Forest of Dean Digital Partnership

FUNDED BY THE BARNWOOD TRUST

BY PROJECT FACILITATOR
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FOREST VOLUNTARY

FV AF

ACTION FORUM

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INTRODUCTION

In 2022 Barnwood Trust announced a Digital Inclusion Fund for Gloucestershire. This was a one-off themed based funding programme aimed at improving access for disabled people and people with mental health conditions to the digital world in ways that best suit them, building on strengths and enabling take up on future digital opportunities.

Along with improved access, Barnwood Trust also identified additional key elements important to this fund. This included an expectation that:

- Projects build on the work already happening in this area and consider how they could further contribute to this body of knowledge;
- The design, delivery and evaluation of projects are co-designed with people of lived experience of disability and/or mental health conditions;
- Projects consider how they can have a sustainable legacy beyond the funding.

THE BID

In July 2022, Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF) submitted an application for this fund to support Forest of Dean communities.

The proposed bid was to deliver a collaborative community partnership project, led by FVAF. This district-wide partnership would be the first of its kind and aimed to break down the barriers people face in relation to digital inclusion and unlock the many assets available within the Forest of Dean communities and the digital world.

To achieve this, FVAF set out to bring together relevant people/organisations to do the following:

- build on the needs identified by Digital Divides research
- work to understand the local needs, develop centralised, accessible information and deliver bespoke projects to address the gaps in digital inclusion.

FVAF was successful in its application and received £203,000 from Barnwood Trust in December 2022. This 18-month programme of work began in January 2023.

In the application for the grant, FVAF laid out an ambitious programme of work which aimed to harness the power of the community sector, to create a local impact, via projects which bring about digital social change through practical and sustainable means.

This was to be achieved by focusing on 5 key areas:

1. Learning Disabilities/Additional Needs
2. Physical Disabilities
3. Sensory Disabilities
4. Mental Health/Wellbeing
5. Children & Young People that may experience any of the above
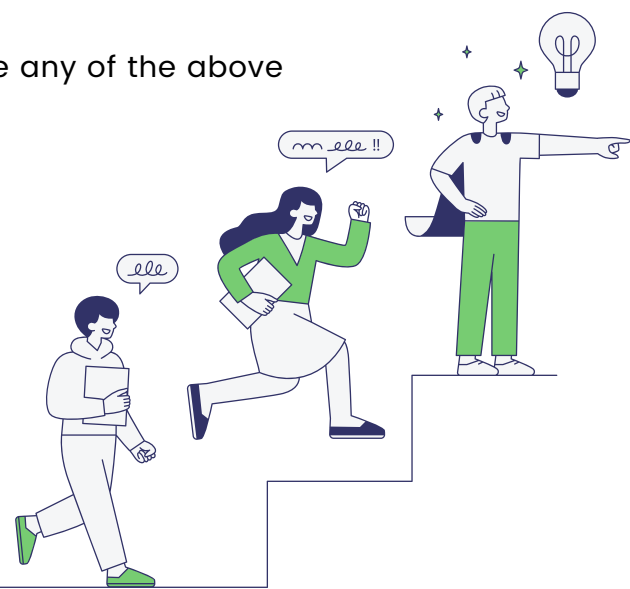
2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The programme of deliverables were broken down in to 4 phases covering 18 months:

PHASE 1: Collaboration: The Partnership
PHASE 2: Understanding the Community: The Research
PHASE 3: Removing Barriers: The Pilot Projects
PHASE 4: Learning: The Analysis

The full application can be viewed in APPENDIX 1

PROJECT DURATION: 18 MONTHS

PHASE 1 | 3 MONTHS

Identifying project stakeholders/partners across 4 main areas:
1. Learning Disabilities/Additional Needs
2. Physical Disabilities
3. Mental Health/ Wellbeing
4. Children & Young people that may experience any of the above

Initial set-up of Project Partner Forum who bring value, passion knowledge, expertise and energy (Max of 12 partners)

Expenditure:
Facilitator: £10k | Partners: £9k

PHASE 2 | 3 MONTHS

- Research/co-design/co-production
- Research across the 4 categories'
- Research focus on understanding Digital Divides insights: the Why, How and What
- Digital Support asset mapping/ to enable the creation of Digital Support Directory- physical and digital copies
- Exploration of community wifi installation in areas with zero coverage
- Reporting of findings and suggestions for pilot phase

Expenditure:
Research: £20k | Directory: £5k
Facilitator: £10k | Partners: £9k

PHASE 3 | 9 MONTHS

- Delivery of Digital pilots identified and designed in Phase 2.
- On-going work improve digital infrastructure in community settings
- Creation of resources/support for VSC; to increase/create online presence, website templates, ensure accessibility and legal and best practice functionality are met universally across the sector.

Expenditure:
Projects delivery:£50k | Facilitator: £10k
Partners: £27k

PHASE 4 | 3 MONTHS

- Pilot evaluations/ findings
- Sharing impact/ success
- Proposal on next steps/ funding requirements

Expenditure:
Facilitator: £10k | Partners: £9k

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Each selected project partner was paid to provide 8 hours of time/ contributions to the project per a month

Each project partner to receive remuneration of £250 per month- £3k in total for project.

Facilitator £40k
Research £20k
Directory £5k
Partners £54k (£250 per day), £3k per year
Projects delivery:£50k
Organisation on-costs at 15% £34k

TOTAL: £203k

Organisation on-costs at 15% £34k
16.7%

Facilitator £40k
19.7%

Research £20k
9.9%

Directory £5k
2.5%

Partners £54k
26.6%

Projects delivery £50k
24.6%
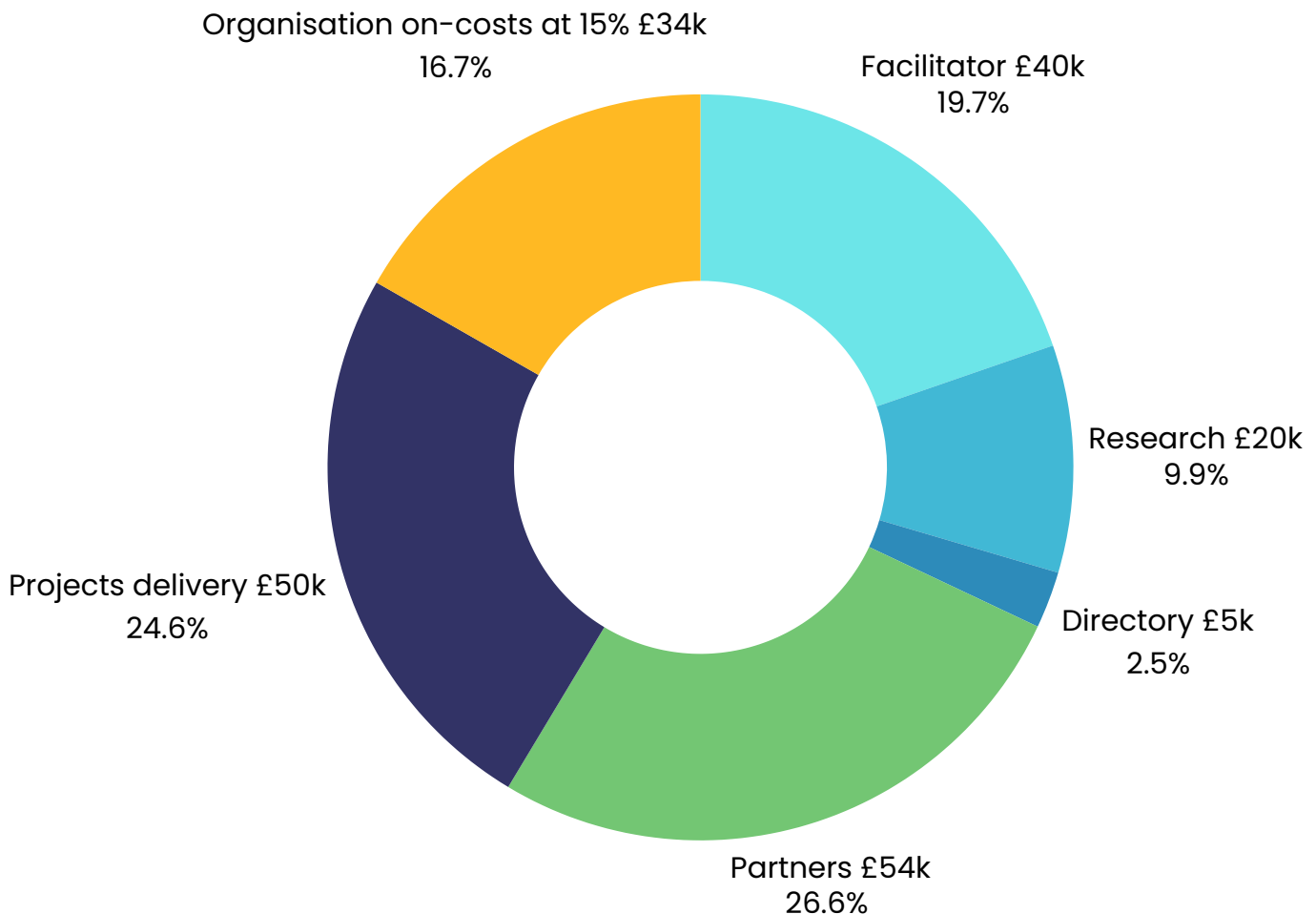
3. EVALUATION AIMS & PRINCIPLES

As laid out in the application and planned works- phase 4 would focus on the evaluation and learnings captured, with 3 priority focuses:

**Pilot evaluations/
findings**
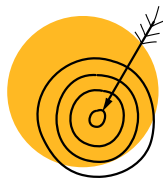
**Sharing impact/
success**

**Proposal on next steps/
funding requirements**

To achieve this, principles and questions were co-designed between FVAF and Barnwood Trust. These principles provided a clear framework for how the evaluation should be conducted, ensuring consistency, integrity and alignment with best practices.

FOREST DIGITAL INCLUSION PARTNERSHIP EVALUATION PRINCIPLES

1. Open and Honest Feedback: Encourage transparent communication throughout the evaluation process. Honest feedback helps identify strengths and areas for improvement.
2. Contextual Consideration: Evaluate within the broader context, considering how findings can influence future decisions, funding, legacy outcomes, and positive impact on the system.
3. Key Messages: Aim to draw out and contextualise key messages from the evaluation. These messages should highlight the impact and effectiveness of specific approaches.
   - Hyperlocal Funding Benefits: Assess the advantages of a hyperlocal funding approach facilitated by Small/Medium Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations.
   - Localised Delivery Model: Explore how the model enables localised delivery by well-placed organisations.
   - Unlocking knowledge and opportunity: How the wide project had enabled and unlocked opportunities for organisations and individuals to access unrestricted funding and knowledge they may not traditionally be able to access.
   - Lived Experience Involvement: Evaluate the benefits of involving individuals with lived experience in designing, delivering and, evaluating pilot projects.
   - Partnership Lessons: Reflect on lessons learned from partnership working and governance.

Barnwood Trust agreed with FVAF that the period from August to September 2024 would be used to undertake the evaluation of the Digital Inclusion Partnership.

4. METHODOLOGY & EVALUATION FOCUS
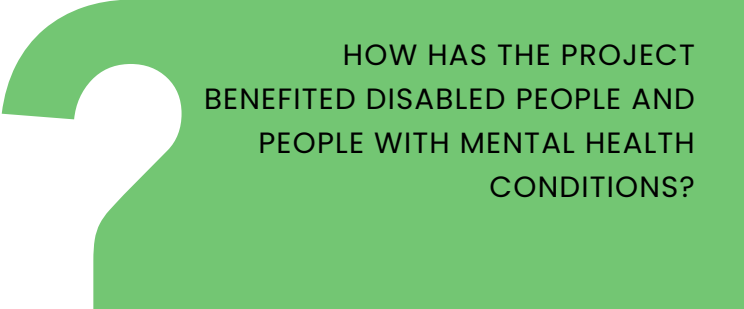
The methodology used in the evaluation is one of a blended approach. Whilst this full evaluation report was conducted and facilitated by FVAF, A critical focus and priority was ensuring an independent evaluator was brought in to strengthen the integrity and openness of the evaluation.

The whole evaluation process included:
- Pilot project evaluations- conducted by pilot delivery leads
- Wider Evaluation Report- conducted by FVAF
- 1:1 semi structured interviews with partners- conducted by independent facilitator- Candace Plouffe
- Partnership Focus Group- conducted by independent facilitator- Candace Plouffe
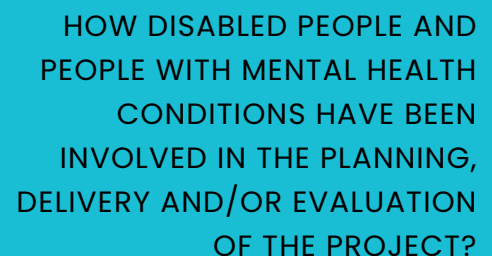
All pilot project evaluation reports, independent evaluation report and focus groups finding can viewed in the APPENDIX 2

There are four key questions this evaluation explores, which were a contractual requirement of receiving this Barnwood Trust funding:

? HOW HAS THE PROJECT BENEFITED DISABLED PEOPLE AND PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS?

? HOW DISABLED PEOPLE AND PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING, DELIVERY AND/OR EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT?

? HOW PROJECTS HAVE BEEN MADE ACCESSIBLE TO A WIDE RANGE OF PEOPLE?

? HOW SUSTAINABILITY HAS BEEN CONSIDERED AS PART OF THE PROJECT BEYOND THE LIFE OF THE FUNDING?

5. INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

In July 2024, an agreement was made between Barnwood Trust and FVAF to commission all independent evaluation elements to independent facilitator, Candace Plouffe.

With Candace's experience and skills, specific to Digital Inclusion in Gloucestershire, and her <u>innovative research</u> on Gloucestershire's Digital Divides steering group, it was agreed Candace would be well placed to facilitate this aspect of the evaluation.

The scope of this work and aims where agreed in advance between Barnwood Trust and FVAF. With deliverables and outputs confirmed by Candace, upon agreeing to take on the work.

The independent evaluation findings have a specific focus on the set-up and delivery of the local digital inclusion pilot projects, supported by the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership. These findings contribute to this broader and more detailed final evaluation, conducted by FVAF, which will then be shared with Barnwood Trust and beyond. The evaluation shares successes, challenges and learning gained in undertaking this ambitious proposal to address digital barriers for disabled people and, those with mental health challenges in the Forest of Dean.

An independent evaluation of the Forest of Dean Digital Inclusion Partnership, with an aim to gather learning that will not only benefit the funded projects through this partnership but, can also be shared with others to create a lasting legacy from the Barnwood Digital Inclusion Fund.

The independent evaluation includes a review of the whole project - from designing the concept, funding application, to the current delivery stage.

The aim is to review, analyse and highlight the:
- Impact (on both partners and individuals) of the project
- Good practice that has been established
- Benefits and challenges of partnership working
- Success and learning in using a co-design/co-production approach

It is hoped that the findings and learnings of this evaluation will assist in the sustainability, planning and execution for the partnership, pilot projects and future partnership working.

6.PROJECT MANAGEMENT & FACILITATION

In the mobilisation phase of the project, FVAF identified potential capacity challenges and the need to employ a temporary Consultant Project Manager to work closely alongside FVAF's Digital Inclusion Project Facilitator, Alex Digby.

In January 2023 Debbie Gillmore joined as Consultant Project Manager, providing unique experience and skills, crucial to laying the foundations of the project. Debbie was identified as being well-placed to take on this temporary role.

This was based on her experiences and connections made during her time with Healthwatch Gloucestershire where, she completed research on: "Access to digital technologies- People's experiences of digital health & care options". Through completing this work, Debbie created an extensive network of Forest of Dean VCS organisations, and a deep understanding of the digital exclusion experiences uniquely experience by rural communities, such as the Forest of Dean.

