



Spark iT: Community
and partnership-
based approaches to
eliminating digital
exclusion

Samantha Briggs
Digital Inclusion
Project Manager,
Spark Somerset

Kerala is rolling out free broadband for its poorest citizens. What's stopping your government?


Oommen C Kurian

The pandemic showed us how digital divides worsen inequality - this project shows they're not inevitable



📷 Women look at a mobile phone during the Hindu Attukal Pongala festival in Kerala, India. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

Let's go to the comments section for fun...


 **ComputerSaysPerhaps** 2 hours ago 5 ↑

In the UK, 95% of households have Internet access. Of those that don't only 1 in 10 say it's because they can't afford it.

85% of UK adults have at least one smartphone.

In effect, then, pretty much everyone here who wants it already has it.

↳ [Reply](#) Mute Report


 **wohstihyrot** 4 hours ago 26 ↑

Kerala is rolling out free broadband for its poorest citizens. What's stopping your government?


Jeremy Corbyn proposed it years ago.

Draw your own conclusions...

↳ [Reply](#) Mute Report

 **clarityofthought** ↳ **wohstihyrot** 3 hours ago 10 ↑

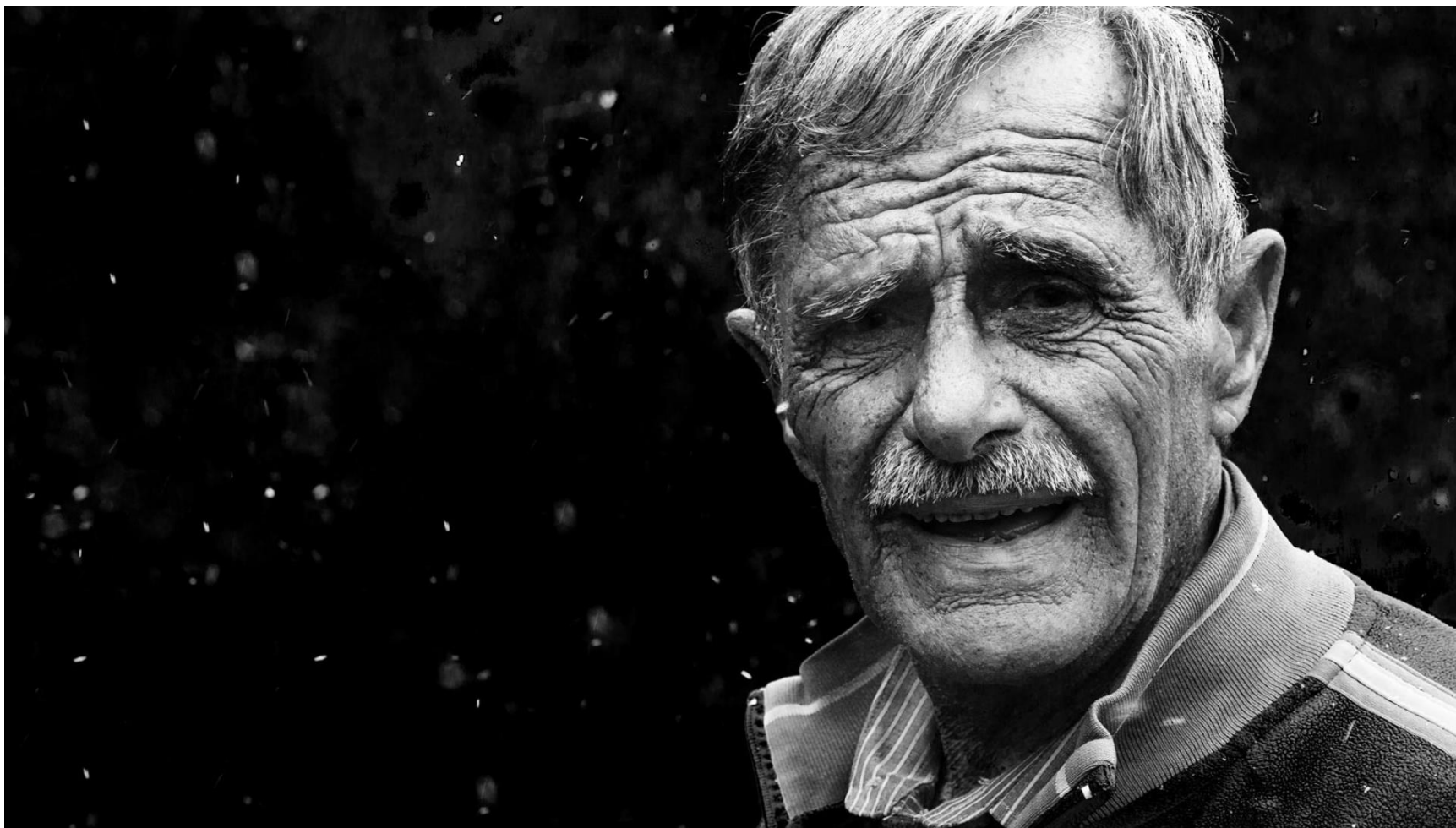
technically JC proposed it to all citizens (including the richest. When they already had it and were happy paying.

