Simon Community Scotland

Get Digital Scotland

Get Connected

I feel part of society

The personal impact of digital inclusion for people with experience of homelessness

With support from

Scottish Government gov.scot

Good Things Foundation

An overview of Get Digital Scotland and our Get Connected 500 Project

Introduction

Get Digital is Simon Community Scotland's digital inclusion programme. We nurture and resource the digital capability of Scotland's homeless sector through training, support and tools.

We want people affected by homelessness to experience an improved quality of life by benefiting from the digital world.

Through our Get Connected Model we provide a digital device (phone or tablet), unlimited data (for one year), a learning framework and personalised support from a trained Digital Champion to people who know the realities of homelessness.

This report describes our approach to digital inclusion and the life changing impact we are able to help achieve for people.

Every step in our Get Digital journey brings us closer to a more inclusive and connected world, where people experiencing homelessness have the tools and support they need to make positive change in their lives.

"This project helped me to discover a new world where I can feel connected. I am happy to be able to speak to my friends."

Great need

With approx 29,000 open homelessness cases in Scotland, what more can we be doing to ensure each of to ensure each person is digitally included?

We are grateful to all of our funders, including the Scottish Government and The Good Things Foundation

This allows delivery partners and the people we support to engage at no cost to them – removing barriers and making digital inclusion possible.

Tried and tested solutions

Join us as we support more people to stay connected to loved ones and access what they need through our Get Connected model (See page 3 for details).

Together we can help overcome the systemic drivers that lead to homelessness

"The work of Simon Community Scotland to include people experiencing homelessness in digital provision, co-funded by the Scottish Government, is invaluable. I welcome this report, which shows that by providing access to digital devices, coupled with support on how to use them, people who are often excluded are given the opportunity to re-connect with friends and family, live fuller lives independently, and with dignity."

Paul McLennan MSP, Minister for Housing

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Our journey so far

2017

- First Digital Drop In at Holyrood Hub
- **Consultation:** Assessing the state of digital exclusion
- 'The Digital Zone' created within the Holyrood Hub

2018

- Get Digital Skills Framework developed
- First cohort of Digital Champions certified
- Digital training programme developed
- Launch of Get Digital Scotland

2019

- **First Get Digital Partners:** CATH and Turning point in Perth
- Digital inclusion integrated within all frontline services provision at Simon Community Scotland

2020

- **New Get Digital Partners:** Transform Dundee, Aberdeen Cyrenians
- Three Get Connected Pilots (connecting 5, 14 and 36 people)
- Coronavirus pandemic highlights critical nature of digital

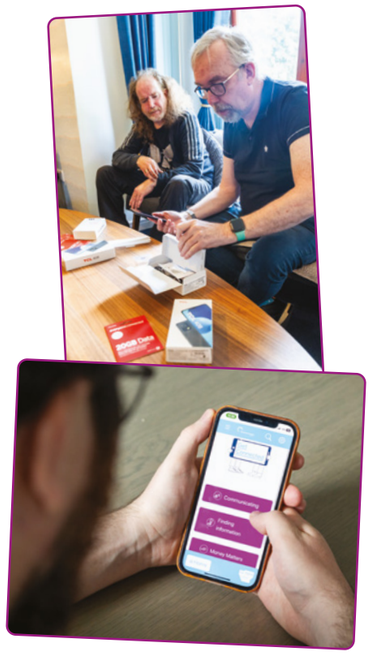
2021

- **New Get Digital Partners:** Frontline Fife and Seascape Ayr
- Get Connected 100 Project designed and delivered by Simon Community Scotland (with funding from the Scottish Government)
- Project design for 'A Digital Approach to Harm Reduction' at Simon Community (working with women who use substances)

Continued →

Foreword

A word from Simon Community Scotland CEO Lorraine McGrath



“To date over 1000 people experiencing homelessness have been supported by this life-changing programme with tailored support, a phone or tablet and unlimited data.

People have been able to connect, some for the first time, with the services and support they need, with loved ones, and gain skills and confidence.

We are learning all the time and we have bold plans to support many more people to have experiencing homelessness to be able to use digital access to change and transform their lives for the better.

Every person’s life and experiences are unique as are the ways they choose to benefit from the digital world. Its remarkable to see the range of ways people choose to use this simple but vital access to bring positive impacts into their lives.

I hope for the day that digital exclusion for people experiencing homelessness is a thing of the past. I am proud of the work that has been done to move us towards that aim but there is so much work still to do, and I look forward to Simon Community Scotland continuing to lead on ending digital exclusion within homelessness in Scotland.”

Lorraine McGrath,
CEO Simon Community Scotland

Our journey so far

2022

- ‘By My Side’ App launched (focused on harm reduction support)
- Get Connected 500 launched, designed and delivered by Simon Community Scotland with support from The Good Things Foundation’s Power Up 2.0 funded by JP Morgan, The Scottish Government and Simon Community Scotland
- **Get Connected:** New Scots launched (with Safe in Scotland) connecting 100 refugees and people seeking asylum

2023

- **Get Connected:** Rapid Rehousing launched with new statutory sector delivery partner City of Edinburgh Council
- **Planning for: ‘Get Connected Portugal’** begins in partnership with Crecher
- **Get Connected:** Housing First launched to embed digital inclusion within Housing First models
- Get Connected App launched
- **Get Connected:** 500 devices all distributed (a year ahead of schedule)

Executive summary

Why digital inclusion matters

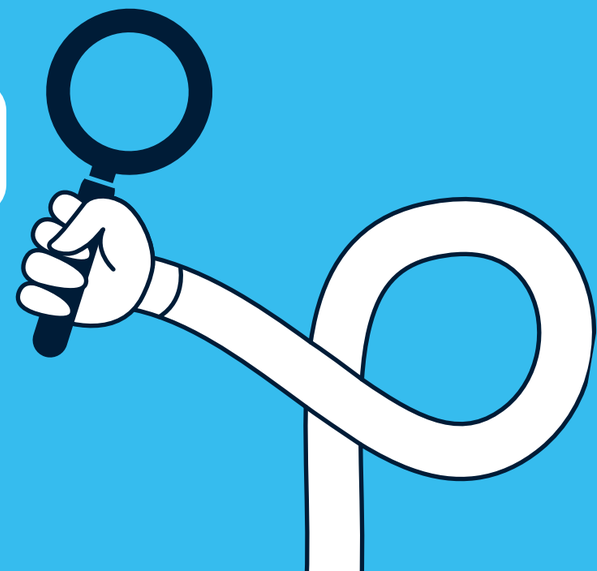
Digital Inclusion: A Journey out of Homelessness

Day-to-day life is increasingly enabled through digital platforms. We use digital to connect with friends and family, access health care and information, enjoy music, games and movies, manage our finances, learn things, work and do our shopping.

Yet many people who have experience of homelessness, do not have access to the digital world – they are some of the most digitally excluded groups in our society.

This places people who are already experiencing trauma and significant difficulties, at a severe disadvantage. Being disconnected from loved ones, and the support they need, makes it almost impossible for them to address and overcome the challenges of homelessness.

“It’s been life changing – I feel part of society.”



Get Digital Scotland

An overview of our digital inclusion programme

Bridging the digital divide makes the most amazing difference to the lives of people who know the harsh realities of homelessness.

Digital inclusion means that people are able to help themselves. Nobody wants to ask for help, or depend on staff to help them. Effective digital inclusion means that people are empowered to find solutions to their challenges themselves, which in turn develops their confidence, independence and sense of self-worth and self-belief.

Get Connected for a better life

People FEEL differently, People THINK differently, People ACT differently

How we do it

Built on an approach that places the people we support at the centre

People at the heart · Trauma informed · Establishing relationships of trust · Learning and adapting

"I'm more connected to myself and my world, exploring things that are useful, interesting and enjoyable for me."

"I'm more connected to my people and communities. Staying in touch with people that matter to me."

"I'm more connected to services and things I need, able to access services and be proactive around what I need."

"I'm more connected to support that works for me, engaging more easily and regularly with my support worker."

What we are learning

1. It starts with empathy – put people first
2. Embed digital support within existing relationships of support
3. Digital inclusion is a gateway to wider inclusion and needed support
4. Digital inclusion enables citizens to influence wider change
5. Invest in and build on cost-effective models that work

Make it easy • Make it right • Make it happen

What we've been doing

Leading the way in Digital Inclusion

Being digitally included opens up a world of opportunities for people. We have also seen how it increases confidence, connection, autonomy, control, learning, health and wellbeing. This is why digital inclusion has become so pivotal to our approach at Simon Community Scotland.

Our national Get Digital Scotland Programme works across Scotland supporting people experiencing homelessness to get online and benefit from the digital world. The programme is delivered through Simon Community services and other homelessness service providers across Scotland – at no cost to themselves.

This is possible thanks to funding and support from a wide range of organisations including the Scottish Government, Simon Community Scotland and the Good Things Foundation. Influencing and inspiring partners globally and domestically, we have been leading the way in digital inclusion in Scotland's homelessness sector.

1,000
devices distributed since 2020

97%
of people feel more connected with friends and family

People at the centre: How we work

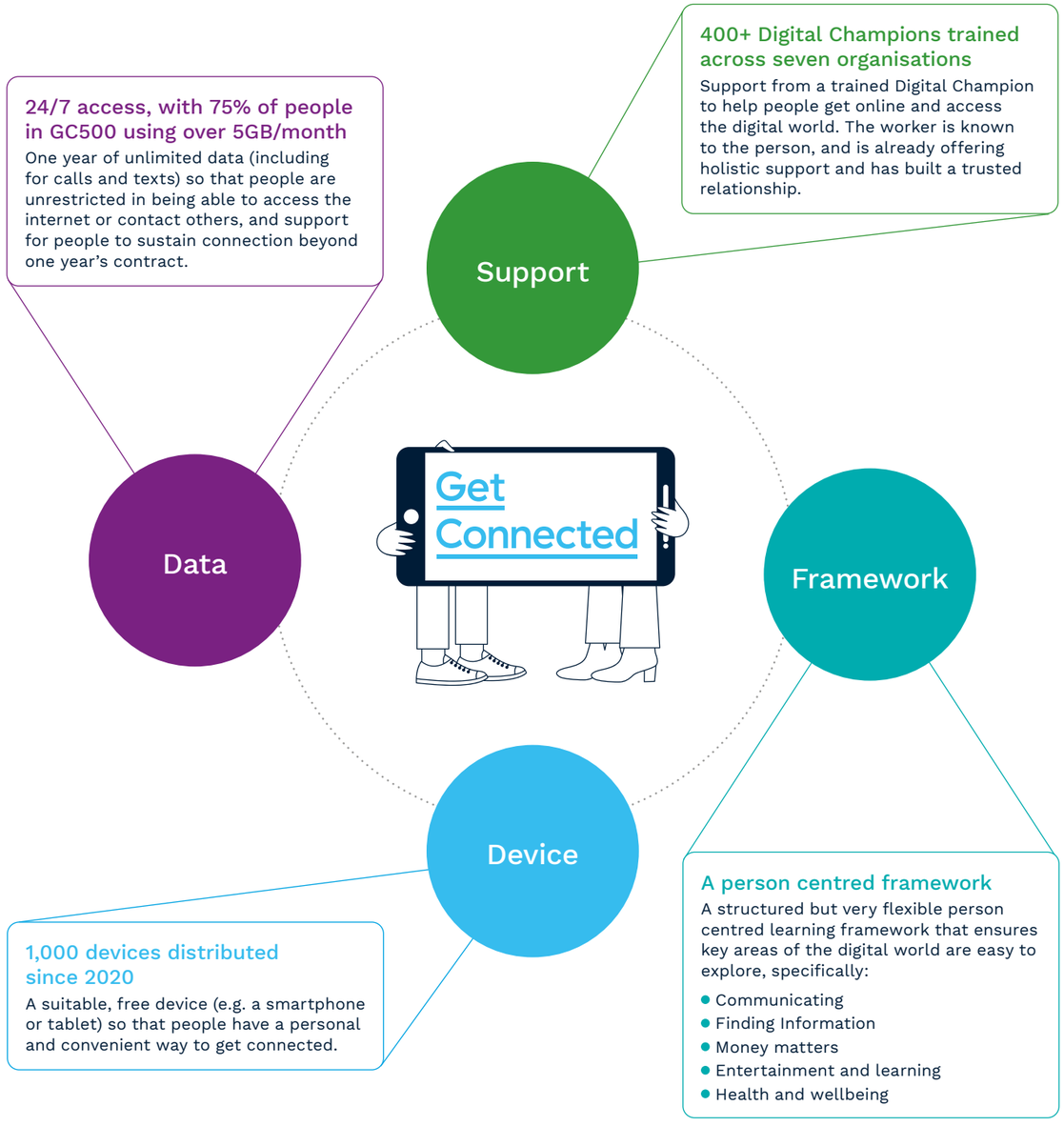
Effective digital inclusion places people at the heart – it starts with relationships.

