It was clear from the beginning of the Coronavirus Pandemic that digital and online provision was going to play an increasingly important part in delivering information, advice and access to services.  A number of new initiatives, including blended learning for school pupils, were developed and the use of online provision was fast tracked out of necessity.  However, we also knew from UK research that approximately 11% of the population did not have internet access at home.  The potential for digital exclusion to increase further due to lockdown and the transfer of services online was recognised by the Outcome 3 group and a meeting held to discuss partnership responses.

The Outcome 3 group were made aware of a project named Digital Connections evolving in Campbeltown that was developed by a partnership involving InspirAlba, Kintyre Youth Café and South Kintyre Community Resilience Group.  They had recognised the need to respond quickly to the digital deficit and developed a model to access surplus devices in the community, reset them and distribute to families and individuals that were badly in need of them.

To move things forward at the pace required Argyll and Bute Council Community Learning staff worked with Digital Connection partners to roll this model out into the communities of Cowal, Helensburgh, Lochgilphead and Oban.  The partnership was also successful in accessing funding to purchase refurbished devices.

Since the start of the Digital Connections project –

- 107 donated devices have been processed and issued to individuals and families

- 150 reconditioned laptops/keyboards/mouse/camera have been issued to individuals and families.

- 47 volunteers came forward offering to assist with technical duties and distribution.

The Digital Connections project offered a quick response to people requiring digital support and the structure developed to support the project was key to the success of a bid to the national project Connecting Scotland by the partners involved in the Digital Connections partnership and based on data and information collated by the Shielding Group.

Connecting Scotland (Phase 1) focused on people in the extremely high vulnerability group ('shielding') group with no device/connectivity and low income.

Phase 1 of the Digital Connections project has delivered –

- 134 devices (Chrome Books/IPad) from Connecting Scotland
- 19 devices (IPad) from Argyll and Bute Council
- 134 MiFi packs to provide access to the internet

Phase 2 of Connecting Scotland is underway and targets households with children and care leavers up to the age of 26.  The application process was completed early November and 207 devices and MiFi packs have been allocated to service providers in Argyll and Bute working directly with the target groups.

A further strand of the Connecting Scotland project resulted in 1317 devices being allocated to schools in Argyll and Bute and distributed based on free school meal data.

**Summary**

| Digital Connections | |
|---|---|
| Donated Devices | 107 |
| Refurbished Devices | 150 |
| **Digital Connections Devices Issued** | **257** |
| **Connecting Scotland** | |
| Phase 1 (Extremely Vulnerable/Shielding) | 153 |
| Phase 2 ( Children and Families) | 207 |
| Schools | 1317 |
| **Connecting Scotland Devices Issued** | **1677** |
| **Total from both projects** | **1934 (1,677 new devices)** |