

## Community Tech Support: Providing a critical service as a response to the pandemic.

ClearCommunityWeb CIC helps develop digital skills in older people, vulnerable or isolated adults & carers primarily across Lambeth, Southwark & Croydon.

We run classes and workshops designed to help people feel more comfortable and confident with technology as well as teaching them to be safer online. We take a person-centred approach to help them to be more independent, to make better choices and access support networks and services.

We have always observed that a person's mental health and current situation can have a direct and negative impact on the ability to learn, to adopt or use something new and to either critically think or troubleshoot. Some of the essential skills to using the internet and technology in general.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we expanded our tech support service to provide virtual (Zoom), telephone and doorstep/ home support – with full PPE provision where restrictions allowed, and services users were comfortable.

Very quickly we found we were able to reach a wide range of new people – those housebound before the pandemic and isolated adults, often with mental health, who prior to the pandemic may not have come to one of our services in a public space.

We have assisted people to download and install software such as zoom to access support networks, council & NHS services, setting up accounts (such as email and online services) troubleshoot issues, running virus checks and helping people who have been scammed. We have, however also provided support for people to access online funerals, bereavement services as well as brokering conversations with utility providers and council support.

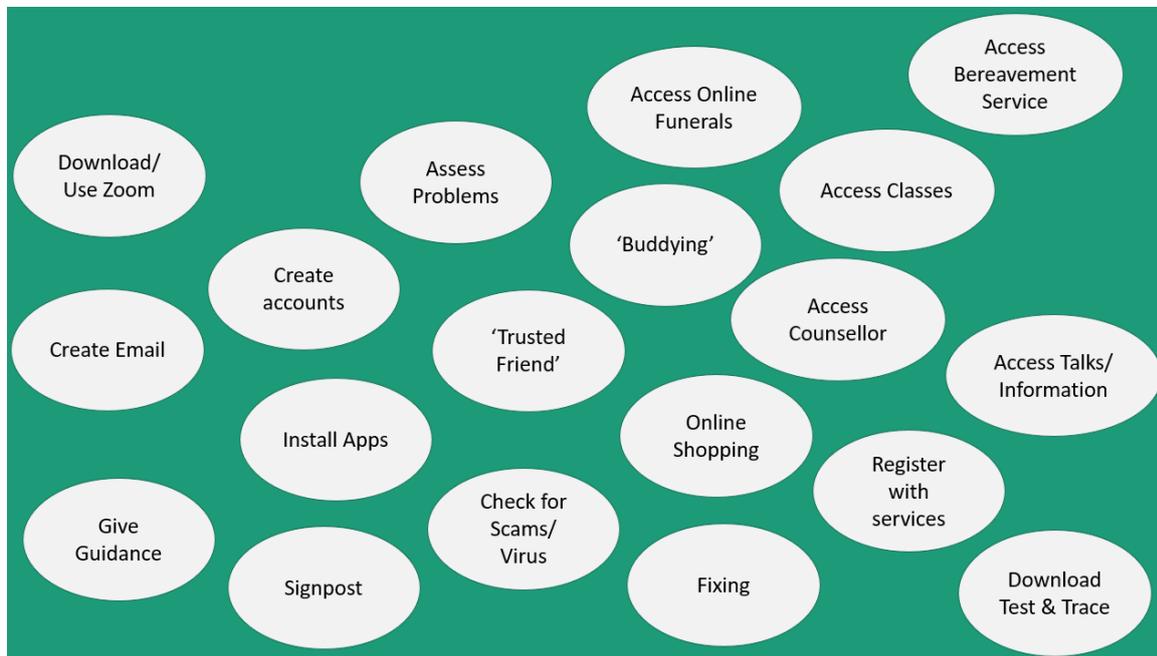
*“During lockdown I lost both my mother and daughter to the virus and was unable to leave my house.*

*With your assistance I was able to attend bereavement counselling with AgeUK Croydon by video which was helpful as I find it difficult expressing myself without eye contact.”*

*Sandra, Norbury*

During this time, people that perhaps had been digitally excluded, not engaged or confident were trying to get online or use equipment with little support.

This, combined with the various pressures of being on-line during the pandemic, then, in cases, lead to an increase in anxiety or at best was a missed opportunity to building confidence.

