

Trends and Friends

Access, use and benefits of
digital technology for homeless
and ex-homeless people

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Lemos&Crane

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Lemos&Crane has worked since 1994 with public service organisations on high profile social issues including homelessness; social housing management; people with learning disabilities; prisoners and ex-offenders; literacy; hate crimes; and financial inclusion.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rise of ubiquitous digital technology is one of the defining trends of our time, transforming the worlds of work, leisure and commerce. This research explores whether the impact of technology seen elsewhere in society and in social relationships are replicated among homeless and excluded people; whether these groups have access to the hardware and software necessary for digital inclusion; whether they want to make use of digital technologies and what aspirations for use of digital technology they might have. The findings of this research challenge the common stereotype of homeless people living an isolated life of social flotsam and jetsam and the assumption that they neither use, want to use, nor would benefit from increasing their use of digital technologies. The benefits of digital inclusion identified by the respondents in this research include wider social and economic inclusion and emotional resilience including maintaining a secure social network, engaging in cultural life, pursuing interests and hobbies and developing skills and confidence for employment.

Methodology

The findings in this report are from two surveys: a qualitative questionnaire devised by Lemos&Crane and staff in homelessness agencies and both quantitative and qualitative interviews conducted by Groundswell peer researchers - people with first-hand experience of homelessness themselves. The research was also informed by the presentation of the LankellyChase Foundation Digital Empowerment Awards recognising and rewarding innovative uses of digital technology with homeless people and other excluded groups.

For our purposes 'digital technology' was taken to mean technology used for communication, entertainment and information including the internet, computers, hardware and software, webcams and digital cameras, games consoles, MP3 music players, tablets, and mobile phones including voicemail and text services, smart phones and all smart phone apps. Based on respondents' usage as reported here, the prevalence of the use of the internet and mobile phones by homeless and formerly homeless people is the most striking trend in the research findings.

Qualitative questionnaire

Lemos&Crane and the research group of homelessness practitioners devised and piloted a qualitative questionnaire covering many aspects of people's experiences of digital technology. 153 questionnaires were conducted in homelessness agencies across the country. The questionnaires were coded and analysed both by frequency count and qualitative analysis.

Groundswell peer research

Based on two focus groups with people currently experiencing homelessness, the peer research and advocacy organisation Groundswell devised a questionnaire of 54 key statements that reflected the range of people's usage, attitudes and aspirations concerning digital technology. 166 questionnaires were completed by five Groundswell peer researchers. Alongside this quantitative data, the Groundswell peer researchers also collected more general comments at the end of their interviews.

The total number of people interviewed for this report - either by completing the Lemos&Crane questionnaire or the Groundswell peer research - was 319. Twenty-two additional people took part in the Groundswell focus groups.

Access and usage

Devices used

Far from the stereotype of people unable or unwilling to engage in technology, the majority of respondents used digital technology in the form of mobile or smart phones and internet access. Ninety-five per cent of Lemos&Crane respondents either used digital technology or expressed an interest in doing so. Among Lemos&Crane respondents 91% had a working phone, of which 46% had a smart phone and 9% owned a Blackberry. Of Groundswell's respondents 87% had a phone, 32% had a smart phone and 6% had a Blackberry. Laptops, desktop computers and tablets were less common, but a significant proportion (39%) of respondents owned at least one of these devices.

Internet access

Regular and frequent internet access was common among respondents, but access was also problematic. Forty-six per cent of the Lemos&Crane respondents said they went online nearly every day or every day and 81% went online at least once a week. This is lower than the comparable figure for the general population. Twenty-six per cent of the Groundswell respondents, a lower proportion, said they went online nearly or every day, 27% said they never went online and 10% did so only rarely. Forty-two per cent of respondents spent between 1 and 3 hours online in a single session. Although respondents go online slightly less often than the general population, they do not spend significantly less time online per session.

Usage

Devices used for internet access differed significantly between our respondents and the general population, reflecting the challenges faced of being homeless. According to Ofcom among all internet users 40% identify their laptop as being the most important device for internet access, 23% say that their smart phone is the most important and 20% identify desktop computers as the most important.¹ Our respondents were much less likely to use a laptop for accessing the internet. Among Lemos&Crane respondents a smart phone was the most commonly used device to access the internet, at 50%, and desktop computers, also at 50%.² The Groundswell respondents were even more reliant on desktop computers to access the internet: 60%. Respondents showed considerable resourcefulness and ingenuity in finding ways to get online as mostly they live in a world of poor quality and expensive computer facilities.

Case study

I have a smart phone (iPhone) with 3G access – but it costs me to use internet – it is not wifi. I usually use my phone to access the internet, either on 3G or using public wifi at railway stations and McDonalds. There is limited internet access at my accommodation- internet is too slow for use to stream media and I have to share one computer with everyone else (16 others live in the accommodation) which means I just prefer to use my phone but am limited here as the screen is small. It slows me down. My main internet use is my Job Seekers Allowance requirement. I also use the internet for contacting friends, finding activities, music, watching films, playing online games such as poker and some phone games such as Temple Run. I use it to help myself not think about my situation, to keep in touch with important people in my life that can support me and to move forward with my goals. The internet is very important to me – it is how I do most things. It is quicker than having to go places in person and helps me to move forward with my life. I have problems using the internet where I live because it is too slow to stream movies and a lot of websites that I want to use are blocked. Having to use communal space means no privacy when using computer.

Constructed from testimony give by Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondents who voiced similar concerns.

Skills, confidence and training

Those respondents who made at least occasional use of digital technology generally considered themselves to have passable skills. The majority rated their abilities as at least 'average', ranging up to 'expert' although 14% said they had no skills at all. Respondents typically felt confident using Facebook and other social media sites but found office and word processing programmes difficult. The majority learned by teaching themselves. Eight-per cent learned through training provided at services, typically older respondents. Feedback from staff, however, suggested that respondents may be over-stating their level of skill.

¹ Ofcom, The Communications Market 2014:4 Internet and Web-based content. P. 262 Available at: http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cm14/UK_4.pdf (Last accessed: 1 December 2014)

² This was in answer to the question 'what do you usually use to access the internet?' – to which some respondents provided more than one answer.

Barriers to access and the role of services

Reliance on (mostly hardware) facilities in homelessness services to access the internet was common but many people experienced difficulties. Roughly half of the Lemos&Crane respondents accessed the internet at homelessness services and 19% used a library. Of all the Groundswell peer research respondents, 22% usually accessed the internet at the particular service where they were interviewed and 18% at a library. 60% relied on the use of a desktop computer, though only 6% owned one.

Common problems included services having too few computers, time restrictions, unreliable internet connections and lack of privacy when using computers. Services blocking particular sites or web searches for security purposes were also problematic. Sixty-six per cent of the Groundswell respondents reported problems in accessing the internet through services. Of these, 38% complained about limitations on times they could go online and 33% that the sites they could access were limited.

Respondents in both groups felt the training they were offered was not appropriate for their needs and usage aspirations. Typically training wasn't basic enough or they thought the skills and programmes being taught (for example, Microsoft Office) were not relevant to their experiences and aspirations.

Libraries

Although libraries are often important places in the lives of homeless and ex-homeless people, they also brought challenges for internet access, despite being relied upon by a significant proportion of respondents (19% of the Lemos&Crane group and 18% of the Groundswell group). Common difficulties in libraries included time limits on computer use and too few computers available. People also faced particular difficulties arising from being homeless. Many libraries required members to have a permanent fixed address to join the library, excluding some from accessing library resources. Perhaps more troublingly, respondents reported being excluded from libraries for having too much luggage.

Cost, contracts and data

Respondents reported difficulties with contract phones and typically had price-imposed restrictive data caps on their phone usage. Phone contracts are often also subject to a credit check, excluding many homeless people. Fifty-five per cent of Groundswell respondents said they couldn't get a phone contract. Respondents were very conscious that they were often restricted to expensive and limiting pay-as-you-go contracts for their phone and spoke eloquently of the difficulties those experiencing exclusion or poverty have in overcoming such restrictions, as well as the negative emotional and social consequences. Just one person mentioned using cheaper alternatives to pay as you go or long-term contracts.

Friends, family and relationships

The most frequent use of digital technology was keeping in touch with family and friends and social interaction. Facebook and other means of online social networking have made contacting family members easier, with all the joys and tribulations that always characterise family relations. Seventy-three per cent of Lemos&Crane respondents said they used the internet to keep in touch with family and friends. Seventy per cent of Groundswell respondents said they only used their phone to keep in touch with friends and family and nearly half said that the internet enabled them to stay in touch and be sociable when they couldn't get out.

Using the internet can be risky and perceptions of potential risks can be given to justify restrictions both on access and content, though there is no inherent reason why capable adults should face differential levels of access or exclusion because of their experience of homelessness. A minority of people expressed difficulties with using digital technology to stay in touch in line with the frustrations of access and cost already outlined. Some, however, had experienced difficulties with others' behaviour online, including Facebook hacking and disliking online culture or content. A few had experienced more serious difficulties such as bullying, blackmail and even assault.

Leisure, entertainment and personal interests

Entertainment and leisure was the second most popular use of digital technology and was highly valued by respondents, including watching or streaming music, TV shows, or films online, playing games, finding information relating to a hobby or interest, or reading magazines and blogs online. Of those who answered (113), 67% said they used the internet for leisure and entertainment. Fifty-six per cent used the internet for their interests and hobbies. Respondents had a varied range of interests and hobbies, reflecting different ages, backgrounds and experiences.

Concerns

Although relatively few respondents reported problems with safety, security or privacy using digital technology, a higher proportion had concerns. Respondents were primarily concerned about the security of their personal information and the threat of identity theft or fraud. Concerns about bullying, harassment, blackmail or other online threats, though mentioned by a few people, were far less common.

The second common concern was losing face-to-face contact as a result of increased use of technology, and in particular anxieties about essential services systematically moving to 'digital by default'. Respondents were worried that the loss of face-to-face contact would reduce levels of trust and connection between people. They were also concerned that complex online systems might make accessing important services more difficult.

Services, uptake and usage concerns

Comparatively few respondents used digital technology – the internet in particular – to engage with statutory or homelessness services. Although the appetite for digital technology was high, this was not always matched by the digital ambitions of support services. Many respondents expressed frustration at levels of training and facilities for accessing the internet and computers, as already mentioned. In addition, few services capitalised upon clients' use of the internet to improve communication of information or nudge uptake of important and potentially life-changing services. Text and voicemail reminders about appointments, however, were well-received and most commonly mentioned as being a particularly helpful means of communicating with services. A few respondents made suggestions of how services might improve and these suggestions were typically similarly 'ground level', personalised uses of digital technology such as using texts to contact street teams, sending information to clients and making use of popular communication platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp.

Recommendations

The emotional, social and practical benefits of digital inclusion for homeless people were clearly evident in the responses. Respondents wanted to be fully involved in social and cultural life and digital technology helped. There were, nonetheless, specific barriers and frustrations that arose from homelessness and exclusion.

Improving internet access at homelessness services

Access to the internet at homelessness services should be considerably improved. Switching from cabled internet to far less restrictive Wifi in all service settings would be particularly beneficial. Similarly removing unnecessary restrictions on content would be highly desirable. Access would become easier and the costs of using mobile phones for internet access would be reduced.

Library access for homeless people

Public libraries should review access requirements to reduce exclusion of homeless and vulnerable people. Not requiring a fixed permanent address to access the computers and the internet would be a significant benefit. In addition, current policies or practices of turning people away because of their luggage or other characteristics associated with homelessness should be abandoned. Providing somewhere for people to leave their belongings would also enable people to make valuable use of library services.

Support and information to find cheaper access solutions

Service users need assistance to get away from expensive and restrictive contracts for phones and the internet and accessing cheaper or better value for money options. Staff at support services should assist service users in accessing affordable options for mobile phone and internet services as part of keyworking and resettlement.

Digital inclusion as part of support workers' support planning approach

Support workers should include advice on and options for affordable access to phone and internet services in their needs assessment, key working, support plans and resettlement.

Services to provide cheap or free equipment for clients

Homelessness services could forge partnerships with low-cost suppliers of digital technology to provide cheap or free hardware such as laptops and mobile phones for clients. Similarly, arrangements for WiFi provision in resettlement hostels and homes would be beneficial. Service providers could also broker access to cheaper mobile phone contracts by offering credit guarantees and passing on the savings of group purchasing of mobile contracts. Mobile phone and internet service providers might even be persuaded to give a greater discount to homelessness services in the spirit of corporate social responsibility.

Use of digital technology by services themselves

Using digital technology to provide service users with information relevant to them – reminders and practical help and guidance such as information on money, health and available services or opportunities – would be a welcome development with obvious benefits in support and resettlement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every generation in the modern era seems to believe that it has created a technological breakthrough removing the barriers of space and time from social interaction. Bicycles made it possible to court girls further afield than neighbouring villages. Cars meant that those who live long distances apart can nevertheless maintain regular face-to-face personal contact without living in proximity. Families could still meaningfully be families of love, conflicts and secrets and live in each other's pockets without living cheek by jowl. Jet aeroplanes extended the range of relatively rapid contact across international spaces as well as disseminating a social virus of curiosity for exotic places and the people that lived in them hitherto only accessible to the bold, hardy and wealthy. And in the contemporary era the impetus of de-spatialising, time-shifting, disintermediating change has been taken up by digital technology.

The world of work has, of course, been transformed in particular by the (soon to be superseded?) desktop personal computer. Notwithstanding the rise of digital technology, the search for the paperless office, once imagined and predicted by the futurologist Alvin Toffler,³ has proved fruitless. Similarly, John Maynard Keynes's forecast that technology and the social commitment to full employment would result in much shorter working hours and more leisure time has proved a vain hope (though looking back a hundred years or more, we certainly work less hard than our ancestors).⁴ Ubiquitous technology has undoubtedly made it easier to work for oneself or from home and more people now do, but it is far from the norm. Technologies have brought new stresses to the working life, in particular the increased expectation of immediacy in response and action, which often means that rather than home working being more relaxed there is an expectation of knowledgeable, comprehensive responses at all times, within and outside the working day.

³ In 1980, Alvin Toffler, the author of *Future Shock* declared that, 'making paper copies of anything is a primitive use of machines and violates their very spirit.' (Toffler, A, 1980 *The Third Wave* P.189 Bantam, New York). In 1975 researchers at the Xerox labs let it be known that they could see the paperless office looming on the horizon, but it proved a mirage. (*Business Week* (2387), *The Office of the Future* p. 48-70 30 June 1975)

⁴ John Maynard Keynes, *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren* 1930 available in: Keynes, J.M, *Essays in Persuasion* pp. 358-373 New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963

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As a consequence those seeking work must now have mobile telephone numbers and email addresses to apply for most jobs, however menial, as well as reasonable keyboard and computer skills then to perform almost all jobs, even many low paid and insecure jobs. This represents a challenge for those who have to acquire these skills from new because age, literacy difficulties or poor educational experiences exacerbate their limitations on keyboards and computers. They also need access to hardware, software and connectivity to get online and into the labour market.

