



# Good Things Foundation COVID-19 Response Report

23 March - 16 June 2020

**Dr Alice Mathers, James Richardson,  
Stephanie Vincent, Joseph Chambers  
and Dr Emma Stone.**



**Good Things**  
Foundation

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	4
<b>Executive summary</b>	5
Impact	5
Challenge	6
Response	6
Learning	9
The future	9
<b>Change: How has COVID-19 and lockdown affected lives?</b>	12
Changes to employment	12
Disproportionate impacts	12
Digital exclusion	13
Poverty	14
Isolation	14
Welfare support	14
Families	14
Digital high street	15
Digital health	15
Adult learning	15
Community support at risk	15
<b>Response: How did collective action address crisis needs?</b>	17
Network partners: frontline response	17
Network partners: adapting and innovating	18
Our collective response	19
Accessible online learning for people to build digital skills	19
DevicesDotNow	19
Performance requirements lifted to provide financial security	20
COVID-19 Response & Resilience Fund	21
Coordinated support to increase network capacity	21
Resources for remote delivery by community partners	21
Volunteering and pro bono support from strategic and funding partners	22
Buddying with community partners	22

# Contents

continued

<b>Impact: What has our collective impact been?</b>	<b>24</b>
Impact on lives	24
Helping community partners to survive and meet crisis needs	24
Meeting needs for digital access, connectivity and support	25
Social connectedness and wellbeing	25
Support with money and benefits	26
Continuing learning	26
Giving purpose and focus	26
<b>Learnings: What will we take forward as an organisation?</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>The future: What comes next?</b>	<b>30</b>
Appendix 1	32
About this report	33
Acknowledgements	33

## Foreword



**Helen Milner,**  
**OBE, Group Chief**  
**Executive**

COVID-19 changed nothing and it changed everything. Millions of people are as excluded now as they were before and during the lockdown period, lacking the skills and affordable access they need to be part of our society. But COVID-19 changed everything because suddenly everyone else was aware that they could not live without the internet.

For people who are able to use technology, shifting everyday life online has been strange and unexpected, but not exactly a leap in the dark. For those millions who can't, the lockdown has meant being literally cut off from the world and essential services - leading to loneliness and social isolation.

The huge restrictions on everyday life due to COVID-19 forced many of our community partners to shut their doors almost overnight. They found themselves unable to offer digital skills training using a blend of face-to-face support and online learning - an approach that has improved the lives of more than three million people since 2010.

In the face of huge changes to normal life, it's been the great strength of the partnership approach underpinning our ambition - a 100% digitally included nation - that allowed us to respond decisively. Communication, collaboration, inclusion and mutual trust have all been vital in achieving good results quickly.

The understanding and empathy of our strategic partners, giving our community network much needed space and time to pivot their approach, has been essential in ensuring critical support has continued to be provided to vulnerable people over the last three months.

I have been constantly humbled and amazed by what our network of hyperlocal community partners has achieved in the face of such a challenge. This report tells an inspiring story of how we supported digital and social inclusion through the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic; through hard facts and powerful numbers. But also through the uplifting words of some wonderful people on the ground, working tirelessly to support the digitally excluded and the most vulnerable in our reshaped world.

The country is now in a transition phase, still in lockdown, but no longer in emergency mode. We're looking forward with cautious optimism, hopeful that the new found awareness among many politicians and journalists that millions of people in the UK are being left behind in our digital society will keep a spotlight on this unacceptable exclusion. We know that our community partners will keep doing everything they can to reach those in the greatest need.

We remain positive and ambitious as we continue to work towards digital inclusion for everyone.

## Chapter 1

# Executive summary

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has changed the world. Digital has instantly become a universal need, and those without it are also those who have been hardest hit. Lockdown has exposed the cost of digital exclusion more clearly than ever before, and this cost is set to continue as the UK economy faces its biggest ever challenge. Digital inclusion was already important: now it is fundamental.

This report tells the story of what has happened to people and community partners across our UK network as a result of COVID-19 and since the start of lockdown in the UK on 23 March 2020, and is based on data collected from a range of internal and external sources up until 16 June. It sets out how Good Things Foundation in the UK, our network and our funding partners have collaborated to provide an effective emergency response: putting those in need first and maintaining access to digital social inclusion during a period of unprecedented change.

## Impact

Good Things Foundation creates impact through partnership, working with both our network of community partners, and our national and international funding partners. Together, we have been able to make a substantial contribution at a time of national emergency, helping to mitigate some of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, and maintaining support for those at greatest risk.

- Almost 700 of our community partners have indicated that they remain operational and delivering digital social inclusion. The true number may be higher, but many community organisations are understandably still focusing hard on their emergency response. Alongside this, 124 organisations have joined our network since 1 April. 44% of our Learn My Way learners say they have received support from centres in our network during lockdown.<sup>1</sup>
- Over 37,000 additional learning episodes have been generated on Learn My Way and 12,000 on Make It Click, as a result of the launch of The Skills Toolkit by the UK Government. Both platforms have seen their reach increase, including to those already online but seeking to upskill and reskill in response to changes in their employment.
- Network partners have provided essential support to those facing the greatest risk. At least:
  - 29% have delivered food and medicines to people who are self-isolating
  - 64% have made emotional support calls
  - 71% have provided advice
  - 72% have delivered learning and technical support to help people get online and remain online, including helping them learn how to work remotely.<sup>2</sup>
- Through DevicesDotNow, almost 2,000 devices and data packages have been distributed to socially and medically vulnerable adults sheltering in their homes, together with telephone support to learn how to use their device and the internet safely.<sup>3</sup> Some of those supported have learned how to use the internet for the first time during lockdown. 174 of our community partners have been involved in distributing devices and providing support, with many more hoping to do so. We continue to seek further donations to respond to continuing demand.
- 79% of people receiving devices through DevicesDotNow report feeling more confident with their digital skills, and 90% say it has had a positive impact on their life in lockdown.
- 54% of our community partners distributing devices are located in the 20% most deprived areas (LSOAs) in the UK, and 51% are located in the 20% of areas with the largest populations of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) residents.

<sup>1</sup> Survey via Learn My Way Newsletter: 26-28 April 2020 (n=144)

<sup>2</sup> Good Things Foundation, Network Coronavirus Response Survey, responses after lockdown announcement on 23rd March 2020 (n=173)

<sup>3</sup> Almost 2,000 devices as of 16 June 2020.

- 29 of our network of community partners have been matched with BT volunteers.
- 125 community partners received grants from our Response & Resilience Fund, allowing them to continue operating and provide vital support to those in need.

Our infographic (on page 10) illustrates the impact of our early collective action and the scale of the social and economic difficulties we are responding to – including isolation, instability in employment, lack of personal internet access, and the UK’s accelerated reliance on digital.

## Challenge

The impact of COVID-19 has been stark: and has been felt disproportionately by groups who already face social and economic exclusion, including digital exclusion. It has moved many others into crisis situations for the first time.

- Deprivation has put people at greater risk. The mortality rate in the most deprived areas of England is more than double that in the least deprived areas.<sup>4</sup>
- Older people and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities have experienced devastating levels of loss; the risk of death involving the coronavirus (COVID-19) among some ethnic groups is significantly higher than that of those of White ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>
- An estimated 7.6 million UK workers are at risk of layoff, temporary furlough, and reductions in hours and pay. Almost half of these workers earn less than £10 per hour;<sup>6</sup> they are also more likely to lack all the essential digital skills for life and work.

## Response

Before COVID-19 and lockdown, economically and socially disadvantaged people with no or low digital confidence, motivation and skills relied on physically accessing support provided by our network of community partners. Digital and social support was provided face-to-face, through

individual and group sessions and drop-ins, and peer support.<sup>7</sup> The network is diverse, including community hubs, libraries, small charities, advice centres, social enterprises, homelessness services, and housing associations.

When lockdown hit, community partners faced a huge challenge: how to maintain this support for those in greatest need? Their response was inspiring and humbling: finding ways to pivot their support, in some cases moving to the local delivery of food and medicines; changing how they work, providing support remotely using telephone and video calling; and continuing to reach out across communities through local networks; and doing all this in the face of loss of income, and loss of staff and volunteers, including to COVID-19 itself.

Many community partners were unable to continue operating as funding and volunteers fell away, but a substantial number continued to carry out their vital work. They have been on the front line of the response to COVID-19.