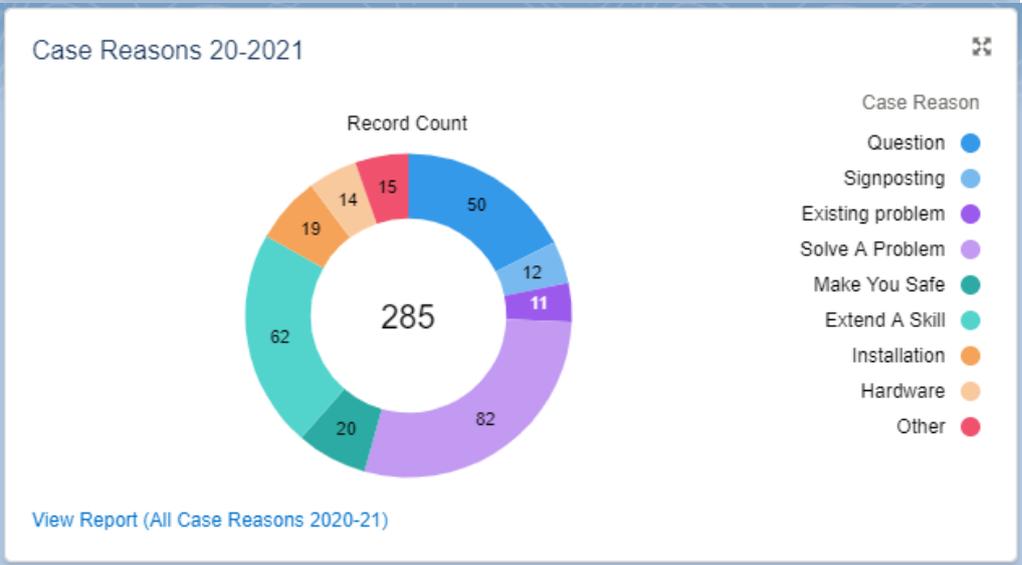
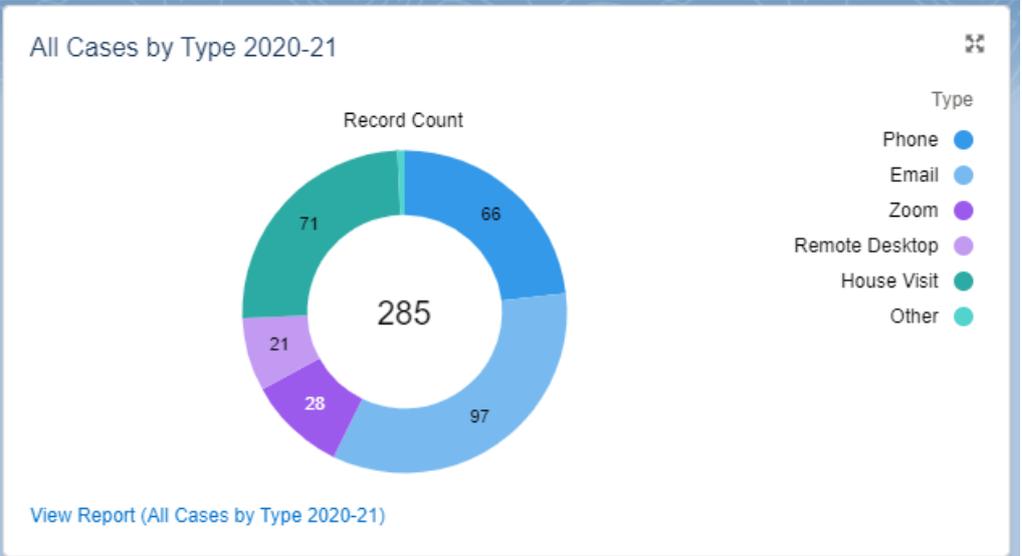
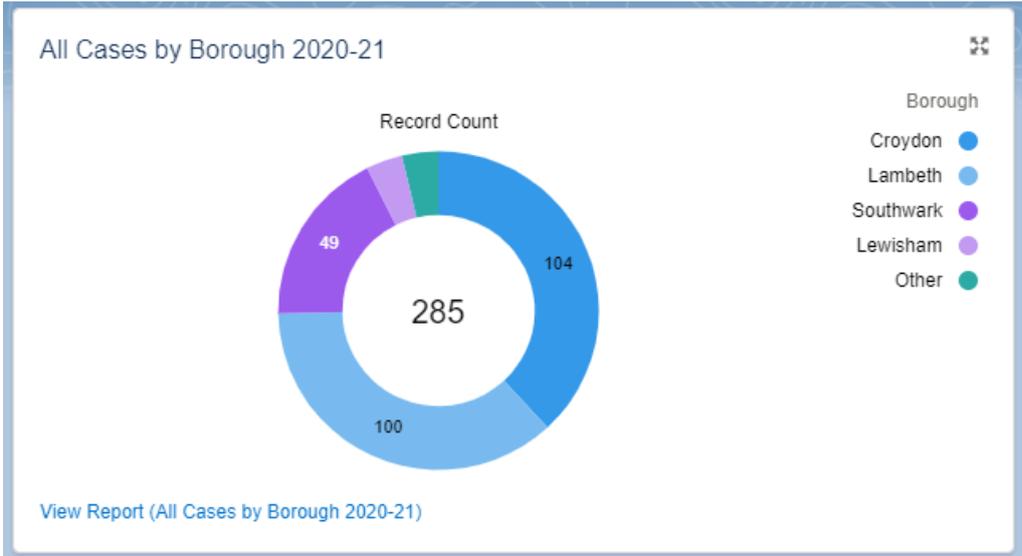


