



# Digital Lifelines Follow On Fund

Final Impact Report  
June 2023-December 2024



## The Digital Lifelines Programme

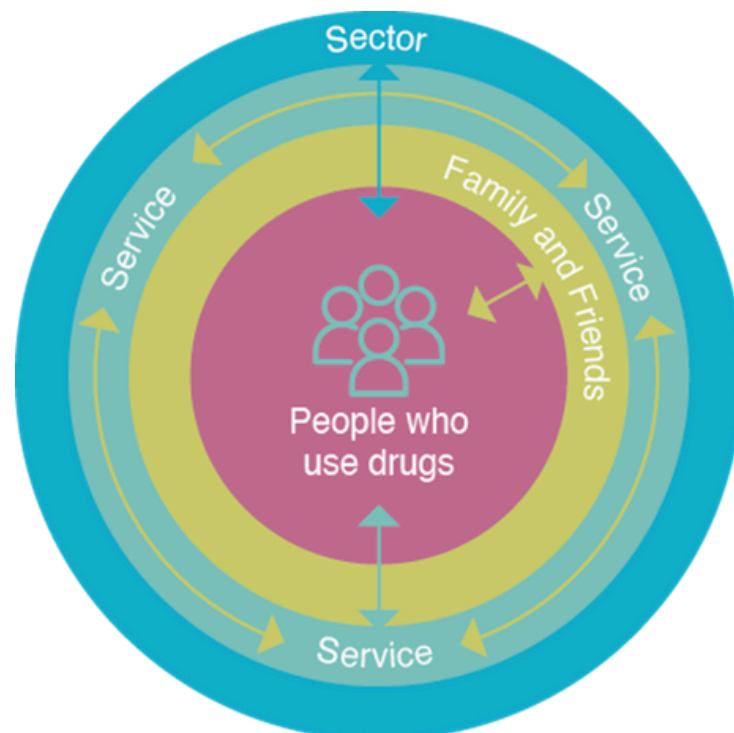
Digital Lifelines Scotland launched in April 2021 funded by Scottish Government as a partnership programme instigated, designed and delivered across a wide range of organisations.

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.



## Follow On Fund

This report provides a summary of the impact of the funding from organisations funded through the Follow On Fund.

Organisations funded through Early Adopters 1 & 2 funds were invited to apply for Follow On Funding in May 2023. All organisations were already delivering digital inclusion work and have:

- Workforce structures in place to support digital skills development e.g Digital Harm Reduction Champions.
- Experience supporting people to build their digital skills and confidence.
- Been delivering a harm reduction approach or had been open to exploring a harm reduction approach and had been supported to do this through this programme.

Initially grants of up to £65,000 were available to support existing digital inclusion work over an 18 month period from June 2023 to December 2024. Participating organisations were also required to attend monthly Community of Learning (COL) sessions to share insights and network with other projects. They received a £5,000 contribution to support engagement within the COL.

Due to increased demand, the programme team agreed to uplift grant awards, allowing organisations to apply for additional funds for devices and connectivity. Four organisations applied and recieved grant uplifts.

A set delivery framework required organisations to support individuals 1-2-1, provide devices and connectivity, and capture impact at individual, organisation, and sector levels. Sixteen organisations were invited; eight applied, with two unable to proceed.



**Maximum  
Award Amount**

**£104,819**

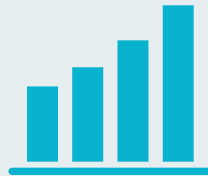
## Funded Projects

Seven projects were supported through the fund, totalling £307,297.



Funded  
projects

7



Total amount  
awarded

£416,981



Average amount  
awarded

£59,569

## Project Delivery

In total six funded projects are operating across eight local authority areas in Scotland, with one project delivering services throughout 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 was targeted at 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



1033

Direct beneficiaries have been supported currently.



