



Digital Lifelines Small Grants Fund 2024

Final Impact Report
December 2023-December 2024



The Digital Lifelines Programme

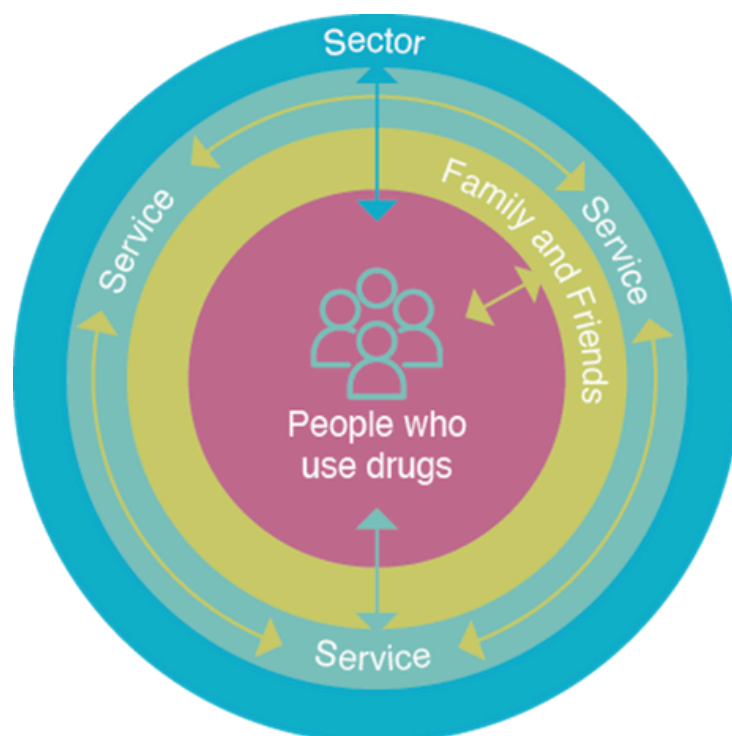
Digital Lifelines Scotland launched in April 2021 funded by Scottish Government as a partnership programme instigated, designed and delivered across a wide range of organisations.

Digital Lifelines Scotland seeks to improve digital inclusion and to design digital solutions that better meet people's needs, to improve the health outcomes for:

PEOPLE have greater access to the confidence, skills, and motivation alongside devices and connectivity that form digital solutions that keep them safe and that enable them to become and remain connected to family, friends and relevant services that support them.

THE SERVICES that support these people have the digital means to develop and strengthen the support they provide, and staff that are skillful in using and developing digital solutions to enable those they support.

THE SECTOR is connected and collaborating, developing joined-up services and exploring digital solutions together.



Small Grants Fund 2024

This report provides a summary of the impact of the funding from organisations funded through the Small Grants Fund 2024.

The main objective of the fund was to support small, local organisations with an income of less than £250,000 per annum to continue or extend digital inclusion activities with people at risk of death from a drug overdose and those who cared about them and supported them.

The primary focus of the organisation did not have to be drug death prevention, but the activity applied for had to involve working with people who were at risk of death from a drug overdose and had recently been:

- Experiencing homelessness
- Transitioning from custody
- Recently discharged from hospital

Initially, grants of up to £10,000 were available to support existing digital inclusion work over a 12-month period from January 2024 to December 2024. Due to increased demand, the programme team agreed to uplift grant awards during delivery, allowing organisations to apply for additional funds for devices and connectivity.

All projects funded through the Digital Lifelines Small Grants Fund 2024 had previously received grants from the 2023 funding round.

In 2023, eight projects were funded. In this funding round, for 2024, four organisations applied for continuation funding, and all were successfully awarded grants. Additionally three projects were further awarded grant uplifts to purchase devices and connectivity.