For people with experience of homelessness, a trauma informed approach must underpin everything we do, so that we can establish safe places for people to access support and heal. By rooting the work in existing relationships of trust, we can quickly support people with what works best for them. Reviewing, learning and adapting enables us to reach more people and tailor solutions for what people really need.

"I enjoy the self regulation, access to wellbeing groups, mental health in the community."

Delivering a model that works

Our Get Connected Model is how we enable digital inclusion for people affected by homelessness. There are four interrelated components that each address practical barriers and personal challenges that people face.



24/7 access, with 75% of people in GC500 using over 5GB/month

One year of unlimited data (including for calls and texts) so that people are unrestricted in being able to access the internet or contact others, and support for people to sustain connection beyond one year's contract.

400+ Digital Champions trained across seven organisations

Support from a trained Digital Champion to help people get online and access the digital world. The worker is known to the person, and is already offering holistic support and has built a trusted relationship.

1,000 devices distributed since 2020

A suitable, free device (e.g. a smartphone or tablet) so that people have a personal and convenient way to get connected.

A person centred framework

A structured but very flexible person centred learning framework that ensures key areas of the digital world are easy to explore, specifically:

- Communicating
- Finding Information
- Money matters
- Entertainment and learning
- Health and wellbeing

What we've been doing (continued)

We first piloted Get Connected at the start of the pandemic in 2020 when it was clear that people needed to be digitally connected to get vital access to health information and other services.

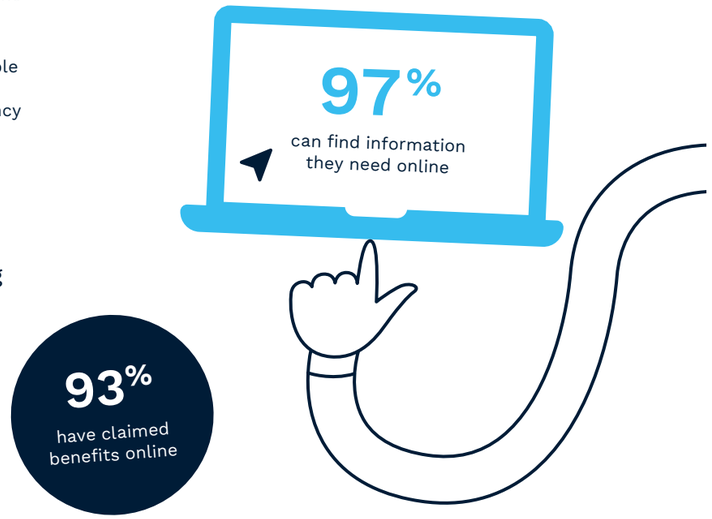
We started this work in Simon Community services, and now work with a wide range of homelessness service providers across Scotland. These include: Aberdeen Cyrenian, Dundee Transform, Turning Point Perth, CATH (Perth), Frontline Fife, Seascape (Aryshire) and the City of Edinburgh Council (Rapid Rehousing team). Our training and advocacy partners are the Mhor Collective.

Through this network of partners and with the support of funders, we have been able to expand the number of people we have been able to support. The funding allows us to support our delivery partners with free training, consultancy and evaluation.

"Additionally, it means we can give people free hardware (i.e. devices) and one year's connectivity. Doing this ensures we remove any further barriers for both the service providers and the people we support, making it possible for organisations to embed digital inclusion within their local context."

In November 2023 we were proud to give out our 1,000th device, marking a significant milestone in this approach.

We have also been able to adapt the model to reach people who have different kinds of lived experience including people in Housing First situations, refugees and those seeking asylum, women who use substances and those using statutory 'Rapid Rehousing' services.



What we've created

We now also have two apps:

Get Connected

Our Get Connected app provides easy access to our learning framework that contains evidence based content and useful links, co-produced with people we support.

The app helps people using digital for the first time in our 'Let's get started' section and provides crucial information around staying safe when online.

By My Side

The By My Side app is an award-winning harm reduction app co-developed by women supported by Simon Community Scotland and directly addresses the challenges people face in gaining access to the right information.

The app initially focuses on advice to prevent drug-related harm, but is now home to wider resources such as mental health guidance, support for those affected by domestic or sexual violence, and information for managing sexual health. Seeing the person first, and not just their drug use is critical.

What we've been seeing

Since launching in 2020, our Get Connected model has been delivering incredible results for people. The life-changing impacts from our recent Get Connected 500 (GC500) project are summarised below.

People speak about their lives being significantly changed – life becomes easier and better because they are more connected to things that really matter to them. There are four areas where people feel more connected:

Because of GC500, I feel more connected to...

Myself and my world

Exploring things that are useful, interesting and enjoyable for me.

- More skills
- Confidence and wellbeing
- Signing up to courses
- Enjoying music, films and other entertainment
- Learning new things

80% accessed digital tools to improve health and wellbeing

"I enjoy the self regulation, access to wellbeing groups, mental health in the community."

"The support I received has helped me with my self confidence."

My people and communities

Staying in touch with the people that matter to me.

- Staying in touch with friends and family
- Re-establishing connection with loved ones – including those far away

95% (118 people) feel less lonely

"The best thing has been establishing links to my family and friends. I didn't have this before."

"I am now able to keep in touch with support agencies and not miss appointments as most of them are online."

Support that works for me

Engaging more easily and regularly with my support worker.

- Easy to stay in touch
- More connection builds trust
- Digital and wider support tailored to what someone needs

98% felt the digital champion support was helpful

Services and things I need

The ability to access services and be proactive around what I need to get on in life.

- Housing services
- Benefits
- Health services
- Shopping
- Utilities

78% feel their housing situation is better

Overall, people tell us how the Get Connected project is changing their lives – they feel, think and act differently:

- **Feeling valued, respected and part of society**
- **Having a sense of control and taking steps to improve life**
- **Learning new things and doing things that are enjoyable**
- **Accessing health, housing and financial services**
- **Improved physical and mental wellbeing**
- **Having more hope for the future**

People are amazing, and with a digital inclusion model that works, astonishing achievements are possible for the people we support.

Digital inclusion means that people can help themselves. Nobody wants to ask for help, or depend on staff to help them. Digital inclusion can mean that people are empowered to find solutions to their challenges themselves, which in turn develops their confidence and sense of self-worth and self-belief.

What we are learning

The five themes below summarise insights from our Get Connected approach and why it matters.

1 It starts with empathy

Everyone deserves respect and needs connection – including and especially in digital spaces.

This is all the more important for someone who has experienced trauma, stigma and exclusion. Giving people the right tools with the right support enables autonomy and helps to rebuild confidence and self worth.

2 Embedded digital support

Embedded digital support within wider relationships of support.

Those who have an existing relationship of support are best placed to offer digital tools and companionship to help someone become more digitally included. When individuals receive this model of support it can be best aligned to their unique needs, and they can achieve remarkable outcomes that enhance their lives.

3 Creating a gateway

Digital inclusion is a gateway to wider inclusion and needed support.

With the right device, unlimited data and tailored support people are – very quickly – more socially included and are able to take actions that begin to address the barriers they face in other areas of life.

4 Influencing change

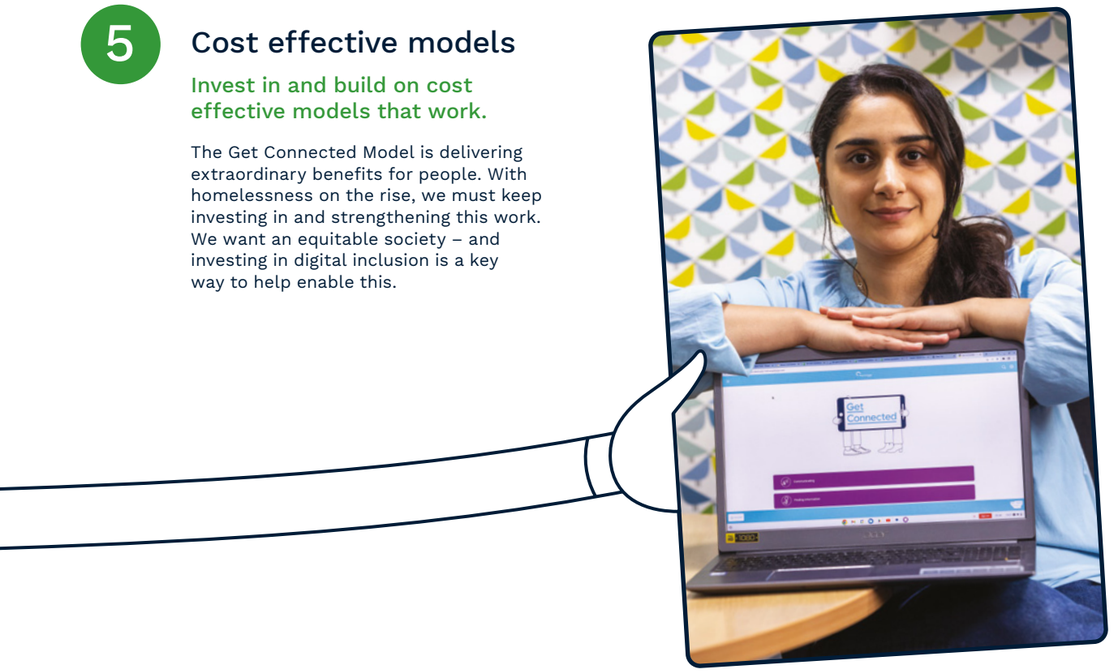
Digital inclusion enables citizens to influence widespread change.

Not only are digitally included people better able to advocate for themselves (e.g. sending an email to their GP or bank), they can also influence wider change (e.g. through online consultations). Additionally we are able to create opportunities for national and local leaders to hear directly from those who are most affected by homelessness and digital exclusion, so that they design better policies and services.

5 Cost effective models

Invest in and build on cost effective models that work.

The Get Connected Model is delivering extraordinary benefits for people. With homelessness on the rise, we must keep investing in and strengthening this work. We want an equitable society – and investing in digital inclusion is a key way to help enable this.



What now?

By building on the Get Connected model we can achieve widespread change for people who know the harsh realities of homelessness and overcome some of the systemic drivers that lead to homelessness. We continue to refine our model.

We are currently strengthening the health and wellbeing components of our learning framework because we are worried that the rapid advances in tech-enabled healthcare could mean that many people are left behind, unable to access potentially lifesaving services. We are finding other ways to continually adapt our apps and approach to suit a wider range of people.

Ending digital exclusion requires a joined up approach built around collaborative working and partnership across all sectors. We are passionate about sharing our experience and knowledge throughout Scotland and beyond so that our learning can influence wider change.

We participate in a range of national stakeholder forums to provide advice and support for policy and programme development. This includes Scottish Government programmes (e.g. Connecting Scotland, the Scottish Digital Alliance and Digital Lifelines), as well as the National Care Service. Through this work we are able to give a vital 'line of sight and connection' to the people we are all here to support.

Join in and help change lives for the better

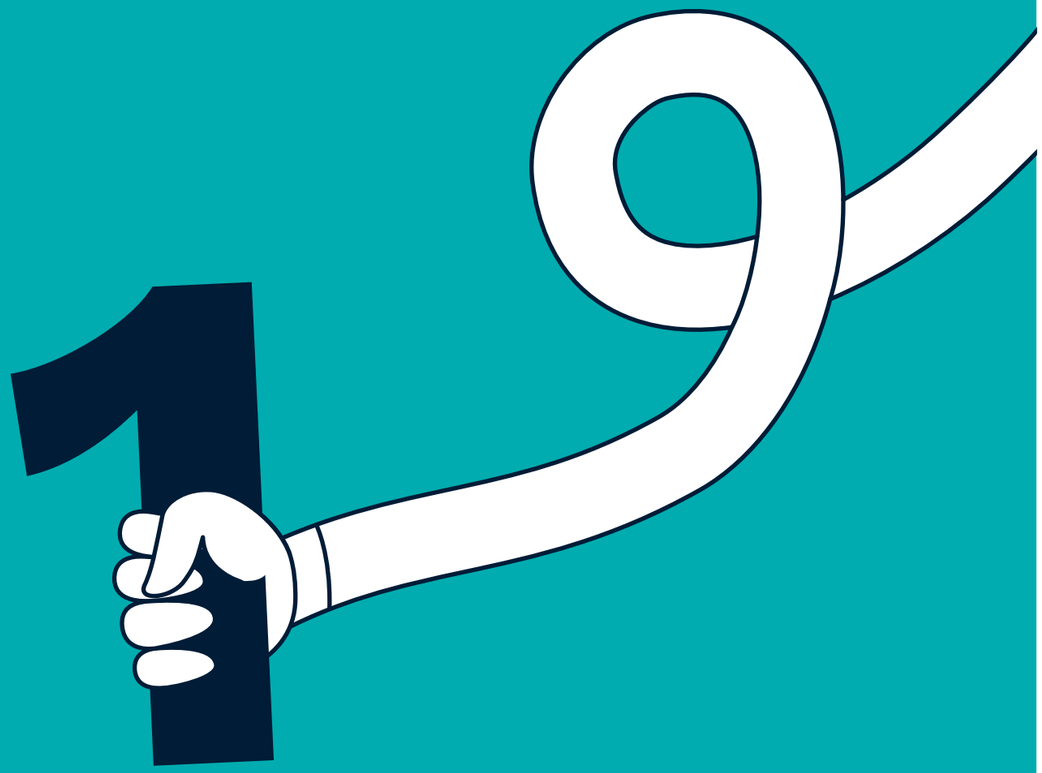
Get Digital Scotland

With the cost of living crisis, homelessness is affecting more people in Scotland (over 39,000 people in 2023) and the challenges are getting greater.