Technology, the defining trend of our time, has not confined its impact to the world of work. The growing centrality of technology in everyone's lives privileges horizontal, people-to-people, stranger-to-stranger, network-to-network connections, reducing or replacing face-to-face, proximate, lasting, involuntary encounters and relationships. These are new but less permanent and binding forms of social relations: the internet chat room, professional 'networking' and lifestyle identities. 'Communities of choice' are growing as 'communities of fate' recede. These new networks and forms of association value difference and individuality. They also bind those with spending power, professional status and fashionable identity into a close alliance, deliberately and inevitably leaving out people who are too poor, old, excluded, out of date or simply boring. Because they place difference and individuality front and centre, universal, simplistic norms of right and wrong are shunted to the sidelines, and in their place is a greater open-mindedness, a certain moral relativism and a willingness to take moral cues from friends and peers rather than authorities, family elders or tradition. Everyday lifestyles have also been transformed: how people communicate with one another; the way information is consumed has become wider rather than deeper; leisure has become even more solitary, private and indoors.

Although leisure may be more private the culture that has emerged, paradoxically, diminishes the importance of personal privacy because of a considerable shift in favour of individual expression and choice and away from traditional virtues of self-restrained discretion. Technology has vast capacity to store and sort enormous volumes of miniscule fragments of personal information in perpetuity. We are all now living in the clouds. The contemporary expressive, individualistic culture has found a vivid place in the newly minted technological and cultural virtual universe of web networks like YouTube, online social networks, reality TV and global branding of traditional sports and pastimes.

Arguably, the impact on social relations has been far greater than changes to the world of work or the economy. Phones, text messages, social media and the rest have all made it quicker and easier to communicate both one-to-one and multilaterally. The amount as well as the speed of communication has increased enormously, though that has not necessarily meant that the number of friends, in the truest sense of the word, has grown. The number of people whom someone welcomes seeing, trusts, confides in and feels some reciprocal obligations towards has not changed. Robin Dunbar has written widely about friendship and notes that most people's social networks rarely number more than 150. Of those, a relatively small number, often in single digits, are those to whom one would confide everything or feel obliged to help in almost all circumstances.⁵ So friendship does not seem to have changed, but the means of communicating with friends have multiplied and therefore the frequency of

⁵ Dunbar, R. I. M. *Journal of Human Evolution* 22 (6): 'Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates'. P. 469-493 (1992). See also Dunbar, R. I. M. and Hill, R. A. *Human Nature*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 'Social Network Size in Humans' p. 53-72. 2003

1. Introduction

contact, often now brief and quick, has exploded exponentially. Multiple means of contact and countless glancing encounters is experienced most powerfully among the young. Young adults have, of course, for a long time had a wider social network than children, who are bound by parental control, or older adults who are bound by professional and family obligations that limit the time available for socialising. The advance into middle age may also be accompanied by a diminution of curiosity and a certain fraying of the appeal of novelty both in sensations and people. Older people, knowing who and what they like, are somewhat less likely to feel minded to extend the sphere of their social contacts and encounters. Digital technology has changed none of those underlying patterns of social relationships.

Leisure too has altered. Films have moved from the cinema to the video to the DVD to the personal computer to the tablet. Recorded music similarly has gone from vinyl to tape to CD to the MP3 player. But the most fundamental difference made in the creative sphere has been that the boundary between artist and audience has been made porous. Everyone can make songs, videos and distribute them online. We can all have our own online TV channel regardless of its quality; the only problem is finding anyone else who wants to watch it!

Of course, digital technologies and the web in particular have created or amplified some darker social effects. It is estimated that at least one in three internet searches are for pornography, which is perhaps not the end of the world in a free society. However, the far more disturbing presence and dissemination of pornography involving children has expanded via the internet. The capacity to meet and find people with shared interests, regardless of location, has also in the extreme meant that, for example, sites that portray suicide and cannibalism, sometimes in real time, are also to be found on the web with persistent searching, perhaps offering a lure to the vulnerable or disturbed mind, though probably not accessible easily enough for the merely curious.

The arrival of the internet during the 1980s created the capability to link various private networks through a shared protocol into a global network of networks. The effect was billions of computer devices around the world could connect to and communicate with each other. Although there were antecedent electronic mailing systems, during the 1990s email became ubiquitous, a method of people with individual digital identities (their email addresses) sending digitally messages principally of text but also pictures and other information. Similarly, (weighty) mobile phones existed in the 1970s and 1980s, but in the 1990s ownership and usage of mobile phones became ubiquitous as handsets became lighter, smaller, with longer lasting batteries and network coverage spread. These three changes – the internet, email and the mobile phone – taken together have re-created aspects of personal as well as business lives. The question for this study is whether the impacts seen elsewhere in society and social relationships adumbrated above are replicated among homeless or excluded people or whether, in fact, these groups of people, because of their wider exclusion from community life and in particular their general absence from the housing and labour markets, have also become digitally excluded i.e. unable to access either these three principal technologies or their benefits.

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As far as homeless, ex-homeless and excluded people are concerned, the questions that then arise, which are addressed in this report are:

- Do they want to use these technologies?
- Do they have access to the equipment, hardware, software and networks?
- What uses do they make of these technologies if they are available to them?
- To what extent do their patterns of ownership or usage vary from the wider population?
- Do providers of support services seek to enhance service users' digital capabilities?
- Do service providers seek to leverage the benefits in efficiency and effectiveness of using digital technologies in their services?

Digital Empowerment awards entry: Core Arts, Core Voices (winner)

The Core Voices project promotes positive mental health and combats isolation by helping to give vulnerable people who suffer severe mental health issues a voice to enhance and express their creative talents to the public, rather than focusing on their perceived difficulties. Clients are able to access 60 creative classes a week and produce their original creative works such as art, poetry and music.

Core Arts has helped a number of clients set up websites using free web and blog technology such as Wix, Tumblr and Instagram. Digital volunteers have helped the clients. The quality of the technology and the work is extremely strong.

Through a series of 4 weekly ICT workshops taught by professional tutors and supported by volunteers clients learn:

- To create a digital creative profile where they can showcase their creative works online.
- How to use digital technologies to enhance their opportunities for learning, volunteering and employment.
- How to reach new and larger audiences with their creative works through the construction of personal websites, sound cloud, blogs etc.

2. METHODOLOGY

The findings outlined here are from two separate surveys: a questionnaire devised by Lemos&Crane and staff in homelessness agencies and both quantitative and qualitative peer research conducted by Groundswell peer researchers, people with previous firsthand experience of homelessness themselves. The research was also informed by the LankellyChase Foundation Digital Empowerment Awards entries (which also illustrate this report).

For these purposes, 'digital technology' means technology used for communicating, entertainment and acquiring and disseminating information including the internet, computers, hardware and software, webcams and digital cameras, games consoles, MP3 music players, tablets, and mobile phones including voicemail and text services, smart phones and all smart phone apps. It does not include TV and radio. The prevalence of the use of the internet and the even higher ownership rates of mobile phones is the most striking trend in these research findings and much higher than would be generally assumed or indeed our own starting presumption. Working with Thames Reach, Lemos&Crane established an action research group for the project, comprising practitioners from homelessness organisations Groundswell, SHP, Connection at St Martin in the Fields, Providence Row, Stonham, Exeter YMCA and St Mungo's Broadway. The action research group met to discuss areas of enquiry to investigate in greater depth, good practice of which they were aware, potential barriers and concerns and to reflect on the findings, conclusions and recommendations. This research group also ensured that the questionnaires and interviews were conducted with a sufficiently large number of people.

LankellyChase Digital Empowerment awards

Lemos&Crane and Thames Reach ran the LankellyChase Digital Empowerment Awards to identify innovations in using digital technologies such as the internet, social media, apps and SMS to improve the lives of homeless and vulnerable people. Entries were welcomed from any UK non-profit organisation working with homeless or vulnerable people, including charities,

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adult social care organisations, homelessness agencies, supported housing providers and local authorities. Prize money of £2,500 was offered to original projects successfully using the growing potential of digital technology to enhance the experiences or prospects of homeless or vulnerable people. There were five award categories: encouraging voice; dialogue; responding to support needs; developing capabilities, and social networks.

In total 71 entries were received from a range of organisations. A shortlist was drawn and a representative from with each shortlisted entry was interviewed. The judges selected one overall winner, two runners-up, two highly commended and one Judges' special award winner. (See appendix A for a list of the shortlisted entries).

LankellyChase Digital Empowerment awards 2014

Winner

- Core Arts Core Voices (see p.12)

Runners-up

- Stonham Moving On Android phone app (see p.17)
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea: Digital Empowerment for Stable Way Travellers' Site (see p.25)

Highly commended

- Papworth Trust (Museum Street Centre): My Safe Social Network (see p.31)
- Creativity Works: The Re|Source (see p.35)

Special Judges' award

- Simon Mott Card readers for Big Issue Vendors

Qualitative questionnaire

Drawing on the reflections and experience of practitioners, Lemos&Crane and the practitioner research group devised and piloted a qualitative questionnaire on people's experiences of digital technology. This included: how respondents access digital technology and what resources they used, their motives and aspirations, programmes and software, knowledge, know-how and skills, social networking, using digital technology to access services, learning and interests as well as safety, risk and privacy. In each of these sections respondents were asked about their experiences, attitudes, as well as problems or concerns and anything they wished to explore further. Respondents were also asked to comment on any other aspect of their experience of digital technology that they wished to share. (See Appendix C for the questionnaire).

2. Methodology

In collaboration with homelessness agencies in London and further afield, 153 responses to questionnaires were received. Questionnaires were used primarily in one-on-one conversation with a member of staff, although some questionnaires were self-completed. Respondents reflect experiences at different stages of homelessness, from street homeless and rough sleeping to living in supported accommodation and then on to receiving floating support in long-term accommodation. The questionnaires were then coded and analysed by frequency of mention as well as a thematic qualitative analysis, from overall impressions of access, usage and attitudes and a more in-depth understanding of people's experiences.

The following organisations conducted questionnaires with clients: Arlington House Hostel, London; Connection at St Martin's in the Fields, London; Emmaus, Bristol; YMCA, Exeter; SHP (at several locations in London); St Mungo's Broadway, London; Stonham (part of the Home Group), west Yorkshire; Thames Reach, London.

Clients varied in age, gender and also in what service provision they used as follows:

Table 1: Age of respondents

Age	No.	%
16-20	21	14%
21-30	30	20%
31-40	18	12%
41-50	41	27%
51-60	28	19%
61-70	6	4%
71-80	2	1%
Undisclosed	5	3%
Total	153	100%

Table 2: Gender of respondents

Gender	No.	%
Male	100	65%
Female	50	33%
Undisclosed	3	2%
Total	153	100%

Table 3: Service setting

Setting	No.	%
Day-Centre Drop In	28	18%
Emmaus Community	3	2%
Floating Support	50	33%
Foyer	11	7%
High Support Mental Health Hostel	3	2%
Hostel	14	9%
Hostel (Assessment Stage)	5	3%
Hostel (High Support Needs)	5	3%
Hostel (Needle Exchange)	3	2%
Hostel (Second Stage)	3	2%
Supported Accommodation	9	6%
Undisclosed	2	2%
YP Floating Support	6	4%
YP Hostel	5	3%
YP Supported Accommodation	6	4%
Total	153	100%

Groundswell peer research

Staff from Groundswell (the peer research and advocacy homelessness organisation) conducted two focus groups (and one test focus group) with people currently experiencing homelessness. The first was at Connection at St Martin in the Fields in London and attended primarily by street dwellers and the second at Dennis Hanfield House, an SHP hostel.

From these focus groups 54 key statements were drafted reflecting people's usage, attitudes and aspirations concerning digital technology. From these statements a questionnaire was developed. A Groundswell peer research worker oversaw the research and four peer researchers were trained to conduct the questionnaire. The focus groups were also transcribed and analysed alongside the qualitative evidence. (See Appendix B for the Groundswell quantitative questionnaire).

The questionnaire was then conducted in the following homelessness services across London: Camden Spectrum; Graham House Hostel (Thames Reach); Miriam Lodge; One Support Arlington; Pagnell Street Hostel (St Mungo's Broadway); the Passage Day Centre; Streetlytes Drop in Centre; YMCA, Wimbledon.

Seventy-nine per cent of the Groundswell respondents were male, the same proportion of men as in overall users of services for single homeless people in England.⁶ Ages ranged from 19 to 72, with slightly fewer (25%) in the up to 30 age group.

A total of 166 questionnaires were completed. The findings from the peer research were not considered in isolation but as part of the overall picture emerging from the data. There were a higher proportion of street homeless respondents in the peer-research sample and this is reflected in the findings. About 36% of the Groundswell sample was currently street homeless, compared to 18% of the Lemos&Crane sample.⁷

Alongside the quantitative data, the Groundswell peer researchers also collected qualitative information. At the end of each questionnaire the respondents were asked to comment in general on their experiences of digital technology. These responses were analysed alongside the rest of the qualitative data.

The total number of people interviewed for this report - either by completing the Lemos&Crane questionnaire or the Groundswell peer research - was 319. In addition, 22 people took part in the Groundswell focus groups.

⁶ Homeless Link Annual Survey of Needs and Provision (SNAP) P.20 2013 available at http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/SNAP2013_Full_Report.pdf (Last accessed 1 December 2014)

⁷ This is an estimate based on type of service at which the interviews took place and respondents' stated uses of that service. It is assumed that those using day-centre facilities were largely street homeless. There will of course be some cross-over, with people in short-term accommodation making use of day-centre drop-ins, and those who would identify themselves as street homeless being interviewed at a hostel, particularly at the assessment stage.

2. Methodology

Digital Empowerment awards entry: Stonham Moving On Android phone app (runner up)

The 'Moving on' app aims to help young people relocate home with as little stress and cost as possible. The app has been developed to help younger Stonham clients moving on in their lives and to give advice and support to young people who find themselves homeless. It helps people to get information about where they can get second hand or recycled furniture, local services including health care and day centres, local crime rates, emergency accommodation and advice on tasks necessary when setting up a new home including changing to the most economic utility providers, basic DIY, budgeting for the move and sources of advice. The app has been used by many service users and is available from the Google app store, one of only a few apps for those who are homeless.

3. ACCESS AND USAGE

- *'I must say that one of the best things that could ever happen in London or in the world for homeless people is the advent of digital technology.'*⁸

Summary

Contrary to prevailing stereotypes of itinerant homeless people, poorly connected and with little interest in digital technology, the overwhelming majority of respondents in this research had a mobile phone, of which a significant proportion had a smart phone. In addition, a fair proportion (39%) had a computer, laptop or tablet. Ownership of other forms of digital technology was less common. Regular internet use was common and many people in fact spent relatively long periods of time online. Respondents were resourceful in gaining access to the internet and made use of it to improve their day-to-day circumstances. However, respondents struggled with particular practical, technical or financial barriers to access, including difficulty getting a contract phone or having to work within restrictive data limits.

