**Transcript**

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:00:00] So, hi, everybody. Welcome to the webinar. Apologies. If anyone received a message saying that it had started earlier as with all things tech, we had a little gremlin. I have to confess that I pressed the wrong button. So you may have had an alert saying that we'd already begun. We are starting as per our one o'clock slot now. I'm really, really excited to Welcome everybody to the webinar. We've got some really great speakers today, and I know it's going to be a really interesting session and we're hoping that that's our one tech hiccup of the day .

So I have my colleague Chris, who is hovering in the background. If you do have any questions or you are experiencing any technical issues, please do put a message in the Q and a box. And Chris will deal with those for you there. I'm just going to pop up my slides. And you should see some subtitles appearing at the bottom. Those are running from the slide deck, so they won't be a hundred percent perfect, but hopefully they are good enough for people to follow along. So I'm just going to Allow another few seconds so that we've got time for people to join us. Particularly after that little hiccup, I wanted to make sure people know that there are webinars running.

And then we'll do some introductions and we will get going with the webinar.

Looking forward to welcoming you all and hearing more about how we are providing support for people with learning disabilities. So today we'll be hearing from ourselves, AbilityNet. I have my colleague Teresa who's involved in the digital lifeline project which we are all running. And she'll be telling us about that.

Really delighted to be welcoming Gary, who is co-founder at learning disability, England.

And we have some of their member organizations with us today.

So Gary is going to be talking to Hft, and we'll be finding more about them. And then I'll be speaking to Veronica from SeeAbility and all great organizations, doing fantastic things, helping people to stay connected during some of the challenges that we have been experiencing in the last year in particular, but before that as well and constantly adapting to a changing landscape.

So I'm just gonna check on the numbers. It looks like we've got a great number of participants and those numbers have leveled off. So I will, without any further ado move on. And we'll get going. So just a little bit of housekeeping.

I've talked about the live captions.

Please do use the Q and a window for any questions, being that for panelists as they come up, we've turned off the chat window that's for a couple of reasons, mostly because of accessibility. If people are using screen readers, it reads out everything that goes in there and it can be quite distracting for people with visual impairments.

We have some slides they will be available and you'll all receive an email with that slide deck afterwards, along with a transcript and a recording, there'll be an automatic email that comes out about that. And then we'll be also be getting a feedback form to let, let us know about how things have been during the webinar for you today, but really hope you all enjoy it.

So from briefly through this so we will be introducing AbilityNet and talking about how we are supporting people through digital lifeline.

We have a case study to share with you, then we'll be hearing from from Gary, from Hft and from SeeAbility and there are some resources at the end of the deck, which we won't read out, but again, there'll be available for you to access afterwards.

So before before we do that I am really keen to hear from everyone who's here.

So I'm just going to launch a poll, which you should see on screen. So the poll is up there now. And we just want to know who is in the audience.

Are you someone who has a learning disability?

Do you work for an organization supporting people with learning disabilities?

You might be a relative of somebody who has a learning disability, maybe a paid carer or other.

And I can see there's quite a few going in there, so please do feel free to pop us a message in that Q and A box. If you're other do let us know, what's brought you to the webinar today it'd be really great to hear from that. So the numbers are still shifting, so I'm just going to give it another few seconds and then we'll end the poll and see what the results are.

I can see that 92% of people have voted, which is great. Thanks so much for doing it.

So interesting to see that very few people here have a learning disability themselves.

We have a high proportion of people who work for organizations supporting people with learning disability, 60% of you 6% relatives and 32% other.

So I will be having a look in the box and seeing who else is here.

Be really interesting to see that afterwards I've just popped those results up on the screen.

So just to introduce AbilityNet, we support people of any age living with any , disability, or impairment to use technology, to achieve their goals at home at work and in education.

So we do that by providing advice information, and we also have a network of over 300 volunteers who are providing support which you can access via our helpline.

And they've been supporting people on the digital lifeline project as well. So the numbers are up there and again, they will be accessible afterwards, but they're doing some really fantastic work in supporting people remotely.

While we've been living through difficult times, So in terms of last year, we supported over three and a half thousand clients in organizations over 4,700 issues resolved. My computer, my way is a fantastic tool for making adjustments to your computer.

And we had over 1.7 million sessions there and 78,000 views of our fact sheets.