APPENDIX 3- Healthwatch report

Debbie's time on the project was spent focusing on the set-up of the partnership, establishing required governance and processes, programme management and creation of bespoke tools to be utilised by partners.

Acknowledging Debbie's skills and experiences, she was commissioned to take on this work at an agreed consultancy rate across a 7-month period. With her consultancy rates being considerably higher than typically seen in the VCS sector, FVAF opted to repurpose the 40k Facilitator budget for this role on a part-time basis. By doing so, it extended the time Debbie could be involved in the project, whilst allowing enough time to achieve the intended aims and deliverables of the role.

Between January' 23 and July' 23 (7 months)- £17,199.00 of the £40,000.00 budget was spent on Project Management Consultancy fees, with a further £4,853.00 spent on FVAF's Digital Inclusion Project Facilitator. This added a further 8 hours per week of resource to the project.

The overall project management and facilitation cost for this 7-month period equated to: £22,052. Leaving £17,948 remaining for project management and facilitation for the following 11 months of the project.

"

This has been a very challenging programme to manage alongside Alex, and at times I have felt I didn't have the skillset to see it through. However, from FVAF's faith in me and support from Alex, I feel we have really got the partner's to the stage where they are now running with their research/projects and have the right tools to project manage them. They can also claim for their activities and there are trackers for FVAF to ensure and help them to keep on budget and on time.

As a 'project facilitation board', I feel we now have a good set-up with regular meet ups in person or on Teams to ensure sign off of documentation or keeping the programme/research/pilot projects on track. This needs to continue too.

I will add, that I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the facilitation team, working closely with Alex and the partner's and am really keen to hear about their success/learnings going forward.

"

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS:

Through semi-structed 1:1 interviews- it revealed:
The use of the external project management contractor to support the partnership in the initial stages of the programme and developing their projects was welcomed by pilot leads.

Many noted that when this ceased, there seemed to be a marked change in how well the partnership worked. FVAF confirmed that the plan was always for the contractor to only support the initial stages of the programme and a robust handover did occur. But once the contractor finished, this reduced the capacity to both nurture the Partnership as a whole, as well as support the 6 individual pilot projects underway.
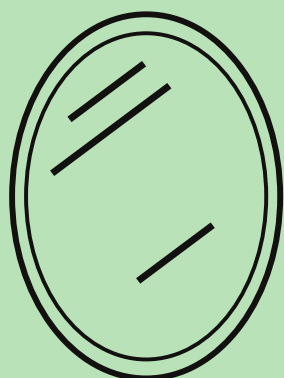
REFLECTIONS

Acknowledging the marked change in how well the partnership worked when contractor and these findings. Identify factors which should be further explored. For example, the change corelates with timings of the project moving in to the pilot delivery phase. As a result requiring different interactions which naturally more focused on delivery and achieving outcomes set-out in pilot briefs.

BESPOKE PROJECT TOOLS

In the initial 7 months of the project, a number of bespoke tools were created to aid and assist in the mobilisation, development and management of the whole project. With the emergent nature of the project, and requirements to be agile in its approach. Debbie Gillmore, Consultant Project Manager, alongside Alex Digby, Project facilitator, worked closely together to co-design bespoke project management and facilitation tools that enabled visibility on required actions, establishing strong lines of communication and clear task management.

By utilising the following tools created clear lines on the responsibility of tasks, plans and deliverables. Critical to this was the ability to log actions, updates and next steps. Without this the close working relationship would not have been achieved to the desired affect required.

Project Management Tools included:
- PID (Project Initiation Document)
- Project Start-up GANNT/ Action Plan
- Risk Register
- Daily Task Tracker
- Budget/Spend Tracker
- Partner Meeting Tracker
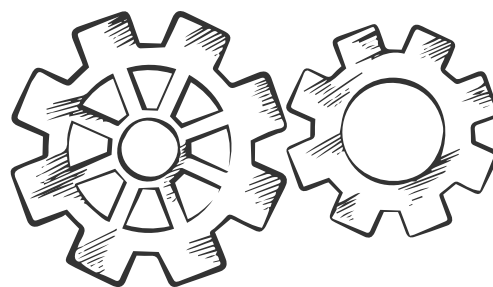
Further to this, bespoke tools were created to support partnership facilitation, remuneration/ partner claims, task planning, research and pilot delivery

Partner Tools included:
- Universal partner claim form
- How to/Instructions for filling in Partner Claims
- Planning Game Template (A tool for agile working in partnership that identifies true time and cost spent on tasks)
- Project Brief
- FOD Digital Partnership Focus Start up Driver Diagram
- Partner Research & Pilot Claim Form
- Pilot Project GANNT Chart Template
- Partner Tools & Process Algorithm

The universal partner claim form was adapted over time, making use of feedback and challenges experienced by partners. This highlighted the importance of creating supporting documents to go alongside the tools.

APPENDIX 4 - v1 claim form
APPENDIX 5 - Instructions

The use of bespoke tools relating to pilot project management varied between partners.

The majority did not make use of them and opted to use their own project management tools. Whilst empowering partners to be autonomous in the management of projects, and embracing diversity of working preferences, it did lead to unexpected complexities, challenges and frustrations.

The absence of having universally adopted processes and tools, led to disparity between the management of pilots, how updates where shared, levels of detail, and the variation of frequency in which updates where shared.

This disparity ultimately led to additional capacity requirements to make adaptations to ensure sufficient oversight was achieved for each pilot project.

Despite the best efforts to co-design these tools alongside partners, it highlighted a challenge unique to partnership working; diversity of partners, their skills, experiences, competences and preferences make the design of universal tools even more difficult.

LEARNING & REFLECTION:

It is clear that the challenges and frustrations faced by both partners and FVAF could have been addressed earlier. Reflecting on this, it appears that less time should have been dedicated to developing bespoke tools. Instead, this time could have been more effectively used during the initial partnership formation stage, with greater emphasis and resources allocated to co-developing governance structures, policies, processes, and procedures. However, it remains uncertain whether this would have been realistically achievable, given the time constraints and partners' primary focus at the time was the urgency to focus on research and co-production of pilot projects.

7.PHASE 1: COLLABORATION THE PARTNERSHIP

Background

The voluntary and community sector plays a vital role in digital inclusion. Small local organisations offering digital support are traditionally very effective at reaching out to people in need but have financial and resource constraints.

By bringing the right community partners together, it was hoped to unlock access to those harder to reach communities and empower them to be directly involved in the co-production of the design and delivery of highly effective and efficient support and in the development of digital infrastructure.

Collaboration also offers wider benefits by offering the opportunity to learn from each other, forge new links and build on existing partnerships.

The drive to build a collaborative partnership, facilitated by FVAF, grew out of interest from its community network. At the first Know Your Patch in-person event hosted by FVAF in June 2022, Barnwood's funding opportunity was raised and discussed at length.

Following this event, FVAF were approached by many trusted partners, who in recognising FVAF's strength as an anchor organisation when developing effective partnerships, voiced their view that FVAF would be best placed to lead the Forest of Dean Digital Partnership.

To move this project proposal forward and to further explore the viability of the planned activities for this community partnership project, FVAF created a briefing note and proactively reached out to its network to invite expression of interest to be involved.

Following this, FVAF identified a range of partners, across its network, whose input and expertise would help deliver maximum impact to the community. Response to the call was very strong and led to productive discussions with a number of interested individuals and organisations including; The Shalom Network, Wye Dean Wellbeing, My Networks, and Forest Sensory Services.

FVAF also continued to field interest from a number of other highly relevant and interested community partners.

APPENDIX 6- graphic/ call out for people to get involved.

PARTNERSHIP KICK-OFF JANUARY 2023

Following an extensive campaign to raise awareness of the project aims and opportunities, a Partnership Launch event was held on January 16th and was attended by the following organisations:

- FVAF
- The Shalom Network
- Camphill Village Trust
- Wild Earth Journeys
- Mindful Vision
- Forest Sensory Services
- Forest Pulse
- My Networks
- NHS Children Mental Health Services
- Creative Education Projects

At this meeting the project overview, timelines, remuneration conditions and delivery expectations were presented.

Following this, at the next project meeting, the aims and objectives of the partners were explored, and common goals and themes were developed to ensure effective and meaningful co production.

INTRODUCTION OF RUMINATION:

- Each selected project partner will be paid to provide up to 8 hours of time/contributions to the project per a month
- Each project partner to receive remuneration of £250 per month
- Partners to claim time across 3-month periods.
- Additional funds available for research and pilot project delivery.
- Partners were provided with a Partner claim form with clear instructions of how to claim and for what work was claimable.
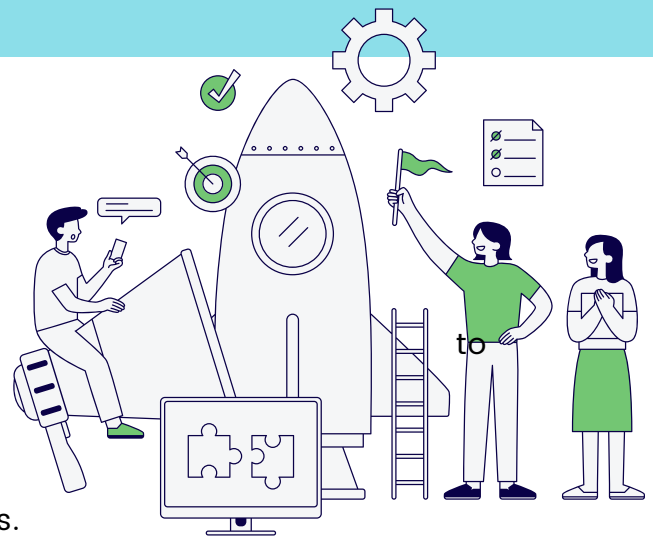
APPENDIX 4- Partner Claim form V1.

In the initial budget, £54k was allocated (£250 per day), £3k per year for each partner which was made available for partners to claim.

Between January 2023 & October 2023- £13,919.25 was paid in remuneration to partners for their time spent at partnership/themed group meetings, community engagement, research and pilot creation.

THEMED WORKING GROUPS

Following a 3rd Partnership meeting in March 2023, reflections were held due to the experienced challenges of facilitating the strategic meeting. 15 people in attendance, with a wide range of diversity, passion, opinions and interests specific to digital inclusion brought both challenges and benefits. The meeting revealed the need to split the group in to 3 identified themes. Taking this approach allowed partners to form smaller, more manageable, focused groups, in order to move onto the research stage.

With the partnership group dynamics established, the next step was to identify the core themes research and pilot projects would initially focus on.

Extensive discussion between partners resulted in the following themes decided upon:

Education   **Safety**   **Hybrid**

Hybrid Theme

Hybrid working technology refers to the tools, systems, and technologies that enable a flexible work/ engagement arrangement where employees/ participants can seamlessly switch between working from the office/ community and working remotely, typically from home. It is often associated with a hybrid work model where employees have the option to work in the physical office part of the time and remotely for the rest. The goal of hybrid working technology is to facilitate a smooth, productive, and collaborative work experience, regardless of the employee's location.

Hybrid theme group:
- Artspace Cinderford
- The Shalom Network
- Forest Pulse
- Forest Sensory Services
- Wilde Earth Journeys
- Mindful Vision
- My Network

Across April and May 2023- the Hybrid theme group met on multiple occasions. This started to form the direction and approaches required for research and co-production. It also enabled a collaborative approach to identifying the required research and co-production to help inform pilot delivery ideas.

Hybrid Theme | Suggested research/pilots:

- Pop/Rock choir: trailing out sound delays, in person/zoom etc
- Sensory empathy: project to explore the realities/environment/feelings of those that live with sensory impairment, put yourself in their shoes
- Bring outdoors indoors/Mindscape: looking into digital options around education/wellbeing/exploratory themes
- Project Engage: exploring technology (including 'raspberry pie') to help those with dementia be able to 'try before you buy'
- Website accessibility: exploring options/resources to help people set up websites ensuring they are accessible and inclusive with instruction that can be utilised elsewhere by others .

Education and Safety Theme

Related to digital education and safety for both adults and young people with learning disabilities.

Education and Safety theme group:

- Artspace Cinderford
- My Network
- The Shalom Network
- Forest Pulse
- Camphill Village Trust
- NHS/Young Minds Matters

Similarly to the Hybrid theme group, this group met multiple times across April and May 2023. The priority focus was on identifying research and co-production needs to help inform pilot delivery ideas.

Suggested research/pilots:

- Self Help safety issues: People on long waiting lists going online for 'self help' and leaving themselves open to harm and exploitation
- The Directory: A possible pilot to research recommendations and signposting, wording, liability etc for the Directory
- Triggers: When educating people around safety, be careful not to put the 'fear of god' into them and set off triggers

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

The intention of the Digital Inclusion partnership was to create a group of no more than 12 members who would oversee the whole programme of work, including the pilot projects, with collective responsibility for successful delivery of the programme.

At the start of the Forest Digital Inclusion programme the partnership had a wide representation (see Appendix 2).

The pilot leads noted in the interviews that this narrowed once identified themes for pilot projects occurred, with the current partnership now only comprised of those organisations/groups who are supporting a delivery of a project.

Interviewees described the issues disabled people and people with mental health challenges experience around inclusion, including inclusion in the digital world.

Dependent on the work of the organisation they were connected to, this included issues around access, lack of skills/confidence and motivation/fear for some.

There was recognition that the current "mainstream" digital support services offered do not adequately understand or cater for people who may require a more tailored approach to address some of the unique barriers disabled people and people with mental health challenges face.

The opportunity to come together and be connected was also noted as a reason to become involved in the Partnership and the pilot work.

Working together was seen as a way to broaden access to the work their organisation does.

So, when individuals were approached by FVAF and heard more about the Partnership intentions, they were keen to become involved, to shape and collectively address the digital exclusion issues known to them rather than trying to do it alone.

As one interviewee noted:

"It showed that we needed to be working together. And to be honest, that makes total sense."

This understanding of the issues and motivation to address these comes through not only the learned experience from the organisational roles they have, but also for many, lived experience with disabled family members who experience digital barriers. It was clear for many that the personal connection to individuals was a real driver to become involved in the Partnership work.

Despite some of the frustrations expressed about the partnership, most pilot leads saw the value in coming together for this work.

"

Feedback From Partners:

"We've got to know each other much better as organisations as a result of it, which is great. There's lots of positives that have come out'

"For me, partnership working is invaluable."

"And the people are just really good, nice people. Can't ask for more than that when you're working. Right?"

"

Creating and nurturing partnerships takes time and energy by all involved. The Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership programme were bold in setting out the ambition to form a partnership to address the digital barriers faced by local disabled people and people with mental health challenges and much learning has occurred.

Lastly, and loosely related, many interviewees did cite a general gap (not digitally focussed) with not having a network of organisations/groups who could meet and address the wider issues experienced by disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

They noted that this was a convening and connecting role that Barnwood Trust did previously play in local areas, and it is missed.

8.PHASE 2: UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY - THE RESEARCH

Background

Based on the current national, local, network partner and first-hand data available the need was recognised for a comprehensive collaborative effort to tackle and break down the barriers to creating a digitally inclusive community in the Forest of Dean.

The Digital Divides report commissioned research confirmed that whilst there is much written about the reality and impact of digital exclusion, less is known about what really works in overcoming exclusion. The aim was to address this with tangible impact and outcomes through the lifetime of the partnership project.

It was recognised that in order to effect a long-term sustainable change, we needed to gain a deeper, more detailed understanding of the situation here and now – those in the community at the greatest disadvantage, the mechanisms that currently exist and the gaps in support and provision.

To deliver effective change, the project invested time and resource to capture an accurate and up-to-date picture of the landscape we are operating in. This was done by listening to the issues and barriers disabled people and people with mental health challenges face to achieve digital inclusion.