4 ONS, Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: deaths occurring between 1 March and 17 April 2020. Available online at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvingcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand17april?hootPostID=f8f83cc51cba7b7e20edce0e1993cadf>

5 ONS, Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales: 2 March 2020 to 10 April 2020. Available online at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march-2020to10april2020>

6 McKinsey & Company, 'COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places' (data sources include ONS, Business Impact of COVID-19 Survey: 6-19 April 2020, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, McKinsey/McKinsey Global Institute analysis). Available online at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/COVID-19-in-the-united-kingdom-assessing-jobs-at-risk-and-the-impact-on-people-and-places>

7 <https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org>

## Starting Point

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Starting Point have supported their community in a variety of ways. They have:

- Contacted all of their existing learners by phone to check in on them and match those who need assistance to digital champions.
- Issued devices to their local learners through our DevicesDotNow campaign.
- Worked closely with Stockport Homes who have contacted every resident over 70 to understand how they can support people who have basic digital skills and need more specific help at this time, such as ordering prescriptions.
- Created a contact number for referrals from the Stockport Council Emergency COVID-19 line with regard to digital support.
- Recruited 84 new community champions to pick up prescriptions, act as phone buddies and collect shopping for neighbours.
- Created a Facebook group with over 800 members who support each other with random acts of kindness, photo competitions and activity suggestions.
- Created an emergency food distribution hub in conjunction with local supermarkets to feed between 20-25 households per week.
- They have even created a 'doorstep depot' where three designated homes on three housing estates receive a delivery of fair share foods every Thursday - neighbours

With generous support from our funding partners, Good Things Foundation set up two emergency response workstreams, focusing on maintaining the sustainability of the network and making our tools and resources available to the widest possible number of people, reflecting the universal need for digital participation and the impact of lockdown on accessing face-to-face

support. Within these workstreams we took a number of actions; we:

- **Lifted performance requirements for all funded projects for a 12 week period.** This vital step was agreed at the start of lockdown with the support and understanding of our funding partners, maintaining funding to community partners but creating the space they needed to pivot and respond to the crisis.
- **Worked closely with the UK Government to help furloughed workers and others gain essential digital skills.** Our learning platforms, Learn My Way and Make It Click, have been included as key resources on The Skills Toolkit,<sup>8</sup> launched by the UK Government for furloughed workers.
- **Mobilised DevicesDotNow<sup>9</sup> in partnership with FutureDotNow, getting data enabled devices to people who need them most.** There are 1.9 million households in the UK without internet access.<sup>10</sup> The pandemic has exposed the impact and extent of digital and data poverty. Through DevicesDotNow, donations and grants from a range of organisations, including our funding partners, have enabled devices with connectivity to be distributed by our network to those in greatest need, along with digital skills support.<sup>11</sup>
- **Created and coordinated pro bono and volunteering opportunities in response to offers of support from our funding partners.** Good Things Foundation, DevicesDotNow and community partners have benefited greatly from the skills, ingenuity and commitment of those involved.
- **Opened up access to free online content for digital skills, and created new resources where a need presented.** We took the decision to remove the mandatory requirement to register on our free digital skills platform, Learn My Way, further increasing its accessibility. We developed COVID-19 relevant content for both Learn My Way and our curated digital skills platform Make It Click. We also co-designed a range of delivery guides and curated content that could help community organisations provide remote support for digital social inclusion.

8 <https://theskillstoolkit.campaign.gov.uk>

9 <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/devicesdotnow>

10 ONS, Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain: 2019

11 <https://futuredotnow.uk>

- **Set up our emergency COVID-19 Response & Resilience Fund.** Using £375,000 of our charitable reserves, we rapidly created an assessment and award process to make small unrestricted grants to community partners delivering digital social inclusion and facing severe financial pressure. This helped mitigate their risk of closure and support continuing delivery.

## Learning

The world is continuing to change fast in response to COVID-19, and people, organisations and countries are learning as they go. Like many others, we have learned a great deal from the experience of lockdown. What we have learned and seen across our network, and in the response to our offer from individuals, is a demonstration of adaptability and the importance of trusted relationships.

As a learning organisation, we will use the insight and data we have collected, and our knowledge of what went right and what did not go so well, to continue to shape our response. We will keep learning. Working with our community partners and funding partners, we will continue to find the best ways to maintain impact in a changed and changing world.

- Community partners on the front line have responded to the COVID-19 crisis with speed, compassion and intelligence.
- Lockdown has been a spur to adaptation and innovation. Community partners have found ways to have impact through remote means that have maintained support to the most vulnerable. Remote delivery of digital skills and inclusion has been difficult (especially when supporting people with no or very low skills). While it has required time, energy and patience, many partners plan to continue some form of remote delivery in future.
- Good Things Foundation has focused on listening to network community partners, responding and advocating for their needs and the needs of those they support. Through real time data and gathering stories from partners, we have been able to respond more effectively, including to new public and policy interest in digital exclusion.
- Digital and data poverty has surfaced as a clear and acute need for many of the most vulnerable in society. The deep knowledge

that network partners have of their communities meant we were able to trust their judgment to identify those in greatest need, distribute devices rapidly and safely, and support them to be used.

- ‘Virtual volunteering’ has emerged as a potentially powerful new model for building capacity in communities, as it has for organisations elsewhere in the UK and overseas.
- The instant change in the importance of digital skills has driven new audiences to use our online learning platforms, particularly those who have been made redundant and those who have been furloughed. This is set to continue as the employment and economic landscape continues to change. ‘Reskilling’ and ‘upskilling’ will become a substantial new area of need, alongside new challenges including a greater need for resilience in an increasingly digital (and remote) workplace.

## The future

The impacts of COVID-19 on our society and economy have already been dramatic and will be felt for years to come. The insight we have gained from what is a short but significant period of time will be used to continue to shape our response as a charity, especially as we prepare for what now seems a certain and deep economic recession.

Digital inclusion was already important: now it is fundamental. Many UK adults who were offline have become internet users. But there remain many for whom social exclusion, educational disadvantage and poverty remain barriers to digital inclusion.

Lack of personal access to the internet, and data poverty, have been exposed even more starkly as damaging issues we need to address. Meanwhile, the everyday use of digital and demand for digital skills has increased among the general population beyond levels seen before the pandemic. We expect continued acceleration of digital transformation and the shift to online services.

As a charity, we will be adapting our strategy to ensure we:

- Continue to focus on those at most risk of digital and social exclusion;
- Spotlight new priorities, such as addressing increased risk of online harms and the need of



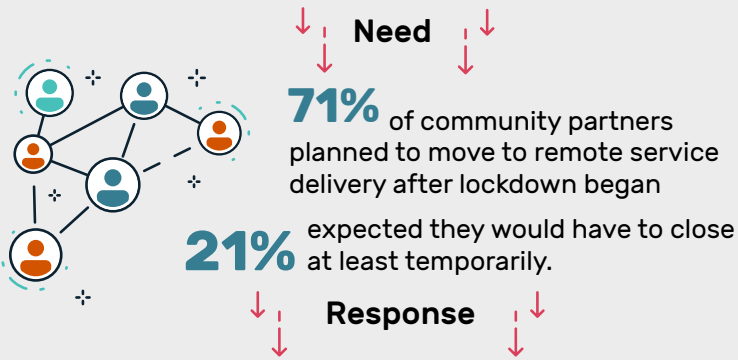
personal digital access for people who cannot afford it;

- Support people to build new skills, such as confidence and resilience to cope and progress in a more (or entirely) digital workplace;
- Target new or expanded audiences, including those who have lost their jobs, livelihoods or educational prospects, and whose lack of essential digital skills will present a barrier;
- Encourage and enable additional delivery approaches, including varied models of remote and socially distanced engagement and learning;
- Develop our model of partnership and collaboration to maintain our impact, with our existing funding partners and by building new partnerships with organisations and others whose commitment to digital inclusion as a social and economic priority has grown.

With digital now a universal need, digital inclusion is undergoing a seismic shift to meet the scale of need now revealed, and to work within the constraints and opportunities of the 'new normal'.

This is a challenge we are ready to meet as we pursue our charitable mission with increased strength and determination. Working with all our partners, we can continue to help everyone benefit from a digital world. Digital inclusion should be everywhere, and for everyone. Everyone should have the chance to be *Digitally Able, Equal and Safe* so they can be *Happier, Healthier and Better Off*.