So supporting a large number of people I'm really delighted to be doing so we have a high level of satisfaction, particularly in terms of the one-to-one support that we provide, which is our volunteers.

90% of people tell us that they are better able to use technology 89% feel more knowledgeable.

But. It really interesting to see that 73% of people feel less isolated and I, know will be hearing about some initiatives about keeping people connected during these difficult times as well.

And for me, this is not about technology. It's about technology as an enabler, and I'm sure we'll be hearing from all the panelists that, about the work that they're doing around that.

So, yes, as I said, we're a Pan disability charity.

So we support people with cognitive impairments, hearing permits or deaf mobility issues neurodiverse needs, visual impairments or blind. But, you know, anyone can call us and ask us for their support, ask us for support.

So Theresa pass over to you. If you could pop yourself off mute.

Thank you. Two would like to just tell us a little bit about the digital lifeline project. Our involvement in it. And I, and how your personally involved in that project as well.

**Teresa Loftus:** [00:08:04] Okay. So my name's Teresa Loftus and I've been working withAbilityNet for quite some time, normally delivering DSA assessments and workplace assessments and was asked to help out on the digital lifeline.

So the digital lifeline we're working in partnership with good things foundation and it's funded by the department for culture, media, and support to provide devices, data, and digital support to people with a learning disability and can't afford to get online.

The scheme is running between March and June and it's funded 5,000 tablets preloaded with data and free tech support.

It's been helping those facing digital exclusion because they can't afford the cost of getting online and are facing increased socialization because of COVID-19. So we've helped some of these people and how we've done that is through assessments and provided and training to some of the online partners as well.

So we've assessed a diverse group of individuals supporting their access to inclusion.

And this has meant that for some, they've not been able to speak with their friends, their family and community groups, by video and this is for the first time since the pandemic started.

So I've spoken to lots of people who are absolutely chuffed that they can actually get online and do things others are accessing online, learning to support their skills in using the tablet via good things foundation learned my way. So that's because. Some people have never actually had a tablet before. Don't know how to use it at all. So Learn My Way is a really good tool to start accessing some of the training materials that they've got. We've also been enabling support to education. So summer access, accessing lessons videos and webinars, and one group in particular have been accessing Makaton singalongs just to reinforce their skills.

So when the assessments come into force really is when, when they're having difficulties.

So it might be that they're having difficulties with configuring the tablet. So as assessors, we can provide some guidance towards that, and that means having a chat with the individual. All their support worker and about how the tablet can be set up specific to their needs.

And through that report, it creates a sorry through that assessment, it creates a user specific report with links to how it can be set up. And we like in particular one, that's been really, really. Well used and that's action blocks, and that simplifies the process effect accessing much needed functions on the tablet.

So it makes it a one-click function. So if somebody wants to use it for YouTube to access a zoom call, they can do it just by accessing this very visual cue on their, on their tablet. And they can make it a user specific icon with an image on that as well. So that's, that's just one of the ways in which we can help

it's just makes it so much easier for people to use. So you don't have to go that route, but it's just one thing that can be very supportive. The other thing that we found is that maybe there's a physical barrier, so there's. Peripheral items that can be recommended as well. So if somebody is prone to drop in a tablet, you don't want them to be using just a normal case. So you want something that's maybe a little bit more robust, or it might be that they need to switch so we can recommend a switch. So it makes access to the online environment a little bit easier, or it could be a keyboard with a guard on it or a mouse. So there's a lot of different things that we can recommend as a result of sort of this assessment

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:12:01] You're touching on a lot of the things that I've been hearing about actually, cause I've been talking to some of the people who've been getting support from us and the action blocks has come up and, and so have the cases already. So I think that that would be a great opportunity to now share the video if that's okay. Unless there's anything you wanted to add.

**Teresa Loftus:** [00:12:21] No, that's fine. Go for the video.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:12:23] So that was a good place for that case study to finish, I think because it is about empowering people in life. So it'd be really great now to hand over to yourself, Gary, if you're able to pop off mute and find out a bit more about that work, the work that you're doing and supporting people and the work that your member organizations are doing in terms of supporting people.

So perhaps you'd like to tell us about the organization that you co founded a little bit about learning disability, England, and how you're supporting people.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:13:00] Well Learning Disability England. It's been going for around about nearly six years and we are an organization of bringing together self advocates. Well, I have learning disabilities and autism and their families, friends and service providers come together because we feel that it, whereas we're stronger together. And we support people with disabilities to have a better life. And at the moment it's been challenging over the last year because of the pandemic.

