

You are fabulous and deserve the recognition for your excellent ideas. Bringing digital inclusion to those that would be in the dark if you weren't there.



Working in the community to tackle Digital Exclusion



An Independent Evaluation of PCrefurb

The service you provide is excellent and helps so many people to gain new skills, confidence and employment.

Kerrie Fletcher
May 2023





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We host a number of community activities including youth club, toddler group, free community cafe, and free repair café. In the past PCrefurb has helped us to set up an Internet connection and WiFi access in the church, for use by our community groups. Received Internet connection and WiFi set-up, plus first 6 months' broadband fees. The service they provided was absolutely superb in every respect. Therefore we are more than happy to recommend PCrefurb / refer people.

Recently PCrefurb provided a reconditioned phone and a free for 6 months SIM card to one of my clients. This person is also attending the Digital Skills groups now so they can gain confidence and knowledge about using this new handset. This person is struggling with poverty and could never have afforded a new phone or contract. We were unable to contact them about the other support we are offering because they previously did not have a phone number. This is allowing the person to manage their finances, benefits account and communicate with energy suppliers much more easily now and therefore making a huge difference to her mental health and wellbeing.

Hadfield Methodist Church

Executive Summary

More and more of us go online as part of our everyday lives. The internet pervades all areas of our lives: In a world becoming 'digital by default' online access is no longer a 'nice to have' but rather essential to normal life and participation in society. Those who have limited or no access to the online world, or who are not confident to use it, find themselves increasingly marginalised or excluded from certain spheres altogether. People who are older, less well off, in less well-paid jobs or who have limiting health conditions are significantly more likely to be digitally excluded.

PCrefurb's services address all 3 key elements of digital exclusion:

- **Device poverty** (not having or having access to suitable connected devices)
- **Data poverty** (lacking sufficient, private and secure mobile or broadband data to meet essential needs).
- **Digital literacy** (skills and knowledge to operate devices & to access and use the internet safely)

They do this through providing **free digital devices, access to data, and digital skills training**, working with a wide network of local partners across High Peak and Tameside to ensure they reach those most in need of support in their communities.

The evidence shows that the services provided by PCrefurb are valued by **beneficiaries, referral organisations and volunteers** alike.

The result is tangible benefits to beneficiaries' **employability, health, wellbeing & quality of life, financial position, skills & knowledge, and social connection.**

I'd been redundant and my work laptop was returned. It was not easy to make applications on my phone but I couldn't afford the outlay for a laptop at that time. I was referred by the job centre whilst claiming unemployment for the first time in my life. The laptop meant I was able to apply for jobs, and I have subsequently gained employment.

Individual beneficiary

Background

PCrefurb was established in 2018 to meet an identified gap in support for people who wanted, but could not afford, to access IT. Initially the group met weekly to refurbish donated computers for local people in need, as well as providing informal tuition for beginners in using computers and drop-in help with devices. A 5-year National Lottery Community Fund grant was secured in 2020 to develop this service, and this report is an interim evaluation of that activity.

Other (mainly NHS) funding was secured for Digital Wellbeing, a digital literacy project delivered by

volunteer Digital Champions. As this project has added value to the original grant (and many people have benefited from both) some evidence relating to this area of work is also covered in the evaluation.

The evaluation report is based on: a review of project documentation and monitoring reports; surveys of individual beneficiaries, referral organisations and volunteers; interviews with staff, referral partners and service users, and observation visits to 2 refurbishment workshops. Evidence gathering for the evaluation took place during January-March 2023.

Key features: Why it works

By **providing free digital devices, access to data, and digital skills training**, to those most in need of support, **PCrefurb** tackles all three of the factors - **device poverty, data poverty, digital literacy** - that keep people digitally excluded.

Through its **network of community partners** – who in turn have relationships of trust with the local people they support – **PCrefurb is embedded in the local community it serves and has a wide reach.**

By delivering **flexible, individual support, in the community PCrefurb** is able to respond to **what people actually need and want to do online.**

By giving a **second life to donated devices** that might otherwise go to landfill **PCrefurb** has a **positive environmental impact.**

This is a very necessary service that provides access to all for digital skills and equipment. The referral scheme to get equipment for our service users is excellent and the digital support classes and workshops run by digital champions is vital to the community. There is no one else that offers this service.

Housing Association

Activity

PCrefurb's main areas of activity are:

Tackling Device and Data Poverty

- Refurbishing and repurposing donated **digital devices** which are then supplied free of charge to individuals in need who can't afford them, or to local community organisations.
- Where needed, they are also helped with **access to data**.

Digital Literacy

- **Digital skills training** for those who lack digital skills, provided by trained volunteer Digital Champions offering 1:1 or group support, in people's homes or in community settings.

Access to support is by referral; PCrefurb works with a wide network of trusted referral partners.

Between March 2020 & February 2023

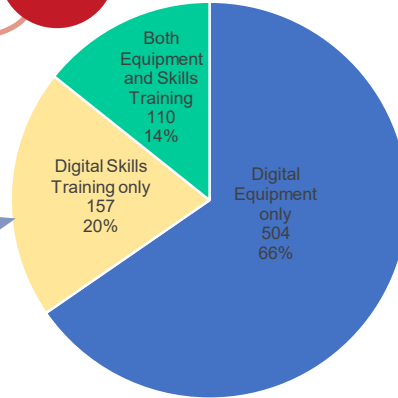
total beneficiaries 939

771 individuals
614 received digital equipment
268 received digital skills training

Equipment refurbished and distributed

- 202 Desktop computers
- 587 Laptops
- 91 Tablets
- 70 Phones
- 170 Monitors
- 29 Peripherals

Total items: 1,149



58 organisations received digital equipment

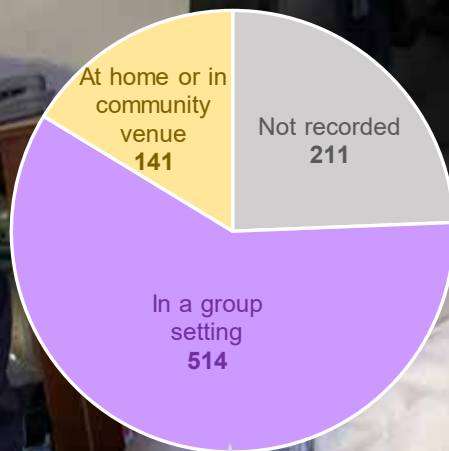
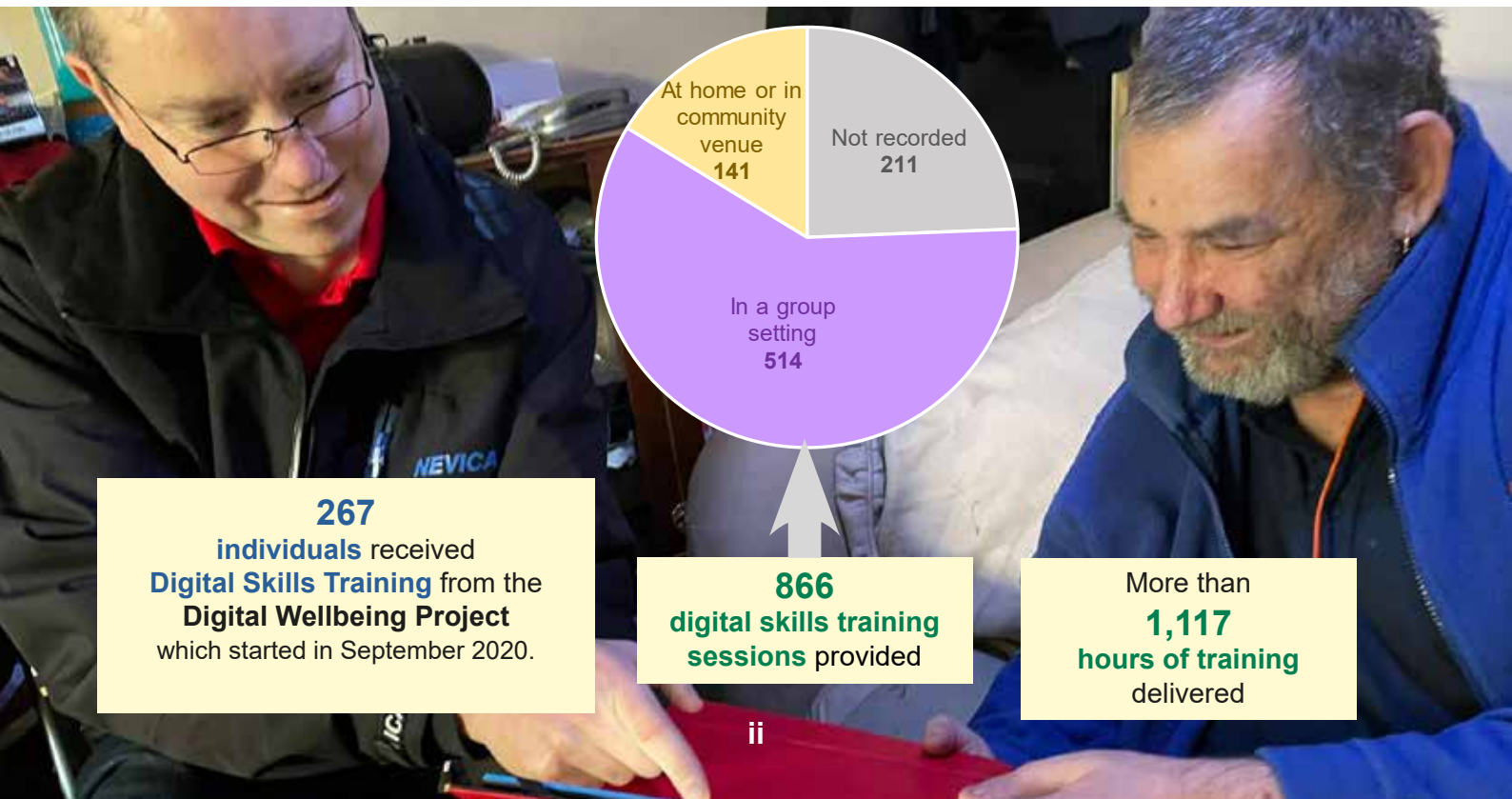
11,000+ wider beneficiaries

672 referrals for digital equipment fulfilled:

- 614** to individuals
- 58** to organisations

1,417 items of digital equipment were supplied:

- 1,149 refurbished devices**
- 268 purchased** (including 87 Covid Appeal tablets)



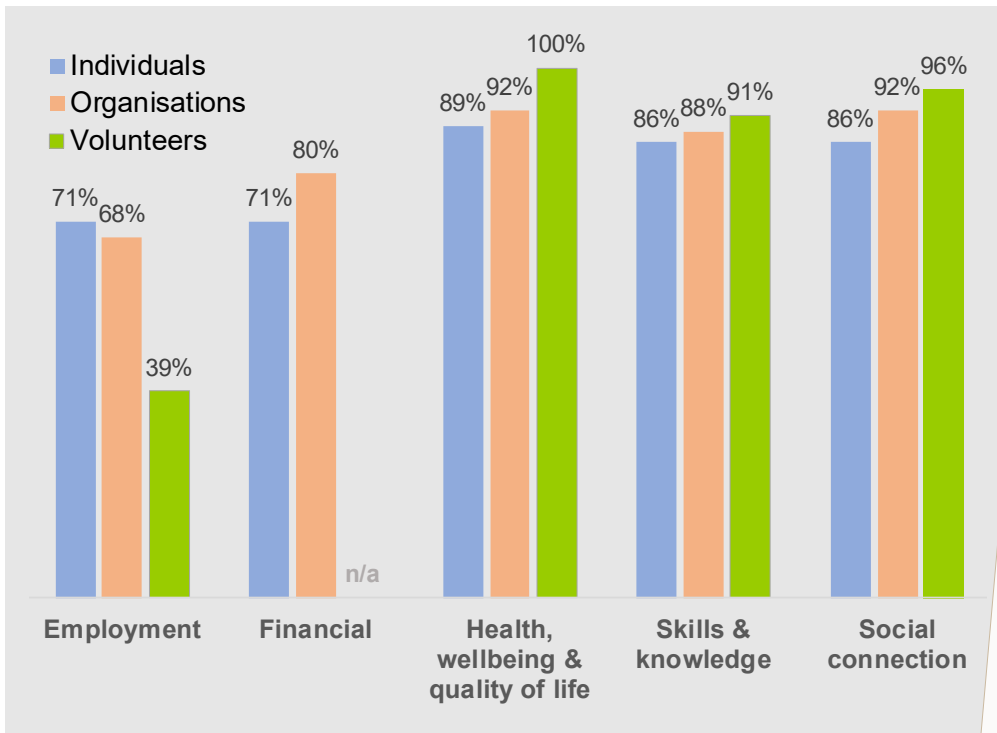
267 individuals received **Digital Skills Training** from the **Digital Wellbeing Project** which started in September 2020.

866 digital skills training sessions provided

More than **1,117 hours of training** delivered

Did it make a difference? Outcomes

Summary: % reporting at least one positive outcome



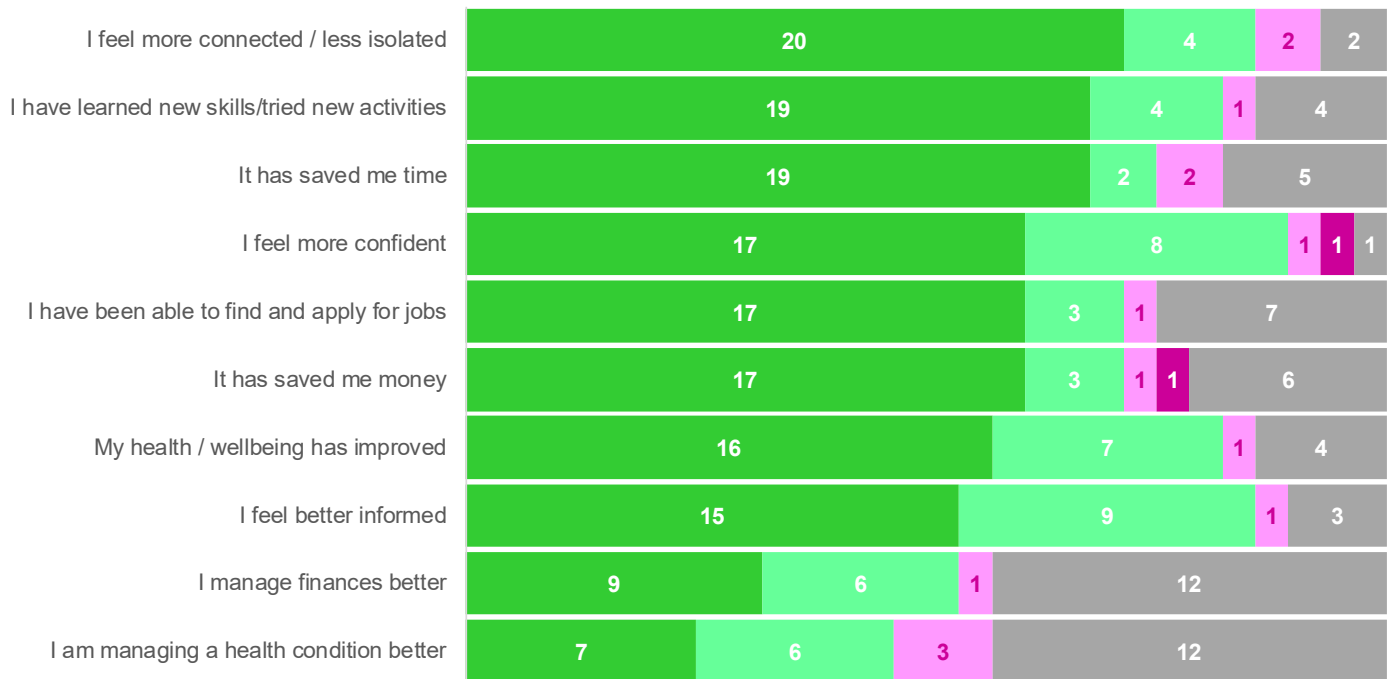
The majority of survey respondents reported that using PCrefurb's services had led to positive outcomes for themselves or for the people they referred to the service.

The smaller number of volunteers reporting employability benefits reflects that a high percentage were retired - so this outcome was less relevant to them

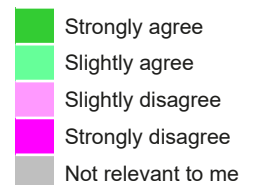
Enabled our clients to connect with others, get work and become independent. Not only refurbishing IT equipment but in doing so improving skills and confidence and strengthening communities by bringing marginalised people together
 CEO, The Zink Project CIO

Outcomes for individual beneficiaries

Because of the device and/or support received from PCrefurb...