The intention was to undertake research in areas that focused on the following categories to develop a deeper understanding of the strengths these marginalised groups have and, can contribute to co-design and delivery of projects:

1. Learning Disabilities
2. Physical Disabilities
3. Sensory Disabilities
4. Mental Health/Wellbeing
5. Children & Young people that may experience any of the above

The Approach:

An innovative and agile approach to "understanding the community" was embraced by the partnership. Being guided by co-production and co-design principles, harnessing the power of lived experience, whilst capturing insights through focused community engagement. Overall, the approach was considered to be venturesome, driving unique and innovative learning, leading to enhance project purpose and impact.

DEFINITIONS & BENEFITS INCLUDED:

Research and Co-Production

1.1 The Role of Research:

Research serves as the cornerstone for informed pilot development. In-depth exploration of the subject matter and relevant data collection was essential. Insights gained from research inform the "what" and "why" of pilot projects.

1.2 Co-Production with Lived Experience:

Involving individuals with lived experience is a vital aspect of the process. Co-production ensures that the voices and perspectives of those directly affected are considered. Co-production mitigates the risk of bias and enhances the relevance of pilot ideas.

Value Proposition Training

2.1 Objective of Value Proposition Training:

Value proposition training serves to guide the development of pilot projects. It aims to eliminate assumptions and biases regarding user needs.

2.2 Facilitating Value Proposition Training:

Value proposition training is conducted to equip teams with the skills to design projects that align with user expectations. This training encourages a user-centric approach.

Mapping Tool for User-Centric Design

3.1 The Significance of the Mapping Tool:

The mapping tool is an instrumental component of user-centric design. It enables the translation of user experiences, needs, and desires into concrete project elements.

3.2 Mapping Target Users and Profiles:

The mapping tool involves the detailed profiling of target users. This enables a comprehensive understanding of user needs and preferences. The tool encourages the formulation of precise questions for users, ensuring the project's value to them.

Enhanced Project Purpose and Impact

4.1 Creating Purposeful Projects:

The culmination of research, co-production, value proposition training, and the mapping tool should result in more purposeful projects. These projects are aligned with the real needs and expectations of the end users.

4.2 Greater Impact:

Informed, user-centric project design is expected to create greater impact. The absence of baseless assumptions ensures that the projects directly address the problems and concerns of the target audience.

LIVED EXPERIENCE & COMMUNITY IDEAS

Recording the lived experience and ideas from the community was fundamental to building an accurate and realistic picture.

To ensure this, a range of accessible community consultation methods were used. This included:
- 1-2-1 meetings
- distribution of paper based and electronic questionnaires
- attending community events at multiple locations

The focus at this stage had been on gathering:
- lived experience of disabled people
- lived experience of people facing mental health challenges
- existing digital support and skills training
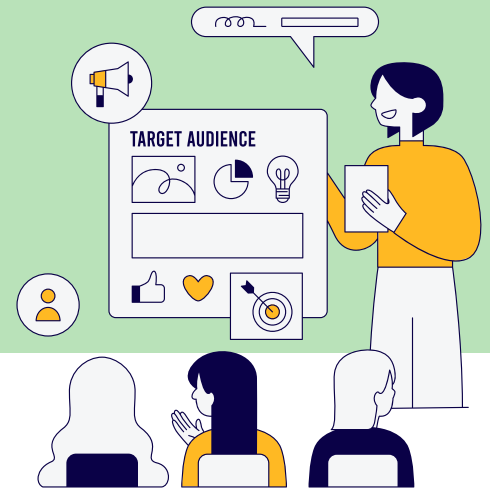
SHARED INSIGHT
THROUGH RESEARCH & ENGAGEMENT

Although partners split into the two smaller themed working groups, each group brought together insight through research and engagement. This was integral to developing a deeper understanding of the strengths their marginalised groups have and, what contributions will be needed to co-design and deliver pilot projects.

A large emphasis was put on capturing experiences every step of the way, (data and analysis is vital at start, during and the end of each research project.)

Themed working groups presented the opportunity to look in detail at the following:
- What methods will be used to obtain the research? e.g. focus groups, one-to-one meetings, external resources, existing online information and data, other methods.
- Who their key 'lived experience participants' are
- Creating paper based and online surveys if needed.
- Recording and carrying out research activities.

Research, co-production, and engagement with those with lived experience lay at the foundations of the projects and in bringing valuable insight .

During themed working groups, continued focus was put on the foundational elements of research, co-production, and engagement with individuals who have lived experience.

These elements play a crucial role in guiding the "what" and "why" of pilot projects.

Research examples:
Accessible website experts, Mindful Vision, conducted a short a short questionnaire to better understand people's situations and frustrations with their websites. This questionnaire was carried out, in-person at the 'Inclusive Benefit Employment event' at Taurus Crafts and at local community event; The Royal Forest Show.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

Many partners identified that their starting point was with "historical" data related to digital exclusion.

This included the Gloucestershire Digital Divides research, previously undertaken, along with other data shared by other organisations in the county and nationally who were working in similar areas.

For partners whose focus was on mental health and well-being, the current research and data demonstrated the effectiveness/benefits of the therapeutic use of their activities (singing, engaging with nature).

This was used as a driver to determine how technology could be utilised to improve access to what organisations are currently offering.

Along with the broader research available, all pilot leads identified a large body of their own organisation's data they could draw upon, through the numerous case studies and single subject stories they had gathered through conversations with disabled people and/or those with mental health challenges.

Discussion groups, surveys and feedback forms were also used by many pilots as part of the data gathering/research stage.

Of note is that all the leads described using an 'action research" approach during the delivery stage of their projects, with observation and feedback from participants used to continually shape and refine the ongoing work of the pilots.

VALUE PROPOSITION MAPPING & USER CENTRIC APPROACHES'

Alongside undertaking research, embedding co-design and co-production into the projects, pilot leads were encouraged to utilise a user-centric approach in the design phase of the pilot development.

To support themed working groups in developing pilot ideas, without confirmation bias of baseless assumptions of user needs, value proposition training was facilitated by FVAF.

This training and mapping tool enabled pilots to be designed based on the lived experiences, needs, wants and desires rather than designing something based on assumptions.

By mapping target users and profiles, it enabled detailed thought on what to ask the end user, to ensure its of value to them. In turn, this should create more purposeful projects, creating greater impact and engagement.

By employing value proposition training and a mapping tool, it aimed to support themed working groups in developing pilot ideas whilst avoiding confirmation bias and baseless assumptions about user needs. The ultimate goal is to design pilot projects based on the genuine experiences, needs, wants, and desires of the target users, thereby increasing their impact and purposefulness.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

There were mixed reviews related to the success of utilising these tools as part of the design phase of pilot projects. 2 of the 6 leads either did not undertake this part of the design phase or were not involved in the partnership when these sessions were held.

For the remaining 4 pilot projects, only a few noted it was a useful tool and exercise to undertake. Some felt it was too formal and /or abstract to use so modified how this was implemented
.
Overall, there was a sense that as this was a very different approach, more time and opportunity was needed by the pilot leads to be able to understand how to use these tools effectively.

Some pilot leads noted that once they understood the process, they did find it useful and could see the benefit in other areas of their work:

"It just needed that little bit longer to sit and actually kind of percolate into people's minds and give them time to process it and then apply it to their own abstract situations. Because every group of people that we were targeting were different across all of the projects."

CO-DESIGN/CO-PRODUCTION

With co-design and co-production being critical components of the overall project, the partnership embraced these principles in both the design and delivery of its pilot projects.

By doing so, a learning culture developed within the partnership . Action learning and live examples of co-production were fed in to both themed working groups. These live examples helped demonstrate the use and effectiveness of co-production methods, whilst fostering curiosity of how similar methods could be utilised in other pilot project ideas.

One example of this is CVT Camphill Village Trust (CVT) co-creating digital offer for CVT residents.

Two co-production workshops were held to identify the need, wants and desires of CVT residents relating to digital inclusion and support.

WORKSHOP 1 – DISCOVERY SESSION
12 CVT residents in attendance - attendees were asked:

What Devices do you use/ want to learn to use?
Laptop | Ipad/Tablet | Smart Phone

What does digital inclusion mean to you?
· Lacking skills to use own devices
· Unable to message friends and family
· Low confidence in using social media
· Unable to search for events/ activities online
· Unable to send messages and/or emails

What digital activities do you enjoy?
· Youtube
· Zoom/ sky- connecting with family
· Google Searching
· Online shopping on amazon/ ebay
· Watching TV/ Films
· Playing music

camphill village trust

Camphill Village Trust (CVT)
Co-creating digital offer for CVT residents

Co-production workshops were held to identify the need, wants and desires of CVT residents relating to digital inclusion and support.

Alongside these questions, residents shared their fears and goals relating to digital. By doing so it identified fears surrounding online safety, devices breaking down, internet pop-ups. Learning goals where identified involving safe online searching, using Zoom and increased confidence on being online.

In keeping true to co-design principles, a follow up session was held with a further 15 CVT residents in attendance. Here the insights captured in workshop 1 were fed back to the group. This was particularly important to ensure what had been captured was a true representation of those involved.

WORKSHOP 2 - FEEDBACK SESSION

Working with residents in an equal and reciprocal way, they were asked to vote on their 3 favourite topics:

RESULTS the votes from the 15 people in attendance:
1. Staying safe online = 10/15
2. Using zoom = 8/15
3. Internet shopping/ banking = 7/15
4. Sending Emails = 6/15
5. Device fixing/ updating = 4
6. How to store/ send photos (Cloud) - 3

Utilising the insights captured in both sessions, whilst verifying resident's digital aims and goals, a 7 week training programme was created.

Session 1 Staying safe online (using email) Part 1
Session 2 :Staying safe online - Using Zoom
Session 3 Staying safe online - Using Face Time & Skype
Session 4 Staying safe online - Using Mobile Phones
Session 5 Staying safe online - intro to Internet shopping 1
Session 6 Staying safe online - Internet shopping part 2
Session 7- Graduation.

The 7-week programme was then delivered in partnership between CVT, The Shalom Network and Creative Educational Projects. The research focused project, refered to as "The Pilot before the Pilot" with its learning being the cornerstone in the design of the latterly delivered pilot project in phase 3.

To be able to evaluate each session, the overall programme and its impact, a bespoke feedback form was created for each session. Participants completed these at the end of each session.

This evaluation and feedback played a crucial role in this research phase. It provided valuable insights of what went well, what didn't and where the delivery, content and resource can be further improved to meet the needs of the groups.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

All the projects shared how challenging using a co-design and co-production approach can be, but how vital it is.

Every pilot project endeavoured to involve participants in designing and then refining the pilots through the delivery phase.

Along with tapping into the wealth of knowledge of their own organisation's client base, some also connected with existing groups in the local area and beyond to support the co-design process. These were typically done by hosting focus discussions about their proposed projects.

What was shared and reflected in the individual project evaluations was the many ways in which disabled people and people with mental health challenges, those with lived experience, were engaged with and involved in not only designing the pilots but delivering them as well.

Feedback From Partners:

"It takes a different approach from the beginning in order to make sure that the audience is, or the participants are or whoever the project is relevant to, are a meaningful part of it. It's a really positive way of working and it's not always easy,"

"It was really good to get them involved. It gave a totally different perspective on things."

9.PILOT PROJECT APPLICATION & AWARD PROCESS

During the "Understanding the Community stage," themed working groups embarked on the development of pilot concept ideas.

It became imperative to establish a structured process for the presentation, evaluation, and scoring of these pilot concepts to determine their feasibility and alignment with the overarching project.

Recognising the need for transparency and fairness in this evaluation process, FVAF extended an invitation to all collaborative partners to collectively design the mechanisms and procedures required for this purpose. The following process was initially outlined and agreed upon:

THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Collaborative partners were invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) for consideration by fellow partners, outlining the essential components of their research projects.

These components included: Aims and Objectives: Clear articulation of the project's goals and objectives. Key People/Stakeholders: Identification of the primary individuals and stakeholders involved in the project. Costs: Detailed cost estimates associated with the project. Timelines: A timeline specifying the project's duration and milestones. Scope: A comprehensive description of the project's scope and boundaries.

This EOI process served as a pivotal step in ensuring that all pilot concept ideas were thoroughly assessed and that only those found to be fundable and feasible within the project's parameters were advanced further. It promoted transparency, collaboration, and an equitable evaluation of these critical initiatives.

APPENDIX 7 –EOI Process Map
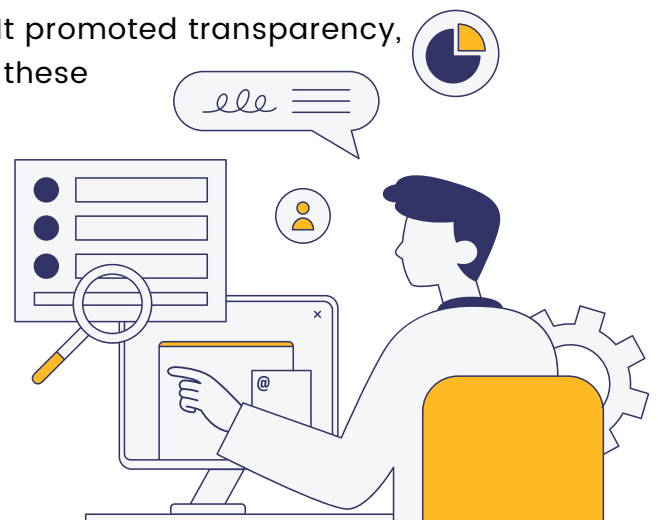
EOI SCORING PROCESS & QUESTION MATRIX

In tandem with the Expression of Interest (EOI) submission form, a collaboratively designed matrix of questions was developed. These questions were meticulously crafted to facilitate the comprehensive presentation of the proposed pilot projects in conjunction with the EOI submission form.

To ensure a fair and impartial evaluation process, each partner was requested to assess EOIs in which they had no direct involvement. To assist in this evaluation, a comprehensive project brief was shared in conjunction with the scoring matrix. This project brief provided valuable context and additional information, enhancing the accuracy and consistency of the scoring process. By combining the EOI submission form with the specially designed scoring matrix and detailed project brief, the evaluation process was streamlined, enabling a thorough assessment of all pilot project proposal.

These questions included:

1.Values
Please tell us how the proposed pilot project aligns with the project's values?
Project Values: Collaboration | Co-production | Lived Experience | Inclusivity | Accessibility

2.Innovation
Please describe how the proposed pilot project displays innovation that benefits the individual /target audience, resulting in increased digital inclusion?

3.Coproduction and Reach of Pilot Project
Describe how the project design and or delivery of project will involve people with "lived Experience"?
How does the project reach (or could potential reach) target audiences?
(target 'lived experience' audience)
- Learning Disabilities/ Additional Needs
- Physical Disabilities
- Sensory Disabilities
- Mental Health/ Wellbeing
- ·Children & Young People that may experience any of the above

4. Ability to deliver within the project timelines

- Does the project have the ability to be delivered within the 6-month project timeline?
- Are there contingencies plans in place in the event of project delays?

N.B. This section will be scored in conjunction with the detail provided in the EOI Project Charter.

5.Success Measures

Does the pilot project have bespoke systems and processes in place to capture success measures of the project for future evaluation?

Barnwood Evaluation measures:

- How your project has benefited disabled people and people with mental health conditions.
- How disabled people and people with mental health conditions have been involved in the planning, delivery and/or evaluation of your project.
- How you have made your projects accessible to a wide range of people.
- How you have considered the sustainability of your project beyond the life of the funding.

Numerical Data:

- How many disabled people and people with mental health conditions were involved in co-producing the work (e.g. involved in designing, planning and/or delivering the work)
- How many disabled people and people with mental health conditions took part in/accessed the activities or services you delivered (e.g. the number of people who attended workshops you delivered or accessed a service you provided)
- Please describe the specific measures you will put in place.