 **HSThompson** 5 hours ago 10 ↑

Seriously? That's the biggest problem of poor people? No internet? So, when they have nothing to eat, they can still look at silly food pictures on Instagram? Or when they get bad education, they can at least watch makeup videos on Tiktok to learn important things for life? When they have horrible work conditions and get paid 20 Cents an hour, they can at least cry themselves to sleep watching Coldplay videos on YouTube at night? Seriously?

When you write an article like that from your nice apartment in London, how can you seriously believe that you're speaking for the poor?

This is Derek...



“A minimum digital standard of living includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.”

Yates, et al – University of Liverpool

[Developing a minimum digital living standard for households with children](#)

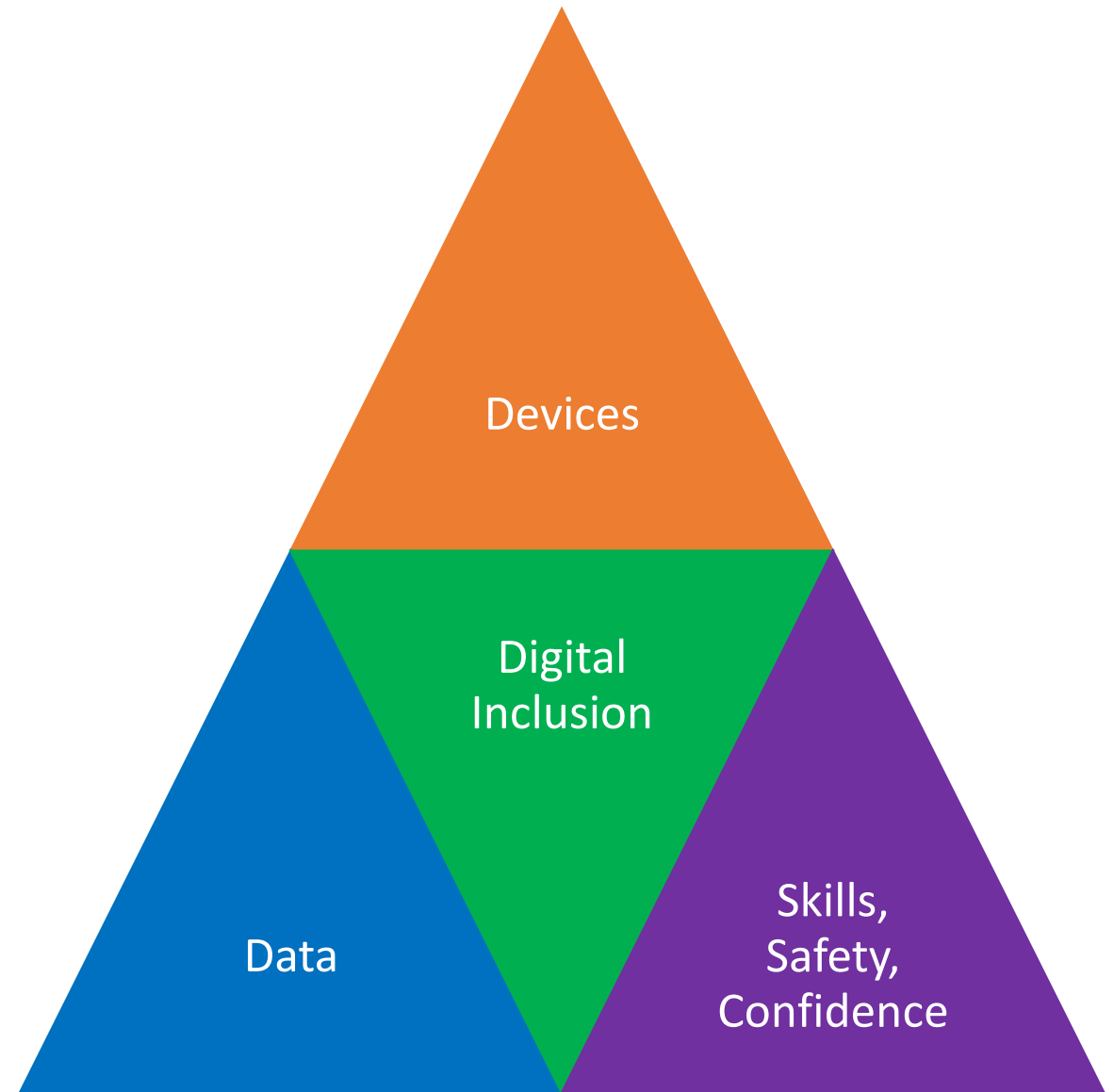
“8% of people in Britain aren’t recent (or have ever been) internet users

But that figure doesn’t account for ‘limited users’ (a further 16%)...