We need more people to help fund and partner with us to expand this work. We want to reach more people with an approach that works. When people are digitally included, remarkable, life-changing things can happen.

getdigitalscotland.org/get-involved

A bold, achievable vision



We want everyone who has experience of homelessness to be able to get online easily and move forward in their lives in a way that suits them.

Getting things right for people

Every life matters. To be healthy and well, everyone needs a safe place to live and access to the support they need. We want everyone who has experience of homelessness to be able to get online easily and move forward in their lives in a way that suits them.

Ordinary life is increasingly enabled through a range of digital formats. Yet most people experiencing homelessness in Scotland are digitally excluded. This makes it really difficult for them to be in touch with loved ones, and connect with support and day-to-day services like banking, health services, learning, entertainment and employment.

Life is tough and being digitally excluded makes it even harder. Being digitally excluded makes exiting homelessness almost impossible. Being digitally included is a critical part of homelessness recovery. We hope for the day that digital exclusion for people experiencing homelessness will be a thing of the past.

We work to make life easier for people

We want people to be able to get what they need in ways that best suit them. More than that, we want people to be able to see the possibilities and be ambitious for themselves.

By challenging myths and the status quo for people experiencing homelessness, and exploring different approaches, we are challenging ourselves and others to do better.

This vision underpins all Simon Community Scotland work, including our Get Digital Scotland programme. It is a person centred approach built around relationships of love, empathy and trust without judgement or pressure of expectation.

Working with a range of partners, including homelessness service providers throughout Scotland, we are driving digital inclusion for the people who have first hand experience of the significant challenges and harms of homelessness. Many know the reality of past and present trauma.

Finding a home is just one of many challenges they face. The mix of challenges can also include poverty, exclusion, hopelessness, mental illness, long term conditions, acute physical pain, repeat trauma, stigma, high levels of physical and sexual assault, problematic substance use, suicide and self harm.

When people are living with the impact of trauma, we must make things as smooth and straightforward as possible for people – so that they can get the help they need and begin to recover.

Supporting people to find solutions – that work for them – is what we do

Enabling someone to have easy access to the digital world is essential if we want people to be able to find solutions to their challenges and overcome trauma and the harms of homelessness.

It's about more than simply being able to navigate day-to-day practicalities. We have learnt that genuine digital inclusion without a fixed agenda typically has amazing impacts for people – It is life changing!

This is what we have seen in our Get Connected projects. Our unique, deeply relational approach ensures frontline workers are trained as Digital Champions to deliver digital support in a way that is integrated within the wider support being provided. To address issues of access, people are given a suitable device and unlimited data. Additionally the Get Connected approach ensures there is a flexible learning framework to support skill development and nurture confidence.

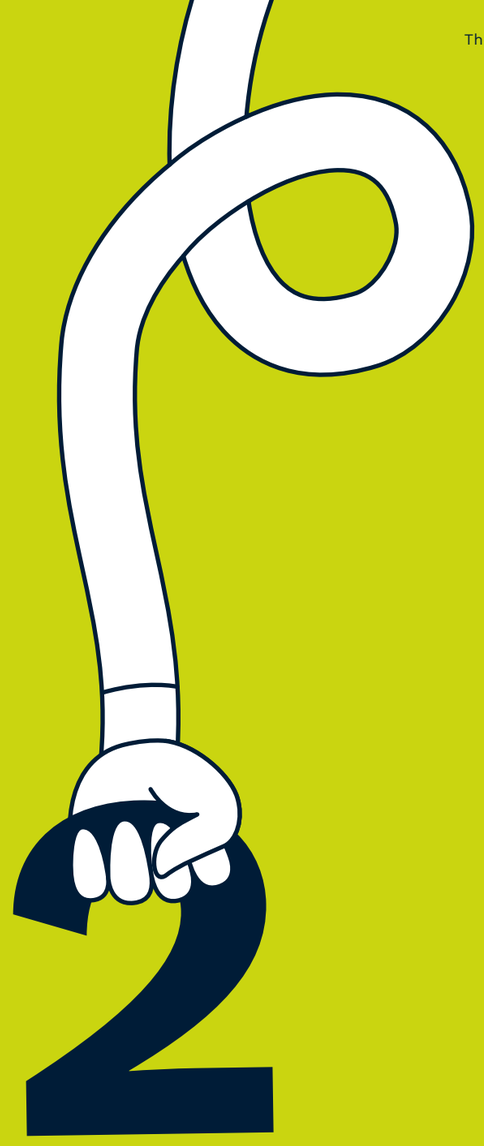
Finding the best way to support and enable digital inclusion is a journey

We continually learn from those we support, so that we can adjust our approaches so they work well for people.

We also actively explore learning together with national and global colleagues who are also grappling with similar questions and exploring solutions to digital exclusion.

This report traces our Get Digital journey and highlights the impact of our most recent Get Connected 500 project.

Denying people experiencing homelessness digital participation denies them basic societal inclusion, worsening their situation.



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The digital divide

Exclusion and homelessness in Scotland

The growing digitization of society reinforces structural inequality, favouring those with access to housing, education, and employment, while further marginalising those in need and placing them at a further disadvantage. Denying people experiencing homelessness digital participation denies them basic societal inclusion, worsening their situation.

Equity – a human right

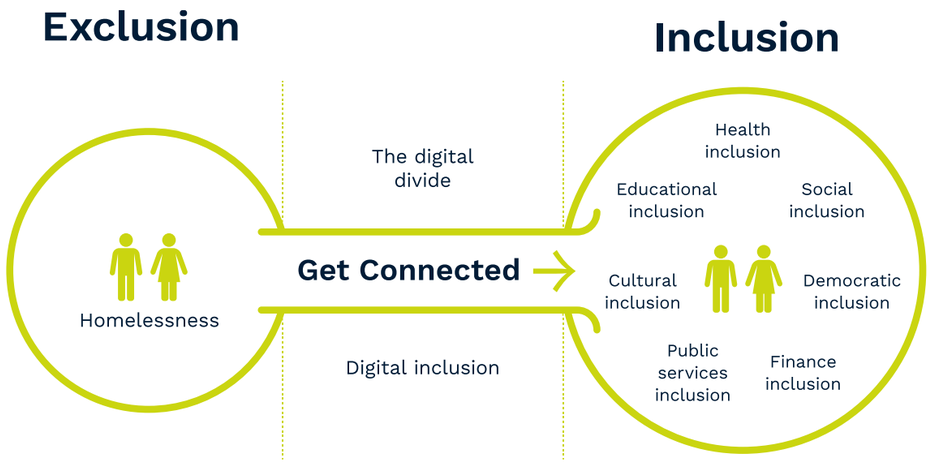
Everyone deserves respect, trust and autonomy – including in digital spaces. This is out of reach for many people, especially for those experiencing homelessness.

Many have to rely on shared devices or using public computers in libraries to be able to access the internet. Yet, everyday life in the UK requires everyday access. We must make it easy for people to own their own device, be able to connect to the internet whenever they want, and have the support they need to discover and use online spaces without restrictions.

A pathway to society

People facing homelessness are among the most digitally excluded groups in the country.

In reality this means people aren't able to manage finances, access health care, contact friends and family, access further education, enjoy entertainment and participate in society. Get Connected creates a pathway to society and all of the other inclusion agendas.



Exclusion and homelessness in Scotland (continued)

Scotland's commitment to digital participation

The Scottish Digital Participation Charter, initiated in 2011 by the Scottish Government and SCVO, underscores the commitment to equip everyone with essential skills. Simon Community Scotland is a proud signatory alongside 750 other organisations. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 heightened the significance of digital inclusion, emphasising its role in accessing essential services, information, and communication with friends and family.

Digital exclusion and why it still exists?

Despite lessons learned during the pandemic widespread digital exclusion persists. The latest Lloyds survey suggests 15% of the population faces online challenges, primarily due to access, affordability, digital literacy, and lack of interest. Addressing this requires more than reducing online costs or standalone digital skills sessions; our experience indicates that a person-centric, relationship-first approach, meeting individuals where they are, is essential to overcoming digital exclusion.

Homelessness in Scotland: The people behind the numbers

We are seeing levels of homelessness in Scotland continuing to rise. In March 2023, there were 29,652 open homelessness cases in Scotland, an increase of 15% on the year before and the highest since records began in 2002. There are more households than ever before in temporary accommodation[2].

People experiencing homelessness typically have little or no income. Data shows that people with lower incomes and in deprived areas have less access to the internet. Other expenses often take priority for people on low incomes such as food, rent and paying bills. This leaves little or no funds to purchase a device or maintain continuous internet access.

2022 research conducted by Ipsos Mori revealed that those who are most digitally included in society also improve their financial capability. They are 11 times more likely to check their bank balance and are able to save more money, more frequently.

2023

29,652 Homeless in Scotland

2022

25,204 Homeless in Scotland

15%
There has been a 15% increase in homelessness cases in Scotland

1 A 2023 study by Get Digital Scotland looking at comparisons costs between pay-as-you-go models and annual contracts of four reputable high street mobile service providers in the UK highlighted that people on PAYG deals will pay on average 83% more over two years, than those on contracts.

2 Homelessness in Scotland report 2022/2023, Scottish Government.

People who have less – pay more!

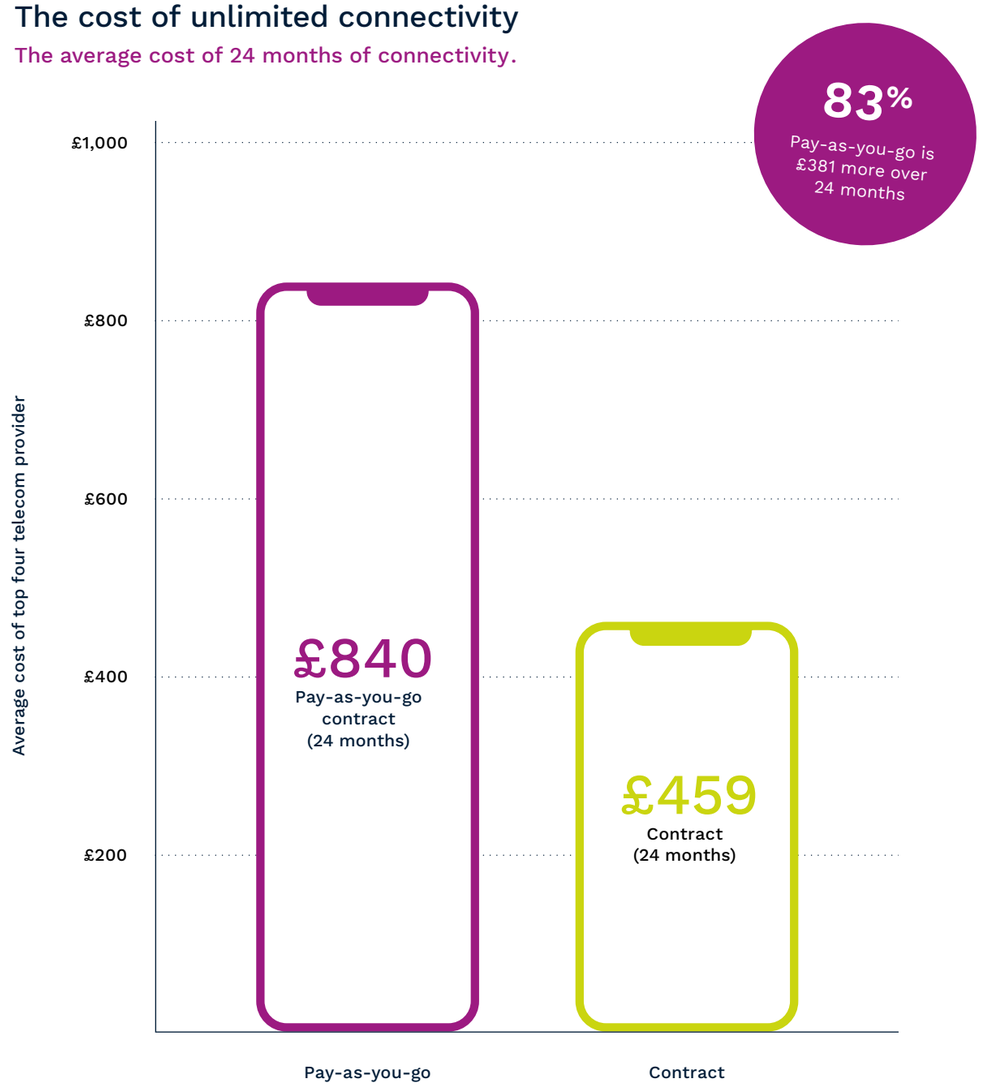
A structural Inequality

Average cost of a 24 month contract versus 24 months on 'Pay as you go' (PAYG).