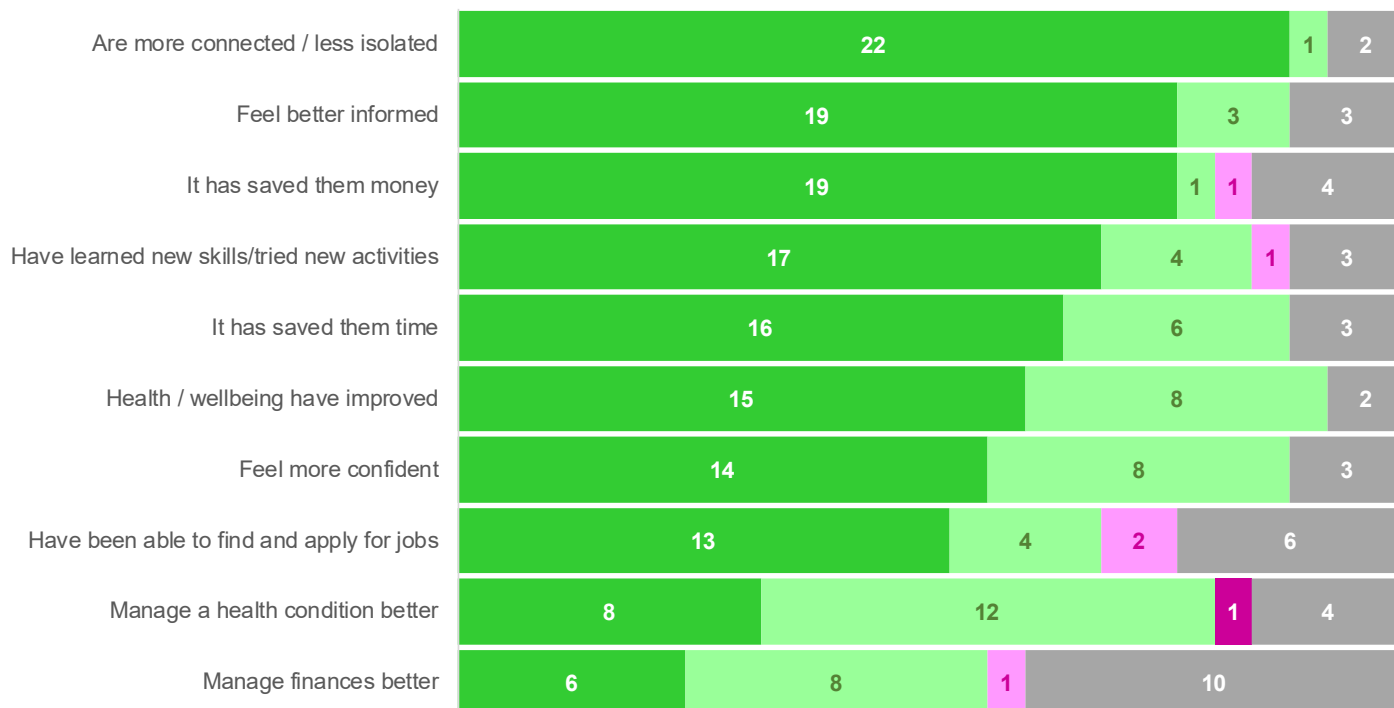


"From being on a very low income as a single parent with 3 children to being made redundant. I have been able to access my online banking, which has enabled me to manage my finances better. I've been able to access job applications and opportunities, which has resulted in successfully finding a new job. I have also gained a new set of IT skills I didn't have when I left school. This has given me more confidence when using technology. All three children use my laptop for homework and college work. It's been a huge help to me as a new laptop would not have been affordable."



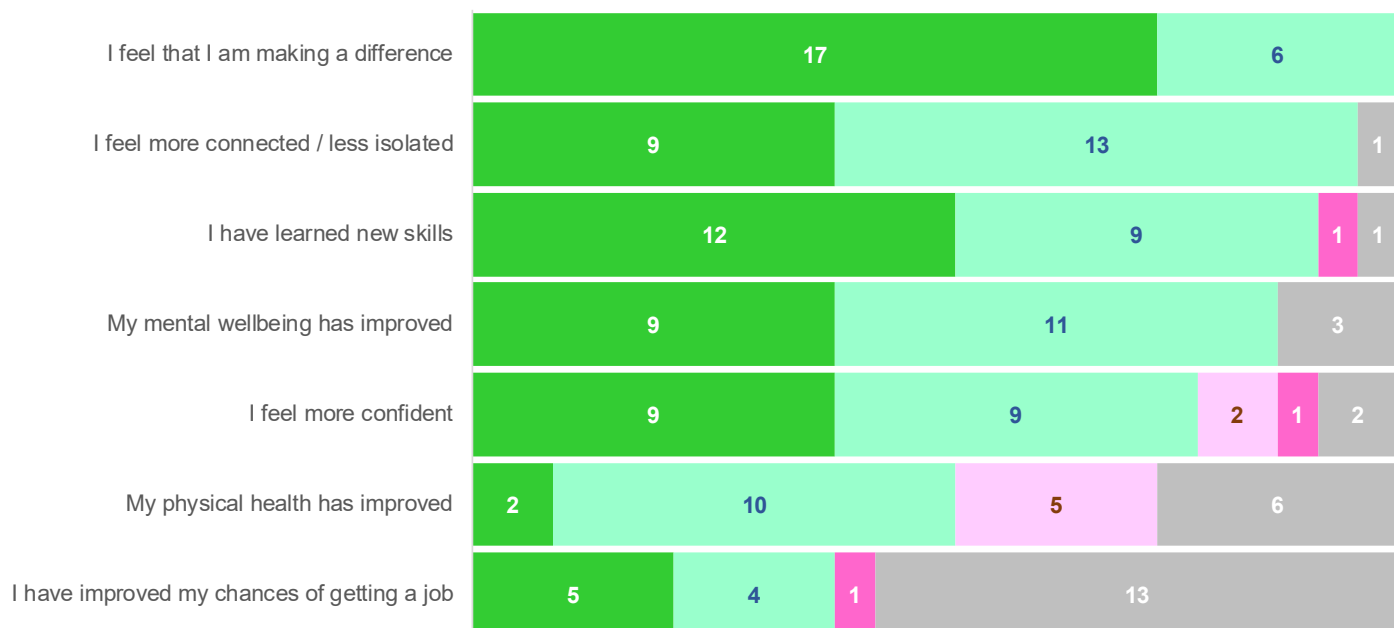
Outcomes reported by referral organisations

Because of the device and/or support received from PCrefurb individuals that we referred report that they...



Outcomes for volunteers

As a result of volunteering with PCrefurb...



People's experience of PCrefurb

98% of service users said **staff were friendly and helpful**

94% had received a **prompt response**

98% of those who received devices said they were in **good working order**

100% of **volunteers** felt they were **well-prepared** and **clear what was expected** of them;

91% felt the organisation **listened to them**

100% of volunteers **felt valued** and would **recommend it to others**

Overall, **99%** of all survey respondents were **satisfied with their experience of PCrefurb**

Recommendations

It is recommended that PCrefurb:

Develop and articulate its long term vision and strategy

The charity has been in existence for 5 years. It has survived the challenges of Covid and the cost of living crisis, as well as the financial challenges of establishing a new organisation in a difficult financial climate. It has secured significant investment and established a track record of successful service delivery; the organisation should therefore have confidence in its potential. It is developing a 3 year business plan; it would be timely now to pause and reflect on what has been learnt and to articulate a long term vision, as well as defining immediate priorities and ambitions.

Diversify its funding base

The charity relies on a relatively small number of funding sources, one of which is due to end shortly. PCrefurb has already identified a need to diversify its funding base, to minimise risk and ensure stability and sustainability of the whole organisation. Grants and contracts will be part of a diverse funding mix, the challenge being to balance the priorities and interests of potential funders with the freedom and flexibility to respond to what is needed locally.

One potential income stream being considered is selling or recycling surplus devices, or charging for training or consultancy work. This type of income has the advantage of being unrestricted, however some trading activities go beyond the legal boundaries of charitable objects, and may require a different legal structure. It would be wise to seek advice on this.

Donor fundraising may not be an income stream, in which the charity wishes to invest significantly. However enabling and inviting financial donations, as well as devices, might appeal to those who prefer to give to local causes and/or who are concerned about the cost of living crisis.

Invest in staff wellbeing

Some survey feedback highlighted significant turnover of staff. Anecdotally, this is an issue affecting much of the voluntary sector; small charities can rarely match the pay and conditions of or larger organisations, so in order to attract and retain staff there is the need to have robust support and development opportunities which make the organisation an attractive place to work.

In small organisations facing high demand, sickness, burnout and retention are serious risks to delivery. This is true at all levels of the organisation. The charity's trustees therefore need to ensure they provide effective support and supervision of senior staff, too.

Strengthen governance

The charity has a small but enthusiastic trustee board. There are, however, some gaps in knowledge and skills, in particular charity sector experience. As the new business plan is developed an audit of trustee skills would identify what else would help the charity going forward. An open recruitment process can be effective in attracting candidates beyond those already known; the process also helps clarify the role, expectations and requirements of trustees. There are free communication channels that can be used to reach suitable audiences. Any strategy for staff and volunteer training should also consider the development needs of trustees.

Explore the potential for a digital community hub

There are benefits of co-location with The Bureau such as its town centre location and the referral between complementary services provided by the two organisations. However it also has practical and operational limitations: Limited storage and work space; size and availability of training space in The Bureau limits the number of workshops offered and volunteer capacity.

Staff aspire to a single hub for delivery of all its activities where, for example, refurbishment, training and drop-in support could be all accommodated to increase the flexibility and availability of the offer. Given the evidence that digital exclusion is best tackled by holistic, responsive, community based support, pursuing this possibility should be a priority.

Explore who benefits and who might be missing out

A more systematic approach to collecting beneficiary data across all services, on all protected characteristics, would help the charity to ensure its beneficiaries are representative of the diverse communities it serves.

In particular, the data shows a difference between the ethnic group of those who received equipment and those who received digital training. It is not clear why this should be the case; the charity is advised to look more closely at this and consider whether positive action is needed. Older people also appear under-represented; this may be due to service delivery focused on those seeking work. However targeted work with this group might be an avenue for future development.

Joanne's story

Joanne discovered PCrefurb through G52, a Gamesley-based Community Group. After many years not working and living on disability benefits, Joanne wanted to set up her own business. Joanne was provided with a laptop and the support of a Digital Champion to help her learn to use it. Joanne told me:

It was a blessing for me. I was in quite a low place at the time and he [the Digital Champion who supported her] was very understanding, he listened, he made me feel seen...we had about 7 sessions together and he showed me the basics. He said picked it up really quickly which was nice. The computer has been a godsend, because I do a lot of courses online. With the guidance he gave me he's created a lot of confidence inside me. I just think it's an amazing service.

Joanne's business is doing well; she has used the computer to write and deliver courses, design marketing materials, do her accounts and more recently to start writing a book. She is also organising a wellbeing festival to give something back to the community.

We are a non-for-profit CIC based in Shirebrook. We deliver activities and events to local people, as well as provide community spaces to grow and develop local activity. We partner with PCrefurb to refurbish laptops that we then distribute out into the community. We have distributed over 400 laptops to a range of people, including school aged children, teenagers, young and older adults. We did this during the pandemic and enabled residents to get online, stay connected and access services when everything was locked down. We also provide community laptops so people can access them on particular days when career advice and support is available too.

community members have got online for the first time and children/teenagers have been able to access learning.

Director, Building Lives Around Shirebrook Town CIC

I found the digital wellbeing group invaluable... I was a technophobe before I was introduced to these classes. I also feel they were valuable to so many people because the help was available regardless of the different equipment they were using.

Individual beneficiary



1. Background & History

PCrefurb was established as a constituted group in 2018 by an employee of local charity The Bureau. He was working on a project which helped people develop essential life skills, and identified a gap in provision for those who wanted, but could not afford, to access IT. Initially small-scale and socially focused, the group met weekly in Glossop Labour Club where members carried out refurbishment of donated computers to give to local people in need as well as providing informal tuition for beginners in using computers and drop-in help with devices.

The organisation registered as a charity and employed its first staff member the following year. A 5-year National Lottery Community Fund was secured in early 2020 to develop the service further and this evaluation is the interim report for that work. Subsequent funding was secured (mainly from Tameside and Glossop NHS) for a digital literacy project (Digital Wellbeing) delivered via a network of volunteer Digital Champions. Many beneficiaries have benefited from both aspects of support and the additional resource adds value to the original

purpose of the Lottery grant, so some evidence relating to this area of work is also covered in the evaluation.

PCrefurb provides

- **Refurbishment and repurposing of donated digital devices** which are then **supplied free of charge to individuals in need** who can't afford them or to local **community organisations**. Where needed, they are also helped with **access to data**, for example through the Good Thing Foundation's data bank, or through helping them to access social tariffs
- **Digital Literacy training** to those who lack digital skills, provided by trained volunteer Digital Champions offering 1:1 or group support, in people's homes or in community settings.

Access to support is by referral only. The charity works with a wide network of partners who identify people in need and link them with PCrefurb.

2. The Evaluation

Evidence gathering for the evaluation took place during January-March 2023. The report is based on assessment of the following material:

- A review of documentary evidence provided by PCrefurb, including data on beneficiaries, funding bids and monitoring reports, and other supporting documents such as referral forms;
- A number of online conversations with the CEO and Operations Officer and a longer face to face interview during a visit to the charity;
- Observation visits to two Refurbishment Workshops and informal conversations with the 7 volunteers who took part.
- The views and experiences of individual service beneficiaries, organisations who had referred their service users and/or received equipment, and a wider group of volunteers were sought via 3 separate surveys mostly completed online (a few volunteers also completed paper surveys). These asked about their experiences of engaging with PCrefurb and the difference it had made to them or their service users. In total 76 surveys were completed by 28 individual beneficiaries, 25 organisations and 23 volunteers.
- 6 informal interviews were conducted via Zoom or telephone with survey respondents who had indicated they were willing to have a follow up

conversation: 3 with referral organisations and 3 with individual beneficiaries – one of whom had gone on to get a job as an employment adviser and refer her clients to the service.

Thanks are due to all of those who gave up their time to contribute to the evaluation and share their stories and experiences.

Particularly in rural areas communication is a key to all services. It is hard to get to and from offices, so to be able to call agencies and them to call a client is very important.

It supports our role safeguarding those more vulnerable. It helps them share any problem preventing them to attend on a given day, so not leaving a gap of uncertainty, where we (professionals) don't know why they can't come.

It has been used towards education, both in finding courses, enrolling, and following the teaching. Also for general purpose learning and engaging during covid, when all services went digital.

I have shared your details with high schools and I hope they referred their Young People, the most disadvantaged. Your services are amazing!!!

*Family therapist,
NHS Trust*

3. PCrefurb: A Theory of Change



ASSUMPTIONS: What underpins what we do and why we do it this way

- In a world fast becoming 'digital by default', being **digitally excluded** can have **serious negative impacts** on all aspects of people's lives
- Some people choose to remain offline; however many more are simply **unable to connect, lack confidence or skills and/or are unaware of the benefits.**
- Some people and communities face **particular barriers to digital inclusion** that need to be overcome, though support, changes to the way services are delivered, or both.
- Support to **overcome digital exclusion** is most likely to be effective if it is holistic and responsive to the needs, priorities and circumstances of individuals. Support is most likely to reach those who need it most through **trusted local relationships and networks.**
- Many unwanted **digital devices that could be repurposed** are currently thrown away

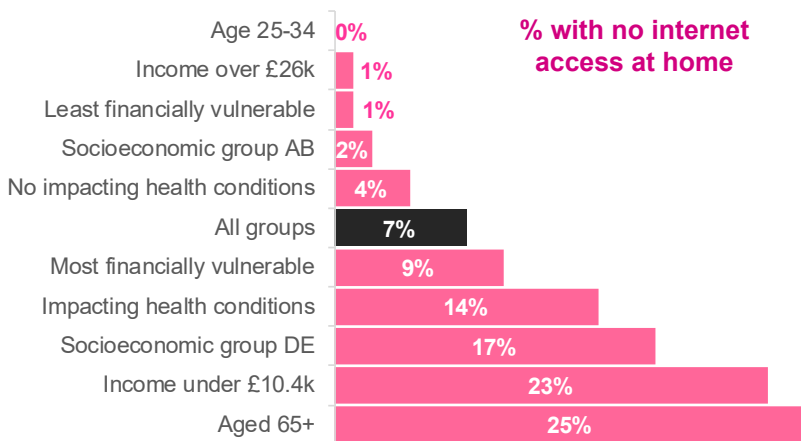
4. Assumptions

What the service is based on and why it does what it does

PCrefurb’s delivery model, as articulated by those who deliver it, is based on the following assumptions

4.1 In a world fast becoming ‘digital by default’, being digitally excluded can have serious negative impacts on all aspects of people’s lives

More and more of us are participating in the digital world. 1.5 million more people went online during the Covid-19 pandemic:¹ 92% of us go online at least daily². However **7% of households do not have access to the internet at home**; another 4% have access in their household but do not personally use it. 5% of individuals rarely or never use the internet, at home or elsewhere. The proportion is significantly higher for older people, those on lower incomes and those in poor health:³



Phrases like ‘digital divide’ and ‘digital exclusion’ need to be used with caution; being digitally excluded/included is not a clear either/or state but rather a spectrum, from those who are never go online, or who rely on others to access it for them, those who use it in narrow or limited ways, through to those who have full access and use it in multiple ways every day. Nor is it a static or permanent state. People can and do become more digitally included – as evidenced from the rapid increase, in recent years, of people going online and using the internet in new ways. But they can also become more excluded as their health, personal or financial circumstances change or technology moves on; as more services shift to digital delivery and levels of internet use increase, an individual can become increasingly digitally excluded relative to others even though their behaviour has not changed.⁴ Moreover headline data about number of users says little about differences in use, how confident and safe people feel negotiating the online world, or the outcomes – what it means for people’s lives.

The Digital Poverty Alliance defines digital poverty as: “the inability to interact with the online world fully, when, where and how an individual needs to.”⁵ The Digital Poverty Lab envisages a digitally included world “where everyone has the internet access they need. In this world, anyone in the UK can pick up a phone, tablet or laptop and be connected.... They participate and thrive in our modern world.”⁶

Others have suggested that we should talk about a minimum digital living standard which “includes, but is more than, having accessible internet adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.”⁷

Why does digital exclusion matter?

