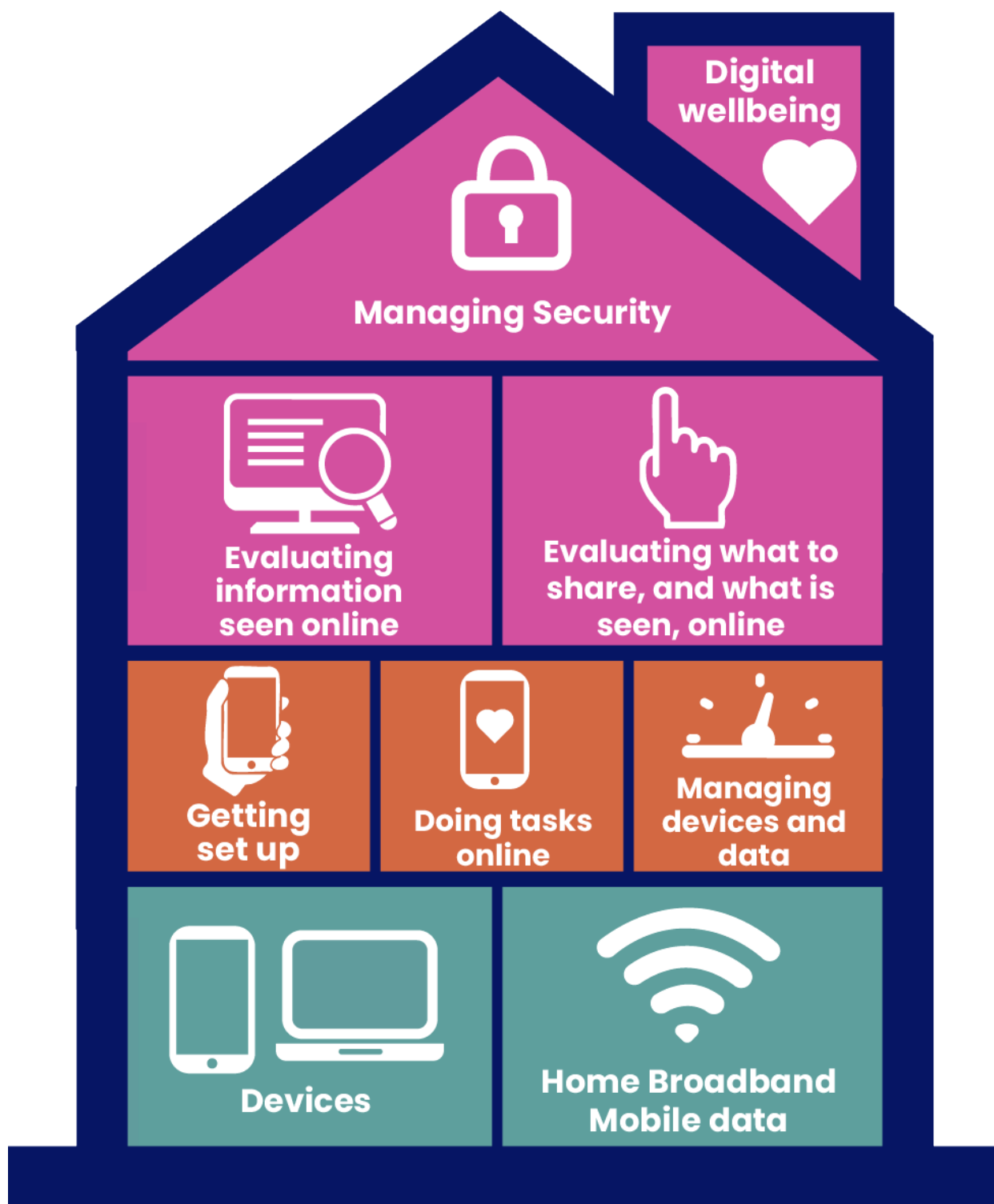


A Fair Digital Foundation for All Children and Young People in Scotland

A practical digital inclusion
toolkit for practitioners working
with children, young people and
families in Scotland



“A minimum digital standard of living (MDLS) includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills and knowledge people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.”

This toolkit is designed to support practitioners working with children, young people and families, including young people with experience of care, who face distinct and often hidden forms of digital inequality.

"A few years ago, (digital) was a luxury but now most people would see it is as an essential. It's access to everything we need. Everything a young person needs".
(Young person)

The Importance of Being Digitally Included: Issues of digital exclusion remain unresolved in Scotland. 6 in 10 households or 354,300 households with children do not meet the Minimum Digital Living Standard Scotland definition – a suite of basic digital needs of households so they can engage with the benefits of being part of the digital society. Households with limited financial resources, lone parents, long-term health conditions, and/or a disabled adult are more likely to be below the standard – only 7% of families caring for disabled children meet the criteria for digital inclusion, and 1 in 6 households referred to food banks has no internet access at all.

Being digitally excluded – lacking access to digital devices, connectivity, and skills – makes it even more difficult for children and households experiencing poverty to access housing, employment, healthcare, education, and social connection.