341

People supported released from custody



637

People supported experiencing homelessness



55

People supported recently in a hospital or residential service



65

Digital Champions have been trained



132

Staff and volunteers have been supported

## Devices Distributed to date

### People Experiencing Homelessness



**376**

Phones



**51**

Laptops



**162**

Tablets



**552**

Connectivity

### People Released from Custody



**262**

Phones



**14**

Laptops



**34**

Tablets



**261**

Connectivity

### People recently in Hospital or Residential Service



**32**

Phones



**15**

Laptops



**24**

Tablets



**47**

Connectivity

## Funded Projects

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
<p><b>Angus Alcohol and Drug Partnership</b></p>	<p>Angus Alcohol and Drugs Partnership's Digi-Angus project supported people experiencing homelessness or transitioning from custody to increase digital skills and improve access to supports and services. Funding allowed them to expand their partnership approach and provide devices, connectivity, one-to-one support, and digital skills sessions to improve access to digital support and reduce drug harm. The project supported 129 participants, 9 staff and volunteers, and trained 3 digital champions.</p>	<p>£75,723</p>
<p><b>Grassmarket Community Project</b></p>	<p>Grassmarket's Digital Citizens project supported people experiencing homelessness or recently discharged from hospital. Funding allowed them to expand their previous hub model to include one-to-one support, providing participants with devices, connectivity, and digital inclusion activities. The project increased access to healthcare and drug-specific support services, as well as built digital skills and confidence to improve social connections and overall wellbeing. The project supported 38 participants, 7 staff and volunteers, and trained 7 digital champions.</p>	<p>£32,414</p>



Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
<p><b>People Know How</b></p>	<p>People Know How’s Reconnect project supported people experiencing homelessness, transitioning from custody, and recently discharged from hospital to help improve their wellbeing by increasing digital and social inclusion. Funding allowed them to work with local ADPs to provide digital drop-in sessions and one-to-one support. The project reduced isolation, increased access to harm reduction resources and support services, and increased coping strategies. The project supported 157 participants, 15 staff and volunteers, and trained 9 digital champions.</p>	<p>£69,630</p>
<p><b>Recovery Enterprise Scotland</b></p>	<p>Recovery Enterprise Scotland's Foundations Hub project worked with people transitioning from custody to increase digital inclusion support. Funding allowed them to increase their staff team to expand their digital inclusion programme. The project provided devices, connectivity, and one-to-one digital support to improve people’s access to resources and support services, helped them maintain contact with family, enhanced their employability opportunities, and reintegrated them into society. The project supported 125 participants, 10 staff and volunteers, and trained 10 digital champions.</p>	<p>£69,135</p>





Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
<p><b>Recovery Scotland</b></p>	<p>Recovery Scotland’s Digital Recovery Outreach Project (DROP) supported people experiencing homelessness or people transitioning from custody in Stirling, Clackmannanshire, and Falkirk. Funding allowed them to develop an additional drop-in hub, which was incorporated into the organisation’s Assertive Recovery Outreach Services. The project provided devices and one-to-one support, working with people to develop their digital skills and confidence, connecting them to wider support services. The project supported 36 participants, 3 staff and volunteers, and trained 0 digital champions.</p>	<p>£36,260</p>
<p><b>Simon Community Scotland</b></p>	<p>Simon Community's Get Connected Stay Safe project supported people experiencing homelessness to reduce drug-related harms and deaths through digital connection, skills, and access to information, services, and lifesaving technology. Funding allowed them to continue the delivery of their Get Connected model, providing devices, connectivity, and digital skills activities, which were underpinned by a harm reduction approach. The project connected people with family and community and improved access to harm reduction resources and services. The project supported 356 participants, 58 staff and volunteers, and trained 36 digital champions.</p>	<p>£104,819</p>
		<p><b>£416,981</b></p>



## Project Insights

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



A common success across several funded projects was the increased independence of those receiving support, which had a positive impact on staff delivering services. Feedback from organisations highlighted that as individuals became more able to manage their own health appointments and Universal Credit claims, staff could focus more on providing tailored support rather than administrative follow-ups



Another key benefit was that digital support enabled organisations to maintain consistent contact with the people they were supporting. It made communication easier and more direct, helping to strengthen engagement and support.