The stereotype of the homeless or ex-homeless person is someone who has lived a chaotic lifestyle, often for many years, with manifold problems past and present possibly including family or relationship breakdown, a history of mental health difficulties at least among older ex-homeless people, perhaps also substance abuse and alcohol misuse. The cumulative effect is that they have ended up with nowhere to live and almost certainly no paid work, reliant on state benefits and supported housing services. In addition they have lost contact with their families and old friends and, if they have any friends at all, they rely on transitory friends made on the street where intimacy is instant and conflict constantly incipient. If this stereotype were true, one might imagine that these itinerants and mendicants had little interest in the digital world or the benefits of technology and, in any event, could not afford access to the equipment. The findings of this research will show that the stereotype of the isolated life of social flotsam and jetsam is miles from the truth, as is the erroneous assumption that this group of people neither use, want to use, nor would benefit further from using digital technologies.

⁸ Male, 60 (speaking with a Groundswell peer researcher)

3. Access and usage

Mobile phones

The majority of respondents had a mobile phone. Of these, a significant proportion had a smart or internet enabled phone. Among the Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondents 91% had a working phone. Of these 46% had a smart phone and a further 9% owned a Blackberry. Of Groundswell's peer research respondents, 87% had a phone, 32% had a smart phone and 6% had a Blackberry.

Although the overwhelming majority had a phone of some description the type of phone that people owned to some extent reflected their age. Among the Groundswell group, half of the 19 to 30 year olds had a smart phone, while fewer than one in three of those over 40 had one. This age effect was even more evident in the Lemos&Crane sample. Seventy-two per cent of phone owners under 30 had a smart phone, compared to 36% of those over 30.

- *'[The] internet is my life and so is my mobile phone'*⁹

Laptops

Laptops, computers and tablets were less common, but a significant number of respondents owned at least one of these devices. The Lemos&Crane questionnaire found that 39% had a laptop, tablet or computer, while in Groundswell's sample this proportion was 29% (with 6% owning a desktop, 16% a laptop and 7% a tablet). This difference might be explained by the higher proportion of Lemos&Crane respondents in comparatively stable accommodation, receiving floating tenancy support (a third of the respondents). Regardless, in both groups a significant proportion – an average of over a third – of people used a laptop. A 71-year-old man told a Groundswell peer researcher:

- *'Mine is called my purple friend. And that is quite serious. My laptop is my purple friend.'*¹⁰
- *'This digital technology is the thing of today. And progress I don't think can be made without it. Sometimes I am baffled by it but I admire it and I would like to know more about it and learn more about it because it is wonderful.'*¹¹

MP3 players, digital cameras and other devices

Aside from phones and smartphones, computers, laptops and tablets a significant proportion also owned and used other forms of digital technology. Twenty-six per cent of those who answered (117) had additional gadgets. Most common were MP3 players (18%), digital cameras (16%) and webcams (9%). A few also had Kindles and games consoles. Among the Groundswell group, 40% of people used other forms of digital technology. The most commonly used devices were an MP3 player (27% of all respondents) and a digital camera (22%).

Web access

Regular internet access was common among respondents, but also presented them with many barriers to overcome. Forty-six per cent of the Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondents

⁹ Female, 50 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

¹⁰ Groundswell focus group participant

¹¹ Male, 71 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

Trends and Friends

said they went online nearly every day or every day, 14% went online 3 to 5 days a week, and 21% went online 1 to 3 days a week (a total of 81% going online at least once a week). Just 8% said they rarely access the internet and 11% said they never did. Although internet usage is undoubtedly common among respondents, it is nevertheless lower than for the general population. The Office for National Statistics found that in 2013, 73% of adults accessed the internet every day.¹² Although roughly the same proportion of adults accessed the internet fairly regularly, our respondents were not able to do so as frequently as the general population.

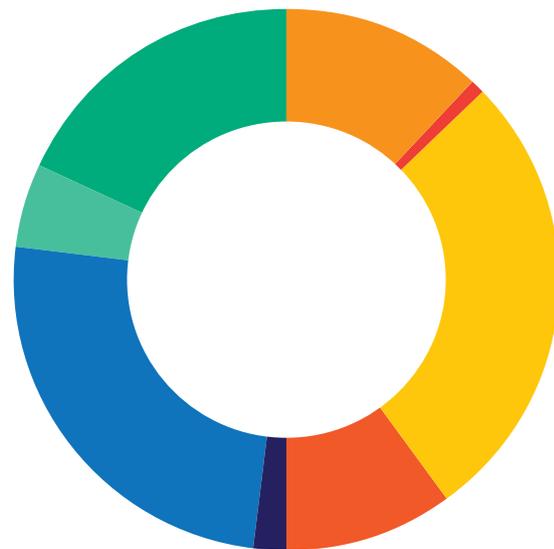
The proportion of Groundswell respondents regularly accessing the internet was lower than those in the Lemos&Crane group. Twenty-six per cent of the Groundswell respondents said they went online nearly every day or every day, 27% said they never went online and a further 10% did so only rarely (suggesting that 63% accessed the internet at least occasionally). There were considerable differences between those under 30 and those over 30. Sixty-one per cent of those aged up to 30 went online every day (or nearly every day), and only one person under 30 never or rarely went online. By contrast, in the older age groups less than a quarter went online every day or nearly every day; around a third never went online, with a further 10% doing so only rarely. See Charts 1 and 2.

Chart 1: How often do you go online?
(Lemos&Crane respondents)



- Every day or nearly every day 46%
- Never 11%
- 3-5 days a week 14%
- Rarely 8%
- 1-3 days a week 21%

Chart 2: How often do you go online?
(Groundswell respondents)



- 1 day a week 12%
- 2 to 3 days a week 18%
- very rarely 10%
- no response 1%
- don't go online 27%
- just started 2%
- nearly every or every day 25%
- 4 to 5 days a week 5%

¹² Office for National Statistics Statistical Bulletin Internet Access - Households and Individuals, 2013 available here: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_322713.pdf (Last accessed 1 December 2014)

3. Access and usage

On the whole, respondents who had access to the internet spent a significant amount of time online, with 42% spending between 1 and 3 hours online at a time, in line with the national averages. The usage rates of Lemos&Crane respondents are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Time online

Usage per day	No.	%
>8	6	4%
5 < 8 Hours	8	5%
3 < 5 Hours	15	10%
1 < 3 Hours	65	42%
Up to 1 Hour	38	25%
No reponse	21	14%

Time spent online by both groups was similar, although more people went online for up to an hour among the Groundswell respondents than in the Lemos&Crane group. There was a marked age effect in the Groundswell group – a third of respondents aged up to 30 said they spent more than 8 hours online a day. Seventeen per cent of this age group said they spent up to an hour online. The opposite was true for those over 30. A third said they spent up to an hour online, and just two said they spent over 8 hours online. The overall usage rates of Groundswell respondents are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5: Time online

Usage per day	No.	%
>8	10	8%
5 < 8 Hours	10	8%
3 < 5 Hours	16	13%
1 < 3 Hours	31	25%
Up to 1 Hour	54	44%
No reponse	2	2%

Ofcom reported in 2014 that the average time spent per month browsing online to be one-and-a-half hours per day (this excludes time spent accessing other media such as audio or video content, which was included by our respondents).¹³ Comparing the time respondents said they spent online to the amount of online activities they said they participated in, it seems likely that some respondents underestimated or understated the amount of time they spent online.

Skills, confidence and training

Those respondents who made at least occasional use of digital technology considered themselves to have passable skills or better. The majority rated their abilities as at least 'average', ranging up to 'expert', although 14% said they had no skills at all.¹⁴

¹³ Ofcom Media facts and figures, available at <http://media.ofcom.org.uk/files/2014/facts-figures-table.pdf> (Last accessed 1 December 2014)

¹⁴ Respondents answered in free text, which were then grouped in categories.

As these categories are self-reported, people may exaggerate their competence or their incompetence. Certainly some staff reported that people's stated confidence sometimes exceeded their technical skills. 'Sitting next to Nellie' as a way of acquiring skills tends to result in the replication of Nellie's limitations and misunderstanding as well as her attributes. The majority of people learned through practice and frequent use of digital technology. The next largest proportion had been taught by friends or family. Just 8% said they learned their skills through training at a service. This method was more popular with older respondents: 75% of those who took this approach were over 30 years of age. See further Charts 3 and 4.

Below are some examples of respondents' descriptions of their abilities, reflecting the considerable range.

- *'Pitifully inadequate'*
- *'I'm not advanced, but I'm in the middle. I have average knowledge. It's better than having none.'*
- *'100% confident for the things I need'*
- *'Good at what I want to do'*
- *'I'm a whizz on computers'*¹⁵

A common theme was confidence in handling those programmes that respondents most wanted to use and conversely a lack of confidence in their ability to do other tasks, reflecting a strong link between levels of motivation and skill. This typically meant people felt confident in their skills using Facebook and other social media sites, but found Microsoft Office and Word processing programmes more difficult to use - with obvious negative consequences for job seeking. Of the 65 people who specified a programme or activity which they were most confident using, 30 (46%) identified Facebook or other social networking sites. Among those who specified a programme or activity where they were least confident, 47% (26 of 55) named Microsoft Office or a particular Office programme (PowerPoint, Excel or word processing software). As one respondent noted:

- *'It confuses me. Everything on the internet apart from Facebook.'*¹⁶

The popularity of social networking was also evident among those with little confidence in using digital technology and the internet in particular. One person commented particularly on the limitations for socialising imposed by her relative lack of skills or knowledge.

- *'Lots of programmes I am not good at - how to do Twitter, Skype, how to see relatives on the screen.'*¹⁷

¹⁵ All Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondents answering the question, 'How would you describe your level of knowledge about the internet and any computer programmes and online tools that you use?'

¹⁶ Female, 26 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

¹⁷ Female, 39 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

3. Access and usage

Chart 3: How would you describe your level of knowledge?

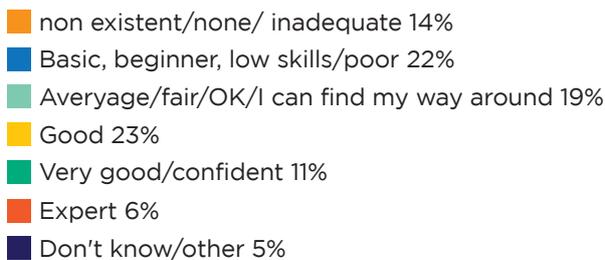
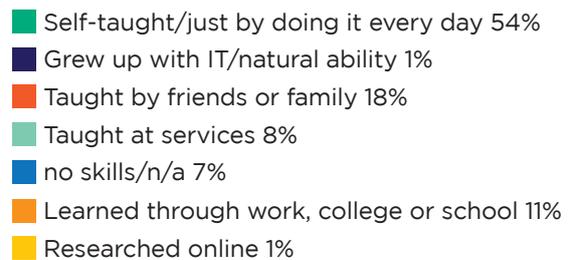
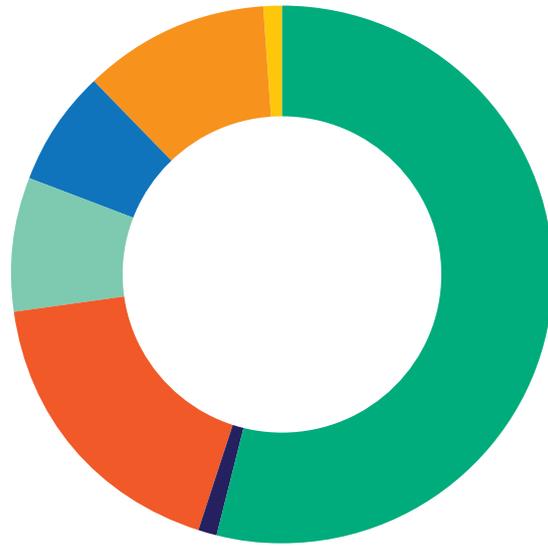


Chart 4: Where did you learn or develop your skills?



While social media sites were the most popular uses, people were also acutely aware that they needed computer skills to get a job. This may have contributed to the relatively large proportion of people who identified Microsoft Office software as an area of little confidence.

- *'If you ain't got the technology and you go to look for a job, the employers want you to use technology. So if you don't get the training to do it, how are supposed to get a job?'*¹⁸
- *'And what with all jobs now..... you need to have some sort of computer technology. What chance have we got?'*¹⁹

Comparisons with wider social norms

For the most part usage of mobile phones and the internet by people experiencing homelessness did not differ widely from social norms among the wider population although the differences between the two groups are telling. According to Ofcom, 93% of all adults own or use a mobile phone, compared to 91% of the Lemos&Crane sample and 87% of the Groundswell sample. Differences were slightly more marked in smart phone ownership. Ofcom figures suggest that 61% of all adults own a smart phone.²⁰ This compared to the

¹⁸ Male, 56 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

¹⁹ Male, 57 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

²⁰ Ofcom Communications Market report for stakeholders: facts and figures 2014 available at: media.ofcom.org.uk/files/2014/facts-figures-table.pdf (Last accessed 1 December 2014)

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54% of Lemos&Crane respondents who owned a smart phone (including Blackberries).²¹ The Groundswell peer research group had a lower proportion of smart phone ownership, 38% (including Blackberries). In short our respondents were more likely to be using older, less flashy phones.

According to Ofcom's figures among all internet users (regardless of which devices they own), 40% identify their laptop as the most important device for internet access, compared to 23% who say that a smart phone is the most important and 20% who identify a desktop computer.²² Among our respondents devices used to access the internet differ considerably from this wider population. Among the Lemos&Crane respondents the most commonly used device to access the internet was a smart phone, 50% (of the 115 who answered) and desktop computer at services, also 50%. Twenty-four per cent used a laptop to access the internet.²³ The Groundswell respondents were even more reliant on desktop computers at services to access the internet – with 60% saying this was their most common means of accessing the web, despite many (87%) owning a phone.

This might in part be the result of seeking to avoid additional costs of internet access via 3G on mobile phones, adhering to data caps or running out of credit. Numerous respondents spoke of being cautious about the amount of data they used on their smart phones, or of not being able to get contracts for their phones. This is discussed in more detail later.

- *'The only... issue is with the WiFi connection. I feel as if there are not enough Wifi hotspots for me to deal with my WiFi when my gigabytes or megabytes have run out on my contract, which lasts me...whatever use. If ... there could be a lot more WiFi hotspots I would appreciate that and then I could just move on, dealing with whatever I have to deal with.'*²⁴

In addition to access and devices there were specific challenges encountered by people who are homeless or vulnerably housed. For example, among the Groundswell respondents 45% had their phone lost or stolen when they were high or drunk, 22% changed phone number to avoid family, dealers, creditors or services and 13% said they regularly bought and sold their phone. Here is a particularly vivid account of the intertwining of digital technology with homeless lifestyles.