And but we kept people informed by going online, having meetings and having spokes how you told me tins and, and generate a PayPal, actually really developed skills. And And knowledge to join Bain online. Doesn't take away if you know, you know, ideal an ideal, well, this is to us, face-to-face doing workshops and having group meetings and conferences.

We, we that's, you know, we, we encourage them to bring people and network people together and they to pick from, from one part of the country to the other, but the lately we had to do more online because, because of the pandemic and a lot of people have been supporting easy reach stuff. Which we've been doing and we're promoting not just that easy read about the COVID from our point of view, it's from where promoting the self-advocacy groups.

Easy reads on convert. It's been doing all the hard work. We're just telling other body in our newsletter that these groups are doing it. Passionate about that partnership working aren't you. And I know that's one of the reasons why you wanted to bring hate hefty with you today. So should we kick off that conversation now?

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:15:29] And you guys can tell us how you've been doing some of that work?

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:15:35] Yeah. So I just wanted to know H F T have been around since 1962. Yes. I was an infant that time. So, so, and it's really interesting, isn't it? So I like to open it up to Vicky and Emma too. Questions, can you tell us a little a bit about H F T.

**Victoria Hemmingway Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Hft:** [00:16:06] Yes. Thanks so much, Gary. And yeah, thanks for having us today. I'm Victoria . I'm the public affairs and policy manager here at HFT. And as a sort of an introduction as Gary mentioned HFT has been around since 1962 we're a national charity.

And today we support around 2,500 people with learning disabilities across England and Wales.

And we provide support through a number of services and opportunities as well. And for every person we support, we really committed to working with them to realize their best life possible. And in terms of the subject matter today we really realized the role that technology can play in, in social care.

And we actually have a dedicated, personalized technology team who work with the people. Supported by HFC to see what role a tech can play in communication, increasing independence, as well as safety choice and control too.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:17:08] What does the sector pulse report tell us about digital inclusion and exclusion.

**Victoria Hemmingway Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Hft:** [00:17:17] So HFT sector Pulse Check report is an annual report that we produce every year. And it's really a snapshot of the financial health of the social care sector, which is produced through a survey with, with providers.

But it also looks at some of the key challenges the sector is faced in, in, in the year prior.

And it will be no surprise that this year and looks really heavily at the impact of COVID-19. And in particular, one of the subjects that we looked at was the use of digital technology to stay in touch during the pandemic and of the providers that we surveyed. It's really great to see that nearly all of them made extra efforts to ensure that those supports were able to remain in touch with during the pandemic. And lots of people turned to digital solutions.

So 94% supported people to use online platforms like zoom to stay in touch with friends and family. And where, where a provider provides data services 64% moved to online provision. What we did find though, which was a bit worrying was that providers also spoke of the barriers that prevented the people that they support from getting online and, and staying in touch. So over three quarters said a lack of digital skills amongst the people they support was a barrier. 56% said that there was a lack of digital skills amongst our staff.

And 58% also talked about the cost of technology being a barrier in these instances.

And I think as we kind of slowly emerge fingers crossed from the pandemic it, I think it will really leave a legacy of doing things a bit more digital by default, where we're socializing and working and accessing, you know, shops and banks and things online. And we, we really think it's vital that people with learning disabilities and social care providers are given the skills and a means of using digital technology and kind of being brought along with a society change to ensure that, you know, society remains and is truly one that remains is truly inclusive.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:19:31] What I think you've asked us this question, but what is HFT doing to tackle digital exclusion?

**Emma Nichols:** [00:19:40] So I'm Emma Nichols. I'm from the personalized technology team and I lead the team and we look at different technologies to support people to live more independently and safely. We're lucky to have our own team that just looks at technology. within H F T and we've set up hundreds of devices during the pandemic to help people too.

Stay connected. And we always start with a, an assessment. So we would assess people's needs, look at what they want to be able to do that they can't do at the moment. Whether that's keeping in touch Vicky touched on access virtual day services. We can support to people in that way as well.

So we, then once we've assessed, we set up the device, we will then offer training and resources to support people, to learn how to use the device. And also that's not just for the people using it, but also the support staff and that the video case study you showed earlier. Sort of touched on that as well.