Those who have less, typically pay more for internet connectivity as they usually rely on pay-as-you-go models which result in higher overall costs for the person. A range of factors – e.g. having low or no income, having poor or no credit ratings, no address, no bank account – prevent people from being able to take advantage of longer term contracts with better prices.

The cost of unlimited connectivity

The average cost of 24 months of connectivity.



83%
Pay-as-you-go is £381 more over 24 months

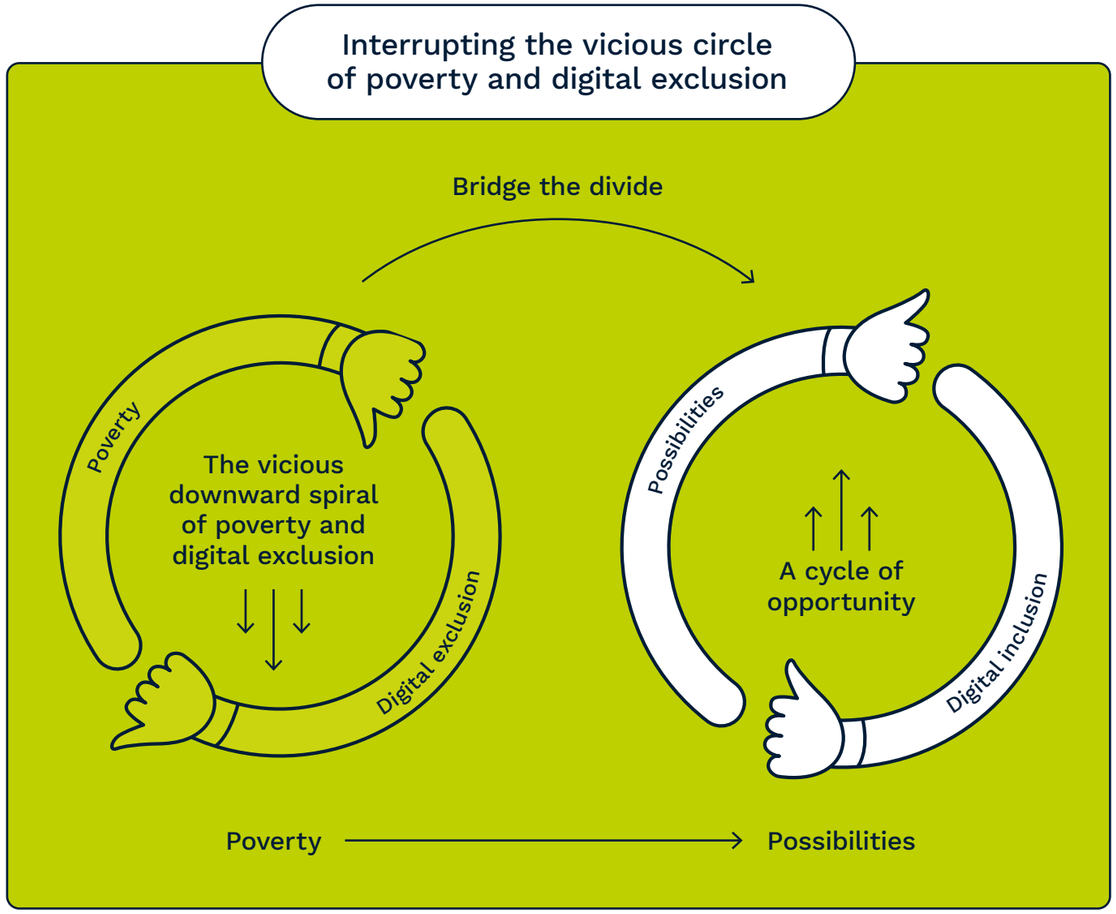
(Source: Get Digital Scotland analysis comparing the costs of four telecommunications brands in Scotland September 2023)[1]

The vicious circle of poverty and digital exclusion

Poverty exacerbates digital exclusion, yet to move out of poverty, people need to be digitally included. This is a vicious, unjust circle.

As a result of all these factors, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness typically experience digital exclusion – and the associated disadvantages – at a much higher rate than the general population.

These structural injustices mean that at the very time when someone is facing the very harsh challenges presented by homelessness, they do not have ready access to the tools, contacts and resources that could help them navigate this very difficult period in their lives.



Make it easy • Make it right • Make it happen

We must give people the opportunity, the autonomy and the tools to connect with support, and manage their lives through digital inclusion. We must bridge the digital divide.

Get Digital Scotland and our Get Connected model

Solutions that work for people

Our Get Digital Scotland programme is focused on making digital inclusion possible for people with experience of homelessness.*

We have been actively working to address the digital divide since 2017. Learning from those we support and partners around the world, we have been developing and adapting our approach to ensure people get what they most need, and in a way that best suits them.

We work with delivery partners across Scotland to ensure this approach can reach the most people.

Together we are ending digital exclusion for people who experience homelessness in Scotland.

Introducing ‘Get Connected’

Our Get Connected Model was launched in 2020 as a response to the pandemic. It is designed as an interconnected model to address key barriers and make things easier for people.

An adaptable model that suits people who need additional support

Many approaches to tackle digital exclusion (such as digital drop-ins and training courses) work best when people have some structure in their lives such as stable housing, work and relationships. For people that are experiencing homelessness these approaches often do not work, and a more flexible, person-centred approach is needed.

Additionally, consistent 24/7 access to a personal device and data is essential to bridge the digital divide. Our model is an approach that increases people’s ability to connect with loved ones, wider support and other things that can help them.

The funding we receive enables us to provide training and consultancy (for free) to our delivery partners, as well as free devices and connectivity to the people we support. In these ways we remove barriers for organisations and people we all support.

Ultimately Get Connected is designed to give people what they need to overcome structural barriers, resolve their homelessness and begin to recover.

Measurable impact

In the past four years we have been monitoring the impact of this approach and seeing just how transformative it can be. When people receive this kind of integrated practical and personal digital support from a trusted person, it is life changing.

* Homelessness can take many forms. It includes street homelessness but also affects those who find themselves in emergency or temporary accommodation. Homelessness exists whenever people do not have a safe, long-term place to sleep – a place that they can call home.

How we do it: The values that underpin this approach

There are four key things that underpin how the Get Connected model has been developed and how it is delivered in different settings across Scotland.

1

People at the heart

Everything we do is about people and all our support is person centred. As with all our Simon Community support, we adopt a person centred approach.

We build relationships that communicate worth and potential so clearly, that people come to see this in themselves. The Get Connected Model provides flexibility for the person to suit their needs and meet their goals. We work with people that have lived experience to ensure the content of our learning framework is useful and relevant.

2

Working in a trauma informed way

We support people who have experienced trauma – past and present. Prioritising their physical and emotional safety, and creating safe places that are orientated around warmth and compassion, is essential.

We want to be part of the healing, not cause more harm or difficulty. All our support, including our digital support, is designed to build on a person’s strengths and help them feel safer, so that they can take steps towards the future they want and the care they need.

3

Learning and Adapting

We are constantly learning and evolving to provide the best service possible for the people we support.

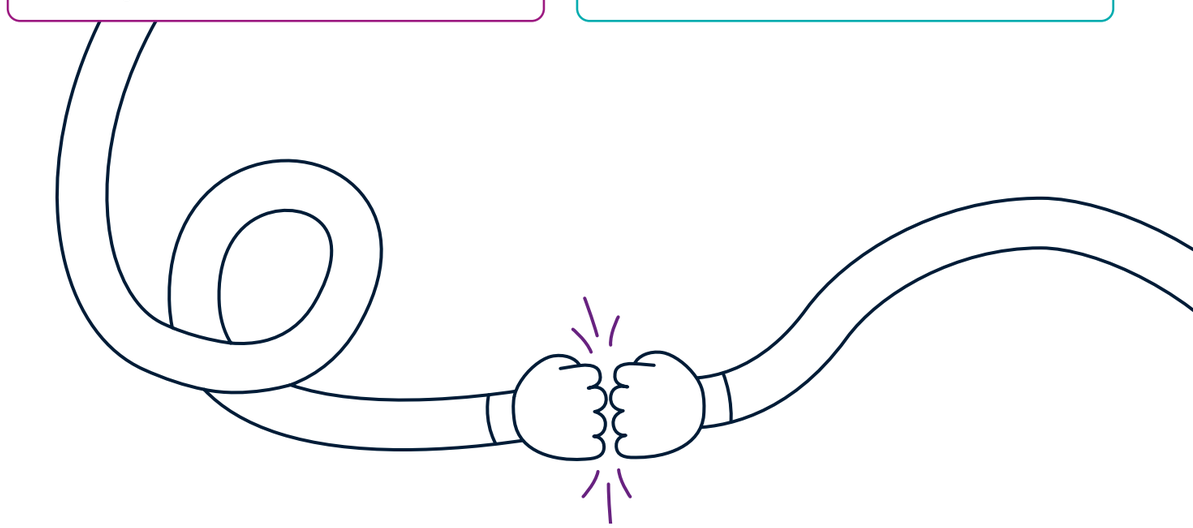
We learn from those people we support as well as others across the world. We increasingly adopt co-production practices when developing new tools and resources, particularly our apps. We have been developing and adapting our Get Connected model since 2020 and it has continued to deliver astonishing results.

4

Established relationships of trust

The trusted relationship that frontline staff build with the people they support is rooted in love, compassion and empathy.

This is a critical foundation of successful digital inclusion as it seamlessly combines digital into the day to day work. Staff understand nuances and challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness, making them the ideal people to deliver this work.



Get Connected: Addressing the barriers

In the past four years we have been monitoring the impact of this approach and seeing just how transformative it can be. When people receive this kind of integrated practical and personal digital support from a trusted person, it is life changing.

This is an integrated, interconnected model

All parts are needed to ensure people can become digitally included and feel part of society. This is how we can help people overcome structural barriers so that they can resolve their homelessness and begin to recover.

A model that works for people across a range of settings facing different circumstances:

Physical barriers

The problem

No device

Without ownership of a device people have limited access to get online. They can only access the internet through other people's devices (a friend or partner) or in libraries or other public spaces.

"I don't own a device that can connect to the internet."

Device

A suitable device (e.g. a smartphone, tablet or computer

The solution

We provide a suitable device free of charge with no restrictions. Having their own device means that people can have more privacy when using it and seek support in ways that suit them. The type of device chosen will reflect their needs in terms of portability, interests and accessibility needs, person-centred always.

The problem

No connectivity

The cost of connectivity can be a barrier for people experiencing homelessness. Limited connectivity through having no broadband or a finite amount of data is also a blocker.

"I can't connect to the internet whenever I need to or want to."

Data

Unlimited data for a year

The solution

We provide data that is always unlimited for one year, in addition we provide unlimited calls and texts. We want people we support to have the freedom to use as much data as they need, whenever they need to use it 24/7. We never want someone to run out of data particularly when they are feeling vulnerable, lonely or unwell.

Personal barriers

The problem

Low confidence

Low confidence can stop people from trying to access the digital world due to a perceived lack of capability.

Low motivation

Being unaware of the benefits of the digital world leads to a lack of interest in going online.

Don't trust online spaces

Concern around online safety, personal data and privacy can lead to people choosing not to go online.

Few or no digital skills

Sometimes people don't have the required digital skills and don't know how to use digital devices or navigate the digital world.

"I don't know how to use a device or navigate online."

Support

From a digital champion who is already providing wider support

"I don't understand the internet – I don't know how it works. I don't see how it could help me."

