence can feel daunting, becoming ‘just another thing’ to learn or potentially ‘another area where they might see themselves as failing.’ Teams noted that individuals’ motivation often fluctuates, with interest levels varying from week to week.

Motivating people to use digital tools to support their wellbeing was particularly challenging due to concerns about data privacy. Some were also worried that engaging with digital options might lead to the removal of face-to-face healthcare services. Additionally, fears around online safety sometimes acted as a barrier to continued engagement. Striking a balance between addressing the realities of online risks and avoiding further anxiety was challenging and largely depended on the individual's current mental state.”



Saheliya

Theme: Learning pace and impact

“Classes often include people with varying abilities and learning paces, so tutors need to be flexible and adapt each session to individual needs. Although this approach meant working with fewer participants at a slower pace than anticipated, it allowed us to make a greater impact on each individual. By keeping class sizes small, we can provide more personalised support and enhance each individuals learning journey.”



Cyrenians

Theme: Engagement and resource



“Getting people to engage with digital inclusion activities was challenging at first due to their underlying fears about their abilities and online safety. To address this, we adopted a 'no wrong door' approach, offering support to every client. This approach was more resource-intensive, as it sometimes involved meeting clients for coffee and then accompanying them to the training sessions. We found that meeting in a comfortable, non-technical setting, like a café, to discuss the sessions and reassure them that they would learn at their own pace in a safe environment was crucial. This strategy has significantly increased engagement, and we've shared it with our partners who refer people to us.”

Just Bee

Theme: Adapting delivery

“Our project didn't go as initially planned, and we had to make some adjustments. Working at a crisis centre means we deal with clients facing challenging circumstances, such as chaotic lifestyles and addiction issues, which can lead to missed appointments. To address this, we made our digital inclusion workshops more flexible, allowing participants to join and learn at their own pace instead of committing to consecutive weeks. This flexibility was key to the project's success.”

Moray Wellbeing

Theme: Set up, reporting and costs

“Getting our project processes set up and referral routes organized took longer than expected. If we had been able to implement these sooner, the project might have gained traction earlier. However, we anticipated that our budget for devices would eventually be stretched once the project was fully promoted and more partners began using the referral pathways. In this sense, the delayed start actually helped us stay within budget.

Our internal referral process has been a bit challenging, mainly due to the limitations of the tools we're using. A CRM with a broader range of features would have made things much easier for the team and reduced the need for manual effort. We're making adjustments to improve the process for this project and future ones. We've also looked into using Upshot, which seems to meet most of our needs, but it's costly and not currently within our budget. As a result, reporting our impact remains time-consuming.”



Scottish Action for Mental Health

Theme: Staff confidence



“Staff confidence and competence in supporting service users to access digital resources and set up tablets have been ongoing challenges, particularly due to training needs. Concerns around risk assessments and the vulnerability of individuals with severe mental health conditions further complicated the process.

To overcome these challenges, we engaged with SCVO and conducted an organisational digital skills audit to guide our digital strategy and training approach. By working closely with staff, we built their confidence in supporting service users to navigate online resources. As a result, service users have experienced increased digital inclusion. We also enhanced uptake by highlighting a variety of activities that contribute to digital inclusion, such as creating email accounts, browsing social media, and streaming music or TV programs.”

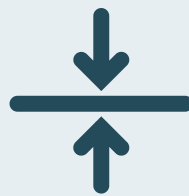
Individual Impact

Awarded projects completed baseline and follow-up surveys for individuals they supported to assess the programme's impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The surveys measured confidence in digital skills including managing money online, accessing health services, and staying safe online. They also examined how these skills affected participants' independence, social connections, and health management. Comparing the results over time showed the programme's overall impact.



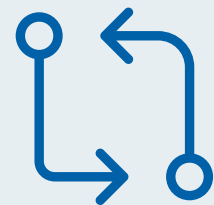
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**Impact
Surveys**



129

**Baseline
Surveys**



65

**Follow - up
Surveys**

Organisations reported valuable insights around tracking individual impact, which allowed them to refine their approach.



Some participants were cautious about sharing personal information. Projects highlighted that building trusting relationships is essential before participants feel comfortable honestly discussing their digital skills.



Many individuals with severe mental health conditions expressed that they did not want to complete surveys related to their health and wellbeing, as their main goal was to learn how to use their devices.