- *'When I was drinking, a mobile phone to me was a way of currency. Because when I was feeling flush on pay day, I would go and buy myself a mobile phone to try and communicate with people, but by the end of that week ... I needed money so I could have a drink. So then I used to sell it. So it was a way of saving actually!'*²⁵

There were also challenges of owning and using digital technology (especially mobile phones) particular to experience of homelessness, especially street homelessness; for example, difficulty finding places to charge a mobile phone and to keep technology safe and dry. In addition, 20% of the Groundswell respondents agreed that a loss of feeling in their fingertips led to difficulty using a smart phone.

²¹ The proportion of people in the Lemos&Crane sample who owned a smart phone is very close to proportion of the general public who owned a smart phone in 2013 – 51% [Ofcom 2014]. Though the smart phone market has increased rapidly in the general population over the last year, this effect has not yet been seen among people who are homeless.

²² Ofcom, The Communications Market 2014:4 Internet and Web-based content. Available at: stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr14/UK_4.pdf (Last accessed: 1 December 2014)

²³ This was in answer to the question 'what do you usually use to access the internet?' – to which some respondents provided more than one answer.

²⁴ Male, 38 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher).

²⁵ Groundswell focus group participant

3. Access and usage

- 'As a homeless person, there's two things – I mean I camp rough and it's the same for anyone rough. Both...all seasons you've got wet weather in England. Technology is a problem to upkeep as is paperwork as well. So for a homeless person it's best to have items that can be dried. So technology is something that I steer clear of. For example many of my phones have been currently broken because of water damage.'²⁶
- 'I don't have place to put my mobile, my laptop – even my clothes. Every day I walk with a bag. I sleep outside, people just stolen my shoes last time. I am afraid to keep £10 in my pocket'.²⁷
- 'Being homeless, it's difficult to find enough power points to charge a smart phone.'²⁸

The Groundswell peer researchers also identified practical uses of digital technology to meet needs particular to homeless and vulnerable people. Twenty-nine per cent of their respondents, for example, agreed that they had used email when sleeping rough to keep up to date with services and 25% said they had used the internet to find free food.

Given the relatively low numbers of respondents owning other types of digital technology (such as MP3 players and digital cameras) and the uncomplicated way in which these additional items were used, this report will focus on access on usage of the internet, computers, laptops, smart phones and tablets. This reflects what respondents discussed in their answers; other than listing the items they owned, none discussed in more detail their usage of other forms of digital technology. There were, of course, some respondents who did not use digital technology. Fewer than 10% of the Lemos&Crane sample and 13% of the Groundswell did not have a mobile phone, although some of these respondents expressed a wish to have one. Eight Lemos&Crane respondents never went online and had no interest in increasing their usage (5% of the overall sample). The proportion of Groundswell respondents who did not use the internet was higher – 27% of respondents never went online, although this does not reveal how many of that group wanted to increase their use of digital technology. The rest of this report will focus primarily on the experiences of those who were making use of digital technology, or who expressed an interest furthering their usage.

Digital Empowerment awards entry: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea digital empowerment for Stable Way Travellers' Site (runner up)

This project addresses inequalities and aims to improve social inclusion and life chances for the Traveller Community on Stable Way through enhanced digital technology. Kensington and Chelsea have installed free to use Wifi for residents at the traveller site. The council has also supplied the residents with refurbished computers to access the internet. This is particularly valuable for the children who live on the site, who need access to a computer as much of their homework is expected to be completed as a Word document then saved and printed in school. Access to a computer is also of great benefit to the parents of these young people in terms of remaining in contact with their schools via email, checking information such as the school calendar, completing school registration, GP appointments, benefit claims, driving license applications and training DVDs, such as the driving theory test, which can be played with a voice-over for those with low literacy skills.

²⁶ Male, 27 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

²⁷ Male, age unknown (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

²⁸ Male, 63 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

4. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND THE ROLE OF SERVICES

- *'It just seems that...because you are homeless, or because you are living in a hostel, digital technology just passes us by. Which I think is a pretty sad thing, especially for a person my age.'*²⁹

Summary

Reliance on services to access the internet was common but many people experienced difficulties with the resources available. As a result, people were not able to access the internet as frequently as the wider population. Common problems were poor or no internet connection at services and too few communal computers (with associated concerns about privacy and timing). Frustration with availability of internet access at services led some to rely on mobile phones for internet access, risking high-cost data usage. Some had attended training at services (8% said they had learned their skills in this way) but dissatisfaction with the training available was common. For those unfamiliar IT, the training was not basic or intensive enough. For those with higher levels of computer literacy some felt that the content of training was not relevant to their needs and aspirations. People spoke of being excluded from public libraries - once a refuge and resource for homeless people - on the basis of not having a permanent fixed address for membership, or for having too much luggage. For those that were able to register at libraries, time limits and unreliable internet were problematic.

Lemos&Crane's respondents typically accessed the internet using their mobile phones (50% of the 115 who answered) or on a desktop computer (50% of the 115 who answered). The remainder used laptops and occasionally tablets. This varied by age of respondent and type of service accessed. Among those under 30, 51% used mobile phones to access the internet, while 9% used a desktop. Of the remaining clients, 15% used mobile phones, while

²⁹ Male, 57 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

4. Barriers to access and the role of services

35% desktop. Respondents typically relied on services, libraries or public Wifi to access the internet. Of the Lemos&Crane respondents who both access the internet and specified the location half accessed the internet at homelessness services (including those resident in hostels or supported accommodation) and 19% used a library. Of all the Groundswell respondents 22% usually accessed the internet at the service where they were interviewed and 18% at a library. Sixty per cent relied on the use of a desktop computer though only 6% owned one.

Those who relied on services for access faced particular problems. Frequent among these were complaints that services had too few computers, unhelpful and perhaps unnecessary time and content restrictions or unreliable internet.

- *'I own a laptop but I am unable to use it here. Unless I want to sit on the bottom of the stairs somewhere. Basically because there's no Wifi. With very limited Wifi access I have got to use one of two very slow old desktops provided in the lounge. Two desktops for over 100 people. Trying to get your job search down there is diabolical.'*³⁰
- *'Slow connectivity, limited computers- 1 computer for 17 people is not enough and blocked access. Having to use communal space means no privacy when using computer.'*³¹
- *'[Any difficulties?] Yes! No WiFi at hostel. Have to rely on my phone's internet.'*³²
- *'I do not think that the internet and computers at the hostel are good enough. There should be more, websites should not be blocked and the internet should be much faster. I would really like WiFi so that we can access internet in our rooms but I know that probably won't ever happen.'*³³

The blocking of particular websites for security purposes was also problematic. Respondents reported that many services prevent access to particular websites such as YouTube and other entertainment sites. Other prohibitions brought particular challenges for foreign nationals who sometimes found access to websites from their home countries blocked by blanket security restrictions.

- *'I get annoyed living in a social services accommodation where there are restrictions on internet access. I understand why web access is blocked but sometimes it blocks innocuous sites and getting this block lifted takes time.'*³⁴
- *'A lot of websites are blocked. Security settings too high, such as accessing overseas search engines. Restricts use of sites in own language. Suggestion: block key words rather than overall settings.'*³⁵

³⁰ Male, 47 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

³¹ Female, 17 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

³² Female, 28 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

³³ Male, 18 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

³⁴ Female, 18 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

³⁵ Male, 22 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

Trends and Friends

These frustrations were mirrored in the Groundswell findings. Sixty-six per cent of the Groundswell respondents reported problems in accessing the internet through services. Of these, 38% complained that there were limitations on times they could go online, 33% that the sites they could access were limited and 31% reported limitations on places in the building where they could go online. Across both groups of respondents services seemed typically to rely on one or a few desktops with cabled internet for their clients.

- *'A lot of hostels do not give internet to their clients. They can't use it. They can use it downstairs in the computer room. But there's not in their rooms, so they can't use their laptop. That's weird isn't it. I don't know how they do it.'*³⁶
- *'Since I have become homeless and living in this hostel I've found it a bit harder. There's no access to anything digital in here. But when I have my own flat I had a laptop. And I said on here that I go online everyday...I do at some point or other on my phone.'*³⁷

Using computers at services also brought privacy concerns. Groundswell found that the most common security problem encountered was someone else's data still open on a communal computer (43%). The third most common was forgetting to log out of a communal computer (32%) and forgetting to clear browsing history on a communal computer (27%).

- *'I think for young people WiFi is almost a human right. You want us to succeed in the world and achieve our potential but nowadays that means accessing the internet for everything and we should be able to do this in a private and quiet space not just the communal area of a shared hostel.'*³⁸

Training

Training was also felt to be lacking or inadequate. Many respondents in both groups felt the training they were offered was not appropriate for their needs and usage aspirations. This was typically either because training wasn't basic enough or that the skills and programmes being taught were not relevant to the experience of those learning.

- *'More training on how to specifically use the software for real world purposes such as writing CVs, formatting and excel.'*³⁹
- *'As it is the progressive means of communication of the day, basic training should be enhanced. Tutoring and prices should be made more affordable.'*⁴⁰
- *'More training and very patient teachers [would improve confidence].'*⁴¹

³⁶ Groundswell focus group participant

³⁷ Male, 49 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

³⁸ Female, 18 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

³⁹ Male, 22 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁴⁰ Male, 53 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁴¹ Female, 48 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

4. Barriers to access and the role of services

Fifty-two per cent of the Groundswell group felt access to IT training was inadequate, 36% that the training was not basic enough and 49% that they needed one-to-one training.

- *'They teach us how to use computers. We should do one-to-one sessions, once or twice a week. But unfortunately the staff are always busy.'*⁴²
- *'There's not enough training basically. Like it would be good to do a course in the hostels or in day centres, where you go and they could teach you properly how to access the internet and stuff like this. Just more training. That's what they need, isn't it?'*⁴³

Some more confident respondents wanted advanced training that matched their aspirations to improve their circumstances and job prospects as well as expressing themselves more fully.

- *'I was put on a course by my local job centre. And they were using old base computers and this was supposed to be an industry standard course to get everybody up to industry standard. And they were using Windows 95.'*⁴⁴
- *'The training for the use of digital technology is purely, from what I've seen, for using computers – just literally logging on to an email account or setting up an email account, beyond that there isn't really much training available. If you want to use a Word package you might be able to get something that will cover that but that's about as far as it will go. You can't get help with like setting up a website or anything like that, which could actually help make you some money and get yourself out of the problem that you're in...'*⁴⁵

Libraries

Libraries, too, brought significant challenges for internet access, despite a significant number of respondents relying upon them (19% of Lemos&Crane respondents and 18% of Groundswell respondents). Common among difficulties faced at libraries were time limits on computer use and too few computers available for public use. Of the 66% of Groundswell's respondents who had difficulties accessing the internet through services 30% said that time limits in libraries were a problem.

- *'At the library the computers freeze or PCs break. They don't look after the computers and it's very difficult to access things. Saving files is a problem when using public PCs – you can lose your work.'*⁴⁶
- *'If you are using the library you only get an hour. And the only way you can go round that is to join about 6 or 7 libraries. And travel around.'*

⁴² Male, 40 (Speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁴³ Male, 43 (Speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁴⁴ Groundswell focus group participant

⁴⁵ Female, 37 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁴⁶ ale, 41 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

In addition to more general problems with library resources people faced specific difficulties especially associated with the experience of being homeless. For instance, respondents reported difficulty with many libraries' requirements that members have a permanent fixed address to join the library. Perhaps more troublingly, respondents reported being excluded from libraries for having too much luggage. Eleven per cent of the Groundswell respondents who had issues accessing internet at services said that libraries won't allow luggage.

- *'You could use a library but to use a library you have got to have a fixed permanent address to provide them... for them to sign you up to the library, to get a library card. So that's one out the window. So most of the time I just use the mobile phone to do job searches.'*⁴⁷
- *'I don't have ... have an address because I camp so I don't have a library account. Libraries don't let people walk in anymore and use internet without having an account. They used to be fine. But now it's changed.'*⁴⁸
- *'When you are homeless ... at this phase where you cannot access libraries, because you might have excess baggage. You might be tired, you might be falling asleep.'*⁴⁹

Cost, contracts and data

Respondents found it difficult to get contract phones and typically had restrictive data caps on their phone usage. Phone contracts require a bank account and often depend on a credit check, thereby excluding many homeless people. Fifty-five per cent of Groundswell respondents said they couldn't get a phone contract. Although monthly payments might be more than paying for credit, the cost per minute or text is often lower than it is for pay as you go. For those who rely on their phones for the internet a contract phone would in most instances be cheaper than relying on credit.⁵⁰ Respondents were mostly aware that they were often restricted to expensive and limiting payment systems of their phone, and spoke eloquently of the difficulties that those experiencing exclusion or poverty have in escaping such restrictions. Put simply: how expensive it is to be poor!

- *'Can I just say another thing - I think some people that are homeless, when they haven't got no credit, they can't get contracts and they have to pay sort of over the top when you are pay as you go. It's ridiculous. And for the amount of data you get. [...] You go over the data limited and it's like...astronomical charges. So it's hard for people -especially if people are homeless.'*⁵¹

Being trapped in over-priced and restrictive mobile use could have a significant impact on how people viewed themselves and their circumstances.

- *'But when you are homeless and usually you are unemployed, you have the services that are quite expensive on a pay as you go. And sometimes it can make it difficult, it can isolate you more. It makes it difficult for you to stay in touch with friends and family. All aspects of it is really ... boils down to shame of being homeless.'*⁵²

⁴⁷ Male, 47 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁴⁸ Male, 27 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁴⁹ Groundswell focus group participant

⁵⁰ Contracts for the latest mobile handsets are often much more expensive, as the cost of the phone itself is spread over the contract time.

⁵¹ Groundswell focus group participant

⁵² Female, 59 (speaking with a Groundswell peer researcher)

4. Barriers to access and the role of services

As a result of restrictive data allowances and expensive pay-as-you-go plans some (21) of those who identified their mobile phones as their primary access point for the internet also made frequent use of public WiFi at sites such as cafés and restaurants, McDonalds, the Barbican Centre in London and public hotspots. Some also made use of friends and family with their own WiFi connection. Limitations prompted some respondents to find inventive means of accessing the web.

- *'Me, myself I haven't got a smart phone or access to a computer. I just use the Apple store. You know, if there's anything I need on there I just pop up to the apple store and have a quick look on the WiFi.'*⁵³

Digital Empowerment awards entry: Papworth Trust (Museum Street Centre) My Safe Social Network (highly commended)

A comprehensive and bespoke project including a mainstream qualification course in Safe Social Networking skills that was written with and for the support of vulnerable disabled adults to access social networks and communicate with peers, friends and family in a safe and meaningful way. The course offers participants the opportunity to set up and use personal online accounts, to interact with their peers and develop their friendships and relationships with people in a meaningful way, both online and in a face to face context. The course includes:

- IT sessions, completing tasks towards proving competence in the use of social networking, using platforms of own choosing
- Talks and discussions in literacy based groups about safety online
- Discussion with external parties including the Suffolk Hate Crime Service and the police
- Tech night sessions, where disabled adults and their supporters are able to learn together to improve understanding, share knowledge and work together to form a safe framework of support
- Independent living skills session that focus on relationships both online and offline, and in how the two worlds interact.