Framework

Structured learning framework accessed via an app

The solution

We provide personalised support and a structured learning framework

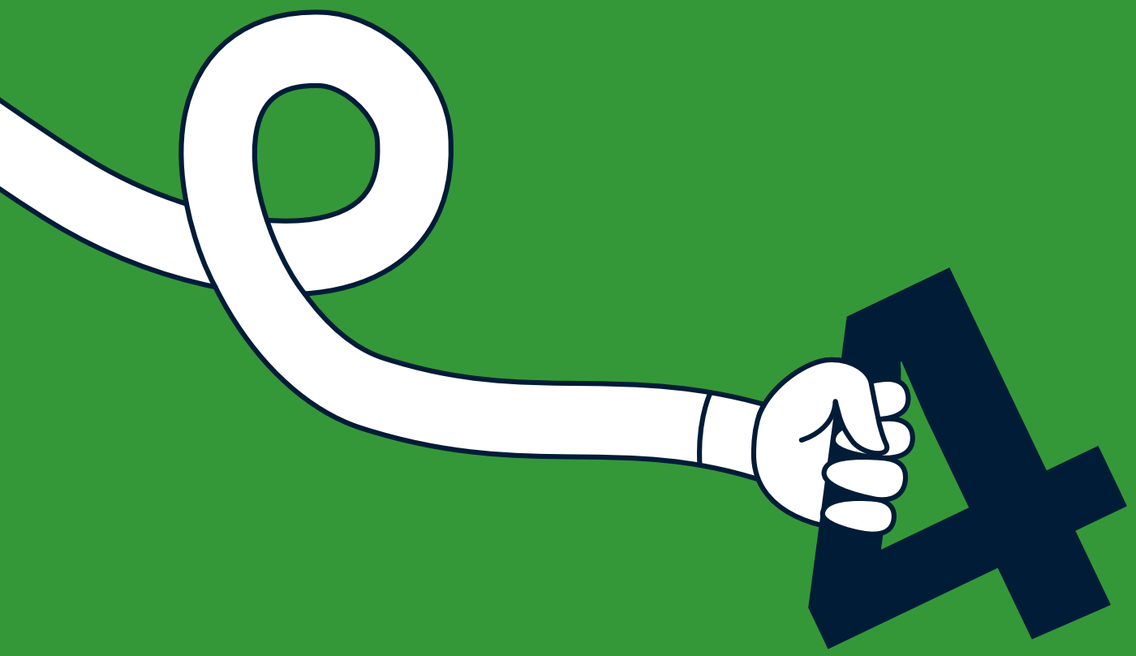
Rather than introduce a new face into a person's world to support them, we train their existing frontline worker as a digital champion. They already have a relationship built on trust and respect, there is already an understanding existing between them around the priorities for that person and they are able to celebrate the small quick wins along the way. The frontline workers' priority is to ensure people can go online safely and legally.

We offer a framework of invaluable trusted, evidence based online resources to help guide the learning process. This is delivered in the form of an app that can be pre-loaded onto a device if the person wants it. We always offer a choice of activities and the direction a person takes with the guidance and support of the frontline worker. The learning process can be self-directed or guided by the frontline worker depending on the person.

Our Get Connected 500 project

The Get Connected 500 (GC500) project launched in April 2022 with the goal of digitally including 500 more people who have experience of homelessness by March 2024.

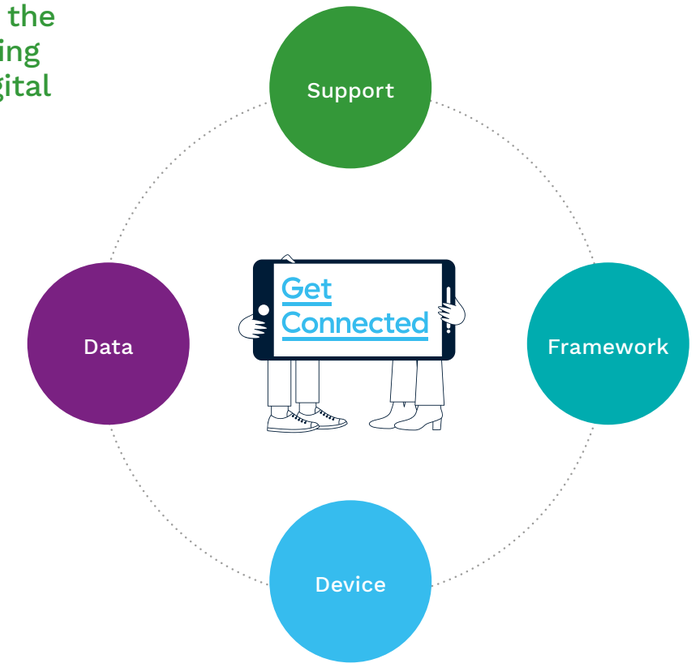
Due to demand and the flexibility of everyone involved, almost all devices were distributed by April 2023 – one year ahead of schedule. This section outlines how we planned and delivered the project.



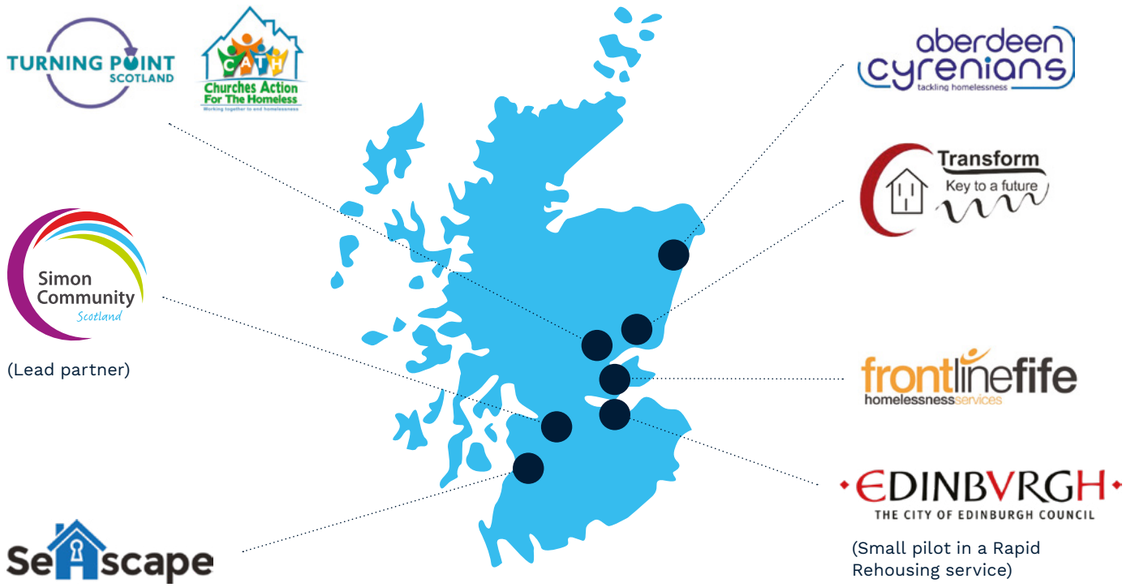
A national approach to digital inclusion

All of our partners are using the Get Connected model ensuring a consistent approach to digital inclusion in Scotland's homelessness sector.

"I used to be able to access the internet only once a week – now, with this device I can access the internet as much as I want, whenever I want."



Our Partners



Our Get Connected 500 project

Setting up

Ambition to impact more people

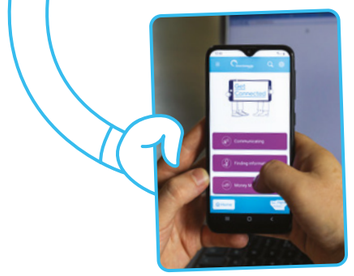
- Building on the life changing impact achieved in the Get Connected 100 project so more people can benefit
- Launch enabled by funding from the Scottish Government, Good Things Foundation and Simon Community

Reaching out to partners

- Leadership and commitment from partners essential to the success of the project
- All existing Get Digital Partners and new statutory sector partners agreed to join in this project
- Our delivery partners had all the hardware, support and training from us for free, which was intentional from our viewpoint to ensure we removed any further barriers for either the support provider or the people they support

Adapting the framework: A focus on health and new apps

- The framework acts as a structured guide for digital champions, and self directed learning for the people we support
- Completed a full review of the Get Connected Learning Framework leading to new tools, apps and services being added as well as a new 'health and wellbeing' section
- Learning Framework launched as the 'Get Connected' App (with support from our digital partners AND Digital)



Delivery

Phased Approach

- We adopted a phased delivery approach
- Over 11 months, 500 devices were distributed in seven phases
- Ensures people get the best support possible and more people can benefit over a longer period of time

People and Logistics

- Frontline staff applied on behalf of the people they support to participate in the GC500 Project
- Devices were distributed directly from our supplier to front line workers (our Digital Champions)
- Connectivity (SIM cards) set up by the Get Digital team and then distributed to the named individual
- Ongoing tracking and monitoring of data usage, with notifications sent to digital champions where data usage was low or zero, indicating someone probably needed additional support

Training Digital Champions

- Digital inclusion training was delivered by 'Mhor Collective'
- 100 frontline workers were trained as Digital Champions
- Training covered key project information, digital inclusion strategies and techniques, and using the Learning Framework

Setup and Handover

- Digital Champions configured the devices as required for example, a secure password, email, WIFI and accessibility options
- Digital champions pre-installed the By My Side and Get Connected apps onto the devices as required
- During the handover, a demo was provided of how to use the device (knowing the basics), including an overview of the Get Connected and By My Side apps

Day-to-day Support

- Digital champions provided ongoing support based on the needs and interests of the person for as long as required
- Wide ranging support was available: building digital skills and confidence, showing what is possible, navigating the digital world for practical tasks (health appointments, keeping track of benefits, applying for courses/jobs), providing reassurance, technical support or inspiring new learning

Evaluation and reporting

- **Baseline survey completed at the start of each phase**, followed by an impact survey around 12 weeks later
- **28 participants and staff members delivering the project interviewed** to understand the personal stories that sit behind 'the numbers'
- **Findings shared publicly** (through social media, blogs, podcasts, reports) to inspire further digital inclusion work and demonstrate the immense impact that can be achieved for relatively small investment

Beyond Get Connected 500

Next steps for people

'Stay Connected' – a new feature within GC500 – encourages project participants to reflect on options that will help them sustain connectivity at the end of their initial 12 month contract. Digital Champions work with the people they are supporting to look at practical and personal things that could help them sustain connectivity for themselves. **Stay Connected has now become an integral part of our model**, without this element we know that some people we have supported will be in danger of falling back into digital exclusion and we feel that this is unacceptable. Some people require more investment from us to be able to sustain connectivity – we cannot do this without continued funding support.

Sustaining our approach

Delivery the Get Connected Model requires ongoing investment – not only in devices and connectivity for more people, but also to keep training Digital Champions, expanding the work to include more service providers, and development improvements for the people we support. **We remain deeply grateful to all our partners and funders, and continue to invite others to join us in the work** (See p47 for more details).

Overcoming Stereotypes: A note on lost and stolen devices

Some people assume that people we support will face challenges in retaining their device. Contrary to this, very few devices that we supply through Get Connected projects are lost, stolen or sold. Devices we supply are considered extremely valuable to the people we support due to the autonomy and online access they provide.

The relational approach helps here: people experience the staff member having belief and confidence in them, which builds up their own trust and belief in themselves and do everything possible to hold onto it.

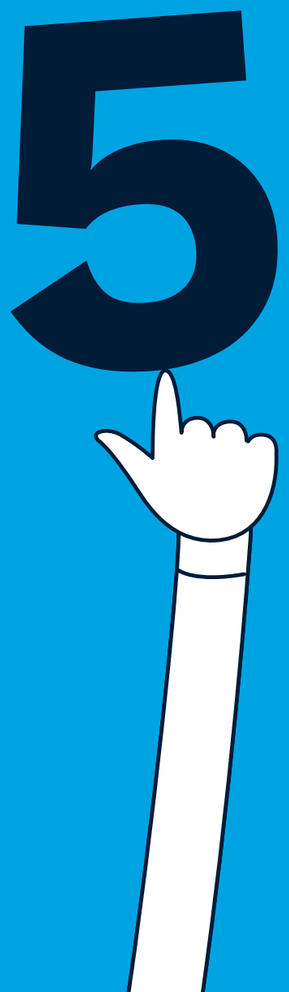
The five categories of the Get Connected Learning Framework

Transformational impact:

Changing lives through digital

When the people we support have the tools, skills and support to get online the results are transformative and genuinely life changing.

This section explores how people's lives have been changed through our Get Connected 500 project.



Homelessness myths debunked

Myth 1:
There is a general acceptance across society that everyone needs to be digitally connected.

No, There is a stigma in society relating to people experiencing homelessness owning devices.

Myth 2:
People who are digitally excluded only need to be given a device and connection – then they can become self-sufficient.