In a world becoming ‘digital by default’ and where most people are online, those who are not, or who have limited access, find themselves increasingly marginalised or excluded from certain spheres altogether. As the Good Things Foundation observes: “The digital divide may have narrowed in the past two years, but it has also deepened.”⁸ Online access is no longer a ‘nice to have’ but rather essential to normal life and as such, there are calls for it to be seen as a fourth utility. The consumer association Which? Is calling for broadband, mobile and landline services to be VAT rated at 5% in line with gas and electricity.⁹

Digital exclusion has real consequences; as Kat Dixon of the Data Poverty Lab puts it: “The online world is the offline world. If you don’t have access to the internet in the UK, you are denied access to essential services.”¹⁰

“Just as our physical environments are constructed in ways that facilitate or hinder certain behaviours and interactions so are our digital environments....technological features can create exclusionary environments. In fact, because social and technological change are intertwined and mutually reinforcing, they potentially amplify inequalities. Nevertheless, the evidence presented shows that there are opportunities to break negative feedback loops through the cultivation of collective responsibility and individual agency in the communities in which we live... socio-digital inequalities are unjust and have real consequences”¹¹

Periodic Table of Internet Elements

Me Medical	Ho Housing	Fn Finances	Et Employment/Training	Gv Government services	Cl Civil	Ed Education	Et Entertainment	Cm Community	Cr Creativity	Sc Social connection	Mo Mobility/Access
Te Tech support	Sh Shopping	Pc Police	Jh Job hunting	Wc Work/Well-being	Oa Online activity	Se Search engines	Vi Video streaming	Og Ongoing	Se Self-improvement	Ff Finance & Savings	Na Navigation and maps
Pr Provision	Ha Health	Fi Financial	Ap Applications	Be Benefits	Pe Partners and friends	Cl Community	Ga Games and apps	Cg Community groups	Re Reading	Vc Virtual reality	Ac Artificial intelligence
Ph Public Health	Hh Home	De Debt	Ne Networking	Im Immigration	Nw News	Ol Online	Gm Games	Su Support	Bl Blogging	Sm Social media	Vo Voice/Video
Mh Mental Health	Mm Mental Health	In Income	It IT/Tools	Uc User Content	De Debt	Hw Home	Eb E-books	Vo Video	Pl Politics	Em Email	Db Data
Gp Growth	Mn Mental Health	On Online	Wk Work and Learning	Co Community	Mp Mail	Li Life	Mu Music	Oc Online	Mc Music	Im Internet	DI Digital
Hs Health	Bl Blogging	Ob Online	Tx Tax	Me Media	EI Email	Kn Knowledge	Mv Movies	Vp Video	Vr Virtual Reality	Ev Event	Sm Social Media
Sg Support	Ct Creative	En Energy	Sh Shopping			St Support	Ra Reading		Ar Art	Od Online	Pm Personal

Kat Dixon and the Data Poverty Lab (Good Things Foundation)

"Internet access is elemental to UK living. Our lives exist in a fluid mix of online and offline experiences"

Kat Dixon, The Digital Poverty Lab

To illustrate the extent to which the digital world is woven through our lives, Kat Dixon developed a **Periodic Table of Internet Elements** – 81 different activities, functions and services, spanning 12 areas of life, that people access via the internet, illustrating how the digital world is now threaded through all aspects of our existence:

"UK citizens need the internet to access essential services and participate in society. Internet access is elemental to UK living. Our lives exist in a fluid mix of online and offline experiences, spanning medical, housing, financial, employment, education, civil, government services, entertainment, community, social connection, creativity, mobility and access."¹²

Individuals will use and value different combinations of these elements according to their own lives, needs and priorities; moreover each element can mean different things to different people: "a video doorbell offers convenience to an office worker, independence to a wheelchair user, and safety to a woman fleeing domestic violence."¹³

The converse is also true: Becoming digitally connected leads to tangible benefits: Individuals supported by PCrefurb to get online report significant improvements to their health, finances, employability and social connection as a result.

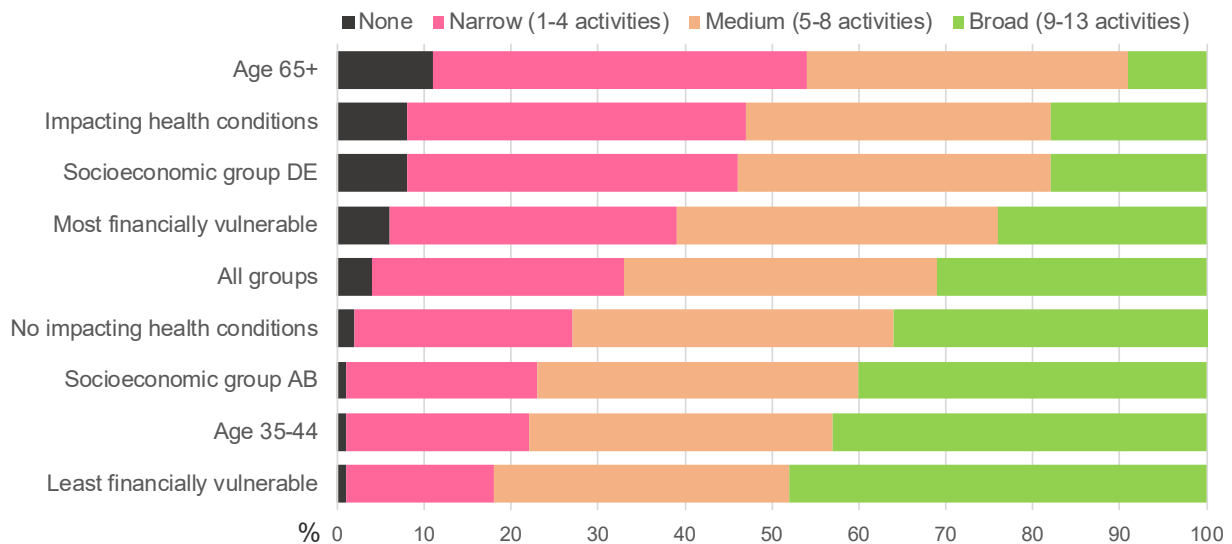
Who is digitally excluded?

Digital exclusion is not equally distributed across the population: Older people, people who are poorer or financially vulnerable, in manual/unskilled jobs or not in paid work, and people with limiting health conditions are significantly less likely to own a connected device or have internet access at home, and they use the internet less often and for a narrower range of tasks.

You are fabulous and deserve the recognition for your excellent ideas. Bringing digital inclusion to those that would be in the dark if you weren't there.

Family Therapist, NHS Trust

Range of internet use



There is less detailed data on differences between ethnic groups - however we do know that people from Black, Other Asian, and Pakistani backgrounds are more than twice as likely to experience poverty and to experience deep poverty as those from white ethnic groups; for those from Bangladeshi backgrounds the rate is two and a half times as high.¹⁴ We do know that poverty and digital exclusion are connected:

“Data poverty is best understood as a cause and a consequence of social inequality. Data poverty is felt acutely by people facing a form of social disadvantage, who may not have the finances, skills, situation or social capital to get good internet access.

“People who face a form of social disadvantage use government services more than the average citizen and therefore access is more critical to them. Lack of adequate internet access fuels these challenges, reducing access to essential services in health, housing, work, education, civic participation, social connection and beyond.

“Interventions which tackle data poverty take a step closer to breaking cycles of social inequality. Access to services and support improves lives. It is circular; one informs and amplifies the other.”¹⁵

4.2 Some people choose to remain offline; however many more are simply unable to connect, lack confidence or skills and/or are unaware of the benefits.

What causes digital exclusion and digital poverty?

The researcher Jan Van Dijk¹⁶ has identified four phases or aspects in an individual’s journey to becoming digitally engaged:

Firstly **motivation or attitude** – they need to be convinced of the usefulness of going on online, as well as overcoming anxiety, technophobia or suspicion of the internet.

Secondly they need to have **physical access** via a suitably connected device; be able to afford or access the connection itself; have sufficient data; have software, and peripherals such as printers; and afford ongoing maintenance, upgrade and replacement costs.

I found the digital wellbeing group invaluable... I was a technophobe before I was introduced to these classes. I also feel they were valuable to so many people because the help was available regardless of the different equipment they were using.

Service user comment to Community Navigator, Social Prescribing Team

Thirdly they need to acquire **digital skills or literacy** – not just the basic skills to operate the device and navigate the internet (though these are obviously crucial) but also the facility to use it in different ways - to communicate, retrieve information, create content and stay safe.

Finally individuals need to **actually use** the digital world. In considering how digitally included/excluded a person is we need to consider how often they go online, for how long, number and diversity of tasks, how active or creative their engagement is, and whether their needs are being met.

“Once people are counted as ‘internet users’ they are no longer considered to be digitally excluded in many surveys. So factors that restrict their use are seldom explored.”¹⁷

Even when connected, those who are older, more financially vulnerable, working in manual/unskilled jobs or unemployed, and who have limiting health conditions, spend much less time online and use the internet for a more limited range of tasks than those who are younger, wealthier, in managerial or professional jobs and in good health.¹⁸

According to Ofcom¹⁹, digital exclusion among UK adults comprises three intertwined aspects:

- **Access** – those who have no access to the internet at home or elsewhere.
- **Ability** – those who lack the digital skills and/or confidence to navigate the online environment safely and knowledgeably.
- **Affordability** – those who struggle to afford access to the internet, and either go without or experience financial strains to retain access.

Any solution needs to address:

- **Device poverty** (not having or having access to suitable connected devices)
- **Data poverty** (lacking sufficient, private and secure mobile or broadband data to meet essential need).
- **Digital literacy** (skills and knowledge to operate devices, access the internet and use it in different ways)

Kat Dixon calls these three elements of digital exclusion the **pointless triangle**:

“Devices, data and skills are pointless without each other. Individuals need the confidence and support to safely conduct their lives online...any initiative which tackles data poverty must address digital inclusion and equity; access to devices, data and skills, and the ability to use the internet confidently and safely.”²⁰

4.3 Some people and communities face particular barriers to digital inclusion that need to be overcome, though support, changes to the way services are delivered, or both

Motivation

Those remaining offline cite concerns about privacy, data security/fraud and cost, as well as simply having no interest or preferring to spend their money on other things. But as Kat Dixon says:

“About 6% of UK homes do not have access to the internet, which means about 1.5 million people are offline. 15% of over-75s in the UK have no interest in getting online at all. But what does ‘no interest’ mean? In my experience, many people, when asked if they want internet, will say no. But if asked if they want to push a button and chat to their grandkids on this screen, their answer is often different...we need to be careful we’re not dismissing citizens because they seem stubborn... Moving into the digital world is scary. I believe anyone excluded from the online world should have the chance to learn about what they can do and make an informed choice of how much or little they want to be online. That means meeting people where they are – talking about fishing, or baking, or TV, or their grandkids. Everyone deserves the chance to thrive online. We need local trusting relationships in our communities, and for digital inclusion teams to bring people on the journey.”²¹

What I find positive is the ‘light bulb’ moments when people you are working with realise that it’s not as scary as they think

PCrefurb Volunteer Digital Champion

Data poverty

The cost of living crisis is forcing families to make impossible decisions, with 5.7 million UK households in April 2022 struggling to pay their mobile, landline and broadband bills. The lowest earners spend almost double their proportion of income on telecoms than the highest earners. The poverty premium means that Pay As You Go customers pay comparatively more for internet access²².

The All Party Parliamentary group reports that 2m households are experiencing data poverty, 3m people have fallen behind on mobile bills and 2.7m on their broadband bills and that 1.1m households struggle to afford a fixed broadband service. 35% of those surveyed by Ofcom said rising living costs would impact their ability to go online; 27%

had already reduced data usage. According to Which, 12.5% of households - and 22% of lower income households - have reduced spending on items such as food or clothes to be able to pay for their connectivity service.

A survey by the Institute for Development Studies in March 2022²³ found that “around one third of people who were not using the internet indicated that this was because they could not afford it”²⁴ not least because internet and mobile service providers link their annual price increases to levels of inflation. However only 1.2% of eligible households have taken up a social tariff; 80% of lower income people said they were not aware of cheap deals available to people on benefits or low incomes.²⁵

A Nesta report²⁶, *Who is vulnerable to data poverty?* described the main factors as being:

- **Money** – having to make hard choices between data and other basic needs, exacerbated in turn by “a negative cycle of data costs; those with low digital literacy are less able to navigate the market and access the best rates”²⁷.
- **Access to contracts** – ‘pay as you go is more expensive; under 18s, and those who are insecurely employed or housed or without a bank account struggle to get a contract.
- **Shared access** – using communal devices or public Wi-Fi restricts availability; privacy and security can also be a concern (e.g. for those experiencing abuse, coercion or control)
- **Infrastructure** – poor, unreliable or slow broadband or mobile infrastructure is still an issue for some (particularly in rural areas).²⁸

Nesta also points out that we need to take into account differences in **need** – for example, someone unemployed and searching for work needs more data but is least able to afford it; households juggling needs of multiple family members, people with language/communication barriers or disabilities may need more bandwidth and support.

Device poverty

7% of people don’t have any connected device but this increases to 14% of those with an impacting or limiting condition, 12% of those in manual/unskilled jobs or not working, 17% of over 65s, and 23% of people earning under £10.4k²⁹. Those least likely to have internet access are older people, those financially vulnerable, living alone, and/or who have an impacting or limiting condition. When someone has more than one of these characteristics, the likelihood of their being digitally excluded increases further – **60% of those aged 70+, living alone and with a limiting condition** don’t use or have access to the internet, compared with **40% of all people aged 70+** and **10% of the general population**.³⁰

Older people and those in manual/unskilled jobs or not working are most likely to be narrow internet users – to use it for only for a small number of activities.³¹ People with low incomes are more likely to own second-hand devices and to experience malfunctioning hardware and software.³²

Different devices also lend themselves to different kinds of activities: “Using only desktop or laptop computers results in relatively few opportunities for continuous communication, entertainment, and location-based activities, while smartphone and tablet users will only miss out on more immersive Internet work”³³ 17% of internet users do so exclusively via smartphone – the proportion is much lower for internet users aged over 65 (12%) and higher manual/professional workers (11%); it is much higher for those in unskilled/manual jobs or unemployed (27%) and the most financially vulnerable (23%).³⁴

Smartphone-only internet users are more likely to be narrow users - using it only for a small number of activities. Most smartphone users agree that activities such as completing forms and working on documents, or comparing products or services online, were more difficult on a smartphone than on a laptop or desktop; people using their phones also try to do things as quickly as possible to avoid using too much data.³⁵ 28% of smartphone-only-internet users felt it put them at a disadvantage.³⁶

Digital literacy

While the number of people with basic digital skills is increasing, an estimated 10.6 million people lacked basic digital skills at the end of 2022; 5.8 million people will remain digitally excluded by the end of 2032. 85% of these will be aged 65 or older. Over half a million people will need some kind of intervention to build their basic digital skills; the return on investment (based on things such as improved health outcomes, employment prospects and benefits to the wider economy) would be £9.48 for every £1 spent.³⁷

According to Lloyds Bank’s 2022 Consumer Digital Index³⁸: 20% of people do not have a set of 8 basic digital skills which includes turning a device on and logging in, connecting to WiFi, opening and using an internet browser, finding and opening applications, keeping passwords and personal information safe. A much higher proportion of people who have physical (40%) or sensory (45%) impairments, learning or memory (34%) or mental health (23%), people aged 75+ (31%), and earning under £13.5k (28%) - do not have these skills.

By providing free digital devices, access to data, and digital skills training, to those most in need of support, PCrefurb tackles all three of the points of the ‘pointless triangle’ that keep people digitally excluded.



4.4 Support to overcome digital exclusion is most likely to be effective if it is holistic and responsive to the needs, priorities and circumstances of individuals. Support is most likely to reach those who need it most through trusted local relationships and networks.

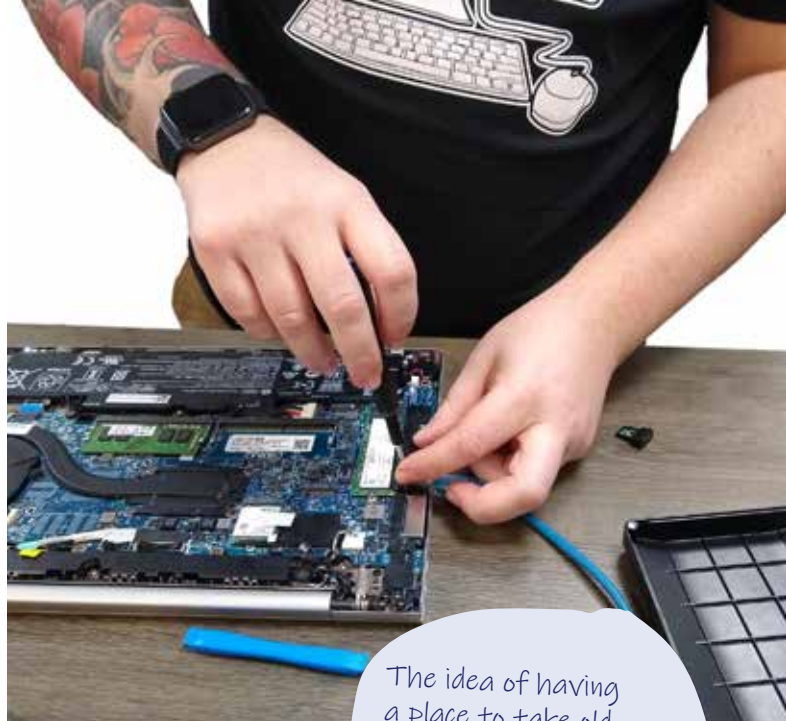
Community and social networks play a crucial role in encouraging, enabling and supporting digital access (including choosing, troubleshooting, repairing and replacing) and literacy (“most digital skills are not the result of computer courses but of learning through practice in particular social user environments”³⁹)

The Good Things Foundation is a UK-wide charity with a mission ‘to fix the digital divide – for good’⁴⁰, a society where: Everyone has the internet access they need; has somewhere local to go for help to use it; and feels able and safe in the digital world. It concludes that this is best delivered through a coordinated social infrastructure of charities and community organisations who have relationships of trust and the ability to respond to local need: “People need a holistic digital inclusion offer which reflects their individual needs - including devices, internet data, and support. This is best delivered by trusted local organisations coordinated nationally.”⁴¹

It also recommends that the support to enable individuals to access the digital world needs to be holistic, responsive and based on relationships of trust: “Evidence of what works in delivering digital inclusion in practice consistently points to the need for sustained, patient, trusted support for older people and working-age adults who are furthest away from being digitally included: finding the right hook, motivating people through quick wins, reassuring and being there when things go wrong, or to provide further support when learning to do new things online.”⁴²

Through its network of partners – including community organisations, charities, statutory services, health professionals, schools and churches who in turn have relationships of trust with the local people they support – PCrefurb is embedded in the local community it serves and has a wide reach.