## Community support



The Response & Resilience Fund has awarded unrestricted grants totalling

**£375,000** to **125** organisations



### Impact

Community partners have provided essential support to those facing the greatest risk. At least:

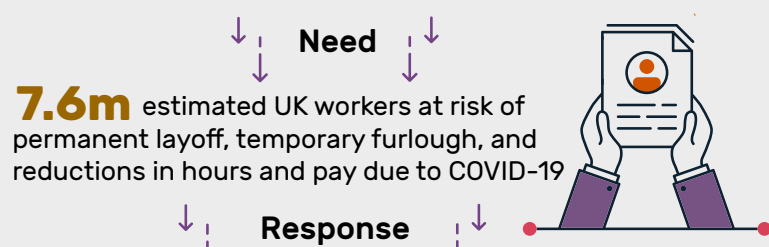
**29%** have delivered food and medicines to people who are self-isolating

**64%** have made emotional support call

**71%** have provided advice



## Digital skills for work



### Impact

**18%** of furloughed workers have improved their online skills to make them more employable



**15%** of those employed have learnt new IT skills/technologies to adapt to new ways of working during COVID-19

Pre COVID-19 **15-20%** were independent learners on Learn My Way. Rising to

**50%** during lockdown.



# How COVID-19 changed the digital landscape

Good Things Foundation

## Lack of personal access

**Need**

**3.8m** people in the UK are almost completely offline



**1.9m** households do not have access to the internet

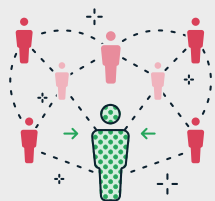
**Response**



**2,000+** devices distributed through **120** community partners to those vulnerable in society. Pledged donations so far will ensure a total of **8,400** devices will reach those who need them most

**Impact**

**Over half** of centres that have been offered devices to distribute through the initiative are located in the **20%** most deprived areas (LSOAs) in the UK



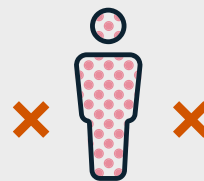
## Social impacts of lockdown

**Need**

**85%** said they had only left home for work, exercise, shopping, or a medical need between 3-13 April



**Response**

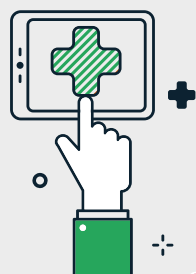


**93%** said that they had avoided face-to-face contact with older or vulnerable adults

**Impact**

**79%** of learners receiving devices through the DevicesDotNow initiative agree they feel more confident with their digital skills as a result of using their device

**90%** say the device has had a positive impact on their life





## Chapter 2

# Change: How has COVID-19 and lockdown affected lives?

COVID-19 has already had a damaging impact on long-standing societal and economic issues such as poverty and inequality. Being digitally excluded has exposed these issues more clearly, and exacerbated their impact.

The stories we've heard from our community partners, about the impact on the people they support, are difficult to hear. For some people, digital technology has enabled them to remain connected to services, support networks and the wider world. For those lacking internet access, and the skills and confidence to find online resources that can help them, digital exclusion has further reinforced the problems created by lockdown.

We have heard from our community partners about isolated older people going hungry because they can't order food deliveries; parents of school-age children, unable to access home schooling resources or free school meal vouchers; people with chronic health problems, who can't find health advice on how to stay safe; people recovering from addictions, tipped back into relapse; people who are insecurely housed worried about future homelessness; and jobseekers stressed and struggling to claim and update Universal Credit accounts.

### Changes to employment

COVID-19 is estimated to have put 7.6 million UK workers at risk of permanent layoff, temporary furlough, and reductions in hours and pay; almost half of these workers earn less than £10 per hour.<sup>1</sup> Hourly pay in the most at-risk sectors is around £10.60 per hour, £4 lower than in the most stable sectors.<sup>2</sup> Part-time workers and lone parents (24% and 13% of the workforce respectively) are more vulnerable to unemployment and unfavourable job changes, with 35% of part-time workers' and 16% of lone parents' jobs at risk.

The scale of the impact on employment is clear from the 2.5 million new applications for Universal Credit made between the beginning of lockdown and the end of May. Individual Universal Credit claims reached a peak of 146,290 on 27 March: twelve times higher than the daily rate in the first half of March.<sup>3</sup>

Widespread disruption to the labour market meant that, in the three weeks following the introduction of lockdown, seven million households - a quarter of all those in the UK - lost either a substantial part or all of their earned income.<sup>4</sup>

### Disproportionate impacts

For those already facing social and economic disadvantage, financial hardship has often been accompanied by personal crises precipitated by isolation and loss of access to support services. The UK's largest domestic abuse charity, Refuge, reported a 700% increase in calls to its helpline in one day; a separate helpline for perpetrators seeking help to change their behaviour received 25% more calls after the start of lockdown.<sup>5</sup> Anxiety and disruption have put people battling drug alcohol and drug addiction at risk of relapse.<sup>6</sup>

The mortality rate in the most deprived areas of England is more than double that in the least deprived areas.<sup>7</sup> For those living in overcrowded, temporary and inadequate housing, with communal facilities and no practical way to maintain social distancing, the dangers have been acute. In the first month of lockdown, the death rate in homeless hostels in London was 25 times greater than among the general population.<sup>8,9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McKinsey & Company, 'COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places' (data sources include ONS, Business Impact of COVID-19 Survey: 6-19 April 2020, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, McKinsey/McKinsey Global Institute analysis). <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/COVID-19-in-the-united-kingdom-assessing-jobs-at-risk-and-the-impact-on-people-and-places>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Weighted average median pay.

<sup>3</sup> ONS, 'Coronavirus and the latest indicators for the UK economy and society: 4 June 2020'. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronavirusandtheukconomyandsocietyfasterindicators/4june2020#universal-credit>

<sup>4</sup> Standard Life Foundation, 'Coronavirus Financial Impact Tracker', April 2020. [https://www.standardlifefoundation.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/57432/COVID-19-Tracker-April-2020-FINAL.pdf](https://www.standardlifefoundation.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/57432/COVID-19-Tracker-April-2020-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/12/domestic-violence-surges-seven-hundred-per-cent-uk-coronavirus>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.healtheuropa.eu/COVID-19-lockdown-could-lead-to-a-surge-of-addiction-relapses/100166>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvingcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand17april?hootPostID=f8f83cc51c7b7e20edce0e1993cadf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/insight/the-housing-pandemic-four-graphs-showing-the-link-between-COVID-19-deaths-and-the-housing-crisis-66562>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/19/fears-of-catastrophic-coronavirus-outbreak-among-homeless-in-hostels>

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups have been devastated by COVID-19 with impacts compounded by pre-existing inequalities in housing, health and employment. The risk of death involving COVID-19 among some ethnic groups is significantly higher than that of those of White ethnicity.<sup>10</sup> This has been acutely felt in communities supported by our network; 10% of network partners (469 partners) are located in areas (LSOAs) where over 50% of the population is BAME.<sup>11</sup>

*“We are seeing more confusion, fear and mental health breakdown amongst our refugee and mostly BAME beneficiaries due to COVID-19 restrictions. For 90% of those supported, English is not their first language, and COVID-19 protocols have at times not been fully understood. Mental health anguish has been persistent, especially amongst users who suffer from existing mental health problems”* – Community Partner

COVID-19 and lockdown has led to a spike in mental health problems. One third of calls to the Samaritans during lockdown have related to isolation, depression and anxiety caused or made worse by COVID-19.<sup>12</sup> In mid-April, the ONS reported that the wellbeing of 53% of all adults had been adversely affected by COVID-19.<sup>13</sup>

Those in low paid or insecure jobs, and people with financial difficulties predating COVID-19, have been hard hit. With no or little safety-net, reduced income has meant being unable to pay bills or buy essentials.<sup>14</sup> People with long-term health problems and disabilities and renters have also been disproportionately affected.