APPENDIX 8 - EOI Document A template
APPENDIX 9 - EOI Document B template
APPENDIX 10 - EOI scoring sheet
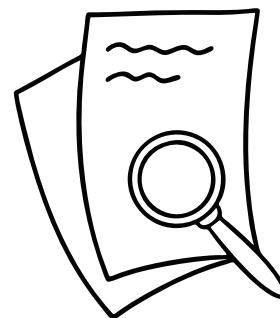
EOI INTERVIEWS

Initially, it was established that an independent interview panel would be designated for the concluding phase of the EOI scoring and selection process.

The panel's composition aimed to encompass diversity and include individuals with direct lived experience. Subsequently, each pilot project would be invited to address queries arising from the EOI scoring process in a face-to-face interview.

However, owing to the remarkable quality of the EOI submissions and the overall projected costs of the pilot projects falling within the allocated budget, a collective decision was reached not to proceed with the interview stage.

Instead, it was agreed, in principle, to provide funding for all six submitted pilot EOIs. This decision was made in order to streamline the process, recognising the merit and feasibility of these initiatives, and to expedite their implementation.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

Interviewees were asked on their experience in submitting their Expression of Interest and in being involved in the review and scoring of the proposals, determining which pilot projects would go forward.

Most pilot leads found the EOI process clear and easy to undertake. One pilot lead reflected how less arduous this was compared to their experience submitting funding applications to other grant funding organisations or statutory bodies. The EOI template, which was co-designed with partners, was found to be straightforward and a helpful way to capture the information required for submission.

However, when one project lead expressed some difficulty with the template, it was discussed and agreed with FVAF that they could organise the information in a way that made sense to them and their project, as long as all information required was included. This aligned with FVAF's intention to have an open, flexible, and collaborative approach within this Digital Inclusion Partnership programme.

One section of the Expression of Interest form required detailed costings for delivery of the project, and it was noted that although this was challenging to do, the structured way of approaching this meant that pilots mapped out all their costs, including ones that often are overlooked.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

All partners had an opportunity to read and score all of the proposed pilots.

Overall, this was noted as a positive experience, and described by interviewees as a "unique" "interesting" "helpful" and a "good" experience and one they had not done before.

Utilising this approach to decide which pilot projects went forward allowed all partners to see the range of projects proposed creating a sense of direction and anticipated impact for the whole locality. It also revealed to the group individual pilot leads/organisations area of interest and expertise.

For some, this created a sense of working together and made visible opportunities for further connections between and across projects, although this was not always capitalised on. This is likely due to the sense of limited time and capacity, with pilot leads preference to now focus on delivering their own pilot as described in the EOI. Many pilot leads described how this opportunity to review other project applications supported their own learning and noted how this experience will shape how they approach applications for funding differently in the future.

As part of the peer review of the applications, each partnership member was asked to score the proposal, which was a new experience for many of them. The scoring framework was noted as being "straightforward in theory" but not always so easy to do and quite subjective.

Although, for some pilot leads, there was a sense of urgency to "get doing", there was a sense of appreciation and a recognition of the value to have the time to really understand and design the pilots aligned to the needs of the people. Recognising by doing this you maximise the opportunity for success and learning in each of the pilot projects delivered.
.

Feedback From Partners:

"It's taking a really long time before we get to the EOI bit. But, again, I think it needed that time in terms of it being different and trying to achieve its goals in other ways. It like, timings on projects always end up getting a little bit stretched towards the end, don't they? And we in the end, had enough time to do all that we had wanted to do, within the time period that we had. "

10. PHASE 3: REMOVING THE BARRIERS
THE PILOT PROJECTS

Background

The mindset for this phase was to position digital as an 'enabler', with the development of pilot projects and shared resources to directly tackle the most common barriers as identified in the research phase (Phase 2).

Intended activity aimed to follow a hybrid/blended approach with online as well as face-to-face and physical activities and resources delivered to tackle broadly:

- Lack of digital infrastructure
- Poor Accessibility
- Low motivation and skills
- Limited knowledge of specialist equipment available
- Limited knowledge of support services and provision
- Lack of consistent trusted support

Phase timeline

The original timeframe for this phase was planned to last 9 months. However due to phase 1 & 2 taking longer than anticipated, phase 3 was initially shorted to 6 months, running from October 2023 to March 2024. This was communicated pre EOI design phase to partners, enabling them to plan for 6 months delivery.

Factors leading to the initial shortening of Phase 3- The pilots included:

- More time required to form partnership relationships
- Additional focus on themed working groups to define pilots' scope of work
- Desire to be led by lived experience, leading to community engagement and research focus taking longer than anticipated.
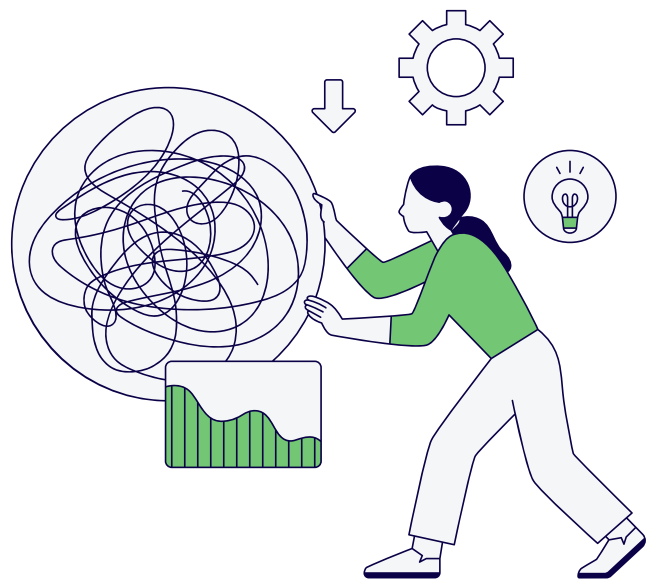
10. PHASE 3: REMOVING THE BARRIERS
THE PILOT PROJECTS

Reallocation of budget

£50k was initially allocated towards Pilot Projects. A decision was taken July 2023 that any underspend from Partner Remuneration and the Research phase would be repurposed to increase funding available for pilot delivery. The revised allocated budget for pilot projects totalled £106k, 50.08% of the overall £203,000 grant received from Barnwood Trust.

Following the EOI selection process, all 6 pilot proposals were confirmed and commenced delivery in October 2023. The allocation of funding for pilot projects totalled £89,076.

The remaining £16,924 was ringfenced as a contingency fund in the event of pilots requiring additional funding. It was further agreed that both partners and Barnwood Trust would be transparently informed of any overall underspend. Alongside this, a pledge was made to propose to Barnwood Trust, that underspend could be utilised as a legacy fund once the overall project finishes.

The Pilot Projects- Partnership and collaboration

The breadth and innovation of selected pilot projects demonstrates the skills, expertise's and ambitions of all partner organisations involved.

Particular attention to detail was taken in adopting co-production principles in the design, delivery and evaluation of each pilot projects. Examples of this flow across each pilot project and demonstrated in each pilot project evaluation. 8 organisations/ groups where involved in the delivery across the 6 pilots projects.

Collaboration between partners across the projects highlights the benefits of adopting a partnership approach to co-production and delivery. By doing so partners recognised and utilised each others skills and expertise's leading to greater impact.

As a result, all 6 pilots were delivered by a collaboration between one or more partners.

Selected EOI's

Forest of Dean Community Choir £6,200

- Jim = Development Director- Artspace Cinderford.
- Lisa - Facilitator, and Choir Leader
- Natalie - Forest Sensory Services.

This project aims to utilise digital technology to enable individuals with visual impairments to engage in creative activities, promoting their well-being. Specifically, it digitally connects users of Forest Sensory Services with the Artspace choir.

(APPENDIX 11 & 12 - EOI DOCS)

Virtual Sight Loss £5,912

- Vicki - Forest Sensory Services
- Seth - The Lab

Innovative solution, enabling more individuals to empathize with those experiencing sight loss. This project involves creating software that simulates specific eye conditions, adjustable by severity, through VR headsets. The aim is to provide users with the experience of living with visual impairment, encouraging empathy, support for others, and thoughtful actions.

(APPENDIX 15 & 16 EOI DOCS)

Camphill Village Trust - Digital Inclusion Workshops £17,099.64

- Janet - Camphill Village Trust
- Miriam – The Shalom Network

The project's primary objective is to deliver digital inclusion workshops to individuals with additional needs, sensory needs, and mental health conditions. The CVT Pilot Project focuses on empowering individuals with diverse needs through digital literacy, fostering inclusivity and independence.

(APPENDIX 13 & 14 EOI DOCS)

Selected EOI's

"Outdoors, Indoors"   £28,214.22

- Andrew Wilde Earth Journeys
- Vickie -Forest Sensory Services
- Seth – Innovation Lab

Innovative initiative designed to bring the beauty and tranquillity of nature to individuals who may not have the opportunity or the inclination to explore it independently. Using digital resources, the project aims to bridge the gap between the indoors and the outdoors, reducing misconceptions and encouraging people to engage with the natural world.

(APPENDIX 17 & 18 EOI DOCS)

Forest Pathways   £27,038

- Guy - Wye Dean Wellbeing/ Mindful Vision

Research focused project to understand and demonstrate website accessibility in FOD, This will be achieved Via combined methods of automated tests, and audits by people from the VI community, The research will help inform the proposed creation of "how to" / "self-help" resources so people can better understand and improve their website's accessibility.

(APPENDIX 19 & 20 EOI DOCS)

Project Engage   £5,000

- Lena - Dementia Action Alliance
- Alex - Forest Voluntary Action Forum

Capacity building and training of community building teams to facilitate "try before you buy "/ Device loan library consisting on digital equipment that can support care whilst reducing loneliness and isolation.

(APPENDIX 21 & 22 EOI DOCS)

FOREST OF DEAN COMMUNITY HYBRID CHOIR

"Bringing people together through digital connectivity and music"

Project Overview:

As part of the initial discussion between partner organisations for the Digital Inclusion project, the digitally-linked choir began as a request from Forest Sensory Services (FSS), their service asked users for singing classes at a similar time that Artspace began an in-house choir.

The service users at FSS were unable to access the Artspace building in central Cinderford mostly because of transport difficulties and lack of support staff, and so we wanted to look at ways to overcome barriers with digital technology and allow the learners to sing together.

Linking the two choirs digitally allowed them to develop their own styles of singing and work on similar songs in a different way. The benefit to participants was evaluated in terms of their reported wellbeing, confidence and improved skills (particularly performance skills), and both choirs have continued after the initial funding period, benefiting all participants.

FOREST OF DEAN COMMUNITY HYBRID CHOIR

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

Number of participants:

- 11 individuals enrolled in 12 sessions at FSS
- 81 total participations
- 21 individuals participated in 12 sessions at Artspace for a total of 151 participations.
- 30 participants across two groups identified as having a disability, mental health condition or as neurodivergent.

Key events:

- sessions completed January – April 2024,
- joint rehearsal/sharing event for both choirs at Artspace on Saturday 18 May,
- joint performance for both choirs at The Wesley Arts Centre Friday 19 July 2024

IMPACT:

- Participants showed an increase in their reported mood, not just as a result of participating in singing sessions, but also appeared to report that their mood was improved over the course of the sessions.
- Qualitative feedback emphasised the skills and confidence improvements
- ·participants were keen not only to continue to participate insinging sessions but also to perform publicly as a result of participating in the project.
- a wide range of unexpected positive outcomes as a result of the sessions, ranging from additional volunteering, participation in external creative activities (two participants making their own performance duo at local open mic nights)

LEGACY:

- Additional funding provided for 10 extra sessions.
- Match funding provided by Adult Education.
- Successful SCOPS education grant to continue FSS choir sessions for remainder of 2024.
- Aims to utilise technology and learning to embed in to upcoming learning programmes.
- Both the choirs have been invited to participate in community Christmas concert at St Stephen's church.

Participants quotes:

"These sessions are so great for getting me back into music and waking up my skills and confidence"

"My mental health and wellbeing has been restored for another week"

"By the end of the session I feel on top of the world"

Project Expenditure	
Allocated budget:	£6,200
Funding Extension: (Enabling 10 extra sessions)	£1,520
Equipment purchases: (incl allocated budget)	£1,980.75
Actual Pilot project spend: £ 7,637.75	

£82.25 UNDERSPEND FOR THE PROJECT

SUMMARY:

The Forest of Dean Community Hybrid Choir Pilot Project demonstrates how digital innovation and technology can help remove barriers to accessing community activities and education. By providing these positive experiences of digital technology, it can impact motivations at both organisational and participant level to further try out digital solutions.

These experiences can often be the catalyst to increasing inclusion via innovation for people with Disabilties and mental health challenges. By embedding more digital technology in both Adult Education programmes and community activities, it is hoped more people can become connected over shared hobbies and passions, leading to increased wellbeing and access to community learning.

The full evaluation of the project can be found in APPENDIX 23 Forest of Dean Hybrid Choir Final Evaluation.

CAMPHILL VILLAGE TRUST
DIGITAL INCLUSION WORKSHOP PILOT

_____

Project Overview:

The pilot project informed by a collaborative approach to co-production was brought together by the aims, aspirations and goals of Camphill Village Trust residents.

The people involved in the Digital Inclusion Project live in Grange Village and Oaklands Park which are two communities within Camphill Village Trust in the Forest of Dean. People who live in Camphill Village Trust are people with a learning disabilities, Autism and varying different levels of mental health.

The primary objective was to deliver digital inclusion workshops to individuals with additional needs, sensory needs, and mental health conditions.

The pilots focus was on empowering individuals with diverse needs through digital literacy, fostering inclusivity and independence. Central to the delivery of the pilot was two volunteers with lived experience.

During the research phase, learning and insights from a "pilot before the pilot" - research workshops enabled a better understanding of the desired learning environment and equipment requirements for the participants to increase accessibility and impact.

CAMPHILL VILLAGE TRUST
DIGITAL INCLUSION WORKSHOP PILOT

IMPACT:

- 8 participants with additional needs, sensory needs, and mental health conditions attended the programme.
- 40 hours of learning facilitated across the pilot- = 160+ hours of participation.
- 2 lived experience volunteers/ 40+ hours of volunteering, supporting delivery.
- 2- Bespoke lesson plans created for each session. Beginners and advanced content
- 46 page Easy read- How to guide developed covering each topic in the pilot.
- 44 page Comic Strip- Online safety resource produced to assist learning.
- Purchase of accessibility focused IT equipment to aid learning

LEGACY:

- Podcasting idea shared across CVT Cop-production team with aim to set-up new podcasting group and purchase equipment
- Easy Read Guide Booklet & ComicStrip resources where created-
- 70+ professionally printed copies of to be shared across both The Shalom Network and CVT houses/ settlements and residents.
- Future opportunity to share learning/ resources across adult social care in Gloucestershire
- Volunteer Reece, taking role in Community Action Pod to further develop his digital skills and interests to help him find work.

Participants & volunteers Feedback:

"Before the Digital Inclusion project, I used Zoom on my tablet to call my mum and used YouTube. The course has helped me to understand how to be safeand not to go to areas that are unsafe." – Learner

"It has helped me with my social skills, one to one teaching, learning how best to manage my time. I have used my computer skills to help others in the group. The Digital Inclusion project has helped me to think about other things I can do with technology. I see it as a steppingstone to future exploration into technology" –Volunteer

"I really enjoyed the podcasting and hope we can get our own equipment to do more of it." – Leaner

Project Expenditure

Allocated budget:	£17,099.64
Equipment purchases: (incl allocated budget)	£4,870.05

Actual Pilot project spend: £16,741.20

£358.44 UNDERSPEND FOR THE PROJECT

SUMMARY:

The CVT - Digital Inclusion Workshop Pilot illustrates the wide-ranging impacts that can be achieved when applying co-production and co-design principles to project design and delivery. This action learning, person-centred approach to group learning, reveals the complexities and challenges faced when facilitating group digital literacy lessons.