By delivering flexible, individual support, in the community, via a network of Digital Champions, PCrefurb is able to respond to what people actually need and want to do.



4.6 Many unwanted digital devices that could be repurposed are simply thrown away

The development of the digital world comes at an environmental cost. A survey by the WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment)

Forum estimates that households in the UK and EU contain on average 9 unused but working electronic devices; small IT equipment and smart phones are among the top 5 pieces of equipment most likely to be hoarded. Only a small fraction is recycled or reused; most will eventually go to waste.⁴³

A detailed study comparing the impact of refurbished and new digital devices over their lifetime concluded that refurbishment could reduce the annual environmental impact by between 43% and 97%⁴⁴

The idea of having a place to take old hardware is just brilliant. It feels safe. It is great that you explain what you do with it, to wipe it all out. It generates a sense of safety, disposing of old laptops or phones. Thank you.

Survey response

We support residents to gain skills and confidence and enhance the well being of all those who live and work in the Ridge Hill area. [We refer people to PCrefurb] To boost their confidence in using laptops/tablets/phones this gives them independence and an extra bonus friendship. One of the clients informed me that he no longer has to ask his daughters to do things for him.

Project Coordinator,
The Big Local

By giving a second life to donated devices that might otherwise go to landfill PCrefurb has a positive environmental impact.

Where refurbishment or repurposing is not possible they are recycled responsibly.

5. Vision and Mission

PCrefurb's mission statement reads:

PCrefurb is a charity that aims to “**bridge the digital divide**”. We refurbish donated IT equipment and redistribute it to those most in need, helping people connect with training and education and to support their well-being. We provide digital skills training in the community and engage volunteers, some of whom face complex challenges, in all areas of our work. We work together for social and environmental good.

PCrefurb works to improve digital inclusion - enabling everyone who wants to do so to benefit from the essential benefits of being online.

Digital exclusion is not equally distributed across populations; people on low incomes, people in manual or low-skilled jobs or who are unemployed, older people, and those with limiting health conditions or disabilities are more likely to experience device poverty, data poverty and lack of digital literacy.

By providing digitally excluded people with **devices, connectivity** and **digital skills** the charity tackles all three of the ‘triangle’ of issues which keep people offline.

Digital connectivity has many benefits but the production of the devices that enable it comes at an environmental and resource cost. By refurbishing and repurposing unwanted digital devices for use in the community - and responsibly recycling any devices that can't be used - PCrefurb extends the life of devices that would otherwise go to waste or go into landfill, helping to minimise the environmental impact.

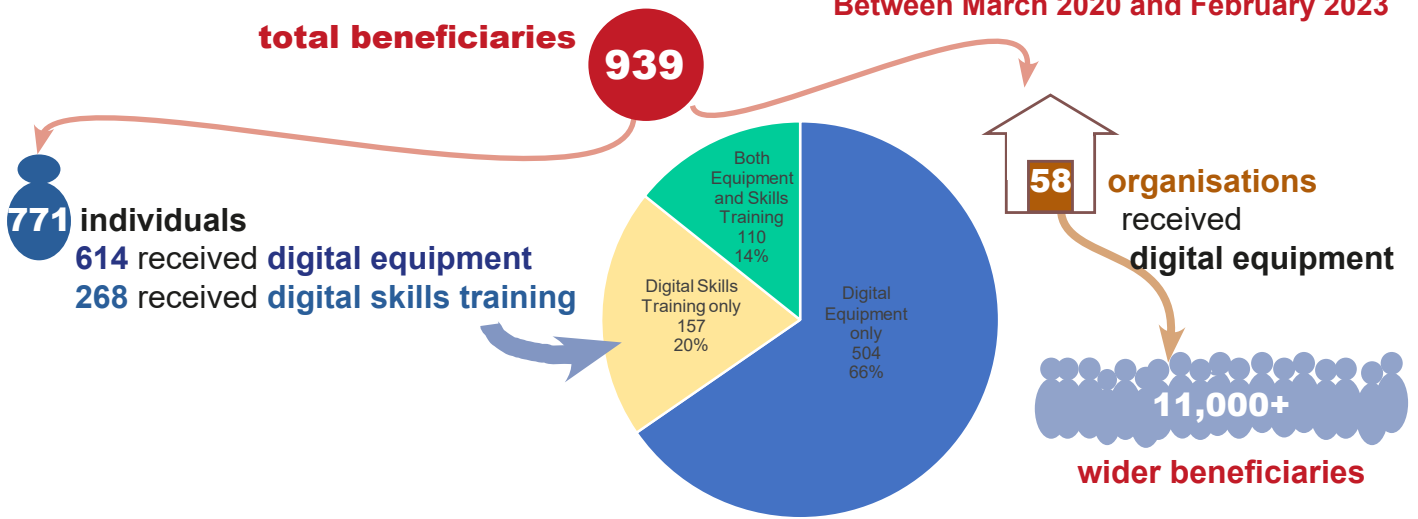
This is a very necessary service that provides access to all for digital skills and equipment. The referral scheme to get equipment for our service users is excellent and the digital support classes and workshops run by digital champions is vital to the community. There is no one else that offers this service.

Housing Association



6. Activity: What was delivered

6.1 How many people were supported?



6.2 Digital access: Devices provided

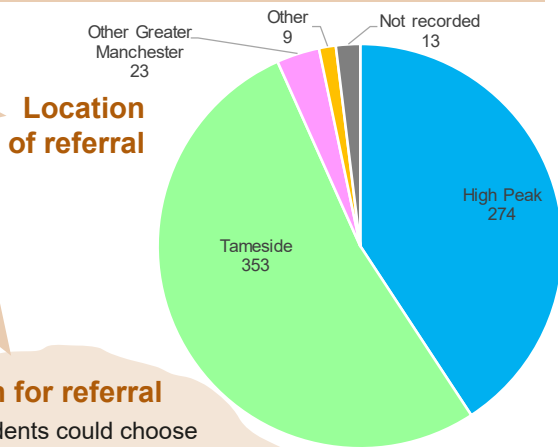
672 referrals for digital equipment were fulfilled:

- **614** to individuals
- **58** to organisations

In total the service received **769** requests for provision of equipment (average **21 per month**) of which 97 were ineligible/withdrawn.

1,417 items of digital equipment were supplied:

- **1,149** refurbished devices
- **268** purchased (including **187** tablets purchased during the COVID appeal and supplied to hospitals, hospices, care homes and other residential facilities to enable people connect to the outside world).



Equipment refurbished and distributed

- 202** Desktop computers
- 587** Laptops
- 91** Tablets
- 70** Phones
- 170** Monitors
- 29** Peripherals

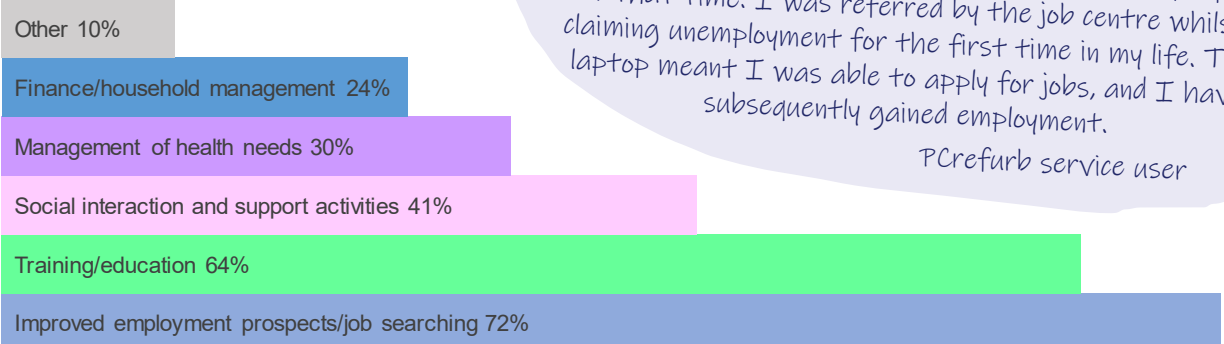
Total items: 1,149

Reason for referral

(Respondents could choose more than one option)

- Limited access to technology 94%
- Low income 90%
- Disability 20%
- Other 5%

Referral purpose: Equipment needed for..
 (Respondents could choose more than one option)



I'd been made redundant and my work laptop was returned. It was not easy to make applications on my phone but I couldn't afford the outlay for a laptop at that time. I was referred by the job centre whilst claiming unemployment for the first time in my life. The laptop meant I was able to apply for jobs, and I have subsequently gained employment.
 PCrefurb service user

Wider beneficiaries

The total number of individual benefiting is much larger as equipment provided to organisations and institutions had multiple beneficiaries.

The calculation below shows an estimate of over **11,000 wider beneficiaries** based on the type of organisation/service, purpose for which the devices were supplied, and number of service users over a defined period.

Note that the actual number of wider beneficiaries will be much higher as the two figures cover a 12 month and 16 month period respectively rather than the whole 3 years of the project.

COVID Tablet appeal

(16 months April 2020 – July 2021)

187 tablets purchased as a result of a funding appeal and supplied to 47 care settings

	Number of Tablets	Estimated Beneficiaries
Care homes	133	6,916
Hospitals	20	1,040
Hospices	30	1,560
Supported Living	4	16
Total	187	9,532

Organisations supplied with refurbished devices (12 months 1 March 2022 – 28 Feb 2023)

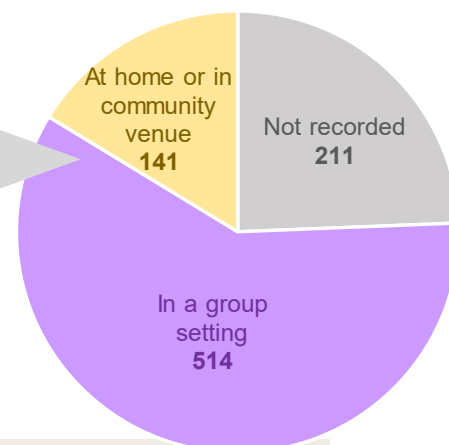
Type of organisation	No.	No. of devices	Estimated Beneficiaries
Charity or community group	9	32	872
Housing association	2	23	154
Local authority service	1	185	370
School (Special Educational Needs)	2	28	125
Social enterprise	3	11	250
Supported living	1	4	4
Total	18	283	1,775

6.3 Digital literacy: The Digital Wellbeing Project

267 individuals received **Digital Skills Training** from the **Digital Wellbeing Project** which started in September 2020.

866 digital skills training sessions provided:

In total more than* **1,117 hours of training** were delivered
*150 sessions took place before hours were logged.

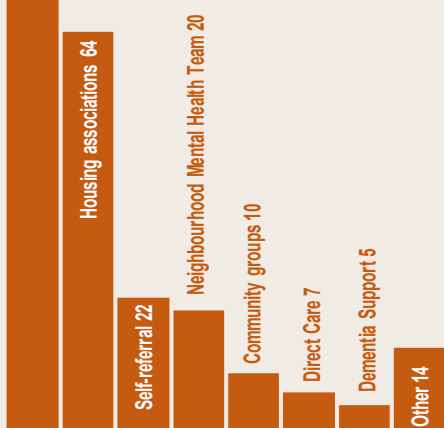


Social prescribers 125

Who refers to PCrefurb?

The charity receives referrals from its network of 45 partner organisations and agencies.

Referrals to the Digital Wellbeing Project came from:



Reason for referral

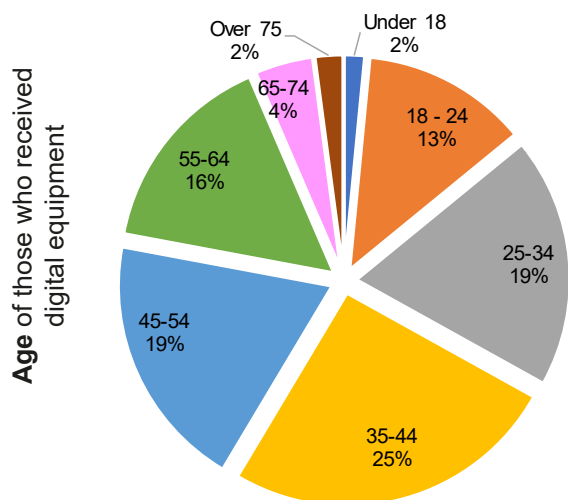
Improved general wellbeing	76%
Reduced isolation	66%
Engagement with community	58%
Attendance of a support/social group	49%
Ability to shop online	45%
Keeping in touch with family/friends	44%
Better management of health conditions	43%
Enjoyment of a hobby	42%
Financial/household management	36%
Improved employment/job searching	27%
Increased education opportunities	26%
Increased support during Covid	18%
Ability to better support a child	9%
Other	16%

(Respondents could choose more than one option)

6.4 Who was supported?

Age

Most of those who received digital equipment were working age, perhaps reflecting the high percentage of referrals for people seeking employment.



Ethnic group

Ethnic group of individual beneficiaries	Equipment	Training
Asian or Asian British		
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	10	2
Bangladeshi	8	0
Chinese	0	0
Any other Asian background	6	1
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African		
Caribbean	1	1
African	12	1
Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background	4	0
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups		
White and Black Caribbean	4	1
White and Black African	4	4
White and Asian	2	2
Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background	6	2
White		
English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	239	241
Irish	2	1
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0	0
Roma	0	0
Any other White background	26	2
Other ethnic group		
Arab	5	0
Any other ethnic group	4	0
Not known/not recorded	281	9
TOTAL	614	267



An analysis of these figures is not straightforward as the charity predominantly serves two areas (High Peak and Tameside) that have a very different demographics.

What is noticeable is the difference between those who received equipment and those who received digital training. It is not clear why this should be the case. The charity is advised to look more closely at the data and explore with referral partners what might be the reasons – and whether positive action is needed to ensure that all those who need it benefit equally from its support.

Ethnic group (where recorded)	PCrefurb beneficiaries		2021 Census	
	Equipment	Training	High Peak	Tameside
Asian or Asian British	7.2%	1.2%	0.8%	9.2%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	5.1%	0.8%	0.2%	2.3%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	4.8%	3.5%	1.3%	2.1%
White	80.2%	94.6%	97.4%	85.5%
Other ethnic group	2.7%	0.0%	0.2%	0.8%

6.5 Devices Donated

Number of donations: 311

- **171** donations from **individuals**
- **140** donations from
 - 53** different donor **organisations** (26 private sector, 7 public sector, 20 VCSE)

Not all items donated are suitable for refurbishment or distribution. Where it is possible for components to be repurposed and reused the charity does so and there is a considerable number of devices and peripherals **in its storage for future use.**

Where donated items cannot be used they are recycled responsibly generating a small income from recycling companies.

6.6 Volunteers

Volunteers support the charity in 4 broad roles:

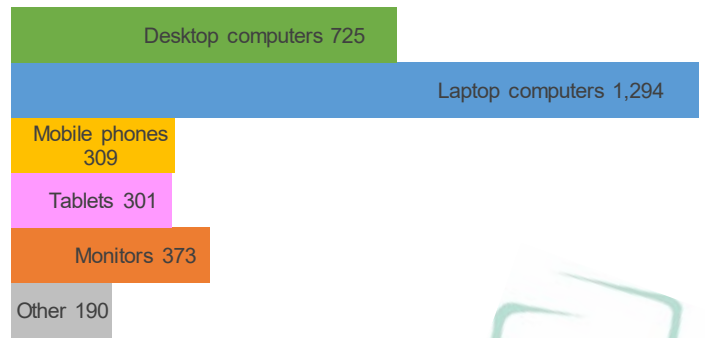
IT Refurbishers

The project currently has 8 regular volunteers who attend one of two weekly workshop sessions. They support the project by helping to refurbish donated devices and make them ready for distribution.

Workshops were suspended from March 2020 to April 2021 due to the Covid pandemic; however 5 volunteers continued to support the project by carrying out refurbishment work from home, with arrangements in place for equipment to be dropped off and collected in a safe and socially distanced way (average 12 volunteer hours per week).

When the workshops reopened in June 2021 8 new volunteers received training funded by the Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner’s Vulnerability Fund. The trainees, all individuals identified by the charity’s community partners as vulnerable, were provided with a structured, 6 week

What was donated?



Total items donated: 3,192



programme of training which included building a PC, installing, and updating an operating system, recycling and cyber safety.