*“All our services support disabled people and those with long-term health conditions, the majority of whom are vulnerable, and many of whom have seen a deterioration in their financial situation as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing as a result of this crisis.”* – Community Partner

## Digital exclusion

Internet access has not been a cure-all for the problems created by COVID-19, but it has helped, as evidenced by significant increases in online activity. A survey for Lloyds Consumer Digital Index 2020 found 78% of people agree that the pandemic has escalated the need for digital skills; 80% agree that using technology has been a vital support to them.<sup>15</sup> Time spent using the internet for work has increased by 67%, video calling by 50%, and school work by 35%.<sup>16,17</sup>

Lockdown has shown more clearly than ever that ‘digital exclusion’ means more than being offline, or having absolutely no digital skills. Lack of personal access to suitable devices and data poverty have come to the fore.

People who are digitally excluded through poverty may rely on using devices and Wi-Fi in shared spaces – no longer available. Even when people have personal access to the internet, they might be using devices which are old or unsuitable for particular tasks, or may not be able to afford the data they need, even for essential tasks.<sup>18</sup> People who lack digital skills may not be confident going online without someone there to help them if things go wrong.

Among those recommended to self-isolate are older people aged over 70. This accounts for 13% of the UK population, or over 8.6 million people.<sup>19</sup> 77% of this group has low digital engagement.<sup>20</sup> For the 10% of the UK population aged over 75, it is estimated that over half (53%) do not use the internet at all, through lack of access, skills, or confidence.<sup>21</sup> Those advised to self-isolate from friends and relatives are therefore likely to be doing so without the ability to buy groceries online, video call relatives or do other tasks the online population has been doing more of since lockdown started.

10 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandand-dwales/2march2020to10april2020>

11 ONS Census Data: 2011; Online Centre Network data and analysis as at 6th May 2020

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/17/poorer-middle-aged-men-most-at-risk-from-suicide-in-pandemic-say-samaritans>

13 ONS, ‘Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 16 April 2020’. Available online at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/16april2020>

14 Ibid.

15 Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2020 (p.28): [https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/banking\\_with\\_us/whats-happening/lb-consumer-digital-index-2020-report.pdf](https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/banking_with_us/whats-happening/lb-consumer-digital-index-2020-report.pdf)

16 YouGov Broadband Survey, 18th–19th May. Results available online at: <https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/r/53/Broadband%20survey.pdf>

17 Opinion survey of internet use during lockdown, 9th–14th April. Results available online at: <https://www.ispreview.co.uk/index.php/2020/05/COVID-19-lockdown-homes-going-online-for-41-hours-a-week.html#respond>

18 APLE Collective for Joseph Rowntree Foundation (6 April 2020), ‘Coronavirus response must include digital access to connect us all’: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-response-must-include-digital-access-connect-us-all>

19 ONS mid-year population estimates: 2018

20 Lloyds Bank, UK Consumer Digital Index: 2020. [https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/banking\\_with\\_us/whats-happening/lb-consumer-digital-index-2020-report.pdf](https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/banking_with_us/whats-happening/lb-consumer-digital-index-2020-report.pdf)

21 ONS Internet Users, UK: 2019. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2019>

## Poverty

79% of non-retired people supported by our network have a household income below £13,000; the cost of personal devices and sufficient connectivity is a cost many cannot afford. Many have reported how lockdown has made the financial situation of those they support even more precarious. Incomes have decreased, while financial commitments like rent have become insupportable. Money worries are contributing to poor mental health and anxiety. Lockdown has denied people access to community services which could help them to get by.

*"Louise moved away from domestic violence. She secured work, but her trauma created issues that meant she could not maintain her job. She is now in rent arrears and has had no money for two months; she is likely to be evicted without help. The effect on her mental health issues means she also only shops when dark and she is also receiving food parcels."* - Groundwork Yorkshire, Leeds

*"This young family is facing destitution. The breadwinner is in and out of zero-hour, short-term employment; they last worked about a year ago. There is depression and anxiety in the family from dealing with poverty over a long period of time. They have no spare finances or internet access, and rely on community internet access, but this has been stopped due to COVID-19."* - Cowdenbeath Community Learning & Development, Fife.

## Isolation

In early April, 38% of adults reported they had self-isolated in the last seven days, 85% that they had only left home for work, exercise, shopping, or a medical need, and 93% that they had avoided contact with older or vulnerable adults. By late May, 88% of adults were still avoiding contact with older or vulnerable people; 63% had only left the house for essential purposes.<sup>22</sup>

For people without personal internet access and no friends or family nearby, community organisations were an incredibly important source of social contact. With lockdown preventing them from accessing these spaces, many became completely isolated. This was acute for those already in distress through bereavement, fleeing conflict, and escaping domestic violence.

*"Paul has been visiting our centre for many years and is long-term unemployed with underlying health conditions and a history of alcohol addiction. He lives alone and his limited social contact means he is struggling, since he is no longer able to meet people at our centre."* - Meadow Well Connected, North Shields

*"Ian is long-term unemployed with low skill levels and poor self-esteem. He has limited IT skills and is struggling with being unable to come to the centre to meet people. He lives in private rented accommodation and has a low income so is unable to afford devices or data. He is struggling with being on his own and we're concerned he may not be managing his own health well."* - Riverside Learning and Education Centre, Liverpool.

## Welfare support

Making or managing a Universal Credit credit application online has been crucial to many. A poll run by Good Things Foundation at a Homeless Link webinar found that over half (55%) of its 47 attendees included accessing Universal Credit as one of the top three reasons a service user would go online - the same proportion as contacting friends and family.

The surge in Universal Credit applications put considerable pressure on helplines at a time when face-to-face support from Job Centre Plus, Citizens Advice and others was unavailable. People faced long waits by phone; and even queues to log into the website.<sup>23</sup> Google searches for "Universal Credit" and similar terms reached a peak in late March, more than double that of the previous week, and have yet to return to comparable levels. This is supported by our Learn My Way data, where we saw 903 course starts for Universal Credit in March and April.

## Families

Our community partners have reported families self-isolating in apartments with no outdoor space; in one case a family of ten, including four children, living in a two-bedroom flat. Keeping children entertained and on track with school work has been difficult for families with internet access, but impossible without it.

*"The family are struggling with home tutoring for their four children, and are not able to do the work"*

<sup>22</sup> ONS, Coronavirus and the latest indicators for the UK economy and society: 4 June 2020

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/26/universal-credit-claims-almost-impossible-as-more-than-500000-apply>

*the school is setting, due to lack of IT equipment. The oldest two children are getting very stressed at not being able to do their work, and one of the younger children is also showing signs of distress” - Groundwork Yorkshire*

This is of national concern as reported by the National Foundation for Education Research, who highlighted lack of digital access in the family home as a significant challenge for pupils, and that teachers ‘are most concerned about low engagement from pupils with limited access to IT and/or those who lack space to study at home’.<sup>24</sup>

## Digital high street

Online shopping, particularly groceries, has surged in lockdown. Supermarkets have even asked customers able to shop in person to refrain from shopping online, to prioritise those self-isolating and shielding. The proportion of online spending in April 2020 reached a record 31%, compared to 19% in April 2019.<sup>25</sup>

## Digital health

The ability to access online health advice has become especially important during the pandemic – not only to stay safe and up-to-date about COVID-19 but to manage other health concerns.<sup>26</sup> The letter sent by the NHS to those at higher risk of COVID-19 complications contained multiple links to online information and support to cope with self-isolation, in most cases with no equivalent offline alternative. It is estimated that between 175,000 and 500,000 people who received this letter do not have access to the internet.

## Adult learning

Disruption to adult learning for adults with few or no qualifications, and requiring support with basic and life skills, has been another casualty of COVID-19. For some, this may be the first time they’ve learned since school, and their first positive experience of learning. As well as digital skills, some network partners support literacy, numeracy, English language learning, vocational qualifications.

*“This time has shown us how vulnerable our students’ learning is, as they do not have IT resources in the family environment” - Community Partner*

*“We have 598 students in the middle of studying for English, Maths, ESOL and Employability skills qualifications.... A pause in their learning could lead to them not attaining a qualification, losing confidence and momentum and not achieving their employment or learning goals” - Community Partner*

## Community support at risk

Alongside impacts on individuals, our community partners themselves have been severely affected. The financial situation of smaller, independent organisations in our network has been so severe that, for some, permanent closure remains a very real threat. A report on the impact of COVID-19 on BAME voluntary and community sector organisations found that micro and small BAME organisations have been most affected and could cease to operate without support.<sup>27</sup> Threats to community services place additional stress upon the people who rely on them.