⁵³ Male, 36 (speaking to a peer researcher)

5. FRIENDS, FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS

- '[I] met my first love after 26 years on Facebook.'⁵⁴

Summary

The most common use of digital technology was to stay in touch with family and friends. Less common was using technology to meet or interact online with new people, although the younger respondents were more comfortable doing this. People greatly valued digital technology for this, which was especially useful for those experiencing disruptive or difficult life events. For the most part, our respondents didn't report many difficulties – other than logistical issues with access – although some had experienced issues relating specifically to this use of technology. Respondents reported a wealth of positive experiences as well as a smaller number of negative experiences through interacting with others online, and sometimes extremes of each. They were not considerably more likely to become victim to online bullying or other forms of harm enabled by social networking, but at the same time the experiences of a few people underlined the vulnerability of people sleeping on the streets. As for much of the general population, using digital technology for social networking – with its potential for both positive and negative experiences – was a central, well-embedded and highly valued part of the respondents' lives.

The most frequent use of digital technology among respondents was keeping in touch with family and friends and interacting with other people. Of those who answered (142), 73% said they used the internet to keep in touch with family and friends. This was true for 84% of under 30s and 65% of over 30s. Fewer (47%) used it to meet new people. Of the Groundswell group, 67% of respondents who selected websites that they use included Facebook. Keeping in contact with friends and family has significant benefits for well-being. A recent study published in the American journal *Computers and Human Behavior* found text-based communication had a significant positive impact on self-esteem.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Male, 46 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁵⁵ Gonzales, A., *Computers in Human Behavior* Volume 39 'Text-based communication influences self-esteem more than face-to-face or cellphone communication', p.197-203. Pennsylvania US, October 2014

5. Friends, family and relationships

Ofcom data published in 2014 reports that 56% of people list social networking sites as among their regular internet usage with 48% saying they had used these within the week prior to the questionnaire and 8% accessing social networking sites less often.⁵⁶ Our respondents' reported behaviour was consistent with this. Sixty-seven per cent of those who those who listed websites they used included Facebook. Fifty-five per cent (88) of all the Groundswell respondents said they had used Facebook to try and reconnect with their families. Seventy-six per cent of these respondents said it was good to stay in touch with their family and 39% that it had brought them closer. However, 28% said that it had been unsuccessful and for 27% it had brought back upsetting memories. Facebook and other means of online social networking, it seems, has made contacting family easier, but mirrors the same complexities and many colours of family relationships otherwise experienced offline.

When asked to specify the best aspects of digital technology Groundswell responses also emphasised its relevance for staying in touch and being well connected. The most popular responses were texting (26%), emails (22%), and keeping in touch with family and friends (21%). Seventy per cent of Groundswell respondents said they only used their phone to keep in contact with friends and family, 18% said they go online to meet new people and 48% agreed that the web enabled them to stay in touch and be sociable when they couldn't get out. Apps that enable contact with others free of charge – such as Skype, WhatsApp and Viber – were particularly popular. Fifty-five per cent of Lemos&Crane respondents used a phone to keep in touch with friends and family and 26% went online to meet new people. Eighteen per cent used Skype and 12% used WhatsApp. Seven respondents did not keep in touch but would like to in the future. For some, using the internet to stay in touch with family and friends had special positive significance in light of difficult or disruptive life events.

- *'I mailed to my big brother when I wasn't allowed to talk to him so I could meet him on his birthday.'*⁵⁷
- *'I go on Facebook. Try to catch up with my kids because they are not talking to me.'*⁵⁸

For respondents who were not UK nationals, who had family living outside of the UK or who were estranged from members of their family, digital technology was especially important.

- *'The main things I find good about being on the internet is going on Facebook [...] I found my sister who I haven't spoken to for 9 years, so I found her on the Facebook and got her number and now we're in contact again so it's a good thing.'*⁵⁹

Mostly respondents used digital technology to keep in touch with family and friends already known to them, and not to meet new people. A few (six) of Lemos&Crane respondents said they either used online dating services or would like to, but it was not considered important by others. Younger respondents were more comfortable using open social networking

⁵⁶ Ofcom, The Communications Market 2014:4 Internet and Web-based content. Available at: stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr14/UK_4.pdf (Last accessed: 1 December 2014)

⁵⁷ Male, 17 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁵⁸ Male, 49 (talking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁵⁹ Male, 38 (talking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

and media, with tools such as Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat which allow users to share content with a wider audience: 46 respondents under the age of 30 made use of these tools compared to 22 respondents aged over 30.

Risks and concerns

Most of the difficulties people said they faced with social networking were technical, practical or logistical, such as problems getting a reliable internet connection or finding websites difficult to use. The issues of access mentioned in the previous section persisted as frustrations to fully joining in with social networking.

A few people, however, had concerns relating to online behaviour, such as online bullying and name calling, not trusting people they speak to online or feeling frustrated or anxious about online culture. Using the internet brought anxiety for some as well as potentially feeling overwhelmed. A striking finding was that 47% of the Groundswell respondents agreed that the internet had information 'which can make you paranoid'.

- *'Some people are nasty and insulting. I have been called horrible things by some people.'*⁶⁰
- *'Met a girl online and they said they want to go out. They were from the Philippines - it was dodgy. They can ask you for money.'*⁶¹
- *'Facebook is full of dumb, stupid things. When you spend time on it, you lose hours of your life. You aren't motivated [...] I want to speak to real people. I am so sad for young kids growing up in this world just using technology.'*⁶²

Although 68% of those who answered (133) said they had not experienced any problems at all with their use of digital technology, among those who had experienced difficulties the largest proportion (48%) were to do with their use of Facebook and social networking. Problems included people posting unwanted pictures or comments on profiles, having profiles hacked and people finding them using Facebook with whom they no longer wanted contact. These specific concerns were mentioned by respondents across all age groups.

The majority (85%) of our respondents said they had not had problems using digital technology for social networking and the bullying or unwanted online activity respondents reported was not more than for the general population. Some respondents, however, did speak of experiences which underline the increased vulnerability of homeless - and especially street homeless - people:

- *'I was on Facebook one time and one of my mates who I called a mate who was a nice person, who I actually thought he was nice. I said to him I am homeless, I am under the bridge in Richmond, can you come and meet me? And I thought it was one of my actual*

⁶⁰ Female, 23 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁶¹ Male, 41 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁶² Male, 23 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

5. Friends, family and relationships

*mates who I have known for years but it wasn't, it was someone else. So ... then this person turned up, he was taking pictures of me whilst I was sleeping. He was showing his bits and pieces to me when I was laying there. And he even tried raping me.'*⁶³

As in the general population, people had both positive and negative experiences using online social networking, and Facebook in particular. Some experiences were at the more extreme ends of this spectrum and very occasionally both extremes were recounted by one person:

- *'The last time I spoke to my sister before I got in contact with her on Facebook was when she was 5 and she is now 17. And I am so thankful that there is Facebook for people so they can actually get in contact with their family, their lost family' [...] My best mate - she was 13 and she was on Facebook and she was talking to this guy who lied about his age. He liked saying that he was 14 when he wasn't, he was 56. And she met up with him and ... yeah. The bad bit about it is that he done stuff to her what shouldn't have happened that's why some internet bits you might want to be safe about.'*⁶⁴

Digital Empowerment awards entry: Creativity WorksThe Re|Source (highly commended)

The Re|Source is a peer led virtual studio and community development tool, designed and developed by women in the criminal justice system. The studio enables women to share their creative work with friends, family and other women in the criminal justice system, safely and securely. People can comment, share and discuss works uploaded to the site. The next step is to commercialise the site so that users can sell their artistic work.

The Re|Source works by connecting:

- Parallel communities in different geographical areas for example, attending the same creative courses in different sites.
- Different communities for example, those with mental health needs with artists through sharing their work and reflections.
- Individuals in custodial settings with others for example, sending their creative space to families and friends.
- Closed communities with general public and arts spaces for example, showing of private creative space and work through digital online exhibition spaces.
- Diverse audiences with cultural spaces for example, exploring groups' creative responses to exhibitions/shows in art galleries and showing these alongside original works.
- Enabling independent peer groups to manage their own meetings, creative projects and on-line spaces and exhibitions.

⁶³ Female, 20 (talking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁶⁴ Respondent, 20 (talking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

6. LEISURE, ENTERTAINMENT AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

- *'[Leisure and entertainment is] very important- it is how I engage with the world as it is comparatively cheap compared to accessing these thing in reality- for example, buying a magazine is the same price as a tube fare so I would usually not but I can read online for free.'*⁶⁵

Summary

Leisure, entertainment and pursuing hobbies and interests was the second most common use of digital technology, and was highly valued by respondents. For the most part this took the form of watching TV, films and music online, but also included online and offline gaming, keeping up with magazines, gossip and blogs, and researching things of interest. People had a wide range of interests that they pursued and researched online, primarily through reading about things that interest them – such as werewolves, ghosts, history and crime – although a few kept up with, and contributed to, discussion on popular topics such as fashion. A handful developed their skills online or worked to turn their interest into a marketable skill. Our respondents were notably less likely to use the internet for shopping or banking; perhaps they don't do as much of either whether online or offline as the general population.

Entertainment and leisure was the next most popular use of digital technology compared to keeping in touch with family and friends. This includes activities such as watching or streaming music, TV shows, or films online, playing games, looking up information relating to a hobby or interest, or reading magazines and blogs online. Of those who answered (113), 67% said they used the internet for leisure and entertainment (65% of under 20s, 47% of over 20s). These findings were mirrored in the Groundswell group among whom YouTube was the second most commonly used site, with 70% of those who answered (121) saying they regularly used it.

⁶⁵ Female, 18 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

7. Concerns

There was some crossover between social networks and leisure and entertainment. Some respondents also grouped social media such as Facebook and Twitter into leisure and entertainment usage, while others spoke of inherently social leisure activities such as online gaming communities or online forums. Eighty per cent of Lemos&Crane respondents said that using digital technology for entertainment and leisure was either important or very important, 4% said it was 'quite' or 'relatively' important and 13% said it was not important. Responses varied across service types and age groups shown in Table 6.

Table 6: How important is digital technology for entertainment and leisure

"Very Important"

Service	No.	%
Floating Support	15	28%
Day Centre Drop In	19	35%
Hostel	9	17%
Foyer	4	7%
Supported/Hostel	3	6%
YP Floating Support	2	4%
YP Hostel	2	4%
Total	54	100%

Age	No.	%
10-20	13	24%
21-30	15	28%
31-40	2	4%
41-50	15	28%
5-60	8	15%
60-70	1	2%
Total	54	100%

"Important"

Service	No.	%
Floating Support	9	40.91%
Day Centre Drop In	3	13.64%
Hostel	6	27.27%
Foyer	2	9.09%
Supported	2	9.09%
Total	22	100%

Age	No.	%
10-20	3	14%
21-30	5	23%
31-40	3	14%
41-50	4	18%
51-60	4	18%
60-70	3	14%
Total	22	100%

"Quite Important"

Service	No.	%
Floating Support	4	50%
Day Centre Drop In	1	13%
Hostel	2	25%
Supported/Hostel	1	13%
Total	8	100%

Age	No.	%
10-20	1	12.50%
21-30	4	50.00%
41-50	2	25.00%
51-60	1	12.50%
Total	8	100%

"Not Important"

Service	No.	%
Floating Support	7	58%
Day Centre Drop In	1	8%
Hostel	1	8%
Foyer	1	8%
YP Supported	2	17%
Total	12	100%

Age	No.	%
10-20	1	8.33%
21-30	2	16.67%
31-40	1	8.33%
41-50	4	33.33%
51-60	4	33.33%
Total	12	100%

Trends and Friends

For some, online leisure and entertainment was clearly a crucial part of their lives.

- *'Very [important]. I would feel a bit isolated without it.'*⁶⁶
- *'Without it would feel bored and uninterested. By using digital technology it keeps the brain stimulated.'*⁶⁷
- *'I play games on there to relax and talk to other friends on the computer.'*⁶⁸
- *'I want internet in my room so I can play online where I won't drink as much as you can't play games when you're pissed.'*⁶⁹
- *'Important as I'm going through depression it helps me look at things to help me.'*⁷⁰

Leisure and entertainment is of course a primary use of digital technology for many users across the general population. Ofcom statistics report that 53% of web users regularly use the internet to watch TV or videos, 38% for watching video clips or webcasts and 35% for playing games.⁷¹ In general these figures are lower than for our respondents, for whom entertainment and leisure was a central part of their use of digital technology.

Shopping

Ofcom wider population figures place both purchasing goods and services and banking as more common activities than social networking or any entertainment uses (at 64% and 57% respectively).⁷² These are two common uses that were under-represented among our respondents. Fewer people used digital technology for shopping and banking compared to the wider population. Only a handful of Lemos&Crane respondents said they shopped or banked online, and the majority of these were under 30. Some expressed anxiety about personal information - and especially bank details - being accessible online. Of the Groundswell respondents 28% agreed they lacked the knowledge or confidence to use online shopping.

- *'I use digital technology mainly if I need to purchase something... I will do a search on the pricing, availability, choice.'*⁷³
- *'In case they get my account/pin number in the bank. I have paranoia about shopping online.'*⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Male, 17 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁶⁷ Male, 45 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁶⁸ Male, 45 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁶⁹ Male, 44 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁷⁰ Male, 27 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁷¹ Ofcom, The Communications Market 2014:4 Internet and Web-based content.
Available at: stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr14/UK_4.pdf (Last accessed: 1 December 2014)

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Female, 59 (speaking with a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁷⁴ Female, 57 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

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One or two people had been successful using eBay profitably.

- *'I have sold things on eBay and I couldn't believe it. It was shoes from Primark that I got for £10 and I think I sold them off for £26. And also requested some postage and packaging so good profit.'*⁷⁵
- *'Sometimes it's very hard to get pedigree dogs, good dogs. So I can go on the internet and then put pictures of my dogs up and sell my dogs. Or buy dogs and stuff like that.'*⁷⁶

Aside from the potential risks when shopping online a few people spoke about online shopping taking something away from the experience of actually purchasing something. For some it was the confidence that the item being bought was right for them. For others it was more the emotional experience of making a purchase. Everyone who mentioned something to this effect saw online shopping as an inadequate substitute.

- *'[Online shopping] is not for me. Because if I am going out to buy a shirt or a pair of jeans, I like to see the shirt or the pair of jeans. I don't - having to look at it on the computer screen is not the same...'*⁷⁷
- *'No I don't like shopping online. I like to go into this shop, look around, pick and choose what you like.'*⁷⁸

Although some, typically younger, respondents shopped online and a few researched deals online, the number of people using digital technology for this purpose was less than across the wider population.

When asked if digital technology enabled respondents to access anything they felt they would not otherwise experience, 67% of those that answered (102) listed at least one thing. Of these the most common were Facebook, other social media and keeping in touch with people. Answers also included petitions, blogs, forums and comments, news and current affairs, games, finding information on hobbies and keeping up with celebrity gossip.

