Digital Blackpool

Service Use and Impact Report – **February 2023**

Adam Beardow – Digital Inclusion Officer

The program

The Digital Blackpool project, funded by Blackpool Council and delivered by Groundwork CLM, is one of the first digital inclusion programs in the North West. The service tackles digital exclusion in the area, providing access to free laptop and mobile router loans, as well as digital knowledge, training and confidence.

The existing library computer service provides invaluable internet access for many Blackpool residents who do not have a connection at home. The library, however, is a finite resource. Physical and mental health conditions, transport, time constraints, work, childcare and confidence can prevent access to the library service. Unfortunately, many Blackpool residents remain digitally excluded.

Digital Blackpool removes those hurdles, making digital connectivity accessible to as many residents as possible.

The program has a total stock of 65 Chromebook laptops and 20 mobile routers. These are loaned via the Blackpool Library system, for periods of 42 days, with an option to extend for further periods of 42 days.

Alongside the hardware, literature is available to assist users who are less confident with computers and using the internet. Digital Blackpool is working with Pride of Place to roll out drop-in digital help sessions within the community, as well as delivering training. Users are also being signposted to Blackpool Adult, Community and Family Learning for ICT courses.

A delivery and collection service is provided, with an average turnaround of 3-5 days from the date of referral.

To be eligible for referral into the program, the resident must be:

- **18 years or over**
- **A Blackpool resident**

Service use and access statistics
From 17/11/2021 to 09/02/2023

Total number of six week loans: **214** *(Includes extensions)*

Number of unique users: **81 users**
(Unique individuals accessing service regardless of loan length)

Extension requests: **55 users**
(Unique individuals requesting extensions past the initial 6 week period)

Number of six week extensions: **133**

Number of completed service uses: **48** *(Number of loans completed)*

Number of active loans: **33** *(on 09/02/23)*

Area distribution

FY1 – 38 users
- FY1 1 – 1 users
- FY1 2 – 10 users
- FY1 3 – 4 users
- FY1 4 – 8 users
- FY1 5 – 5 users
- FY1 6 – 10 users

FY2 – 10 users
- FY2 0 – 6 users
- FY2 9 – 4 users

FY3 – 14 users
- FY3 7 – 10 users
- FY3 8 – 3 users
- FY3 9 – 1 user

FY4 – 20 users
- FY4 1 – 2 user
- FY4 2 – 3 user
- FY4 3 – 3 users
- FY4 4 – 11 users
- FY4 5 – 1 user

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Equipment and digital connectivity

Number of mobile router requests: **34**

Number of users with existing internet access: **47**

Number of users with mobile phone numbers: **77**

Number of users with pre-existing email accounts: **78**

Number of users with pre-existing Google accounts: **55**

Referral pathways

Most successful referral pathways: Libraries, Citizens Advice, Groundwork

Impact on wellbeing and mental health

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is a scale of positively worded items for assessing a population's mental wellbeing.

Two WEMWBS forms are completed per service user – one is completed on delivery, and a second at the end of the loan. The initial WEMWBS is scored to a total of 35 points over 7 questions. The second WEMWBS is scored to a total of 70 points over 14 questions. In the below statistics, the figures have been compared on a 7 question basis.

To date we've had **38** completed pairs of questionnaires.

76.32% of users have reported an increase in wellbeing after accessing the service. We've seen a mean increase of **6.17** points out of a total of 35.

The questions on the WEMWBS and the mean point improvement reported:

"I've been feeling optimistic about the future"

22 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.182** points

"I've been feeling useful"

20 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.4** points

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"I've been feeling relaxed"

27 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.519** points

"I've been dealing with problems well"

19 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.632** points

"I've been thinking clearly"

16 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.813** points

"I've been feeling close to other people"

21 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.429** points

"I've been able to make up my own mind about things"

13 users reported an increase / mean improvement of **1.462** points

Use of equipment

The most common use of the equipment includes:

- Online courses
- Job searching
- Entertainment
- Skill development

User feedback

"We both now have full time work starting at the end of the month thanks to the use of the laptops"

"I really appreciate you helping us out like this, it means a lot to myself and my family. You really are a superstar"

"I've been keen to start my mental health course but unfortunately isn't doable on my phone only a laptop so this would be a fantastic support for me."

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"I'm applying as my daughter is home with a broken elbow and she needs access to her homework and what a brill service you provide for the community."