*“They keep asking me, ‘what’s going to happen after this?’ ‘are you still going to be there for us?’ It’s so hard’ - Community Partner*

Without community support in place many more lives would and will yet be drastically affected. The next section therefore describes both the response to crisis and community needs by our network partners, and how we and our funding partners have collaborated to support them.

<sup>24</sup> National Foundation for Education Research, Schools Responses to COVID-19: Pupil Engagement in Remote Learning. Available online at [https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4073/schools\\_responses\\_to\\_covid\\_19\\_pupil\\_engagement\\_in\\_remote\\_learning.pdf](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4073/schools_responses_to_covid_19_pupil_engagement_in_remote_learning.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> ONS, Retail sales, Great Britain: April 2020

<sup>26</sup> Four in ten feel too concerned about being a burden to seek help from their GP at present: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2020/04/help-us-help-you-nhs-urges-public-to-get-care-when-they-need-it>

<sup>27</sup> Murray K (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on the BAME community and voluntary sector. Ubele Initiative. <https://www.ubele.org/covid19-supporting-bame-communities>





## Chapter 3

# Response: How did collective action address crisis needs?

In the days running up to lockdown many of our community partners reported that local people in their communities were scared and confused. They came into community centres to get advice on what to do and what would happen. They did this because of their trust in our community partners and the ability to walk through their door at any time with any need. Lockdown restrictions removed a critical part of the network's support model: being able to be there, providing face-to-face support, internet access and WiFi.

Below, we describe the response and adaptability of network partners, and how they, we and our funding partners have responded together.

### Network partners: frontline response

Frontline social support providers, such as many in our network, are located in the heart of disadvantaged communities and have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response. They're well-known, locally connected and responsive to changing needs. There is no standard type. They include community hubs, libraries, advice centres, homelessness and addiction services, social housing providers and those meeting needs of specific demographic groups. Many offer informal, open-ended help with a range of issues including personal finances, employment, health, and integration - all adversely affected by COVID-19.

During lockdown, our community partners found creative solutions with limited resources and supported by local volunteers they have been providing:

- **Crisis support:** delivering food parcels, hot meals, hygiene supplies, medicine and care for children.
- **Social contact:** using remote channels (phone and digital) to check on socially isolated and lonely people, and distributing devices.
- **Support to learn:** remote delivery of learning support with digital skills, English language learning, and digital skills for

remote working.

As the physical spaces provided by community partners were sometimes the only places where people accessed the internet or got support to use it, many network partners have distributed or loaned whatever devices they had available to them (such as old laptops or tablets), despite risks of damage or non-return.

Those network partners who had not already had to close as a result of lockdown restrictions, moved quickly to respond. They drew on their local knowledge to scenario plan around the potential impact and support needs in their community. They provided reassurance and information that could be trusted. They did advocacy work to help people get support.

#### CPO Media

CPO Media in Grimsby have converted to an entirely remote operation while still supporting the community they are very proud to be part of. They make daily calls to their customers to monitor their health and wellbeing, as well as offering additional support including food deliveries, collecting prescriptions and online learning.

#### Impetro CIC

Impetro CIC are based in Ravenhead and are doing all they can to support vulnerable people, even when presented with a number of challenges. The largest of these is the lack of digital skills in their community, which makes it very difficult to assist them with online tasks such as applying for Universal Credit or Government grants. The team is working hard and is committed to the cause. For example, they helped seven self-employed people in the space of five days to complete all the required paperwork for payments, which they have all now received. This is no easy feat given the complexities of online support and the sensitive nature of the required information.

In a survey of our network partners at the end of March, 21% responded that they had closed entirely; 71% were continuing to support their community remotely.<sup>1</sup> A fraction kept their space open, limiting access. 61% saw a decline in demand (likely as they had closed their physical space), while 23.2% noted increased demand, especially from more vulnerable people.

Community partners who remained open, even while their physical spaces closed, faced the question of how to evolve their face-to-face support to a remote delivery model, while struggling to keep their own organisations afloat.

### Network partners: adapting and innovating

The resilience and innovation shown by network partners has been incredible, and it is a testament to many people's hard work and ingenuity. Remote delivery instantly became a necessity, providing a catalyst to innovate.

#### Disability Resource Centre

Disability Resource Centre in Birmingham have cancelled all face-to-face support, but they continue to deliver digital support via telephone and video calls. They have created a PDF of helpful tips for their learners which covers recognising fraud, using Skype and ordering shopping online so that they are better equipped to stay safe and connected. They have been helping people in their community with setting up online banking and setting up bill payment reminders through apps and calendars so that they have better control of their finances.

#### Being Woman

Being Woman in Alnwick have hit the ground running with their remote offer. They have trained digital champions on running webinars on various subjects, including how to navigate Learn My Way; these are now being offered to their clients. They are also recording instructive videos which can be shared via WhatsApp. They have had a flurry of new queries regarding employment and benefits, and they are working with Durham University to help develop an accredited course.

#### Age UK Gateshead

Age UK Gateshead have shifted to online delivery, and continue to support their learners with digital skills. They reach around 3,000 - 4,000 people per week, offering respite and hot meals. They are now helping with Zoom GP calls and a friendship group scheme, where they have groups of up to 10 people connecting on a weekly basis. Alongside this, they are also bringing digital training in-house and are upskilling their staff and volunteers via Zoom so that even more people will be able to support digital inclusion in their community.

#### Learn for Life Enterprise

Learn for Life put their resources online and offered support over the phone. Without being able to attend a physical community space, their ESOL learners were struggling to continue learning. However, Learn for Life - and similar community partners - found that people who attended their centre and sessions before lockdown have felt able to set up virtual peer support networks to motivate each other, share advice, and offer each other help around technical issues. This is a testament to the welcoming, trusted and safe environments which so many community partners provide.

The aim of community partners like these, who have successfully adapted their delivery models to online or multichannel, is to make remote support part of their ongoing offer:

*"We see real opportunities for delivering an increased number of services remotely. The carers accessing virtual/online groups are really benefiting and have the added relief of not having to worry about respite care for their loved one, while still playing an active role in the group."* - Signpost Stockport For Carers

*"COVID-19 has made us develop an online delivery model ... the pandemic has made us face that challenge head on and it is something we want to continue. We realise that it will make many of our courses more accessible in future, especially for those on shift patterns and those who are more isolated and for whom face to face provision is more challenging."* - Aspire Sussex

<sup>1</sup> Good Things Foundation, Network Coronavirus Response Survey, responses after lockdown announcement on 23rd March 2020 (n=173)

## Our collective response

Good Things Foundation has worked with frontline organisations in its network for more than a decade, supporting and encouraging them to help get people online, and providing funding through a wide range of social programmes. Since lockdown, we have listened to network partners and responded through changing and extending our support. This has included running Zoom sessions and additional training webinars, changing our map of online centres, and setting up a funding database and a web page to share resources.<sup>2</sup> Through asking partners about what challenges they were experiencing, we identified several priority needs which required an immediate, coordinated and collective approach.

- How to reach and support new groups of people with limited digital skills, who have become more vulnerable as a result of this crisis: people home working, furloughed, recently made unemployed or at risk of redundancy.
- How to address the lack of personal digital access and data poverty, especially among those self-isolating and shielding - where lack of access placed significant limits on who could be supported and how.
- How to alleviate financial and delivery pressures on community partners at risk of closure who were struggling to survive, and therefore struggling to provide support to people in need.

### Accessible online learning for people to build digital skills

As the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 started to be felt more heavily, we saw changes in use of our online learning platforms: Learn My Way and Make It Click. These platforms had been designed for use by adult learners (especially those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds), with support provided face-to-face in a community setting. To remove any potential barriers to people using our learning platforms, we removed all registration requirements.

In late April, the UK Government's Department

for Education launched a new online platform, [The Skills Toolkit](#). This includes links to Learn My Way and Make it Click. The Skills Toolkit is aimed at furloughed workers who might want to use the opportunity to upskill in digital and numeracy. Following this, we have seen considerable growth in interest from a new demographic of learners.