Hobbies and interests

Fifty-six per cent of respondents used the internet to research or pursue their interests and hobbies. This was an important part of their lives. Respondents had an extremely diverse range of interests and hobbies, as is to be expected from any large group of different ages, backgrounds and experiences. Hobbies included making music, animals and nature, werewolves, zodiac signs, celebrity gossip, sports, chess, learning new languages, flower arranging, crime, history and local history, crafts and cooking.

- *'Learning a little Japanese - basics such as greetings. He is working with some Japanese colleagues and would like to build relationships.'*
- *'I look up different London areas and history. I read about Ronnie and Reggie Kray... I try to play computer chess against the PC but it always beats me!'*

⁷⁷ Male, 49 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁷⁸ Male, 55 (speaking with a Groundswell peer researcher)

Trends and Friends

- *'Documentary films about haunted houses – I like ghosts.'*
- *'I take photos of parks and nature.'*
- *'I love music. You don't think about the shit in your life when you have music. It helps you stay calm.'*⁷⁹

A few respondents used digital technology to try to establish stability and income through their hobbies for example, through online advertising of their craftwork (such as flower arranging or music) or learning to turn a hobby, such as computer programming or coding, into a marketable skill.

- *'My sister put pictures of wedding flower arrangements, funeral flowers and wedding cakes to show what I can do'*⁸⁰

A few respondents (6) used the internet to access discussions, debates, forums and blogs and engage with a wider conversation.

- *'I look at a number of blogs and take part in serious discussions and petitions about parliament, government and how youth homelessness is viewed that I might not if I did not have access to the computer.'*⁸¹

When asked if the internet gave them access to anything they would otherwise not experience, leisure and entertainment, and particularly social media and hobbies and interests were common responses.

Digital Empowerment awards entry: SHP Unheard Holler (shortlisted)

SHP set up Unheard Holler (<http://unheardholler.blogspot.com>) in 2011 as a platform for the people passing through SHP to express their views, either in writing or on video, on social issues and other topics that are important to them. SHP worked with social enterprise On Road Media, to run blogging workshops for SHP clients as well as sessions for SHP services staff to enable them to support people in their services who wish to learn how to blog. The blogging project is embedded into the service by ensuring that regular workshops are delivered by staff and volunteers at each of our five training hubs across London, and that training is also available to our hostel residents. The blog covers personal experiences and social issues like housing, mental health and addiction, as well as general subjects chosen by the bloggers. Participants are taught how to use flip cameras, film interviews, conduct 'vox pops' and edit short videos, as well as how to set up a blog, write a blog post with at least one image and one hyperlink for Unheard Holler, and make their own video blogs.

⁸⁰ Female, 58 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁸¹ Female, 17 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

7. CONCERNS

Summary

Respondents' concerns about digital technology were largely focused on privacy and the risk of identity fraud, and hacking. Although some had experienced online and offline bullying, harassment or threats to well-being, proportionately very few reported being worried about bullying and blackmail. Although a majority reported accessing services using digital technology, in practice this took the form of researching information about services on offer and receiving text reminders for appointments (a popular service). There were far fewer instances of people actively engaging with services online, attaining information and guidance specific to their situation (for example, through online assessment tools) or asserting themselves as consumers (for example through direct communication online or providing feedback). Some, larger-scale services conducted online – such as Universal Jobmatch – were often considered too complex and difficult to use. In general, respondents used digital technology for social networking, entertainment and interest – a meaningful and popular pursuit across the population, but not to express themselves as consumers or to engage proactively with ground-level services. This might in part be due to inaccessibility or absence of many online services.

Safety, privacy and security

Relatively few respondents reported negative experiences when using digital technology and the majority of these were about social networking. Around half of those that answered had worries about using digital technology. These were predominantly older respondents. While some (mainly younger) respondents were confident they could manage online risks. Others avoided particular uses of the internet so as to avoid difficulties.

Privacy was a common issue among those respondents with concerns. Using shared computers for social networking led some to feel uneasy about accidentally leaving their

social media sites accessible to others. In addition, concerns based on well-publicised privacy scandals were expressed. Aside from privacy, one clearly emerging concern was the threat of losing face-to-face contact with people, and in particular being denied services due to an increased systematic use of digital technology.

Respondents' negative experiences and safety concerns

When asked if people had experienced any problems with safety or privacy when using digital technology the majority (74%) of those that answered (132 respondents) said that they had none. Sixteen knew somebody else who had experienced a problem with security or privacy. Nine per cent of the Groundswell questionnaire respondents said they had had their identity stolen online.

A few people did speak of experiences – particularly with social media – which were threats to security and well-being. These included the more extreme examples of offline harassment, such as those discussed in the social networks chapter but also included blackmail and online bullying.

- *'He made a mistake online and he was consequently getting blackmailed for it [...] My brother is very trusting, so he ended up talking to people online, meeting people online. He don't get the internet. He was like, 'oh I meet people' online and then consequently he met the wrong people.'*⁸²

Although relatively few respondents said they had experienced a problem with safety, security or privacy using digital technology, a higher proportion had concerns about this. Among the Lemos&Crane respondents who answered this question (88), 48% said that safety and privacy was something that concerned them, of whom 24 said that their concerns affected the way they use the internet. There was a clear correlation between age and concerns about safety and privacy. Thirty-five per cent of those under 30 were worried about safety and privacy, compared to 84% of those over 30. These seemed to be general concerns – when asked to specify particular concerns a relatively large number of both the under 30s and the over 30s were unable to (77% and 75%, respectively).

- *'I want to tell you I am getting old and I am getting scared.'*⁸³

Some people had few concerns simply because they avoided particular online activities such as banking and online shopping, or putting their details online.

People were primarily concerned about the security of their personal information and the threat of identity theft or fraud. Concerns about bullying, harassment, blackmail or other online threats were less common, at 6%. This was mirrored in the Groundswell survey. Just 6% mentioned being bullied or attacked online as one of their worries (selecting three main

⁸² Male, 20 speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher

⁸³ Male, 60 (speaking with a Groundswell peer researcher)

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concerns from a list). More common worries were losing face-to-face contact with people, services putting personal information online, spending too much time on the internet, developing physical problems (such as poor eyesight or a bad back), being found by somebody they didn't want to see or accidentally downloading a virus.

- *'I am very worried about giving over... my details.... even my name, my age, my date of birth. Because... where I live...people can steal your identity... they can access your bank account.'*⁸⁴

The impact of recent highly publicised privacy scandals and instances of hacking were evident in the concerns and worries that some respondents shared. References to NSA, eBay being hacked and other privacy scandals reported in the media were recounted.

- *'The British government they spy on Google, Facebook ... for example. Yes I am simple person, they don't care about me. But if I was somebody who they are interested in they can read all my emails and check my Facebook. There is no private. I believe this because of people like Edward Snowden and Wikileaks. What can I do? I can do nothing.'*⁸⁵
- *'I hear Sky news said that a hacker took 600,000 passwords'*⁸⁶
- *'I would not want to do online banking. There was a recent problem with eBay. Nothing is secure on the internet.'*⁸⁷

The second common concern, which came up primarily in the Groundswell open question, was losing face-to-face contact as a result of increased use of technology and of services going online in particular. There were two aspects of this concern: that loss of face-to-face contact would reduce levels of trust and connection between people, increasing isolation (67% of Groundswell respondents agreed that phones or computers stop people communicating properly) and that complex online systems would make accessing services more difficult.

- *'I just find that people avoid ... they use their tablet, phone or internet as a way of avoiding what is around them. And I think lot of us would converse and talk a lot more and be a lot more ... aware of our surroundings if we just put down the mobile or put down the phone and didn't use the internet.'*⁸⁸
- *'I've never had to [access services] online - please God I don't. Because I just wouldn't like to do it online. I would rather just phone up and make an appointment ... it is a trust thing. And it's face-to-face contact.'*⁸⁹
- *'That's when things get sorted out, when you speak to people. You can negotiate, you can express, you build trust ... Like myself, I build relationships. Offices or people that are working with me start to trust me and they will work hard ...they will help me. Most of the breakthroughs for homeless people are done... in person, not online.'*⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Male, 55 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁸⁵ Male, 40 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁸⁶ Male, 52 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁸⁷ Male, 48 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁸⁸ Male, 32 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁸⁹ Female, 50 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁹⁰ Male, 27 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

Lack of use by services: nudging uptake

The appetite for digital technology among service users was rarely matched by homelessness and other support services. This was manifested in two ways. In the first instance, many respondents expressed frustration at levels of training and facilities for accessing the internet and computers, as discussed in chapter 4. In addition, few services capitalised upon clients' use of the internet to improve communication of important information or nudge uptake of services. Those services that were online were mostly inaccessible and complex for users – such as Universal Jobmatch, which was commonly mentioned as being difficult to access. Although over half of respondents (56%) reporting using digital technology to access services, only 10% used digital technology to actively engage with services such as receiving specific information relating to them, communicating directly with staff, completing forms and applications for housing or support. The remainder primarily spoke either of contacting services by telephone or using the web to research available services but not to interact with those services directly. Text and voicemail reminders, however, about appointments, for example, were well-received. These were most commonly mentioned (by 18% of those who said they communicated with services) as being particularly helpful. Sixty-eight per cent of the Groundswell survey respondents agreed it was good to have text messages reminding them of appointments.

A generally low level of actively engaging with homelessness, social care, health or other services online was also the case among respondents of the Groundswell survey. Of this group, 34% had used NHS Direct and 8% had accessed a consulate online. On the other hand, respondents were aware of a systematic move towards services being accessed and distributed online. Forty-two per cent said that some services wanted them to put their accounts online and 21% said their GP wanted them to book appointments online.

Numerous people reported considerable difficulties accessing and navigating .GOV websites and Universal Jobmatch in particular. Thirty-four per cent of Groundswell respondents agreed it was difficult to conduct job searched online. For some this was merely a nuisance while for others it brought considerable anxiety. Difficulty with this site did not vary much between age groups.

- *'[Universal Jobmatch] was terrible. It was like – the website wasn't very helpful. It was very confusing ... it was for me. What I found was ...I don't know how to answer these questions. So I could potentially be answering questions wrong and they might think that I am trying to pull a fast one so to speak. It's not, it's just I don't understand what is being said in front of me.'*⁹¹
- *'Ease of facility of use in these websites is the biggest barrier for people to be able to benefit from them being there.'*⁹²

Direct and personalised interaction with services via digital technology (such as text reminders) was appreciated. Many respondents, however, felt excluded and unsupported by systematic moves by services to online provision, without providing face-to-face or phone

⁹¹ Male, 22 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁹² Groundswell focus group participant

7. Concerns

support for those who could not access these or who found navigating online systems difficult. This was, again, most frequently expressed in relation to potential employers, job seekers allowance and Universal Jobmatch.

- *'... A friend of mine went to sign on a couple of days ago. This person is very poor with reading and writing. To do that job search online -wow, wow! Well would they accept your explanation when you go to sign on? No they won't - you should go and look for a job. But there's no one to help first time with the computer and help you do it. So you've got to face the next problem -when are you going to get paid?'*⁹³
- *'Where is that communication? There's no communication. It's just you do this and if you don't fit the criteria you know you're out.'*⁹⁴
- *'If there's a job in the paper at the moment, you will see an internet thing but you will not see a phone number where you can phone up for an application form. And that to me is wrong because they are marginalising those people that don't have internet access. They are saying we don't want you if you have to phone up.'*⁹⁵
- *'It could be a lot better. They could make it easier... like you can't go to the Jobcentre - there's no one there to help you, you've got to do it by yourself.'*⁹⁶

Some Lemos&Crane respondents made suggestions for how services could use digital technology to improve communication with their service users. For the most part suggestions were based on utilising already popular free platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Skype to enable communication in a familiar format. These suggestions are similar in practice to text-reminders; ground-level, personalised and direct communication - via digital technology - between service user and service. A few people also suggested specific approaches to improving the accessibility of services for homeless and vulnerable people.

- *'For example you could have an app where homeless people could register with you and call [a] street response team with information where they are.'*⁹⁷
- *'Have more information videos and clips to show what happens and what they can expect. Use QR codes to link to service out of hours.'*⁹⁸

For the most part, however, suggestions centred on improving training, the facilities at services, making contacting services free of charge by phone or over the internet and ensuring that emails and other communications were responded to.

⁹³ Groundswell focus group participant

⁹⁴ Groundswell focus group participant

⁹⁵ Groundswell focus group participant

⁹⁶ Male, 23 (speaking to a Groundswell peer researcher)

⁹⁷ Male, 50 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

⁹⁸ Male, 22 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

Respondents' usage

Another concern, closely linked to the above, was that of the typical usage of digital technology by respondents. Social networking, social media and leisure and entertainment were the most popular uses of digital technology and of the internet in particular. While this is a meaningful aspect of many people's lives and an important – and popular – benefit of digital technology across society, opportunities for other more practical or developmental benefits of digital technology were not being taken. Respondents were not actively engaging with services, accessing specific information or services to improve their situation. People were not using digital technology to express themselves as a consumer group. This was exacerbated by services not meeting the need for service users in terms of facilities, training or online resources. This is not a consequence of customer inertia or lack of interest but services not meeting demand, nudging uptake or publicising online resources. Equally, the inaccessibility of many services' online platforms, particularly government services, is an additional hurdle for those who want or need to use online services.

Some respondents, however, used digital technology to exemplify the potential for day-to-day use of digital technology for regular, useful contact with support staff as well as control over financial and social circumstances. These respondents were typically younger.

- *'I often text staff and social care. Project staff often email me with information, reminders etc. My school also email me to let me know what is happening in terms of timetabling and coursework for the week. I manage my benefits claims online and also receive my pay slips to my email account. I regularly use online banking. I use the forums on orange and other mobile phone companies to resolve problems with phone contracts and give feedback. I use internet to make my GP appointments.'*⁹⁹

In addition, there were a few potentially troubling uses of digital technology among the responses, as well as instances in which respondents seemed vulnerable to exploitation:

- *'You can add a young girl and it might be their mother or a bloke even. You don't who people are. People need more education on it.'*¹⁰⁰
- *'Research things like, serial killers.'*¹⁰¹
- *'He is worried about safety and viruses. He is not using his laptop until he gets the latest version of Norton Anti-Virus installed by a PC shop. It seems that the anti-virus software/ PC shop is tapping into client's insecurities about security and privacy to charge a lot of money for software updates.'*¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Female, 17 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent). This respondent didn't currently own a phone, and lived in a young persons' hostel with communal desktop computers. She also owned her own laptop, provided by support services to assist in A Level studies.

¹⁰⁰ Male, 48 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent)

¹⁰¹ Male, 27 (Lemos&Crane questionnaire respondent). This respondent was online for 5 to 8 hours every day.