**Maximum
Award Amount**

£19,309

Funded Projects

Four projects were supported through the fund, totalling £58,119



Funded
projects

4



Total amount
awarded

£58,119



Average amount
awarded

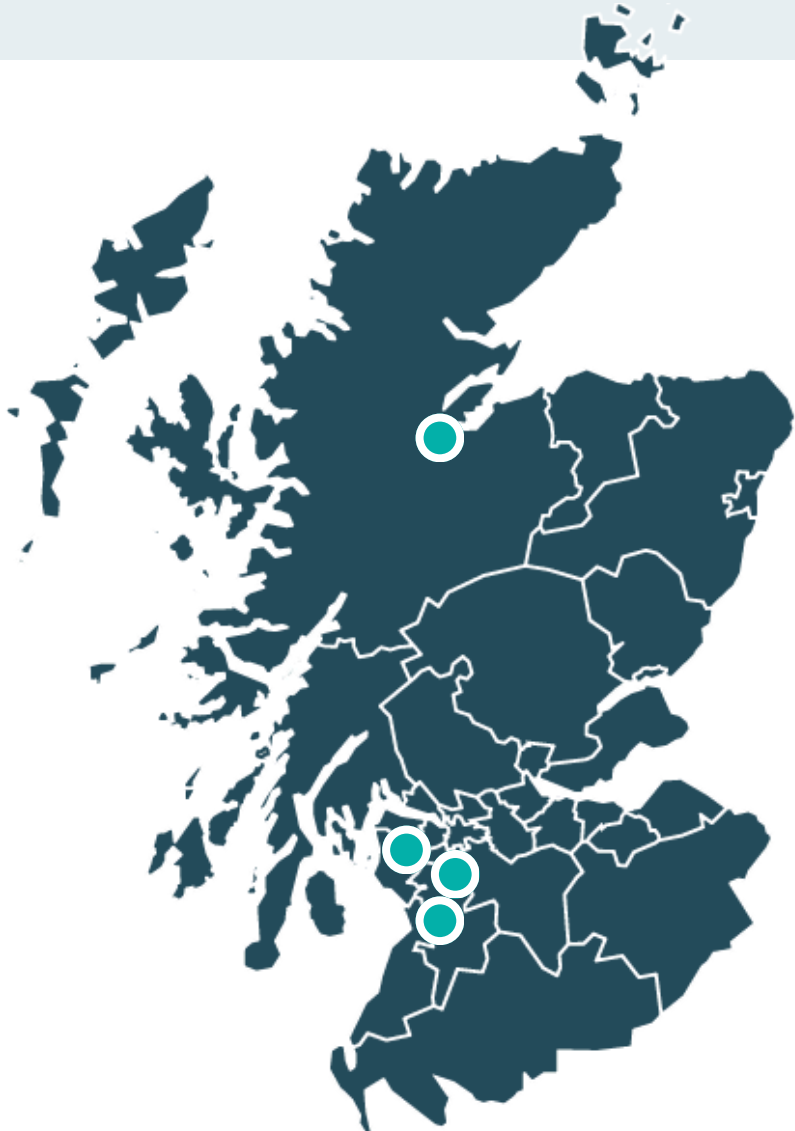
£14,530

Project Delivery

In total, 4 of the funded projects are delivering across 4 local authority areas in Scotland.

[Find out about each funded project in our interactive Google map here](#)

(Use the panel on the left side of the google map to select tick boxes of data you want to view or hide)



The Beneficiaries

This programme targets people who are at risk of drug related harm and are, or have recently been:

- Experiencing homelessness
- Released from custody: or
- In hospital or a residential service



2538

Direct beneficiaries have been supported currently.



