



Digital Inclusion Fund

Addressing the Digital Divide for Disabled People and People with Mental Health Challenges: An opportunity to apply for funding from the Digital Inclusion Fund

We are pleased to announce a one-off funding initiative for 2022 aimed at addressing digital exclusion experienced by disabled people and people with mental health challenges in Gloucestershire. One-off funding to meet an ambitious, specific outcome is a new way of funding for the Trust.

We set out here why we have prioritised this issue for specific funding in 2022 in the Digital Inclusion Fund, what it is for and how to apply.

A priority for 2022 – improving access to the digital world

We recognise that for disabled people and people with mental health challenges to be truly included and part of their community we need to find ways that not only address the barriers found in the physical world but the online world as well.

Technology is part of our everyday world. From shopping to banking, connecting with friends and family near and far, looking after our health, working, learning, and playing technology plays a role in making this happen.

We recognise that not everyone wants to participate in the online world, or should be expected to do so, it is a matter of personal choice. The Trust is not endorsing a “digital by default” approach and would expect there are always alternative ways to access goods and services individuals require.

However, research tells us that when access is limited due to lack of equipment, skills and/or confidence people are at a disadvantage. It limits education and

employment opportunities, increases risk of loneliness and social isolation, and often results in paying more for goods and services by those who are already living in poverty.

So now is the time to address this barrier. And to do so we are intending to invest £450,000 to tackle the digital exclusion uniquely experienced by disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

We anticipate this funding will also support the county to gain better insight about what is needed to create the best possible digital environment in Gloucestershire for disabled people and people with mental health challenges to make the most of their lives, now and in the future.

What we have learned about the impact of digital exclusion

The recent work undertaken by Gloucestershire Digital Divides¹ revealed the extent of digital exclusion in our county.

30-40,000 (6-8%) adults in the county are effectively offline – **Digitally Excluded**

Further 80-100,000 adults are online but are missing out on the full benefits of the internet – **Digitally Challenged**

21,500 premises in the county (7.4%) still do not have access to Superfast broadband – **Digitally Constrained**

For disabled people and people with mental health challenges the likelihood of being digitally excluded is even greater

Disabled people are consistently among the demographic group research shows as being more likely to be digitally excluded....

Disabled adults not internet users is 14.9% compared to 3.4%

Barriers to digital accessibility are varied

Need to improve accessibility – either to facilitate digital independence or to provide assisted digital support... *Digital Proxies*

The findings of the Gloucestershire Digital Divides work aligned with the key pieces of research undertaken as part of understanding the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

Both Barnwood Trust and Inclusion Gloucestershire heard from disabled people and people with mental health challenges as well as organisations who support them of what the impact of Covid 19 pandemic was on their lives. Of note was that the opportunity digital solutions offered in improving access was overshadowed by the barriers in having the means and support in accessing technology in a way that met their needs.

<https://www.barnwoodtrust.org/news/our-changing-world/>

Barnwood Trust *Our Changing World*2020 – Digital Findings

- Recognition of the importance of Digital service provision in our daily lives
- VCS organisations responded to Covid-19 with a shift to a digital model of service delivery, following the direction of travel for many years by public and statutory bodies
- A lack of sufficient IT equipment and associated technological limitations were described as a challenge for some families and individuals
- Digital inclusion needed to be understood as being about more than just having a device
- Accessing online content developed by organisations was challenging in itself and as a result created accessibility issues.
- Importance of recognising the psychological barriers which prevent people accessing online platforms
- Accessibility of Online Provision for People with Sensory Impairments – unique requirements of equipment, digital platforms, and skill sets
- For many, online services were not felt to be a perfect replica for the face-to-face services valued by so many people.
- However, the range of online services available has opened the door to services they have never been able to access before
- Ideally would want the development of hybrid systems in which face-to-face and remote services are able to complement one another was suggested as a way to help reach a wider range of people. This would, however, require radical investment and resourcing to be sustainable.

Actions Recommended

Reduce barriers to accessing services digitally and remotely, whilst recognising that this type of support may not be appropriate for all
Ensure digital initiatives are able to provide sustained support to individuals and communities, and that these initiatives are co-ordinated across sectors

Findings of Inclusion Gloucestershire

Mental Health Experience Led Opportunities (MHELO) Network digital exclusion survey in response to Covid-19

- Concern that organisations and services are not considering how mental ill health can impact on accessing online resources/supports.
- For those with neurodiversity, the volume of online interaction can be overwhelming, resulting in sensory overload, shutting down as a coping mechanism, and missing out on important information or contacts. Not due to lack of digital skills but due to difficulties with 'executive function' and ability to process information.
- Noted increased anxiety and fear levels which surround change and people not being able to understand how to use technology resulting in not accessing a particular service because of fear or knowledge.
- Lack of recognition that fluctuating mental health states (such as found with anxiety) can result in intermittent digital exclusion
- Social anxiety can carry over onto digital platforms – worry and fear about getting it wrong (e.g., wording an email, interacting on video platforms) or not knowing how things work, such as chat functions.
- Data security and sharing concerns, with both over and under sharing, and not knowing who has access to private and sensitive information create worry.