There's, it's actually developing support workers skills to do that. They can support people better to understand how to use the device. And then where we offer ongoing support and training us, people get more confident with the technology. They also then want to do more things. So it's about maybe adding different apps or, or different sort of device devices they might want to start using as well.

Cause it's not just tablets that we're looking at. We're looking at lots of different technology solutions that have supported people during the pandemic. And that might be things around keeping safe, reducing people's anxiety, keeping them occupied. You know, when they've been in locked down and not been able to go out and socialize like they normally would.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:21:24] Can you tell us about the case study of good practice?

**Emma Nichols:** [00:21:30] Yeah, we've got, we've got some great examples. I think one that really Springs to mind for me is a gentleman called Paul and Paul was admitted to hospital with COVID-19. And he was in a high dependency unit. He was very, very poorly. And core has always been readily in touch with his brothers and sisters met was really you know, it was a, it was a really important thing in Paul's life with his family. So we provide them with a tablet device and a dongle so that he could access the internet. And he was then supported by the nurses in the ward to stay in contact with his family and have that face-to-face communication. A couple of weeks later, he came out of hospital and he now continues to use his tablet to keep in touch with his family in the comfort of his own home.

But one of the bits of feedback which really resonated with me was from his family. I think it was a sister emailed us to say that thank goodness for the tablet device and supporting him, but also to say that they feel that it had a really, really positive impact on his recovery. And one of the reasons why he did, he did make a full recovery, which is, which is really great.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:22:54] What has been the impact of the pandemic?

**Victoria Hemmingway Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Hft:** [00:22:58] I'll, I'll start with this answer, I suppose. And so I think it's really fair to say that many of us have relied really heavily on digital technology over the past year for socializing and work at shopping. I suppose, pre pandemic, we might've done this, this in person really.

But I think it's also true that for some moving online has hasn't been straightforward and the pandemic has really brought to light the need to tackle this chill exclusion. And that's especially the case if we're going to be doing more online and using digital devices moving forward Emma might have something to add to that.

**Emma Nichols:** [00:23:37] Yeah, I think, I think just to add, I mean the pandemic has seen a significant increase in the use of technology within social care. And we see it as an opportune time to really build on the lessons learned. And also the digital skills that people have gained through the pandemic is a real opportunity to sort of develop that further and also really to help to drive innovation within the sector.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:24:05] Thank you. Thank you very much. Thanks everybody. I just wanted to reflect on what you've all been saying really, which is it's just fantastic to hear that word legacy is used a lot, but I really get a sense of the fact that there's been an acceleration in terms of change. And as I said earlier, that this is it's more than technology, isn't it?

It's very easy to just see devices, but when you hear those real life stories that you've shared, it really brings to our attention, the fact that this is part of everyday life, but actually there are barriers for Certain groups, and it's really important that we all offer that support to make sure that everyone has that equal access to the technology and able to maintain connections during challenging times, as you say that going forward, hopefully we'll all have a choice of connecting face-to-face, but also being able to make those connections remotely.

So thank you so much for sharing an overview of the work that you're all doing.

I have another poll now which I'm just going to bring up on screen. So given our earlier poll I was hoping there would be some more people who are using their devices. But it would be good to just know about either yourself or your service users and to think about how confident they are now, I guess in terms of using applications, using technology that they have received or are you using, so I'll launch the poll now.

So yeah, I think it'd be great to answer this in the context of the service users. So. Very confident. In terms of knowing about adaptations that can be made, that thing that we've touched on already around specialist, peripheral equipment confident you can mostly make changes to suit people's needs or come up with ways to overcome barriers, using things like additional keyboards or the kind of cases that we've talked about.

Are you quite confident in making changes or, or not confident at all that you'd like to know more about how to make adaptations to technology such as tablets so that it is easier for those service users to access all the things that we've been talking about, like video conferencing, connecting with people, or maybe it's WhatsApp.

So yeah, just allow a few more seconds for people to pop their answers in there. And then we'll end the poll and share the results.

So numbers are still going up in terms of engagement. So just give it a couple more seconds for people to pop that answer in there.

That's brilliant. Thanks ever so much, or just share the results with you.

So I'm very confident. We've got 4%, I'm confident we've got 22% of people and saying that they can make changes to suit people's needs or come up with ways to overcome those barriers.

I'm quite confident, 42%.