Nor does it account for households where the data and devices aren’t adequate for everyone’s needs...

So, that’s *at least* 125,000 people just in Somerset who are like Derek – but it’s likely to be much higher... maybe a quarter of a million...”

Me, crunching numbers, trying to comprehend the scale





Data

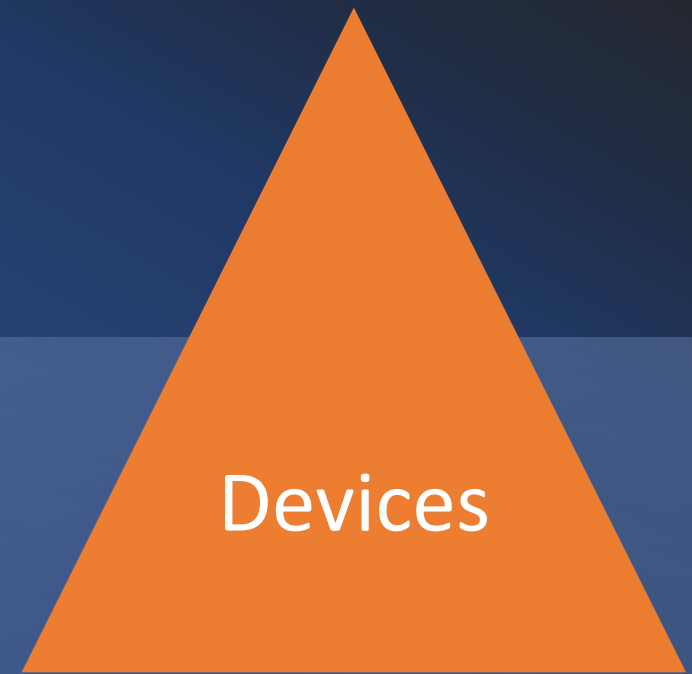
- 5% of all UK households don't have home internet – that's 1.25 million households across the UK, circa 12,500 households in Somerset ([Good Things Foundation, Digital Nation 2022](#))
- 36% of people with a data package in the South West experienced affordability issues ([Nov 22 data – OFCOM](#)) – that's around 200,000 people across the Peninsula
- GTF reports around 20% of people who aren't online report that this is because it's too expensive – that's at least 25,000 people in Somerset
- We use MiFi loan schemes and mobile data donations from TelCo industry. We refer to Somerset Libraries and Citizens Advice Bureau, and help people to access social tariffs in our Digital Cafés and over the phone .




We provide a tablet loan scheme, and make referrals to similar schemes, for example those from Somerset Libraries.

We partner with a local CIC, Donate IT, providing advice, promotion and events to them, in exchange for gifted refurbished devices.

We provide advice at our Digital Cafés around device suitability and appropriate specifications to improve consumer confidence.



- During the pandemic 1 in 5 children didn't have access to an appropriate device like a laptop (Digital Poverty Alliance)
- 16% of 18-25 year olds don't have access to a laptop or desktop (Good Things Foundation 2022)
- Most of the over 55's we see in Digital Cafés are using devices that are obsolete in some way and many are worried about updating their devices



125,000
have low or no
Skills, Safety,
Confidence

We have 50 staff and volunteers across Somerset who work with people to develop their digital skills, safety and confidence by operating:

- Regular Digital Café events - over 95% of Somerset residents have a Digital Café within 10 miles of their home – we're working to make that 5 miles
- 1:1 sessions in our hubs and other delivery venues
- 1:1 in home sessions for those who cannot attend Café settings
- Business hours telephone helpline
- Access to our repository of online, self-guided training including links to Learn My Way and Barclays Digital Wings

We work in partnership with the following organisations, sharing resources and information to improve our reach:

- NHS – Somerset Foundation Trust Teams, Somerset Primary Care, Health Connectors, and the ICB Digital Team
- Somerset Libraries
- Somerset Council Resettlement Team
- Community Council for Somerset
- Our network of delivery hub partners including Minehead Eye, the Hub at Bridgwater, the Balsam Centre, The Cheese and Grain
- With more to come! Mapping and Embedding for 2023/4



Q: Why should you even care?

