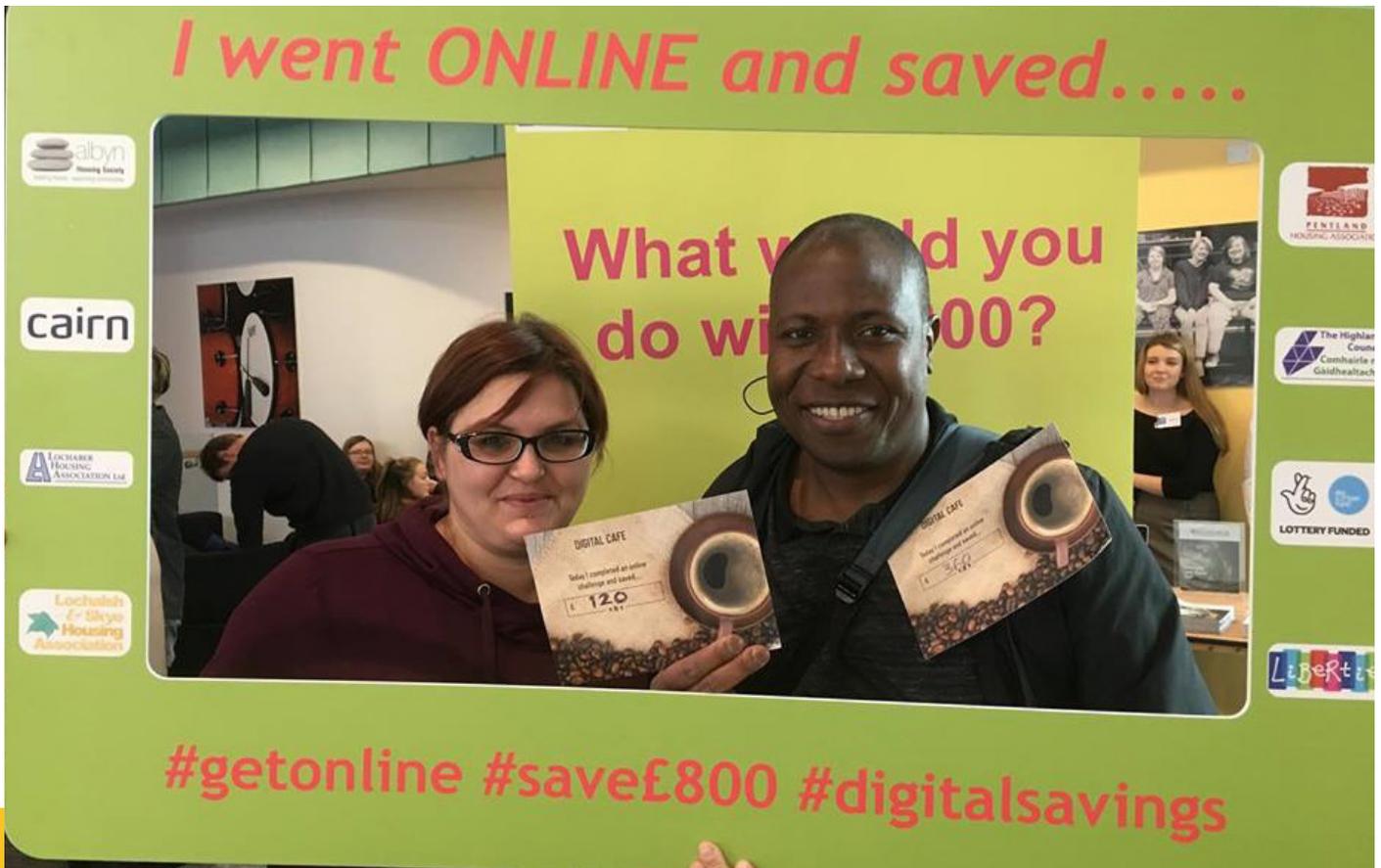


The Libertie Project: Digital Rural Challenge

A Digital Participation Charter Fund Case Study



460



individuals directly supported by the Digital Rural Challenge project, across the Highlands in both rural and urban locations.

The Digital Rural Challenge project used Charter Fund support to take digital to rural and remote communities, and communities with shared lived experiences. Particularly those that were hard to reach, like those in prison settings. Here, Libby Bligh, Chief Executive of the Libertie Project describes the impacts of going digital to the lives of those they engaged with. She also describes how they used and adapted SCVO's Essential Digital Skills Toolkit to evidence a need for digital within a particularly hard to reach group.

We discovered we could work best by training up those already in communities as they were able to reach more people in more remote settings than we could on our own. We went into places that people were comfortable, and the engagement was far better.

By supporting these groups to gain Essential Digital Skills, we've managed to see some tangible impacts on their lives. Some have saved enough money to go on their first family holiday, or not had to worry about heating their home in winter, they've overcome social isolation by connecting with online self-help and peer led groups.

We managed to engage with many people by asking them what they would be able to do with an extra £800? We call it the Digital Poverty Premium, it means that by not getting online, the average person is over £800 a year worse off. In Highlands however, we've discovered that it can sometimes be as much as £2,200. So far, we've helped 137 people save over £15,000.

There was an older couple that saved £1,200 a year, the amount they saved was enough to take them out of fuel poverty, because they were finding it difficult to heat the house.

The Libertie Project used SCVO's Essential Digital Skills Toolkit as a basis to carry out an exploratory piece of work in a prison setting in the Highlands. They wanted to understand the digital issues for prisoners, and how having Essential Digital Skills could potentially mitigate the risks of reoffending.

“ We do lots of work in prisons, and we're very aware that there is no digital access in the prison, but that the potential benefits for this community in gaining Essential Digital Skills is huge; we know through examples shared with us that having online access in prison would have prevented problems such as debt, unemployment, family stress and chaos on release, therefore leading to a reduced risk of reoffending.

To do more work with this community, we needed to evidence that need first, we needed to find out what they could and couldn't do and what they would like to do. What we found was online banking, cancelling contracts, not putting the family into debt - they came up as the big issues, as well as safety.

SCVO's Essential Digital Skills Toolkit was incredibly useful when carrying out this piece, especially the Checklist. We slightly adapted the Checklist; visually we made more differentiation between work skills and life skills, so we could then take out that data and look at employability, in terms of home life and income maximisation. This work has provided an evidence base for more work in the future. We are combining our findings with some more in depth research we are doing with Edinburgh University. Digital Skills for offenders is coming out as a huge emerging issue.