So people still looking for a bit of guidance around how to make those changes, to make devices easier for people to use and 31% not confident at all which in some ways it's great that we're doing this webinar because everyone on here is Ready willing and able to offer that support. So I'll just reiterate those numbers at their end of the webinar. And please do get in touch with the organizations. And I know we're all very willing to help with that.

So moving on Veronica, are you there?

**Veronica Mulenga, SeeAbility:** [00:27:58] Hi there, Sarah.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:27:59] Hi, Veronica. How are you doing? So see ability or another organization who have been supporting people with learning disabilities. So be great to hear about you, but also the specific initiative that you think is quite recent, which is creating connection.

So just introducing SeeAbility, and then we can find out about how you've been innovating to help people keep in touch.

**Veronica Mulenga, SeeAbility:** [00:28:25] Well, thank you. Yes. Hi everyone. I'm Veronica Mullingar and I am from SeeAbility. Just a little introduction about SeeAbility well, the organization has been running for nearly 220 years. It was formerly known as a volume school for the blind before it changed to see ability. And the organization itself, we provide ambitious support for people with sight loss, learning disabilities and autism. We w w we aim to support people to live ambitious lives and achieve things they never thought possible.

So whether that's forming more friendships and relationships, enjoying new experiences and activities, or even finding employment, we have made a real commitment and to demonstrate what inclusive communities can look like and to create opportunities where everyone has a chance to live love, thrive, and belong as equal citizens.

So in regards to creating connections, a project that I look after I mean, that's the ability, everything that we do is informed by us listening to the needs of people, flooding disabilities, autism, and sight loss. And our organizational focus and direction is determined by people that we support during the pandemic and the various numerous downs that we've had.

People told us that they had increased feelings of isolation and loneliness, and that they were finding that very, very hard. I'm feeling further excluded from society. And they were finding it difficult to make that transition to the digital world. So in partnership with learning disability, England, and then members, we started off creating connections and it was basically built to, for people to learn new skills and designed to support people, to use internet safely and to connect with friends and family. Again, just doing a trade for everybody else's said pro pride grievously. To me, it is that connection that having that thing of face and making those real connections through the program itself, we've also been using volunteers to support people with learning disabilities through their own community as well as their own self advocacy groups.

So in essence, what we're trying to do is that people learning disabilities can actually get connected. And then they can build a relationships as well as also build new digital skills. That's very key. And what everybody has pointed out is that it is about that bridging that digital skills gap, not only for people learning disabilities, but for that wider network. And why does support network and as previously mentioned, it is what, what skill sets does the support workers, their families and carers have. We really wanted to support that in order to, for that digital skills gap to be lowered as well.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:31:21] So, what are some of tell us about some of the things that people have been doing with the support of yourself and learning disability, England and there are only real success stories, similar to the ones that we've heard from HFT that you'd like to share.

**Veronica Mulenga, SeeAbility:** [00:31:34] Yes, absolutely I mean, through the ground, what has happened is that we've worked with 24 self-advocacy groups who are all members of learning disability, England. And what we have done is really to support them, to put their services online so that they could reach the members themselves. And we've been so.

In such a short timeframe, you know, we've reached through over 1,001 thousand 500 people with learning disabilities to access those services online. And without this fundal that this network that we have, this wouldn't have been able to achieve. And one thing that I could, you know, case study that for me, that popped out for me was that somebody who had never used zoom before through this partnership and through this fund that we've, we received the received the support on a one-to-one basis to access those, those Online activities as well as learn how to use zoom and eventually actually got a job and did an interview and got a paid job through that.

So it has really opened up opportunities. And now like somebody else said, it's not, it's not just about getting connected. It's about what else could be available and what else is achievable for everybody to access as well.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:32:52] So we've already heard some fantastic stories around online singing groups and people getting, getting jobs through using technology. I wonder if there are any challenges we've heard a little bit about some of the barriers and also maybe to share learning from some of those barriers that we can pass on to other people on the call in terms of specifically tackling those. That'd be really fantastic.