These complexities increase in-line with group sizes and the varying range of knowledge, skills and experience of the group. It emphasises the need for additional resource and funding to enable more support in group settings, with the ability to provide 1:2 and some cases 1:1 to support.

Confidence building, social connection, skills development and new found curiosity for digital are all positive impacts experienced by participants. It is hoped that this will be a stepping stone for the group to move on to the next stage of their digital skills journey.

Via the co-creation of Easy Read guides, and comic strips, Internet safety has become imbedded and resources are now accessible. These accessible resources acting as an enabler to move forward with confidence in internet safety.

To finish, the remarkable achievements and contributions of the 2 volunteers with lived experience should be highly commended. The inclusive environment which has positively impacted to their personal, social, and employment skills is a testament to The Shalom Network and CVT values of inclusivity. Without this inclusivity and lived experience involvement, the pilot wouldn't have seen the high-level of joy, impact and passion.

The full evaluation on the pilot project can be found in APPENDIX 24

"OUTDOORS, INDOORS"

Project Overview:

This 'proof of concept' pilot project aim was to create a digital library of immersive films, audio recordings, and a virtual reality environment of the Forest of Dean to replicate natures therapeutic benefits on mental and emotional health.

The initiative was inspired by historic research highlighting nature's therapeutic benefits on mental and emotional health.

This pilot project successfully created a digital library of immersive films, audio recordings, and a virtual reality environment to replicate these benefits, demonstrating significant positive impacts on participants' wellbeing.

Participant Engagement:
- The project engaged 41 participants, with a diverse age range from 20 to 84.
- Significant number of participants reported medical conditions or disabilities.

Created content:
- 10 Youtube Films
- 15 Soundscape films
- 2 Youtube Livestreams
- 10 VR Environment
- 30+ uploads to Outdoors Indoors YT Playlist

"OUTDOORS, INDOORS"

CONTENT CREATION EQUIPMENT INVESTMENT:

£3966 was invested in equipment. Example of these are:
- Specialist contact Mic's
- High powered Editing Laptops
- Audio Recording device

Through the delivery of the pilot, 3 events were held to premiere the content with the intention to capture feedback and impact it had on individuals.

Sounds of Nature Playlist Events

Event 1: Hosted on December 19, 2023, at Speech House with outpatients from Colliers Court and referrals from Social Prescribers. Participants reported the experience as "relaxing" and "therapeutic."

Event 2: On March 5, 2024, at Forest Sensory Services for visually impaired attendees. The nature sounds, particularly a recording interrupted by a dog, were well-received, prompting engaging discussions and positive feedback about the calming and nostalgic effects

Event 3: Virtual Reality and Video Experiences

Butterfly Gardens Event: On May 9, 2024, the team showcased VR and video experiences to volunteers and Disabled attendees at the Butterfly Garden. Positive feedback emphasised the relaxing and engaging nature of the VR environment, regardless of this being a proof of concept and needing adjustments in situ to aid user's experience.

"OUTDOORS, INDOORS"

LEGACY & FUTURE PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS:

Based on the achievements and challenges of the various pilot projects arranged by Wilde Earth Journeys (WEJ), there are a few strands of continual development and areas of research that could be interesting to develop further:

- Expand Digital content library
- Accessibility improvements & Digital Literacy Workshops
- Mental Health Initiatives
- Digital Personalisation and Technological Advancements

By focusing on these key areas of research, WEJ can build on the success of the pilot project, addressing identified challenges and expanding its impact on community wellbeing through innovative, yet inclusive nature-based engagement solutions.

Participants & volunteers Feedback:

""I think it was very clever, very, very clever. Thank you. I've never done that before, so. That's another tick"

"I thought it was very good. It was very foresty and I thought you could wander around, which was the whole point of it. So I really enjoyed it … I thought it was just brilliant."

"I thought it was lovely. It felt like you were in the forest. It was nice to be able to pick things up and turn them over to see what the flower was like underneath."

"OUTDOORS, INDOORS"

Project Expenditure	
Allocated budget:	£28,214.22
Equipment purchases: (incl allocated budget)	£3,966.31
Actual Pilot project spend: £25,298.51	

TOTAL £2,915.71 UNDERSPEND FOR THE PROJECT

SUMMARY:

Wilde Earth Journeys has successfully leveraged digital resources to enhance community wellbeing through nature engagement. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from various community groups highlights the project's significant impact on mental and emotional health.

The pilot project provides a strong foundation for future initiatives, ensuring that the therapeutic benefits of nature continue to reach those who need them most.
By expanding the digital content library, improving accessibility, and conducting educational workshops, WEJ can further its mission of fostering wellbeing through nature, ensuring inclusivity and sustainability in its future endeavours.

The full evaluation of the project can be found in appendix APPENDIX 25

FOREST PATHWAYS

Project Overview:

The research focused project aimed to understand and demonstrate website accessibility in the FOD, This would be achieved via combined methods of automated tests and audits by people from the VI community.

The research aims to help inform the proposed creation of "how to"/"self-help" resources so organisations can better understand and improve their website's accessibility.

Delivery:
Forest Pathways worked with forest related website owners helping them to understand their website from an accessibility perspective and explain how they might be excluding people because of disability.

Through the research phase it became clear that you would need an army and several lifetimes to hand hold individuals through the necessary processes to make their websites accessible. The initial data sets produced from working with local companies indicated none of the sites were accessible.

DELIVERY cont...

It was then decided much more data and evidence was needed to try and work out what the challenges were and why.

Going from the initial 12 websites which were audited, over 600 forest of dean website and over 700 Gloucestershire websites were tested.

A further 20 principal websites and 178 websites associated to Forest of Dean's VCS sector (see appendix) were tested. Total number of web pages analysed using automated testing was in excess of 200,000.

The testing phase demonstrated the very poor state of website accessibility in the Forest of Dean and beyond.

The data was used to establish common trends of failings to develop the resources and self-help videos so people and organisations can better understand how they could improve their websites accessibility.

For the main phase of the project, we worked with visually impaired and blind people who because of their disability were able to inform us about website accessibility based on their own lived experiences. These experiences allowed us to produce the resources and refine the testing process.

Lived experience data gathering

Data gathering was crucial to the project as it identified the enormity of the problem and the data would enable resources to be built to show the public, businesses and developers how to improve websites and code.
Additional Data sources:

* RNIB data - Sight Loss Data Tool
* Barnwood – Digital Divides Gloucestershire

The project worked with individuals with varied disabilities but included people who use the following assistive technologies due to their sight impairment:

* JAWS
* Supernova
* Electronic magnifier
* NVDA
* Apple IOS accessibility tools
* Elderly citizens

The a range of disabilities of people who conducted manual testing ranged from being blind, severely sight impaired, visual impairment, macular degeneration and cataracts.
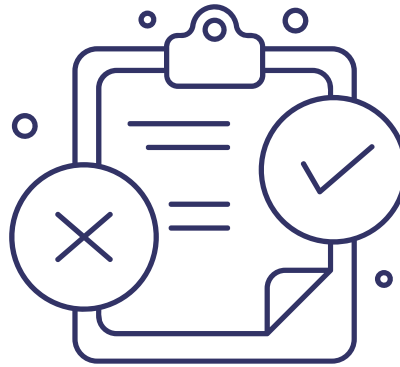
FOREST PATHWAYS

Testing:

The following organisations took up the offer for an electronic audit during the research phase:

- ArtSpace
- CAB
- Dean Heritage Centre
- Forest Sensory Service
- Forest Pulse
- DiverseLeap
- Newent Initiative Trust
- Ross Labels
- Shalom Network
- Forest Pathways
- Ashley's Meadow

Only one organisation engaged in further work.

Created resources & self-help materials

Through the research and findings, a vast range of resources and self help materials where created. These are now freely available thanks to the project funding which has enabled Forest pathways to produce a resource platform. www.forestpathways.co.uk.

Written- online accessible documents
- 25 Website accessibility
- 66 How to
- 31 News
- 7 About
- 25 About assistive technology
- 25 Testing resources
- 1 Accessibility

Videos
- 34 Our videos
- 1 Testing video
- 3 How to
- 56 Videos we love
- 2 About videos
- 1 Learning video

Project adjustments

As the project progressed adjustments were made:
- More budget was made available from the how to videos and resources to be able to increase the manual testing.
- Budget was allocated to YouTube training which was used to promote the resources and was shared with another partner, Wilde Earth Journeys and continue to collaborate to develop YouTube strategies.

"OUTDOORS, INDOORS"

Project findings

- Out of the Forest of Dean 500 tested sites 73 passed a WAVE test (web accessibility evaluation tool that checks a website for accessibility issues) but government data would suggest that up to 60% - 70% inaccuracy meaning data could be out by a huge margin.
- ·Manual testing indicated that even when websites had scored with no errors 9 out of 10 websites would not be accessible.
- Automated testing identified common accessibility failings which we refined to 12 of the most common accessibility failings

> ## Guy Woodland- Project lead
>
> The greatest take away from the project is the complete reluctance of organisations to engage with inclusivity and accessibility beyond the usual tick box acknowledgement. The common factors are:
>
> • Lack of skills
> • Lack of knowledge
> • Company culture issues
> • Company does not care
> • No support form organisation in terms of time and or resource
> • No testing so actually doesn't know the status of their platform
> • Don't understand legal obligations
> • A commitment to acknowledge challenges and then nothing is done about those challenges.

Next steps:

Widen scope to the world wide web.

- Develop a recruitment and training program to employ people from the VI community to be accessibility ambassadors and auditors.
- Opportunity to hold an accessibility workshop at the GrowthHub in Mitcheldean

FOREST PATHWAYS

Project Expenditure	
Allocated budget:	£27,038.00
YouTube Training	£1,976.44
Actual Pilot project spend: £27,636.44	

TOTAL £598.44 OVERSPEND FOR THE PROJECT.

SUMMARY:

This innovative research focused pilot project has taken huge strides in generating much needed awareness around the importance of online accessibility and the common accessibility faults found on websites.

In addition to this, it paints a vivid picture of the common negative experiences people from the VI community typically have when using the internet.

The research further reveals the challenges the VCS sector face in regards to skills, knowledge, understanding, funding and resource required to positively implement change to their websites' accessibility standards.

These challenges are further acerbated due website accessibility requirements being complex to understand, often requiring specialist support, in an emerging field with conflicting advice and guidance. It is hoped with pending legislation on website accessibility standards, Forest Pathways passion and drive will take further leaps making the online world accessible to all.

The full evaluation of the project can be found in APPENDIX 26 APPENDIX 27 Executive Summary

VIRTUAL SIGHT LOSS
&
PROJECT ENGAGE

It is important to note that not all projects were able to deliver their pilot fully as set out in their EOI's.

The 2 pilot projects (the Virtual Sight Loss Experience and Project Engage) did not progress sufficiently in the delivery stage for a robust evaluation of the work undertaken.

Due to varying reasons, both projects experienced significant challenges related to organisational and staffing changes, which subsequently created capacity issues for delivery.

With the acknowledgment of the potential impact of these two pilots, the Digital and Community Hubs Facilitator at FVAF took on a greater support role, ensuring that the progression of the work continued, albeit at a much slower rate.

Although there has not been the progress and success anticipated with these 2 projects, the pilot leads and those involved in supporting these projects can clearly identify the learning which has occurred and can be built on going forward.

It is hoped that these two projects will continue to be supported to full delivery in the future.

VR VI PILOT

Project overview

Innovative solution, enabling more individuals to empathise with those experiencing sight loss. This project involves creating software that simulates specific eye conditions, adjustable by severity, through VR headsets. The aim is to provide users with the experience of living with visual impairment, encouraging empathy, support for others, and thoughtful actions.

Challenges:
- Capacity/staff change at FFS led to not participating in project as previously planned in EOI
- VR developer- left mid-way through project and refused to pass on work.
- Technology not as advanced as initially thought.
- This enforced a restart on content development- Feb 24 leading to delays. Completion of the VR content is due to completion September 2024.

Project Expenditure	
Allocated budget:	£5,912.00
Equipment purchases: (incl allocated budget)	£958.00
Actual Pilot project spend: £ £3,388.00	

TOTAL £2,524 UNDERSPEND ON THE PROJECT

NEXT STEPS:
- Forest Sensory Services are keen to reengage once the VR content is finalised. And wish to test and utilising both content and VR headset with their service users
- Strong desire within FOD Dementia Action Alliance to utilise the VR resource to create awareness and empathy for people living with dementia.

PROJECT ENGAGE

Project overview

Capacity building and training of community building teams to facilitate "try before you buy "/"Device loan library consisting on digital equipment that can support care whilst reducing loneliness and isolation.

Challenges:
Due to capacity and shifting priorities of both project leads and respective teams, the project was unable to move forward as planned.

Project Expenditure	
Allocated budget:	£5,000
Actual Pilot project spend: £0	

NEXT STEPS:

- Despite unable to move forward, the "loan library" equipment remains accessible to the public.
- Plans are underway to understand how to resource capacity budling across VCS stakeholders
- The project has previous funding reservesfor the project, held by Forest Dementia Action Alliance.
- Additonal acknowledgment of need to continue with project
- Working with clinical occupational therapist to assist in connecting opportunities to people in need.

Project Engage which had previously been financially supported by Barnwood Trust to undertake this project. Once the Digital Inclusion Partnership was formed, it made sense to include this project within the Partnership pilots to offer more support in ensuring its progression. This was supported by Barnwood Trust. The previous funding received from Barnwood Trust for Project Engage is not included in the above figures only the allocated amount from the Partnership fund as agreed in the pilot application process.

FOREST COMMUNITY ACTION POD PILOT PROJECT

The Community Action Pod
Melanie Benn

Project Overview:

One additional pilot project idea came to light in January 2024. The idea first came up during discussions on how could the successes and impacts of the pilot projects be shared in innovative ways.

With common communication styles being in a visual format, The idea of a Community focused podcast that would help tell powerful stories of local impact in audio form sparked great enthusiasm.

The concept was discussed with multiple partners before being presented to Barnwood Trust to which they loved the idea of and confirmed that some of the underspend from the overall pilot project budget could be utilised to fund the following:

- Set-up of Community Focused Podcast
- To purchase podcasting kit that would also be accessible to the partnership and communities.
- To create a 6-episode pilot Podcast series

FOREST COMMUNITY ACTION POD PILOT PROJECT

Themes & Podcast concept

Following the decision to move forward with the Podcast idea, FVAF's Community Builder, Melanie Benn took on the responsibility for the project. Leading on the podcast concept, purchasing equipment and acting as the Podcast host.

With Melanie's passion to share stories of community action the Community Action Pod was formed. It primary aim being to share stories the incredible organisations, volunteers and groups doing meaningful work in relation to:

- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Digital Inclusion
- Dementia awareness and support
- Disability Advocacy
- Inclusive Community Activities.
- Volunteering

The concept further developed to include interviews for episodes that involve FOD Digital Inclusion Partnership partners. This presented a great opportunity to promote pilot projects, there impacts, organisations involved and the voice of participants and their experiences.

Episode Focus

4 of the 6 episodes have been released across multiple podcasting platforms with the final 2 episodes planned to be released across September & October 2024.

Episode 1- Nature & Wellbeing- Special Guest Wilde Earth Journeys
Episode 2- Digital Inclusion- Special Guest The Shalom Network & CVT residents.
Episode 3- Mens Shed- special Guest FOD Community Shed
Episode 4- Dementia- Why inclusive communities are crucial
Episode 5- FOD Volunteer Awards Special
Episode 6- Access and Inclusivity in the Arts- Special guest ArtSpace.

The initial 4 episodes have been well received alongside positive feedback, with over 180 episode downloads to date.