Typical Assumptions made:

- People assume that you have internet connection.
- People make assumptions about people's abilities – age stereotyping
- People still assume that people do have access to technology
- People assume everyone understands the same language about technology

What is Needed

Recognition of the Real and Significant impact of Mental Health in digital exclusion

- Many areas of life which now rely heavily on digital access - banking, getting benefits, paying bills. Can result in more anxiety about getting it done on time and carrying out the transactions correctly.
- Connecting with some services (e.g., benefits or health services) are quite emotive interactions. It can be hard to do so online where you have lost the ability to read body language and not having someone trying to help you describe what you are experiencing.

Training and support

- Need to have not only appropriate training, but appropriate ongoing support and how to access this.
- Training and support needs to be tailored for the individual (e.g., some may need written prompts, others physical demonstration)
- People need access to proper technical assistance. Those providing support need to know what they are doing to be able to teach others

Choice and Control

- People need to understand that they can access services and support in a different way if they are not able or wanting to use digital offer. Support needed to feel confident to ask for this.
- Appropriate adjustments need to be made, including those required to accommodate mental health issues

More about the work of Inclusion Gloucestershire and the MHELO network:

<https://www.inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/engagement/mhelo-mental-health-expert-led-opportunities/>

Our response to the research

Digital inclusion is a key route into creating significant opportunities for disabled people and people with mental health challenges in Gloucestershire. We find it unacceptable that if you are disabled or experience mental health challenges you are at greater risk for being digitally excluded.

We have therefore created a one-off opportunity to apply for funding from the Digital Inclusion Fund, which has a total value of £450,000, which could be used over multiple years and for a variety of schemes. Through this the Trust aims to create the impetus for the societal and systemic change that needs to happen to ensure disabled people and people with mental health challenges are no longer disadvantaged in participating in the online world.

We recognise that for some groups of disabled people and people with mental health challenges, the issues underlying accessibility can be complex and cannot be solved through merely providing a piece of equipment, adjusting digital platform accessibility and/or teaching skills.

We also recognise that some people may always require some support and if that is the case we would want them to find a way to be online that is safe, respectful of them as individuals and gives them as much control and choice in how to do so.

The purposes and aims of the Digital Inclusion Fund

The purposes of the Fund are to ensure that:

- barriers uniquely experienced by disabled people and people with mental health challenge, which result in digital exclusion are addressed. These barriers may result in the

- inability to access the internet/platforms
- inability to access to necessary equipment
- lack of opportunity to develop the skills/confidence to participate in the online world
- current and future digital initiatives in the county are designed and delivered in a way that thoughtful about and is inclusive of disabled people and people with mental health challenges
- there is an increasing body of knowledge and insight of the barriers for disabled people and those with mental health challenges in accessing the everchanging digital world and how best to address the issues uncovered in Gloucestershire

The aims of the Fund are to support:

- local, inclusive opportunities for disabled people and those with mental health challenges to access the continuum of support required to participate in the digital world
- collaborations in exploring and delivering sustainable ways to address the conditions that contribute to digital exclusion specifically for disabled people and people with mental health challenges
- ongoing research and insight in relation to digital technology and the needs and aspirations of disabled people and people with mental health challenges

Key outcome

The key outcome that the Fund is seeking to achieve is that disabled people and people with mental health challenges can access the digital world in ways that best suit them, building on strengths and enabling take up of future digital opportunities.

Supplementary outcomes

The following are additional issues of importance for the Trust in making this investment:

- people with lived experience of disability and/or mental health challenge have been involved in designing and/or delivering and/or evaluating the digital inclusion proposal
- the work has a durable, long-lasting, legacy after the funding has finished
- consideration is given to embedding and/or expanding existing digital technology offers in order not to duplicate or reinvent wheels
- the work contributes to the body of knowledge and insight into how to create the right conditions to ensure disabled people and people with mental health challenges have access to current and future digital technology

Applying for the Digital Inclusion Fund

We are interested in:

- simple or complex solutions, large or small scale. The funding could be used for lots of small initiatives or one or two big ones: we will make that decision when we review the applications, recognising that often small amounts of funding can achieve big impacts
- collaborations between organisations who may be able to combine different types of experience and expertise to improve digital inclusion
- county-wide or hyper-local initiatives: the research undertaken by Gloucestershire Digital Divides demonstrated geographic differences in digital exclusion, suggesting that place-specific proposals building on both local assets and local needs may be required
- consideration of the specific digital inclusion needs of disabled people and people with mental health challenges who may not be reached by mainstream initiatives nor statutorily funded services

Applications for funding can be used to support digital inclusion for Gloucestershire residents of any age.