Refining the timeline and approach for completing impact surveys remains key to striking the right balance between gathering meaningful data and respecting participants' preferences.

Individual Impact

The impact survey data highlights a positive effect on participants' digital skills and personal wellbeing. Individuals demonstrated notable improvements in their digital abilities, online confidence, and information retrieval skills. They became steadily more skilled in managing finances, accessing entertainment and learning resources, and utilizing online health services. This boost in confidence also extended to online safety.

The data in the graphs below represents aggregated results from participants who completed both a baseline and follow-up survey, allowing for a clear comparison of progress over time.

Experience



Just Bee

"This aspect of the project has allowed individuals to develop basic digital competency with some of them using the internet for the first time. The group learning sessions allowed clients to develop skills in technology to help them to build confidence in addressing issues with housing, online banking, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) assessments and job applications."

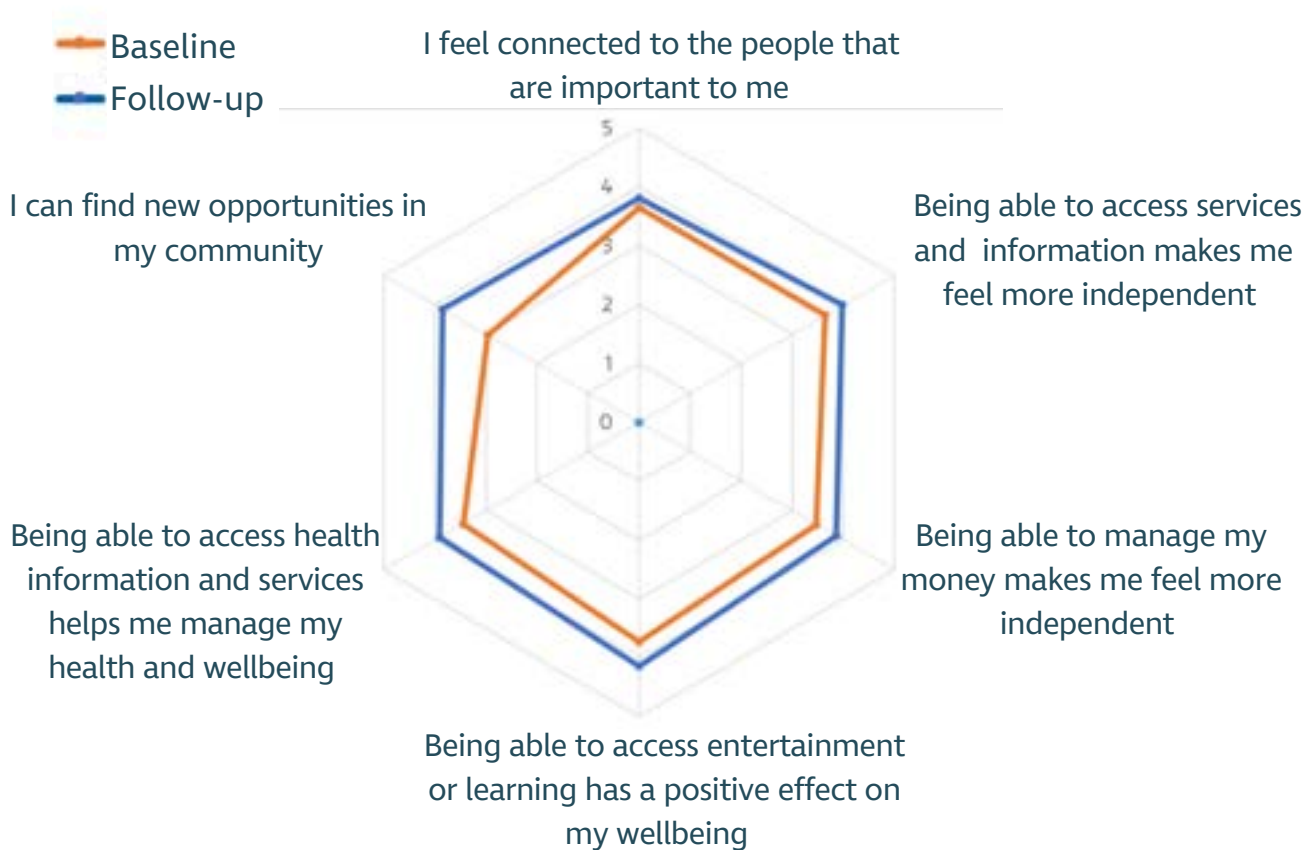
Cyrenians

"By the end of our support, we've seen that our clients can now engage online with health services, local and national government, and interest groups. They're also more confident interacting online with friends and family, which has really boosted their mental health and confidence to keep using technology on their own."