THE COMMUNITY ACTION pod

CREATED WITH THE LOVE OF GRASSROOTS AND COMMUNITY ACTION AT THE HEART

LISTEN NOW!

LISTEN HERE

Showcasing inspiring stories, in an accessible format, from local people who have made their ideas come to life.

Featured guests so far:
- Camphill Village Trust
- The Shalom Network *and*
- Wilde Earth Journeys

The podcast kit is also available for hire to voluntary community groups.

For more information on The Community Action Pod and ways to get involved contact the Host Melanie Benn

@ melanie@fvaf.org.uk 📞 01594 822073

Produced by: Forest Voluntary Action Forum

Funded by: The Barnwood Trust Digital Inclusion Fun

FOREST COMMUNITY ACTION POD PILOT PROJECT

Wider Impact and Use

Further use has been made of the podcast kit that was purchased via the fund. CVT residents had the opportunity to try out the kit as part of their Digital Skills pilot project. The residents enjoyed learning and using the kit so much they requested use of it to record audio versions of comic strips that had created on online safety.

Project Expenditure	
Allocated budget:	£5,500
Equipment purchases: (incl allocated budget)	£623.67
Actual Pilot project spend: £5,500	

NEXT STEPS:

- Develop volunteer model to assist in the recording and editing of future episodes
- Seek local sponsorship and funding opportunities to produce more episodes
- Utilise the podcast platform and brand to advocate disability inclusion
- Promote access of Community Podcast kit

QUANTITATIVE TAKEAWAYS

Forest of Dean Community Hybrid Choir
- Participants: 30 individuals with disabilities or mental health conditions.
- Sessions: 12 sessions at FSS (81 participations) and 12 sessions at Artspace (151 participations).

Camphill Village Trust - Digital Inclusion Workshops
- Participants: 8 individuals with additional needs, sensory needs, and mental health conditions.
- Sessions: 40 hours of learning facilitated.
- Volunteers: 2 volunteers with lived experience, contributing 40+ hours.
- Resources created: 46-page easy-read guide and 44-page comic strip on online safety..

"Outdoors, Indoors"
- Participants: 41 individuals aged 20 to 84.
- Content Created: 10 YouTube films, 15 soundscape films, 2 YouTube livestreams, 1 VR environment.
- Events: 3 premiere events.

Forest Pathways
- Websites Tested: Over 600 Forest of Dean websites, 700 Gloucestershire websites, and 200,000+ web pages.
- Resources created: Numerous guides and videos on website accessibility.

Forest Community Action Pod
- Episodes Released: 4 out of 6 planned episodes.
- Downloads: Over 180 episode downloads.

Equipment investment
- £12,746.75 was invested in equipment across all pilot projects
- The invested equipment sits within a equipment hire pool accessible to partners and communities

QUALITATIVE TAKEAWAYS

Forest of Dean Community Hybrid Choir

- Impact on Well-being: Participants reported improved mood, confidence, and performance skills.
- Unexpected Outcomes: Increased volunteering and participation in external creative activities.
- Legacy: Continued sessions with additional funding and integration into adult education programmes.

Camphill Village Trust - Digital Inclusion Workshops

- Learning Environment: Tailored support and easy-read materials enhanced accessibility.
- Volunteer Impact: Volunteers with lived experience played a crucial role in creating an inclusive environment.
- Legacy: Creation of easy-read guides and comic strips on internet safety, with plans for future podcasting activities.

"Outdoors, Indoors"

- Therapeutic Benefits: Participants reported the digital nature experiences as relaxing and therapeutic.
- Engagement: Positive feedback from diverse community groups highlighted the project's impact on mental and emotional health.
- Future Development: Plans to expand the digital content library and improve accessibility.

Forest Pathways

- Awareness: Raised awareness about the importance of online accessibility and common accessibility faults.
- Challenges: Highlighted the skills, knowledge, and resource gaps in the VCS sector regarding website accessibility.
- Future Steps: Plans to widen the scope of the project and develop a recruitment and training programme for accessibility ambassadors.

Forest Community Action Pod

- Storytelling: The podcast effectively shared stories of local impact, promoting community initiatives and digital inclusion.
- Participant Engagement: Engaged CVT residents in podcasting, enhancing their digital skills and confidence.
- Future Plans: Develop a volunteer model for recording and editing, seek sponsorship, and promote the podcast platform.

REFLECTIONS

The pilot projects collectively demonstrated the transformative potential of digital inclusion initiatives. Key reflections include:

Co-Production and Inclusivity: The involvement of individuals with lived experience was crucial in designing and delivering impactful projects. This approach ensured that the projects were relevant and responsive to the needs of the target audience.

Challenges and Adaptability: Some projects faced various challenges, including capacity issues and delays. However, the ability to adapt and learn from these challenges was a significant strength of the partnership.

Sustainability and Legacy: Many projects seek additional funding to continue delivery whilst having developed resources that will continue to benefit the community beyond the project's lifespan. This focus on sustainability is essential for long-term impact.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS:

During the interviews, project leads were given an opportunity to share reflections on the successes, challenges and learning in the delivery phase. As greater detail of this is captured in each of the individual pilot project final evaluations, the focus of this part of the interview was to identify key themes across all projects. Specifically, what were the factors that supported successful delivery, what were the barriers and challenges encountered and what is the overall learning in the delivery of the projects through the partnership.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

The remaining 4 pilot projects were all able to share the success and impact of their pilots. Indeed, many pilot leads noted that their expectations of the project have been exceeded.

Feedback From Partners

"I don't know that I really would have ever appreciated the potential, the positive impact, how much impact it had. And the desire that's been created to do more, the real drive to do more, and to expand it."
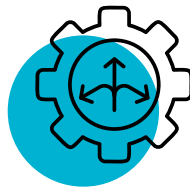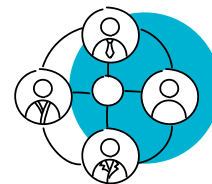
"The impact was phenomenal"

3 factors emerged as vital in supporting the successful delivery of the pilot projects:

Learning mindset   **Flexibility & opportunity**   **Opportunity to collaborate**

A Learning Mindset

A large part of the reason for the success of pilots was the "learning" mindset instilled into the projects and adopted by all pilot leads.

Each lead described using a continuous feedback process to shape and refine how delivery was undertaken as the pilot progressed and were not afraid to do so. Every lead noted the need to adjust delivery of the pilot at some point in their projects. For many this was due to technology not working as anticipated and/or their own knowledge on how to use it. Many recognised that in future projects more learning or support in this area was needed.

In some pilots the skills and abilities of the project participants was not as anticipated with either an over or under estimation of abilities. Projects were quickly adjusted to accommodate the differing needs in these cases.

FLEXIBILITY & OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

Many pilot leads described how they appreciated being able to have the flexibility to adjust and, in some case, expand their pilot briefs as new opportunities were recognised. And by doing so they created a greater impact than anticipated.

Pilot leads generally felt supportive in doing so, particularly where changes in projects were of a more minor nature. What was not anticipated was the need for some pilots to significantly change their approach to enhance their impact.

In these cases, there was not an agreed or built in process on how to bring back partners together as a whole to share, review and sense check the changes proposed. This left FVAF under pressure and feeling solely responsible in ensuring there was not too significant mission creep and that the changed pilot projects were still able to deliver the agreed outputs to support the overall aims and objectives of the Partnership programme.

For pilot leads, excited about the new opportunities they have identified, they felt frustrated with the additional scrutiny they were placed under, and this created a strain on partner relationships.

LEARNING REFLECTION

A reflective learning of FVAF is the absence of a much-needed Partnership MoU (Memorandum of Understanding), inclusive of shared principles and values. From FVAF's experience of project delivery via partnerships, peer-to-peer accountability, and open scrutiny has remained central to the partnerships success.

Having a formalised MoU may of helped mitigate challenges and frustrations. Whilst feelings of frustration due to perceived additional scrutiny must be validated, no behaviours of additional scrutiny where displayed. With all partners, and pilot projects treated equitably. It may be that the feeling of additional scrutiny stems from the misperceptions that major changes to projects wouldn't face similar scrutiny they would typically get from a funder administrating traditional grant funding, in comparison to a funding through partnership model that was used.

A learning moving forward could be for the partnership to discuss their experiences of peer-to-peer accountability, communicating preferences and to map out differences between Grant Funding VS a Funding through partnership model.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

Opportunity to Collaborate with Others

All pilot leads described the benefit of collaborating and working with others, either with Digital Inclusion partner members or others who were contacted to support their work.

Pilot leads reflected on the need to have the range of skills around a project. Having a knowledge of disability, and an understanding of digital exclusion issues and what was needed to address these was not enough. People with the digital technical skills who understand the power and potential of the technology to address the barriers was also required.

A good example of this is with the Virtual Sight Loss experience project, and their proposal to use virtual reality to enhance understanding of the impact of sight loss for everyday activities of living and in using technology.

The collaboration and links made with the Innovation Lab, and the understanding and skills the Lab technician brought to the partnership enhanced this work greatly and has resulted in a project brief with a much improved, personalised experience going forward.

OVERALL REFLECTIONS ON DELIVERY OF PILOT PROJECTS

During the interviews and reading the pilot projects evaluations it is clear the pilot projects have played a significant and successful role in achieving the ambitions set by the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership programme.

Key to the successful delivery was the pilot projects openness, flexibility, and willingness to embrace a learning mindset throughout this stage. The importance of collaboration and working with others was noted and very much appreciated.

The challenges and frustrations noted by many of the pilot leads tended to centre around the governance structures for the pilot projects. On reflection it was noted that perhaps not enough time, attention, or capacity was given to work through and collectively agree the necessary policies, processes and procedures needed to guide decision making and support smooth delivery of the projects.

However, despite the challenges, many of the pilot leads were proud of what they had achieved, and noted the projects exceeded even what they could anticipate.

PHASE 3 CONCLUSION

Whilst the revised timeframe for the agreed pilot projects was Oct to March 2024, 6 months. additional time was provided to all projects via mutual agreement.

The decision was taken in the interest for pilot projects to achieve their full potential, optimising their learning and impact.

Where pilots didn't plan in evaluation write-up time in their EOI, they were provided more time to formally write up and share their evaluation.

The total time of this phase took 9 months which was proposed in the project proposal bid to Barnwood Trust

The Forest of Dean Digital Inclusion Partnership has laid a strong foundation for ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide, demonstrating the power of community collaboration and the importance of inclusive, user-centric approaches.

The pilot projects have exceeded expectations, showcasing the significant impact of digital inclusion initiatives on individual participants with disabilities and mental health challenges.

Moving forward, the partnership aims to build on these successes, addressing identified challenges and expanding its impact through innovative and inclusive digital solutions.
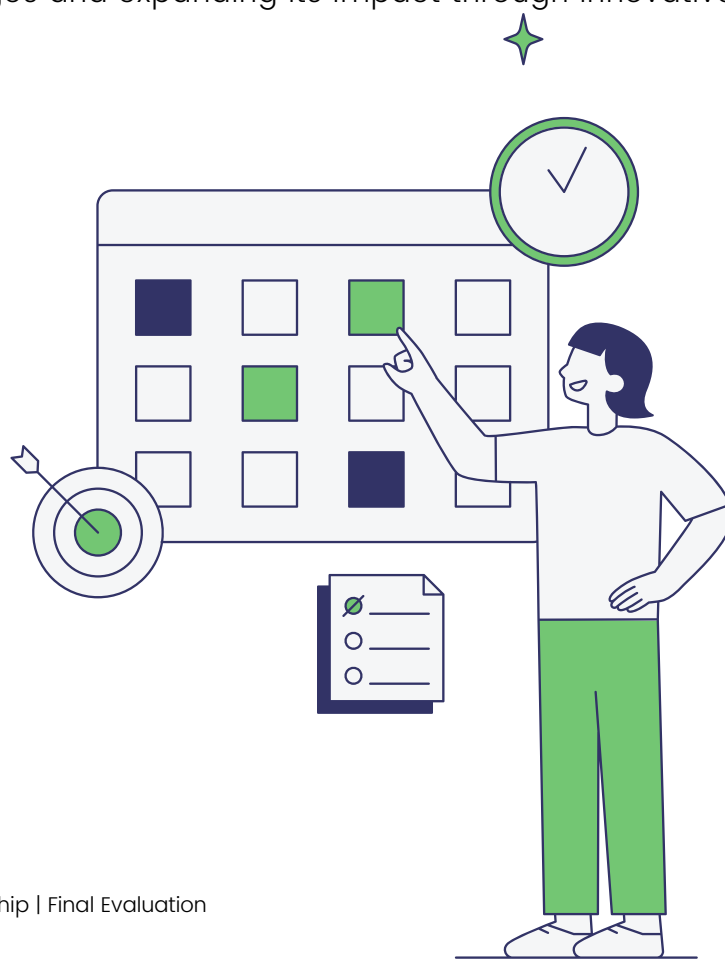
11.THE DIGITAL SUPPORT DIRECTORY

Background

One of the goals of this project was to build on the initial asset map collated by Digital Divides to create a trusted and central point of resource and information.

A core element of the research phase was to draw up a detailed asset map of all the existing services and opportunities that currently operate to support disabled people and people with mental health challenges in the Forest of Dean. Alongside this, a comprehensive analysis and record of suitable, accessible local community venues would be created. All the gathered information would be complied into a clear, concise, and fully accessible Digital Support Directory.

This Digital Support Directory would be aimed primarily for use by the community and therefore would be co-produced with the project's community advocates. This will ensure that we create a user friendly and accessible publication.

We know that this style and format of publication offers real benefit and value to the community, having recently created and distributed similar comprehensive directories, Forest Compass and Volunteering in the Forest of Dean.

RESEARCH & DIRECTORY DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the duration of the project, continued focused was put on collating details of new and existing digital inclusion provision being delivered across the Forest of Dean.

What became apparent, there was little to no bespoke offer in the district in the form digital inclusion that is designed or aimed at disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

Other than person- centred offers such as the Digi Hubs Project and Adult Education courses, it made it challenging to build on the initial asset map collated by Digital Divides.

Focus was pivoted to updating existing asset maps which captured existing services and opportunities that currently operate to support disabled people and people with mental health challenges in the Forest of Dean.

This work enabled a fresh update to the popular 'Forest Compass'. This physical and digital directory lists 100s of community groups, services and provisions. Many of which are accessible to disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

Forest Digital Compass- contents
To accompany the 'Forest Compass' a 'Forest Digital Compass' was formed. The contents of the Forest Digital Compass includes:
- Introduction and overview of FOD Digital Inclusion Partnership
- Overview of each pilot project being delivered by the Partnership
- Bio and contact details of each Partner organisation and their services
- Information on where to access community based 1:1 support
- Advertisement of the Community Action Pod.

RESEARCH AND DIRECTORY DEVELOPMENT

Distribution and Reach

Version 1 of the 'Forest Digital Compass' was built in to the 'Forest Compass' making it a dual purpose resource for communities. On one side you have the Forest Compass, when you flip it round you have the 'Digital Compass'.

Taking this approach meant the distribution and reach of the directory would be far greater. It is hoped that people facing digital exclusion will pick up the dual directory with unintended purposes to find out about digital inclusion provision but result in becoming more curious and motivated to become digital included and take up one of the offerings listed.

1000 physical copies were printed. Each copy consisting of 156 pages. Over 700 copies have been distributed across the Forest of Dean, with a particular focus distributing to community centers, information points, day centers, and place based spaces were services operate supporting disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

Version 2 of the 'Forest Digital Compass' is a standalone directory, consisting of 16 pages. 700 copies are on order for print with distribution plans in place like the approach taken with version 1.

Digital and accessibility adaptations

From FVAF's experiences of creating and distributing directories, Physical copies are often the preference for people. However there is a place and purpose for digital versions to be created. PDF versions of both versions are under construction and will soon be accessible online on a variety of platforms. Further plans and ambitions are to create accessibility adapted versions to ensure screen readers and accessibility tools can read its contents appropriately.