This toolkit supports practitioners (and also service commissioners and grant funders) to raise awareness of the importance of digital inclusion for tackling child poverty, and identify steps to embed digital inclusion strategies across the work of their organisations. These are vital steps in supporting children, young people and families to live rewarding lives in the digital age.

Supporting The Promise Scotland: Scotland has committed, through *The Promise*, that children and young people with care experience will grow up loved, safe and respected, and that the systems around them will remove the barriers that limit their lives. Digital inequality is now one of those barriers. As more services become digital-first, access to devices, data, skills, understanding and support has become essential for education, housing, income, health care and relationships. When digital access is restricted, whether through poverty, placement type, organisational rules or fear of risk, young people with experience of care are disproportionately affected.

This toolkit supports practitioners to uphold *The Promise* by embedding digital inclusion into everyday practice. It recognises that digital access is not simply about technology, but about safety, trust, relationships and rights. Practitioners play a crucial role in ensuring that young people are not left behind as the world moves online and that digital systems do not become new forms of exclusion.

Addressing Devices, Connectivity, and Skills

 Devices	 Connectivity	 Practical skills	 Critical skills
<i>"Have a meeting with the family, ask them what they need and be approachable"</i> – insight from secondary school children	<i>"[In] Children's houses, [the] Wi-Fi standard is terrible – not accessible at all. Often young people also didn't have data so were fully excluded."</i> – practitioner supporting care-experienced young people	<i>"It's a nonsense belief that all young people can use digital. We have this inherent belief that all young people can – but computers are so different from smart screens."</i> – practitioner supporting care-experienced young people	<i>"Parents should be taught online safety issues so they can help children"</i> – insight from primary school children
Find out: what devices do children and young people and their household have or need? Smartphones are not the best option for education, or for filling out some online forms (e.g. for work, housing, benefits, etc).	Find out: do children, young people and their household have fast enough broadband in their home to meet their needs? Do they have adequate data for when out and about?	Find out: do children and young people and their household have the practical digital skills to use devices, and feel confident using the devices that they can access?	Find out: do children and young people and their household have critical digital skills to identify risks, and to recognise misinformation?
Where identified as an essential need, can you build the costs of providing families with suitable devices into your operational or service or programme budget?	Can you raise awareness of potential ways to save money on broadband, like social tariffs? Can you distribute free mobile data to 18+ year olds via the National Databank?	Can you provide digital skills support and/or training, or partner with skilled providers to develop referral pathways and informed signposting to appropriate existing resources?	Can you support children, young people, parents or carers to use devices safely, securely, thinking also about digital wellbeing? Can you support creative, as well as critical, online engagement?

Understanding the impact of digitisation

As more services become digital-first, organisations need to understand what this feels like for the people using them. The research found that children, young people and practitioners described digital systems for benefits, housing, education and healthcare as difficult to navigate, particularly where people lacked devices, connectivity, confidence or support. Even if they have a suitable device and connectivity, parents and carers may lack the digital skills and confidence needed to support their young people to access services, especially if they have a disability or health condition themselves. Digital-first services can unintentionally create new barriers unless organisations actively design around people's needs.

'The biggest barrier is the whole system - you can talk about the nuanced elements, but the whole system, digital first, is the problem.' (Young person)