Individual Impact

On a personal level, participants reported an improvement in feeling more connected to people important to them, more independent in accessing services and managing money. They also experienced a positive effect on wellbeing from accessing entertainment and better management of health through access to information and services. Additionally, there was a notable increase in finding new opportunities in the community as a result of engaging with digital inclusion activities.

Impact



Moray Wellbeing Hub CIC

"This project has allowed us to build trusting relationships, empowering individuals to make small changes by encouraging them to ask for support. We've found that sometimes people come to a drop-in with one issue, which then leads to discussions and support around digital skills. Self-stigma can be a significant barrier when seeking help to upskill or request devices. We address this by offering safe, non-judgmental spaces that welcome all Moray citizens, whether they prefer in-person one-on-ones, group sessions, or online spaces."

Impact Story: Carr Gomm

Connected Lives



Kirsty, a young woman with Huntington's disease and poor mental health, began Connected Lives feeling socially isolated and struggling with motivation, often experiencing suicidal thoughts. We provided her with a tablet, 12 months of connectivity, and personalized support to build her digital confidence. Initially skeptical about the impact of digital tools, Kirsty now says her perspective has "completely flipped 180 degrees."

Through Connected Lives, Kirsty discovered how digital resources can enhance her daily life. She started using YouTube to watch gaming tutorials, reigniting her passion for playing her PlayStation. This has positively impacted her mental wellbeing, giving her a sense of accomplishment. Kirsty also taught herself knitting, crocheting, and creating diamond art via YouTube, which helps maintain mobility in her hands, affected by Huntington's disease.

As a regular participant in the Connected Lives Peer Network, Kirsty initially felt anxious about using Zoom and meeting new people. Over time, she has gained confidence and now feels genuinely connected to the group.

"The group is so welcoming. You feel you're part of a wee family. For me to go from having no friends to new people knowing my name and caring about me...that's a big thing. It's such a nice, wee happy place that I like going to. It makes me feel like I have people in my life."

"I'm feeling not as doom and gloom. I see light at the end of the tunnel. I don't need to sit and do nothing all day. I can get up and do things. Even using the tablet to play calming music helps me sleep better. It might sound silly, but this tablet has completely changed me. It's done wonders for my confidence – it's helped me meet people and make friends."

Encouraged by her positive experiences with the Peer Network, Kirsty used Facebook to find local groups and activities, meeting women her age and trying new hobbies. She also attends Restart cooking classes, which give her a reason to leave the house and support her goal of managing her nutrition for her condition."

Digital Pioneers Housing Fund

The fund's purpose was to support impactful digital inclusion work in a housing context to achieve the following outcomes:

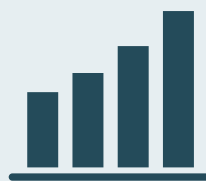
- Tenants or customers have improved access to housing support and wider services (e.g. services supporting health and wellbeing) through digital tools.
- Tenants or customers have improved digital skills and feel more digitally confident.
- Tenants or customers have improved wellbeing and increased connections as a result of digital inclusion work.
- Staff and/or people connected to housing organisations will have improved skills and confidence to engage tenants or customers and support them to be digitally included.
- Digital Pioneer organisations will contribute to developing a sustainable model of digital inclusion, at scale, in the housing context.

Overall, seven projects were supported through the fund, totalling £344,160.



Funded
projects

7



Total amount
awarded

£344,160



Average amount
awarded

£49,165



Organisations Supported: Housing Fund

The Fund was open to organisations who had been delivering housing landlord services, supported housing services or specialist housing advice in Scotland. Organisations supported via the fund include four Housing Associations and three Registered Charities. The table below provides a project summary and awarded amounts per project.