No, People need personalised support delivered by a trusted person for as long as is needed – so that they can build needed digital skills and confidence.

Myth 3:
People will sell the device at the first opportunity.

No, People really appreciate being gifted a device – it becomes a highly prized object (only 11% lost, stolen or sold).

Myth 4:
Digital Inclusion just helps people do a few things more easily.

No, Digital Inclusion totally transforms almost every aspect of people's lives.

Get Connected 500 things that happened

Making Life Easier.

People have reported significant changes in their relationships, in their attitudes, in their belief of what is possible, in their ability to take care of themselves and their feelings of self worth and personal value.

What was involved?

500 people with experience of homelessness and digitally excluded

7 Get Digital Partners

8 locations across Scotland

500 devices provided (phased over 12 months)

500 SIM cards

With unlimited connectivity for one year

102 Digital Champions

Trained during 16 training sessions

Our learning framework developed into our Get Connected App

Numerous in-person and online sessions between the people we support and their digital champions

How we measured impact:

441 baselines surveys

257 impact surveys

28 interviews with staff and service users

"I only used to be able to access the internet once a week prior to this device."

The type of device and support worked for the vast majority of people who participated:

98% feel they have a suitable device

97% feel they have enough connectivity

94% have improved their digital skills

72% felt motivated to learn more about digital

91% safer online

96% feel more confident

How people used their device (average usage per user per month):

68 texts

112 minutes of phone calls

75% of users used 5GBs or more

The difference it made

Get Connected has had a wider range of powerful impacts. Life is better for people because they are more connected to stuff that matters most to them and can make things happen more easily.

"The project gives me a lot of independence and freedom to support myself."

I feel more connected to:

- Myself and my world: Exploring things that are useful, interesting and enjoyable for me including education, employment and entertainment
- My people and communities: Staying in touch with people that matter to me
- Support that works for me: Engaging more easily and regularly with my support worker
- The services and things I need: Able to access services and be proactive around what I need to get on in life including in relation to finances, housing and health services

These practical, social and emotional benefits mean that people feel, think and act differently in their own lives.

- **Feel:** They feel valued, more supported and more confident
- **Think:** They are able to imagine a different future and have the skills needed to explore things they need and enjoy
- **Do:** Ultimately, through Get Connected, people have what they need to take practical steps that help make life better

Connection matters: Exploring the four themes of connection that Get Connected delivers

Through our evaluation process, we have identified four ways in which people's lives are being improved by the Get Connected approach.

This graphic captures the overview of how these different connections are strengthened, and the impact it can have in people's lives.

See pages 31 – 39 for more detail and further evidence of these life changing themes.

I'm more connected to myself and my world

Exploring things that are useful, interesting and enjoyable for me

- Greater skills and confidence
- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Pursuing opportunities (e.g. jobs, education, volunteering)
- Accessing enjoyable entertainment
- Learning and exploring new things (like languages, cooking and new hobbies)

Find out more on page 31-32

"I have the freedom to explore health, life and opportunities."

I'm more connected to my people and my communities

Staying in touch with people that matter to me

- Human connection in traumatic times
- Re-establishing, building and maintaining relationships
- Keeping in touch with friends and family
- Supporting other people, and being supported
- Reducing social isolation
- Peace of mind knowing you can reach out anytime
- Greater sense of wellbeing, belonging and connection

Find out more on page 33-34

"The best thing is that I feel part of society and can keep in touch with family."

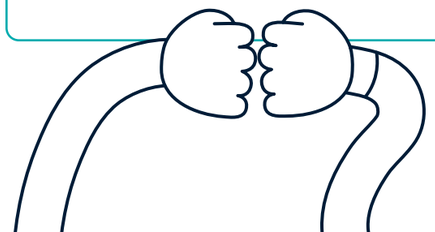
I'm more connected to support that works for me

Engaging more easily and regularly with my support worker

- Tailored digital support to do the things I need
- A sense of being valued and more supported
- More in touch with my support worker – it's easy!
- Accessing support from places that are convenient to me and more private (e.g. my home)
- Nurturing connections with my support worker that feel safe and useful
- Helps support workers too as it provides a more reliable connection to the person
- Greater connection leads to more trust and stronger relationships with support workers, which ultimately leads to better support

Find out more on page 35-36

"I feel so much better as I can keep in touch with my support workers."



I'm more connected to services and things I need

Able to access services and be proactive around what I need to get on in life

- Easier access to a services – many of which require digital engagement
- Making progress on housing situation – including being better able to manage tenancies
- Managing finances through online banking and easy access to my benefits information
- Accessing health services and information
- Finding the best deals on utility services
- Able to do online shopping

Find out more on page 37-38

"Life is better because you can do things more quickly, like accessing benefits."

I’m more connected to myself and my world

Exploring things that are useful, interesting and enjoyable for me.

As a result of Get Connected 500 people have stepped into a whole new world of opportunity – making ordinary things possible, expanding horizons and enabling people to try and learn new things.

Increased levels of digital skills and confidence mean that people no longer need to rely on others for help with ‘day-to-day’ tasks. They have been able to do things for themselves which in turn helps to build independence, confidence and self-belief.

Digital capability leads to people working towards and achieving the things that matter to them like pursuing education, finding employment and doing courses, and enjoying simple things that were previously impossible: like reading, watching TV, doing yoga or listening to music.

The Get Connected approach has helped improve people’s health and wellbeing, and their self esteem. It has allowed people to shape a future where opportunities align with aspirations – a future that has more hope.

“Freedom to explore so much about health, life and opportunities.”

80%
have accessed digital tools to improve health and wellbeing

“It’s been brilliant. I can listen to music, watch movies and check the football scores when I am at home.”

Case study

Finding the Right Path

John

One of our men we support was finding his mental health was being affected by not having very much to do with his time. This made it difficult for him to settle into his tenancy. As a result, he was starting to get involved in a bit of anti-social behaviour and at one point was in danger of losing his tenancy.

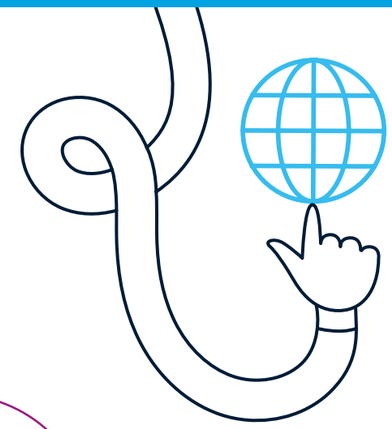
When he got his phone and SIM card through Get Connected 500 things really started to change. He has been using the phone to listen to his favourite music on YouTube and has downloaded some of his favourite games which is helping him pass the time doing something he enjoys, and making a significant improvement to his mental health. There have also been no further reports of anti-social behaviour as he is using his phone to keep his mind occupied. He is also able to keep in touch with his friends much easier without worrying about using up his minutes.

Our frontline worker was able to assist him to download his banking app which is allowing him to check his balance and pay bills much more easily without having to travel on the bus to his nearest bank to do this. He has also been able to set up some direct debits. As a result, his bills are getting paid on time which takes away further risks of issues with late payments.

“Get Connected 500 has helped improve John’s quality of life. He is much more in control of his finances and, rather than doing things that others find anti-social, he is able to use his time doing things that he enjoys.”

“This project helps me to research new college courses, meditation videos and well-being support much more easily.”

“I love it, It’s great for my wellbeing, I haven’t been able to listen to music in years!”



Greater skills and confidence
to make things happen for myself giving more self esteem, self worth, choice and control

Accessing enjoyable entertainment
Films, videos, TV, books, music and computer games

How has life improved

Learning and exploring new things
(like languages, cooking and new hobbies)

Improved mental health and wellbeing

Pursuing opportunities
e.g. searching for and applying for jobs, signing up to and doing online college courses)

80%
have accessed digital tools to improve health and wellbeing

70%
feel their financial position is better

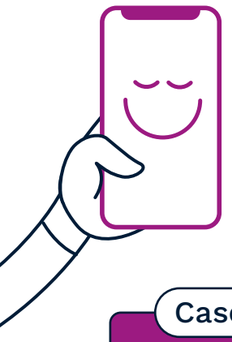
I’m more connected to my people and my communities

Staying in touch with people that matter to me.

While experiencing and recovering from trauma, positive human connection matters above all else. Whether building new relationships, or re-establishing old ones, meaningful personal connections bring a sense of belonging, self worth and feeling valued. Digital is truly an enabler when it comes to connecting with people, impacting positively on mental health and wellbeing.

Get Connected 500 has made it easy for people to connect with friends and loved ones through digital channels. This included parents being able to reconnect with their children. Through messages, calls and social media, people have been able to build and maintain relationships, reducing social isolation. Many participants particularly appreciated learning and using video calls. People reported feeling less lonely and having more peace of mind knowing they can easily reach out to a friend or family member during the best and worst of times.

Get Connected has enabled participants to have the most important people in their lives really close to them at all times. This personal connection is the very essence of wellbeing.



92%
have stayed connected on social media

Case study

Transformational change

James

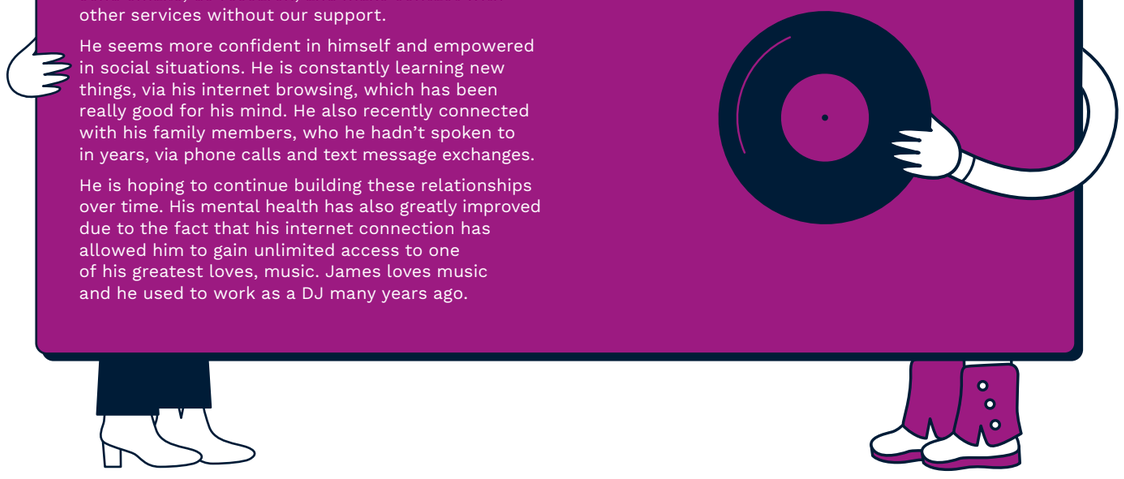
Prior to getting the device and unlimited data SIM plan, James was completely socially isolated. He was heavily dependent on our support in many ways and his mental health was very poor.

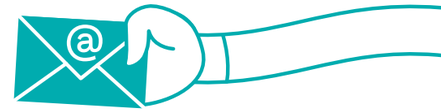
Since getting digitally connected, we have witnessed such a transformational change in him. He has become much more independent: in the sense that he is now able and willing to make phone calls, send emails, do research, and make contact with other services without our support.

He seems more confident in himself and empowered in social situations. He is constantly learning new things, via his internet browsing, which has been really good for his mind. He also recently connected with his family members, who he hadn’t spoken to in years, via phone calls and text message exchanges.

He is hoping to continue building these relationships over time. His mental health has also greatly improved due to the fact that his internet connection has allowed him to gain unlimited access to one of his greatest loves, music. James loves music and he used to work as a DJ many years ago.

Unfortunately he spent the past 10 years with very limited access to music because he was experiencing homelessness and without any financial means for a digital device or music player. Now James spends much of his time listening to music and watching video performances of his favourite bands. It makes him so happy and more productive in his daily life. He is gaining incredible value, and improving his overall well being from the Get Connected Project. He feels that it has changed his life.





“It has enabled me to keep in touch with family abroad which I didn’t know how to do before due to being older and unsure of the internet.”

“The best thing has been establishing links to my family and friends. I didn’t have this before.”

Re-establishing, building and maintaining relationships

Keeping in touch with friends and family

Human connection in traumatic times

How has life improved

Supporting other people, and being supported

Peace of mind knowing you can reach out anytime

Reducing social isolation

Greater sense of wellbeing, belonging and personal connection

“The best thing is that I feel part of society and can keep in touch with family.”

80%
have communicated with friends and family using video calls

“I have loved video calling with my family. I had only managed to speak on the phone for years. I can now physically see them.”

94%
have spoken to friends and family with voice calls

I’m more connected to support that works for me

Engaging more easily and regularly with my support worker.