Activity: In their shoes

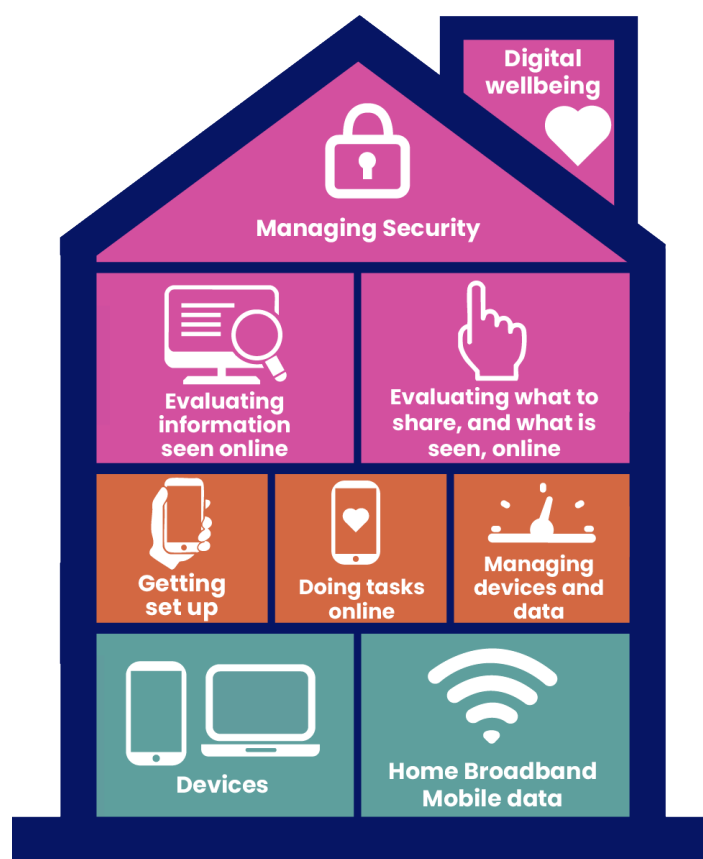
Periodic Table of Internet Elements

Me Medical	Ho Housing	Fn Finances	Et Employment/ Training	Gv Government services	Ci Civil	Ed Education	Et Entertainment	Cm Community	Cr Creativity	Sc Social connection	Mo Mobility/ access
Te Test results	Sh Social housing application	Pc Price comparison	Jh Job hunting	Wc Work commitments	Oa Online activism	Se Search engines	Vi Video streaming	Og Organising	Se Self expression	Ff Friends & family	Na Navigation and maps
Pr Prescriptions	Ha Housing association contact	Fi Financial information	Ap Applications	Be Benefits application	Pe Petitions and protest	Cl Classroom learning	Ga Gaming and e-sports	Cg Community groups	Re Making reels	Vc Video calls	Ac Assistive technologies
Ph Public health information	Hh House hunting	De Debt advice	Ne Networking	Im Immigration services	Nw News	Ol Online learning	Gm Gambling	Su Survivor support	Bl Blogging	Sm Social media	Vo Voice activated assistance
Mh Mental health	Mm Mortgage management	In Online investing	It Interviews	Uc Universal credit journals	De Democratic debate	Hw Homework submissions	Eb eBooks	Vo Volunteering	Pl Platforms	Em Email	Db Doorbells
Gp Consultations	Mn Maintenance requests	On Online shopping	Wk Working and learning	Co Council services	Mp MP email	Li Online libraries	Mu Music streaming	Oc Online communities	Mc Music creation	Im Instant messaging	DI Deliveries
Hs Hospital Appointments	Bl Manage bills	Ob Online banking	Tx Tax forms	Me Free school meals	El Electoral register/census	Kn Online knowledge	Mv Metaverse	Vp VoIP Platforms	Vr Virtual reality	Ev Events	Sm Smart systems
Sg Support Groups	Ct Council tax	En Energy Bills	Sh Side hustle			St Student finance	Ra Radio/ podcasts		Ar Art	Od Online dating	Pm Password Managers

Purpose: To better understand your service's user journey from the perspective of someone experiencing digital exclusion.

- Using the Periodic Table of Internet Elements, think about the children and families you support. Highlight the elements that you think matter most to them.
- Pick a service that the people you support often need to access e.g. Universal Credit, online banking.
- Walk through the entire user journey and map the functional and critical digital skills needed to complete a task e.g., filling in a form, uploading a document, verifying e-mail address.
- Consider if and how they might need to:
 - Check eligibility
 - Create an account
 - Verify identity
 - Complete a form
 - Upload documents
 - Receive updates
 - Respond to requests
 - Manage their account
 - Get help if something goes wrong
- Now think of someone accessing your service and think about any unique barriers they might encounter.
- Consider this journey for the 6 priority family groups. What is similar? What might be different?

Supporting The Promise Scotland: When mapping the user journey, consider how this experience differs for young people with experience of care. For example, think about barriers such as shared devices in residential care, lack of broadband in kinship care, or limited data access for young people living independently from age 16.



Activity: Mind the gap

Purpose: To identify any points in your service pathways that assume people are digitally included.

Using the MDLS house resource, spend a few minutes reflecting on what children, young people and families need, whether in their own home or kinship care, residential home, or temporary accommodation.

- This activity works best as a group activity, making use of some flipchart or a whiteboard/ Miro board.
- Now consider one of your service pathways under the following headings:
 - Awareness of the service
 - Referral into the service
 - Assessment of needs
 - Provision of ongoing support
 - Exit / Follow-up
- For each stage of your service pathway reflect on the following prompts:
 - How is digital being used? (email, online form, website, QR code, video call)
 - What does the person need? (appropriate device, data allowance, digital skills/ confidence)
 - What assumptions are we making? (they have an email address, they have unlimited data, they can remember passwords, they have a private space for video calls)

- What support is available at this stage? (device access, human support, data connectivity, printed guidance)
- What could go wrong if they can't complete the digital task? (minor inconvenience, delayed engagement, missed appointments, service exclusion, increased risk, crisis escalation)
- Reflect on what this exercise is telling you about digital exclusion in your own service pathways and what actions you can take to remove barriers.
- You may find it useful to consider how the different priority family groups might experience unique challenges, requiring a different response.

Supporting The Promise Scotland: As you reflect on assumptions, consider those that disproportionately affect young people with experience of care, such as assuming they have private space for video calls, stable WiFi, or long-term access to a personal device.

Next steps: Now that you've mapped your service and understand any gaps, it's time to think about what resource you might need. Activity 3 will help you take stock of what you have and what you might need.