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Aberdeen Foyer	Aberdeen Foyers Housing Digital Support project work with young people in Aberdeenshire at risk of experiencing homelessness. Funding allowed them to expand their current services to provide devices, connectivity and digital inclusion support to improve access to supports and services and to reduce isolation. The project supported 43 people, 5 staff and volunteers and trained 1 digital champion.	£54,867
Blackwood Homes and Care	Blackwood's Digital Buddies project worked with older people in supported living accommodation, in rural areas in Scotland. Funding allowed them to expand their current digital inclusion model across newly acquired supported living accommodation. The project supported 45 people and 30 staff and volunteers and trained 5 digital champions.	£55,000
Simon Community Scotland	Simon Community Scotland's Get Connected Housing project works with people experiencing homelessness. Funding allowed them to embed their existing digital inclusion approach within their Housing First & Housing Support Services within Edinburgh. The project provided devices, connectivity and one to one digital support to work with people transitioning from homelessness and temporary accommodation to sustained tenancies. The project supported 132 people, 19 staff and volunteers and trained 8 digital champions.	£54,982

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Prospect Community Housing Limited	Prospect Community Housing's Link Up project works with people with a disability or long term health condition in Wester Hailes. Funding allowed them to continue to work in partnership with WHALE arts to deliver digital drop-ins and one to one support to improve digital skills and confidence. The project supported 43 people 5 staff and volunteers and trained 1 digital champion.	£31,310
Shettleston Housing Association Limited	Shettleston Housing Association's Shettleston Does Digital project works with older adults who are not in work or are retired. Funding allowed them to expand their existing digital inclusion work in partnership with Fuse Youth Cafe to deliver digital drop-ins and digital skills training to improve digital confidence and increase access to services and support. The project supported 157 people, 10 staff and volunteers and trained 9 digital champions.	£54,980
Link Living	Link Living's Digital support service supports young people and people with moderate to severe mental health conditions across Edinburgh to improve digital skills. Funding allowed them to continue delivery of their Digital Support Service providing connectivity, devices and one to one support to improve digital skills and confidence. The project supported 72 people and 1 member of staff.	£50,268
Queens Cross Housing Association Limited	Queens Cross Housing Association's Digital Spaces in Community Places works with multiple digitally excluded groups across communities in Glasgow. Funding allowed them to continue delivering digital sessions including coding for young people, digital cafes for older people and structured course content across 4 community facilities in Glasgow. The project supported 149 people, 40 staff and volunteers and trained 15 digital champions.	£42,753
		£344,160



Impact Insights : Housing Fund

Overall projects reported that 126 staff and volunteers have supported over 800 people with digital inclusion activities. In total, 59 Digital Champions have been trained via funded projects and 328 devices and 217 connectivity packages provided to support tenants facing digital exclusion.

The Beneficiaries



853

Direct beneficiaries have
been supported



126

Staff and volunteers have
been supported



59

Digital Champions have
been trained

Devices Distributed



155

Phones



107

Laptops



66

Tablets



217

Connectivity

Project Insights

Funded projects have reported many successes throughout their delivery. These include enhancing support for young people with mental health conditions through digital tools, expanding access to essential online services, and boosting confidence and engagement. The projects have effectively combined digital learning with practical support, helping people navigate housing services and manage daily tasks more easily. By creating welcoming spaces and using existing staff as digital champions, the projects have reduced isolation, built stronger connections, and simplified access to resources that improve overall wellbeing.

Link Living

Theme: Mental health and digital access



“The impact of our project on supporting young people with various mental health conditions has been really positive. By providing devices and data, we've helped them stay connected and engage with a range of online services. This support has enabled them to access essential resources like housing bids, benefit accounts, online therapy, learning courses, studying opportunities, and job searches.

Many of the young people we support find in-person appointments challenging and stressful due to their mental health. Helping them navigate these processes online has significantly reduced this stress. The project has also made a big difference for our staff, who now better understand the critical need for devices and data, and the support required to help these young people build their skills and confidence.

By providing devices and data, we've also opened new ways for these young people to connect with their support networks through platforms like Teams, Skype, email, and video calls, which has led to increased engagement with our services.”



Simon Community

Theme: Improving and expanding services



“Our Let's Talk Digital drop-in, which runs one afternoon a week, supports frontline workers who are assisting people who need more help than they can provide due to their workload. Initially, this session was held once every two weeks, but due to its popularity, we are about to expand it to two afternoons per week. Participants have suggested additional resources we can include in our Get Connected app related to housing, and we are actively working on incorporating these. These updates will include links to EdIndex and move-in checklists, which can be used by both frontline workers and individuals.”

