

# St Augustine's

## Digital Inclusion Project 2020

*Pilot phase June - September*

### Report Summary

Nat Hairsine (Project Coordinator)

The main aim of the St Augustine's Digital Inclusion Project was to provide Wi-Fi and technology to the homes of our Centre Users who lacked access to these essential provisions, and for this to become a life-enhancing aspect of their time at home during the coronavirus pandemic.

### How did the project work?

#### Funding and Budget

[Community Foundation for Calderdale](#) contributed £5250 as part of their Community Resilience Fund, and a further £5000 was contributed by [Tudor Trust](#). The business [Thomson Reuters](#)' donated £1000 and an individual from the branch made a further £1500 donation out of personal funds.

Each household unit cost £136.80 including VAT for the three month duration - that includes the cost of the dongle at £57.60 and three months unlimited wifi at £26.40 per month including VAT). *Update: As we've moved beyond the pilot phase we've been able to source the month wifi at slightly less, at £22.80 per month including VAT .*

#### Sourcing

[Rocksalt](#), an IT Consultancy Service, provided us with:

- 60 x three month O2 data contracts
- 60 x Huawei Mobile Wi-Fi Dongles
- two phases of delivery.

[GNS](#), our IT Support partners across the road at HOTS, provided us with a refurbishment and upgrade service for any donated devices. 23 devices were donated, and 16 of these have been refurbished and passed on to Centre Users so far.

We received a further 11 laptops from Computer Recyclers, and 50 mobile phones provided by Tesco Mobile through the [Voluntary and Community Sector Emergency Partnership](#).

### **Application Process**

Priority was given to:

- those currently in receipt of asylum support or those who are destitute
- families with school age children who are in need of tech/data to aid with education
- people with a limited level of English and/or engaging with English Language classes at beginner/intermediate level
- those who have been identified as being particularly isolated (e.g. single men).

We also took into consideration the following:

- current data and tech provision of the individual (in Houses of Multiple Occupation - HMO) or the household of a family unit
- how many people as a result will directly benefit from this support (i.e. if it is an individual in a HMO).

### **Agreement**

A 'light touch' [agreement](#) was signed which covered recipients' responsibility to care for the dongle, and code of conduct required whilst using it.

### **Installation**

Recipients were given a simple 'How To Guide' in both paper and electronic form. A WhatsApp group was also created in which videos were shared to resolve installation issues. In the future, a guide in video form could be useful.

## **Who received dongles and devices?**

**How many of our households received dongles?** During this pilot phase, just under a third of the households we support received dongles (60/188). We have since expanded this number.

**How many families and individual children benefited from the project?** 30 families and 67 individual children benefited from the project in addition to individuals not part of family groupings.

**How many nationalities accessed the project?** People spanning 27 nationalities accessed the project. They came from Iran, Kurdistan, Pakistan, Iraq, South Africa, Iraq, Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan, Zimbabwe, Honduras, Cameroon, Eritrea, Syria, Sudan, Rwanda, El Salvador, Kazakhstan, Palestine, Chad, Brazil, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Senegal, Egypt, Ghana and Albania.

**Where were dongles and devices dispersed across Halifax?** Our project benefited people not only in Park Ward but also in Pellon, Boothtown, Southowram, Elland and Sowerby Bridge.

## **What difference has the project made?**

## English Language

The Digital Inclusion Project has had huge benefits for St Augustine's English Language provision. 33 students with dongles are currently engaging with online English Language classes via Zoom, compared to only 4 of these people before they took part in the project. That makes a handful of new classes meeting up weekly and being able to learn, as well as socialise with others, in a time when neither of these can easily happen face-to-face.

### A Case Study

*Maza received an internet dongle from St Augustine's because she matched the criteria that we set - she is currently in the asylum process, and has been for a very long time, meaning that she has very little money and is not allowed to work. She was spending a massive proportion of her monthly allowance on data top ups from a shop, and this was a stressful predicament for her as she would always be anticipating the moment that her data would run out and she would be completely without internet access until the shop was open again.*

*She has three children who are eighteen, sixteen and nine years old - who were not always able to complete college and school work that has been set for them during their remote learning as a result of COVID-19. Maza was regularly attending ESOL lessons in person prior to the pandemic, and when these lessons were moved online to Zoom, she did not have enough data to take part.*

*Maza said:*

*"When you don't have internet you feel like you are nothing."*

*"It relieves me from finding £35 a month. I can use that to buy boxer shorts for my son and football boots for my daughter."*

*Overall, the Digital Inclusion Project has enabled Maza to learn English again, socialise with others, save money that can be spent on essential items, and has given her a peace of mind, no longer worrying about when her internet will run out. Her children have been able to aid their education and have had ways of staying entertained during an incredibly isolating and boring time. Maza rated her experience of the Digital Inclusion Project a 10/10!*

### Quotes

**Learning English and other skills:** *"Now I can learn to speak English with YouTube whenever I want"*

**Coping with COVID-19:** *"It was hard being in all the time, with no school, and the family have just had a new baby, so having a tablet was very handy."*

