

A scenic rural landscape featuring a paved road that curves through rolling green hills. The hills are covered in lush green grass and some areas of taller, golden-brown grasses. A large, leafy tree stands prominently on the right side of the road. The sky is a clear, bright blue. In the background, there are rolling hills and a utility pole with power lines.

# The Rural Support Bus Project

freedom

Rural ction  
DERBYSHIRE

*our* **JOURNEY**





Purchased our motorhome in December 2024.



There was an initial delay in the project due to unforeseen difficulties in securing a motorhome, which is a critical resource for delivering the project. The motorhome is essential for transporting staff members and equipment, ensuring accessibility for clients and enabling the smooth execution of project activities.

### Key challenges faced

#### Availability issues:

- ❖ Local providers had limited availability during the required timeframe, likely due to high demand.
- ❖ Difficulty in finding alternative options with appropriate specifications, such as seating capacity, accessibility features, or required safety certifications.

#### Budget constraints:

- ❖ Unexpectedly high purchase costs exceeded the project's initial budget allocation, requiring adjustments and additional funding.

#### Administrative delays:

- ❖ Lengthy processes for securing approval from supplier and negotiating price caused a bottleneck.
- ❖ Delays in obtaining necessary insurance coverage and a certified driver further contributed to the postponement.



What do we offer?



The RSB service, a mobile community outreach initiative, regularly visits rural communities to provide access to vital services for those in need. In addition to the digital support services, Freedom's RSB focuses on offering basic support services, including:

- ✓ Food Parcels
- ✓ Hot drinks and comfort: the motorhome offers hot drinks, including tea and coffee, to help combat isolation and provide a warm, welcoming environment. This creates a safe space for clients to connect with Freedom's volunteers and support worker, alleviating loneliness.
- ✓ Companionship: Freedom's support worker and volunteers provide a non-judgemental space for clients to talk, where they can share their concerns about health, financial struggles, digital struggles, and isolation.



The Rural Support Bus Locations





What did we achieve?



- ✓ 73 clients supported
- ✓ 1-1 support in a community setting
- ✓ Free Wi-Fi
- ✓ Provision of digital services on site
- ✓ Signposting to other digital services
- ✓ Average age demographic – 45 – 65+
- ✓ Overall Digital Champions – 7

The RSB has become a hub for social interacting and connection. This aspect of social connectedness is just as important as the practical support provided. The success of the project lies in the holistic nature of the support provided – combining practical help (food, drink, advice) with emotional support (companionship, community building) and empowering digital skills. The project has proven to be a success in empowering clients. The key to success has been the holistic and client-centred approach. Future expansion of the project could focus on strengthening digital infrastructure, increasing volunteer capacity, and providing ongoing digital literacy to support long-term sustainability.

## CASE STUDY



Name: Sarah\* Age: 62

**Location:** Lives in a remote rural village of Whitwell with limited access to technology and digital services.

Sarah has recently retired and wishes to stay connected with her family and friends, many of whom live far away. She also wants to access online health services and manage her finances digitally. However, Sarah lacks confidence with technology and has limited prior experience with digital tools. Her rural location compounds these challenges, as internet access is inconsistent, and there are few local resources for learning digital skills.

**Challenges Identified by Lyndsey:**

Sarah did not own a personal computer or smartphone and relied on a shared tablet provided by a family member.

Internet connectivity in her area was unreliable and slow.

Sarah was unfamiliar with basic digital tasks, such as navigating websites, sending emails, and using video calls.

She expressed concerns about online safety, including scams and privacy risks.

Living in a rural area meant Sarah had limited access to in-person digital literacy workshops or community groups.

**Support Plan created by Lyndsey:**

Conducted one-on-one training sessions tailored to Sarah's goals, including:

Setting up and using email to communicate with family.

Navigating video conferencing tools like Zoom for virtual gatherings.

## CASE STUDY



Accessing and managing online NHS healthcare portal to book appointments and order prescriptions.

Delivered training in a step-by-step format, using clear language and printed guides Sarah could reference later.

Educated Sarah about recognising phishing emails and avoiding scams.  
Helped her set up secure passwords.

### Ongoing Support:

Connected Sarah with Lyndsey's email who is providing periodic check-ins to address any new questions or challenges. Sarah bought a second-hand laptop with her son's support.

### Outcomes:

Sarah is now comfortable using her laptop to send emails, browse websites, and participate in video calls. She regularly connects with her grandchildren online, strengthening family bonds.

Sarah successfully manages her health appointments and prescription orders through an online portal, reducing the need for long trips to Clowne.

Sarah feels less isolated and more independent, engaging with her local and virtual communities.

With ongoing support and her growing skills, Sarah is optimistic about exploring more digital opportunities, such as online shopping and virtual hobbies.