Prospect Community Housing

Theme: Increased digital access for housing and mental health

“Tenants have also started using more housing-related services. Two tenants wanted to use EdIndex to learn how to bid for a new home online, something they had struggled with prior to the project. Another tenant had always been nervous about registering for Home Swap but now has a profile there. Prospect has also noticed that, after receiving support from Link Up, several tenants are using our online portal, My Account, for the first time. This allows them to access services such as viewing their rent balance, paying rent, logging repairs, and updating their details.



Taking part in Link Up has also made a difference to the participants' sense of wellbeing and broader self-confidence. One tenant joined the project with multiple mental and physical health issues. She wanted activities that would keep her occupied in her home as she was not able to go out much, and learned how to create music lists and use YouTube. As her health improved, she accessed support services online. Link Up also helped her complete a passport application online so that she can visit family abroad for the first time in over a decade.”

Aberdeen Foyer

Theme: Upskilling staff and improving delivery



“The digital champion training with Mhor Collective was a big hit! Housing staff feedback was incredibly positive, with many saying they learned a lot about how to support people digitally. The training also kicked off some great conversations between our Housing and Digital Inclusion teams, helping us spot areas where we can improve.

Our Housing teams now have a clearer picture of how we handle device distribution, and the Digital Inclusion team has a better grasp of the digital tasks the Housing team helps tenants with and the resources they use. This exchange of knowledge has made our digital support smoother and more effective, making sure we meet our tenants’ needs and goals in a more consistent way across all our services.”

Queens Cross Housing Association

Theme: Scaling up

“Outside of our digital drop-ins, our Digital Café sessions have been a huge hit. By offering a healthy lunch alongside digital learning and dedicated social time, we’ve found an appealing way to encourage people to step out of their usual routines and join a class they might not have realized they needed. The success of this approach has highlighted the potential to expand these sessions to other areas we serve—Dundasvale, Woodside, and Queens Cross—where lunch clubs previously existed. This will be a quick and effective way to scale up the project and engage with many more digitally excluded tenants.”



Shettleston Housing Association

Theme: Partnerships and digital support

“Delivering the project in the Fuse Youth Café, a shared space with services like The Pantry, TSMAS (Tollcross and Shettleston Housing Money Advice Services), and STEP (Shettleston and Tollcross Energy Project), has been a huge positive. This "one-stop-shop" model offers wrap-around support, helping individuals break down barriers and become more self-reliant. Participants often come for digital skills but also end up accessing other resources, such as welfare advice, energy provider assistance, housing services, or health and wellbeing information.



This collaborative approach empowers people to take control of their lives, boosting confidence and reducing dependency. The partnership not only provides a full range of activities in a welcoming, non-intimidating space but also broadens the impact and outcomes for the people we support.”

Blackwood Housing

Theme: Sustaining digital



"The decision to use our existing staff from across the organisation has proven highly beneficial. Leveraging their knowledge of company culture, processes, and goals has created continuity and stability while supporting employee growth and customer satisfaction. These staff members, now digital champions, will carry this momentum forward throughout their time with us, ensuring the progress made over the past year is maintained across all departments."



The Challenges

Funded projects faced several challenges throughout delivery. Managing capacity was difficult, as many tenants preferred one-to-one sessions, which limited participation due to the extra time and resources required. Some tenants opted to use their own devices, which were not always suitable for learning and reduced the number of new devices distributed. Tracking impact data also posed challenges, especially in gathering feedback from those receiving devices across different services. Additionally, coordinating shared staff across departments and managing appointment no-shows added complexity. As the projects reach the end of their funding, sustainability remains a concern, given the challenging funding landscape and increased demand for support.

Prospect Housing

Theme: Staff capacity and device preference



“Managing capacity for the project has been challenging at times, as many tenants prefer one-to-one sessions over drop-ins. These individual sessions are more labour-intensive and require careful management of available slots each week, which has reduced the number of participants we can support. However, sustained engagement through one-to-one sessions has been higher, demonstrating the value of this approach.