849

People supported released from custody



1184

People supported experiencing homelessness



88

People supported recently in a hospital or residential service



18

Digital Champions have been trained



20

Staff and volunteers have been supported

Devices Distributed to date

People Experiencing Homelessness



135

Phones



4

Laptops



46

Tablets



412

Connectivity

People Released from Custody



205

Phones



3

Laptops



27

Tablets



525

Connectivity

People recently in Hospital or Residential Service



67

Phones



0

Laptops



5

Tablets



72

Connectivity

Funded Projects

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
East Ayrshire Churches Homelessness Action	The project is supporting people in urban and rural areas affected by substance use through drop in and recovery hub services. The project supported 58 participants, 6 staff and volunteers and trained 2 digital champions.	£10,000
Red Chair Highland LTD	The project provides devices, connectivity, and digital support to people in crisis affected by substance use in Highlands. This project is delivered in partnership with Apex Highland who work with people affected by the criminal justice system. The project supported 52 participants, 4 staff and volunteers and trained 7 digital champions.	£10,275
Irvine Sports Club	The project provides devices and digital inclusion activities for families affected by substance use in North Ayrshire. The project supported 1832 participants, 5 staff and volunteers and trained 4 digital champions.	£19,309
Recovery Ayr SCIO	The project tackles digital poverty through providing devices and basic digital skills training and support within the recovery community in South Ayrshire. The project supported 179 participants, 5 staff and volunteers and trained 5 digital champions	£18,535
		£58,119



Project Insights

Throughout the duration of the project, organisations provided feedback on what worked well, key factors that contributed to success, and valuable insights.

-  Participants reconnected with family, friends, and online recovery communities, reducing isolation and improving emotional well-being.
-  Access to online recovery communities provided ongoing peer support, ensuring participants felt connected even when in-person meetings were not possible.
-  Devices helped individuals apply for housing, benefits, and employment opportunities, contributing to greater stability and independence.
-  Personalised training and tailored app recommendations from organisations to those being supported improved engagement, making the support more effective.
-  Organisations provided feedback that strong partnerships, supported by clear communication, efficient referral processes, and consistent support, contributed to the project's success.
-  Organisations highlighted that maintaining contact digitally with participants resulted in more effective and impactful support.



Project Insights



Organisations reported that introducing digital learning opportunities, such as photography and digital graffiti courses, encouraged engagement and interest in using devices.



Engaging in these creative digital activities helped build people's confidence, making them more likely to access digital support services



Having readily available devices ensured that individuals in urgent need could connect quickly, improving access to essential services and support. For organisations, this meant a fast turnaround—from receiving a referral to providing a device—ensuring timely support.



Some organisations successfully partnered with local groups to refurbish second-hand devices, allowing them to maximise their budgets and increase the number of people they supported.



Organisations were flexible in their approach, which enabled participants to access a variety of support including training courses and mental health resources, based on their individual needs.



The Impact

Recovery Ayr SCIO

Theme: Responsive Delivery

"A key success of the project has been the swift turnaround from referral to device delivery. The Recovery Ayr team has streamlined processes, ensuring that devices—complete with basic training and pre-installed apps—are provided within two working days, or often on the same day. This rapid access to connectivity is crucial for individuals in need, enabling immediate support and engagement with essential services."



Red Chair Highland

Theme: Partnership Working

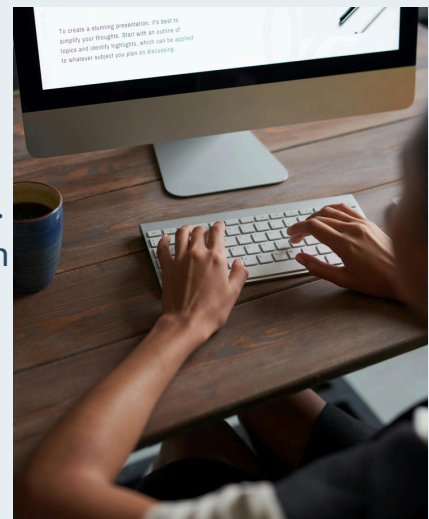
"The partnership between Apex and Red Chair Highland has been a real success. Robust communication channels, effective referral systems, swift response times, and available ongoing support systems have resulted in efficient and impactful support for project participants. Having the means to maintain contact with those supported has ensured more consistent, effective, and meaningful support."

Irvine Sports Club

Theme: Broadening Access to Services

"Often, people come to us for Digital Support and become involved in other elements of the organisation. We use the no-wrong-door approach, where people can access any support they need through the organisation or a partner organisation we work with.

