

End Digital Poverty Day 2024 – a report by the Business Board Network of member activity

Digital poverty is the inability to interact with the online world fully, when, where and how an individual needs to. 1 in 7 adults and 1 in 5 children in the UK are digitally excluded. This divide exacerbates socio-economic disparities, severely limiting access to education, employment and social interaction.

Following its success in 2023, the [Digital Poverty Alliance](#) is once again using September 12th to mark **End Digital Poverty Day 2024**. This is supported by a range of stakeholders including the Business Board Network. As members of the National Delivery Committee, the Business Board Network are very happy to showcase just some of the important work that a selection of our members are undertaking to address digital poverty either on their own or with their stakeholders.

Lancashire Skills Hub

They are overseeing a Digital Freedoms project in Lancashire which built on the work that they did during the pandemic. Digital Freedoms 50+ was focused on providing older residents with digital devices, data and digital skills to help them cope with the accelerated switch to digital during the various lockdowns. This was aligned with increasing concerns about health and growth in economic inactivity, so enabling Lancashire residents to engage with health services online. It was a joint project with Lancashire County Council and they worked with Selnet, who are the social enterprise network in Lancashire.

Digital Freedoms 18+ is the second iteration of the project and was primarily funded through covid recovery funds from LCC.

The programme targeted digitally excluded residents, distributing 920 devices with skills support to improve resident's confidence in accessing online services, particularly health related. The primary aim being to improve health and wellbeing, reduce social isolation and improve employability.

Lancashire Libraries added an additional grant of £10k to purchase MiFi devices and gave access to the Good Things Foundation Data Bank plus offered skills support alongside the **Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise** (VCFSE) organisations involved in the project.

A total of 920 digitally excluded residents were supported through the project including:

- 480 – socially isolated
- 270 – no local support network
- 874 – financially excluded
- 208 – poor physical health
- 277 – poor mental/emotional health and well-being

Feedback from beneficiaries included: "*Learning how to use new technology and look for information has helped me feel digitally aware and more independent. I find online banking easier too*" and "*This has made a massive difference. I can now order online medication and I have access to a trauma group support and therapy. I have been using mind-focus and sleep apps too*"

Lancashire Skills Hub has also facilitated a company donating devices to adult learners at the Lancashire Adult Learning earlier this year.

Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership

They have produced their Leicester and Leicestershire digital inclusion [report](#) 2024, updating a previous version. With an increasing growth in the use of basic digital skills in the workplace, along with accessing services, learning and using technology in the workplace, the research aimed to develop a fuller understanding of the challenges related to digital exclusion in their area.

Some of the findings include:

- Challenges such as access, skills and connectivity have improved a little since Covid.
- There still remains some issues with digital poverty impacting all ages but the problems impact different age groups in different ways.
- The most disadvantaged are still at greatest risk of digital poverty.
- Programmes/training to address upskilling need to be better/differently promoted to expand awareness.

On the back of this, a fuller area mapping of digital skills helping to assess area gaps is being put together.

Norfolk County Council

Digital poverty is a high priority topic across their work and a common conversation amongst their community, employer and provider networks.

Their current standout [project](#) is **Tech Skills for Life** which supports residents living in West Norfolk, North Norfolk and Great Yarmouth. They have a team of Community Tech Coaches that help people to access laptops, tablets and internet data plus give advice about affordable broadband. They also teach people the skills that will make technology easier to use and build confidence around using the internet safely.

They work with the NHS and a range of volunteer groups and local community organisations to make sure that everyone can use technology and access essential online services if they want to.

An initial pilot was completed in West Norfolk and it is now expanding.

OxLEP

They have been [running](#) a 'No Limits' programme with a £1.7m suite of targeted interventions benefiting Oxfordshire businesses and communities. This has been funded by the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) by Oxfordshire County Council.

It provides up to 30 hours of 1-1 employability support, digital training, travel bursaries, Wi-Fi dongles, devices and data top ups across Oxfordshire.

Through the programme over 530 people were supported with digital devices in Oxfordshire to reduce the impact of digital poverty!

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Their Digital Inclusion West Yorkshire programme [focuses](#) on building the capacity of community organisations to deliver digital skills and access to those who are digitally excluded in local settings, across the West Yorkshire region. They also [help](#) organisations to find and apply for funding and resources to increase digital inclusion.

They are working in partnership with the five West Yorkshire local authorities and have recruited a Digital Inclusion Officer in each of those areas. The DIO's are currently working with several community organisations including charities, health organisations and community centres.

York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority

They are currently running a digital inclusion project under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, as a joint initiative between the People & Skills and Communities themes.

They are providing a digital support package for community, voluntary and public sector organisations to enable them to create digital hubs across North Yorkshire. The package of support includes capital funding for equipment and infrastructure plus revenue funding for the development of the hubs including staffing costs and volunteer recruitment. There is also a training package to upskill volunteers and employees as digital champions. This includes digital essentials training through a licence, wrap around training (train the trainer, mental health first aid) and an ongoing resource library.

They have recruited a co-ordinator for the project to work with organisations to develop their hubs and they are based in a VCSE organisation and have been part funded by some money from the ICB.

The aim is really to build capacity in the community to be able to reduce social isolation and promote digital inclusion. They want the hubs to be sustainable and continue after the funding has ended and they hope that the development fund and training will support this.

Summary

As you can determine, our members are very passionate about addressing digital poverty. We would be very happy to make introductions to the DPA or to the individual members outlined above. Equally, we are confident that there will be further work taking place in other areas if further evidence and spotlighting is required.