Another challenge we’ve encountered is tenants’ preference for using their own devices for learning rather than accepting new ones from the project. This preference led to a few issues, as we had budgeted for distributing more devices and some of the older ones weren’t always ideal for learning. It seems that many tenants had an emotional attachment to devices gifted by family and friends and wanted to show that these gifts were being used. Additionally, many tenants already had Wi-Fi access, often arranged by relatives. Craig has had to learn how these older devices work, but we believe that this familiarity has made participants feel more comfortable as they start their learning journey.”



Aberdeen Foyer

Theme: Reporting on digital activities

“Gathering information for reporting purposes remains a challenge. Our current approach relies on assumptions and informal conversations, which isn’t the most efficient for capturing detailed data. While we’re starting to use Upshot and collaborate with Data Orchard to enhance our reporting tools, we still lack a streamlined process for tracking digital-specific support without increasing the workload.



Collecting impact data from clients who receive devices is particularly difficult, as detailed feedback is usually only available from those directly involved with digital inclusion services. We are actively exploring ways to improve the kit request process and ensure that reporting tools like Upshot are used effectively to capture all relevant information.”

Blackwood Housing

Theme: Navigating digital support across departments



"Managing shared staff across different departments was a bit tricky at first, especially with the need to adjust schedules for digital appointments based on tenant needs. Initially, we could only access staff one day a week, but as tenant demands changed, we often had to switch days. It took about three months to find a good rhythm and help other departments see how beneficial the digital project could be. There was lots of negotiating with different departments and line managers to make sure we had the right resources when needed. In the end, it led to better teamwork and a smoother process for everyone involved."



Shettleston Housing Association

Theme: Reporting on digital activities

“Occasionally, we face the issue of participants not showing up for their appointments. This can be particularly frustrating given our often busy waiting lists. To address this, we’ve developed a customer charter that outlines what participants can expect from us and what we expect from them. This helps set clear expectations and improve commitment to appointments.



Some participants also stay after their appointment, feeling comfortable with the team and sometimes oversharing personal information. To manage this, we’ve trained our digital champions to direct them to appropriate support and introduced an “unassisted corner” for practicing their skills after appointments. This helps keep main sessions focused while allowing participants to continue learning and access support or services to meet their needs.”

Simon Community Scotland

Theme: Long term sustainability



“We are concerned about sustainability. Although we are supporting people with connectivity until June 2025, this support will end in December 2024 when funding runs out along with our Digital Team's contracts. We are exploring how our frontline workers can continue offering digital support into 2025. However, the current funding landscape makes that increasingly challenging.”



Individual Impact

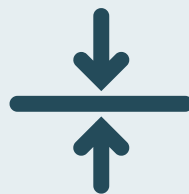
Awarded projects completed baseline and follow-up surveys to assess the programme's impact on individuals' mental health and wellbeing. The surveys measured confidence in digital skills including managing money online, accessing health services, and staying safe online. They also examined how these skills affected participants' independence, social connections, and health management. Comparing the results over time showed the programme's overall impact.

Overall, 422 impact surveys were completed by funded projects, including 360 baseline surveys and 62 follow-up surveys.



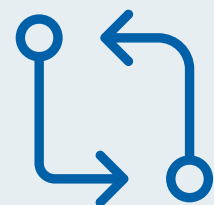
422

**Impact
Surveys**



360

**Baseline
Surveys**



61

**Follow - up
Surveys**

Organisations reported that the low number of follow-up surveys was due to several factors:



Many sessions were one-off, where individuals sought support for a specific issue and did not return.



Completing surveys during initial visits felt intimidating for some individuals, so the focus was to build relationships first. As a result, some surveys were not completed, especially for participants who attended for a short periods of time.



Projects faced challenges when scaling up across their organisations. Staff buy-in from different services took longer than anticipated. Training staff on new processes, including completing impact surveys, was time-consuming as they needed to learn how to access the funding portal and support individuals in completing the surveys.

Individual Impact

The impact survey data highlights gradual positive effects on participants' digital skills and personal wellbeing. Individuals reported improved digital skills and confidence, as well as improvements in their ability to connect with others online. They became more adept at finding important information, managing money, and accessing entertainment and learning resources. Additionally, participants gained confidence in using health services and staying safe online. On average, there was an improvement across all areas for people supported with digital inclusion activities.

The data below shows the results of impact surveys where both baseline and follow-up surveys were completed with the individuals supported.