Half of the people we work with at the moment come through Digital Skills Training and go on to other activities and services."



An Impact Story

East Ayrshire Churches Homelessness Action

John faced significant challenges after his release from prison for offenses related to substance use. Homeless and struggling to access essential services, he felt isolated from his family and lacked a support network to guide him toward recovery. Through the Digital Lifelines project, John received a smartphone and data plan, along with basic training on using digital tools to access vital resources.

This new lifeline allowed John to quickly begin rebuilding his life. He reconnected with his family, gaining much-needed emotional support, and accessed CBT and other health-related apps to support his recovery. The smartphone also became a gateway to joining an online recovery group, where he built relationships with others on similar journeys. Using his new device, John applied for housing assistance and successfully secured temporary accommodation. The Digital Lifelines project provided John with the tools and opportunities to regain control, rebuild stability, and work toward long-term recovery.

What difference did the project make?



Reconnecting and Reducing Isolation: The project has helped individuals reconnect with family, friends, and peer support networks, reducing isolation and fostering well-being. Online recovery communities provided vital support when in-person meetings weren't possible.



Access to Resources and Stability: By supporting virtual recovery programs, benefit applications, and essential communication, the project has improved access to services. It has enhanced immediate support, reduced harm, and promoted long-term stability and reintegration.



The Challenges

Projects experience a range of challenges throughout the duration of the project which organisation put measure in place to overcome.



Staff changes in some organisations caused short delays in project delivery. These were quickly fixed by assigning trained staff members to take over, allowing the project to continue smoothly.



Some participants had difficulty using devices effectively due to limited digital literacy, delaying their access to essential services. Additionally, some were hesitant to engage with the project due to mistrust of services.

To address these challenges, personalised group sessions were introduced to help participants build confidence with digital tools. Peer-led outreach also played a key role in building trust and encouraging people to embrace digital access.



Several organisations experienced higher demand for support and a significant increase in device usage, resulting in a greater need for devices than originally expected.

To address this, the Digital Lifelines programme team proactively implemented a contingency plan to help organisations meet the increased demand, which included an uplift in funding to allow organisations to purchase additional devices based on demand.



Effective partnership working was crucial in overcoming challenges such as sourcing additional devices and connectivity, ensuring organisations could meet increased demand and continue providing essential support. This collaboration was also vital in supporting people facing multiple complex challenges, helping them engage with and be signposted to the right support at the right time.



A small number of devices were lost, stolen, or damaged (less than 8% of devices), and replacements were provided to minimise disruption.

Key Learnings and Considerations for Future Funds

The Digital Lifelines initiative has supported multiple funds, each with similar aims but distinct areas of focus. This report concentrates on insights from the Follow-on Fund. At the same time, other funds—such as Small Grants 2024 and Early Adopters 3—were delivered over a similar period, each addressing digital inclusion in different ways. As a result, many of the recommendations and conclusions align across these programmes due to their shared objectives.



Device Distribution and Protection

Practical considerations, such as providing protective covers for devices, should be factored into future programmes. Organisations highlighted that this simple step reduced long-term costs and helped participants value their devices more. Building this into future budgets and encouraging its use could enhance sustainability.



Project Planning and Engagement

The length of the grant period should allow sufficient time for project planning. Some organisations faced challenges with initial engagement, which could limit the overall impact of their work. Providing structured time and support for planning—particularly through in-person Community of Learning events—could help mitigate these challenges. These events also encourage a strong sense of community and could further encourage partnership working across the programme.



Sustaining Impact Beyond Funding

A key concern for organisations was how to sustain the impact of their work once funding ends. Greater focus and tailored support could help projects embed their success for long-term benefit. Impact surveys have proven valuable in measuring success, but smaller organisations may lack the infrastructure for effective data collection. The programme could explore ways to provide more targeted support to these organisations, helping them integrate impact measurement into service delivery.





Grantmaking

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Contact

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