### Conclusion:

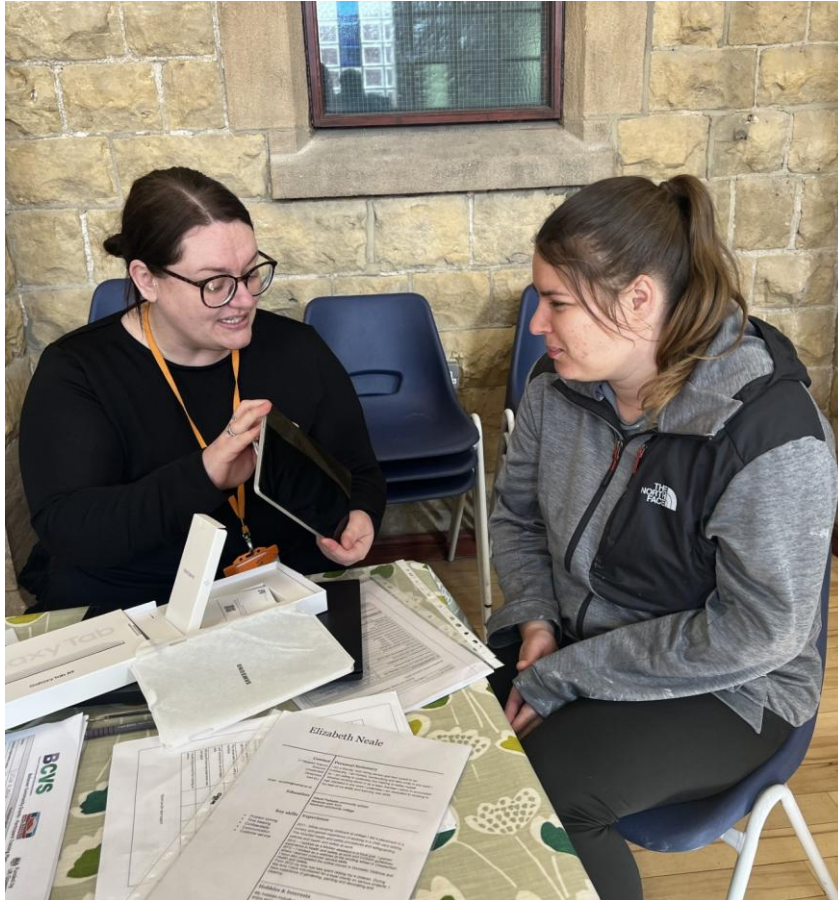
This case illustrates how addressing both technological and skill-based barriers can empower individuals in rural areas to participate fully in the digital world.



## DIGITAL INCLUSION AT ST. BERNADETTE'S CENTRE



## REPORT (SO FAR) ON THE PROVISION OF 1-1 DIGITAL SUPPORT TO PROMOTE DIGITAL INCLUSION, SOCIAL CONNECTION, AND DIGITAL HEALTH SKILLS



The rapid digitalisation of services and communication has left many individuals, particularly older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those with low income, excluded from essential aspects of modern life. In response, this project was implemented to provide **bespoke, one-on-one digital support** tailored to each individual's needs.

The three key goals of this initiative are to:

- Increase digital inclusion
- Reduce social isolation caused by digital exclusion
- Enable and support people to develop digital health skills



## **Project Objective**

Freedom's support team decided that the primary objectives of the 1-1 digital support provision were to:

Identify individuals experiencing digital exclusion

1. Provide personalised training and support based on their digital literacy level
2. Improve access to digital tools and services (e.g., email, video calling, health apps)
3. Strengthen their confidence and independence in using digital devices
4. Connect individuals with online communities and health resources to combat social isolation

## **Methodology**

To ensure the success of the initiative, the following approach was taken:  
Needs Assessment: Initial interviews were conducted to understand each participant's baseline digital skills, social needs, and health-related digital goals.

Tailored Support: Each client receive 1-on-1 guidance from a digital support worker over a series of weekly sessions.

Flexible Delivery: Support is provided via phone, or at St. Bernadette's Centre depending on client's preferences.

Progress Monitoring: Skills assessments were repeated at intervals to track learning outcomes and confidence.

## CASE STUDY



### Case Study: Mrs. A's Journey to Digital Empowerment

#### Background

Mrs. A, aged 72, lives alone and has minimal family nearby. She relies heavily on Freedom Community Project cafes for social interaction. She had never used a smartphone or computer before and expressed fear and confusion around technology.

#### Intervention

Mrs. A was enrolled in the digital support project after referral from a support worker. Over 8 weeks, she was introduced to a tablet with simplified accessibility settings, laptop and printer.

Mrs. A attended weekly visits and received guidance from a digital support worker. Step-by-step guidance included learning about basic functions (turning on the devices, Wi-Fi, using Zoom, browsing the NHS website)

#### Outcomes

By the end of her support period, Mrs. A was able to:

- Video call her grandchildren

- Book GP appointments online via her local surgery's website

- Use the NHS App to order repeat prescriptions

- Participate in online social groups through Facebook and a virtual church group

#### Impact

Mrs. A reported a significant increase in her sense of connection and independence. She expressed a new sense of purpose and mentioned that “the world no longer feels as far away.”

*Any* **QUESTIONS?**

