

Written evidence from the Good Things Foundation (DEG0159)

About Good Things Foundation

Good Things Foundation is the UK's leading digital and social inclusion charity. We bring together a network of thousands of hyperlocal community partners across the country (the Online Centres Network), working together to reach those who need support, often some of the most vulnerable in society. Through our online learning platform, Learn My Way, we've supported more than 3 million people to gain digital skills since 2010.

Our Network partners are all independent of Good Things Foundation - they are small community centres, local charities supporting people with disabilities or unemployment, homeless shelters, job clubs, libraries, Age UK centres, et al. We call it a 'big club with a shared vision' - a vision of a world where everyone can benefit from digital, and a world where nationally coordinated but hyperlocal, holistic, informal support is available for all who need it.

For further information and data on this submission, please contact Tom McGrath – tom.mcgrath@goodthingsfoundation.org.

Key recommendations

- **A Digital Lifeline¹** to be introduced by the Government to help people with disabilities who have been adversely affected by the pandemic, boosting their digital skills for life and work. We provided three scalable options in a proposal to the Cabinet Office in November 2020. This would utilise our existing network of hyper-local partners, helping between 450,000 - 110,000 people with disabilities and those with limiting conditions in England.
- **Greater investment in the promotion of free accessible online learning content to support people with digital employability skills.** 73% of people with a disability which causes a substantial long-term and adverse effect felt their confidence had improved as a result of using our Learn My Way digital skills platform. 87% of the same group wanted to progress to further learning – showing how investing in free, accessible platforms can boost motivation for digital employability skills.²
- **Provide funding for connectivity and devices which meet the needs of people with disabilities.** Good Things Foundation has distributed over 10,000 devices to people most in need throughout the pandemic through Everyone Connected, including

¹ For further details, see Annex 1. Full details available on request. .

² Further quantitative data available in Annex 2.

people with disabilities. The Department should increase funding for such devices so that people with disabilities can be supported to be stay connected, and those who are able to work can develop their digital employability skills.

Digital Lifeline

Good Things Foundation is proposing a Digital Lifeline model to support people with disabilities during the pandemic and beyond. All of the people supported by Digital Lifeline will gain essential digital skills from the Government's [Essential Digital Skills Framework](#), which the Government has designed and implemented with partners and sets out the digital skills required for life and work.

Everyone engaged and supported by Digital Lifeline will be able to do the following activities using the internet once their learning is completed:

- Carry out a video-call (eg Zoom) with a loved one or a GP
- To use online services, such as keep up to date with Covid-19 information online, using digital health services such as order repeat prescriptions, or order shopping online
- Know the basics of keeping safe on the internet, such as secure passwords and watching out for suspicious behaviours
- Know how to change accessibility settings on their device to suit their needs.
- For relevant working age adults, be able to search for jobs online and to apply for work online.

The Digital Lifeline will help up to 450,000 people with disabilities, providing up to half of these with devices that meet their needs. And the skills that they develop will help relevant working age adults to excel, both in finding jobs and in work itself. For further details about Digital Lifeline, please see Annex 1, and full details are available on request.

What progress has been made, especially since 2015, on closing the disability employment gap? How has this progress been made?

The unemployment rate for people with disabilities has roughly halved between 2013 and 2019, helping to reduce the overall disability employment gap.³ This is encouraging, yet significant progress is still needed, particularly to help people with disabilities need greater support to get online – to find jobs, to work remotely, and for their personal lives.

³ ONS. (2019). [Disability and employment, UK: 2019](#).

According to Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index (CDI), people with an impairment are 25% less likely to have the skills to access devices and get online independently compared to non-disabled people.⁴ And only 38% of people with a physical impairment have the digital skills needed for work, compared to the UK average of 52%.⁵

There are many reasons why digital access is lower amongst people with disabilities, and these factors have clear ramifications for employment outcomes. These include:

- **Inaccessible websites and devices:** many websites are still not designed with people with disabilities in mind, making the job search more difficult. Moreover, some people with disabilities do not have the skills or confidence to get online.
- **Financial constraints:** the high cost of getting online for households who already have additional disability-related expenditures (on average £583 per month higher⁶) means that people with disabilities miss out on employment opportunities and options for remote-working.
- **Venue accessibility:** even in normal years, venue accessibility has proved a challenge due to many buildings not being fit for the needs of people with disabilities. Covid-19 has added additional pressure, particularly for those who are shielding, making it even harder to access support.
- **Negative attitudes towards disability:** negative learning experiences can reduce motivation to pursue digital skills training, in turn having a negative effect on employment prospects.
- **Low English skills:** people with disabilities have, on average, lower English literacy skills – this makes digital skills uptake harder, making it more difficult to find and apply for a job online.

However, these barriers are not uniform, and it is important to stress that every person must receive support which meets – and is appropriate to – their needs.

Embracing digital inclusion presents clear advantages for improving employability amongst people with disabilities. Globally, digital inclusion has helped to “level the playing field for persons with disabilities at all stages of the employment life cycle-hiring, retention, and promotion,” according to the World Bank.⁷

Meanwhile, platforms like Learn My Way, developed by Good Things Foundation and delivered by our community partners, have helped to boost the digital skills for life and work for people with disabilities. 64% of Learn My Way users who self-define as having a disability

⁴ [Lloyds Bank CDI](#). (2020).