Organisations also highlighted the significant benefits of collaborating with partner organisations to support their clients' needs. Partners reported noticeable improvements in clients' lives, attributing this to the combined support from both their own services and the organisations they worked with.



Several organisations found the Digital Lifelines Community of Learning beneficial, as it brought funded organisations together, creating opportunities to share best practices and offer mutual support.



## Impact and Insights

### Simon Community Scotland

#### Theme: Trusted Support

"The support being delivered by someone already familiar to them was key to the project's success. It meant there was no need to build a new trusted relationship from scratch. There was also no fixed learning agenda—each person had different priorities, and we could shape the support around what mattered most to them."



### Shine Women's Mentoring Service

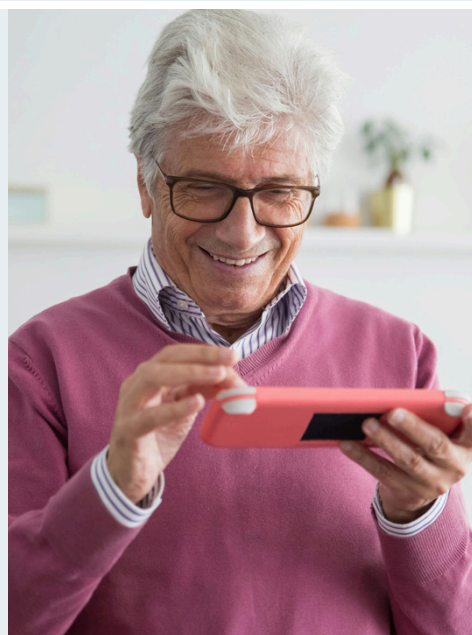
#### Theme: Inclusive Support

"The funding has allowed us to work in an equitable and inclusive way, offering support to all of the people we work with at any stage of their journey. Having the funding allowed us to plan support for the whole delivery year rather than just a short-burst intervention."

### Angus ADP

#### Theme: Collaborative Work

"The Digital Lifelines project has enabled a partnership between the Vibrant Communities Team (VCT) and the Angus Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP). Working together has helped build links with workers and enhanced the digital literacy support on offer. We know we have saved lives, and participants are happy to share that with us. People have told us they would not be here now if they didn't have the device."



## Impact Story

### Grassmarket Community Project

Robert was referred to our services by a partner organisation and is currently in temporary accommodation after becoming homeless upon leaving prison. He is applying for housing through Edindex, a joint initiative between Edinburgh Council and local housing associations that streamlines access to various housing options.



Keen to find work, Robert faces significant digital access barriers. He lacks experience using digital devices and feels overwhelmed by technology. Since leaving prison, he has been without a phone or data, making it difficult to reconnect with his brother, who lives overseas.

At his first visit to our Digital Drop-in session, we conducted an impact survey to assess his needs and provided information about our services.

Based on his feedback, we determined that a phone would best suit his needs. We set it up with essential apps, including video calling tools, email, and job search platforms, and helped him add key contacts for relevant organisations.

**“After getting his phone, Robert started attending our weekly IT skills group to practice typing and explore more features. Being involved in community activities, like our art group and wellbeing sessions, has made a huge difference for him. He’s feeling less isolated, more hopeful, and more independent. It’s amazing to see how access to digital tools, paired with community support, has had such a positive impact on his well-being.”**





## An Impact Story

### Recovery Enterprise CIC

We've worked with women's support services to assist vulnerable women facing domestic abuse, addiction, and forced prostitution. Providing digital devices connects them to support networks, crisis services, and mental health resources, offering a path to safety and recovery. Connectivity also helps them to stay in touch with caseworkers, social workers, and legal advocates for ongoing support.



## What difference did the project make?

By continuously assessing needs and refining our approach, we have been able to tailor digital solutions to the specific challenges faced by each group of people we support.

Digital support has been pivotal in transforming lives, particularly for those battling addiction. Access to online recovery meetings, mental health support, and crisis intervention services has provided many with the tools needed to stay engaged with their recovery journey. By integrating digital access into addiction support frameworks, we have empowered individuals to seek help, maintain sobriety, and rebuild relationships, ultimately leading to more stable and fulfilling lives.