Resources

- **Periodic Table of Internet Elements**
- **The MDLS House**
- **The 'Pointless' Triangle**

Ask, don't assume

Our research suggests that digital exclusion is often hidden because people feel embarrassed, ashamed or worried about being judged. As a result, organisations cannot rely on people volunteering information about digital difficulties. Instead, staff need to create supportive, non-judgemental conversations that make it easier for people to discuss challenges with devices, connectivity, skills, confidence and online experiences.

Digital barriers are often intertwined with wider experiences of poverty, exclusion and disrupted life experiences. For many people, admitting they are struggling with technology can feel like admitting failure. This can be particularly true for young people, who are often assumed to be naturally digitally skilled, and for adults who feel pressure to keep up with increasingly digital services.

Young people with experience of care may feel additional shame or fear of judgement when discussing digital challenges, especially if they have previously been punished for device use or struggled with high-stakes digital systems like housing or Universal Credit, where loss of, or delayed, access has material consequences for housing, income, health services, and the ability to take up positive opportunities.

"There's this fear around making mistakes – and the consequences... losing access to services". (Practitioner)

Activity: Talking about digital

Part 1

Starting the conversation can be difficult. In a group, come up with a list of potential conversation starters to find out if someone may be digitally excluded. Think of how you can shift the focus away from a person's ability and onto the technology, systems, and circumstances around them. Consider the different opportunities where you might be able to explore this:

- During initial contact/intake
- During a needs assessment process
- During a drop-in
- When you're developing a support plan
- When you're doing a review

We've got some examples to help you get started:

- "Have you ever found an online service confusing or hard to follow?"
- "Do you find that websites or apps change in ways that catch you out?"
- "Is your internet connection reliable where you are?"
- "Do you have your own device, or do you share one with others where you live?"
- "Is it easy to get online where you're staying just now?"
- "Have you ever lost access to a device because of a move, a change in placement, or a broken phone or laptop?"

Part 2

Try some role playing to test your conversation starters. Have one person play the role of a practitioner and the other play the role of a digitally excluded person accessing your service.

Reflect on how this felt.

As the service user:

- Which questions felt comfortable?
- Which felt intrusive?
- Did you feel judged?
- Would you have disclosed the problem?

As the practitioner:

- Which questions worked well?
- Which felt awkward?
- What responses were unexpected?

Now explore:

- What would you change before using these questions with real service users?
- How can you make conversations feel more supportive?

Top tips – Consider how to formalise these conversations into screening questions as part of your service referral/intake and/or support planning processes.

Part 3

Some organisations find it helpful to have triage questions and/or do research to understand people's needs and barriers, or to evaluate services.

Q1. Online or not?	Q2. Barriers	Q3. Vulnerabilities
Which of the following apply to you? (tick one) ☐ 1.1 I go online as much as I want ☐ 1.2 I go online but want to go online more ☐ 1.3 I do not go online and don't want to go online ☐ 1.4 I do not go online but want to go online	Which of the following apply to you? (tick all that apply) ☐ 2.1 I own or have regular access to a device (i.e. laptop, tablet, mobile phone) that meets/could meet my online needs ☐ 2.2 I own or have regular access to a mobile internet connection that meets my online needs ☐ 2.3 I own or have regular access to a broadband internet connection that meets my online needs ☐ 2.4 I have the knowledge and skills to do most things I need to online ☐ 2.5 I am confident to do most things I need to online ☐ 2.6 I depend on others to do things for me online ☐ 2.7 None of these apply to me	Which of the following apply to you? (tick all that apply) ☐ 3.1 If I needed help to do things online I would know how to get support ☐ 3.2 I am worried about being safe online ☐ 3.3 I couldn't afford to repair/replace a device (i.e. laptop, tablet, mobile phone) if it broke ☐ 3.4 I am struggling to afford a mobile internet connection ☐ 3.5 I am struggling to afford a broadband internet connection ☐ 3.6 I solely depend on public computers to do things online ☐ 3.7 I solely depend on Wifi outside of home to do things online ☐ 3.8 None of these apply to me

- Consider the '**Indicators of Digital Inclusion**' from Good Things Foundation.
- Think about whether your service can use these as part of triage, intake, surveys or research to identify digital exclusion.
- Have a look at the Family Fund Scotland case study for an example of how this works in practice. Family Fund used the Indicators of Digital Inclusion as part of their recent survey research with the families they support to understand more about digital participation levels and impacts.