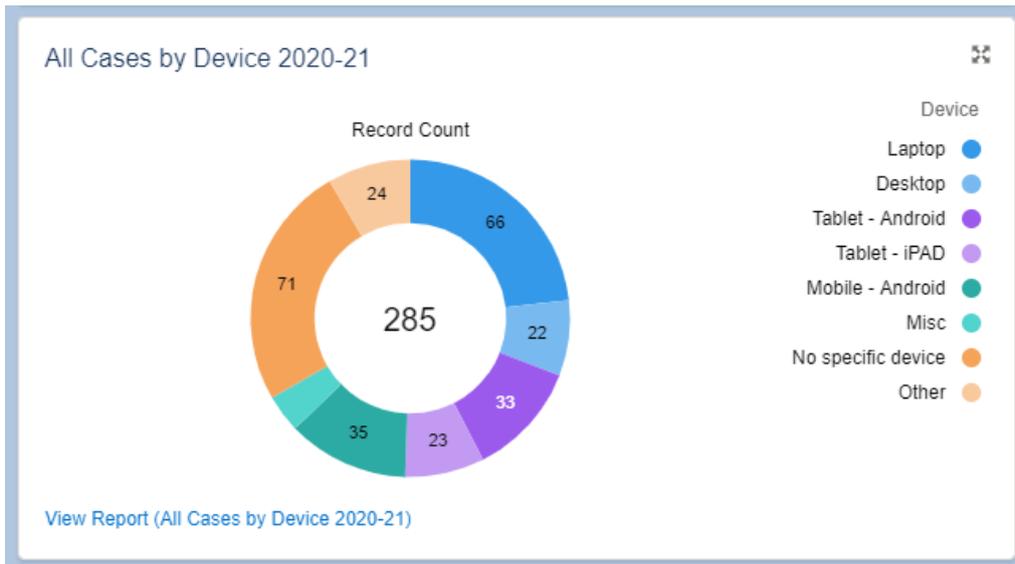
### Breakdown of cases

In the period between March 2020 and March 2021 we received 285 support cases; primarily referrals from local charities, housing, NHS/ CCG partners, support & recovery services, libraries and link workers/ social prescribers.

We also saw a rise in referrals from grassroots organizations such as Tenants & Residents Associations, food banks and community kitchens.