Charities, Community Interest Companies, social enterprises, and other groups who work in Gloucestershire's local communities and not-for-profits can apply.

You do not need to be a 'constituted' organisation or group to apply but if your organisation or group does not have a bank account, you may need to work with another organisation which can accept the funds awarded on your behalf.

The funding can be spent over multiple years, on core or project costs to achieve the outcomes you are setting out.

The Application Process

All funding programmes at Barnwood Trust are underpinned by a set of guiding principles, to read more about these [click here](#).

How to apply for the Digital Inclusion Fund:

You can apply for this Fund using our online grants application system, with the link found here: <https://barnwoodtrust.flexigrant.com/>

If you would like our application forms in any other format to make it easier for you to access, or if you would like assistance in completing the form, please do not hesitate to contact our Funding Team by emailing grants@barnwoodtrust.org or calling 01242 539935.

We are holding three open, online sessions to answer any questions you may have about making an application on the following dates:

- 14th June, 12:00pm – 1:00pm
- 20th June, 12:30pm – 1:30pm
- 29th June, 9:00am – 10:00am

Please contact us to receive the zoom link for any of the above sessions.

If you are unable to make any of these dates but want to discuss making an application, please get in touch with Ged Cassell, Funding Policy Coordinator, ged.cassell@barnwoodtrust.org tel. 01242 539935

How we will assess applications

We are committed to transparency about the Trust's funding processes so we want to be as open as possible about how we will award the funding in this initiative.

For the Digital Inclusion Fund, this will be a three stage Process:

Stage 1: All applications received will undergo a 'due diligence' review to ensure that all applications meet the basic requirements of eligibility for funding by the Trust. If there are any questions about your application at this stage, you may be contacted by our Funding Team for clarification.

Stage 2: Short-listing will be undertaken by reviewing applications against a set of essential criteria for this funding, so it is important to answer all the questions on the grant application as fully as possible. You may be contacted for further information at this stage.

Stage 3: Final selection will be made following a review of all eligible applications and recommendations made by an external panel of people with lived experience of disability and mental health challenge and/or learned experience and expertise relating to digital technologies and applications.

Evaluation of the impact and reach of the funding

One-off thematically focussed funding to meet an ambitious, specific outcome is a different way of funding for the Trust. With this new approach we will want to know not only what you did, how you did it but also what impact it has made in

addressing the digital barriers that disabled people and people with mental health challenges face. We are therefore keen to hear your ideas on how you would approach the evaluation of the impact and reach of the work if you were awarded funding.

And rest assured, to support our own ongoing research and insight into this important area, we will want to collaborate with you in finding the best set of metrics and tools to demonstrate impact and success in what you are doing. If, once the work is under way, as part of that ongoing evaluation process a change in approach seems sensible, we will be happy to agree this with you as part of our regular grant review process.

Key Dates

Grants Application Open: 6th June 2022

Grant Application Close: 31st July 2022

Shortlisted applicants informed by: 5th September 2022

Successful applicants informed by: 31st October 2022

Award payments made: November/December 2022

Contact for more information:

Ged Cassell, Funding Policy Coordinator ged.cassell@barnwoodtrust.org 01242 539935

Appendix 1 About Barnwood Trust

Our vision is to create the best possible environment in Gloucestershire for disabled people and people with mental health challenges to make the most of their lives.

To make our vision a reality we have set ourselves four goals, which are for disabled people and people with mental health challenges to:

- follow their passions and take up opportunities
- live in well-designed homes in welcoming, sustainable communities
- be fully involved in creating welcoming communities, spaces, and places
- influence people, places, and organisations to make positive changes on disability issues and inclusion

We believe we can meet our goals by focusing time and resources on:

⇒ *Changing Conditions*

Barnwood works across the county proactively in place-based development, brokering collaborations and introducing funding where necessary, to create societal and systemic change which will benefit disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

We use our convening power with people, groups, and organisations locally and county-wide, to drive that systemic and societal change, as a means of influencing conditions impacting on disabled people and people with mental health challenges

⇒ *Listening and Learning*

We want to hear from disabled people and people with mental health challenges about what needs to change in the county to make things better. We believe in strength in numbers and the importance of every voice.

Barnwood Trust has a research programme that is focussed on disability and mental health. Our research helps us, and others, to drive systemic and societal change, through campaigning and policy work.

We have a learning programme which builds thinking and capacity in the county and helps participants to understand more about disability, mental health, and how to make change in the county.

⇒ *Funding*

The Trust is a long-established charitable foundation and the steward of funds on behalf of the people of Gloucestershire. We provide funding to individuals, organisations, groups, and places. Our funding is informed by research and supported by relationships that increase its impact.

As well as responding to requests for funding, we also identify priority areas for investment that will benefit disabled people and people with mental health challenges, and then initiate partnerships and projects for this investment.