

Report to Lanreath Parish Council Meeting 17th January 2023
Adult Digital Exclusion

by Cllr John Gundry, Lanreath Parish Council

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present information on adult digital exclusion and opportunities to counter it, relevant to Lanreath Parish.

2. Background

In September 2022, Lanreath Parish Council received a letter, almost certainly circulated to other parish councils, from a Mr Chris Goninan of St Just. Mr Groninan is a past District and Cornwall Councillor with responsibility for older people at Penwith District Council.

He enclosed an article he had written called "Equality for All". His article noted that the only way of communicating with many commercial and government organisations is online. "Elders and those on low incomes, the most vulnerable in our communities, will become disenfranchised as more technology makes them more isolated in our communities." He asks "Should Cornwall ... be taking the lead in building a national campaign to address this issue?"

This matter was discussed at the November 2022 Parish Council meeting minuted as below: "Equality for all: Mr Chris Goninan's letter 8th September refers, in which he proposes that Government should be made aware of the struggle of some in rural communities having no access to and/or lacking the necessary skills to use digital technology. He requests feedback from Lanreath Parish Council. Chairman suggested that we cannot be sure how much this affects our community, and how would that be ascertained. Cllr Gundry offered to research and identify organisations that could assist at village level."

I have therefore endeavoured to identify, as pertaining to Lanreath Parish,

- The extent of adult digital exclusion,
- The opportunities to counter adult digital exclusion.

3. The Extent of Adult Digital Exclusion in Lanreath Parish

No information regarding adult digital exclusion specifically in Lanreath Parish is evident. However, national and regional information is available. The source is the Office for National Statistics 2019 report

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04> . From that report, 2018 data on "internet non-users" (those who have never used the internet or last used it more than 3 months ago) showed:

- In 2018, South-West England had about the national average of internet non-users at 10.2% of the population. The UK average was 10.5%. The highest proportion of non-users was in Northern Ireland at 14.2% and the lowest in London at 7%. The rate for the South-West had declined from 17.2% in 2012.
- Nationally, the percentage of internet non-users was greatest amongst older people. The proportion of all non-users who were over 64 was 79%.
- The most common reason for not having internet access in the household was a perceived lack of need (64%), followed by a lack of skills (20%). (National data across all ages, 2017).

- The most popular activities of adults who did use the internet were sending or receiving emails (84%), finding out about goods or services (77%), internet banking (69%) and social networking (65%).

More precise data on the extent of digital exclusion in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is given in a substantial document describing Cornwall Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023. The document (available here <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/people-and-communities/digital-inclusion/digital-inclusion-strategy/>) says on page 7 that "For Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, the 2018 ONS figures show that over 13% of the adult population have never used the internet". Comparing this 13% with the national data cited above puts the Cornwall & Isle of Scilly rate above the national average and the second-highest nationally.

4. Opportunities to Counter Adult Digital Exclusion

Cornwall Council provides two principal ways for people to acquire and improve their digital skills.

4.1 Cornwall Council's Digital Inclusion Programme

A significant programme to counter digital exclusion is provided by Cornwall Council and described here <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/people-and-communities/digital-inclusion/>. In an email about this programme, Ms Dawn Stoddern, Cornwall Council's Digital & Social Inclusion Team Lead, writes:

"A lack of digital skills and access can have a huge negative impact on a person's life, leading to poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy, increased loneliness and social isolation, less access to jobs and education. Evidence from leading charities and research institutes over the years continues to show that it is those already at disadvantage through age, education, income, disability or unemployment who are most likely missing out, widening the social and digital inequality gap."

The principal components of the Digital Inclusion programme (the 2019-23 strategy for which is described in the document referenced earlier) are below, as described on the website, with additional information from Ms Stoddern.

A. Computer Beginner Support

(<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/people-and-communities/digital-inclusion/computer-beginner-support/#form>) is described as offering "free, friendly advice and guidance to help you get online and use the internet safely ... using a telephone or video call in the comfort of your own home". Ms Stoddern amplifies:

"This is definitely a suitable way for older and excluded people to get online and access digital skills support. It offers the benefit of having tuition in your own home at a convenient time. The topics we cover range from setting up a laptop and tablet to use for the first time through to help to use specific websites for online services.

"Appointment hours are between 10 – 4.30 Monday to Friday. There is no set time for the duration of a support session they can range from five minutes to an hour (they can go on for longer if a break is taken) There is no restriction on how many support sessions a person can have – the support will continue as long as they need. All support sessions are usually on a one-to-one basis so that each person receives exactly the help they need, however if there is a recurring theme, we can arrange for groups of between four and six people to attend a set training session via Teams." [Microsoft Teams provides online live interactive video.]

B. Free Online Learning and Support

(<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/people-and-communities/digital-inclusion/free-online-learning-and-support/>) provides access to a variety of online resources. Of these, as described on the webpage:

- Learn My Way is a website of free online courses for beginners, helping you develop digital skills to make the most of the online world. Ms Stoddern comments:

“Learn My Way is an excellent way to improve digital skills and allows people to work through topics at their own pace – this can be blended with telephone and Teams support as detailed above.” Ms Stoddern also comments that access to Learn My Way can be provided via public computers at Liskeard and Looe libraries.

- Digital Unite is an award-winning range of 400+ how-to technology guides. These cover a whole host of digital topics, written by subject matter experts and updated daily.
- Ten other online resources are listed on this webpage, including Open Learn, Reed Training and The Skills Toolkit.

4.2 Adult and Community Education ICT Courses

ICT (Information and Communication Technology) courses leading to formal qualifications are provided by Cornwall Council Adult and Community Education whose website is here: <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/schools-and-education/adult-and-community-education/ict-courses/>. This website asks

“Are you looking to get started with computers or learn new skills for everyday life? Our nationally recognised, free Essential Digital Skills qualifications will give you the practical skills you need. Learn how to use your device to get online safely, keep in touch, make online transactions, create and edit documents plus much more.”

The website allows those interested to enquire or enrol on courses which are provided locally at Bodmin and Liskeard Adult Education Centres.

5. Conclusions

- No precise data on adult digital exclusion for Lanreath Parish is evident but 2018 figures show that over 13% of the adult population of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly had never used the internet. This was the second-highest rate nationally. Those data also identify a lack of skills as the reason given by 20% of people for not using the internet. It is worth noting, however, that these data are nearly five years old and adult digital exclusion is likely to have reduced since then.
- Cornwall Council provides skill improvement opportunities as below.
 - The Digital Inclusion programme, all of which is remotely-delivered:
 - Computer Beginner Support: interactive assistance available in one’s own home, via the telephone or an online live interactive video link, or on public computers at Liskeard and Looe libraries;
 - Free Learning and Support: free online courses and access to a large number of technology guides.
 - More formal computer skills education is available at Bodmin and Liskeard Adult and Community Education Centres.