⁵ Lloyds Bank CDI. (2020).

⁶ Scope. (2019). [Disability facts and figures](#).

⁷ World Bank. (2016). [Bridging the Disability Divide through Digital Technologies](#).

which has a significant impact on their daily lives report that their improved digital skills have boosted their independence.⁸

We have also seen some success in improving digital skills for work through our Future Digital Inclusion programme, funded by the Department for Education. We have found that investment in digital skills and digital literacy in trusted local places boosts positive outcomes, from finding employment opportunities to increasing the uptake of future learning.⁹

What is the economic impact of low employment and high economic inactivity rates for disabled people? Are some disabled people (for example, young disabled people or people with different health conditions) more at risk of unemployment or economic activity than others?

Scope has identified that people with disabilities spend an average of £583 more per month on disability-related expenditure, compared with households where no-one has a disability.¹⁰ This increases the likelihood of poverty for families with at least one person with disabilities. In turn, this compounds the employment gap. As disposable income is lower, these families face difficulties in getting online – via suitable data connections and devices – which lowers opportunities for job-seeking.

Many people with disabilities may face higher barriers to employment and training due to the impacts of Covid-19, particularly as many people with disabilities have been required to shield. In England, 1.1 million disabled people under 65 years are not accessing the internet; a further 1.2 million have access but very low digital skills, of whom 138,800 are looking for work.¹¹ Combined with the effects of lockdown, this presents an extremely challenging environment for digitally excluded people with disabilities to get the employability skills they need.

As such, one of our target groups for our Digital Lifeline proposal are working age people with disabilities who are unemployed and digitally excluded. This group includes younger adults with learning disabilities or other impairments who may face higher barriers to employment. Our Digital Lifeline proposal would help these groups to find work – *if* this is what suits their needs and personal situations – by providing basic digital skills training over the course of one year. This includes the ability to: make a video call; use online health services; stay safe online; personalise accessibility settings on their devices; and how to search and apply for jobs online.

⁸ Good Things Foundation. (2020). Internal data on outcomes of Learn My Way platform.

⁹ Good Things Foundation. (2019). [Future Digital Inclusion: delivering basic digital skills for those in need.](#)

¹⁰ Scope. (2019). [Disability facts and figures.](#)

¹¹ Ofcom (2020). [Adults' Media Use & Attitudes report 2020.](#) [Analysis by Prof. S. Yates for Good Things Foundation.]

What improvements should DWP make to the support it offers to unemployed disabled people via Jobcentre Plus?

Our Digital Lifeline proposal takes into account that many people with disabilities – particularly those with learning disabilities – require a longer period of training in order to establish trust and build relationships necessary for successful skills development. It is crucial that people supported via Jobcentre Plus are allowed to learn and develop skills at the rate that suits their needs best. Indeed, it is particularly important that they are not rushed into seeking employment at a time which may be damaging to their health – be that mental or physical.

Similarly, more needs to be done to ensure people with disabilities have devices and connectivity which are adjusted to their needs, and this forms a key part of the Digital Lifeline. Good Things Foundation created the ‘devices with digital skills’ model during the first Covid lockdown and we have since distributed over 10,000 devices. Via our existing network of community partners, we can scale this to reach people with disabilities across the country – however we need further funding and resources in order to do so.

Devices distributed via Digital Lifeline will be beneficial for Jobcentre Plus as it will allow people with disabilities to develop their digital skills – for work and life – in their own space or a trusted place. These personalised devices will help to drive more positive outcomes for skills development, and help reduce the employment gap.

What evidence is there of “best practice” in supporting disabled people remotely—either in or out of work?

The model of Good Things Foundation has always been to support people in trusted places with trusted faces – so we had to act fast in response to the pandemic. Many of our community partners now offer support over the phone and, where possible, over video calls.

Disability Resource Centre, part of our network in Birmingham, have continued to provide support via audio and video calls. They created documents for learners to help them recognise fraud online, tips for using Skype effectively, and demonstrate how to shop online. They’ve also helped people to set up online banking tools so that they have better understanding of their finances.

However, remote support can only be provided if people with disabilities have access to devices and connectivity which suit their needs. Good Things Foundation, via our Everyone Connected programme, provided such devices, helping people with disabilities to stay connected throughout lockdown.

How should DWP look to engage disabled people and the organisations that represent them in formulating the Strategy?

A key tenet of the Department's strategy going forward should be to co-design with people with disabilities. We have previously run projects for people with learning disabilities, where it was crucial to involve them in the course-design process by listening to their needs and asking about their current digital experiences.¹² Time also had to be taken to understand their communication needs, and it is important to respect that not everyone will be willing or able to work at the same pace. Overall, there will be no one size fits all approach for supporting people with learning disabilities.

Good Things Foundation has also employed the co-design approach with regards to healthcare. We worked with the NHS on their Widening Digital Participation scheme,¹³ and our pathfinders how healthcare could be improved through wider access to digital skills. This involved working alongside the groups that we were supporting, which included people with disabilities, to design digital health programmes which fit their needs.

