



Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership
A caring partnership

New “godsend” digital device scheme helps vulnerable Aberdonians stay connected

Lonely and isolated people in Aberdeen are getting connected with friends, loved-ones and vital services, thanks to a new City Council-backed digital device scheme.

Aberdeen City Council has been handed 240 devices under the Scottish Government’s Connecting Scotland project, which was set up to combat social isolation amid the current covid pandemic. A further 100 devices are also now on their way to Aberdeen under the project, and another 45 are going to local organisations, taking the total allocation for the city to 385.

Under the scheme, iPads and Chromebooks are being delivered to people who currently have no such devices to keep them digitally connected.

Connecting Scotland is funded by the Scottish Government and is being managed by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations – supported in the city by Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership as part of the Aberdeen Together initiative, along with other community partners including Foyer and SHMU.

Many of the devices are being targeted to the right people by the Partnership’s community link practitioners who are attached to Aberdeen’s GP practices. A number of third sector organisations have successfully applied to the project, allowing them to identify people to receive the devices and to give on-going support.

The support is being provided to recipients by “digital champions”, who are on hand to help with problems and queries and upskill people to enable them to get connected and stay connected. If people do not have a broadband connection, they receive a mobile wifi device to provide them with connection for 12 months.

The devices allocated to the city are being distributed to those who will benefit most – people who are not digitally connected by owning a device via a broadband connection, who are on low income, and who are in the shielding category because of their health conditions.

Partnership Transformation Lead Gail Woodcock said: “People receiving the devices are using them to apply for jobs, help their children with schoolwork, keep in touch with family and friends, attend virtual GP and health appointments and access services online.

“Research has shown that loneliness and living alone with poor social connections is as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and has a greater impact on health than

obesity. Lonely people are also more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease and depression, so we are very hopeful that something as simple handing over a digital device will have a hugely beneficial health impact for many people.”

Fiona Clark, city council Service Manager for Libraries & Community Learning, said: “Many people have highlighted the impact of lockdown on their mental health and say that the devices have made a world of difference to them by offering means to maintain vital contact with others and giving them opportunities to keep active with online reading, learning and exercise programmes and activities.

“The feedback has been extremely positive, with people telling us they are now able to do so much more than they could do previously and able to build and strengthen their connections ad of course make new ones. People have also really appreciated the ongoing support they receive.”

Allan Clark, from Mastrick, was one of the people to receive an iPad and is using it to email family and friends and for shopping.

Former maintenance engineer Allan, who has been diagnosed with motor neurone disease and lives alone, said: “The iPad will be absolutely brilliant for me. I’ll be using it to stay in touch with my 94-year-old uncle in Canada, to keep in contact with a good friend who is like my carer, and to do online shopping maybe once a month.”

And Allan was full of praise for the sterling support he is receiving from his link worker, Hollie Irving, admitting she was helping with all his new IT queries. “Hollie has been a godsend to me. She has been absolutely brilliant in helping me to get set up.”

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