**Veronica Mulenga, SeeAbility:** [00:33:19] Absolutely. I mean, yes. I mean, we found was actually the same barriers that HFC had pointed out as well. I mean, from ourselves support, we found that some of the barriers was the support staff didn't have access to the equipment or the software with accessible features. These accessible features are also quite costly. So there is a learning that, you know, is we need to find. Accessible costs for the, for them to be open to everybody as well. And what we've also found that, you know, not everybody knows how to have the right device in order to use what is available to them. So again, like what would AbilityNet do and having those assessments it's really necessary to know that, that everybody has the right tools and the right skill set in order to get online and, and have those access to them.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:34:12] Yeah. And I think from an ability net perspective, what we would probably say is that most devices today have got those accessibility features. It's just that they're kind of hidden and often takes a little bit of digging around to find them, which is the reason why we as a charity, as well as so delighted to be supporting the work and the digital lifeline project.

So thanks so much for that, Veronica. It's really great to hear about another example of how, how people have been helped during this time. So I'm really pleased that we've got some time now for Q and a. So I'll just hand over or just specifically ask my colleague, Chris, who's been keeping an eye on the Q and a and see if we've got any questions coming through for the panelists.

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:34:58] Yeah, I think the first one is around Hft. So a couple of people, Mark and Sarah have been asking what does Hft stand for?

**Victoria Hemmingway Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Hft:** [00:35:09] HFT historically stood for Home Farm Trust.Home .

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:35:11] Great. Thanks for answering that. Another question is coming from me saying good specific speech reading programs. For example, beyond that, eh, licenses for visually impaired folk, she's saying that's a very good question.

And we'll come to Theresa on that one from an accessibility point of view.

**Teresa Loftus:** [00:35:32] Oh, hi. Well actually on the tablets you get screen readers already installed on there. So as part of the accessibility options, so you've got things like talk back that's there. And in fact, some of the tablets will actually link up with your braille readers as well. So it's, it's quite a usable device. Our Android tablets and iPads as well, iOS and Android.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:36:02] Sorry, Chris, I'd just add to that as well that if people are looking for accessibility features and you can't find them just to reiterate that ability net service my computer, my way, which is a free online tool, you can search there by operating system, by impairment and also by what you want to do. So you can just pop in there yeah. Text to speech or make screen bigger text, bigger on screen. And, and you should find some of the answers there. .

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:36:34] William Davies is asking or saying we need free broadband and for people with learning disabilities and totally understand that William service providers are reviewing that all the time and that our projects. That could be on the cards in the next couple of months. So would just say kind of watch this space.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:36:52] Yeah. I just wonder if the panellists have anything to say on that is that the people have spoken a lot about that kind of, I guess the last mile that broadband is there that, that remains a barrier that the devices are being given out, or are you finding that for some service users that, that connectivity is still a missing piece and who wants to pay that?

**Emma Nichols:** [00:37:15] Yeah, definitely. I mean, we are for an example where our community partner in the digital lifeline project as well, and as part of that work asking people who would like to device, we were inundated with responses from people saying. We'd love a device, but we also need connectivity. So the great thing about the digital life planners, we get the connectivity with it as well. And I think because people are sort of at home more, they're so much more reliant. We, we in the organization provide a small amount of broadband width for people we support, but because they're accessing smart TVs and everyone's at home trying to get online at the same time, that bandwidth just isn't enough anymore.

So we need to look at ways of providing that to people so that they can, they can get it online when they want and do what they want.

**Victoria Hemmingway Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Hft:** [00:38:06] I would just like to echo what Emma says really. And just, I suppose, highlight another of the findings from our sector pulse research this year over a third of providers said that connectivity was an issue in making sure that the people they support were able to stay in touch. So yeah, it's clear that providers are finding that an issue as well. Yes. We're seeing that across the board.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:38:27] There's a little way to go, Gary. I can see you do add something as well.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:38:31] Yeah. I say, I think it should, it should be free and because it's, it's a useful tool, it's not a luxury, it's an essential, and that's what it's got to be seen as I think also we need and some people will live in the countryside. Neat. Super highway. And that should be needed per feed provided. And at the moment it's all, this is costing people they're out of their range and we need to make sure that this is a free creative delivery and fruit and good quality surface as well. It's not about quantity.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:39:20] And I think you're absolutely right Gary. And what you're saying that it's shifted from being seen as, you know, a bit of a luxury until we've all seen during the challenging time that we've lived through that. This is not a, a nice to have as an absolutely essential service, particularly for the people that you're working with.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:39:39] I think charities have a big role in providing that.

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:39:44] There's been two questions about the stats, which you were discussing. I'm just wondering, is the saying is the survey providers that Victoria mentioned available and then another question to see, where can we access the stats?