Annex 1: Digital Lifeline: A Covid Emergency Response to Digital Exclusion for Disabled People

The following was submitted to the Cabinet Office in November 2020 for potential funding. We are including the proposal here for further information.

According to the latest Ofcom data on internet use, up to 5.7 million people in England with an impairment or condition which limits their activities faces digital exclusion. Of this number: 3.3 million people are non-users of the internet; 1.1 million only use the internet in a very limited way (not even social media), and a further 1.3 million have some access but very low digital skills (only social media)¹⁴.

Led by Good Things Foundation, working with key partners, this proposal sets out how disabled people could be supported through emergency direct action in communities across the country, as part of the Government's response to Covid-19.

Disabled people and people with conditions which limit their daily activities are more likely to be digitally excluded, lacking access to the internet and digital skills. Those facing digital

¹² Good Things Foundation. (2018). [Doing digital inclusion with the most excluded: people with learning disabilities.](#)

¹³ Good Things Foundation. (2020). [Digital Inclusion in Health and Care: Lessons learned from the NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme. \(2017-2020\).](#)

¹⁴ [Ofcom 2020](#) / Analysis by Prof. S. Yates for Good Things Foundation

exclusion are among the estimated 9 million adults across the UK who cannot use the internet without support.

The pandemic has disproportionately affected disabled people who are more likely to be severely affected by or die from Covid-19, and are less likely to have access to online services to reduce risk of infection, maintain health and well-being, and reduce isolation and loneliness. Disabled people made up almost 6 in 10 of all deaths involving Covid-19 in the period from March to July 2020.¹⁵ Those who are digitally excluded (without internet access, or digital skills to use the internet fully) are unable to order food and prescriptions online, forcing them to rely on family, friends and neighbours, or forcing them to travel unnecessarily, in both cases increasing the risk of infection. They are frequently isolated in their homes, experiencing severe loneliness and depression; and they are more likely to experience job insecurity, and be unable to find or apply for work online. This is an emergency.

This proposal includes three scaled options. Digital Lifeline, would help **450,000 - 110,000 disabled people and those with limiting conditions in England**, by giving them the digital skills they need during the pandemic and for the future. Around half of these (222,600 - 22,500) would receive a digital device and connectivity adapted for their needs.

Hyperlocal community hubs (small charities and social enterprises that specialise in supporting disabled people in their community, as well as housing associations, libraries and others) would engage and support disabled people through Covid-safe face-to-face engagement, as well as social distanced Zoom classes, and telephone assistance. Good Things Foundation, charityAbilityNet and community partners have been delivering support through remote models since the first lockdown began.

Community hubs would be given new digital devices (tablets with mobile data) and support to distribute these to disabled people sheltering in their homes. These organisations would then provide practical support by telephone to help beneficiaries set up their device and access essential services. This would be supplemented by expert advice and support from charity partners, helping disabled people adapt their device to meet their needs and providing access to ongoing specialist support.

In one year, disabled people facing the most severe barriers to their life chances because of the Covid-19 pandemic would be helped to:

- Carry out a video-call (eg Zoom) with a loved one or a GP

¹⁵ [ONS 2020 Coronavirus related deaths by disability status in England and Wales 2 March to 14 July 2020](#)

- Use online services, such as keep up to date with Covid-19 information online, using digital health services such as order repeat prescriptions, or order shopping online
- Know the basics of keeping safe on the internet, such as secure passwords and watching out for suspicious behaviours
- Know how to change accessibility settings on their device to suit their needs.
- For relevant working age adults, be able to search for jobs online and to apply for work online.

This will have a profound impact on people's lives, and form an important part of the Government's Covid-19 response, supporting those in greatest need.

The 'devices with digital skills' model was created by digital inclusion charity Good Things Foundation during the first lockdown, and has already been used to distribute over 10,000 devices to those in need. It is scalable immediately, with 1,300 local organisations currently active in Good Things Foundation's network, and harnesses the drive and community spirit of small charities and social enterprises on the front line. Almost a third of people helped between March-July were supported to use the internet for the very first time and without any face-to-face contact.

Annex 2: Quantitative Outcomes Data from Good Things Foundation

Good Things Foundation carries out an ongoing survey of learners using the free Learn My Way learning platform, which collects a wide range of demographic and impact data; survey data show that disabled learners report multiple positive outcomes as a result of improving their digital capabilities. Following best practice in survey design, disability in the survey is self-defined: respondents are asked if they consider themselves to have a sensory, physical or cognitive impact, or physical or mental health problems, and then if this condition (or conditions) has 'a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities' (the definition of disability in the 2010 Equalities Act). A summary of key outcome statistics is given in the table below:

Key outcomes	Where learners have a self-declared disability as defined by the Equalities Act (2010)...
Improved self-confidence	73%
More independence	64%
Better able to manage money	44%
Better able to deal with housing issues	50%
More informed about health	59%
Less lonely or isolated	51%
Better able to access public services	61%
Progress to further learning	87%

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