Get Connected changed the way people were able to access support services. It also changed how connected they feel to their support worker. The combination of strong relationships and digital connection makes it easy and simple to engage with meaningful support when it is needed.

Supporting people during difficult periods of their lives requires meaningful, regular and convenient connection. Yet without reliable digital tools, much of the support delivered by frontline workers in homelessness services, has required a high level of in-person contact. This brings added time demands and complexity for people we support in dealing with appointments and the logistics and costs of travel.

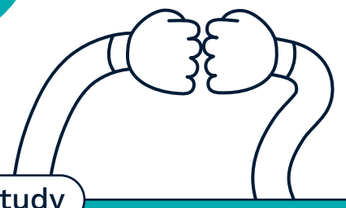
Being able to offer people a free device and unlimited data (for a year) helped show people how much we care, which helped to build trust. Offering tailored digital support – from someone they were already familiar with – meant people could focus their digital learning on what was most important, useful or interesting to them.

Having a device ‘in their pocket’ also means they can access support at times and in places that are convenient to them – including from the comfort and privacy of personal (rather than public) spaces.

Ultimately, because of the digital device, most people who participated in Get Connected 500 are more connected with their support worker. In this way, digital inclusion is making it possible for people to get better support so that they can resolve their homelessness more quickly. It also means they have easier access to more things that can help them as they heal from trauma and the harms of homelessness.

For the support worker, historically they would have worried about someone moving into a more independent living scenario – how are they? Are they managing? This allows people to bridge those spaces where connection might be lost, instead ensuring that our service continues to walk alongside people for as long as they need us to.

98%
of people felt the digital champion support was helpful



Case study

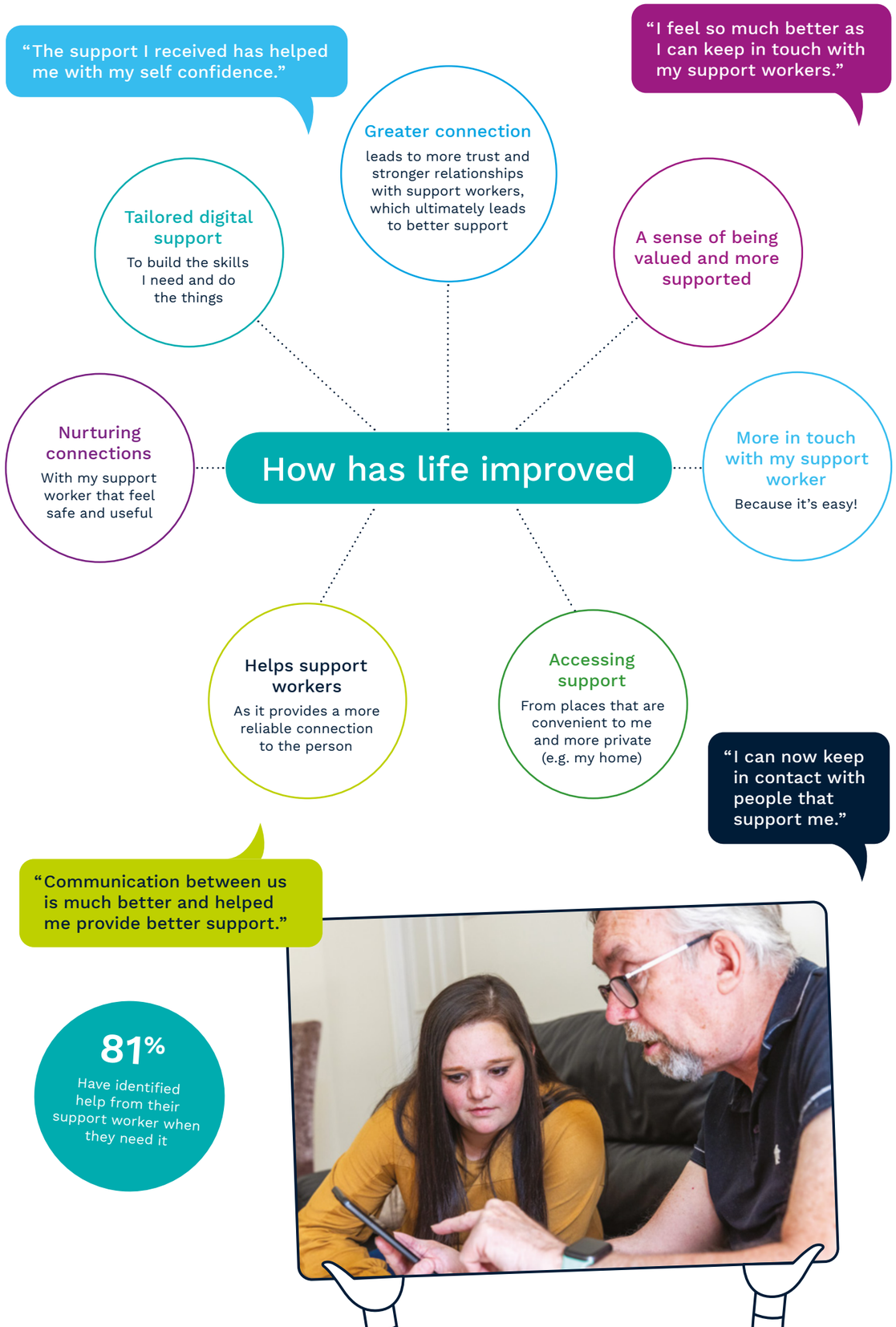
How more connection can deliver more support

Phil’s support worker

“Phil was sleeping rough in various parks in Glasgow when I met him about six months ago. By providing him with a smartphone he was able to maintain contact with us through phone calls, email, and texts (WhatsApp) during a very vulnerable time in his life.

The increased contact has led to increased engagement in support. He has regularly attended The Access Hub for meetings I helped to arrange with an Immigration Adviser. Even more crucially, it allowed us to keep in contact while I sourced accommodation for him, and alert him when this accommodation was ready for him to move into.

He could then access Google Maps on his phone to make his way to the accommodation, without needing to come into The Hub, and get a print out of a map.”



I’m more connected to services and things I need

Able to access services and be proactive around what I need to get on in life.

Get Connected has demonstrated how digital inclusion is an essential gateway to accessing wider services. Engaging with services through digital channels does not only make things easier, it is often the only way to engage. In many cases, people who can’t get online are even further excluded in society because they are unable to access statutory services or engage with businesses that require online access.

Through Get Connected, people have been able to access essential services that they need. We have seen examples of people using digital to manage their housing situation and utilities, access vital health services, and manage their finances, including getting bank accounts, applying for benefits and paying bills online.

Being able to do all of these things more easily is providing people with a pathway to get things done, access the services they need and make life better!

“I am now able to keep in touch with support agencies and not miss appointments as most of them are online.”

70%
have accessed digital services to support their health and wellbeing

“Life is better because you can do things more quickly, like accessing benefits.”

Case study

A whole new world of opportunity opens up

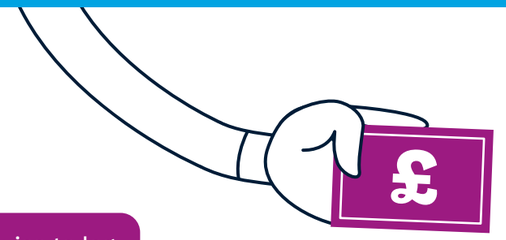
Jessica

This is a story of a young woman Jessica who was working in a nursery and through her work was also studying a child care course.

Before getting the Chromebook through Get Connected 500 she was having to borrow a tablet from her work. This device was also difficult to navigate for the type of course work that she was doing. Jessica also wanted to start up her own child-minding business.

Having the Chromebook allowed her to get her Facebook page set up with ease and create documents that she could use for flyers.

Jessica has been really over the moon with the device! It has made so many things much easier and opened up a whole new world to her which was very difficult to access just using her phone.



“I use the device to log into and manage my universal credit.”

94%
know how to get help with money, debt or benefits

Managing finances
Through online banking and easy access to my benefits information

Easier access to a services
Many of which require digital engagement

Able to do online shopping

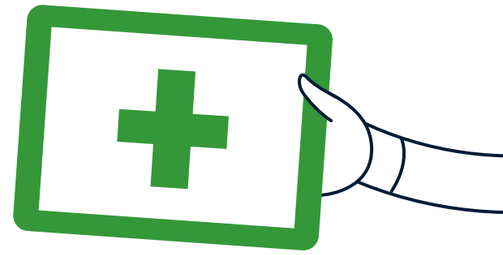
How has life improved

Finding the best deals on utility services

Making progress on housing situation
Including being better able to manage tenancies

Accessing health services and information
Including being better able to manage tenancies

78%
feel housing situation is better



Get Connected for a better life

The Get Connected approach has resulted in people being more connected to themselves, to friends and family, to support workers and to wider support services. This has delivered enormous practical, social and emotional benefits that mean that people feel, think and act differently in their own lives.

People have reported improved connections with friends and family, access to healthcare services, enrolment in educational courses, better financial management, and enhanced engagement with support. We have heard so many stories of how people's lives have been simplified and improved through digital.

This transformation is particularly life-changing for individuals experiencing homelessness, a group that often faces significant digital exclusion. Our interviews and conversations with participants and their digital champions have highlighted three notable changes: shifts in feelings, thoughts, and actions.

People **FEEL** differently

More independent.

Feel better about themselves and have an enhanced sense of health and wellbeing.

Able to do things for themselves.

More in control of things in life that matter.

"It's been life changing, I feel part of society."

People **THINK** differently

About options and what might be possible.

With optimism about their future.

That they have the ability and means to make change in their lives.

"I can do anything now."

People **ACT** differently

Taking steps to improve their wellbeing, finances, housing situation and relationships.

Putting things in place to live the life they would like to live.

Moving towards homelessness recovery and thriving.

"I now check my bank account by myself using the banking app."

These significant changes in attitudes, perceptions and approaches are deeply transformative. People are now finding themselves in a better place to access tools and support that helps them heal from the harms of trauma and homelessness. Together all of these things mean that people can journey towards homelessness recovery and pursue things in their lives that really matter.

Achieving widespread change

People are amazing, and with a digital inclusion model that works, astonishing achievements become possible!

The five themes summarise key insights from our Get Connected approach and why it matters.

Supporting people with this approach has reinforced and deepened our understanding of what people need. It has also made us even more ambitious for the people we support. As organisations and society we must make things much easier for those facing so much difficulty and the powerful effects of trauma. We must do things in ways that bring healing not harm. Effective digital inclusion is a powerful way in which we can help bring this transformation and help make life better for people.

What we're learning

1

It starts with empathy – put people first

Effective digital inclusion work is rooted in understanding and responding to what people need.

Everyone deserves respect and needs connection – including and especially in digital spaces. This is more important for someone who has experienced trauma, stigma and exclusion.

Digital inclusion means that people can help themselves. Nobody wants to ask for help, or depend on staff for help.

Digital inclusion can mean that people are empowered to find solutions to their challenges themselves, which in turn develops their confidence and sense of self-worth and self-belief.

We must make it easy for people who have experience of homelessness to own their own device, be able to connect those devices whenever and wherever they want and have the skills and confidence to use the internet freely and safely.

2

Embed digital support within existing relationships of support

Relational, person-centred approaches are the keystone of supporting people who have experience of trauma.

Those who have an existing relationship of support are best placed to offer digital tools and companionship to help someone become more digitally included.

To make a powerful difference, digital support must be seamlessly integrated into the suite of trauma-informed frontline services being offered. This requires training and supporting frontline workers to be digital champions – including helping them see how life changing digital inclusion can be for people.

Case study

What Person Centred Support Feels Like

Reflections from a Digital Champion

Right from the first 'action', Get Connected 500 had a positive impact. The initial 'giving' of the device from the worker has been met with gratitude.

For the people I'm supporting, it has created a feeling of being valued and not being judged or indeed defined by their perceived problem(s). This is very important because it also sends a message about the meaning of equality in its widest sense.

As a support worker, I have learned that the 'measurement' of the benefits of the device should not just depend on the 'desired outcomes' (for their journey out of homelessness). It should include the value and importance of the initial giving of the device and what it is saying to that individual, that they matter and they are valued.

It is also reassuring that if the digital side does not work out as hoped, nothing changes in terms of the support they will receive – their continuing support is not conditional upon what happens to the device.

Get Connected continues to demonstrate that getting things right for people matters. People who have been so excluded in society typically need to put in so much effort simply to try to get what they need. For the people we support, simply being given a device that can make their lives so much easier, has been game-changing.

> "Get Connected continues to demonstrate that getting things right for people matters."