Resources

- **Internet Matters – Conversation starters to understand your child's online life**
- **Internet Matters – Digital Passport: A resource for care experienced children and young people, and their carers**
- **Good Things Foundation – Indicators of Digital Inclusion**
- **Family Fund – Digitally Excluded 2026 – Research report**

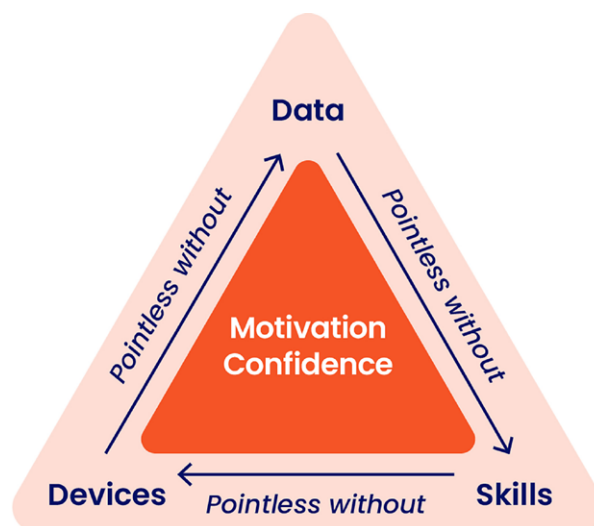
Resourcing digital inclusion

The research found that access to digital inclusion support is often inconsistent and can vary significantly between local areas. Children, young people and practitioners described uncertainty about what support was available and how to access it. Building a clear picture of local assets, services and referral pathways can help organisations respond more effectively to digital exclusion and avoid duplicating existing provision.

"[Access to digital support]'s a postcode lottery." (Practitioner)

Activity: Connecting the dots

Purpose: To identify and map the local organisations, services, resources and community assets that can help address digital exclusion and understand how people can move between them.



Consider the 'Pointless Triangle'. Having a device is pointless without connectivity ('data'), which is pointless without (digital) skills. And digital skills are pointless without a device.

Then, start to map available support and provision.

- Using a flipchart or a whiteboard/Miro board, draw a rough outline map of your local area.
- Using the following prompts, map where there is existing service provision:
 - Access to **devices** (libraries, device refurbishment projects, hubs, schools)
 - Access to **data** connectivity (public wi-fi, National Databank providers, social tariffs)
 - Access to **digital skills** and/or online safety and digital wellbeing support (third sector organisations, digital drop-ins, National Digital Inclusion Network member organisations)
 - General provision for families, children and young people (community centres, youth clubs, advice centres)

Supporting The Promise Scotland: When mapping local assets, identify which services are accessible to young people with experience of care, and where gaps exist for kinship carers, foster carers, residential units or care leavers living independently.

- Now label each local or community asset with a dot, thinking about the children / young people / households you support:
 - Green – An established referral pathway
 - Amber – An informal/signposting pathway
 - Red – No pathway
- Reflect on what you've mapped with the following questions:
 - Where are there no services?
 - Where are referral routes weak?
 - Which organisations are critical to the pathway?
 - Are there services that everybody relies on?
 - Are there services that offer support across all three parts of the triangle – devices, connectivity, and digital skills?
 - Are there priority family groups or others who might struggle to access support?
 - What happens when someone needs more than one type of support?

Supporting The Promise Scotland: Are there particular care settings (kinship, residential, supported accommodation) where referral routes are weaker or digital support is harder to access?

Now that you have an idea of your local ecosystem of support, you can layer this over the results of the 'mind the gap' activity. This will give a good overview of where and how you can start to embed digital inclusion in your service delivery, and what funding and other resources you need to make this a reality. Consider:

- What digital access, skills, confidence barriers are most likely to be experienced by the children, young people and families we support?
- What does our organisation or service already offer to identify and reduce these barriers?
- Which other support does or could our organisation refer people to or partner with locally to reduce barriers?
- How can we build digital support into our wider support offer to children, young people and families, and into future funding bids?
- Is our organisation a member of a local digital inclusion network, if there is one?
- Is our organisation a member of the Good Things Foundation digital inclusion network?

The outputs of these exercises might give you the basis of a funding bid, addressing unmet need, or a new partnership.

In areas where there is already an emerging or established local ecosystem of digital inclusion support, the **Digital Inclusion Partnership Pathway Tool** can help stakeholders to assess the maturity of their partnership working, and where they can work together to improve.

Top tip – always speak to an organisation before you start referring or signposting people. It's important to check that organisations have capacity to take your referrals, and that you are clear on the eligibility criteria and processes.

Resources

- **ALISS – A Local Information System for Scotland | ALISS**
- **SCVO – Funding Scotland**
- **Directory of device refurbishment projects in Scotland**
- **Good Things Foundation – National Digital Inclusion Network, National Databank, National Device Bank**
- **Good Things Foundation – Digital Inclusion Partnership Pathway Tool**

Embedding change

The research found that digital exclusion is not a standalone issue but one that cuts across many of the challenges faced by children, young people and families experiencing poverty. Accessing education, housing, healthcare, benefits, financial services and social connections increasingly relies on digital access, skills and confidence.

Despite this, it often remains invisible within organisational processes and decision-making. A digital inclusion maturity assessment helps organisations take stock of their current approach, identify gaps and opportunities, and develop a clear plan for embedding digital inclusion across service delivery, workforce development, partnerships and organisational culture. It provides a practical framework for moving from good intentions to sustained action.

"We need a clean, clear pathway to devices and data".
(Young person with experience of care)

Activity: A digital inclusion health check for organisations

Digital Inclusion Maturity Standards

Understanding

We know our digital touchpoints. We've mapped where, when, and how digital shows up in our services.