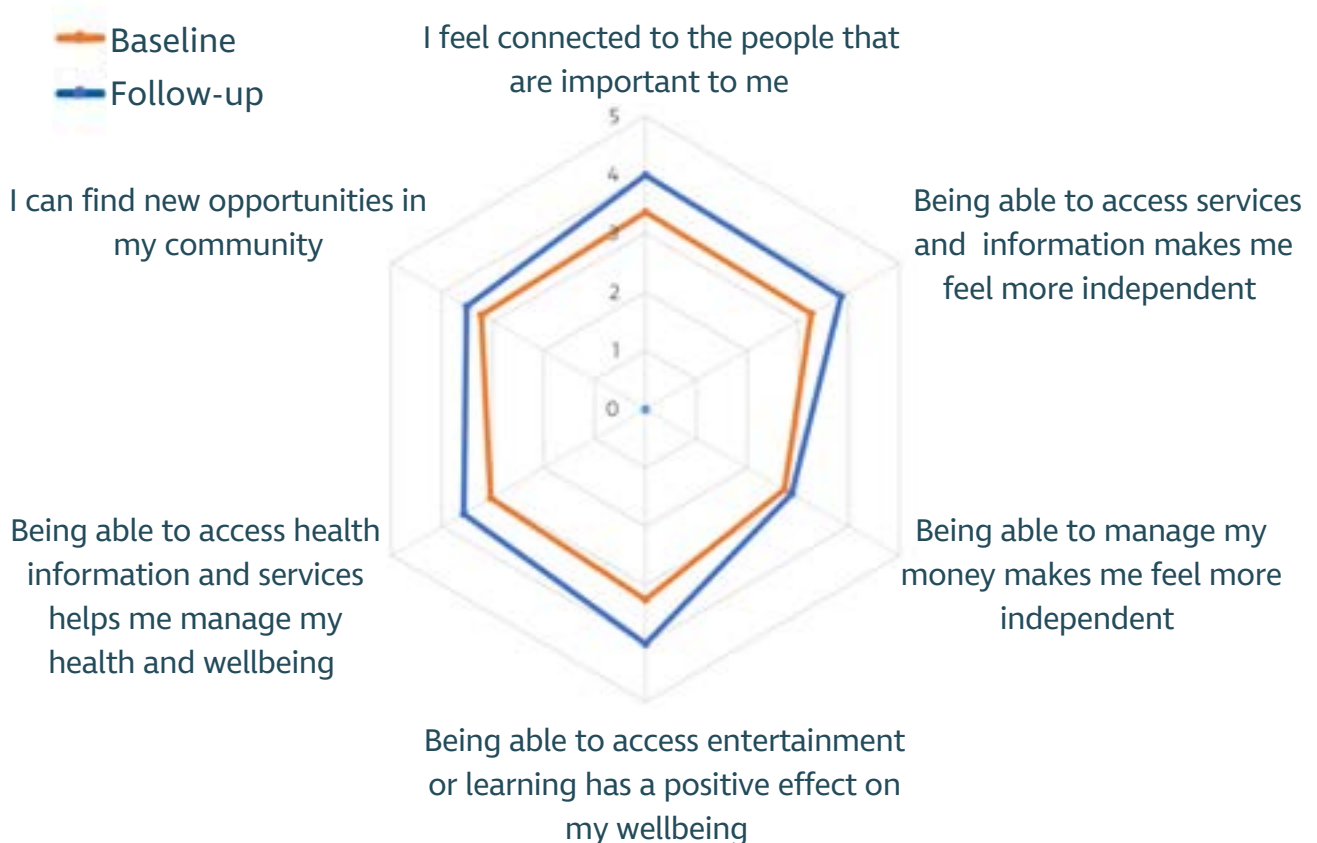
Queens Cross Housing Association

"We provide a wide range of support, from one-off sessions to one-on-one and classroom-style learning. Initially, we struggled to integrate the impact surveys into these. We don't typically register individuals for the Digital Drop-in sessions, and sometimes they attend just once, so they won't complete an impact survey. This made us think about how we measure the impact of one-off support too. We are adapting our reporting to accommodate this. We agreed it was better placed in our classes or digital support that goes beyond one session."