Since lockdown, boosted by The Skills Toolkit, over 106,000 additional learning episodes<sup>3</sup> have been generated on Learn My Way; 37,000 of these came directly from The Skills Toolkit. An additional 20,000 resources have been used on the Make It Click directory; 12,000 of these came directly from The Skills Toolkit. We are now seeing increased learning activity among people who are more likely to be working age, employed and not looking for work, and to have some digital skills at a basic to intermediate level. We have also seen a large increase in the proportion of female learners (as high as 70% of learners<sup>4</sup>). Women are disproportionately affected by the pandemic in terms of employment sector and type, and childcare arrangements.<sup>5</sup>

### DevicesDotNow

The efforts of network partners to distribute as many of their own devices as possible to people who would otherwise be left unconnected fell far short of demand. COVID-19 increased the urgency of addressing the lack of internet access experienced by 1.9 million households across the UK (whether through lack of device or connectivity).

Through DevicesDotNow - a UK initiative led by FutureDotNow - we have worked with network partners to distribute digital devices, connectivity and digital skills support to those most in need. Applications to DevicesDotNow have stripped bare the myth that the UK is a nation where personal digital access is no longer an issue.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/resources/coronavirus-support-for-you-and-your-communit>

<sup>3</sup> Course start events/clicks out to external resources recorded using Google Analytics; this is not equivalent to individual unique users.

<sup>4</sup> Good Things Foundation, Learn My Way Learner Survey: April 2020 responses

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/personalandeconomicwellbeingintheuk/may2020#disproportionately-impacted-groups>

<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/parents-struggling-and-women-keyworkers-are-anxious>

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/covid19/2020/05/12/women-have-been-largely-ignored-in-the-COVID-19-response-this-must-change/>

<https://www.ft.com/content/316c2353-fe00-4cd8-91de-dd4f2413a938>

### Lack of internet access and data poverty

*"The learner is a mum of two little children. She is seeking asylum in the country and is struggling to make ends meet financially. She also attends college and is trying her best to move forward in life. She asked us for a device to continue with her learning when this crisis started, but we were unable to meet her need then as we had a limited number of laptops. This led her into depression as she was unsure whether she could continue with her learning. A device will enable her to continue with her goals and keep her kids entertained during the lockdown, which will help her cope with anxiety too." - DevicesDotNow application*

*"Eric is a vulnerable adult and has learning difficulties. He lives alone and has no relatives nearby and few friends. He comes into our centre weekly for support with job searching and advice with his bills, and payments. He is worried that he won't be able to job search without the internet and may have his benefits stopped - we have tried to reassure him but he is still anxious." - DevicesDotNow application*

*"Estelle is a victim of domestic violence and is fleeing abuse. She is struggling because she does not have internet access at home to link up with us and other services that support her. She also suffers from anxiety and is finding the lockdown situation difficult because she can't follow her usual routines including the social support she gets from attending our centre." - DevicesDotNow application*

DevicesDotNow has been a cross-sector collaboration, piloted and implemented at pace, where national and local strengths combined to make a difference in people's lives. It would not have been possible without our network partners. In parallel, we have launched a Crowdfunder project<sup>6</sup> to help vulnerable adults stay connected: 50% for purchasing devices, dongles, SIM cards and mobile hotspots, and 50% for community partners distributing devices and providing support.

We have also worked collaboratively, sharing resources and learning, with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations to support Connecting Scotland, with Wales Co-operative Centre to

support Digital Communities Wales, and Go ON Northern Ireland.

### Performance requirements lifted to provide financial security

As a result of COVID-19, many referrals to network community partners from external agencies have temporarily or indefinitely stopped, resulting in the cessation of other income streams (outside of those provided through Good Things Foundation). For some, this may be linked to funding models which are 'payment by results' or where income depends on referrals from external agencies. For others, this may be a loss of revenue from hiring physical spaces to other community groups.

*"As we cannot provide services in the current lockdown, we don't get paid. This impact on our cash flow has placed us under insurmountable financial strain, as we do not now have any income or savings to service our normal operational costs, which includes business rates, premises rent, utilities bills, telephone lines, our security alarm, insurance, regular payments for our photocopier, software licences, and broadband."*

At the start of lockdown, with support from all our funding partners, we were able to continue financially supporting the network - making payments as scheduled and lifting performance requirements for funded community partners for a 12 week period. This has been a lifeline for community partners through a time of financial stress and uncertainty.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/help-the-vulnerable-stay-connected>. By 27 May 2020, the Crowdfunder campaign had raised £3,000.

### Lincs Training

*"We are based in rural Lincolnshire and our "normal" activity consists of face to face outreach sessions in local community venues. The outbreak of Covid19 brought these sessions to a stop and concerns of how we would meet funding targets, which is our main source of income. We have been inundated with people asking for help with a variety of topics from device issues, connectivity problems to well-being, help around getting shopping, prescriptions, connecting with friends and in general being a trusted point of contact. We have helped all of these people, but unfortunately none of them would have generated any targets towards funding and therefore we would have had a major cash flow issue if we had not received the news from Good Things Foundation that funding requirements had been lifted. This decision allowed us to survive the last few months and more importantly to be able to help the local residents with digital and non-digital support. The continued support from Good Things Foundation has been invaluable to us and we would like to express our thanks to all within the organisation. We work with other funding bodies but none of them have given the same level of support and some have imposed stricter restrictions making it impossible to meet their targets. We are now looking forward to the future and new ways of working to meet the needs of the community." - Rich, Lincs Training*

Even with this support, sustainability has been severely impacted. Organisations we work with face the same problems as businesses. Overheads need to be paid (rent, utilities, equipment hire, insurance, etc). Furloughing staff may reduce expenses, but it also reduces the number of people available to deal with problems. This, coinciding with the end of the financial year, has hit some organisations especially hard.

### COVID-19 Response & Resilience Fund

Some of our network partners are social enterprises or Community Interest Companies, which may restrict their access to available sources of COVID-19 relief and grants. Many partners have lost revenue from rent, room hire

and community cafés (important unrestricted income which covers costs which might not be covered by other funding).

In response to increased financial pressure on community partners, we set up a Response and Resilience Fund, using £375k of our charitable reserves. Network partners could apply for a one-time unrestricted grant of up to £3,000. They could use this to cover some of the financial costs they were finding it hard to meet, while also allowing them to continue supporting their communities, and help them prepare for when they are allowed to open up their physical spaces.

*"Funding for this financial year from some of our stakeholders has been withheld with no guarantee of release. As the flow of customers has abruptly dried up, we have experienced sudden loss of income and profit. We are in dire need of funding to ensure we will be able to stand after this crisis, so any financial help will help us to rebuild our future."*

Demand from the network to the Response and Resilience Fund has been high; 239 community partners applied. Small unrestricted grants have now been made to 125 organisations. Across the community support sector, even with such initiatives, there is still an unmet need for greater financial security.<sup>7</sup>

### Coordinated support to increase network capacity

With support from our funding partners, we have helped to increase network capacity in new ways: helping community partners to deliver remotely instead of face to face; exploring new models of 'virtual volunteering' to match pro bono support and corporate volunteers with network partners; and setting up a buddying scheme involving Good Things staff.

### Resources for remote delivery by community partners

Early on, we created a webpage on our network website to support partners to access information and deliver remotely.<sup>8</sup> We curated guidance and good practice from trusted external sources (such as the Money and Pension Service, Accenture, JobCentrePlus, Digital Unite, AbilityNet, TEC Cymru, Wales Co-op and Open University). We developed new resources, including three How

<sup>7</sup> Murray K (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on the BAME community and voluntary sector. Ubele Initiative. <https://www.ubele.org/covid19-supporting-bame-communities>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/resources/coronavirus-support-for-you-and-your-community> See also this guide for digital mentoring produced by Good Things Foundation Australia: <https://www.beconnectednetwork.org.au/training-resources/digital-mentoring>

To Guides which we co-designed with network partners:

1. [Helpful guides: how to set up a virtual coffee morning](#)
2. [Helpful guides: how to set up an online cooking club](#)
3. [Helpful guides: how to offer virtual employability advice](#)

### **Volunteering and pro bono support from our funding partners**

Many of our funding partners generously offered pro bono and volunteering support to our network of community partners, Good Things Foundation and DevicesDotNow. This includes Accenture, BT and EE, Google, JP Morgan, Lloyds Banking Group and Mastercard. To date, 29 network partners have been matched with BT and EE volunteers, as well as one Good Things staff volunteer.

A virtual volunteering pilot was set up to meet demand from our community partners, who were keen to learn about relevant tools, and find the best ways to communicate virtually with the people they supported. Alongside providing useful information on digital communication, BT and EE staff have shared their expertise with community partners.