¹⁰² Staff member conducting a Lemos&Crane questionnaire with a 63-year-old male

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report identified patterns in usage of digital technology that challenge and contradict common stereotypes of homeless people. Respondents were actively seeking to remain engaged and embedded in ordinary social and cultural life and used digital technology – much as the general population do – to achieve this. On the other hand, the research identified barriers and frustrations with access to and use of digital technology which were especially associated with the experience of homelessness and exclusion. The considerable emotional, social and practical benefits of digital inclusion for homeless people were evident in responses – alongside less commonly felt fears and anxieties, principally around the elimination of face-to-face interaction by increased systematic migration of services to online systems.

Conclusions

Usage

Usage of digital technology – and mobile phones and internet in particular – is widespread among homeless and vulnerable people, and almost as prevalent as in the wider population. Some patterns of use differed from the wider population, reflecting differing circumstances. Nearly all the respondents had a mobile phone, and a significant proportion had a smart phone. Although laptop, desktop and tablet ownership was less common, and markedly lower than the general population, a significant proportion owned one of these devices. The majority (an average of 70%) used the internet at least once a week, typically spending between one and three hours online at a time. While the wider population most commonly rate laptops as their usual means of getting online, homeless and vulnerable people interviewed for this report typically relied on their mobile phones and desktops provided by services: 60% of

Trends and Friends

Groundswell respondents relied on desktops for internet access. Respondents - and younger respondents in particular - prized their mobile phones and internet access. Respondents were able to get online less often than the general population, but spent a comparable length of time online during each session.

Particular uses of digital technology - and of mobile phones in particular - which differ from the wider population are also evident. Frequent buying and selling of mobile phones, changing mobile numbers frequently and relying on public internet access, for example, were common reflecting the experience of being homeless. Similarly, mobile phones were a means for some to find free food and to access services, although sleeping rough made it difficult to keep technology dry, safe and charged.

Internet access was most commonly used to stay in touch with family and friends, for entertainment and leisure and to pursue personal interests. Fewer respondents used online banking or shopping than the general population.

Benefits

Digital technology, mobile phones and the internet in particular, had significant and meaningful benefits in maintaining positive social networks - keeping in touch with family and friends - and engaging in popular culture and entertainment online. Respondents most commonly used - and were most confident using - those programmes and platforms that enabled social contact: email, Facebook and other social networking sites, Skype and other video calling software and texts or instant messaging.

Contrary to the stereotype of homeless people as living itinerant and isolated existences, reliant on fleeting and potentially intense friendships with others in the same situation as them, the respondents in this research used digital technology to remain embedded in family life and friendship groups. This for some was particularly beneficial in light of disruptive or difficult life events in the present or the past.

Difficulties with access at services

Many respondents relied on services to gain access to the internet and the majority of these experienced difficulties and frustrations with this. Complaints of homelessness services having too few computers to meet demand, unreliable or slow internet, poor provision for privacy when using computers and restricted internet were consistently voiced by respondents. This is a significant limitation on people's usage of the internet both for practical tasks such as job hunting, applying for housing or researching services as well as accessing the benefits of keeping in touch with family and friends, pursuing hobbies and engaging in popular entertainment and mainstream online culture. This pushed some to rely on their mobile phones for internet access - a frustrating option.

Libraries, too, were a source of considerable frustration for some respondents, of whom roughly a fifth (with little difference across age groups) relied on libraries to access the internet. The requirement of many libraries for members to have a fixed permanent address was an insurmountable hurdle for many respondents, preventing many from accessing library

8. Conclusions and recommendations

resources – including the internet – at all. For those that were able to join a local library, difficulties with privacy, timings on computers and unreliable internet were a problem. Some respondents spoke of being turned away from libraries for having too many bags with them on arrival.

These barriers represented a significant source of concern and frustration to many of the homeless people interviewed for this research, who were keenly aware of the need for access and skills with digital technology for employment, access to services including benefits and social and cultural inclusion. Respondents were equally aware that their circumstances occasionally forced them into expensive or restrictive set-ups for mobile phone and internet access and spoke eloquently about the emotional, practical and financial implications of this.

Problems associated with exclusion: prejudice and price

The payment plans that respondents typically relied on were not good value for money. Despite relying on their smart phones for internet access, respondents were often excluded from cheaper pricing options for phone and internet. Credit checks, larger initial payments and the need for regular direct debits prevented many respondents from entering into a contract. The consequence for many was limiting data allowances with the threat of costly charges.

Lower-cost contracts and payment plans for mobile phones, such as rolling short-term contracts, are available and some phone companies specifically offer low-cost SIM-only flexible contracts. This approach might be suited to this group but was mentioned by just one respondent, suggesting that few knew of the option or were informed or encouraged by support staff to find out more.

Additional problems associated with the experience of being homeless included difficulty keeping digital technology safe and dry when street homeless and risk of theft. As a counterpoint to this, respondents often showed considerable resourcefulness in finding ways to access digital technology, and WiFi in particular, for the things they needed.

Support services online

Service providers have not fully exploited the opportunities or benefits of digital technology in service provision. Although many services – employment and Jobseekers Allowance in particular – are now primarily online, people experienced great difficulty, anxiety and frustration in trying to navigate these systems and felt unsupported and excluded by a system which seemed to privilege those with regular internet access and good computer (and general) literacy skills.

On the other hand, respondents valued the ways in which services could use technology to keep in touch with them, such as appointment reminder texts and alerts. This potential to maintain contact and provide information to service users doesn't seem to be commonly offered. Although many were concerned that digital communications might supersede face-

to-face contact and conversation, people also valued immediate, personalised information via digital technology and some offered succinct suggestions for how service providers might improve their service using digital technology. While by no means a replacement for the one-to-one interpersonal work, digital technology nevertheless has considerable practical potential, which is far from being fully realised.

Recommendations

1. Improving internet access at homelessness services

The majority of respondents were reliant on support services to access the internet and many were frustrated by the experience. Internet access has the potential for significant and meaningful emotional and social benefits in terms of maintaining and engaging in positive social networks and culture and improving skills and confidence often necessary for a long-term move away from homelessness. In addition, practical tasks associated with state, health and statutory services are increasingly only accessed online. Respondents relied on mobile phones and desktop computers at services to access the internet. If access at premises of support services was inadequate some respondents relied on their smart phones for access and so risked expensive data charges as well as experiencing the frustration of navigating sites on a mobile phone. It is therefore in the interests of clients and providers alike to improve access to the internet at services. As well as improving internet connections (for example, by switching from cabled internet to a far less restrictive and more ubiquitous availability of WiFi) this might also include reviewing current protocols for blocking online content. The widespread availability of WiFi at homelessness services would be enormously popular among service users as well as having potentially transformational effects in lifestyles and employment prospects.

2. Library access for homeless people

One of the more concerning findings emerging from this research is the manner in which homeless people are often excluded – either deliberately or indirectly – from accessing computers, the internet and other services at some local libraries. Having a fixed permanent address for membership for lending accounts, for which debts might be accrued, is a reasonable requirement. For those members who wish only to access computers, however, for which you pay before use, or newspapers it seems an unnecessarily excluding hurdle. Public use of computers, or computer access-only accounts, for which no fixed address is necessary, is an achievable modification to the system which would allow homeless people to make use of computers and the internet more freely.

Excluding people on the basis of carrying sleeping baggage or for other characteristics associated with being street homeless seems unfair and reinforces social exclusion, poor self-image and the practical, financial and social frustrations of life as a homeless person.

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The current limits on what people may or may not bring with them should be urgently reconsidered. Alternatively, a safe place within the library where baggage might be left at the owners' risk could be offered. Exclusion on the basis of other physical characteristics associated with street homelessness is disturbing.

3. Support and information to find cheaper access solutions

There are cheaper options available for internet access and smart phone contracts than both pay-as-you-go and long-term contracts. These include bundles, pay-as-you-go dongles, flexible contracts and SIM-only rolling contracts. Many of these do not require credit checks and allow customers to change or terminate without fee at any time and to pay either by direct debit or monthly bank transfer.

It would be in the interests of service users and homelessness services alike if support staff at services were to become much better versed in the options available on the market, display and provide information to their clients about finding cheaper ways to navigate phone and internet providers. Supporting people to set themselves up with a system that suits their circumstances would ensure clients are better equipped to break out of a pattern of expensive services for something on which they rely for social and practical inclusion.

4. Incorporating digital inclusion into support workers' key working and support plans

Digital technology has overwhelming significance for many homeless and vulnerable people both in terms of maintaining contact with friends and family, participating in mainstream culture and accessing necessary services such as job searching and benefits. Digital inclusion for many is becoming almost a pre-requisite for social inclusion and part of a route out of homelessness and towards emotional resilience. Given this, digital inclusion – ensuring clients' access to a mobile phone and internet – is a meaningful part of support workers' role in key working and resettlement. This is increasingly important as many more services move online, and those without access to the internet – or the confidence and skills to use it – are excluded from important practical as well as social online activities.

Support workers might include steps to promote digital inclusion in their key working, support planning and resettlement. This should not be on a token or ad hoc basis but a central part of the support package, to match the utility role of digital technology in the lives of many respondents like electricity, hot water or TV. For instance, an initial assessment might include a new client's current use of digital technology and ways in which they could be helped to improve this. Supporting somebody through the move into new accommodation might include helping them secure reasonably-priced, good quality internet access and an affordable mobile phone contract.

5. Services to provide cheap or free equipment to clients

Services could provide cheap, second-hand equipment such as laptops or mobile phones to those who would benefit from their own resources for internet access but otherwise wouldn't be able to do so. This might be achieved by establishing a partnership with local second-hand traders or others within the digital technology industry and this would enable services to provide simple but fully functional equipment for much less than high street or 'pay weekly' shops (that often require a credit check and are potentially expensive). The particulars of this might be established depending on the nature of the service and the client. For example, whether equipment is loaned or given, whether they are free or clients pay a small deposit or fee, or repay the cost of the equipment in small, manageable instalments (interest free) over a flexible period of time. This would provide an alternative to potentially expensive pay weekly purchases or high street options.

6. Use of digital technology by services themselves

The LankellyChase Digital Empowerment Awards entries are examples of innovative use of digital technology by homelessness service providers to improve the experiences of their service users. This research suggests, however, that as yet digital technology has not been fully embedded into day-to-day practical contact between service users and homelessness service providers. The respondents indicated that they were appreciative of instances of services using technology to proactively provide them with information, reminders and messages, and were left frustrated when services websites weren't regularly updated or their emails were not efficiently responded to. Using digital technology to provide service users with information relevant to them - reminders and practical help and guidance such as information on money, health and available services or opportunities - would be a welcome addition to service provision.

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This research sought to examine whether the impact of the advent of ubiquitous digital technology seen elsewhere in society and social relationships are replicated among homeless or excluded people. The findings show that the majority of the homeless and vulnerable people interviewed for this study want to use digital technology and have demonstrated the willingness and ingenuity to do so. Many have made their own way into online culture and use, but are finding themselves excluded from realising the full potential that accessing services, social networks, information, culture and entertainment online might bring. Homelessness services have an opportunity to directly engage with their clients via digital technology; to nudge uptake, provide information and reminders and keep people connected to support services near them. Comprehensively including digital inclusion into services' support planning and resettlement approach could pave the way for homeless or vulnerable people to access the resources and information they need to embed themselves within wider social and cultural networks and take lasting steps away from homelessness and towards emotional, social and financial resilience.

APPENDIX A: DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT AWARDS: SHORTLISTED ENTRIES

Action Homeless Leicester: Down Not Out

Down Not Out is a news agency run by and for homeless, vulnerably housed people and other marginalised groups, providing access to media related courses and offering opportunities to develop and amplify their own voices to tell their own stories and to raise awareness and challenge stereotypes.

Big Issue: Card Readers for Big Issue vendors

The project aims to provide mobile Chip and Pin card reader devices to Big Issue Vendors to enable increased sales of the magazine and thus increased income from customers who previously may have walked on by due to insufficient/no cash as we move forward into an increasingly cashless society.

CoolTan Arts: CoolFruit

CoolFruit is an inspirational, stigma busting digital magazine project developed by vulnerable people with complex needs, facilitating a peer lead opportunity for people to express themselves, have a voice and share their experience 'as citizens' whilst challenging cultural stereotypes developed by media and myth.

Core Arts: Core Voices

Promoting positive mental health, through clients who suffer severe mental distress and isolation creating creative digital profiles that will showcase their creative talents in music, art and writings.

Creativity Works: The Re|Source

The Re|Source is a peer led virtual studio and community development tool, designed and developed by women in the criminal justice system.

Home Works: Digitall

A dedicated digital inclusion worker embedded in Home Works housing support team, providing flexible and personalised one-to-one digital inclusion coaching to vulnerable clients who are homeless in East Sussex.

Mayday Trust: 'ME' mobile phone app

'ME' is a mobile phone app for homeless and vulnerable people to experience real time access to their own development plans, social networks, local services and opportunities.

P3 The Social Inclusion Charity: Community Reporter Scheme

P3 Community Reporters gives people a voice. People experiencing social exclusion use exciting digital technology to have their say on things that matter to them; through blogs, social media, newsletters, videos and photos.

Papworth Trust Museum Street Centre: My Safe Social Network

A comprehensive and bespoke project including a mainstream qualification course in Safe Social Networking skills that was written with and for the support of vulnerable disabled adults to access social networks and communicate with peers, friends and family in a safe and meaningful way.

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea: Digital Empowerment for Stable Way Travellers' Site

Addressing inequalities and improving social inclusion and life chances for the Irish Traveller Community on Stable Way through enhanced digital technology.

Single Homeless Project: Unheard Holler

In 2011 SHP set up Unheard Holler as a platform for the people passing through SHP to express their views, either in writing or on video, on social issues and other topics that are important to them.

Stonham: 'Moving On' Android mobile phone app

An Android mobile phone app to help young people move home with as little stress and cost as possible and to assist young people who find themselves homeless.



