

Spotlight

# Safeguarding and Staying Safe in a Digital World

Featuring:

Women in Tech North East CIC and Age UK Gateshead

Pages 4 and 12

Also in this issue

Page 7  
Digital Inclusion: It's Closer Than You Think

Page 18  
Guest article: Beyond Digital Borders, Hope Beyond Borders

Cover photo: Three women chat at a networking event.

# Contents

Introduction by Lisa Goodwin, Chief Executive	3
Spotlight: Women in Tech North East CIC	4
Governance and Risk Management: Keeping Your Organisation Safe	6
Digital Inclusion: It's Closer Than You Think	8
Digital Safety in the Volunteering World	10
Spotlight: Age UK Gateshead	12
Safeguarding in a Digital World	14
Beyond Digital Borders	16

## About this magazine

As of 2025, Connected Voice Magazine is published twice a year. We aim to make sure all information is correct and up to date but we do not accept liability for any mistakes that may inadvertently appear. Views and opinions in this magazine are not necessarily those of Connected Voice.

Images: as part of our commitment to accessibility, we describe images for those using screen readers.

If you have any queries about this magazine email [connect@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:connect@connectedvoice.org.uk)

## Issue 23: Safeguarding and Staying Safe in a Digital World

The Autumn 2025 issue of Connected Voice Magazine, 'Safeguarding and Staying Safe in a Digital World' highlights the impact of digitisation on society, the benefits and the importance of digital inclusion.

We hear from our Chief Executive Lisa Goodwin, who highlights the growing challenges VCSE organisations face in staying safe online and supporting beneficiaries in an increasingly digital world, especially with limited resources and rising cyber security concerns.

For our Newcastle-based Spotlight, we hear from Women in Tech North East CIC about their thriving community of women in the technology sector, offering a welcoming space for women from

all career stages to network.

For our Gateshead-based Spotlight, we speak to Age UK Gateshead about how their work supporting older people in Gateshead has evolved to include digital support to keep everyone connected and included.

Elsewhere, we hear from Sergi Ramon from Hope Beyond Borders. There are also plenty of insights from our team, including from our Advocacy team, Business Services, Support and Development, and Volunteering.

We hope you enjoy this issue and welcome any questions you may have! ●

# Safeguarding and Staying Safe in a Digital World

**Lisa Goodwin**  
Chief Executive



We chose the theme of Staying Safe in a Digital World for this magazine because we have been having a lot of conversations with VCSE organisations over the past few months about the challenges both of keeping organisations safe online, and ensuring safety and appropriate support for beneficiaries in an increasingly digital world.

Cyber security is on everyone's mind right now after the high profile issues experienced by M&S and other

**“As organisations with limited resources, reducing our cyber security risks in the VCSE sector isn't always easy, but we are here to help.”**

companies such as Land Rover.

If you want to increase your skills and knowledge in this area please do check out our training programme, which regularly features cyber security courses. You can also talk to us about other support available – including pro bono support from businesses through our Sector Connector programme.

An increasingly digital world creates multiple challenges for VCSE organisations.

As well as the cyber security issues, there is the constant challenge of keeping pace with technology, and

making sure we can make the most of the advantages it brings us, while not compromising our ethics or losing the person-centred focus which so many of us have.

The way we support the people who use our services has had to shift significantly in the past 10+ years, as people grow accustomed to receiving information digitally, and as the challenges for the individuals we support shift in the digital world.

A good example is youth groups, who are dealing with the effects of young people spending increasing amounts of time online, cyber bullying and so on. We know that the world has become increasingly 'digital by default', which presents challenges for us all in supporting people.

We are pleased to be able to bring people together to tackle these challenges in a practical sense through our digital inclusion programmes in Gateshead and Newcastle. But we are aware that with one staff member on each programme, we can only really scratch the surface in terms of meeting need.

The articles in this edition showcase some great work that is going on within our membership to support digital inclusion, as well as highlighting some of the things we all need to think about as we do our best to keep up with the rapidly evolving digital world ●

# Spotlight: Women in Tech North East CIC

## Women in Tech North East CIC

Women in Tech North East CIC aims to create a supportive community for women in the tech industry in the North East.

### What does your organisation do?

It all started with a networking event in 2022. Women in Tech North East wanted to provide a friendly and welcoming space for women\* in the technology sector.

Three years on, we are now a Community Interest Company, with a thriving community which welcomes women from all career stages and from across the technology sectors. From CEOs to students, developers to entrepreneurs, we make space for our women in tech to meet, connect, be inspired and grow.

Around 1 in 4 tech workers in the UK are women and many face significant barriers to career progression. According to the Lovelace Report, over 75% of women with 11-20 years experience said that they had waited more than three years for a promotion and whilst 90% of women want to move into management, only 25% believe they can.

### Tell us about your key projects

In the past three years since we started, we've hosted 13 highly successful free events in collaboration with industry partners like Waterstones and Credera, which were all fully booked.

“We want women and gender diversity to be more visible in the technology sector. We are determined to work towards a more inclusive tech ecosystem in the North East.”

Our most recent event in August 2025 focused on tech entrepreneurship and was hosted at Sunderland City Hall.

We held an inspiring morning where attendees listened to the stories and insights from two incredible female founders, Rojin Yarahmadi & Victoria Smith.

They spoke about their journey into entrepreneurship, the rollercoaster of building a business and the road to securing investment.

We then hosted a Q&A panel with Rojin and Victoria, who spoke on behalf of our event partner Sage, before coffee, cake and conversation - the bit everyone loves!

Although funding inequality and gender disparity in the tech sector came up in conversation, the tone of the morning was far from heavy.

Photo: Ten women listen to a guest speaker delivering a presentation at a Women in Tech event.



\*Our goal is to provide a supportive environment for women, women-identifying individuals, and non-binary and gender non-conforming people from all backgrounds and life circumstances.

It was celebratory, proactive, and full of energy and attendees left feeling motivated and optimistic.

Our next plans are our Autumn 2025 event in Gateshead, in collaboration with Digital Catapult, and launching our new partnership opportunities for businesses and

seeing how we can engage with Connected Voice and the wider VCSE community.

We've also previously engaged with Home Group, who host Connected Voice at One Strawberry Lane.

**“ I left the last event feeling that women really can do anything!**

organisations to support us in 2025/2026.

We have so many more ideas - from training opportunities to developing more online resources - and we love to collaborate, so get in touch with us to explore how we can work together.

### **How has Connected Voice supported you?**

We've just become a member of Connected Voice in Summer 2025, after one year as a Community Interest Company. As we scale up as a CIC, we're looking forward to

**“ WiT NE showed me I'm not alone... there are others out there similar to me that I can connect with and get support from. You've motivated me even further! I left the last event feeling that women really can do anything!**

We've run two events there, and Home Group have been one of our brilliant event partners!

Visit [womenintechnortheast.co.uk](https://womenintechnortheast.co.uk) to find out more ●



Photos: Three women chat at a networking event. (left); a panel of women at a Women in Tech event.(right)

# Governance and Risk Management: Keeping your organisation safe

**Jeremy Cain**

Support and Development  
Coordinator



**Our Support and Development Coordinator Jeremy Cain shines a spotlight on Governance and Risk Management, with handy tips on keeping your organisation safe.**

I've just asked my Italian wife what she thinks about the Daleks. Her response was a little disappointing: "Bins on wheels," she said, "with a plunger on their nose." I blame her upbringing.

Devoid of any culture- at least the popular sort (yes, I'm aware of the Romans, Dante and Puccini, but we're not talking about them right now)- she doesn't experience the terror that many adults my age still feel at the very mention of Dr. Who's most fearsome foes.

Like many others, I genuinely used to hide behind the sofa, somehow convinced that it would keep me safe from extermination; but when you're trying to keep your charity safe, you probably need a bit more than a sofa.

As with many aspects of the operation of any organisation, good governance is the best place to start. Get the governance right and you can avoid many problems before they even arise and, when some inevitably do, you have the right foundations in place to deal with them.

But what exactly do we mean by safety in the context of the VCSE sector?

Well, when we think about keeping a charity or other voluntary sector organisation safe, we should be thinking about maintaining its ability to provide services to its beneficiaries; as always, we need to be focussed on our organisation's objectives as described in our governing document.

There are many things that could threaten this, and these will be different for different organisations, but the Charity Commission suggests grouping them into 5 categories (see CC26: Charities and risk management

for more details) to help identify the significant ones:

1. Governance risks (e.g. in-fighting amongst trustees)
2. Operational risks (e.g. someone being injured on your premises)
3. Financial risks (e.g. not having enough reserves to cover unexpected expenses)
4. External risks (e.g. the economic and political environment reducing your income)
5. Compliance with law and regulation (e.g. not being aware of new regulations)

Identifying the risks, obviously helps you to manage them and its good practice to document how you go about this in a risk management policy. Indeed, reviewing and managing your risk is an important responsibility of charity trustees and having a policy is a good way of demonstrating that you're doing this.

A good policy will not only identify risks, but it will require you to think about how you can address them

Start by asking yourself what the likelihood of something happening is and then, if it does happen, what will be the impact. You can use a matrix like the one below to help you highlight which risks you should be most concerned about.

Risk analysis matrix		Likelihood of risk occurring		
		Low (1)	Medium (2)	High (3)
Impact if the risk occurs	Low (1)			<i>In-fighting amongst trustees (3)</i>
	Medium (2)		<i>External economic environment (4)</i>	
	High (3)	<i>Personal injury on premises (3)</i>		

Note that the scores (in brackets) in the body of the matrix and generated by multiplying the likelihood and impact scores together. Also note the examples are only examples, you may need to place the risks in a different box in the matrix- if your building is poorly maintained, for instance, there will be a greater likelihood of personal injury.

In any case, whilst you should work to address all risks it's a good idea to start with those that have the highest scores.

Not every risk can be removed but every risk can be managed, at least to some extent. You need to look at each of the risks you've identified and work out what you can do to minimise them. This might be obvious (e.g. remove the trailing cables in your office) or it might take a bit more thought.

Either way, we're here to help so let us know if this is something you'd like some support with.

It's a good idea to document this in something called a risk register. This might sound complicated but it's just a structured way of organising and recording your thought processes (you can find a useful template in CC26).

Your risk register will not only list the risks, along with their likelihood and impact, but

identify what you can do about them, who should be doing it and how the Board can be sure it's been done.

The risk register should be reviewed annually, or even more often if your circumstances have changed significantly.

And that's it- a quick guide to risk management! It could clearly be a bit of a chore, but I hope I've convinced you it's worth your precious time.

If I haven't, then ask yourself this: would you drive a car without being insured? That's a form of risk management and most of us wouldn't dream of it.

In any case, the friendly Support and Development team are here to help make it as easy as possible, so just get in touch.

We may not have a sonic screwdriver, but if you need a good policy to save the universe, then we might just be able to help ●

# Digital Inclusion: It's Closer Than You Think

## Stella Simbo

Newcastle Digital Inclusion in Health & Social Care Project Manager



Stella Simbo reflects on the importance of digital inclusion in everyday conversations and the realities of the task ahead.

The topic of digital inclusion is often thought of as something “out there”; a policy issue, a tech problem, or something that affects other people.

As the conversation continues a powerful shift often happens. As we talk, people begin to realise that digital inclusion, or exclusion, is something that touches all our lives; our work, our relationships, and our communities.

That realisation opens the door to something transformative: the understanding that we can all play a role in improving digital inclusion for others.

## Looking Closer to Home

Judith Temple, our Office Manager, has worked at Connected Voice for over 30 years and has not only witnessed the organisation’s digital transformation—she’s helped lead it.

“I’ve probably been the IT go-to person for quite a few years... maybe people think I’m going to be helpful, not talk down to people. So, I think maybe that makes people feel confident to ask things.” Throughout the years, Judith has been a steady guide, helping colleagues navigate change with patience, clarity, and care.

“We used to book time to send an email on one shared computer.... now, everything is digital—even the franking machine.”

Judith’s story is a reminder that digital inclusion isn’t limited to ensuring universal access to the devices, data and skills needed to get online and navigate the internet confidently and safely. Digital inclusion is also

supporting people through change, creating opportunities for people to shape that change, and embedding choice at every step.

Judith’s experience reflects the principles outlined in the NHS’ Fit for the Future 10-Year Plan, which calls for empowering staff and providing training and support. She acknowledges the benefits that the use of digital tools can bring to an organisation but also says:

“You can spend your whole budget, on IT but if people aren’t trained or supported, it’s not cost-effective.”

Her approach; collaborative, thoughtful, and inclusive—shows how involving people in decisions leads to better outcomes.

Whether it’s choosing a phone system, setting up HR software, or migrating to SharePoint, Judith has consistently advocated for asking questions, listening to staff, and planned for what’s next.

## Digital Inclusion and the Aging Workforce

According to statistics (Digital Nation, 2025, Good Things Foundation), 77% of those with no basic digital skills are aged over 65. However, Judith’s journey challenges stereotypes about age and digital capability. While older people are often labelled as digitally excluded, Judith’s experience shows that exclusion can be more about opportunity than age.

“I haven’t seen a skills gap with older people in the workplace... some are highly skilled.”

Her story is a powerful example of how, with the right support, people can thrive at any stage of life.

Newcastle's JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) for older people recognises digital inclusion as a key factor in wellbeing and access to services. Digital inclusion is key to enabling older adults to remain in employment, if they chose to, explore self-employment, and access essential services.

## Digital Inclusion is Personal

Judith's reflections also highlight how digital inclusion affects those close to us. Her sister, who doesn't use digital tools, struggles to access banking and healthcare.

"She's quite excluded from things that are important, like healthcare or banks, I think big businesses must have the capacity to help people who still need to do things differently."

Judith uses the NHS app but only discovered its full functionality through her daughter.

"Sometimes other family members can help you; I thought it was a really good tool to have because it's so difficult getting through on phones."

## What's Happening in Newcastle

Across Newcastle, local authority organisations and many voluntary sector organisations are working hard to support digital inclusion. Platforms like InformationNow also serve as valuable resources for finding local services and support.

These efforts reflect the growing recognition that digital inclusion is not just about access, it's about connection, confidence and community. It can be helping someone apply for benefits, access healthcare or stay in touch with loved ones, the infrastructure and relationships built locally are vital.

## Final thoughts: Digital Inclusion Starts Here

Judith's story reminds us that digital inclusion is not a destination—it's a journey. It's not just about technology; it's about people, recognising that behind every system is someone trying to make it work, behind every statistic is a story worth hearing.

When reflecting on what helped her to navigate digital change, Judith's words echoed those of others I've talked to working in the community: build confidence, offer guidance without assumptions, and create space for learning. Whether it's a colleague navigating a new phone system or a family member starting to manage their health online, the key is to embed choice, ask questions, and open conversations.

"Sometimes people feel talked down to if you assume they can't do something," Judith reflects. "But if they do need support, it's best to talk them through the process so they can do it themselves next time."

As we prepare for this year's Get Online Week, we're reminded that trying something new requires trust, support, and spaces where people feel safe to ask questions.

Digital inclusion isn't something that happens "out there"—it's something that happens in our offices, our homes, and our communities.

Let's continue to look closer to home. Let's listen, support, and build systems that are not only fit for purpose, but fit for people ●

# Digital Safety in Volunteering

**Nimerta Virdee**  
Volunteering Voice and  
Engagement Manager



**Our Volunteering Voice and Engagement Manager Nimerta Virdee discusses the digital evolution of volunteering and the importance of online safety.**

Volunteers are the heartbeat of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector—delivering services, supporting communities, and even leading organisations as Trustees.

As the sector embraces digital transformation, Volunteer Coordinators and volunteers alike are navigating both exciting opportunities and new challenges.

Digital tools such as Volunteer Management Systems, online scheduling platforms, and messaging apps have revolutionised how we recruit, onboard, and engage volunteers. They offer efficiency, flexibility, and scalability. At

**“It really helps to know that there are other people out there in similar roles who are facing similar challenges, and that we have somewhere to come together and share these.**

the same time, we’re seeing a rise in digital volunteer roles—from social media support to data entry and even cyber security assistance.

Our work through the Gateshead Volunteer Centre and the Volunteering Newcastle programme supports volunteer-involving organisations with developing these new roles and upskilling volunteer coordinators

and networking across both the Gateshead and Newcastle Volunteer Coordinators Networks.

With all of these advancements in technology and new digital volunteer roles comes a growing need for digital safety. VCSEs are increasingly targeted by cyber threats, including phishing attacks, data breaches, and ransomware.

Many organisations hold sensitive volunteer and service user data, making robust data protection practices essential. This includes using strong passwords, enabling multi-factor authentication, regularly updating software, and ensuring volunteers understand how to handle data responsibly.

To support this shift, Connected Voice has developed a Digital Good Practice Guide for VCSE Volunteering-Involving Organisations, offering practical advice on digital tools, data security, and inclusive digital practices.

The guide is available to download here: [2025 Connected Voice Digital Good Practice Guide for VCSE Volunteering-Involving Organisations | Connected Voice](#)

As part of Get Online Week 2025 (20–26 October), Connected Voice will also be hosting two key events:

**Cyber Security Awareness Training 21 October, online:**

A practical workshop exploring how VCSEs can protect themselves and their volunteers from cyber threats. This session will also cover how to build a culture of digital safety within volunteer teams.

[Register here](#)

**Digital Tools Upskilling Event 24 October, One Strawberry Lane:**

A hands-on session for Volunteer Coordinators across Gateshead and Newcastle, focusing on practical digital tools, tackling digital exclusion, and empowering volunteers as digital champions.

[Sign up here](#)

By embracing digital tools while prioritising safety and inclusion, VCSEs can future-proof their services and ensure volunteers thrive in a connected world ●



**Photos: A Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators Network Meeting themed on Digital Tools.**

# Spotlight: Age UK Gateshead



Age UK Gateshead supports older people across Gateshead to live happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Age UK Gateshead is based on Gateshead High Street, with its Dementia Hub located in Christ Church Hall.

[www.ageuk.org.uk/gateshead](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/gateshead)

## What does your organisation do?

Age UK Gateshead is a local independent charity dedicated to supporting older people across Gateshead. We provide advice, activities, and services that help people stay independent, connected, and safe—whether that's through day centres, friendship groups, or digital support. Our mission is simple: to ensure that older people in our community can live later life to the fullest.

## Tell us about your key digital projects

At Age UK Gateshead, safeguarding means more than protecting people in person—it means ensuring they can confidently and safely navigate the online world too.

Our Digital Drop-In Sessions give older people a safe place to ask questions, bring their devices, and practice new skills. We offer advice in simple, approachable language on everything from creating secure passwords to identifying fake communications. Many participants leave with a sense of empowerment, telling us that they can now confidently use their GP app, message their grandchildren, and purchase online.

In Gateshead, we also provide internet safety workshops. These emphasise resilience building in addition to practical measures, such as identifying phishing sites. We help people feel ready and less prone to panic when confronted with questionable texts because

“We remain committed to evolving with community needs, ensuring a better future for all.”

prone to panic when confronted with questionable texts because scammers frequently utilise emotional pressure.

Our method is adaptable for people with dementia or memory problems. To ensure that safeguarding advice is useful and simple to implement at home, we employ straightforward graphics, repetition, and assistance for caretakers.

Our work is about more than preventing harm. By building digital confidence, we also reduce loneliness. Wellbeing can be significantly enhanced by having the ability to participate in online classes, share images, and attend video calls.



Photo: Two men and a woman look at smartphones at a Digital Drop-In Session in a library.



Above all, independence is the key to safeguarding in the digital environment. Recently, one participant told us that he no longer had to endure the anxiety of bus rides because he felt safe purchasing online. Another talked about how happy she was finally able to join her family WhatsApp group.

At Age UK Gateshead, we're proud to be a trusted guide for older people, helping them embrace technology safely and stay connected in a digital age.

### How has Connected Voice supported you?

Connected Voice is a key partner of Age UK Gateshead, integral to ensuring Age UK Gateshead are well networked and the voice of the communities we represent are heard at all tables.

### What do people say about your organisation?

To find out more about what we do visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/gateshead](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/gateshead) or call us on 0191 477 355 ●



“ I finally did my shopping online the other day, thanks to Millie. No more struggling with buses or heavy bags – I just wish I'd learned how to do it sooner.

“ I live in Spain and thought I'd only see Mam when I flew back. Thanks to the help from Age UK Gateshead, she can FaceTime me whenever she likes – it's the next best thing to being there.

“ I never thought I'd be able to join a family WhatsApp group. Now I can see my grandchildren's photos and send them messages—it makes me feel part of things again

Photos: An older lady uses a tablet computer (top); Four older people at a Digital Drop In Session with Age UK Coordinators (bottom)

# Safeguarding in a Digital World

**Jane Kingston**  
Head of Advocacy



**Our Head of Advocacy, Jane Kingston, discusses the increasing need for safeguarding and the support Connected Voice can offer.**

Abuse can happen anywhere to anyone by anyone. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, financial, neglect or self-neglect, discriminatory, organisational, domestic, modern slavery or criminal exploitation.

The increase in digital technology and the reliance of digital systems for almost all our public services has increased the risk of abuse and scams for everybody. In everyday life risk of harm has increased. With new technologies and artificial intelligence, the opportunity to fall victim

**“ At Connected Voice we have specific ways we safeguard people in our communities.**

of a scam is increasing for anyone. We are all required to be more vigilant to unusual or urgent sounding emails, and those weird texts that appear on our mobile phones.

Organisations are now thinking about new policies to protect staff and service-users from digital scams.

Whilst we don't make assumptions about people's abilities and mental capacity to look after themselves. Some people are at more risk of harm due to their circumstances. This may include people with learning or physical disabilities,

mental health conditions, sensory support needs. People who misuse drugs or alcohol may be vulnerable at times and some older people may need extra support. Those people with care and support needs who cannot protect themselves will need safeguarding from the local authority.

Not everyone is eligible for a formal process to keep them safe. Many rely on loved ones, community groups and social media to keep them informed on what is genuine or safe.

When faced with a situation is recommended to raise a safeguarding concern or having a chat with a member of the local authority safeguarding team. At Connected Voice we have specific ways we safeguard people in our communities.

## Training

We deliver a training programme to VCSE organisations in Newcastle and Gateshead on basic safeguarding principles.

This reminds volunteer trustees about their responsibility to have robust policies and procedures when working with the public. Good practice is training everyone in your organisation in basic safeguarding which is offered by local authorities.

In Connected Voice we also have a team of Independent Advocates who offer support to people who are at risk of or in harm. Safeguarding people comes in many forms.

- Listening – people often need to vent frustrations with a trusted person
- Educating – we have a wealth of help for people to understand their rights, find solutions and make choices that will improve the situation they are in
- Safety planning – Independent Advocates will help someone to explore their situation and understand ways to reduce the chance of repeat abuse. It's often complicated when the abuser is known to the person
- Upholding rights – Independent Advocates support people to change service providers and call out bad practice
- Complaining – people in receipt of a public service have a right to complain. Public bodies in place to scrutinise our care providers such as the Care Quality Commission will investigate concerns raised.
- Challenges – Independent Advocates have a role to escalate situations through formal routes. We access the Court of Protection for some of our society's most vulnerable people who are in locked settings deprived of their liberty or at risk from abusive representatives/attorneys

## Positive safeguarding processes

Independent Advocates are integral to formal safeguarding processes.

The Care Act 2014 introduced a specific duty for Independent Advocates to support anyone who had trouble engaging with the local authority if they didn't have any other support from friends or family to explain the steps taken.

At Connected Voice we have researched the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Those who are physically or mentally disabled. Those who are new to the country and have little or no English language skills to navigate our criminal justice or health and social care systems.

We sit on the Safeguarding Adults Board in Newcastle and Gateshead to represent our membership and the concerns people in communities are experiencing around safeguarding.