*"We had an hour's support session on how to use Microsoft teams, and then our volunteer provided us with good advice and some really useful ideas for templates to manage our projects better. The support was really helpful and we appreciate it. Thank you."* - Network community partner

Lloyds Digital Champions, already paired with community partners in Manchester prior to lockdown, have continued to provide support virtually and have drawn in wider support to complement this.

Virtual volunteering appears to be a helpful response to the coronavirus crisis. It has been used by other organisations in the UK and internationally, but it is a new way of working for us, and we are still learning. It has the potential to be developed as a powerful model for providing employee supported volunteering.

### **Buddying with community partners**

In late March, we launched a buddying scheme.<sup>9</sup> This has involved a wide range of staff at Good Things Foundation, and offered an extra source of direct support to community partners - bringing benefits to centres and to staff. Already 34 community partners have been buddied and we plan to continue this scheme.

*"I wanted to share the good news with you first that our [Charitable Trust] application is successful ... some points that you mentioned to me while we met were very useful for me to say in the assessment process"* - Buddied centre who successfully secured a £30k grant

<sup>9</sup> We launched our Buddying scheme through different social media channels, including Twitter: [https://twitter.com/Online\\_Centres/status/1243139220182568961](https://twitter.com/Online_Centres/status/1243139220182568961)



## Chapter 4

# Impact: What has our collective impact been?

Good Things Foundation creates impact through partnership, working with both our network of community partners, and our national and international funding partners. Together, we have been able to make a substantial contribution at a time of national emergency, helping to mitigate some of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, and maintaining support for those at greatest risk.

The collective response by Good Things Foundation, our network of community partners and our funding partners has resulted in impact at individual, community and national levels. Many of our projects in response to COVID-19 are still ongoing, and we continue to adapt to changing needs, but we are delighted that - together - we have achieved many great things during lockdown.

### Impact on lives

- Almost 700 of our network partners have indicated that they remain operational and delivering digital social inclusion. The true number may be higher, but many community organisations are understandably still focusing hard on their emergency response. Alongside this, 124 organisations have joined our network since 1 April. 44% of our Learn My Way learners say they have received support from centres in our network during lockdown.<sup>1</sup>
- Network partners have provided essential support to those facing the greatest risk. At least:
  - 29% have delivered food and medicines to people who are self-isolating
  - 64% have made emotional support calls
  - 71% have provided advice
  - 72% have delivered learning and technical support to help people get online and remain online, including helping them learn how to work remotely.<sup>2</sup>

### Helping community partners to survive and meet crisis needs

Staff at various community organisations have noted that the decision to lift funding requirements has made a significant difference to their ability to support people in crisis in their communities, with the first payment being a financial lifeline for many.<sup>3</sup>

*“Relaxing funding reporting requirements during the lockdown helped our centre very much. In the first place, changing the working requirement from office base to home base is very difficult especially in connecting learners. Even if we try to contact learners most of our clients were and still some are in a state of fear and confusion. So, our focus was on emotional support followed by support with their benefit claim (helping with universal credit) and for micro businesses supporting them claiming government business support. On top of this most clients do not have devices and/or internet access making remote delivery training difficult. Even for those with devices and internet access we support them remotely setting up their devices (such as installing printers and software) and helping them with practical activities such as supporting them to browse the internet/watching videos and how to keep navigating safely. Most of these supports couldn't be captured for reporting purposes. Therefore, relaxing the funding reporting requirement helped us to focus on this and other vital supports to the community.”* – Bekele, Hackney Development Cooperative

Through our Response and Resilience Fund, 125 community organisations have received a small unrestricted grant. This small but valuable

<sup>1</sup> Survey via Learn My Way Newsletter: 26-28 April 2020 (n=144)

<sup>2</sup> Good Things Foundation, Network Coronavirus Response Survey, responses after lockdown announcement on 23rd March 2020 (n=173)

<sup>3</sup> Further case studies on the impact of lifting funding requirements on Network sustainability may be found online at <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/news-and-blogs/blog/staying-resilient-being-woman-0>



financial contribution came at the right time, giving partners a 'breathing space'. It has helped network partners expand their operations; explore new ways of delivering; hire or rehire staff; and attract volunteers. The fund's flexibility meant community partners could make best use of the resources to suit their situation.

*"Without this money we would have ended our delivery, which would have had a knock on effect with other programmes and contracts. Partners would have lost confidence in us and the business that supports over 1,200 learners per year (for the past 10 years) would have no option but to close"* - Community Partner

### Meeting needs for digital access, connectivity and support

Over the last few months, the internet connectivity and data packages provided by DevicesDotNow and supported by many of funding partners has been a lifeline for thousands of individuals and their families.

Survey feedback and discussions with community partners and some beneficiaries reveals several ways this has made a difference, including: social connectedness and wellbeing, support with money and benefits, helping adults and families to continue learning, and giving people purpose and focus.<sup>4</sup>

- Almost 2,000 devices with connectivity and data packages have been distributed to socially and medically vulnerable adults in response to data poverty. 174 of our network partners are currently involved in distributing these devices, with more ready to do so. All recipients are socially vulnerable due to low income and lack of internet access at home, as well as being either over 70, disabled, or without a support network nearby. 25% of recipients met one of these criteria as well as being medically vulnerable, having an underlying health condition requiring them to 'shield'.
- 79% of people receiving devices feel more confident with their digital skills; and 90% of people receiving devices say it has had a positive impact on their life.
- 54% of our network community partners who have been offered devices to distribute are located in the 20% most deprived areas in the UK. 51% of partners are located in the 20% of areas with the largest populations of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) residents.

### Social connectedness and wellbeing

Community partners who have distributed devices and support to vulnerable people through DevicesDotNow reported positive impacts almost immediately. Many relate to social connection: people have been able to get in touch with friends and family; to use social media and to make new friends:

*"Rachel suffers from depression and has been isolating. Through receiving the device however, she has been able to build up her digital skills, learn how to shop online and stay in touch with her mum, which have helped her mental well being"*

Being able to access online support from professionals, from peers, or simply being able to talk with friends and family, has helped to reduce issues of stress, anxiety and depression. This has been vital for people who rely on support services which then moved online during lockdown.

<sup>4</sup> Further case studies on the impact of DevicesDotNow may be found online at <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/news-and-blogs/blog/devices-dot-now-who-do-we-choose>

### **Support with money and benefits**

Lockdown meant closures of many physical spaces where people turned for help with applying for benefits online, managing Universal Credit claims, starting online banking or looking for jobs. People without internet access or devices have struggled to do these essential activities. Through DevicesDotNow, more people in poverty have been able to carry out these activities, reducing stresses and preventing problems from worsening. We will build on this in the months ahead through our new collaboration to support digital and financial inclusion for people on low or reduced incomes.

*“every time I speak with Ray, he’s over the moon that he has managed by himself to sort out his online banking and can now order his own medication”*

*“Through remote training, Sajid is now able to see their Universal Credit claim and apply for jobs on their own”*

### **Continuing learning**

Three quarters of DevicesDotNow beneficiaries are people who were previously in contact with our network - who were left with limited personal means to carry on learning once lockdown started. Being personally connected has helped them continue learning and eased pressure around other challenges.

*“After receiving a tablet from Good Things Foundation Aisha could not express how happy she is. The device has allowed her to get enrolled on a biology course... The tablet is a godsend, not just socially but also academically”*

With many schools partially shut, learning has moved online. Households without suitable devices and internet connectivity have been locked out of online learning - impacting children’s educational and social needs, causing stress for parents, and putting pressure on family relationships. DevicesDotNow has helped parents support their children’s learning, and meet their own needs.

*“Having a device has helped Amy’s children to keep up with their online school work ... and allowed her to keep up with her own learning to enable her to gain an employment qualification.”*

*“Myra has been able to help her children with their school work and find information on how*

*best she can cope during the current situation as a single mum”*

### **Giving purpose and focus**

Lockdown has meant being at home for large portions of the day; those shielding unable to leave at all. Boredom and restlessness are intensified for those without a digital device.

*“Lucy was feeling very lonely, bored and low before she was given her device. She is not always the most communicative person, but she loves drawing, painting and writing. The tablet has allowed her to do all these things while keeping a little more in touch with people”*

Receiving devices and connectivity has also opened up opportunities for distraction, mental stimulation and online support for people who face complex health challenges including substance misuse and addiction, and some who were at risk of suicide.