Digital Empowerment Questionnaire

Name of Service:

Date:

About You

1. What's your gender						
Female	Male	Transgender	Transsexual			
2. How old are you?						
3. What services do you use here?						
About your use of digital technology						
4. Do you have a phone?					YES	NO
5. If yes what sort of phone is it (select all that apply)?						
landline		Smart phone (iPhone, Android)				
mobile phone (old school)		Blackberry				
6. Do you own (select all that apply)						
Computer (desk top)	Laptop	Tablet	N/A			
7. How often do you go on line (select only one)						
1 day a week	2-3 days a week	4-5 days a week	Nearly every day /or every day	I've just started	Very rarely	I don't online
8. What do you usually use to access the internet? (select only one)						
Blackberry		Smart phone (e.g. iPhone, an Android phone)				
Laptop		Desktop computer				
Tablet (e.g. iPad, Galaxy)		I don't access the internet				
Other, please specify:						

9. How do you usually get online? (select only one)				
Private WiFi		Wired internet service		
3G		A dongle		
Shared internet at services		Bluetooth Hotspots		
Free public WiFi		I don't get on line		
Other, please specify:				
10. Where do you usually access the internet (select only one)				
Library		A day centre		
This service		Coffee shop		
Other:		I don't access the internet		
11. When you go on line how much time do you usually spend in total? (select only one)				
Up to an hour		1 hour, less than -3 hours		
3, less than 5 hours		5, less than 8 hours		
More than 8 hours		N/A		
12. Do you use any of these computer programmes? (circle all the ones you use)				
Word	Excel	Photoshop	Internet explorer	
Powerpoint	Access	Picasa	Outlook	
Others (please specify) :				
13. Do you use any of these web sites? (tick all the ones you use)				
Facebook	Google mail	TFL	Google	
MSN (Hotmail)	twitter	Wikipedia	Youtube	
Channel 4 racing	Ask Jeeves	News not UK	UK news	
Sports	Amazon	Ebay	Gumtree	
Netflix	BBC sports	Skype	Paypal	
Stop stream TV	gambling website	Fruit loops	TV guide	
Tomtom route planner	Point and click games	learn my way	Internet banking	
Kick-starter				
14. Do you use any of these apps?				
BBM	Whats App	Instagram	News Apps	
Hi5	Tinder	Spotify	Sports Apps	
Skype App	None of these	Other:		
15. Do you use any of this digital technology?				
A webcam	An MP3 player	A digital camera	An e-Reader	None
Others (please specify) :				

Your Experience of Digital Technology			
16. I've had the same phone number for... (please circle 1 only)			
Less than a month	1 month, less than 6 months	6 months less than a year	About a year
1 year, less than 2 years	2 years, less than 3 years	3 years, less than 5 years	More than 5 years
17. Tick all that apply			
I've had my phone (lost or stolen) when I'm high or drunk			
I've changed my phone number because I didn't want to be found by (family/dealer/debtor/services)			
I buy and sell a phone regularly (most months)			
None of the above			
18. The best things about digital technology are (tick your top 3)			
If you make mistakes in forms on line you can easily correct them.			
Using DVD's to teach you how to do things e.g. writing a book			
Gumtree for freebies.			
Ebay to buy and sell stuff			
Researching services (e.g. financial, support)			
being reachable by services			
can keep loads of paperwork without having to carry it around			
can keep loads of music without having to carry it around			
can check how the transport is running, whether the train is delayed			
Discounts you can get online			
Spell check			
its instant communication			
Being in touch with family and friends			
You can get online almost anywhere now			
Emails			
Texting			

19. When I was sleeping rough I could keep up to date with DWP, Housing Options etc. via email						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
20. I use Digital Technology to have a voice (e.g campaigns, petitions, blogs)						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
21. I use Digital Technology for business						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
22. I've found places to get free food online				True	False	N/A
23. I've used digital technology to apply for work				True	False	N/A
24. I've gambolled online				True	False	N/A
25. I used computers when I was working years ago- all those things that I learnt then are old hat				True	False	N/A
Issues with Digital Technology						
26. I'm scared of technology						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
27. I worry about using passwords						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
28. Someone stole my identity on line			True	False	Don't know	N/A
29. Abbreviations like LOL /WTF /LMFAO/TTFN confuse me.						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
30. I can't get a contract for my phone and pay as you go is more expensive for internet use						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
31. There are things on the internet that can do your head in - information which can make you paranoid						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
32. I don't know how to turn a computer on				true	false	
33. I am losing feeling in the tips of my fingers so I get things wrong sometimes on my phone or the computer.				N/A	true	false

34. When using digital technology I am most worried about: (please tick the 3 that make you worry the most)						
Spending too much time on the net.						
Loosing face-to-face connection with people						
Ending up with physical problems e.g. eyesight problems, bad back and/or painful hands						
Downloading viruses and damaging my computer						
People I don't want to see finding me						
Being bullied or attacked online						
Services I use (e.g. Drug and alcohol, homelessness etc.) putting information about me online						
35. I find it frustrating when: (please tick the 2 that frustrate you the most)						
People use technology problems as an excuse						
I get sales calls						
Internet connection is slow						
Websites have technical issues						
The computer or website crashes and I have to start what I was doing again						
Social networks						
36. I have used facebook to try and reconnect with my family and...(tick all that apply)						
It was unsuccessful						
It brings back memories that upset me						
It is good to stay in touch						
It has brought me and my family closer together.						
None of the above						
37. I only use my phone for keeping in contact with friends and family				True	False	N/A
38. I go online to meet new people				True	False	N/A
39. I can stay in touch and be social when I can't (agoraphobic/ avoiding old networks) get out to see people.						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	

Safety, risk and privacy						
40. I have experienced the following security issues: (tick all that apply)						
On a computer that has communal users I have got on to the computer and someone's email/facebook etc. is still open						
On a computer that has communal users I have forgotten to logout						
On a computer that has communal users I have forgotten to clear my history						
Someone I know hacked into my Facebook or email						
You open one window that leads you to sites you don't want to see						
None of the above						
41. I would not give out my debit card number online or over the phone				N/A	True	False
42. I don't want to use PayPal because you still have to give your details				N/A	True	False
43. When I need to deal with a person on the phone I find it hard to trust them						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
44. I think it's better to go online to pay for your stuff, your clothes, your food shopping. But I have not got the knowledge or the confidence to do it						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
45. I experienced getting a (pay day etc.) loan on computer and it worked out badly						
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	
46. The services I access the internet from control my use including: (tick all that apply)						
Times when you can go online						
Places in the building where you can go on line						
Sites you can access						
Libraries won't allow me in with my baggage						
Libraries have time limits on accessing computers						
None of the above						

47. People don't really communicate; they are sitting there talking to a phone or a computer screen.					
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
Experiences of Accessing services via Digital Technology					
48. I find it difficult to do Job Searches online					
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
49. There's no one at the Job Centre to help you do your job search on line					
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
50. A lot of government websites are so complicated that it's hard to find what you need					
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
51. I've used NHS Direct.				True	False
52. I've accessed Polish (or other) consulate online				True	False
53. Other services I use say: "we need you to go online, we want your account online."				True	False
54. My GP wants me to book appointments online				True	False
55. I get text messages to remind me of appointments; which is good.					
Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
Barriers regarding Digital Technology					
56. Training in Computers and IT (tick <i>all</i> that apply to you)					
There is not enough access to training					
The training available is not basic enough for me					
I need one to one training to learn about computers					
I need to have a computer I can practice on to be able to remember what I learn from a training course.					
IT training tends to be low level. Unless you pay for it.					

57. Barriers to accessing and using digital technology (tick <i>all</i> that apply to you)	
Reading and writing skills	
Learning difficulties	
Access to equipment	
Knowledge	
Anxiety/Fear	
None of the above	
58. The biggest problems with services for homeless or vulnerable people making more use of digital technology are: (tick the <i>3</i> that you think are most likely to impact on you)	
Don't have access to the equipment	
Lack of literacy skills	
Fears around Personal Security	
Makes social exclusion worse	
Contact over the internet is not contact	
Don't have the knowledge and training	
Puts people out of work	
Don't want to use the technology	
Will just stop accessing services (drop of the radar)	

Thank you for completing the questionnaire!

Please give us 5 minutes to talk into the recorder about your experience of digital technology.

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS: QUESTIONNAIRE

We are helping with a research project, working alongside other homelessness agencies in London looking at how people experiencing homelessness use digital technology and the effect that this has on their lives. The aim of the work is to understand what people think about digital technology and to work with services to find ways of improving access to the kinds of technology that people find most useful.

‘Digital technology’ is technology used for communicating, entertainment and information. This includes the internet, computers and all computer programmes, webcams, MP3 music players, laptops, tablets, mobile phones including voicemail and text services, smart phones and all smart phone apps. It does not include TV and radio.

In this interview we would like to ask you about your experiences of using digital technology. We’ll ask you about the ways you use digital technology, what you use it for, the impact it has on your day-to-day life and anything that you feel makes it easier or difficult to access digital technology in the way you would like. We are also interested in your views of potential risks involved in some uses of digital technology. There are no wrong answers to these questions; we would like to hear about anything you think is relevant from your experiences.

Other homelessness agencies are taking part in the research and so lots of other people are being interviewed. All the answers will be given to the researchers who are running the project and they’ll produce a report. The researchers, Lemos&Crane, are independent. They’re interested in making services more person-centred and effective and have a strong track record in this field.

You don’t have to answer all the questions. You can answer just some of them – if you feel some questions are too personal you can choose not to answer. Or you don’t have to take part at all. If you do take part, everything that you say is completely confidential and anonymous. We will only ask your age, gender and the services you make use of here. This is so we can see if there are any differences in answers across different age groups, gender and services. This information will not be used to identify you. Your name won’t be known to anyone. No one who reads the report will know that it was you that gave the answers.



Section One: About you

Questions	Answers
How old are you?	
What is your gender?	
What services do you use here at ...?	

Section Two: Your use of digital technology

Question	Prompts	Answers
What digital technology do you regularly use?	<p>Do you have a phone?</p> <p>If yes, what sort of phone do you own a do you have? (for example: landline, mobile phone, smart phone, Blackberry) computer, laptop or tablet?</p> <p>Do you regularly access the internet?</p> <p>If yes, what do you usually use to access the internet?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart phone (e.g. iPhone, an Android phone) • Blackberry • Laptop • Desktop computer • Tablet (e.g. iPad, Galaxy) • Other, please specify 	

Appendix C: Lemos&Crane questionnaire

	<p>How do you usually get online?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private WiFi • 3G • Shared internet at services • Free public WiFi • A dongle • Wired internet service • Bluetooth Hotspots • Other, please specify 	
	<p>Where do you usually access the internet?</p> <p>Do you use any of the following other types of digital technology?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart phone apps (please tell us which) • Computer programmes (please tell us which) • A webcam • An MP3 player • A digital camera • An e-Reader • Other, please specify: 	

<p>How often do you use these?</p>	<p>How many days a week do you go online?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 day a week• 2-3 days a week• 3-5 days a week• Nearly every day or every day• Up to an hour <p>How long do you normally spend online?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1-3 hours• 3-5 hours• 5-8 hours• More than 8 hours <p>How much time do you normally spend using other types of digital technology?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up to an hour a day• 1-3 hours a day• 3-5 hours a day• 5-8 hours a day• More than 8 hours a day	
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Section Three: Your experience of digital technology		
1. Motives and aspirations		
Question	Prompts	Answers
<p>If you use any digital technology, for example the internet, computers, tablets or a phone, what are the main things you use it for?</p>	<p>Have you found any particular use of the internet, computers or phones helpful, enjoyable or interesting? If so, could you say more about it?</p> <p>Is there anything that makes it more difficult for you to use technology for the things you would like?</p> <p>Do these difficulties have an impact on how you use your phone, internet or computer?</p> <p>Is there anything which you don't already do that you would like to use computers, phones or the internet for?</p>	
2. Leisure, pleasure and taking part		
Question	Prompts	Answers
<p>Do you use any digital technology - for example the internet, computers, tablets or a phone - for leisure or entertainment?</p>	<p>How important is this use of technology to you?</p> <p>Do you ever use the internet to access entertainment you might not otherwise experience?</p> <p>For example: trends on social media, fashion, discussion boards, events, groups, comments, debates, petitions etc</p> <p>Have you ever had any problems when using the internet for leisure and entertainment? If so, what were these problems?</p>	

3. Programmes, tools and software		
Question	Prompts	Answers
<p>What online tools, computer programmes or software do you regularly use?</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Skype • Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc) • YouTube • News websites • Online games and entertainment • Information resources online <p>Computer programmes or software include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office software (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) • Computer games • Music software (iTunes, Windows Media, etc.) • Image software (Photoshop, MS paint etc.) • Offline education resources 	<p>How do you access these?</p> <p>Have you ever had any problems with the tools and programmes you use? If so, what were these problems?</p> <p>Do you use any mobile phone apps? If so, which do you use?</p>	

4. Knowledge, know-how and skills		
Question	Prompts	Answers
<p>How would you describe your level of knowledge about the internet and any computer programmes and online tools that you use?</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social networking sites • Information resources • Games • Downloading software • Word processing programmes, • PowerPoint • Music software such as iTunes or Windows Media • Image software such as Photoshop 	<p>Are there any particular types of programme that you feel confident using?</p> <p>If so, how did you develop your skills using these programmes?</p> <p>Are there types of programme that you are less confident using?</p> <p>If so, does this have an impact on how you use these programmes?</p>	

5. Social networks		
Question	Prompts	Answers
<p>Have you ever used technology such as the internet, your phone, computers or tablets to meet new people or to get in touch with family and friends?</p>	<p>If yes, how did you go about doing this? Could you describe the experience?</p> <p>If not, would you like to use technology to meet new people or stay in touch with family and friends?</p> <p>Have you ever had any problems when using the internet to meet new people or get in touch with family or friends?</p> <p>If so, what were these problems?</p> <p>Has anybody you know ever experienced problems using the internet to meet new people or get in touch with family or friends?</p>	

6. Access to services		
Question	Prompts	Answers
<p>Have you ever used the internet, your phone or computers to communicate with healthcare, homelessness or other services?</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicating with staff and services by email, phone or text • receiving voice mails, emails or text messages with details of appointments or other messages • getting advice from staff or services online • providing feedback or complaining about a service • entering a petition or commenting on services • making an appointment online • sending forms and documents online • managing benefits online • registering to vote 	<p>Have you experienced any use of technology to communicate with services that you thought was helpful?</p> <p>Have you ever had any problems using technology to communicate with services? If so, what were these problems?</p> <p>Can you think of any ways services could use the internet, phones or other technology to make their service better?</p>	

7. Learning		
Question	Prompts	Answers
<p>Do you use the internet, computers, a tablet or your phone to learn new skills, get information or explore an interest?</p>	<p>Is there anything you have found particularly useful for learning or getting information about a hobby or interest?</p> <p>Have you had any difficulties using the internet, other computer programmes or your phone for learning or exploring interests?</p> <p>If you haven't used technology to learn or explore an interest, is this something you would like to do?</p>	

8. Safety, risk and privacy		
Question	Prompts	Answers
<p>Have you ever had a problem with safety or privacy - or experienced something that made you feel uncomfortable - when using the internet, computers, your phone or other technology? If yes, what happened?</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receiving messages or images that you do not want or that make you feel uncomfortable • Emails 'phishing' for your personal details • Feeling uncomfortable with information about you being online • Unintentionally accessing material that you did not wish to see • Computer viruses • Being concerned about others accessing information on your or shared computers/phones 	<p>Has anybody you know ever had this experience? What was their experience like?</p> <p>Is privacy and safety when using technology something that concerns you?</p> <p>Are there any potential risks that you find particularly concerning?</p> <p>Does safety and potential risk affect the way you use the internet, your phone, computers or other technology?</p> <p>What do you think might help people to feel more confident about their safety when using the internet, phones and other technology?</p>	

Final remarks		
Question	Answer	
Finally, is there anything else you would like to comment on about using computers, the internet, phones and other technology?		

Closing statement:

So that's the end of the interview. Thank you very much for helping with the research. To confirm once again the interview is completely anonymous.

Interviewer's observations:

Name of interviewer:

Email/contact number: