

# **Digital By Default - Adapting to Change or Driving Exclusion?**

**Jon Corner – Chief Digital Officer, City of Salford**

**Irene Lockett – Director, Sovereign House**

**Adam Micklethwaite – Director of Digital, Social Inclusion, Good Things Foundation**

Becky started by introducing the session and acknowledged the role Salford and Greater Manchester has played in the digital scene, historically.

**Jon Corner, Chief Digital Officer, Salford City Council**

Jon started his presentation by explaining his background in business, creating and selling tech companies in GM. From this he became the Chief Officer for Digital Salford and as part of his role he has created some aims and objectives:

- To become one of the world's most attractive cities for digital enterprise
- To become a connected digital city for the people of Salford

Jon explained that connectivity is crucial for Salford, there are areas of Salford with no option for connectivity so we need to get the lines in.

Digital Salford is made up of key member organisations for the city: Salford City Council, MediaCity, Salford CCG and The University of Salford.

Jon explained that Salford was the first city in the UK to have the 5g connectivity. He goes on to explain that 5g means that low latency (buffering) will completely disappear. This means that the connections and the networks are now strong enough for driverless cars, for example. It also allows for machines to do repetitive tasks.

Jon concludes by emphasising that the priority for Salford is to get the plumbing fixed first. We need the pipes laid down in order to get access to this connectivity and it should happen through partnership between companies, local authorities and buildings.

**Irene Lockett – Sovereign House**

Irene explained that Sovereign House started in Ghana but then moved to Salford. Irene was surprised talking to people in Salford that a lot of them didn't have tech at home so she decided to start running classes for young people focussing on programming and coding.

Some students do really well at Sovereign House but struggle in mainstream IT classes at school. Irene thinks this is because they do not get the 1-1 support that they get at Sovereign House.

We also work with the parents of students and have found that the students who live with parents who have none of their own tech at home are the ones that struggle the most.

Irene stressed that in Salford, and the UK as a whole, computers might be everywhere but not everyone has access to them, the work SH has done with the students, Irene has found that parents have been inspired by their child learning and want to learn themselves.

Irene also discussed that at SH, they teach the importance of being a good digital citizen which involves subjects like; sharing safely on social media, scams and theft, hacking and viruses etc.

### **Adam Micklethwaite – Good Things Foundation (GTF)**

Adam started his presentation by discussing that with the fast pace of technology being embedded into society, people are being left behind. 12% of UK adults are 'offline'.

With the digitizing of Welfare Reform, Tax and the NHS Long Term Plan, all of these important factors of life in the UK could actually increase exclusion. Adam believes the VCSE sector could play a vital role going forward. These organisations have links with the communities who are digitally excluded. They are the trusted face in the community that can really support the people who need it the most.

At Good Things Foundation the term Digital Inclusion is about people. Adam explained that the way GTF work is that they partner with large agencies to get funding and then channel it to smaller organisations in the community.

Adam finished by emphasising that there is a big opportunity in Salford. Demand for VCSE support is increasing as funds have been decreasing. Digital inclusion, being incorporated into work that is already being done, can provide powerful evidence for funders.

### **Q&A Session**

One question for Adam (GTF) was; What is the easiest way to engage with people who are isolated?

Adam answered that the more work you do in the community, the harder that gets. Especially because you end up working with micro communities. Adam said that they had seen success when organisations had used participants pre-existing networks of people as recruiters.

Another question for Adam (GTF); Carers involved with my charity I run, don't do anything tech wise and it's frustrating, what do you suggest?

Adam said that they should talk to GTF! In the past they have worked with carers and people with dementia in the past.

A question for Jon: There are lots of new builds in Salford. Would these be ready for new tech such as 5g?

Jon answered by saying that new builds generally speaking are fine, however there are some housing associations that don't see access to the internet as an essential when building houses which is slightly worrying.

At this point, the group came up with a list of actions of which the three below received the most support:

- Clearer Signposting to opportunities in the community
- Digital banking support for groups in the community
- Develop a way to challenge larger organisations on behalf of people who do not fit into a box? For example, those who struggle with engaging with digital services.