**Victoria Hemmingway Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Hft:** [00:40:00] Yeah, absolutely. So the stats are available in our latest sector. Post-it research. I can share the links with you in the Q and a, and perhaps they can be shared as part of the slide deck following the session too.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:40:15] Great. Thank you, Victoria.

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:40:17] Another question from Bolton, John saying, Hey, what are some practical techniques for content authors, webs, web designers, and developers to make it to provide better accessibility for people with learning disabilities.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:40:34] I'm wondering if HFT have any research on that?

**Victoria Hemmingway Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Hft:** [00:40:39] I'm afraid not on that.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:40:40] One of the things that I can contribute is that with the Version 2.2 of the web accessibility guidelines, which WCAG.

There is a specific focus. There are neuro-diversity and building up to version three, there is an increased focus there on I guess they're leveling up and making sure that websites are accessible. I think some of that focus is going to be around language, some of the way that things are phrased on forms that we might take for granted that are easily misinterpreted.

So that's some of the things that are coming through and there's also going to be a much greater focus which I think really echoes with all of the organizations that we've heard from before is a focus on involving users in that process, actually talking to people with learning disabilities and asking them what they are finding challenging.

So I think there are some positive signs coming through, but that is a little way off. So yeah, that's what I can contribute on that. Hopefully that's helpful.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:41:47] We should do something a bit like what Microsoft doing, and they employ people with. Autism in their, in their establishment, they can take apart a computer and then reassemble it again.

And we need to, we need jobs and knowledge from paper with a learning disability in that kind of role. And I think that we can, if we can employ people, the learning disabilities, they also be like a role model for other people with disabilities.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:42:28] It's very active. And I know Jenny Lee flurry is a particular advocate of that and she has previously spoken at our tech share pro event.

And I can also add to the slide deck, some links of some talks that Jenny's been involved in to see if we can find some resources about that as well. Gary, that's a really good point. Any other questions coming through Chris? .

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:42:51] Question from Teddy. Teddy's asked other than the practical aspects of access and proficiency in the technology. Are there any programs available regards the social skill development side, online socialization, even as simply as understanding and arranging a time to call what it means when the screen freezes, et cetera.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:43:11] I don't know if Theresa, you got any insight there or anyone else wants to contribute on that?

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:43:25] Sorry, I haven't actually sorry on that one.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:43:30] No problem.

**Emma Nichols:** [00:43:32] The as part of the digital lifeline jets the good things foundation website has some really fantastic resources on there. Covering a wide range of different techniques and support around accessing and using device is so it would definitely worth looking on there. I think.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:43:54] Yeah. And I think you'll find that we've, there's some good fact sheets and stuff on our website as well. And I, I picked up earlier, I think that a couple of the speakers were touching on that element of safety. I wouldn't want to overlook that either. I think there's there's a, there's a lot around safety, keeping people safe online. We've done a couple of previous webinars, which again, I can share, which you've got some simple tips around things like you know, being able to tell that the person that you're talking to is, is really who they are. Some watch out for scams and things like that that were presented in quite plain English by and some speakers.

So I can add those into the Q and a afterwards. Cause I think there's some of that is what you're touching on there. Chris I'll make sure we share those resources as well.

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:44:42] Yeah, definitely online safety is definitely becoming more to the front. And the thing, you know, there's other useful guys, particularly guys at friends against scams, for example, Adam Carter, and then the team that always produced really good material.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:44:57] One of the simple tips that we were trying to use after one of our webinars was another organization which is called take five. A lot of the scammers and a lot of the people who are trying to suck you in with those kinds of social techniques. One of the main things that they will do is get you to try and act quickly.

So the take five is a shorthand for almost taking a breath and not reacting in the moment. So just taking a bit of time to think about is this really who I think it is .

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:45:30] Apart from that, it should be safe against abuse and a hate crime online is happening with spokespeople and people from ethnic minorities. Now there should be something for for people with learning to split this or autism. So, so that I think is the duty of the big companies like Facebook and Twitter and Microsoft to make sure that our safety net in those to stop the abuse and hate crime coming through. And I think that's, they should, those companies need to work alongside big charts for organizations like ourselves.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:46:22] Hmm. Really good point. Thanks for that.

Chris, anything else coming through on the questions there?

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:46:29] Yeah. There was a couple of questions coming in regards to volunteer support where we have volunteers. So we are UK wide. So feel free to get in touch. I've got a big team of over 330 volunteers. Who've been more than happy and to see what we can do for you.

But there's, I think this is a really, really good question. And it comes from Sarah Jane Jones, or she's asking, can someone self refer into service, which I think is the digital lifeline projects in my service. And my sister has learning disabilities, but lives independently. And isn't connected to a service provider. My sibling doesn't have wifi broadband, which you need to have this and what can be put in place to protect against making bad financial decisions and safeguarding on the internet.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:47:22] Yeah. This has happened a lot. And even in residential settings this is a worry for the style, you know to try to protect people, but the people, people with a learning disabilities and autism need to have access to digital service, but also have the same thing as I've been talking about a little while ago to be adapted and to making sure that, that, that, that the residential places have free Wi-Fis service.

And maybe it's something we could I think the charter organizations work alongside big companies to, to put in free wildfire service and making sure that they flattery laptops like this, like during last year had for students to have free free laptops. Now wouldn't that be great for people with learning disabilities and autism to have that, that, and and have that with free whitewash.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:48:45] Yeah. And there's some resources that we can share afterwards again, around getting connected That free is not currently available, but I think we've got a couple of blog posts around how to find lower cost connections, which might be useful for people and that we can share afterwards.

So, Chris, I think we've got time for one more question. If you could pick one out.

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:49:08] Yeah. That's I think this is a great one. Just come from Kevin's he's asking, do the panel believe there's a risk that a focus on connections using tablet, devices, and other video interfaced the trucks from the more general use of personalized technology applications for addressing a wide range of needs, both for supporting growth and for addressing issues of safety and security.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:49:36] Anyone want to pick that one up?

**Emma Nichols:** [00:49:39] I can. Yeah. I think it's a really, really good point. I think during the last 12 months, I mean, we, as a team, for example, we look at a wide breadth of technology to keep people safe live more independently. There has been a specific focus on tablet devices over the last year, really to help with social isolation, social isolation. But I think it really goes back to the assessment. The assessment is key. So when you're working with somebody you're looking at their needs not just around sort of staying connected, but also around their goals, what skills they want to develop the daily living skills and they want to go out independently and things like that. So there is a danger that people can get very much focused on the tablets, but there is a lot more right. That it's, it's really about that holistic approach. I think.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:50:34] I'd also add that within some of those applications that are implied there, Chris, around things like video connection. One of the things that ability net has been really conscious of is that those platforms platforms like zoom that we're offering today often different ways of interacting.

So even as I look at the gallery, now, some people are on camera, some people aren't. I think it's about having that conversation about what people feel comfortable with. Some people might be more comfortable talking in a chat program. They might be happy to join a video call, but not want to have that face on screen.

And it's about talking to people and agreeing that it's okay to have different styles of interacting within the apps within the platforms. And they, again, all have settings that can be adapted for that. So we've got about one minute, Chris, is it. Is there one more question that you wanted to flag up or is, is that yeah.

**Chris Grant, AbilityNet:** [00:51:35] Well, we'll finish on McKim from Kim styling, Kansas. Can you suggest any well executed resources for easy to read on Covid please.

Easy to read. It says what resource for easy to read and COVID so none of it is easy to read the boat. COVID perhaps

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:51:55] so plain English information about COVID. Yeah.

**Gary Bourlet:** [00:51:59] Hmm. We've got a load of self-advocacy groups have actually done a lot on this sort of thing. And they're the ones that are actually been providing the infamous easy reads information on, on COVID.

But the thing is that the information comes out so four weeks later, then when the debate comes out And it's used in our South advocacy groups, resources and finance when the government really should be providing it. Hmm.

**Sarah Botterill:** [00:52:35] Yeah. So we'll finish there because we are unfortunately out of time, but I'd just like to say a huge, thank you to all of the panelists who have joined today.

It's been really interesting to hear about the work that you're doing. I hope people have got lots from the Q and a, and I'm pleased that we managed to get through so many questions. We will have a look and see if there are any outstanding ones. And we will round up, as I said, some of the information after the event and we'll publish a blog and we'll share the links within it.

So thank you ever so much for everyone who has joined us today. And yeah. Take care and hope to see you all again soon. Thanks very much. Thank you. Bye-bye bye-bye.