We listen before we deliver. We've done user research to understand how digital exclusion affects the people we work with.

We've listened to our workforce. We know where the strengths, gaps, and anxieties are in our teams' digital skills.

We've weighed the trade-offs. We understand both the risks and rewards of embedding digital.

Approach

We've hardwired digital inclusion into our culture. It shows up in leadership, policies and strategies, not just comms.

We design our services based actual need. We've designed an approach that responds directly to our research on how digital exclusion affects the people we work with.

We measure what matters. We monitor impact, not just outputs, and we can tell the story of digital inclusion in our organisation.

We test and learn. We've tested our approach and learnt from our mistakes, making changes as we go.

Resource

We've invested in our workforce. We have provided the time and resource to help our workforce undertake digital upskilling.

We know what we've got. We've mapped our internal capacity so that we can build on our existing assets e.g. people, tech, spaces.

We don't reinvent the wheel. We use learning resources that already exist and share what we create to benefit others.

We've mapped the ecosystem. We know who's out there, who's missing, and who we should be working with to shift the dial on digital inclusion.



Purpose: To understand where your organisation is now and identify practical next steps for strengthening digital inclusion.

This activity gives organisations a framework to check where they are on their digital inclusion journey. This can form the foundation for an action plan, identifying areas of strength to build on, and areas for development.

<https://scvo-digital-inclusion.scoreapp.com/>

This activity can be undertaken in different ways:

- Use it in a team meeting and reach a collective consensus on where your organisation is for each standard. Have someone make notes on the discussion so you have context for the results.
- Have people complete it individually from different levels of the organisation e.g. senior management, service coordinators, frontline practitioners. This might give some interesting insights on how well digital inclusion is actually embedded, versus perceptions.

Supporting The Promise: As you assess your organisation's digital inclusion maturity, consider how well your policies and practices meet the needs of young people with experience of care, including those in kinship care, foster care, residential care, secure care, and those moving through throughcare and aftercare. Does your organisation have clear pathways for digital support specifically for care-experienced young people, or is provision inconsistent across placements?

A digitally confident workforce

The research highlights that digital inclusion depends not only on access to devices and connectivity, but also on trusted adults having the confidence and capability to support children, young people and families. Assumptions that people are naturally digitally skilled can leave needs unidentified and unsupported.

Supporting The Promise: Many practitioners worry that increasing digital access might increase risk, especially in residential or high-support environments where safeguarding pressures are high. Without space to talk openly about these fears, staff can default to restrictive or punitive practices that unintentionally limit young people's rights and opportunities. A digitally confident workforce is one that can discuss risk honestly, understand what they are worried about, and feel supported to make proportionate, rights-based decisions. When staff feel safe to explore their concerns, young people are far more likely to feel safe and far more likely to get the digital access they need

"It's only the door in. You need the supportive environment, the trusted adult."
(Practitioner)

Activity: Taking stock

Purpose: To understand your workforce's digital strengths, confidence levels and development needs, so you can better support children, young people and families experiencing digital exclusion.

In this exercise you will design and deliver your workforce digital skills survey. We recommend this exercise build on previous activities, which you have undertaken with the wider workforce. Now bring together a smaller group to help design the survey.

Consider the following:

- Map out the digital skills that are important for the work you do, building on your previous mapping and inspiration from existing frameworks e.g., Essential Digital Skills Framework, MDLS Framework, the Indicators of Digital Inclusion.
- Include both practical ('doing') and critical ('understanding') skills.
- Include a few questions that will help you understand attitudes to digital. This may surface any anxieties people have, as well as identifying those that are more enthusiastic about digital and may wish to play an active role in this space.
- Remove stigma and shame for your colleagues by making the survey anonymous so people can be honest. Clear comms around the purpose of the survey can also help reduce fears.

Top tip – if you don't have the internal capacity to develop a survey, simply adapt a combination of the **SCVO Digital Skills Check-up Tool** and the **Indicators of Digital Inclusion** from Good Things Foundation.

Supporting The Promise Scotland: Include questions that explore staff confidence in supporting young people with experience of care, who may face unique digital barriers such as restricted access in residential care, lack of broadband in kinship care, or fear of making mistakes in high-stakes systems.

- What digital risks are you most worried about when supporting young people with experience of care?
- How do these worries influence your decisions about access, restrictions or device use?
- Are there times when fear of safeguarding responsibilities has led to limiting access more than was necessary?
- What support, guidance or reassurance would help you feel confident balancing safety with young people's digital rights?
- How can your team move from *avoiding* risk to *managing* it in a proportionate, trauma-aware way?

Help to get started:

SCVO Digital Skills check-up tool

Next steps:

- Share the anonymised results with the wider workforce and use this to develop an organisational digital skills plan.
- Create an internal network and peer support to facilitate learning opportunities.
- Undertake the survey in 12-months to review your progress.