## Chapter 5

### Learnings: What will we take forward as an organisation?

As an organisation, we made a swift and successful transition to remote working. We have worked collaboratively, adapting, experimenting, learning, and listening to people and community partners. We will continue to do this.

- **Staying focused on supporting the most vulnerable people in our communities:** This focus has driven Good Things Foundation and our partners throughout, and we've achieved real impact as a result.
- **Using data and partner insight to drive our response:** Pulling from multiple sources, we have created weekly reports. Business intelligence and the visualisation, analysis and use of data has become more critical to our organisational decision making.
- **Using our voices to inform and influence change:** We have advocated for change and promoted the amazing work of community partners.<sup>1</sup> We have worked with partners to promote DevicesDotNow, The Skills Toolkit, and reach out to digitally excluded audiences. We have shared our knowledge with Select Committees and other policy-influencing bodies.
- **Prioritising network sustainability:** We have made unprecedented numbers of calls and emails to existing partners, onboarding 124 new network partners, working at pace to provide both funds, support and information.
- **Trusted relationships and partnerships:** While requirements have been lifted, we have worked even more closely with community partners who are still operating. This will support the evolution of programme delivery.
- **Redesigning how we engage and collaborate:** We have experimented with social media channels, online tools and facilitating virtual co-design workshops with community partners, learners, employers and others.
- **Digital systems and learning tools to meet demand and user needs:** We adapted our digital systems to deal with increased demand and made more resources available online. We are re-evaluating our systems and learning products in the light of COVID-19 to support new users and needs.
- **Respecting and valuing our staff:** We ensured a smooth transition so the whole team could work well remotely, and feel supported and connected to support staff wellbeing. We remain financially viable and ready to adapt.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for examples of national and international media coverage.



## Chapter 6

### The future: What comes next?

Since lockdown in the UK began, and Good Things Foundation activated its emergency response, we have learned a great deal about digital social inclusion in the new context of COVID-19.

**Digital inclusion was already important: now it is fundamental.** COVID-19 has made digital a universal need, and digital inclusion a social and moral imperative. But those who face both digital exclusion and forms of social exclusion, from unemployment and poverty to disability and homelessness, now risk falling even further behind. It is vital that digital inclusion is part of all policies, programmes and social interventions.

**The problem hasn't gone away.** Some people who were offline have become internet users during lockdown. But a substantial number of people remain locked out of the digital world, and social exclusion, low skills and poverty compound their digital exclusion. We need to redouble our efforts to help them.

**Providing access to the internet, and tackling data poverty, are critical elements of digital social inclusion.** DevicesDotNow has been a successful emergency response, reducing social isolation and meeting some of the needs exposed by temporary closure of public spaces where people can safely access the internet; but a sustained response is needed. The crisis has also raised fundamental questions about what children and adults of all ages should have, as a minimum, to enable digital participation.

**The role of community organisations and community champions in digital social inclusion has never been more important.** Good Things Foundation's community partners have responded heroically to the crisis, some focusing on providing emergency services including food and medicine delivery, others finding new ways to reach and support those who are digitally and socially excluded, particularly through remote delivery. They have done all this in the face of unprecedented challenges. The full extent of the impact of the pandemic on the community sector is not yet known; but the passion, resilience and creativity of our community partners has

shone through. They have provided a lifeline for those in greatest need, and shown once again that community action is critical to digital social inclusion.

**Demand for digital skills has increased amongst the wider population.** The economic impact of lockdown on employment and future prospects, particularly amongst furloughed workers, means that more people now see the need to improve their digital skills. Alongside this, employers continue to shift towards digital ways of working which will impact on the skills and capabilities required for the workplace. Data shows there is a substantial gap in functional workplace digital skills in the UK workforce, and demand for these skills will continue to grow. Employers will need to play their part in reskilling the workforce, and self-supported learning will play an important role for those already online; but community organisations will play a primary role in supporting those who are offline and disengaged from learning.

#### What next for Good Things Foundation and our partners?

At the start of lockdown, we agreed with all our partners to maintain grant payments to community partners for funded digital social inclusion projects, and lift performance requirements for a 12 week period. This was a crucial decision. It created the conditions for community partners to adapt to the reality of lockdown while maintaining their commitment to project objectives; and it enabled us to gather real time insight from community partners as the implications of lockdown played out. We remain hugely grateful to all our partners for their understanding in taking this important step.

From here, we will work with our partners to agree how project delivery should 'pivot' to reflect the new world we have entered. During the next quarter of this year (July-September), we will continue to gather data and insight about the challenges and opportunities reported by our community partners and the people they support. This will drive conversations with each of our

partners about project scope, design and delivery.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our society and economy have already been dramatic and will be felt for years to come. The insight we have gained from this short but significant period of time will continue to shape our response as a charity, as we prepare for what now seems a certain and deep economic recession.

We will be adapting our strategy to ensure we:

- Continue to focus on those at greatest risk of digital and social exclusion;
- Reflect new priorities, such as digital access and data poverty, and the increased risk of online harm;
- Support people to build the confidence, capability and resilience they will need for future job roles;
- Target new or expanded audiences, including those who have lost their jobs, livelihoods or educational prospects, and lack the essential digital skills they will need to progress;
- Encourage and enable new models of delivery, including remote and socially distanced engagement and learning;
- Develop our model of partnership and collaboration to continue to deliver impact, both by working with our existing funding partners and by building new partnerships with organisations who share our vision and recognise the urgency of our mission.

There will be challenges ahead. Social restrictions will continue to impact on delivery, and the expected deep recession will put pressure on funding. The ability of community partners to deliver at the levels we have seen in the past will undoubtedly be affected. But we are determined to tackle these challenges head-on. We will work openly and collaboratively with our partners, respond to the evidence we collect, and seize opportunities to work in new ways.

Our mission as a charity is more relevant now than it has ever been, and we will continue to fight for a world where everyone can benefit from digital.

## Appendix 1

Good Things Foundation external engagement activity during lockdown advocating for digital skills and inclusion

16 April - [Oral evidence to the Social Integration APPG](#)

17 April - [Written evidence to the Social Integration APPG](#)

22 April - [Written evidence to the PICTFOR APPG](#)

28 April - [Digital Agenda](#)

28 April - [BBC News Online](#)

28 April - [BBC News Channel interview](#)

28 April - [The Guardian](#)

4 May - [Daily Telegraph](#)

5 May - [Euronews](#)

5 May - [Reuters](#)

6 May - [DevicesDotNow open letter, Julie Elliott MP to Oliver Dowden CBE MP](#)

7 May - [Written evidence to the Loneliness APPG](#)

15 May - [Oral evidence to DCMS Select Committee on Impact of COVID-19](#)

19 May - [PICTFOR Virtual Roundtable](#)

1 June - [Radio5Live - Wake Up to Money programme](#)

1 June - [Reasons to be Cheerful Podcast](#)

6 June - [Evening Standard](#)

7 June - [CNN.com](#)

11 June - [Oral evidence to the APPG on Digital Skills](#)



## About this report

The findings presented here draw upon external referenced data sources and our insight and analysis gathered from the start of the COVID-19 lockdown on 23 March 2020. The research was carried out by Good Things Foundation's Research and Data Insight Teams, Dr Al Mathers, James Richardson, Steph Vincent, Joseph Chambers, Jane Mackey, Dr Liam Hardy and Dr Emma Stone. Any errors are our own.

## Acknowledgements

Good Things Foundation would like to thank our network of incredible community partners for their work in ensuring digital and social equality for all people and communities during the most difficult times and in future.

We are also grateful to our funding partners for their continued support and commitment to furthering digital social inclusion across the UK and internationally:

- Accenture
- BT Group
- Openreach
- The Carnegie UK Trust
- The Department for Education
- The Department for Work and Pensions
- Google.org
- HM Courts & Tribunals Service
- HM Revenue & Customs
- Lloyds Banking Group
- JP Morgan Chase Foundation
- The Office for National Statistics
- Wales Co-operative Centre
- Welsh Government

For more information about this report, please contact Good Things Foundation at [research@goodthingsfoundation.org](mailto:research@goodthingsfoundation.org)

For more information, contact us on:

e: [research@goodthingsfoundation.org](mailto:research@goodthingsfoundation.org)

t: 0114 349 1619

Photographs taken by Danielle Maibaum

Published June 2020