“Obviously, because of fairness and great health and well being outcomes, but what about “businessy-stuff” like UK economy benefits, ROI and saving money when people access your organization’s information and services online?”

The [Tinder Foundation and Go ON \(2015\)](#) found that true digital inclusion created 6 main benefit categories:

1. **Earnings**
2. **Employability**
3. **Retail Transactions**
4. **Communication**
5. **Time Savings**
6. **NHS Cost Savings**

Periodic Table of Internet Elements

[Kat Dixon for the Good Things Foundation \(2022\)](#)

Me Medical	Ho Housing	Fn Finances	Et Employment/ Training	Gv Government services	Ci Civil	Ed Education	Et Entertainment	Cm Community	Cr Creativity	Sc Social connection	Mo Mobility/ access
Te Test results	Sh Social housing application	Pc Price comparison	Jh Job hunting	Wc Work commitments	Oa Online activism	Se Search engines	Vi Video streaming	Og Organising	Se Self expression	Ff Friends & family	Na Navigation and maps
Pr Prescriptions	Ha Housing association contact	Fi Financial information	Ap Applications	Be Benefits application	Pe Petitions and protest	Cl Classroom learning	Ga Gaming and e-sports	Cg Community groups	Re Making reels	Vc Video calls	Ac Assistive technologies
Ph Public health information	Hh House hunting	De Debt advice	Ne Networking	Im Immigration services	Nw News	OI Online learning	Gm Gambling	Su Survivor support	Bl Blogging	Sm Social media	Vo Voice activated assistance
Mh Mental health	Mm Mortgage management	In Online investing	It Interviews	Uc Universal credit journals	De Democratic debate	Hw Homework submissions	Eb eBooks	Vo Volunteering	Pl Platforms	Em Email	Db Doorbells
Gp Consultations	Mn Maintenance requests	On Online shopping	Wk Working and learning	Co Council services	Mp MP email	Li Online libraries	Mu Music streaming	Oc Online communities	Mc Music creation	Im Instant messaging	DI Deliveries
Hs Hospital Appointments	Bl Manage bills	Ob Online banking	Tx Tax forms	Me Free school meals	EI Electoral register/census	Kn Online knowledge	Mv Metaverse	Vp VoIP Platforms	Vr Virtual reality	Ev Events	Sm Smart systems
Sg Support Groups	Ct Council tax	En Energy Bills	Sh Side hustle			St Student finance	Ra Radio/ podcasts		Ar Art	Od Online dating	Pm Password Managers

What can I do as an individual to help reduce digital exclusion?

- Help out at an existing or emerging Digital Café event weekly (2 hours per week plus travel time)
- Meet home-bound clients for 1:1 sessions (2 hours per week)
- Help us return calls to the public (flexible)
- Meet clients in public venues for individual support sessions (flexible)
- Deliver and collect devices and kit, including set-up (flexible)
- Start up and run a Digital Café in your local area with the support of Spark iT (4-5 hours per week)



What can I do as an organizational decision-maker to help reduce digital exclusion?

Please Donate!

- Your People: Corporate volunteering (www.sparkachange.org.uk)
- Your Resources: Consider how your existing vehicle fleet might help deliver kit across the county
- Your Devices: Donate your old devices
- Your Philanthropic Funding: Sponsor one of our initiatives

Please Be Inclusive!

- Reject a 'digital only' approach
- Design inclusive digital first solutions
- Check staff's skill levels – empower them with training, kit and policies





KEY CONTACT INFORMATION

sparkit@sparksomerset.org.uk

01458 550 977

07908 984 801

www.sparksomerset.org.uk/spark-it

All email address formats are:

Firstname.lastname@sparksomerset.org.uk

Samantha Briggs – Digital Inclusion
Project Manager
Emily Rushton – Project Assistant

Melissa Lewis – Area Coordinator
(Glastonbury through Burnham, plus
Smart Energy coordination)

2 x Hub Pilot Locations:
Bridgwater – **Melissa Lewis** (The Hub)
Minehead – **Bethany Wrigley** and
Charlie Russell (Minehead Eye)

BRUCIE BONUS SLIDE!!!

Stats, references, information and more!

[Government Digital Service Inclusion Checklist](#)

[LGA Steps for Delivering Inclusion Projects](#)

[Digital Nation Infographic – Good Things Foundation](#)

[2023 Digital Poverty National Delivery Plan – Digital Poverty Alliance](#)

[UK Digital Poverty Evidence Review – Digital Poverty Alliance](#)

[Online Nation 2022 – OFCOM](#)

[Follow the ICB's Digital Team on LinkedIn](#)





Over to you:

1. Stories from the floor
2. Questions and answers