Further support to embed digital inclusion

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

SCVO helps voluntary sector organisations in Scotland embed digital inclusion into the design and delivery of their services. Support usually starts with an assessment to understand current strengths and opportunities, followed by a tailored action plan. From there, organisations can access a range of support, including digital skills surveys, workshops for staff and volunteers, service design expertise, and support to develop or strengthen their digital inclusion strategy.

digital@scvo.scot

Mhor Collective

Mhor Collective believes digital underpins every single aspect of our whole society. While it can unlock incredible opportunities, and open doors to new possibilities, lack of meaningful access to the internet, and to the necessary skills, can also make things worse for people, compounding other inequalities. Until full social equality is achieved, we don't think the problem of digital exclusion is going away any time soon. Mhor Collective supports organisations and communities to build digital confidence, media literacy and

trauma-informed practice. We design programmes, training and resources that strengthen inclusion, wellbeing and participation, helping people navigate digital life safely, creatively and with agency. Our work blends strategy, facilitation and community-centred learning.

info@mhorcollective.com

Family Fund Scotland

Family Fund is the leading charity supporting families raising disabled children in the UK with grants, practical support, and opportunities. Organisations interested in the digital needs of disabled children and their families, grant making or developing family friendly support for digital skills and confidence should contact:

digitalskills@familyfund.org.uk

CASE STUDY

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

“It’s about collaboration and working together”

What

Renfrewshire Council has been celebrated for its championing of place-based digital inclusion. This is embedded across policy areas through a range of initiatives that improve digital access and participation for people and communities experiencing exclusion. Their Digital Strategy 2025–2030 includes a detailed strategic theme on digital inclusion, and reporting on child poverty is directly linked to digital inclusion efforts, with their Annual Child Poverty Action Report including progress on a range of digital inclusion projects. A clear aspect of their approach to digital inclusion is that connectivity and devices are only part of the picture. Renfrewshire Council’s approach recognises the wider outcomes of digital inclusion and seeks to address barriers experienced by individuals facing disadvantage. For example, for care experienced children and young people in particular, digital access can strengthen connection with their family, education, support networks and wider communities.

How

Through the Circuit Scotland Project, YMCA Scotland, Mhor Collective, and Renfrewshire Council, working alongside consortium partners including Youthlink Scotland, Barnardo’s Scotland and, previously, Scottish Tech Army, delivered a co-produced programme for care experienced young people which combined creative opportunities such as film-making and coding with activities designed to build confidence, digital skills and aspirations. It also engaged foster carers, residential staff and social care professionals, recognising that sustainable change is strengthened through developing confidence and skills of wider support networks alongside young people. Current activity includes a range of initiatives, from DigiZones – 24 hubs across libraries, community venues and the Skoobmobile mobile library, with free practical support, devices and opportunities for developing skills – to the DigiRen Network, the Citizens Voice Forum and Digital Champions, each of which support residents to get online and make the most of digital services. Digital Champions have supported individuals and families on low income, with 444 SIM cards issued, representing 96TB of data. They have invested in public WiFi across children’s homes and care homes, as well as in public venues. They organise the annual DigiKnowVember festival, celebrating digital innovation and inclusion. Work with Renfrewshire-based charity Pachedu shows how local partnerships can address both environmental and social challenges: the Council funds a device recycling service within this charity, which supports ethnically diverse residents, allowing unwanted digital devices to be refurbished and redistributed to digitally excluded individuals and families.

Why

Renfrewshire Council recognises that lack of digital access and participation affects multiple aspects of people’s lives. Therefore, digital inclusion requires a coordinated response across services, including libraries, housing, employability, education, community learning and children’s services. Links to The Promise are clear: children, young people and families should be able to access help when they need it, sustain connections with the people who matter to them, and have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives. Digital exclusion can create significant barriers to this, particularly for families experiencing poverty. The Council seeks to overcome these barriers by ensuring that digital inclusion remains connected to wider anti-poverty and community empowerment activity. This is reflected through programmes such as Fairer Renfrewshire; the Fairer Renfrewshire Panel, made up of residents with lived experience of poverty (most of whom are parents) have fed into their Digital Strategy and provided evidence to support digital initiatives in the local authority area.

CASE STUDY

DIGI BYTES

“The expectation is that everybody has a computer at home, or everybody has internet at home, but it is not the case.”

What

Digi Bytes is part of the core delivery of Moray Libraries. Beginning in 2023, they provide support for digital skills through digital learning kits and social networks for young children and their parents/carers

How

Digi Bytes offers in-person group training sessions for parents to gain confidence and skills via digital resource kits. Various kits are then loaned to the families with accompanying guidance across four-week blocks. Kit types include augmented reality, interactive learning, and coding. Families gain different experiences across the different kits, broadening their digital skillset and allowing parents and children to learn and build digital confidence together. Gamifying learning, each kit has an underlying educational value; for instance, some kits are geared towards maths and spelling, but are packaged in a fun activity such as programming an animal bot (cat, rabbit, dragon, unicorn, or dog). With a dedicated digital learning coordinator, Moray Libraries run several digital inclusion projects including providing digital technologies to rural areas of deprivation, and free connectivity via MiFi/SIMs.

