people know **HOW**

Unlocking Your Ideas

Connect Four Journal

How are community organisations supporting people with data connectivity?

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July 2022

Abstract

Scottish charity People Know How has been delivering digital support projects for over six years, supporting individuals in the community and campaigning and collaborating across sectors to facilitate long term social change. Having identified three main elements of digital inclusion over the course of their work (digital devices, digital skills and connectivity), they have been continuing their service delivery while also campaigning to end data poverty. As part of their social innovation model, People Know How conducts research and consultations to ensure their services continue to address current need. They recently gathered views from seven people they support who are experiencing data poverty, and ten organisations supporting people with digital inclusion. This research underlined the relative lack of knowledge and awareness about data connectivity and available support, the intricacies of which are explored in this article.

Keywords

Data poverty, connectivity, digital inclusion, Connectivity Now, Reconnect, digital

Key points

- Data poverty is the biggest obstacle to digital inclusion

- There are many practical tips, resources and information that can be provided to organisations providing connectivity support

- Learning can be taken from programmes and initiatives that took place over the pandemic as we continue to combat digital exclusion moving forward

Introduction

[People Know How](#) is a Scottish social innovation charity that aims to create spaces where people feel included, and to facilitate collaboration to change perspectives and empower people to realise their strengths and improve lives.

The charity has been delivering digital support projects through their [Reconnect](#) service for over 6 years, supporting individuals in the community and campaigning and collaborating across sectors to facilitate long term social change.

Providing data connectivity support

People Know How has identified three elements of digital inclusion: devices, digital skills and connectivity.

- They have been able to provide **devices** through partnerships and donations from businesses, universities and other charities.

- They support people with their **digital** skills through one-to-one befriending and digital groups.

- They offer **connectivity** solutions through projects we design and run themselves, as well as partnering with programmes like [Connecting Scotland](#), to provide data and support to use it. They also run [Connectivity Now](#), a campaign which aims to end data poverty across Scotland.

Why is data connectivity so important?

Digital boasts the ability to connect people across all types of boundaries, but without internet, the result can be the opposite.

Data poverty is when individuals, households or communities cannot afford sufficient mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs. This can be isolating and has far-reaching effects on the mental, physical, and social health of households – from shopping

for essentials and maintaining finances, to staying connected and finding employment or education.

UK data from 2021 shows that:

- 1.5 million UK households (6%) don't have home internet access, rising to 11% of poorer households. (Ofcom 2021)

- 2 million UK households struggle to afford broadband (Ofcom 2021)

- 10 million adults don't have the most basic digital skills (Ofcom 2021)

- 40% of those offline earn less than £15,000 and 55% below £20,000 (Ofcom 2021)

- 1 in 6 broadband customers struggled to pay their bill between March 2020 and January 2021 (Citizens Advice 2021)

These sobering statistics show the realities of data poverty across the UK.

How are community organisations supporting people with data connectivity?

As part of their social innovation model, People Know How conducts research and consultations to ensure their services continue to address current need. They recently gathered views from seven people they support who are experiencing data poverty, and ten organisations supporting people with digital inclusion. They hoped this would generate top tips and guidance for others, but in fact, the research underlined the relative lack of knowledge and awareness about data connectivity and available support – such as the lack of advertisement around '[social tariffs](#)' for broadband.

This resonates with a recent [audience poll at a Policy in Practice webinar](#), where 58% of money guidance practitioners who responded said they were 'not very confident' or 'not at all confident' about providing support to people around broadband or mobile data costs. This was similar in the research conducted by

People Know How – with over half saying they lacked confidence.

When the charity asked people who have received connectivity support about what they looked for in a broadband package, almost everyone placed price as their number one consideration, with just over half also prioritising speed, and half choosing data amount. By contrast, when they asked service providers, the highest-ranked priority was data amount. Lack of understanding about amounts and speed of data may contribute to poor uptake of potential solutions to data poverty, such as social tariffs.

A few organisations mentioned supporting people to use price comparison websites when choosing internet packages. These can be useful, but require a level of internet access, digital skills and confidence to use them.

The research also enquired into respondents' knowledge about data needs and consumption. When People Know How asked people who have received support to rank internet activities in order of data consumption, some were unaware of how little data is used by activities like online banking, or how much is used by video conferencing or streaming. Half put social media browsing at the top; with the other half placing video chatting first instead. Importantly, none of the organisations reported offering advice on 'making your data go further,' and almost all said the reason for this is that they don't know enough about it to feel confident advising others.

Learning from Connecting Scotland

As well as providing their own digital support, People Know How has also been heavily involved with the Scottish Government programme Connecting Scotland, both distributing devices provided by the scheme and operating their national helpline.

The programme was set up over COVID, with the aim of supporting everyone in Scotland to get online. It works with organisations to distribute devices and connectivity in the form of MiFi's pre-loaded with SIM cards.

When the programme began, the MiFi's only provided 20GB of data per month. During this time the helpline would frequently receive calls from users who were unaware of why their data had suddenly stopped working. Upon investigation, many said they had recently discovered on-demand television streaming services. Some callers would phone in the middle of the month and would have to wait until the following month for their 20GB to be renewed.

An understanding of data usage would have been beneficial to these recipients. Most recently, in the last iteration of the programme, Connecting Scotland offered unlimited data for 2 years. The programme is now making plans for future iterations and how they will continue this support.

Outside of Connecting Scotland, packages with fixed data provisions are a real option for people with a smaller budget. An understanding of data usage can help people make informed choices about packages on offer, and how much data they need to complete essential activities online.

Connectivity Now: Campaigning to end data poverty

Derived from People Know How's digital work, our Connectivity Now campaign outlines three main actions to end data poverty in Scotland.

The first calls to regulate connectivity, offering better packages to people on low incomes and viewing internet as a basic utility.

The second calls to link connectivity to shared spaces. Done securely, sharing and subsidising data through community hubs and social housing can substantially widen access to data.

Finally, the third action calls to zero-rate essential service websites, allowing everyone to access essential services online for free, or in other words, without spending any data.

Since launch, People Know How has been campaigning for pledges of support from organisations and community groups whose

backing will support them as they lobby the government to implement policy change that can make the campaign a reality.

Data poverty is just one aspect of poverty, but it is one that impacts many other aspects, reducing access to education and employment, heightening the cost of living, and negatively impacting wellbeing. People Know

How is calling on policymakers to recognise the impact that data poverty has on people across Scotland and to implement lasting change.

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