Drivers

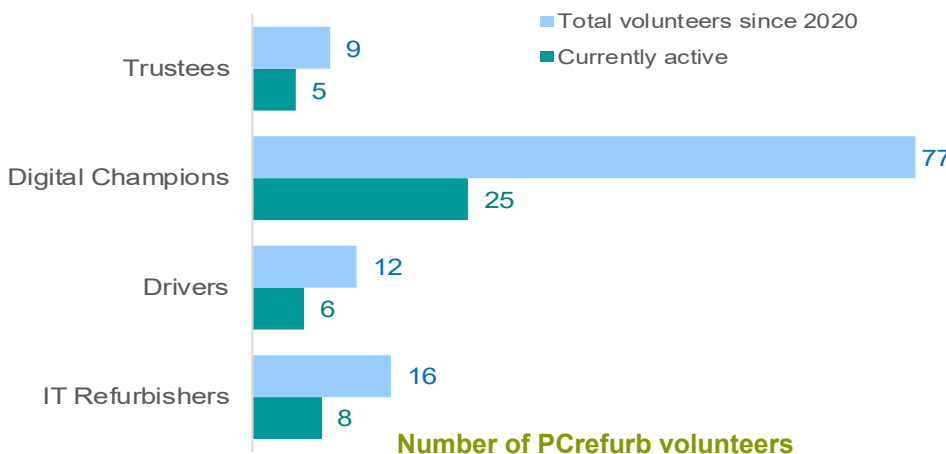
Around 6 volunteers use their cars to collect and deliver IT equipment to/from individuals, organisations and businesses across Tameside and High Peak

Digital Champions

Funded by the NHS as part of the Digital Wellbeing Project, Digital Champions provide digital skills support and mentoring to help beneficiaries access the online world, in their homes or in community/ group settings.

Trustees

Like all charities, PCrefurb has a board of volunteer trustees who are ultimately responsible for its direction and governance.



I feel like I'm part of a team who, together, are doing their best to bridge a growing digital divide. It's been a nice stretch for me too, moving from a role which was highly technical and specialised, working mostly on my own, to helping people with things that it's easy to take for granted. It's also helped me develop some patience ... although there's work to be done here!
PCrefurb Volunteer

7. Did it make a difference? Outcomes

The survey used a simple set of outcome measures which can be grouped into 5 categories. Respondents were asked what difference that their engagement with PCrefurb had made, and were invited to give the extent to which they agree or disagree with a set of outcome statements (summarised in the table below).

3 surveys were created: One sent directly to **individual beneficiaries**; a very similar one for **organisations** who had referred to or used the service, asking them about the difference this had made to their service users; and a separate survey for PCrefurb **volunteers**.

Because of the **device and/ or support received from PCrefurb**

	Individual beneficiaries report that:	Organisations report that individuals they referred:	Volunteers report that, as a result of volunteering with PCrefurb:
1 Employment	✓ I have been able to find & apply for jobs	✓ Have been able to find & apply for jobs	✓ I have improved my chances of getting a job
2 Financial	✓ It has saved me money	✓ It has saved them money	--
	✓ I manage my finances better	✓ Manage finances better	
3 Health, wellbeing & quality of life	✓ My health/wellbeing has improved	✓ Health / wellbeing have improved	✓ My physical health has improved
	✓ I am managing a health condition better	✓ Manage a health condition better	✓ My mental wellbeing has improved
	✓ I feel more confident	✓ Feel more confident	✓ I feel more confident
4 Skills & knowledge	✓ It has saved me time	✓ It has saved them time	✓ I feel that I am making a difference
	✓ I have learned new skills / tried new activities	✓ Have learned new skills /tried new activities	✓ I have learned new skills
5 Social connection	✓ I feel better informed	✓ Feel better informed	
	✓ I feel more connected / less isolated	✓ Feel more connected / less isolated	✓ I feel more connected / less isolated

7.1 Who responded to the survey?

7.1.1 Individual beneficiaries

28 individuals who had received support responded to the survey. 17 had received equipment only, 10 had received both equipment and digital skills training and 1 had received neither (though they had temporary loan of a laptop).

Equipment received by most was a laptop (18); 7 said they had received a desktop computer, 1 a tablet and 1 a smart phone.

Digital skills training had, in most cases, been provided 1:1 either in the person's home (7) or in a community setting (1); 2 had attended a group.

Reasons for using the service

The most common reasons that people gave were to look for work or for learning, or to find information though social, financial and health reasons were cited by a minority; one person received a laptop after attending a group course which they had used for gaming, but later returned as it was too slow.

To use a computer to use my voice to increase charity work for minority groups

It was used in lockdown to help me to learn B.S.L
To do a business administration course

To start up my own business. I was referred to you for help with computer skills such as, book keeping, writing emails and documents

While referrals to the service may be for one immediately presenting need (e.g. job seeking) provision of a device can lead to a much wider range of uses and benefits for a whole family:

From being on a very low income as a single parent with 3 children to being made redundant. I have been able to access my online banking, which has enabled me to manage my finances better. I've been able to access job applications and opportunities, which has resulted in successfully finding a new job. I have also gained a new set of IT skills I didn't have when I left school. This has given me more confidence when using technology. All three children use my laptop for homework and college work. It's been a huge help to me as a new laptop would not have been affordable.



Individuals' reason(s) for using the service: I hoped that it would enable me to...

7.1.2 Organisations

25 responses were received from those who had referred individuals to PCrefurb and/or who had received support directly for their organisation.

19 had made referrals of individuals needing digital equipment, 8 had referred people for digital skills training, and 8 had received equipment for their own organisation's use. Another 3 reported other benefits including equipment for use by refugees, an internet connection and WiFi set up, and online health resources. 1 had donated equipment to PCrefurb

Organisations were asked to provide a short description of what they do. A wide range of services, across voluntary, public and private sector organisations included

- Support people in a range of different circumstances including those experiencing domestic abuse, refugees, asylum seekers or migrants; ex-offenders, mental health, substance abuse
- Local voluntary organisations organising community activities or providing community spaces, including a church providing a range of community activities, a local history/heritage group, physical activity, social and intergenerational groups.
- Health services including social prescribers, support to patients in GP surgeries, mental health services for children and adults
- Support for those who are unemployed or on low incomes including debt advice, help with job seeking, training
- Social or supported housing including a private children's home

A few respondents asked for their comments to remain anonymous, however organisations happy to be identified are listed on p35.

Why do you refer people to PCrefurb?

When asked to describe why the organisations made referrals to PCrefurb and for what purpose, many wrote about helping those unable afford a device due to low income, or with digital skills, to enable them to: Access services or communicate with government agencies or apply for benefits; look for work or apply for jobs; attend courses, study or access online learning; to maintain contact with loved ones.

Phones / SIM cards for people who have had to change numbers / leave phones behind / hand over for police evidence. Laptops for home learning / access to benefits etc

Crossroads Derbyshire – domestic abuse service

To boost their confidence in using laptops/tablets/ phones this gives them independence and an extra bonus friendship.

Project Coordinator, The Big Local

A lot of our participants cannot afford to purchase equipment for themselves. We have computers in our office but not enough for participants to come in for group sessions. Participants are also expected by ourselves (and JCP) to continue to job search. Or, perhaps they are doing online courses, use the computers for household finances, etc If the Participant has a mobile phone it is usually very basic and therefore not suitable for various activities set.

Employment Advisor, Restart Glossop

We heard that refugees were able to access a laptop computer from PCrefurb, as an important part of their communications with home, and adjustment to living in the UK.

Host of Ukrainian refugees

We want to help our customers sustain their tenancies, we try to support them to save funds, progress into employment and training and help them to get digitally upskilled

Social Investment Specialist, Onward Homes

For those who are maybe digitally excluded and in need of a device for either attending our courses, especially those online, or for getting through life's demands. PCrefurb is also a great place to refer some of our autistic clients to become part of the workshop groups there

Centre Manager, Christians Against Poverty
 ☞ Revive Church New Mills

PCrefurb presented the Trust with a Laptop to enable volunteers to access various information from its archives, existing and new, and digitise them for inclusion in its collection. They also allowed us to swap an older Desktop PC for a laptop to use for presentations. Both computers were gratefully accepted and have become essential to the work the Trust is doing.

Director, Glossop Heritage Trust /
 Glossop & District Historical Society

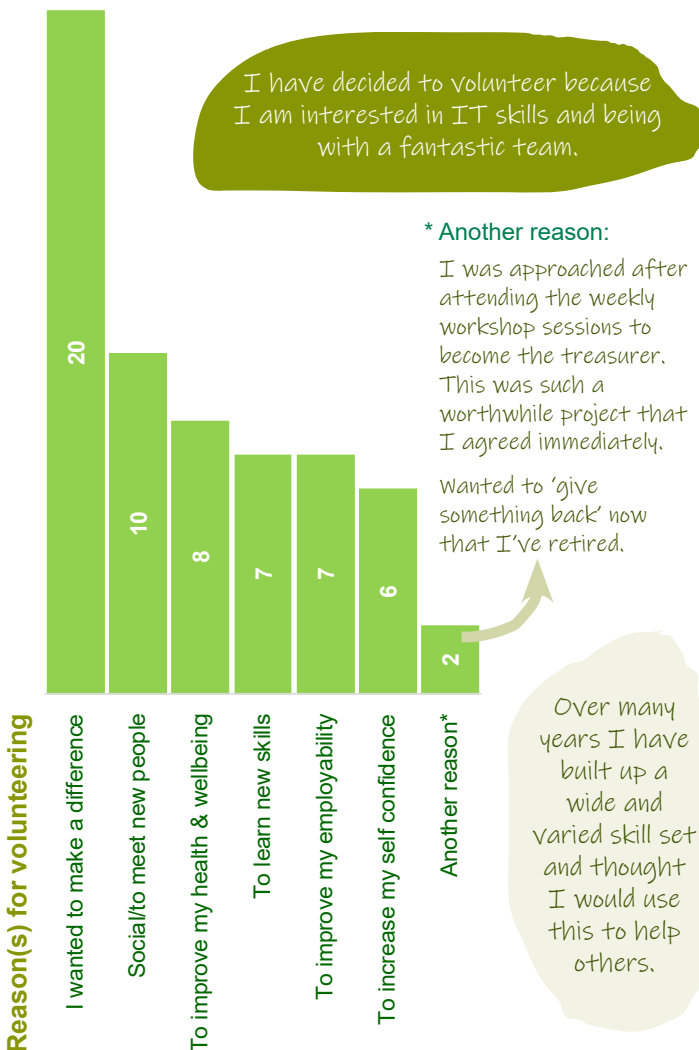
7.1.3 Volunteers

23 current or former volunteers responded to the survey: **14 Digital Champions, 7 IT Refurbishers, 3 Drivers and 2 Trustees** (3 volunteered in more than one role).

16 had started volunteering within the last 2 years, 2 had volunteered for 2-4 years (reflecting, perhaps, that recruitment of new volunteers was paused during the pandemic). 5 had volunteered for 4 or 5 years (PCrefurb has existed since 2018)

How did you hear about PCrefurb?

The most common sources were word of mouth or personal contact (7) or the internet (5, with 3 specifying a request on a Facebook community page), via their GP Surgery (4), Social Worker (2), College (1) or another source (3)



I applied for a job, unsuccessfully and was asked if I'd like to volunteer.

I saw a post on Facebook asking for digital champions volunteers. As soon as I read what it was about, I knew I had the skills to do this as I work in IT and helping people learn new skills is my passion, so I immediately signed up.

I was one of the founding members and trustees.

Reason for volunteering

Invited to say more about their response, retirement was a factor in a number of responses, the wish to remain active and engaged in the community, give something back, or share the skills they had gained. Others cited the feeling that the project was valuable and worthwhile and/or a good fit with their interests, skills or other commitments.

Following my retirement, I was keen to be an active member of my community & utilise some of the many skills I had accumulated during my career. As I worked with IT throughout my career (as a Data Analyst) PCrefurb seemed like a natural fit.

I hadn't thought about volunteering before, but when I received the message from the doctors surgery and made the follow up phone call, I felt it was something I could do. I also thought it was something worth doing.

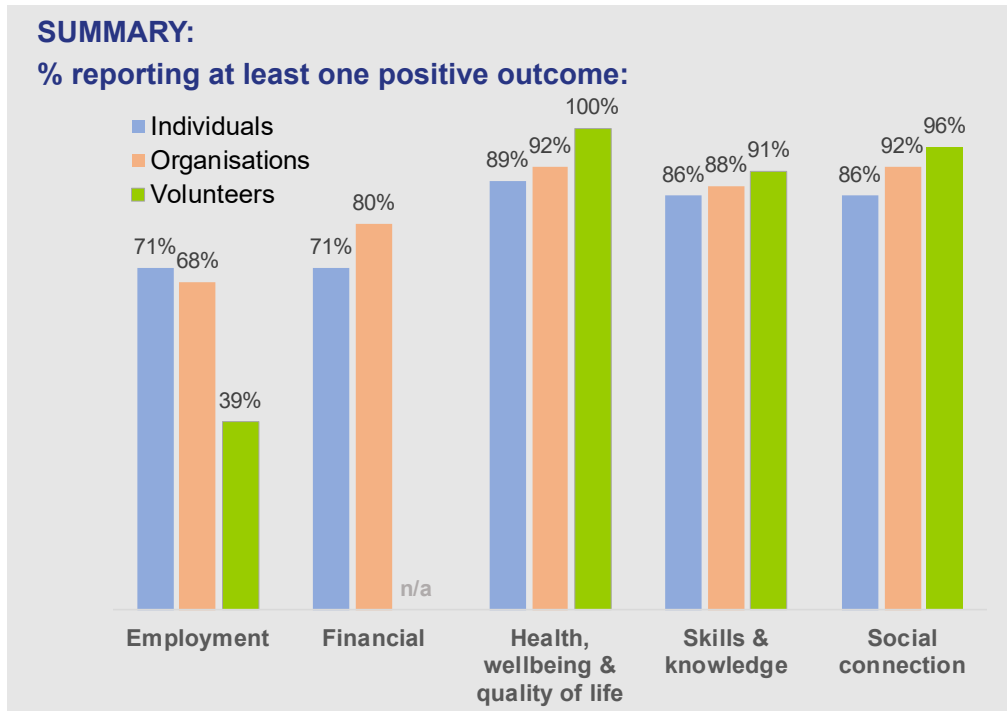
I'm very close to retirement and know that without something useful to do my mental health would quickly deteriorate. Having spent most of my working life in IT volunteering with PCRefurb was an ideal opportunity.

I retired in June 2020 I was wanting to use skills I had used in work to help other people, I also wanted to be involved more in my local community. This role was also flexible no fixed session with fitted around my other commitments

I felt the project was a worthwhile one which would help local people and organisations.

I am retired with spare time on my hands. During my career I have always used IT/trained colleagues in its use. I saw this as a way of giving something back.

7.2 Outcomes



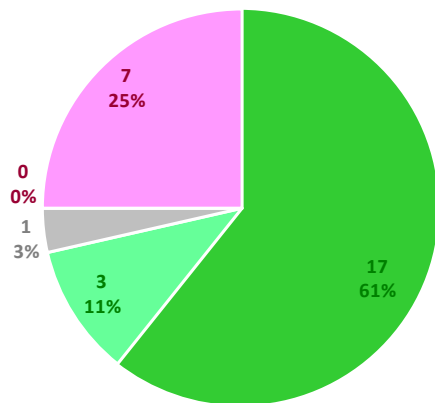
The service you provide is excellent and helps so many people to gain new skills, confidence and employment.

Individual beneficiary

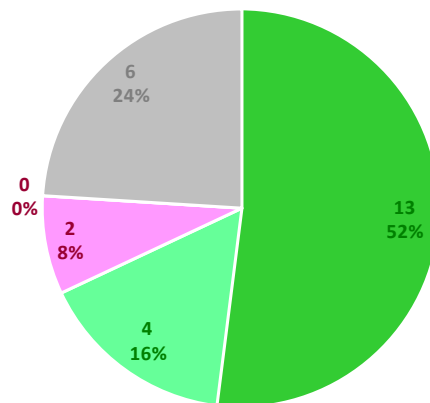
7.2.1 Employment Outcomes

Because of the device and/ or support received from PCrefurb...

Individuals: I have been able to find and apply for jobs

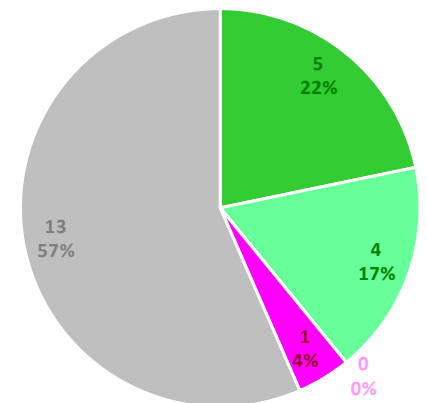


Organisations: Individuals we referred report that they have been able to find and apply for jobs



As a result of volunteering with PCrefurb...

Volunteers: I have improved my chances of getting a job



- Strongly agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not relevant to me

I was referred by the job centre whilst claiming unemployment for the first time in my life. The laptop meant I was able to apply for jobs, and I have subsequently gained employment.

The relatively low number of volunteers reporting employment outcomes perhaps reflects the number of responses from those who were volunteering because they were retired – for whom this outcome would be less relevant.

Thanks for the opportunity to learn a new program. And I had a zoom interview, I was able to make a test request with your laptop. Thank you very much!

I used your services personally whilst unemployed then in my role as Employment advisor. I would not have been able to afford a new laptop and my old one wasn't working. It also enabled all my participants to search and apply for jobs, create a CV and manage their appointments and finances.

The following is what I wrote for the office at Glossop having returned the computer at the end of my loan period. It still reflects my thoughts about PCrefurb and how grateful I am to them in enabling me to get my life back on track again:

Having been out of the world of employment for quite a few years owing to caring for my ailing mother, I realised that getting back into secretarial/administrative work again would be very difficult without upgrading my skills. My aged computer was unable to cope with Microsoft software upgrades and I felt stuck at the first hurdle.