**Benefiting kids' schoolwork:** *"It's been great for the children in particular, especially while they have been off school. They have been able to access learning, but also games and cartoons to keep them entertained."*

**Financial ease:** *"it saves so much money that now can be spent on other essential items."*

**Navigating bureaucratic systems:** *"It was great for the family so they could send files to their solicitor and to Migrant Help/the Home Office and other official offices."*

**Recognition and self worth:** *“you are a love for us immigrants... that we feel loved even far from our homeland... we feel remembered... thank you...”*

**A sense of normality or going ‘back to normal’:** *“The CU has a degree in Computer Science. The two older children are computer-literate. Their very limited access to a laptop was a source of frustration which the Project was able to remove for its duration”*

**Not running out of internet:** *“It's unlimited, so I can use it as much as I want during these months that we are just at home.*

**High quality internet:** *“It's fast! You had warned us that maybe only two people would be able to use it at one time but I have had 6 people share mine before at the same time and it has been very fast. It is the best dongle you could have picked”*

**Connectivity:** *“I have had difficulties arranging 1:1 sessions with A because he has had issues to deal with and he really wants structured lessons - but because of the WiFi project he has been in touch with me (a first) because he is keen to access online learning.”*

### **Usage statistics**

- All sixty dongles have been used on a regular basis
- The highest usage over the last month was 350GB (a lot of internet) - equivalent to 700 hours of Zooming
- The lowest usage over the last month was 80GB - equivalent to watching 25 high definition films
- The average usage was around 100GB - equivalent to 5000 hours of browsing.
- Around forty individuals/families were able to access online events during the Summer Programme.

## **STA’s Digital Inclusion going forward**

### **Learning from the project’s limitations**

1. The dongles we provided used **sim cards and mobile data**, rather than actual broadband. A small number of recipients had poor 3G/4G signal in their accommodation meaning the dongle did not improve their connectivity. That being said, O2 was chosen as the provider due to the company having the best coverage in Park Ward.
2. Although providing broadband may be the ideal solution to the limitation above, there are **legal issues** surrounding the payment of a service user’s ‘bills’ by an organisation, which may have implications for people’s asylum cases. It would be useful to think about how longer term broadband could be provided to Centre Users whilst avoiding any tricky situations.
3. Technical issues, to do with things like charging the dongle or typing the password correctly, were difficult to solve from a distance. Because of the **restrictions of COVID-19**, these troubleshooting conversations were mostly attempted either via WhatsApp or telephone call, however being able to go to somebody’s home to do this would

have been easier where there is a language barrier. Two Centre Users did provide technological support from time to time, however, and this could be built on in the future, perhaps with a weekly tech drop in. The reality is that both staff and volunteers often have difficulty with technology so it would be great to give Centre Users the opportunity to exercise their expertise in a peer-led way.

4. **The sharing (or not sharing) of dongles within households:** some Centre Users expressed they felt that the dongle was made inaccessible to them by their housemate, by means of changing the password, taking the dongle whenever they left the house, or taking the sim card out and putting it in their phone instead. This also led to one loss of a sim card.
5. There was not enough time to be able to put in place a **Digital Casework Plan**, whereby members of the Support Team could use modes of connectivity such as Zoom in order to do casework. We could think about setting up a system by which Centre Users can navigate online aspects of the Home Office, NHS, Migrant Help and more, with the virtual help of the Support Team.
6. There was not enough time for a **full assessment** of all of our Centre Users' households in order to assess the scale of need. This meant that we had no option but to use the standard criteria, as initiated by Bristol Refugee Rights, in order to choose recipients. The next step, in order for St Augustine's to create its own criteria that works for the particularities of the organisation and its users, is to carry out a full assessment. This could be shared between the Support Team and Welfare Callers. The criteria could be reimagined, so as to consider other corners of the community such as Roma people. It must be considered, on the other hand, that asylum seeking people usually have the worst financial situation out of all of our Centre Users with very little benefits.
7. The contracts had a **time limit of three months**. As the end of the contract due near, Centre Users were sad and concerned, having become used to this level of digital access in their homes and all the benefits it has brought. Digital Inclusion has become an integral part of the work St Augustine's does, or at least during the pandemic it remains so. It has improved the wellbeing of the community and must continue. *Update: thanks to additional funding from Calderdale Community Foundation and the Kings Place Foundation, we are able to extend people's contracts for a further 6 months, till mid April 2021, and expand to support another 25 houses. We are now providing wifi support to 85 homes. However this isn't a sustainable model in the long term as it requires us to find £30K a year. We need to work together with the Council and other bodies like the Good Things Foundation to develop blanket coverage and inclusion for those who need it most. <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/fix-the-digital-divide>*
8. The **provision of refurbished laptops and tablets became slightly overlooked** at points in the project as this was effectively a whole project in itself that required lots more time. With more capacity, potentially a much bigger amount of devices could be sourced and more refurbishments could be done. *Update: a centre user who is experienced in IT is now refurbishing donated laptops for minimal costs which means we can support more people.*