Directory Costings	
Allocated budget	£5,000
Development & printing	£2,500
Remain budget held for further development £2500	

12 OVERALL PROJECT
LEARNINGS & CHALLENGES

A core aim of the community partnership project was to create a long-lasting legacy and sustainable change for the whole community.

Throughout the project, a robust process of review and evaluation was carried out to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the activity. The aim for this to be achieved was by following an agreed project delivery plan template. This project plan ensuring consistency of the type and quality of delivery and accurate and timely collection of participant insight data.

At the end of the project's timeline, as a collective, the partnership would propose and agree on next steps to ensure learning is acted on and the successful outcomes are sustainable.

A final evaluation report of the findings, learnings, outcomes and successes would be published and available publicly to the whole community.

In this section we explore the learning and challenges captured throughout duration of the overall project.

FVAF embraces the learning and challenges identified across the project and the independent evaluation findings. In remaining true to its organisational values, FVAF is dedicated to action learning and committed to learning from all experiences and challenges that have been identified. Through reflective practice and partnership working, these critical learnings will be used to inform both existing and future projects, partnerships and collaborations.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

During the interview, most pilot leads noted an issue related to proposed pay rates which were deemed too low and/or not refined enough to recognise the varied roles that may be required to support a project. Further discussion surrounding this occurred, and revised rates were confirmed by FVAF to support both budget planning at the application stage and ensuring that rates quoted were competitive for the work undertaken.

REFLECTIONS & LEARNINGS' PAY RATES

The initial rate for partner remuneration was set at £31.25 PH.

This is considered to be a generous hourly rate for the sector in comparison to other VCS partnerships- for example Integrated Locality Partnership rumination fees are set at £28 PH.

The high rate of £31.25 PH was set to reflect the senior level of representation the partnership aimed to achieve, alongside the high level of strategic work that was required by partners in the initial phases of the project.

As the partnership developed, it revealed some partners were unable to claim rumination due to their statutory role preventing them. Whilst this didn't create issues or barriers to participation, it is important learning to capture and should be considered when creating cross sector partnerships that involve statutory involvement, such partners from the NHS, and County council.

Across both phase 1 & 2, there was a large disparity between the total hours claimed by partners at the initial £31.25 rate.

Some fulfilled their total monthly allocation consistently; some didn't claim any hours. This could reflect the diverse range of membership in the partnership. For example, partners who are salary-based employees at an organisations and therefor rumination fees wouldn't affect their monthly income.

Whilst others not on salary-based income who are more reliant on project based fundings and remuneration for earnings. These learnings are interesting and require further exploration surrounding motivations and driving facts of participating in partnerships where remuneration is offered.

It was first raised by a partner during the research phase if the existing partner claim rate would transfer across to the project delivery phase. They expressed that this would require consideration due to the varying level of roles and tasks which would be carried out. This revealed that a flat rate of £31.25 PH could heavily inflate costs of pilot delivery. If not acted on, it could prevent pilot projects from identifying feasibility, sustainability, and hidden costs.

With the view to ensure the most value and impact could be achieved from the delivery phase, pay-scales were explored with the partnership and Barnwood Trust.

In July 2023 it was proposed that, after several discussions with Barnwood and as a Project Board, to discontinue with the £250 partner's payment.

Rationale shared with partners was, the £250 daily rate and £31.25 hourly rate are not reflective of the average payment scales' within the community sector.

Further reasoning was given for the need be realistic around the cost of activities and of projects for those who may go onto request further funding, following the Digital Inclusion Programme.

REFLECTIONS & LEARNINGS' PAY RATES

If agreed that if it continued with the current £31.25 hourly rate, is likely to have a negative impact on the outcomes, such as the research and projects costing too much money to carry out and complete.

Multiple community sector pay scales were explored, to help inform the decision on the following '3 stage pay rate':

Project Manager £27 per hour
Project co-ordinator £23 per hour
Team member £19 per hour

Partners were welcomed in to discuss this on an individual basis. This also included any agreed suppliers that may be brought in to carry out work and activities on research and pilot projects.

The reaction to this was mixed, with the majority of concerns raised by partners who are employed on a subcontracted basis within the organisation they represent. The emerging concern is that proposed rates where not attainable or to below their contractual rate.

Acknowledging these concerns, partners were welcomed in to discuss further where clarification, rationale was provided and accepted. Revised rates were then confirmed ensuring that rates quoted were competitive for the work undertake.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

Although each pilot project could identify specific challenges to the delivery of their own projects, there was an emerging pattern of challenges surrounding the overall governance and supporting infrastructure of the pilot project delivery.

FLOW OF RESOURCES

Once project plans and budgets were agreed, an issue emerged around how resources were distributed to the pilots.

For some there was an assumption that the agreed resource would be allocated to the individual organisation/group to proceed with their work, and which would have been preferred.

They understood that there was some opportunity to flex and move resources as required to deliver the project, and that they would be required to report back on spend for auditing purposes.

However, as work was completed and/or resources spent, pilot leads were required to submit multiple invoices for approval and payment to FVAF as the Partnership fund holder.

REFLECTIONS & LEARNINGS

Attention to detail and focus was put into the flow of resources for pilot projects. During the pilot design phase, open communication was held between Consultant project manager and project partners. At the time much thought and discussion was had on how the flow of resources would work once pilot delivery commenced.

Whilst pilot projects where being designed, 1:1 meetings with each partner were held. Here partners were informed the planned processes and tools which were being designed for pilot delivery. This included the requirement of completing project plans and process in making claims for pilot projects.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION FINDINGS

Pilot leads shared that the internal financial control systems used by FVAF either did not match their own organisation's financial systems (which created additional work) and/or was not agile enough to be responsive to the needs of the pilot projects. The invoicing process was described as cumbersome and there were significant delays in payments received.

This had a greater impact on those projects where the organisation/group leading it was either a sole provider and/or secured external contractors to support the delivery of work.

For FVAF, there was acknowledgement of the issues the invoicing system created both for the pilot projects as well as for their own organisation, having to cope with a large volume of invoices flowing in from 6 projects. There is a question on whether this stretched the capacity of the FVAF finance team and system and with hindsight it would have been helpful to secure additional dedicated resource to support this element of the project.

With a large amount of money allocated to the pilot projects (circa £90k) FVAF also felt the burden of responsibility to ensure the funding was used wisely and there was sufficient due diligence in scrutinising and monitoring spend.

Key learning from this issue would be the need to spend more time as a Partnership on the financial governance arrangements, ensuring a system is designed that works for all. This needed to be done prior to any delivery so that all pilots project leads clearly understood the role FVAF was playing in Partnership fundholding and that they were not acting as a "grant awarding body".

Rather than allowing the financial processes to emerge as the pilot projects were being delivered, it would have been beneficial to set time aside in the pre-pilot stage to co-design and agree clear funding processes, which included how and when to access funds, an agreed set of essential information required to do so (to support financial accountability),an agreed time frame for receipt of payment following invoice submission and a process to be used to resolve any queries/disputes.

This would have also confirmed the role of the partnership members in ensuring collective accountabilities for all the resources for the programme so that responsibility and decision-making did not fall to any one organisation, in this case FVAF.

Alternatively, this collective accountability could have been done through more formal arrangements at the start such as creating a Partnership Memorandum of Understanding.

REFLECTIONS & LEARNINGS

It is important to reflect and highlight the efforts throughout project to design financial governance arrangements and the steps made to amend and improve the processes. For example, the initial Partner claim form which was revised.

Further consideration should be made on the collective responsibility in following processes that were initially agreed. Accountability should also be acknowledged when the flow of resources are delayed due self-imposed reasons. Examples of these include:

- Incorrect details/ references on invoices
- Submitting claims/ invoices for work that was not listed in project planning and EOI's. .
- Disregarding the need to verify and confirm completion of work which had invoiced work by 3rd party supplies.
- Stating unrealistic payment terms (10days) despite being communicated on several occasions that financial systems in place operate towards 30 day payment terms.

Reflecting on these challenges and learnings, it could be considered that an easier approach would of been to take an phased approach to release of funding instead of the payment on completion of work approach used.

However, this approach removes the opportunity and pilot delivery goal to comprehensively capture the true costings of tasks and pilot projects which could later help inform feasibility, strategy and funding.

OWNERSHIP OF RESOURCES

Projects which required equipment for their delivery noted that purchasing of this equipment happened quite quickly and was done by FVAF.

However, there was a misunderstanding and concerns raised on ownership of the equipment, i.e., did it belong to the individual pilot project organisation or was it being loaned to them by FVAF.

This was a different experience for organisations. When they had applied and secured grants for other projects that required equipment, they would purchase and own the equipment going forward as part of the grant award.

Although this did not necessarily delay delivery of the projects, not having this clarity of the ownership of equipment for the pilot projects has caused some disconcertion and may impact on the legacy of some of the projects.

The above issue highlights the difference between grant funding versus funding through a Partnership, in which ownership of equipment is held collectively between partners and not within a single organisation or project.

As a point of learning, it would have been helpful for partner members to spend time prior to delivery stage to discuss the ownership, sharing and ongoing maintenance of assets.

At the time of the interview, it was not known if organisations that wanted to continue with the work of their pilot would now need to find a way to reprocure the equipment they have been using or if the loan agreement entered into with FVAF will continue to allow them to use the equipment on a long-term basis.

FVAF has clarified that while the loan agreement was set-up and managed by themselves, the resources are now listed assets with the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership and is seen as a technology/equipment pool which all partners have access to. Alongside this, there is scope for an agreement to be established for the transfer of ownership of specific assets, recognised as a "gifted asset" contingent upon the successful fulfilment and completion of the pilot project.

As a final point in this area, the future use of the assets, who can use them, for what purpose, how to access and maintain them is also one that needs to be considered by the Partnership going forward.

EXTERNAL CONTRACTING

Two projects experienced challenges in delivery after an issue arose with an external contractor who was secured to support technical elements of the project (i.e., coding).

The contractor did not fulfil their brief and was subsequently let go. There were further challenges in securing the return of the project equipment being used by this contractor in a timely fashion. Unfortunately, this contractor also did not hand over the work they had done but rather deleted it. This resulted in delays to the project and some work needing to be redone.

For the projects involved, key reflections on lessons learned with this was the need to ensure that there is robust governance and formal contracting mechanisms in place to secure and oversee external contractors.

In this instance, a formal written contract with the following included may have alleviated this situation;
- Key contact for the Project, supervision, and reporting mechanisms
- Time to be spent on the project
- The work to be delivered
- How the services will be delivered
- Project delivery dates
- Renumeration, amount and process
- Termination of contract terms
- Any agreement to use of the project property
- Data protection and data processing agreement
- Intellectual property agreement

SUMMARY OF LEARNING, CHALLENGES & SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

Financial Governance:
- Co-Design Financial Processes: Engage all partners in designing a financial governance system that includes clear processes for accessing funds, required documentation, payment timelines, and dispute resolution.
- Phased Funding Release: Consider implementing phased funding releases to reduce the administrative burden and ensure smoother financial management.
- Dedicated Financial Support: Secure additional dedicated financial support to handle the volume of transactions and ensure timely payments.

Asset Management:
- Clarify Ownership: Establish clear guidelines on the ownership, sharing, and maintenance of equipment and other assets.
- Technology Pool: Maintain a technology/equipment pool that all partners can access, with agreements in place for the transfer of ownership where appropriate.
- Long-Term Use: Develop a plan for the long-term use and maintenance of assets to ensure sustainability beyond the project lifespan.

Contracting and Governance:
- Formal Contracts: Ensure all external contractors are engaged through formal contracts that include detailed project supervision, deliverables, timelines, remuneration, and termination terms.
- Contract Management: Implement robust contract management practices to monitor contractor performance and ensure timely resolution of any issues.
- Contingency Planning: Develop contingency plans to address potential delays or issues with external contractors, including backup resources and alternative solutions.

Partnership and Collaboration:
- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): Create a Partnership MoU that outlines shared principles, values, and responsibilities, ensuring collective accountability and decision-making.
- Regular Reviews: Conduct regular reviews of partnership processes and governance arrangements to identify and address any emerging issues.
- Capacity Building: Invest in capacity building for all partners to enhance their understanding of financial governance, asset management, and contracting practices.

13. PARTNERSHIP CONCLUSION

Reflections on the Future: Of the Pilots, of the Partnership
A key priority for the Barnwood Digital Inclusion Fund was to consider how successful work can be sustained once funding has ceased. For the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership this includes thinking about the ongoing work and legacy of both the 6 pilot projects undertaken as well as the partnership as a whole.

Future of the Partnership
At the time of the interview, there were mixed reflections on whether the Forest Digital Inclusion Partnership should continue in the future. some were unsure of the future of the partnership:

> I hadn't even considered that the partnership would continue Because I don't think it's in a fit shape to continue."
>
> "It's not been given a purpose to continue."

While others were clear of the need to do so.

> "I think it's increased the profile of digital inclusion and knowledge of what happens around the county. Because sometimes in the district, that is the challenge we have is how do you know what other people are doing?"

13. PARTNERSHIP CONCLUSION

Many felt the current partnership would need to revisit its purpose, membership and how it works together to be more responsive and agile. It was noted that, should it continue, it will only succeed if resourced adequately.

"These sorts of partnerships can be really, really powerful, and effective. They kind of live and die by their funding, really. They need some kind of mechanism by which the organisations that are coming together and spending time, are resourced in order to make it happen, are actually benefiting from it.

But at the same time, it would have to have a well thought out purpose in order to make sure that it was valuable for the organisations and valuable for the people that we wanted to work with."

"And I think we need to protect that time going forward, and resource it if it needs resourcing. But it's so wide reaching. And I think the opportunity what this partnership set out with was huge. It was absolutely huge, and there's so much more to be done with it. "

FVAF committed to further explore the future of the Forest Digital Inclusion partnership with the current partner members, starting with a focussed facilitated session exploring the experiences of partnership working as part of the final programme evaluation underway.

The partnership were welcomed back together for a focus group independently facilitated by Candace Plouffe on Monday 9th September 2024.

PARTNERSHIP FOCUS GROUP
REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

For the partnership Focus group that took place on Monday 9th September 2024, 5 out of the 9 existing members of the partnership attended. The remaining 4 partners were unable to attend due to other commitments and annual leave.

Aims and purpose of the sessions was:

- Reflect on the the journey we have taken together

- Understand the experience and learning of partnership organisations being a part of and contributing to the strategic oversight of the Forest Digital Inclusion programme;

- Explore what long lasting impact has been achieved from creating a Partnership; Determine if there is value in sustaining the Partnership going forward and how it may need to continue to further develop

A presentation on the Forest Digital Inclusion journey was delivered by Alex Digby- Digital Inclusions Projects Manager. The presentation provided reflection on the impacts, successes and achievements that had been achieved since her partnership started in January 2023.

See APPENDIX 28 for full findings of focus group

A presentation on the Forest Digital Inclusion journey was delivered by Alex Digby- Digital Inclusions Projects Manager. The presentation provided reflection on the impacts, successes and achievements that had been achieved since her partnership started in January 2023.

The presentation can be viewed in APPENDIX 29 – Journey reflection

Following the presentation- partners where asked to individually consider and share responses to the following questions.

1. What struck you the most about the reflection presentations?
2. What opportunities about this partnership excited you and why?
3. What was on thing you enjoyed/benefited from your involvement in the partnership?