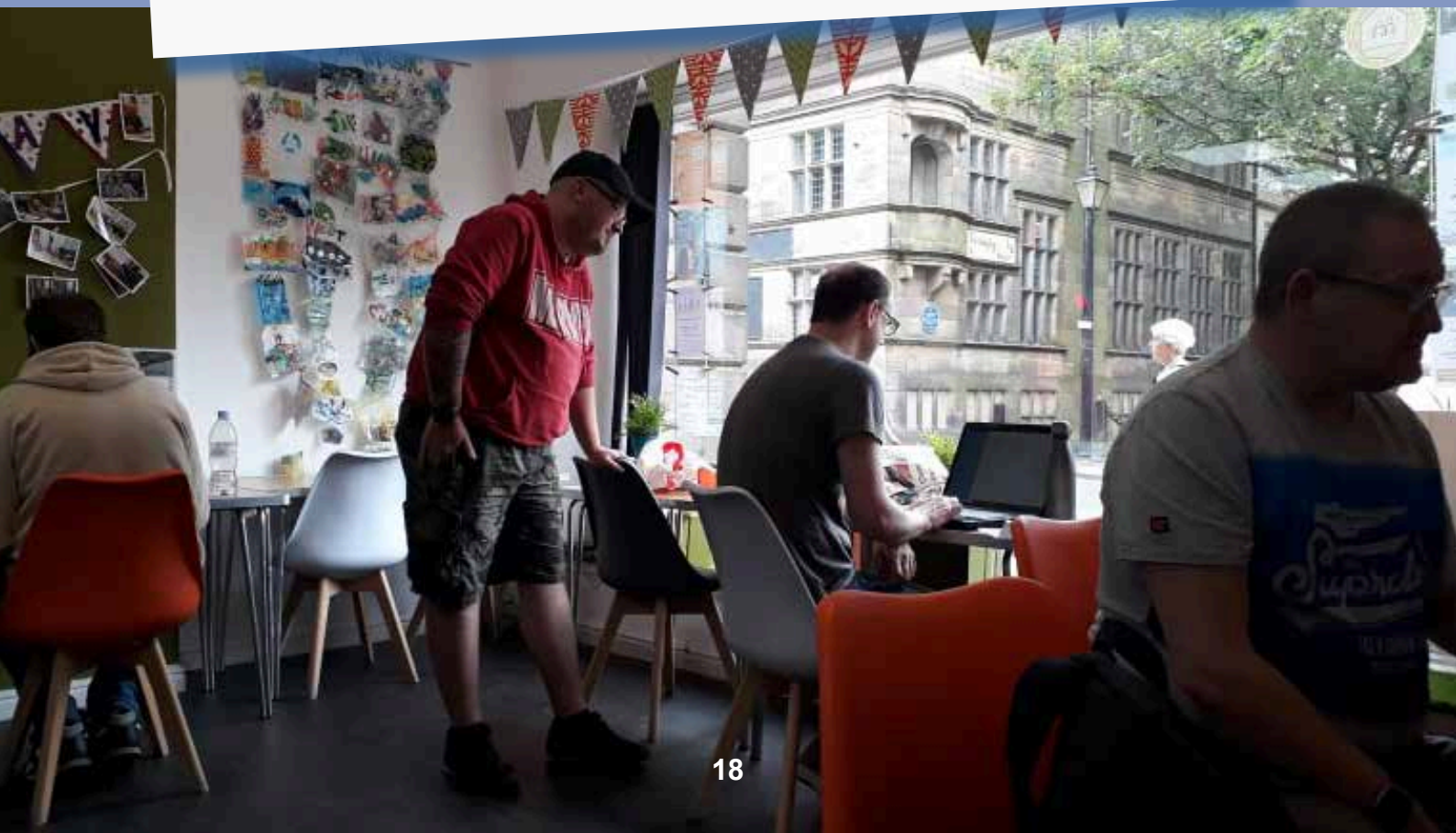
Sarah Kelly at the High Peak Careers Service offered to contact PCrefurb to see if it might be possible for me to borrow a laptop or desktop computer so that I could access some suitable online training. I was very impressed at just how quickly PCrefurb contacted me with the offer of a desktop pc which I would be able to collect within a couple of weeks. I was on my way with updating my knowledge and skills.

Sadly, life turned things upside-down part way though my re-education and the staff at PCRefurb were extremely accommodating in extending my loan period for a further three months so that I could continue when I was able. I am very grateful for their understanding and kindness during that time.

After picking up the learning reins again and getting back on track I now feel much more confident in contacting prospective employers and have even felt competent enough to extend my knowledge into different areas. A new job hasn't happened just yet owing to a move to a different area - and possibly employers being a bit shy of employing someone approaching 60 years of age. Ah well, someone, somewhere will take that leap of faith I'm sure! In the meantime, I am putting my skills to good use in the voluntary sector.

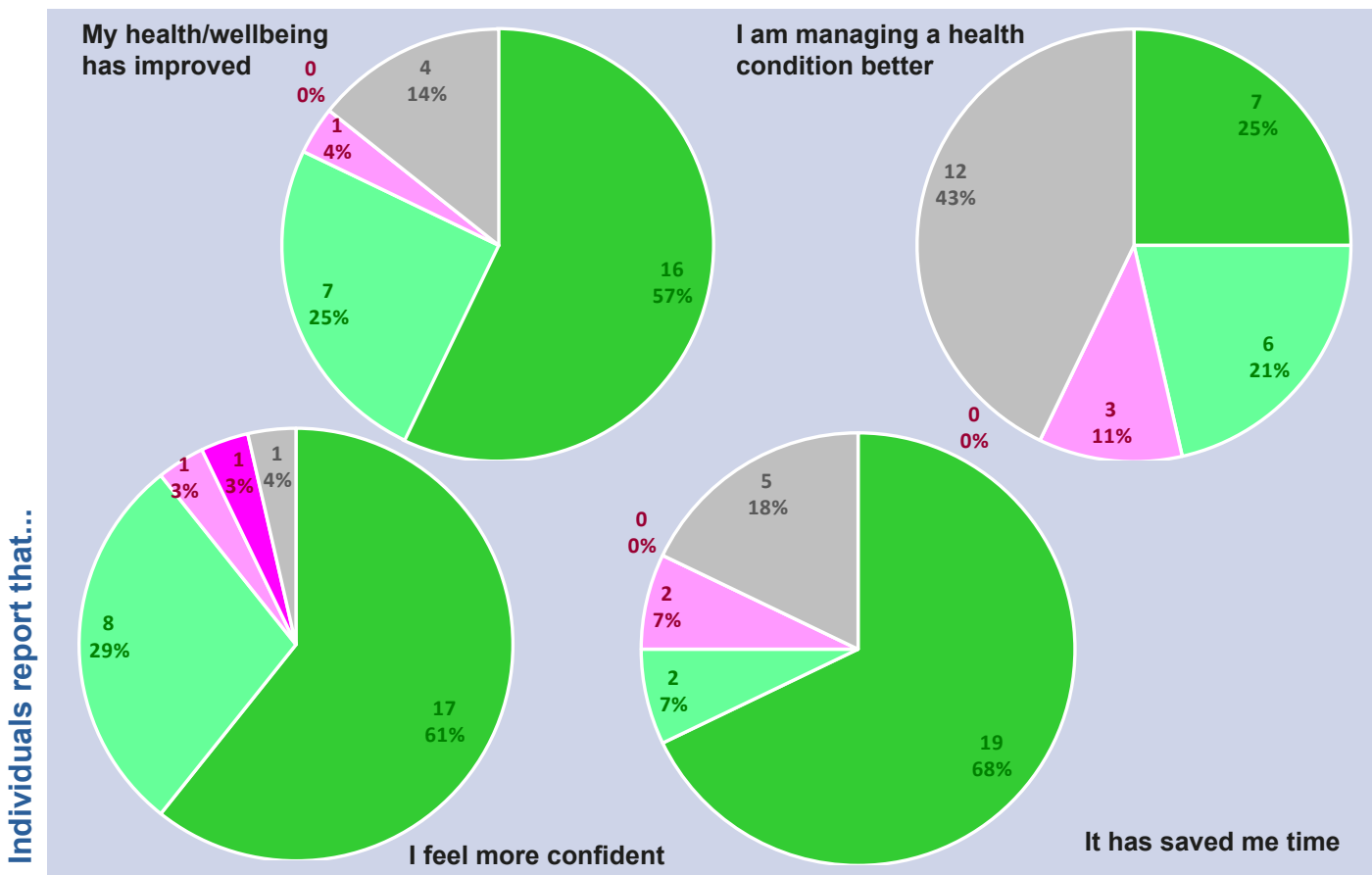
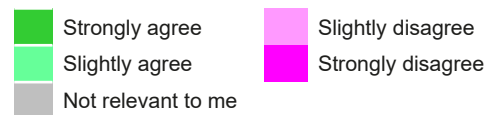
Thank you again to the staff at PCrefurb; you have been instrumental in helping me get to grips with my life again!

Individual beneficiary

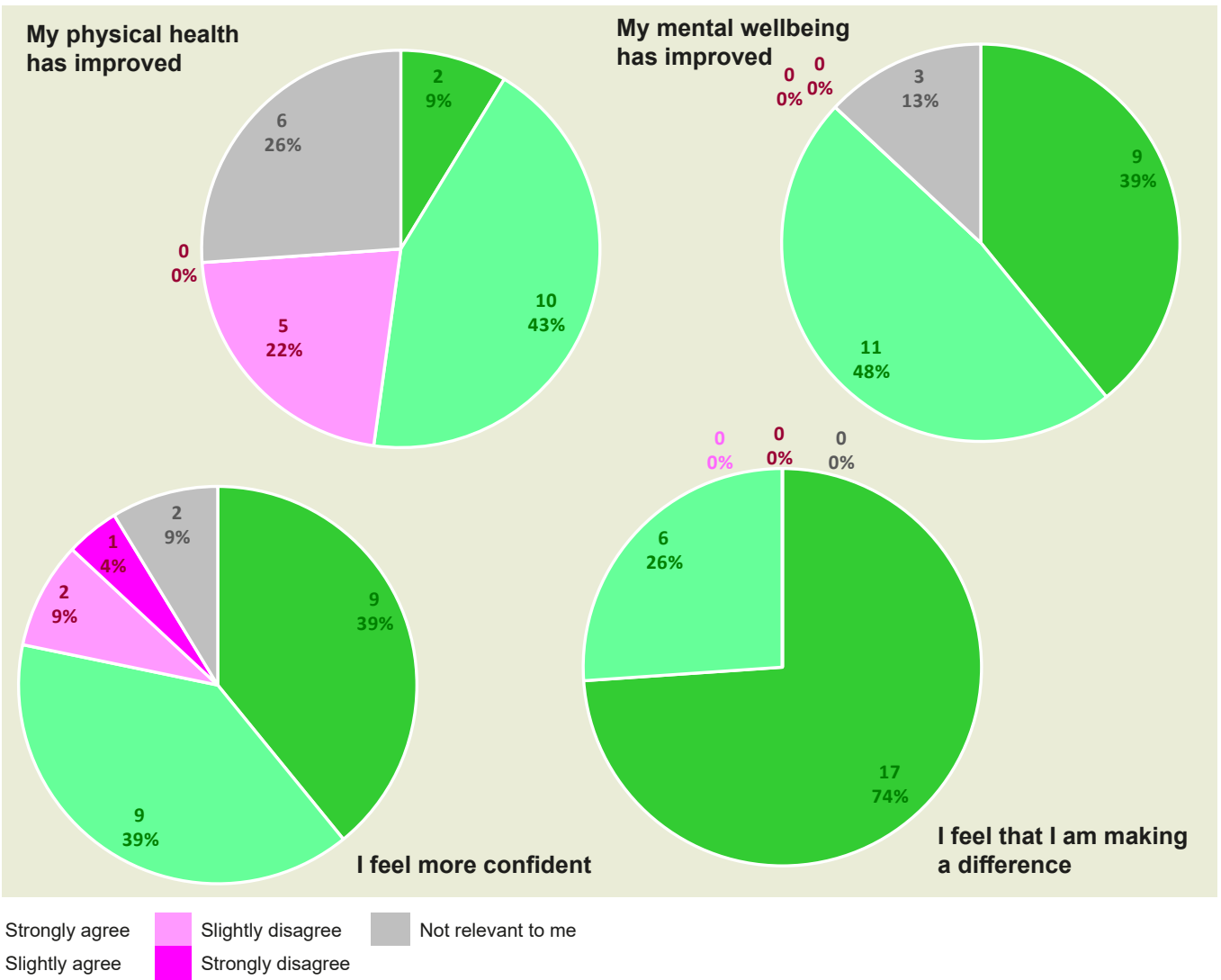


7.2.2 Health & Wellbeing Outcomes

Because of the device and/ or support received from PCrefurb...



Volunteers: As a result of volunteering with PCrefurb...



[I] Provide support for patients at their surgeries to access/use various apps such as Patient Access and NHS app etc. I empower patients to use these online resources/apps to be better equipped and benefit from these etc saving time or visits to the surgery.

Volunteer Digital Health Champion

Recently PCrefurb provided a reconditioned phone and a free for 6 months SIM card to one of my clients. This person is also attending the Digital Skills groups now so they can gain confidence and knowledge about using this new handset. This person is struggling with poverty and could never have afforded a new phone or contract. We were unable to contact them about the other support we are offering because they previously did not have a phone number. This is allowing the person to manage their finances, benefits account and communicate with energy suppliers much more easily now and therefore making a huge difference to her mental health and wellbeing.

Community Navigator,
Social Prescribing Team, The Bureau

Several volunteers noted that as well as health benefits both to themselves they could see the benefits to those they were helping:

Having been in cancer treatment for 12 months I felt that I needed to get back out into the world and help others with the skills that are second nature to me that are alien to others .

I feel that I have not only improved my wellbeing but also that of those who I have worked with.

I feel better in myself as I'm getting out plus I'm helping someone else

In particular, volunteers took pleasure in seeing change and benefits to those they were helping:

I enjoy helping others and get pleasure from their betterment.

It's very satisfying to see the difference that I am able to make when helping people to use Digital Health Apps & to see their confidence in using IT grow.

At the end of the sessions most people say they really enjoyed taking part and appreciated what they had learned. I think it also gives others confidence.



Equal Education Chances
is a non-profit organisation that aims to support and empower children and young people living with disabilities and their families; to learn and develop academic, social and vocational skills. We also provide advocacy services to promote inclusiveness and facilitate support directly to the individual and through parent/tares, school, religious or play settings.

Weekly
Family
Educational
Wellbeing
Recreation



I enjoy working with patients to empower them in the use of various online health resources in a wide number of settings ie in surgeries and community hall settings. I feel I am enable to make a difference with positive out comes for all the patients I have encountered.

I have learned about the actual barriers to doing things on-line. I have also learned that the most difficult things in the early stages of getting used to doing things on-line are the security barriers. These barriers also make it difficult to assist. Initially most people have few things that they understand would be useful to them on-line as they have learned to use the ways that have always been available. However, these are being taken away.

Other volunteers felt strongly about how important the service was:

I am passionate about people not being left behind as so many things move to online only. People who have not learnt these skills need a relaxed accepting environment and encouragement rather than been "shown" quickly by well meaning friends and relatives. I am especially keen for people to be able to access health resources having retired from the health service and understanding the difference it makes if they are able to do this.

Helping people to use a computer and apps opens up far more opportunities for them for a multitude of things. If you are not a bit tech savvy in this day and age you are far more disadvantaged. And those that are, for one reason or another, already disadvantaged tend to be the same people who have the least access to the technology to help them. So facilitating access to the technology and its use has to make a difference to their lives in my view.

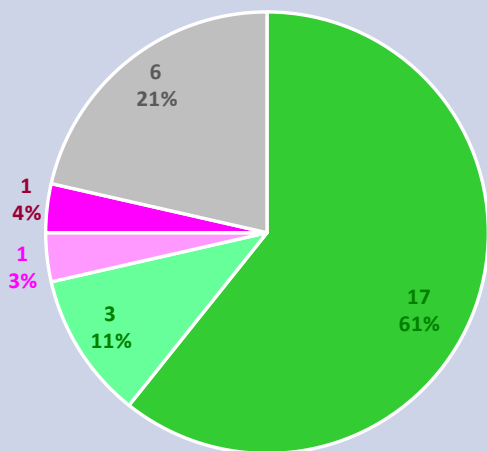
My mental health has certainly improved since volunteering. Also, I get great satisfaction knowing I've helped others.

PCrefurb Volunteer

7.2.3. Financial outcomes

Because of the device and/ or support received from PCrefurb...

It has saved me money

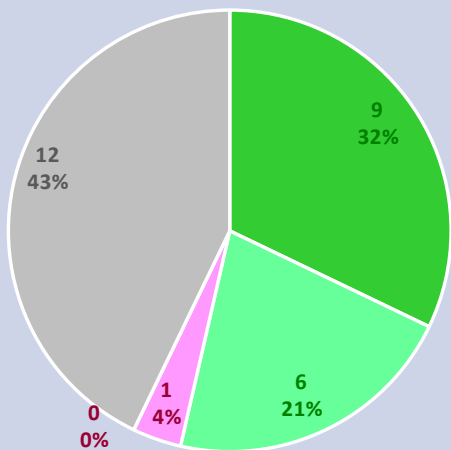


The obvious benefit is to those who could not afford to buy or replace a device, or who would have had to struggle financially to do so. A smaller number also reported being better able to manage finances as a result of having access to the internet.

[People are referred to PCrefurb] Because they do not have a phone, or cannot afford one.. People have been happy to have a decent phone to use.

Probation Officer, Probation Service

I manage my finances better



From being on a very low income as a single parent with 3 children to being made redundant. I have been able to access my online banking, which has enabled me to manage my finances better. I've been able to access job applications and opportunities, which has resulted in successfully finding a new job. I have also gained a new set of IT skills I didn't have when I left school. This has given me more confidence when using technology. All three children use my laptop for homework and college work. IT's been a huge help to me as a new laptop would not have been affordable.