One of our project's biggest successes is providing digital tools that support individuals during crucial transitions. Pre-release digital support for those in custody has been especially impactful, ensuring immediate access to essential services upon release. A working phone, pre-set contacts, and internet access help connect individuals with housing, addiction support, medical care, and financial services right away.



By assessing needs and refining our approach, we tailor digital solutions to each individual's challenges. Whether that's expanding telehealth, supporting job searches, enabling financial independence, or ensuring access to recovery resources, our digital inclusion strategy reduces social exclusion and supports long-term stability.

## Individual Impact

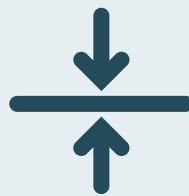
Funded projects conducted baseline and follow-up surveys to evaluate the programme's impact on individuals' mental health and well-being. These surveys assessed confidence in digital skills such as managing money online, accessing health services, and staying safe online. They also explored how digital skills influenced individuals' social connections, entertainment access, and overall well-being. Tracking changes over time provided valuable insight into the programme's overall effectiveness.

Overall, 453 impact surveys were completed by funded projects, including 323 baseline surveys and 104 follow-up surveys.



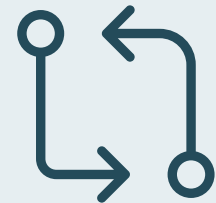
**453**

**Impact  
Surveys**



**323**

**Baseline  
Surveys**



**104**

**Follow - up  
Surveys**



Organisations reported that conducting baseline impact surveys was a useful tool for support workers to initiate conversations and better understand people's digital needs.



Based on the information gathered from the initial baseline survey, organisations highlighted the benefits of conducting impact surveys and using the data collected to provide tailored, person-centred support.



Organisations also shared challenges in conducting follow-up surveys. Upon reflection, organisations considered how they could overcome these issues in the future, such as involving referral partners in the process.



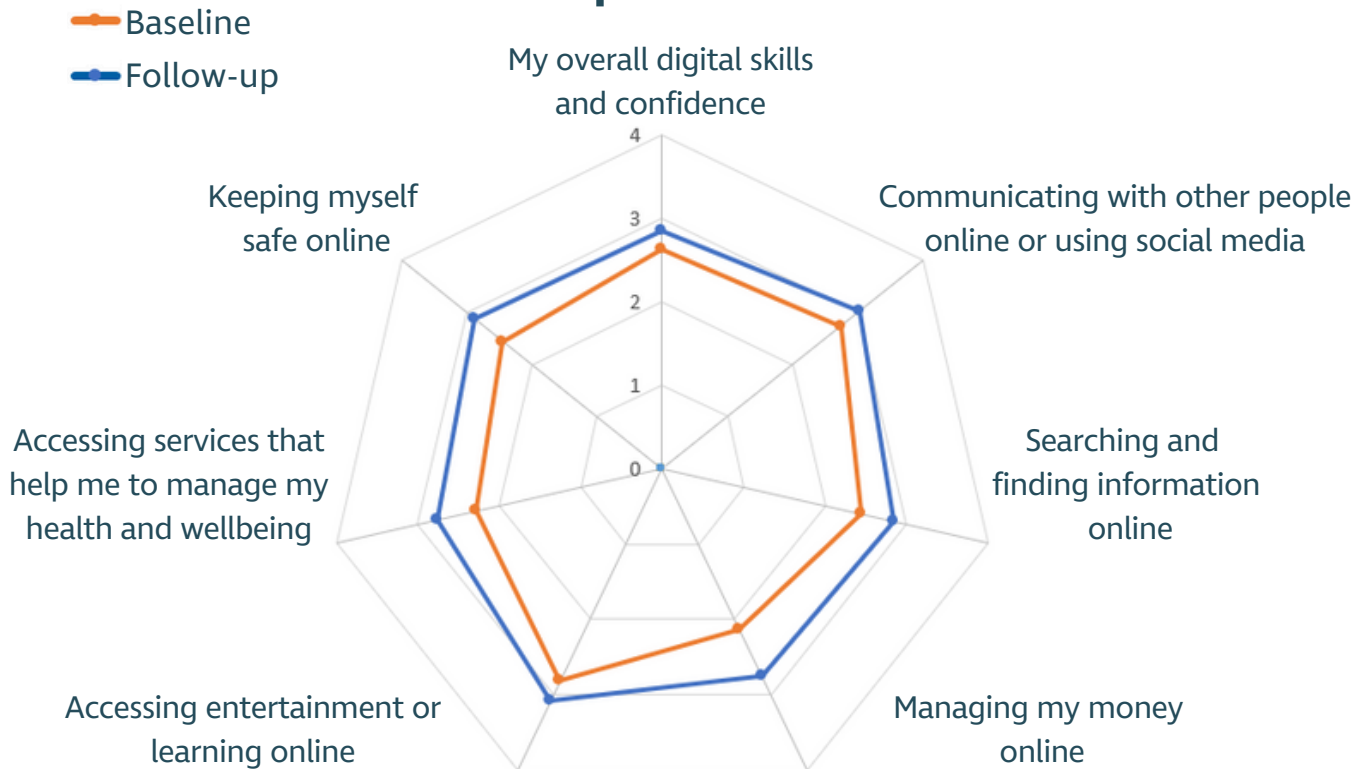
Many organisations found impact surveys valuable for their evaluations, as they provided meaningful evidence of the project's positive effects, confirmed the achievement of intended outcomes, and highlighted the benefits of the support to both individuals and service providers.