PARTNERSHIP FOCUS GROUP
REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

PARTNERS REFLECTIONS

Struck you most	Opportunities that excited you	Enjoyed/Benefited from being Involved
Just how much freedom we were given by Barnwood to design our project – flexibility in shaping our projects	Working with others and learning about different organisations and lived experience	To see development of ideas to completion
Level and wide range of investments into projects	Chance to increase my awareness of others' challenges	Safe space, with peer to peer challenge /thinking to further develop ideas
Change in partnership makeup, number of partners who dropped away as the work progressed	Enabled people from CVT to have an opportunity to be involved in a community wide project where they could share their experiences and learn from the project	The creation bringing an idea alive, with the opportunity to access the equipment/resources to do so
The breadth of knowledge within the partnership when first established	Working with partners who are passionate and connected to the targeted audiences	Passing on my knowledge and learning from others
The breadth of knowledge within the partnership when first established	Chance to bring sizeable investment into the forest and allow partners to shape the spend	Cross partnership working, see across multiple projects

HOW DID THE PARTNERSHIP WORK?

The next activity focused on how the partnership worked and a STAR Activity was used to draw out experiences of the following:

Separateness:
How diverse was the group?
Were the diverse perspectives of members drawn out?

Tuning:
How well did we listen to each other, reflecting and ollectively making sense of the local digital challenges?

Action:
How well did we discuss and agree on actions needed and have opportunity to support each other in delivery of these?

Reason:
How clear was our purpose?
How important was it that we work together?

Partners were required to:
1. Think about each compass point definition
2. Place a dot on each axis, A green star for the original partnership group. A black dot for the current partnership group (centre is Low, End of axis is high)
3. With one another discuss what patterns you are seeing.

UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERN SHIFT

Compass Points	Original Partnership	Current Partnership
Separateness: Diversity of the group. The diverse perspectives of members were utilise	High Level of Separateness, wide and diverse group	Shift to a Lower level of Separateness - less representation, particularly with physical disability and children, young people
Tuning: How well we listen to each other, reflecting and collectively making sense of the local digital challenges	Low Level of Tuning	Higher level of Tuning
Action: How well we discuss and agree on actions needed and have opportunity to support each other in delivery of these?	Medium Level of Action	Higher Level of Action - likely higher as partnership shifted to focus to the delivery phase of the pilots
Reason: How clear is our purpose How important is it that we work together?	Low Level of Reason	Higher Level of Reason - increased clarity as shift to theme based working and smaller partnerships formed around individual pilot projects

STAR ANALYSIS

Reason:

- Original, larger partnership had the diversity, however that always creates the potential of many coming with their own agendas, making it challenging to agreeing the core purpose, focus of the work
- There were wide and diverse beliefs on the underlying issues tyring to address, hard to know how to focus down. Lower "tuning" and communication challenges were also an element that contributed to this.
- People came with different perspectives and own passion for an area - at times hard to see how they all fitted together until the partnership shifted into themes and pilot "partnerships"
- Not sure collective purpose became clearer for current partnership – what was clear was the individual purpose of each pilot. Tendency to have a focus more on pilot "partnerships" rather than the wider partnership.

Tuning:

- Initial phase there was a lot of people in the room and in meetings, making it hard to grasp direction of the work. Follow up communication, written confirmation of decisions helped.
- Some relied on Alex in FVAF as the single point of communication, not so much on the wider collective partnership.
- Communication at times was a challenge. Not sure we listened to each other as well as we could of.
- Once in the pilot project phase, did not meet often enough to "lift up" and look at all the work as a whole – focus on own area instead. Lost collective oversight of the partnership. Opportunity to now come back together
- Timing and capacity issues in meeting together – sense of pressure to focus on and deliver the pilots
- Sense that remuneration framework (payment to participate in wider partnership work and meetings) may have not worked as well as hoped. For those in organisations, with full time jobs, additional funding did not create more capacity to focus on partnership activity.

Action:

- Took time to agree core elements of the work, and there was delayed actions as result of this. Once in pilot phase action was better, but again at individual pilot level, not necessarily supporting each other through the wider partnership.
- Separateness: diversity was generally met, except for representation of physical disability. Ongoing question on how do you include those with lived experienced more fully, including strategic discussions? How the partnerships were formed and their operating environments not conducive for this to happen
- Need to recognise and, spend time to understand the diverse working styles and preferences

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & LEARNINGS FROM STAR ACTIVITY:

The original, larger partnership showcased a rich diversity of members, bringing a wide range of perspectives and passions. This diversity, while initially challenging due to differing agendas and beliefs, ultimately led to the formation of focused themes and pilot partnerships that harnessed these varied viewpoints.

However, the collective purpose remained somewhat unclear, with a tendency to focus more on individual pilot partnerships rather than the wider partnership.

During the initial phase, the large number of participants brought a wealth of ideas and energy, but also made it hard to grasp the work's direction. Follow-up communication helped clarify decisions, though there was an over-reliance on a single point of contact.

In the pilot phase, the focus on individual areas allowed for deep, impactful work, but infrequent meetings led to a loss of collective oversight. Timing and capacity issues, along with an ineffective remuneration framework, further complicated collaboration.

Despite these challenges, the partnership demonstrated resilience and a commitment to continuous improvement, recognizing the need to better understand diverse working styles and preferences for more inclusive and proactive collaboration in the future.

13.1 REFLECTIONS & WRAP UP

To conclude the focus group the following activity was completed to capture reflections from the sessions whilst highlighting what the next steps could be.

Individually, partners were asked to discuss their reflections and consider:

- What: stood out for you today?
- So what: Why was that important?
- Now what? What further actions make sense?

What Stood out for Today	So What and Now What
- Success, passion and collaboration that has been shared - Open and Honest challenge - Opportunity as a group to get to spend time and get to know each other - How much Partners and value partnership working	Next Steps: - Alex's slides will be shared - Evaluation will be completed the end of September and will be shared with partners for feedback. - Will pull from evaluation a proposal to Barnwood on how to use the underspend, but welcome ideas and feedback on this. - Presentation to Barnwood in November. Arrange follow up Partnership meetings, for October and November. The November meeting will have better idea of Barnwood's view on the underspend. - Opportunity to highlight the great work of the Forest partnership and pilots at the Digital Innovation week – key date 16th October, more info to come from Alex - Reminder that collectively we could keep the partnership going, not all about money but rather relationships and keeping the connections - knowing working together will have great impact for the people we serve

13. REFLECTIONS & WRAP UP

The focus group session highlighted the success, passion, and collaboration among participants, emphasising the value of partnership working.

Open and honest challenges were welcomed, fostering genuine dialogue and strengthening relationships.

 Participants appreciated the opportunity to spend time together, reinforcing the importance of maintaining connections beyond financial aspects. This collective effort is seen as crucial for achieving a positive impact on the people they serve.

Moving forward, several actions were identified to build on this momentum.

Alex's slides will be shared, and an evaluation will be completed by the end of September, with feedback from partners.

A proposal on how to use the underspend will be developed and presented to Barnwood in November.

Follow-up partnership meetings are planned for October and November, with a focus on showcasing the work at the Digital Innovation Week on October 16th.

The emphasis will be on nurturing relationships and ensuring the partnership continues to thrive.

13.1 PARTNERSHIP CONCLUSION SUMMARY

The focus group, facilitated by Candace Plouffe, brought partners together to reflect on their journey with the Forest Digital Inclusion programme.

Whilst not every partner could attend on the day despite great efforts, opportunity was proved for partners to feedback on the findings that were shared following the focus group.

The focus group revealed Participants appreciated the flexibility in project design and the opportunity to collaborate with diverse organisations. They valued the significant investments and the development of ideas to completion. However, challenges included differing agendas and communication issues, which initially made it difficult to agree on a core purpose.

The shift to pilot partnerships helped clarify individual purposes, though the collective purpose remained somewhat unclear.

Looking ahead, participants expressed excitement about increasing awareness of others' challenges and the potential for further collaboration. They emphasised the importance of maintaining connections and nurturing relationships beyond financial aspects.

Next steps: Follow-up partnership meetings are planned for October and November. group aims to continue building on their successes and addressing any remaining challenges to achieve a positive impact on the community.

It is felt that there is a strong need and ambition to continue as a partnership with collective aims to build on its successes and address the many remaining challenges to achieve positive impact across the Forest of Dean.

14. BARNWOOD
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Background

One of the conditions upon being awarded the grant from Barnwood was to support the Trust in their commitment to learning about best practice in digital inclusion, and to sharing learning from this funding with the wider sector and county.

The Trust therefore required all grantees to take part in a minimum of two Community of Practice sharing sessions in 2023, during which there would be a chance to meet the other organisations involved in the Digital Inclusion Fund. At the session there would be opportunity share details of projects, including challenges and successes, and share learning with a researcher who will be evaluating the Fund.

Across the lifespan of the project, 5 Communities of practice were held of which FVAF attended all. Due to the agreed benefits of the sessions, a further one has been proposed for October 2024.

Experiences

The Communities of practice were both well received and beneficial to attend. The attention to detail Barnwood took to create an open, learning and sharing environment should be commended. The opportunity to meet with other grantees was refreshing and thought provoking. Laying foundations for creativity and ideas to take back to the FOD Partnership

Passion and enthusiasm by all were present throughout. This often led to coming away with feelings of positivity that we were contributing to a vast ranging programme of Digital Inclusion provision that had wide ranging impacts. There was much agreement that research and learnings from the overall grant could and should help inform wider systems and policy.

Overall, the Community of Practice was a success and is hoped that it continues. Providing a learning and sharing pace for strategic leads working on bridging the digital divide for disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

SUMMARY

The Barnwood Community of Practice, part of the Digital Inclusion Fund, has been highly successful in fostering collaboration and shared learning among grantees.

FVAF's participation in all five sessions highlighted the enthusiasm and commitment to this initiative. These meticulously organised sessions provided a refreshing and thought-provoking environment, sparking new ideas and creativity.

The passion and optimism of participants underscored the significant impact of their collective efforts in digital inclusion, with a consensus on the importance of using research findings to inform broader systems and policies.

The safe and supportive space allowed for open discussions about challenges, fostering a learning mindset among attendees. Participants shared experiences and solutions, enhancing the overall benefit of the sessions.

The proposal for an additional session in October 2024 underscores the value of this initiative, which continues to provide strategic leads with opportunities to learn and share best practices aimed at bridging the digital divide for individuals with disabilities and mental health challenges.

15. EVALUATION & CONCLUSION

The Forest of Dean Digital Inclusion Partnership project has been a significant success in addressing digital exclusion among disabled individuals and those with mental health challenges.

Through a collaborative and inclusive approach, the project has effectively harnessed the strengths of various community organisations, leading to impactful pilot projects and valuable insights.

Key Achievements: The project successfully implemented diverse pilot projects, such as the Forest of Dean Community Hybrid Choir, Camphill Village Trust Digital Inclusion Workshops, and the "Outdoors, Indoors" initiative. These projects provided direct benefits to participants, generating valuable resources and learnings that can inform future digital inclusion efforts. For instance, the Hybrid Choir project improved participants' mood, confidence, and performance skills, while the Digital Inclusion Workshops at Camphill Village Trust fostered digital literacy and inclusivity among individuals with additional needs.

Learning and Adaptation: A critical aspect of the project's success was its emphasis on co-production and the involvement of individuals with lived experience. This approach ensured that the initiatives were relevant and effective, fostering a learning mindset among participants and partners. Continuous feedback and adaptation were integral to the project's methodology, allowing for adjustments in response to emerging challenges and opportunities. For example, the Digital Inclusion Workshops adapted their sessions based on participant feedback, leading to the creation of easy-read materials and comic strips on internet safety.

Challenges and Solutions: The project faced several challenges, including financial governance issues, the need for clearer ownership of resources, and the complexities of partnership working. Financial governance was a significant challenge, with pilot leads noting issues related to the internal financial control systems and delays in payments. To address these challenges, the project emphasised the importance of co-designing financial processes, implementing phased funding releases, and securing additional dedicated financial support. Ownership of resources also posed challenges, particularly regarding the equipment purchased for pilot projects. Clarifying the ownership, sharing, and maintenance of these assets was essential to ensure their long-term use and sustainability. The project established a technology/equipment pool accessible to all partners, with agreements in place for the transfer of ownership where appropriate.

15. EVALUATION & CONCLUSION

Impact and Legacy: The project's impact extended beyond the immediate benefits to participants. It raised awareness about the importance of online accessibility, highlighted the skills and knowledge gaps in the voluntary and community sector (VCS), and generated valuable resources for future use. For example, the Forest Pathways project created numerous guides and videos on website accessibility, addressing common accessibility faults and providing self-help materials for organisations.

The project's legacy is evident in the continued use and development of the resources created. Many pilot projects seek additional funding to continue their delivery, while the resources developed will continue to benefit the community beyond the project's lifespan. The Forest Digital Compass, a comprehensive directory of digital inclusion services, is one such resource that will have a lasting impact.

Future Directions: Moving forward, the partnership aims to build on these successes, addressing identified challenges and expanding its impact through innovative and inclusive digital solutions. Key recommendations include creating a Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to outline shared principles and responsibilities, conducting regular reviews of partnership processes, and investing in capacity building for all partners.

Underspend and suggestions: From the overall grant that was awarded- there is circa £16,000 remaining unspent. This has been frozen with collective agreement of the partnership it should be recommended to Barnwood Trust for it to be utilised as a legacy fund of the partnership. Initial recommendations of the partnership of how the "legacy fund" could be used are:

- Resource to strengthen the partnerships its governance and processes.
- Rumination fees for partners for Strategic involvement and development
- Investment to further development pilot projects.
- Investment to continue delivering pilot projects (i.e Forest Community Choir & Podcast)
- Investment in additional technology and equipment for the Equipment pool.
- Funding for printing and distributing resources created from pilot projects (i.e Easy Read guides & Forest Digital Compass)

The referenced suggestions above will be proposed to Barnwood Trust following the submission of this evaluation and monitoring requirements.

15. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Forest of Dean Digital Inclusion Partnership has laid a strong foundation for ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide.

The project's success underscores the importance of community collaboration, user-centric design, and the need for continued investment in digital inclusion initiatives.

By addressing the challenges encountered and building on the lessons learned, the partnership is well-positioned to continue making a significant impact on digital inclusion for disabled individuals and those with mental health challenges.

CLOSING STATEMENT

As we conclude this remarkable journey of the Forest of Dean Digital Inclusion Partnership, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for what we have achieved together.

This project has been a testament to the power of collaboration, innovation, and the unwavering commitment of our partners to bridge the digital divide for disabled individuals and those with mental health challenges.

From the outset, our vision was ambitious: to create a digitally inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Through the dedication and hard work of our partners, we have not only met but exceeded our expectations. The pilot projects have demonstrated the transformative potential of digital inclusion initiatives, providing tangible benefits to participants and generating valuable resources that will continue to serve our community.

Our journey was not without its challenges. We faced issues related to financial governance, resource allocation, and the complexities of partnership working. However, these challenges have only strengthened our resolve and highlighted the importance of adaptability, continuous learning, and open communication. The lessons we have learned will undoubtedly inform and improve our future efforts.

The legacy of this project is profound. We have created resources that will have a lasting impact, such as the Forest Digital Compass and easy-read guides on internet safety. Our pilot projects have fostered a sense of community, improved well-being, and opened new avenues for digital engagement. The positive feedback from participants underscores the significance of our work and the difference it has made in their lives.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Looking ahead, our focus is on sustainability and growth. We are committed to building on our successes, addressing the challenges we encountered, and expanding our impact through innovative and inclusive digital solutions. The creation of a Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will ensure that we continue to work together effectively, with shared principles and responsibilities.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Barnwood Trust for believing in us. All our partners, participants, and supporters. Your passion, dedication, and collaboration have been the driving force behind our achievements. Together, we have laid a strong foundation for ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide, and I am confident that we will continue to make a significant impact in the years to come.

Thank you for being part of this incredible journey. Let us continue to work together, innovate, and create a more inclusive digital future for all.

Warm regards,

Alex Digby

Digital Inclusion Projects Manager
Forest Voluntary Action Forum

APPENDIX