Individual beneficiary



Individuals report that...

It has enabled individuals to access online forms that are required by most companies especially organisations such as mental health establishments to gain better access from the service. For example that could include online free [mental health] workshops ... Or gaining help from Citizens advice. Even local GPs are requesting to book appointments online. thank you.

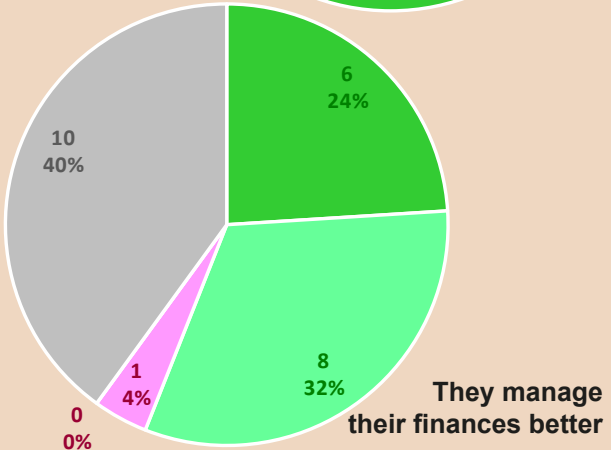
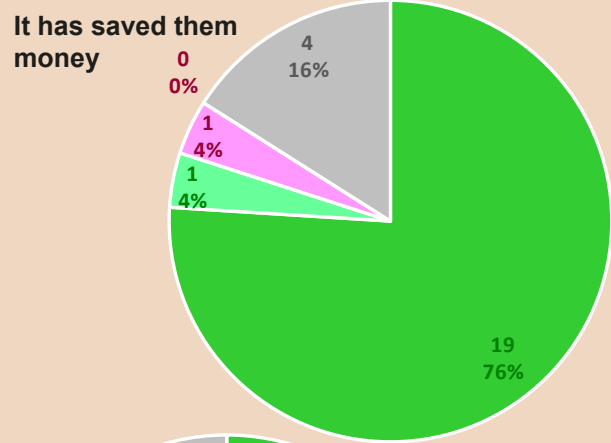
Mental health support service

This is fantastic to offer participants IT equipment who would otherwise be unable to access.

Employment Advisor, Reed in Partnership

The laptops that have been provided have helped staff and young people complete training, work that needed doing for several courses and day to day running of the home. A lot of the YP that have used refurbished laptops have used these to complete school work when isolating or haven't been able to access school or education.

Senior Residential Care Worker, Penarth



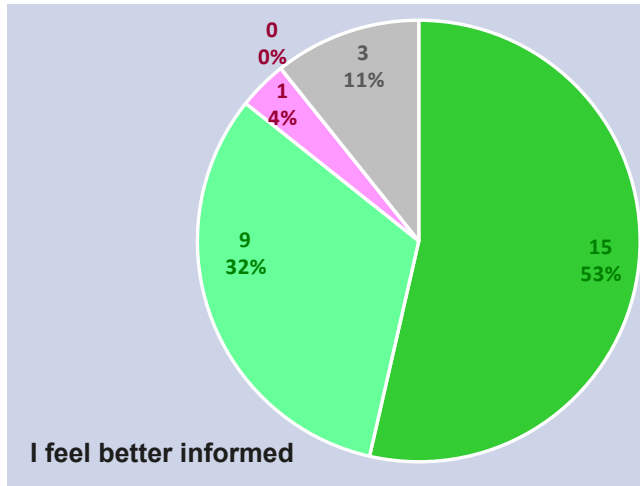
Organisations: Individuals we referred report that ...

7.2.4. Skills & Knowledge Outcomes

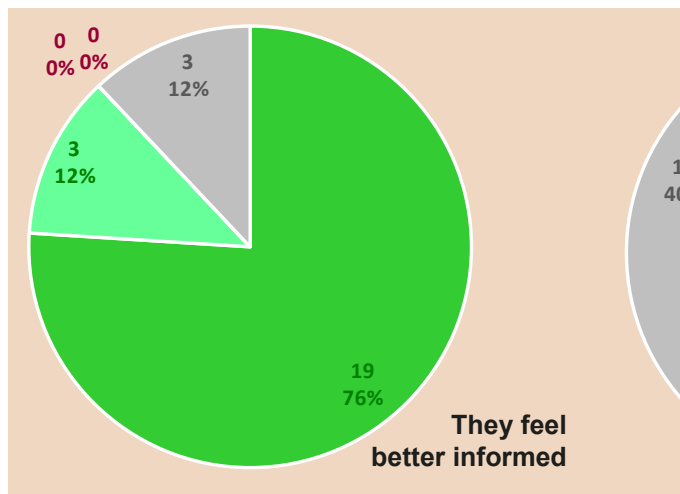
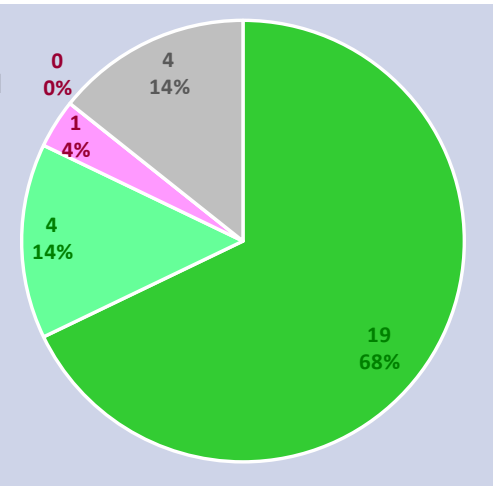
Because of the device and/or support received from PCrefurb...



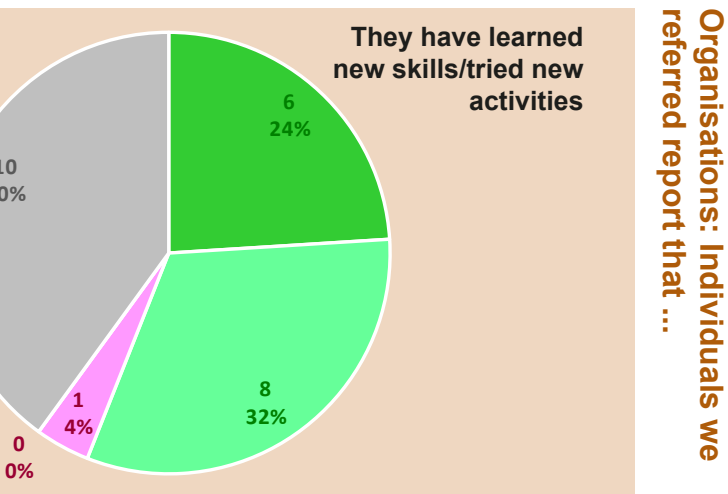
Individuals report that...



I have learned new skills/tried new activities



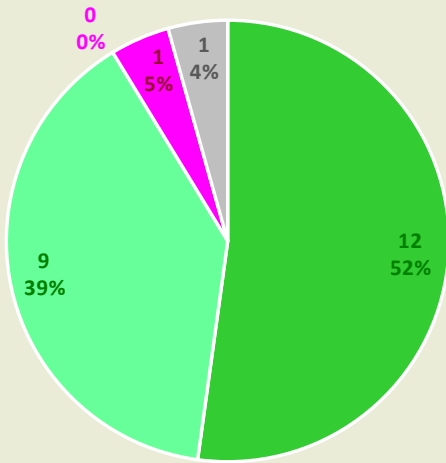
They have learned new skills/tried new activities



Organisations: Individuals we referred report that ...

Volunteers: As a result of volunteering with PCrefurb...

I have learned new skills



■ Strongly agree ■ Slightly agree
■ Slightly disagree ■ Not relevant to me
■ Strongly disagree

The laptops that have been provided have helped staff and young people complete training, work that needed doing for several courses and day to day running of the home. A lot of the YP that have used refurbished laptops have used these to complete school work when isolating or haven't been able to access school or education.

Senior Residential Care Worker, Penarth

It has enabled them to join a remote university access course

Project Manager, Refugees & Mentors CIC

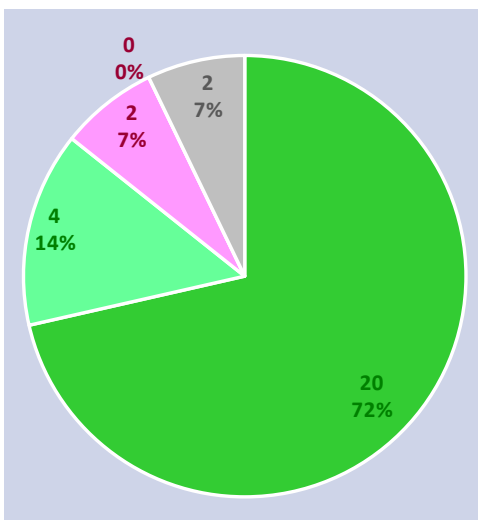
Our service users have been happy that they have been able to access online facilities and be able to work on computers to facilitate their training goals

Social Investment Specialist, Onward Homes

7.2.5. Social Connection Outcomes

Because of the device and/ or support received from PCrefurb...

Individuals: I feel more connected / less isolated



I am helping the user by typing this for her as she hasn't got fluent English yet. She is able to use the laptop by switching from her own language and back again. Her son is shown lessons both for here in England and home country. It has been used several times a week since getting it over six months ago. Zoom has been much easier on the laptop rather than her phone.

Individual beneficiary

It help me with my loneliness and to try and achieve the help for the courses

Individual beneficiary

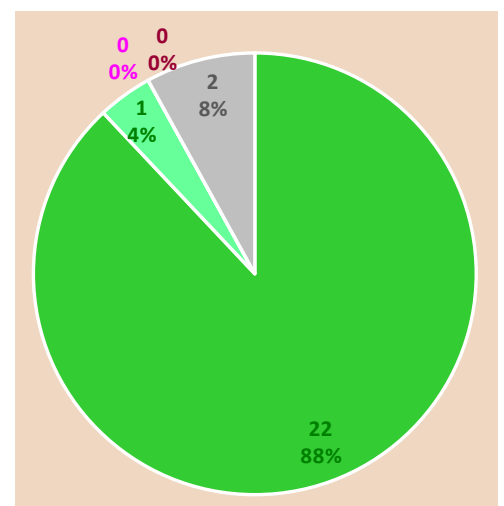
Organisations: Individuals we referred report that they feel more connected / less isolated

Enabled our clients to connect with others, get work and become independent. Not only refurbishing IT equipment but in doing so improving skills and confidence and strengthening communities by bringing marginalised people together

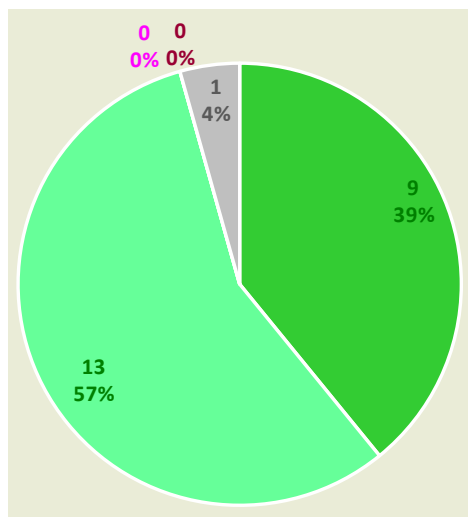
CEO, The Zink Project CIO

The impact that the group has on our local community is immense. For example during the COVID pandemic the group provided IT equipment to many nursing homes to enable residents to communicate with their families.

PCrefurb Volunteer



Volunteers: As a result of volunteering with PCrefurb I feel more connected / less isolated



This outcome features less in the narrative responses to the volunteer survey; however in the refurbishment workshops groups visited, volunteers particularly emphasised the importance of social contact, belonging and fellowship, and the difference it had made to their lives. Some had been very socially isolated before they had been persuaded, for example by a social worker, to give it a go. One volunteer told me how deteriorating mental health had caused him to leave home and become estranged from his family; volunteering at the workshop – the sense of belonging and making a valuable contribution – had turned his life around and he had now re-established contact. A sense of belonging/being part of a team however were factors for volunteers:

I love working with PCrefurb, which is very close to my heart because of my dad. I thoroughly enjoy being a digital champion and getting involved with their meetings to see what a difference it has on other people's lives, so they are no longer digitally excluded and what plans they have for the future

PCrefurb Volunteer

I feel like I'm part of a team who, together, are doing their best to bridge a growing digital divide. It's been a nice stretch for me too, moving from a role which was highly technical and specialised, working mostly on my own, to helping people with things that it's easy to take for granted. It's also helped me develop some patience ... although there's work to be done here!

PCrefurb Volunteer



7.3 The experience of using the service

Individuals

I received a prompt response



The equipment provided was in good working order



Staff were friendly & helpful



Overall, I was happy with the service I received



Organisations

Two additional questions related to the referral system and whether they would recommend it to others.

I received a prompt response



The referral system was easy and straightforward to use



The equipment provided was in good working order



Staff were friendly & helpful



Overall, I was happy with the service I received



I would recommend PCrefurb to others



Respondents were invited to say more about their experience of using PCrefurb's services, what they found positive, what the service could do differently or do better, and any other comments:

The service you provide is excellent and helps so many people to gain new skills, confidence and employment. When I spoke to your staff they were always polite, helpful and knowledgeable.

Individual beneficiary

I've had a very positive experience, excellent communication, updates etc. Keeping me updated. It's an excellent service, staff and volunteers are fabulous!

Project Coordinator, The Big Local

It has helped me to have access to volunteering opportunities that I see online. Has help me to connect with my community online group and enjoying so many benefits from them. PC refurb is a fantastic initiative. Without them helping me, I don't know how I would have been able to manage my mental health because I feel so isolated without a device. One of the volunteering am doing is as a result of the use of the PC to search online and am volunteering online with the aid of the PC. My story of course will be one out of many people they have impacted our lives positively. Being a single mum, loneliness is inevitable but PC refurb has helped me to overcome this by having access to the world online.

Individual beneficiary

We have always found the team at PCrefurb to be very courteous and helpful no matter what we ask them. They are also a great outsource with regards to some of our Participants volunteering with them. I will hopefully be getting a group of our participants together for Basic IT skills training.

Employment Advisor, Restart Glossop

It's a great service that helps improve the ability of individuals to connect with their community, support services etc. It offers this support local to people of Glossop and links closely with wellbeing support Bureau projects.

Community Navigator,
Social Prescribing Team, The Bureau

There were many generally positive comments about the service, both from individuals and organisations:

The best idea I have seen developed in years!! Well done you!
Family Therapist, NHS Trust

All the aspects of the organisation. Also the communication and trust that evolved, i.e if a client was not able to keep their PC and tried to sell it. We were able to address this and try to help clients understand that these were items for their own benefit. Reviewing processes, in a complex environment of low income, different financial pressures. Always a great customer care approach from all involved.

Organisation which refers to PCrefurb

Comments about interactions with staff and volunteers were particularly positive:

Extremely friendly and helpful

i thought they was really helpful and great help

Lovely friendly, approachable and down-to-earth people. Good equipment which was clean and well set up. Flexibility in extending the loan period. Their understanding of my requirements and a willingness to find the right equipment for my needs.

All interactions were professional and kind.

Polite staff.

They are nice and supportive

The person that come to train me was very welcoming, very patient with me

Brilliant, understanding, organised and friendly

wonderful group of people, focussing on helping and supporting residents to be digitally inclusive

Fantastic, great team to work with

Efficient and knowledgeable.

have a can do attitude

Nothing negative at all. Ease of dealing with them was probably best feature

Respondents also commended the speed and quality of the service (including drop-off/delivery of equipment); quality of the equipment provided and follow up support:

Everything, the products and service you offer is second to none

Good and professional service.

Drop off service

I received the laptop very quickly

Prompt delivery. When I had issue with the PC and I contacted them, they responded immediately and solved the issue.

Organisations also reported positive experiences of making referrals and communication with the service:

The system is working well and gives differing levels of help and assistance to the clients we interact with.

I was kept up to date and informed of dates and times of when items were ready to be collected. The referral system was way to use and I even had the YP fill out the referral form for the last laptops and computer. The constant contact and updating of when items are ready and the timeframe of referral to collection.

Very efficient

I've had a very positive experience, excellent communication, updates etc. It's an excellent service, staff and volunteers are fabulous!

Communications were good and all were helpful.

Excellent communication and good quality equipment

Specialist knowledge and provision

They are always focused and give a good quick response

Very quick and helpful

A number of respondents reiterated their appreciation of personal benefits of what they, or their service users had received:

This is an opportunity to find a job and work remotely thanks to your service

how it helps people

i would not be able to do my computer course without it

This is an opportunity to find a job and work remotely thanks to your service

I am more confident now going with the support I received from PCrefurb

I had very basic computer skills when I first started now I feel more confident using the laptop

You made me so happy. Thanks so much for helping me.

Thankyou.. employment has changed not only my financial situation but mental health has improved.

After helping me I now run my own business and with the skills they provided me with I have managed to write my own courses.

Clients fully appreciate this service and enjoy attending the sessions. Clients have also reported the great advantages of gaining new digital and IT skills as well.

I can't recommend them highly enough

thank you for a much needed service which makes a real difference to people lives

Keep up the good work guys

Just a great big thank you to all the staff at PCrefurb

The referral scheme to get equipment for our service users is excellent and the digital support classes and workshops run by digital champions is vital to the community. There is noone else that offers this service.

Volunteers, too, commented on the difference that they could see the service making to beneficiaries

This service is invaluable to clients. Commissioners need to understand the impact that this training can have.