## Individual Impact

The data in the graphs below represents aggregated results from participants who completed both a baseline and follow-up survey, allowing for a clear comparison of progress over time.

The data indicates an overall improvement in digital skills and confidence across all categories over time. Participants reported increased proficiency in key areas, including online communication, information searching, and financial management. The most significant improvements were seen in managing money online, accessing services for health and wellbeing and keeping safe online.

### Experience



## Simon Community Scotland

### Support Worker Feedback

“They have used there device for linking in with family and friends via calls text and social media. They also uses their device for watching Netflix and accessing meditation via YouTube which helps with their mental health.”

“He is gaining confidence, missing fewer appointments, and becoming more sociable.”

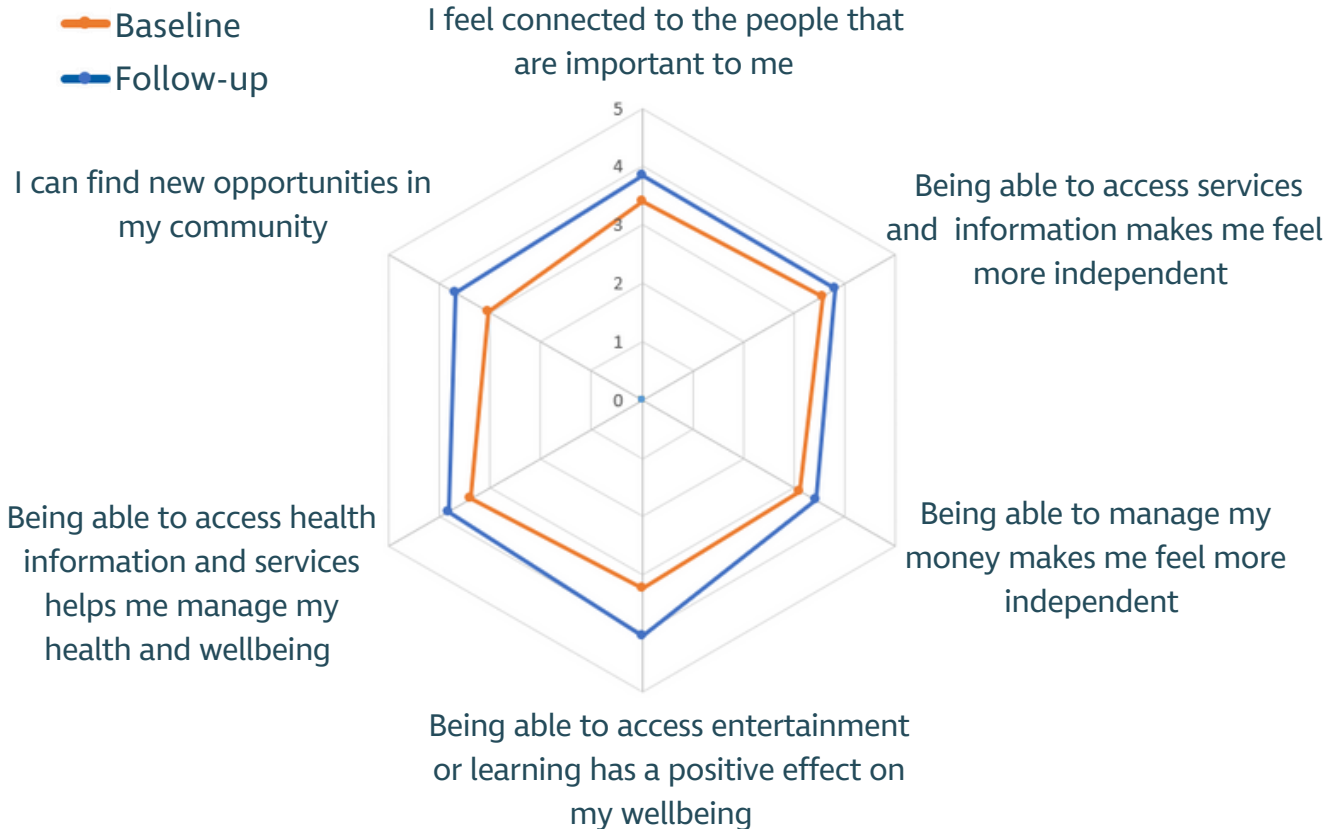
### Participant Feedback

“It has helped me to pay my bills, shopping on line, and help me support my kids homework.”

## Individual Impact

Findings from the Impact Surveys indicate a positive shift across all measured areas over time. The most significant improvements were seen in participants' ability to find new opportunities within their communities and their increased engagement with entertainment and learning resources—both of which contributed to enhanced well-being. Participants also reported feeling more connected to important people in their lives and more independent, particularly in accessing services and managing finances with confidence.

### Impact



## Simon Community Scotland

### Participant Feedback

“Moving into my first tenancy without a phone was challenging, but having one has been a lifeline. It helped me stay on my Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST), connect with my support worker and social worker, make calls to sort out my bills, and stay in touch with family during a stressful time when I felt alone.”

