DIGITAL INCLUSION AT Framework

Digital Inclusion case study

# Donated Vodafone SIMs through charities.connected scheme play a massive role in helping Framework Housing Association tackle digital exclusion

Framework Housing Association has benefited from a generous donation of SIM cards from Vodafone through their charities.connected scheme. It's easy to see how this benevolent gesture from Vodafone directly impacts Framework's service users in giving them a 'lifeline' to the world and case studies have been written to illustrate this. What's harder to see is the impact this programme has had on Framework's overall plans to improve Digital Inclusion across all services. This case study looks at this impact in more detail and the key role the Vodafone SIMs have played.

Framework received a grant from the Access Foundation to form a dedicated two person Digital Inclusion team in December 2022. This provided the impetus to start a project that will positively impact so many of our vulnerable and digitally excluded service users.

Since the team was formed in December 2022 over 75 laptops have been delivered to 42 separate Framework services to provide connected IT services for our service users. These laptops have been donated by some of Framework's corporate partners. The decision was taken to convert these machines from Microsoft Windows devices to run Chrome OS Flex. This has prolonged the life of the machines and provides an easy to manage and simple to use device for our service users. Each machine has been supplied with a dongle and a donated SIM from Vodafone. These SIMS have 40Gb /data per month and are active for 6 months. The machines are being used to enable residents to access the Internet for reasons such as Zoom meetings, Universal Credit journals, job searching, accommodation searches, online training, and meaningful social activities. Most of our hostels do not have public wifi availability. Using the SIMs has provided a standalone solution for Internet connectivity and greatly benefited the service users.

As the connected laptops are in our services, they are also being used in our Skills Plus sessions ensuring that practical IT activities are embedded in the lessons. Skills Plus is a bespoke training solution that gives service users the skills and confidence to make a success of their new tenancy and live independently when they move from Framework supported housing. Residents need to know how to pay bills, report repairs, check their tenancy agreements, check journey times, book travel, make an appointment at the doctors..... These are all online tasks that can now be covered in the Skills Plus sessions.

The Digital Inclusion Team also provides a programme of training and drop-in support to improve the levels of IT skills amongst our all Framework service users. Self-directed learning is available through the LearnMyWay package and service users are encouraged to enrol on community based courses. Volunteer Digital Champions have also been recruited to support this exciting and rewarding venture. The core training offering is Digital Skills Days that are run weekly in the Nottingham Training Centre, fortnightly in Lincoln and monthly in Worksop, Scunthorpe and Boston. The Training Centre has been fitted out with 8 donated laptops and 4 refurbished desktops. The other locations, however, require the use of the donated Vodafone SIMs for access to the Internet. Some learners bring their own devices, such as a Smartphone or Tablet, many of which have donated Vodafone SIMs installed.

The Digital Skills Days are a more informal way to get engagement with our service users in anything digital and cater for all levels of learners. We hope to attract learners with a wide range of abilities. Volunteer Digital Champions are available to help people register and use the LearnMyWay application. We assess learners needs and agree an Individual Learning Plan. This is likely to involve LearnMyWay or may be building confidence so that they can enrol on a local IT course. Some learners may want to complete more advanced courses. We might even find that we can support people to find training on things related to work (such as CSCS training).The sessions are relaxed and people can attend for all day or just pop in for an hour or two. People have the opportunity to use the Internet for research and may play games. Playing word or number games helps improve IT and other core skills.

The Digital Skills Day also includes a more formal one-hour session during the day. These cover topics such as staying safe, scam awareness, secure online banking, safe shopping, 2 factor authentication, using digital resources to identify

energy and cost-of-living savings, accessing services…Learners will be encouraged to attend, but it is not mandatory.

We are currently running one Zoom session per week, but this is likely to increase as more Digital Champions are recruited. Learners can join from home, often using the donated Vodafone SIM. It's just part of Framework's plan to tackle digital exclusion and we are very pleased that Vodafone are a key partner in our quest.

Kevin Rookes, 19th May 2023