3

Digital inclusion is a gateway to wider inclusion and support that people need

As society increasingly turns to digital solutions, it is crucial to prioritise people who are digitally excluded, ensuring they are not further marginalised.

This is particularly relevant for ensuring people have access to services – especially health services and resources – as these are becoming more and more digitised.

We have seen over-and-over how effective digital inclusion through the Get Connected approach enables people to become more included in society. With the right device, unlimited data and tailored support people are – very quickly – more socially included and are able to take actions that begin to address the barriers they face in other areas of life also (e.g. in housing, economic, cultural, education, democratic and public service domains). This delivers wide ranging benefits for people in their day to day lives.

4

Digital inclusion enables citizens to influence wider change

As citizens of Scotland and the world, the people we support have an essential role to play in helping shape a society that works for all. They have unique insights into the challenges of homelessness and the things that can help.

As a society, many of our systems inadvertently perpetuate injustice, and can make things particularly difficult for those who have faced significant trauma. Policymakers increasingly know that change is needed; better ways of doing things are needed, and this will only happen if they can draw on the insights of those who experience these issues first hand. Yet, due to exclusion, many in positions of power can struggle to connect meaningfully with those who have valuable perspectives from their lived experience.

Get Connected facilitates digital inclusion, and many we have supported are eager and willing to share experiences. Not only are people better able to advocate for themselves locally (such as reaching out to their GP for entitled support), they are also better able to engage in digital consultations. Furthermore, because of our established relationships with people we are well positioned to help facilitate the exchange of people's first hand experience and insight within different forums including the Scottish Government.

5

Invest in and build on cost-effective models that work

Investing in integrated digital inclusion support is cost-effective – it not only broadens the scope of support (enabling remote connection) it also directly helps deliver the outcomes homelessness service providers want to see for the people.

These – and wider – significant benefits are possible with modest investments in devices, connectivity, establishing a flexible learning framework and training an existing delivery team as digital champions.

Our Get Connected model continues to enable astonishing change in the lives of people. With homelessness increasing, more investment is required so that we can continue to give people what they most need when facing enormous challenges.

A key part of the effectiveness of Get Connected has been to repeatedly ask 'what more can we do?' and 'what could we do better?'. To answer these questions we listen closely to those we support, and our partners. Co-production with people we support has been the bedrock of some of the most innovative tools and resources we've been able to launch.

There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Listening to people's experiences and ideas to improve what is already working will enable us to maximise investment and impact – so that more lives can be changed for the better.

Delivering even more impact:

What now?

We continue to work with others and build on Get Digital's success. We want more people who know the first hand realities of homelessness and benefit from our learning and approach.

Expanding the work

Making our digital inclusion work stronger.

We want our digital inclusion work to expand and be even more meaningful for people. Through active consultation and adopting co-design approaches, people with experience of homelessness are helping us deliver more effective support.

Developing our apps

People with lived experience of homelessness and our digital partner (AND Digital) are helping us improve our apps. We are currently enhancing the health and wellbeing section of our Get Connected app and our By My Side app.

Strengthening our evidence base and exploring transferability

We are exploring with Dundee University how best to deepen our evaluation and adapt the Get Connected model to even more settings.

Enhancing our work through continuous learning

With every project we review, learn, and adapt to enhance our processes and services. All members of our digital team complete digital leadership training to ensure we stay current and can spot emerging opportunities and collaborations.

Adapting • Innovating • Celebrating

Taking Get Connected further

With support from existing and new partners and funders, we are able to expand the groups we serve and the number of people we can include. The current Get Connected projects include:

Get Connected: Harm Reduction

Supporting 150 people at risk of harm through substance use to get online. (A collaboration with Harm Reduction colleagues, and funded by the Digital Lifelines Follow on Fund).

Get Connected: Housing First

Providing 130 people in Housing First tenancies with devices, connectivity and support. (Funded by Digital Pioneers in housing programme and collaborating with our colleagues in our housing services).

Get Connected: Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP)

Partnering with Edinburgh City Council to trial our model in a statutory service. We are training local authority staff as digital champions and providing devices and connectivity for 40 people.

Get Connected: Portugal

We are also supporting our friends at Crescer in Lisbon to launch Get Connected: Portugal – a small trial to see how best to apply the Get Connected model and learn internationally.

Sharing learning and shaping change

Ending digital exclusion requires a joined up approach built around collaborative working and partnership across sectors. We are passionate about sharing our experience and knowledge throughout Scotland and beyond. Our learning can influence wider change.

Providing advice and support for policy and programme development

Through consultancy and engagement we participate in a range of stakeholder forums to give a vital 'line of sight and connection' to the people we are all here to support.

Connecting Scotland

We are on the governance board of this Scottish Government programme set up during the pandemic to tackle digital exclusion.

National Care Service

Through our input we are helping to connect policy leaders and service designers with people with lived and living experience of homelessness to ensure their insights and needs can shape the design and delivery of care in Scotland.

Digital Lifelines

We participate in the Programme Delivery Team and Community of Learning of this Scottish Government initiative set up to deliver digital inclusion programmes and funding to reduce the risk of harm and death for people who use drugs.

Digital Inclusion Alliance (a Scottish Government initiative)

We are part of this network of people from a wide range of sectors – coming together with the goal of ending digital exclusion.

"Simon Community Scotland are enthusiastic contributors to the Digital Lifelines Scotland Community of Learning, sharing experience and learning with the organisations supported by Digital Lifelines Scotland but also listening and learning from the experiences of others.

To help organisations implement or refine their approach to digital inclusion support, the Digital Lifelines Playbook recommends using the Get Connected Framework and directs people to the app to allow them to access relevant resources."

Digital Lifelines

Speaking about what works

We are grateful for every opportunity we get to speak about our approach and the life changing impact it is having. Wherever possible, we ask those we support to speak for themselves – they have the first hand experience of how transforming effective approaches to digital inclusion can be.

Our podcast

Audio formats provide an excellent way for people we support to share their experiences and stories.

We are so grateful to everyone who has spoken with us about the difference our work has made to their lives.

Search for 'Simon Community Podcast' to find episodes

Speaking events

We are delighted to be able to share what we are learning in different places including:

- SCVO The Gathering 2022 and 2023
- Digital Health and Care Scotland Conference 2021, 2022 and 2024
- House of Lords, Digital Committee Event 2023
- Edinburgh University Nursing Students 2022 – lecture on 'Digital Healthcare and Homelessness'
- Kings Fund event 2022 – keynote address on digital inclusion in health
- Housemark virtual event 2023 (UK housing associations) – on the importance of digital inclusion in a housing setting
- SCVO Digital Inclusion Roadmap Launch Event 2023

The life changing impacts we've seen have been possible because of the wide range of people and organisations working together. We are so grateful for everyone who has brought their time, energy, resources and expertise to support us in making this happen.

Gratitude and thanks

People we support

Our Get Digital work is for the people we support and what has been achieved would not be possible without these tenacious, brave and remarkable people who are facing the most enormous challenges every day. They have shaped this work and continue to show us how we can do better. Thank you. You are amazing.

Our Digital Champions across Scotland

Frontline staff in a range of organisations are the ones to deliver digital inclusion support day-to-day.

They continue to grow their own skills and build relationships with people, so that lives can be better. You truly are champions. Thank you for what you do.

Awards and recognition

People we support are the reason why we do what we do, in the way we do it. We are proud that the impact of our digital inclusion work is being recognised across the sector.

SCVO Scottish Charity Awards 2023
The Digital Citizen Award for our Digital Approach to Harm Reduction project

Herald Digital Transformation Awards 2023
Commendation for the Get Connected model

Scottish Digital Health and Care Awards 2022
The Scottish Digital Inclusion Award for our Digital Approach to Harm Reduction project

SCVO Scottish Charity Awards 2022
Commendation for Get Connected 100

Our partners

We are so grateful for all the organisations who help to make this work possible.

Get Digital Delivery Partners (homelessness service providers):
Simon Community Scotland (lead partner)
Aberdeen Cyrenian
Dundee Transform
Turning Point Perth
Cath (Perth)
Frontline Fife
Seascape (Ayrshire)
City of Edinburgh Council (small trial ongoing to embed our Get Connected Model within Rapid Rehousing services)

Supportive suppliers
DB Comms (2020-2023)
Vodafone (since 2023)

Training and advocacy partners
Mhor Collective

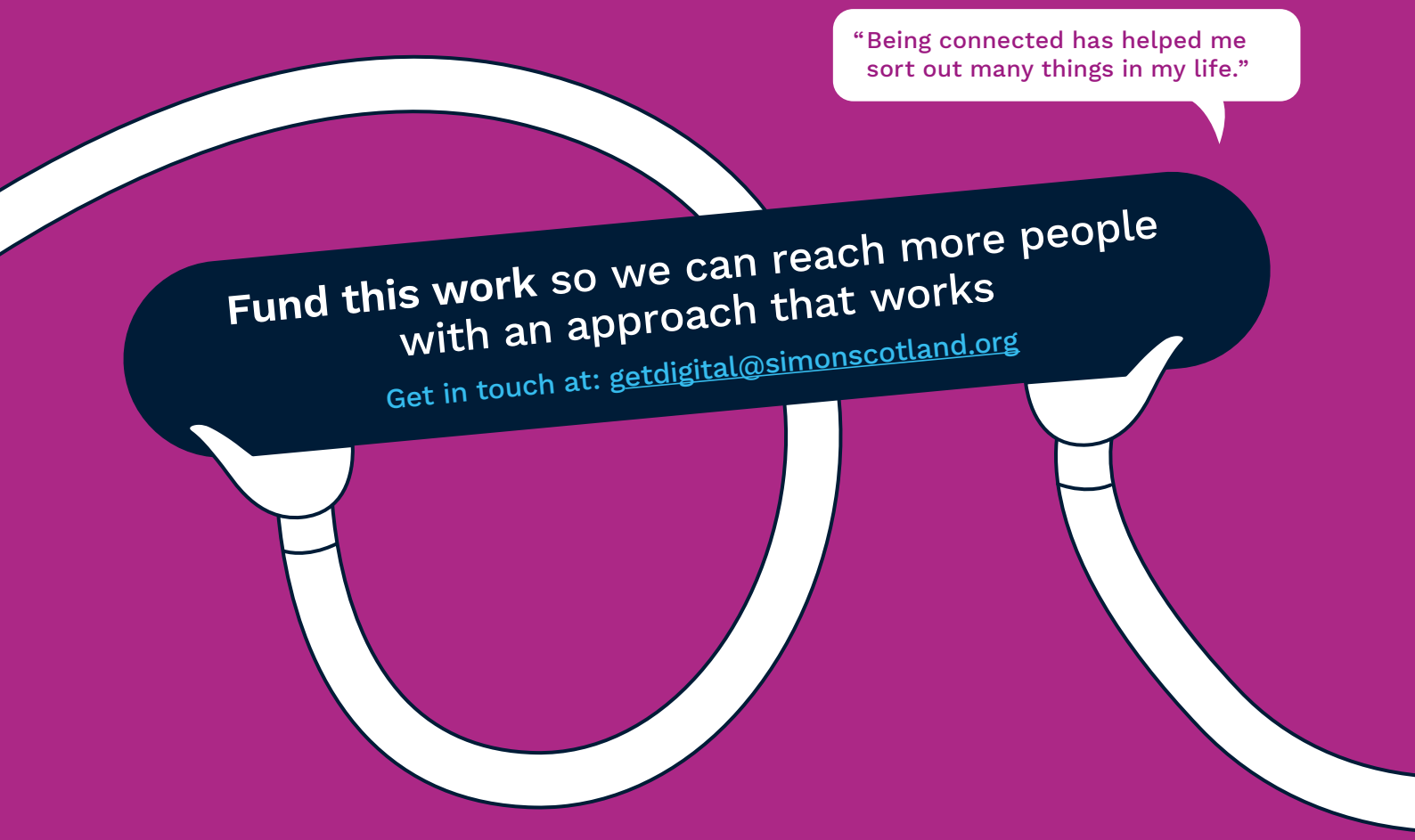
Corporate partners
AND Digital (since 2021)

We'd like to give a special thanks to our friends at Mhor Collective and And Digital for all of their support in delivering our Digital Inclusion Work.

Funders

Join us to make a difference

The journey continues. As long as there are people facing the challenges of homelessness, the need for being proactive around digital inclusion remains. Join in. Help change lives for the better.



Partner with us
Let's share ideas for how we can make a bigger difference.

Learn more about our approach
Listen to our podcast, invite us to speak to your team, follow us on social media for updates.

Share best practice with others
So more people can adopt this effective, life-transforming Get Connected approach.

Get Digital Scotland

Simon Community Scotland
472 Ballater Street, Glasgow G5 0QW

T: 0131 344 0825
getdigital@simonscotland.org

@GetDigitalScot

getdigitalscotland.org

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