Individual Impact

On a personal level, participants reported feeling more connected to important people in their lives and experienced greater independence in accessing services and a slight improvement in managing finances. They also noted a positive impact on their wellbeing from engaging with entertainment and learning resources. Additionally, they felt better equipped to find new community opportunities, reflecting an overall improvement in social engagement and participation. Overall, the digital inclusion activities had a positive impact on participants' confidence, independence, and quality of life.

Impact



Impact Story: Prospect Housing Link Up



Anne has been a long-term tenant of Prospect Housing in Wester Hailes. For years, she was adamant that she had no interest in learning digital skills or going online. “That’s not for me,” she would say whenever anyone from Prospect suggested digital training or support. Despite regularly attending our Tenants’ Forum with our housing manager, Anne remained firm in her decision to stay offline.

In January, things began to shift. During a Tenants’ Forum session, Prospect’s IT Officer presented the newly expanded services available through the Prospect My Account online portal. She demonstrated the platform and how tenants could access a range of services through it. Although Anne watched the presentation, it was clear she couldn’t access these services herself, as she wasn’t online.

“I knew Anne wasn’t comfortable with digital things, but I thought if we introduced it gently, she might reconsider. Our Housing Manager had a chat over a cup of tea with Anne and although at first she was hesitant she eventually agreed to meet with Craig, our digital support officers from our partner organisation Whale Arts.”

Anne initially worried that her digital knowledge was too basic and might waste Craig’s time. However, with reassurance, she began weekly one-to-one sessions using her old laptop, learning basic digital skills, learning to send emails, use search engines, and about online safety.

Craig discovered that Anne is a keen gardener but had concerns about making online purchases and keeping her money safe. He introduced her to online shopping and safety, working with her to build her confidence. With support, she bought two garden ornaments online, which were much cheaper than she would normally pay.

Anne now attends regular digital sessions, and her online access is improving. She is registered and using her Prospect Housing Account online, exploring making online appointments, and viewing her bills. She is even planning to make an online purchase independently, showing how her confidence and skills have flourished.

“I never thought I’d be doing all these things online but with the right support, it’s not as scary as I thought.”

Conclusions



Established Digital Tools:

Many housing organisations already have online apps or services. Staff feel more confident using these tools rather than other resources. Upskilling staff is crucial to embedding broader digital inclusion support.



Staff Upskilling and Guidance:

Projects supported by the Mental Health Fund emphasised the need for upskilling staff, creating guidance, and developing Digital Champions. These steps are essential before promoting online tools and resources. There is a need to build knowledge and confidence in identifying safe and appropriate health-related resources.



Peer Networks and Support Groups:

Several Mental Health funded projects focused on creating peer networks and support groups to improve community connections. This, combined with digital inclusion support, was key to engaging people in conversations about digital related to health and wellbeing.



Trusted Staff Relationships

Familiar staff are important for engagement. People are more likely to engage with digital support and services when supported by a trusted staff member. Additionally, online safety was a concern for those being supported. Ensuring staff feel confident to have conversations about online safety and support people to feel safe online is key.



Person Centred Support:

One-on-one support, though resource-intensive, is the most effective way to help people use digital tools for their health and wellbeing.





Combined Support:

Digital support cannot work in isolation; pairing it with practical support that addresses the needs people identify themselves is much more effective. When projects combine digital learning with practical support, they see improved engagement and reduced feelings of isolation. Individuals are more likely to use digital services when they understand how these services meet their needs. By focusing on these needs, projects are able to support people to explore how digital tools can improve their health and wellbeing.



Adapting Impact Reporting:

Adapting existing impact and reporting approaches to capture digital inclusion support has been challenging and requires resource and investment in staff training.



Digital Champion Training:

Training Digital Champions has been essential for promoting digital inclusion across services. It helps staff understand what digital inclusion is and its benefits. This understanding paves the way for discussions about how digital inclusion fits into their roles and how it can be supported. Projects have reported that this training has sparked conversations across different services and improved internal referrals or requests for assistance from staff trying to support people digitally.



Leadership Buy-In and Scaling:

To effectively scale digital projects, strong leadership support and upskilling for staff across all services are essential. When digital inclusion is integrated into the organisation's entire range of services, it becomes more embedded and is not limited to a single digital team or department. With genuine commitment from senior leaders and the incorporation of digital inclusion into overall strategy and objectives, the organisation can achieve smoother implementation and greater success in expanding digital initiatives.





Grantmaking

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