PCrefurb Volunteer Digital Champion

Suggestions as to what could be done better/ differently focussed on:

Expansion into other areas

A number of respondents wished that the service was available in other areas and wondered if the charity might expand its operations (specifically, to cover Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales and Sheffield as well as expanding the offer within High Peak):

Expand, I'm now also working in Chesterfield, as well as the High Peak. I know it is a big area and the problems on digital inclusion are big both in rural and town areas, for different reasons.

Deliver IT workshops throughout the High Peak

The referral process

The referral system /forms could be more flexible by including more free text boxes to add specific details or additional needs of the clients I am referring in.

My experiences referring into PCrefurb have been overall very positive [but] Issues with waiting times and feedback have been experienced.

Communication

Although most feedback on the service praised its efficiency and good communication, two suggestions related to lack of clarity about what was offered/available:

Communicate better. I think I may have got lost in the system. I was receiving emails from 3 people at once. I completed a form as I am on benefits and was in the process of setting up a Charity group. My current laptop was and is broken. The team tried various things to fix it but couldn't. They loaned me a laptop so that I could speak virtually at an international event. Which I returned. I still don't have a laptop I can work on, but this was over 6 months ago. And I never heard anything again maybe its a communication breakdown. I do have a communication disability. I'm kind of stuck right now with no computer access. Lovely people though... I needed a computer to progress my life. I was loaned one for a weekend and no further support Maybe I misunderstood I'm Saving up for a computer as I don't want to appear cheeky. I don't know if I misunderstood the service or what could be offered.

Individual beneficiary

For non-IT people like me I would've valued some IT help in setting up Word etc. This wasn't offered and I don't know whether they would've done it if we had asked but if not then I would say this would be a very valuable service to offer in future.

Organisation which PCrefurb provided with a computer

A further two focussed on communication after a referral had been made:

It seems a bit like a nit-picking thing to bring up but it could be a relatively easy step to include in what is already a very well thought out and executed procedure:-

I wasn't initially sure that PCrefurb had received my request for equipment via the Careers Service but a quick call to them confirmed that I was on the list. After that I was contacted within the week to say that a desktop computer was going to be available within a few days.

Individual beneficiary

It would be useful to hear from PCRefurb once they have placed an item of equipment through the referral. We usually only hear from the person receiving the equipment. It would be easier to track for us if we heard it from PCRefurb.

Organisation which refers to PCrefurb

As well as two from organisations about wider promotion of what's on offer:

If I wasn't aware of The Bureau where they are based I wouldn't know about their services.

Make sure Derbyshire resettlement team promote the service

I think they are doing fine anyway.

They are a helpful organisation.

Keep doing it as you are

Highly satisfied with the service provided.

Issues with supply or availability of equipment:
There were a few issues either with the functionality of the equipment provided, how it was delivered, and the availability of devices:

I had to replace the charger very quickly.

Unfortunately I received a laptop from PCrefurb that once turned on every 5 minutes would turn off. It was a referral through universal credit at the time and I was told by them on a phone call that I'd have to wait so long for another referral when I asked if a replacement was available. [PCrefurb] Staff were very helpful despite receiving a laptop that didn't work properly, it was the job centre who said I'd have to wait.

I received a desk computer without boxes. If you put the computer, keyboard and monitor into boxes separately, that can be better.

My laptop is a Chromebook, which I'd never used. If some training had been available in the first instance that would have been helpful.

I had to wait a couple of weeks for a laptop rather than a desktop. I feel a bit ungrateful saying that but I really couldn't have used a desktop.

the demand out ran the supply .. as we referred so many people to your service

However 8 individuals and 7 organisations answered nothing / the service is fine:

They are brilliant keep up the good work.

They've done well already.

Nothing fab service.

The 8 organisations who had received **equipment for their own use**, said that as a result it had enabled them to operate more effectively or do more (5), improve the IT skills of staff/volunteers (4) use their funds for other things (3) or work remotely (3).

Others reported benefits for their service users or the wider community:

We were given a desktop computer for our office and it was a wonderful thing to be given when we need it; I was surprised how quick and easy it was; the computer is in excellent condition. [What was positive?] Everything. Nothing negative at all. Ease of dealing with them was probably best feature. PCrefurb is a great initiative. And the people I interacted with were lovely and very easy to deal with. 100% happy.

Director, Wellfit Health and Wellbeing CIC

Community members have got online for the first time and children/teenagers have been able to access learning.

Director, Building Lives Around Shirebrook Town CIC

Computers were refurbished in the community IT suite that we help to manage. This has meant that there is more and better access for the community.

Social Investment Specialist, Onward Homes

We are able to provide WiFi for people using our church building

Property Steward, Hadfield Methodist Church



Volunteers

I received good training/preparation for volunteering



I feel clear about what is expected of me



Overall I am satisfied with my experience as a volunteer



I would recommend volunteering with PCrefurb to family/friends



Volunteers overwhelmingly reported a very positive experience of volunteering with PCrefurb:

Social aspect

Excellent discussions

I feel I'm a valued member of the organisation

It's very difficult to provide training to cover every possible scenario, but we receive regular updates & there is always the option to contact Emma for an immediate answer. Working as a group of volunteers works well as there is always the option to discuss any issues with other volunteers & often results in a solution being found.

The amount of support, training, documentation I've got has been phenomenal, everyone's open to new ideas and even if some are of dubious quality they get listened to.

I enjoyed being a volunteer and making a small difference to people's lives.

It's very worthwhile and you feel you are making a difference to people's lives.

There was praise for staff, though turnover of staff was also commented upon:

I have seen several changes of staff but without exception they have all been helpful, knowledgeable, approachable and supportive

The support has been fairly good, but the turnover of staff has been high.

The training and support provided, and the sense of being valued, of making a positive contribution, were important PCrefurb Volunteer

I am supported in my role



I am listened to by the organisation



I feel that my contribution is valued by PCrefurb



Some had actively encouraged friends and family to volunteer -in one case at least, successfully:

I have advised my family/friends of this role suggesting that they may want to be involved in they have the opportunity to be so (and are inclined/have the time)

I have actively worked on friends and family to think about this type if volunteering

My husband helped with deliveries after hearing from me what a great organisation PCrefurb was.

What (if anything) did you find positive about your experience of volunteering with PCrefurb

The sense of being appreciated, a positive and supportive working environment;

I find that i'm really appreciated in my role as a volunteer.

I felt very supported and valued by the team

The support and team work

It's a very welcoming and friendly environment and it's great to hear how things have worked on have benefitted people.

It's great knowing Emma is there as back up. I really appreciate her help.

The feeling of making a difference

Helping make a real difference to others

The appreciation you get from clients when you teach them new things or help them with things they've been struggling with..

I feel I am contributing to the project and when I see the lightbulb moment from clients when they 'get it' I feel something has been achieved for them and given them confidence

Knowing you are helping others and giving them confidence.

The satisfaction of feeling i was giving something back and assisting people.

The experiences of seeing people learning new skills and their pleasure in doing this

The experience of volunteering

learnt a lot about how surgeries want to work in the future and how all these apps all fit together to enable this to become effective and beneficial for both the patients and staff.

Meeting new people (clients & volunteers) & improving my own knowledge (eg as an iPhone user my knowledge of Android phones/tablets was non-existent, but has now improved considerably). Good feeling passing on my knowledge & feeling useful again.

The skills I've learned and friendships I've got

I appreciate being given the opportunity to help

What (if anything) do you think PCrefurb could do differently / do better?

Many of the suggestions related to service delivery rather than volunteers needing something different.

Some Digital Champions wanted the project to attract more beneficiaries:

Carry out a few more Roadshows to capture more clients but in supermarkets assisted housing or businesses!

We had to stop the program as there wasn't anyone willing to participate so I feel that it would be better to find a more suitable setting with willing people to work with.

I'm not sure how things work on the management side and how new clients are recruited, but more new clients would be something I'd like. That way I'd feel I was contributing more.

There were a couple of suggestions as to how the service could be more accessible to beneficiaries:

Perhaps provide more opportunities for disadvantaged people who can not come out to outside settings-ie have a home service.(with paid expenses for the volunteers)

Perhaps have a more welcoming office environment where people can just call in for advice.

And some relating to the support of Digital Champions in their role

Give us a folder with all the info / paperwork we need for sessions. Plus create a best practice method of how to present to clients with reasons and helpful ideas to pass on

It would be nice if refreshments were offered at these sessions for both volunteers and patients

One Digital Champion was frustrated with support sessions being cancelled:

Some clients are not very considerate of volunteers/other clients when cancelling at extremely short notice (on the day!) which is incredibly frustrating. It's a difficult balance to strike, but I do think that clients need to understand that if they repeatedly cancel at short notice they will not be allowed to access the service again (A sort of "3 strikes & you're out" approach).

There were also a few requests for better communication (though what was lacking was not always specified):

Communicate better with everyone.

I still feel communication isn't at its best for me personally. Just for those in charge of me to be more proactive and not to have to second guess some things.

Sometimes communication is a little delayed, but I understand that due to other factors why this may be the case.

Others were content with things as they are:

I think it's OK as it is

Doing the 1hr per week Digital Cafe is about right for me and the support is good enough.

The way its going is amazing don't think anything can do better.

Thank you for the opportunity and experience it was nice to work with you.



8. Recommendations

8.1 Overview

The evidence suggests that PCrefurb has an effective delivery model that achieves real outcomes for people who are digitally excluded. The service is respected and valued by those who refer in to it, beneficiaries and volunteers alike. There are some suggestions for change in the surveys but overall the reported experience is almost unanimously positive.

It tackles digital exclusion in a holistic way, tackling a range of issues. Through its network of trusted

relationships with local organisations and agencies, it is able to reach those who are least digitally confident and most excluded. It tackles digital access by addressing both device and data poverty, providing free devices and connectivity to those who would otherwise be unable to afford to get online. It tackles digital literacy by providing community-based, flexible, personalised mentoring and support to help people navigate the digital world, to 'meet them where they are at' and use the internet in ways that matter to them.

8.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that PCrefurb:

8.2.1 Develop and articulate its long term vision and strategy

The charity has been in existence for 5 years and has survived the challenges of adapting its delivery to the pandemic and to respond to the cost of living crisis, as well as the financial challenges of establishing, resourcing and maintaining a new organisation in a difficult financial climate. It has secured significant investment to develop services, delivered those services and met its targets. With a track record of effective delivery, strong local relationship and knowledge, and the learning from 5 years of providing support, the organisation should therefore have confidence in its potential. PCrefurb is currently developing a 3 year business plan. Despite current pressures, it would be a good point for staff and trustees to take time to reflect together on what has been learnt along the way, as well as to articulate a long term vision as well as defining priorities and ambitions for the immediate future.

8.2.2. Diversify its funding base

The charity is currently reliant on a relatively small number of funding sources for its activities. One of its largest income streams – NHS funding for the Digital Wellbeing project – will end shortly; obviously securing new resource to take its digital literacy offer forward is an immediate priority. PCrefurb has already identified the need to diversify its funding base, to minimise risk and ensure the stability and sustainability of the organisation as a whole.

Grants and contracts will be a part of this diverse funding mix, though as the charity has already found, potential funders tend to be particularly keen to target resources at particular demographics, and focus on online activity within their own sphere (for example, accessing health services or seeking jobs). Too narrow and inflexible a service offer risks excluding some people who genuinely face barriers, who would benefit from support, but who don't fit the criteria. The evidence suggests that digital inclusion is best achieved by responding to what individuals themselves want or need to achieve by going online; the best way to ensure long-term, universal digital inclusion is holistic provision – responding to the needs

and motivations of those seeking to connect, to enable them to engage with the tasks or activities that matter to them, and in doing so develop skills and confidence that can be applied in other areas of life. The challenge for the charity (as for many) is to balance what they would ideally like to do, and, pragmatically, the things for which resource is currently available.

Another income stream the charity has articulated the wish to explore is income generation by selling or recycling surplus devices and components, or charging for training or consultancy work. This type of income has the advantage of being unrestricted, therefore available for the charity to use for purposes of its choosing, however some trading activities can take organisations outside the legal boundaries of charitable objects, and may require a different legal structure such as an associated, non-charitable trading subsidiary. It would be wise to seek guidance on this, perhaps initially to talk to similar organisations that have gone down this route, as well as taking more formal advice before proceeding.

One final point is that it would be possible to encourage and enable the public to make financial donations as well as donating digital devices. Donor fundraising may never form a significant income stream, or be an activity in which the charity invests significantly; however some food banks have had success in generating this kind of support, and there are relatively cheap and quick ways of inviting this, for example making a statement on publicity that donations of cash are also welcome, adding a 'click here to donate' facility to the website. There is much public concern for the impact of the cost of living crisis and there are those who prefer to give to local causes.

8.2.3 Invest in staff wellbeing

Some of the feedback provided in the surveys highlighted that there has been some significant turnover of staff. Anecdotally, this is an issue affecting much of the voluntary sector (and all sectors) – however small charities can rarely match the pay and conditions of public or private sector partners or larger organisations, so in order to attract and retain staff there is the need to have robust support, supervision, training and development opportunities which make the organisation an attractive place to work, and where staff want to stay.

In small organisations facing high demands for services, sickness, burnout and retention are serious risks to delivery. This is true at all levels of the organisation. Charities, governed as they are, by voluntary trustee boards, need to ensure that they provide effective support to the most senior staff.

8.2.4 Strengthen governance

Staff report that the charity has a small but enthusiastic board of trustees. However there are some gaps in knowledge and skills, in particular a lack of trustees with significant experience in the charity sector. As the new business plan is being developed an audit of trustee skills and competencies would be useful to identify what else would help the charity going forward. Other voluntary organisations have found an open recruitment process effective in attracting candidate beyond the limited pool of those already known; developing a recruitment process also helps clarify the role, expectations and requirements that the charity has of its trustees. There are free communication channels that can be used to reach suitable audiences, for example CVS bulletins/newsletters or Volunteer Centre services as well as via partner/referral organisations. Any strategy for staff and volunteer training could also specifically consider the needs of trustees to develop in their role.

8.2.5 Explore the potential for a digital community hub

There are some benefits arising from co-location with The Bureau, including its central location in Glossop town centre, and the referral between complementary services provided by the two organisations. However it also has practical and operational limitations. There

is limited storage space; the charity has access to a larger storage facility off-site but this space is not suitable for refurbishment work, meaning that devices and components need to be transported between the two sites; it also may not be available in the longer term if the site is redeveloped. The size and availability of the space in The Bureau used for refurbishment workshops limits the number of workshops offered and volunteer capacity.

Staff have expressed the wish for a single hub where all activities could be defined and where, for example, refurbishment, training and drop-in support could be all accommodated to increase the flexibility and availability of the offer. Given the evidence that digital exclusion is best tackled by holistic, responsive, community based support, pursuing this possibility should be a priority.

8.2.6 Explore who benefits and who might be missing out

As noted in section 6.4, the data shows a difference between the ethnic group of those who received equipment and those who received digital training. It is not clear why this should be the case; the charity is advised to look more closely at this and consider whether positive action is needed. Older people (one of the groups most at risk of digital exclusion) also appear to be under-represented; this is perhaps accounted for by some funding and referrals being particularly focused on those seeking work but might be an avenue for future development / funding. Additionally, it would be worth a more systematic approach to collecting beneficiary data across all services on all protected characteristics to ensure the service's reach is representative of the communities it serves.



Notes & References

Notes

- ¹ Good Things Foundation (2022a) p4
- ² Ofcom (June 2022) Table 67
- ³ Ofcom (Jan 2023) Table 29
- ⁴ Helsper (2017) p229-230
- ⁵ All Party-Parliamentary Group on Data Poverty (2022) p6
- ⁶ Dixon (2022) p3
- ⁷ Good Things Foundation (2022b) p1
- ⁸ Good Things Foundation (2022a) p4
- ⁹ Chan (2022)
- ¹⁰ Dixon (2022c) 'A periodic table of internet elements'
- ¹¹ Helsper (2021) p3
- ¹² Dixon (2022a) p12
- ¹³ Dixon (2022a) p13
- ¹⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) pp52-56
- ¹⁵ Dixon (2022a) p15
- ¹⁶ Van Dijk (2017) p7
- ¹⁷ Faith, O'Reilly & Verdin (2022))
- ¹⁸ Ofcom (Jan 2023) Table 8, Table 56
- ¹⁹ Ofcom (2022) p4
- ²⁰ Dixon (2022a) p15
- ²¹ Dixon, Kat (2022b)
- ²² Dixon (2022a) p15
- ²³ Faith, Hernandez & Beecher (2022)
- ²⁴ Faith, Hernandez & Beecher (2022) p4
- ²⁵ Faith, O'Reilly and Verdin (2022)
- ²⁶ Lucas, Robinson & Treacy (2020)
- ²⁷ Lucas, Robinson & Treacy (2020) p12
- ²⁸ Dixon (2022) p14
- ²⁹ Ofcom (2023) Table 63; household income data from Ofcom (June 2022) Table 29
- ³⁰ Ofcom (2022) p10
- ³¹ Ofcom (June 2022) Table 56. A 'narrow user' is someone who uses the internet for 4 or fewer of 13 defined types of online tasks
- ³² van Deursen & van Dijk (2019)
- ³³ van Deursen & van Dijk (2019) p358
- ³⁴ Ofcom (June 2022) Table 39
- ³⁵ Ofcom (March 2022) p10
- ³⁶ Ofcom (June 2022) Table 40
- ³⁷ Centre for Economics & Business Research (2022) pp4-5
- ³⁸ Lloyds UK (2022) Consumer Digital Index
- ³⁹ Van Dijk (2017) p7
- ⁴⁰ Good Things Foundation (2022a) p2
- ⁴¹ Good Things Foundation (2022a) p5
- ⁴² Centre for Economics & Business Research(2022) p3
- ⁴³ WEEE Forum (2022)
- ⁴⁴ Fangeat, Eskenazi, Fourboul et al (2022) p181

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