"Laptop is great and I am so grateful to have something to use. I was wondering what is the chance of extending the loan? I had my phone stolen and smashed and the laptop is my only life line. I have a meeting with social services online in the next few weeks and no other way of attending."

"I use a computer but my feet are swelling up. My doctor says I must put my feet up so I am wondering if I can borrow a laptop for a while to see if I can use it from my armchair with my feet elevated."

"I currently use Revoe Library on a daily basis to do my job search, keep in contact with family and check my emails. I've seen a flyer for this scheme and really would like to be considered as I spend a lot of time at the local library and the days it's shut I have to travel, so would really benefit from it."

"This would really help me as I am currently living in supported accommodation and I have started up my own artwork page, so I would like a more practical way of working on that, instead of just trying to do it all on my phone."

Post-access progression

After completion of the loan, 3 users have confirmed the purchase of their own digital equipment. 2 users have signed up for home internet packages. 5 further users have stated that they will be purchasing a Chromebook in the future.

13 users have commented that access to the equipment had improved the ease of job searching.

10 further users have commented that access to the equipment had improved the ease of attending online courses. 7 users stated that it wasn't possible for them to complete their online course without access to a laptop or PC.

Marketing

The Digital Blackpool project has been marketed both digitally and in print format. Digitally, the project has been promoted via email newsletters, on Facebook, on both Blackpool Council and Groundwork websites, and through referral partners.

The project has had two printed flyer designs; an initial design advertising the 3 week loan period, and an updated design advertising the 6 week loan period. These were distributed in local libraries, community hubs, medical centres, job centres and leisure facilities.

Since then, Pride of Place have worked with the project to create additional flyers which advertise the Digital Blackpool project, as well as the Lloyds TSB digital helpline which is now available.

Print marketing seems to be the most effective strategy at reaching the target audience, and an uptake in referrals has been noticed since the distribution of the updated flyers.

Future marketing strategy includes further distribution of flyers to local businesses, such as cafes, hairdressers and charity shops, wider medical centres such as dentists, sports facilities, supported accommodation and further community hubs and centres.

Roller-banners are planned for distribution in libraries, to compliment the existing offering. Flyers have proved most successful in libraries, and a permanent fixture may increase uptake further.

Further digital marketing will be undertaken, in an effort to capture the secondary audience – digitally connected residents with relatives or friends who may use the service.

Summary of performance

The Digital Blackpool project had a slow initial uptake in late 2021, early 2022. The extension of the loan period to six weeks has drastically improved the uptake, with promotion of the project in April having a noticeable impact on numbers.

Evaluation of the figures suggests that, initially, the scope of the project was too narrow, with eligibility being limited to Covid 19 isolation referrals. Uptake improved with the expansion to include low-level mental health referrals, though only slightly.

As the scope of the project has expanded to include all residents, and the loan period increased to 6 weeks, the number of users has been steadily increasing.

The library system has seen an increased number of new users, due to previously unregistered residents accessing the program. Several residents who were previously unaware of the digital services available at the library are now aware and using these services.

Connections and rapport between local services and both Groundwork and Blackpool Council has improved as a result of the project.

At the end of May 2022, mobile routers were out of stock due to demand.

Of the 48 completed loans, 6 users did not return their equipment.

Opportunities to improve

There are several possible areas of improvement that I have noticed while delivering the program:

- Several key process points rely on a single member of staff. These include referral processing, collection and delivery, library membership checks, and equipment collection and preparation. Arrangements must be made going forward to allow for alternative contacts in case of leave.
- In the event that demand exceeds the capability to provide a delivery and collection service, plans must be made to ensure that equipment is returned on-time and in original condition.
- We do not currently provide project documentation in accessible formats or alternative languages. We also do not provide documentation in large print format.

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- We do not offer the option to purchase equipment after loan periods. While digital inclusion is improved for the loan period, the 42% of users will lose internet access upon loan completion. The current service only offers a temporary solution to digital exclusion.

Next Steps

In the coming months, Adam will be expanding the range of supporting documentation available for users, to cover a wider range of skill levels. Alongside this, plans for additional video training is being explored.

Marketing and leaflet distribution focus will increase, expanding the current list of distribution areas. Efforts will be made to increase the number of users from postcodes that currently do not access the service as frequently.

We have had many enquiries regarding equipment purchasing. Further discussions should be held to evaluate whether this can be part of the service scope.