“It has ensured I no longer feel left behind or off the grid. I can contact friends, family, and key worker 24 hours a day. I feel I always have support.”



## The Challenges

Projects experienced a range of challenges while delivering projects across the funding programme, many of which they were able to overcome, as detailed below.



A common challenge among organisations was resistance from some service users who had a deep-rooted mistrust of technology, often due to past experiences or concerns about surveillance.

To address this, organisations worked closely with support workers and peer mentors to build trust, boost confidence, and highlight the benefits of digital inclusion in a way that aligned with each individual's needs.



Organisations reported that participating in the community of learning sessions enabled them to collaborate with others facing similar challenges, share ideas, refine their approaches, and ensure digital inclusion efforts remained aligned with the needs of those most at risk.



A common challenge identified by organisations during the project was broken phones. To address this, they provided cases and screen protectors and used this experience to ensure all future devices were equipped with protection.



Organisations also expressed concern about sustaining the project once current funding ends. They emphasised that digital inclusion has been crucial for rehabilitation and recovery, warning that without ongoing support, those who have benefited from digital access risk becoming disconnected again.

Organisations have been proactive in looking to overcome this by looking for long-term solutions such as partnerships with public and private sector groups and also exploring grant funding to secure funding to continue the project.



## Learning 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

For more details on the Digital Lifelines Follow On Fund email:

**Kirsty Heron**

**Grants Development Officer**

**[kirsty.heron@scvo.scot](mailto:kirsty.heron@scvo.scot)**

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