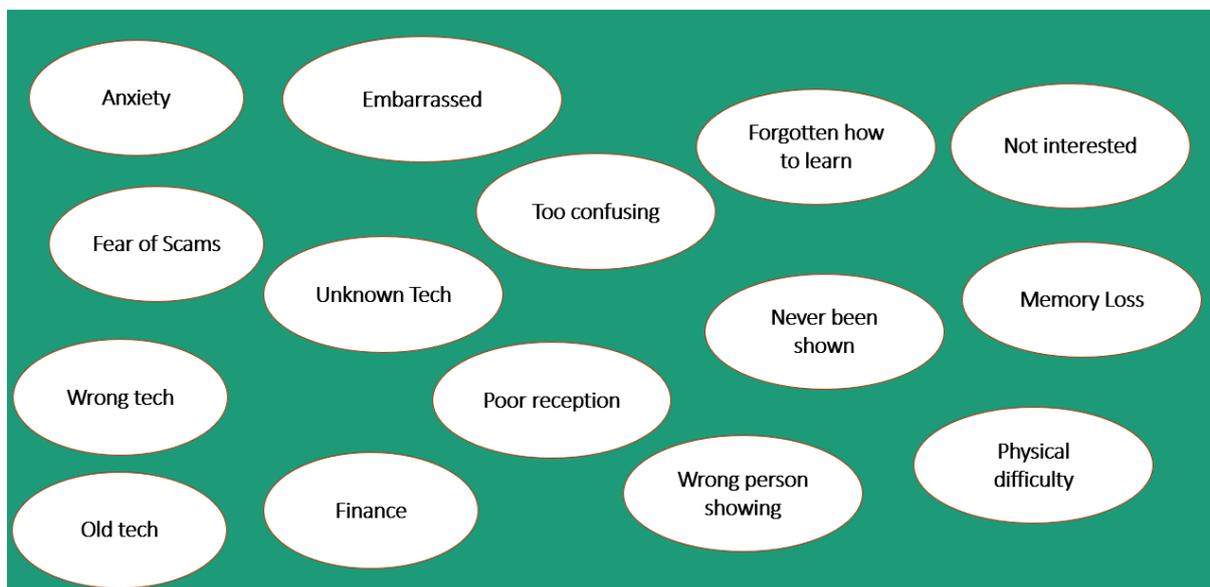
We also advertised the service with leaflets through doors, via food parcels and on community noticeboards. We also engaged with the Mutual Aid groups and community activators in our immediate area.





### The Barriers

We have focussed on understanding both the barriers to the adoption of technology and to learning, the most common seen below.



We noted that people experienced multiple barriers and this mix was unique to the person, but underlying this we have noted mental health, anxiety, trauma all having a significant impact on the ability to learn and adopt something new, accentuated during an external crisis such as pandemic.

Work we would like to explore and test further.

*"Thank you for not making me feel clueless. I have just been starring at my computer for weeks getting more stressed. Really appreciate what you did. Small steps"*  
Ruth, Lambeth

*"My netbook was causing me a huge headache and lots of anxiety. I was really taken aback by the friendliness of everybody and it was a very calm environment.*

*"My netbook is heaps better than it was, only occasionally giving me a stop code and turning off - but I can live with that. The fact is I have more confidence in it working when I switch it on in the morning."*  
Julie, Southwark

"I feel I can now get in touch and talk to people again. I'm connected to the outside at last"  
Rose, Lambeth

### **"Tech" Re-distribution, Donations and Connectivity**

During this period, we also worked with many organizations including Good Things Foundation, HubBub, Community Tech Aid and Millennium Community Solutions to redistributed donated or upcycled equipment to vulnerable residents.

During this period, we have redistributed 45 Smart phones, 32 Tablets, 12 Laptops, 18 desktops which on average lead to 3.5hr of additional support to use the device in a basic way. Ie turn it on and complete one or two common and useful tasks but not independent. This was time/ resource that wasn't factored into these projects from the outset when trying to resolve digital exclusion by a device alone.

The price of connectivity, ability to get a contract and the quality of service were all factors that were underestimated at the beginning of this period, rendering many donated devices redundant,

### **What we have learned**

It is as much a human challenge as it is technological as those who have not adopted technology and are the most digitally excluded require significant support.

The same problem presented can take 15 mins or 5 hours over 3 weeks to resolve depending on the person and circumstances. The wrap around service can be in excess of an hour Confidence, support, working equipment & connectivity need to all be in place Building confidence in someone can be fragile and a delicate process in which you cant 'watch the clock'.

Learning to ask the right questions is important as having an email is not the same as being able to use email.

Information from referrers isn't always helpful, even with best will in the world. People may try to explain what they think the problem is – but we focus on what they are trying to do – which are different things.

We do believe it is a service to be developed and not 'Just help' or a temporary response to the COVID situation.

### Further information

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