Why

Gamifying learning, each Digi Bytes kit has an underlying educational value; for instance, some kits are geared towards maths and spelling, but activities are packaged in a fun, interactive way such as enabling children to programme an animal bot (cat, rabbit, dragon, unicorn, or dog). Through initial inperson sessions, parents can also benefit by building both social networks and digital skills and confidence. Digi Bytes is an extremely popular programme, with a waiting list since its inception.

CASE STUDY

FAMILY FUND

“For different families, having that opportunity to get online can mean so many different things: communication, education, access to play”

What

Family Fund is a charity that offers grants, services, information and support to families raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people. The organisation aims in particular to support low-income families, though much of their work is applicable to all families, not only those on a low income. In 2025, Family Fund provided over 7000 grants to families across Scotland.

How

Family Fund’s ‘Digitally Excluded’ report (2026) found that 93% of families with disabled or seriously ill children were either digitally excluded or at risk of exclusion. To combat this, the organisation offers a variety of support, ranging from grants to purchase digital devices to one-to-one training sessions covering how to stay safe online and tablet accessibility options. They make use of the Minimum Digital Living Standard to embed digital inclusion across their services, taking a holistic approach, working in partnership with other organisations to combine digital and financial skills support. Family Fund also encourage using digital devices as a creative outlet to improve well being, running practical workshops on coding and online movie-making, among other topics. All workshops are delivered at no cost to families, are short-term to increase accessibility, and provide valuable socialising opportunities, with a mixture of in-person and online options and a large online peer support community. During the school summer holidays, Family Fund organises a Discover Digital festival, with interactive online and on-demand workshops. Recent sessions have explored how to use Artificial Intelligence to produce an illustrated storybook and the creation of stop-motion animation videos.

Why

Family Fund focus on ensuring that families with disabled and seriously ill children are afforded the same opportunities as other families, and recognise that this can only come through being digitally included. Their programmes aim to emphasise the positives of digital devices alongside developing existing skillsets, providing structured and fun activities that those they support can engage with as a family. The MDLS is built into their Information and Support Strategy (which covers digital inclusion), used as a means of setting goals and measuring both where they are and where they are trying to get to.

CASE STUDY

DIGITAL XTRA

“If a community can provide a football or rugby club, they should be able to provide a coding club”

What

A small Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) which encourages the development of digital skills amongst children and young people by supporting innovative, creative, and meaningful extracurricular computing and AI initiatives. Between 2016 and 2026, Digital Xtra distributed grant funding to 210 projects providing extracurricular computing activities, which amounted to £1,189,000. Recently, the organisation has adapted their funding structure, meaning that they are now moving away from grant awards and concentrating on establishing a network of community coding and AI hubs nationwide.

How

Digital Xtra has an inclusive focus aimed at widening participation in areas often excluded from extracurricular computing activities, for instance through lack of local resources or geography (i.e. areas of high deprivation and/or rural isolation). It also focuses on groups under represented in tech including supporting several grassroots clubs and activities aimed at inspiring more girls to learn how to code (from 2016 to 2025, over 50% of children and young people engaged by supported initiatives were female). Digital Xtra offer schools/organisations free lesson plans and resources on setting up coding clubs and training in digital ethics. From 2026, Digital Xtra will begin developing a national network of community coding and AI hubs across Scotland’s local authorities with support from industry and the Scottish Government, and in partnership with UK-wide organisations including Raspberry Pi Foundation and Raising Robots.

Why

Digital Xtra is passionate about creating extra-curricular digital activities for young people. They also stress the importance of ensuring educators and families in young people’s support networks are digitally skilled so they can be a positive influence and source of guidance.

CASE STUDY

MHOR COLLECTIVE

“We began by building a safe, reflective space for frontline staff to talk honestly about what worries them most when supporting young people online, and to explore, together, the complex realities of digital safety and security”

What

Mhor Collective is a non-profit organisation that takes an intersectional, rights-based approach to offer programmes of co-design, development, delivery and evaluation of projects to help those impacted by digital inequality. Mhor is the Gaelic language word for *big*, reflecting the organisation’s inclusive ethos: they work with a range of colleagues, clients and partners across both the non-profit and public sectors.

How

Working in conjunction with Circuit Scotland and their provision of STEM maker spaces for care-experienced young people, Mhor Collective have offered digital support to the trusted adults of these young people, ensuring that they in turn have the skillset to support their young people. Mhor has also worked in partnership with YMCA to deliver training sessions on online safety and digital inclusion to youth workers. Sessions centred around digital inequality and issues including cyber bullying, online grooming and misinformation, and embedded practical activities to fully explore these timely topics.

Why

Mhor Collective recognises that digital technology underpins every aspect of our society, and that digital exclusion can compound existing inequalities, for instance those faced by care-experienced young people. They are therefore committed to providing wraparound support for the trusted adults of care experienced young people as well as these young people themselves, enabling both groups to fully benefit from digital technology in a safe and well informed way.