Our offer includes:

- **Research reports** on the impact of abuse and hate on people in our community
- **HATE ID app** free from the Google Play Store. We also offer training on how to use the app to identify hate crime, hate incidents and support for victims. All designed to practically help trustees, staff and volunteers in community organisations who want help to handle elder abuse, racism, and homophobia or ableist hate crime
- **Training to explore and understand cultural difference** and create cohesion in communities
- **Listening to your organisation's concerns around safeguarding** and escalating to Safeguarding Adult Boards
- **Safeguarding training**
- **Independent Advocacy** to support people you may have concerns about, and ways you can refer them to us
- **Digital Inclusion projects in Newcastle and Gateshead** to improve accessibility to people who are at risk of being left out from vital health services ●

# Beyond Digital Borders

**Sergi Ramon**  
Hope Beyond Borders  
Digital Inclusion Trainer

**Sergi Ramon, Digital Inclusion Trainer for Hope Beyond Borders, explains the impact of overcoming digital exclusion through community-led initiatives.**

Today, we live in a world where technology connects everything. For many, using a phone or booking an appointment online is second nature. But for those who didn't grow up with tech, especially asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants from Spanish-speaking backgrounds, this digital world can feel like a locked door.

Language barriers, lack of devices, and limited tech experience make it even harder. And when you arrive in a new country, the first few months can be overwhelming. You don't know where to go, who to ask, or how to start. You want to build a new life, but everything seems hidden behind a screen you don't know how to use.

That's why we started Hope Beyond Borders. We are a community-led group supporting families across the North East through our Green Welfare approach. This combines social work, environmental awareness, and advocacy for digital inclusion and climate justice.

We know what it's like to feel lost in a system that wasn't built for you. When we launched our digital skills course, supported by Newcastle University and Connected Voice, we didn't come with a fixed curriculum. We started with a blank page and listened.

We asked people what everyday tasks caused them stress, like booking NHS appointments or using Google Maps, and built sessions around those needs. It wasn't just about teaching tech. It was

about rebuilding confidence, reducing isolation, and creating a safe space to learn and grow. One of our most powerful stories is of a man in his 60s who came to our drop-in sessions barely able to use his phone. Over time, with patience and support, he learned to send emails, manage GP appointments, and even help others. Today, he is a volunteer, a friend, and a vital part of our community.

This project is about more than digital skills. It is about empowerment. The biggest barriers are often emotional, such as shame, fear, and lack of confidence. By addressing these with care and community, transformation happens. At the start of each session, we gathered around coffee and pastries. These small rituals grew into shared meals, each reflecting the rich cultures of our participants. These moments built trust and connection, turning our centre into a space of warmth and belonging.

Week by week, we created a community where every story mattered. We didn't just teach people how to be digital. We walked with them through the journey. For us, it's not just a course. It's a way to make people feel seen, supported, and capable of building the life they deserve.

We are deeply grateful to Newcastle University and Connected Voice for believing in our grassroots mission. Their support helped us build something real, beyond borders and barriers, rooted in hope ●

## Contact us

### Connected Voice

Support and  
Development

Expert support services that enable voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to set up, be sustainable and informed, achieve their objectives and come together.

[connect@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:connect@connectedvoice.org.uk)  
0191 235 7021

### Connected Voice

Advocacy

Free professional support to individuals to help them be aware of their rights and choices, make informed decisions, advocate for themselves and facilitate their voices being heard.

[advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk)  
0191 235 7013

### Connected Voice

Business  
Services

Quality and cost-effective financial support services that meet the growing needs of charities, community organisations and social enterprises.

[cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk)  
0191 235 7020

### Connected Voice

Haref

Working with communities and organisations throughout Newcastle and Gateshead to reduce health inequalities linked to ethnicity and culture.

[haref@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:haref@connectedvoice.org.uk)  
0191 235 7022

### Connected Voice

Health Equity

Connecting charities and community organisations to health services to improve digital inclusion, mental health support and social prescribing.

0191 235 7022

### Connected Voice

Volunteering

Supporting volunteering across Newcastle and Gateshead through employee volunteering (Sector Connector), promoting volunteering opportunities and offering advice.

[volunteering@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@connectedvoice.org.uk)  
0191 235 7038 (Gateshead Volunteer Centre)  
0191 235 7039 (Sector Connector Newcastle)

[www.connectedvoice.org.uk](http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk)

 @ConnectedVoice.Bsky.Social

 @ConnectedVoiceCharity

 @Connected Voice

Connected Voice is a registered charity (number 1125877) and company limited by guarantee (number 6681475) registered in England and Wales. Our registered office is as above.