



Tech vs Abuse 2.0

Final Evaluation Report

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Glossary

Digital partner: A specialist digital agency which works closely with funded partners to implement and optimise their digital product.

Funded partner: An organisation that has been supported by the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 programme.

Minimum viable product (MVP): A version of a product with sufficient features to allow for basic functionality and enable funded partners to receive user feedback to iterate and improve the product.

No cost extension (NCE): Extensions to the project period beyond the planned award end date. This means no additional funding will be provided, but funded partners are provided with additional time to spend down existing funds and ensure that all deliverables can be met.

CAST Playbook: A guide to the process of developing digital products and services, based on iterative and user-based development methodology. The Playbook can be found here: www.playbook.wearecast.org.uk

Executive summary

About Tech vs Abuse 2.0

Tech vs Abuse 2.0 was designed to support a range of organisations to develop creative and effective digital solutions, co-designed with users, to improve the safety of people affected by abuse and improve service delivery. Eleven organisations received funding of between £50,000 and £75,000 to undergo an early stage discovery research process and develop a minimum viable product. In addition to the funding provided through Tech vs Abuse 2.0, funded partners also had access to a consortium of digital agencies providing specialist technical support.

The evaluation explored key features of the programme's design and processes, achievement of intended outcomes and wider impact.

What were the key findings?

Programme design and processes

Overall, Tech vs Abuse 2.0 was **appropriately designed and allowed funded partners to meet their aims through the programme**. The application process and grant management was clear and flexible to funded partners' needs, although the funding available was too low for some organisations to fully realise their goals. In particular, funded partners welcomed the additional flexibility offered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The technical digital support agencies and external digital partners played a **valuable role in the digital development process, increasing the skills and confidence of funded partners**, despite some issues around clarity of roles and organisational capacity to fully engage with the support.
- However, the **size of the grant available was not enough to allow all funded partners to fully achieve their original aims**, due to the costs of digital partner engagement being higher than anticipated for some.

Outcomes

Our report concludes that, on the whole, **Tech vs Abuse 2.0 supported funded partners to achieve their primary aims** to conduct valuable user research to inform wider organisational planning as well as their product development process, and prototype and develop MVPs which in many cases have shown promising results.

- After 12 months, **six funded partners had developed a deliverable digital service** and the **remainder had designed and tested multiple prototypes**. Following completion of the programme, funded partners have varying plans to continue user research, launch their products, sustain and/or scale their product.
- **All funded partners achieved interim outcomes** such as using evidence to identify appropriate solutions and better understand their service users' experiences and journeys. However, it is **too early to determine whether longer term service user**

outcomes were met, although there have been some promising indicators of early impact.

- Tech vs Abuse 2.0 led to **funded partners increasing their digital competence and confidence with using tech as part of their service delivery**. COVID-19 restrictions highlighted the potential value of using digital products to support service users remotely.

What does this mean for the future design of similar programmes?

The experience of delivering Tech vs Abuse 2.0 has highlighted some key learning with wider applicability in the funding sector:

- **Social tech products need long-term time and investment to sustainably develop.** This has implications for the amount of funding on offer, the flexibility of funding needed, the project length and the support needed by organisations to develop realistic plans.
- The importance that all partners involved in the programme **understand and recognise the specific challenges, nuances and complexity of developing digital products in the abuse sector**, given the sensitivities and practical challenges associated with technology as a potential tool of abuse.
- Non-specialists or those who have not been involved in similar projects previously require **expertise and high-quality advice to support their development**.
- **COVID-19 has highlighted the potential opportunities and challenges for the abuse sector**, including the escalation of the problem of abuse and need to develop social tech products to support service users remotely.
- To build on the legacy of Tech vs Abuse 2.0, it is important to consider the future funding opportunities to **ensure that organisations in the abuse sector have the investment they need to empower people experiencing abuse to access support whenever they need it**.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations are summarized at [the end of the report](#) and include:

- ✓ **Provide support to applicants and funded partners on how to budget effectively** for social tech development projects, particularly for those with little experience in this area.
- ✓ **Offer training or support to the digital support agencies** to ensure that they are fully informed about the practicalities and considerations of **developing digital products in the abuse sector**.
- ✓ Provide a **contingency budget** to cover unexpected costs, for example if funded partners experience delays or unexpected challenges with their project.
- ✓ **Review the Tech vs Abuse programme priorities and focus in the light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the abuse sector**, including the enhanced need for effective remote support services and the importance of continued investment in social tech product development in this context.

1. Introduction



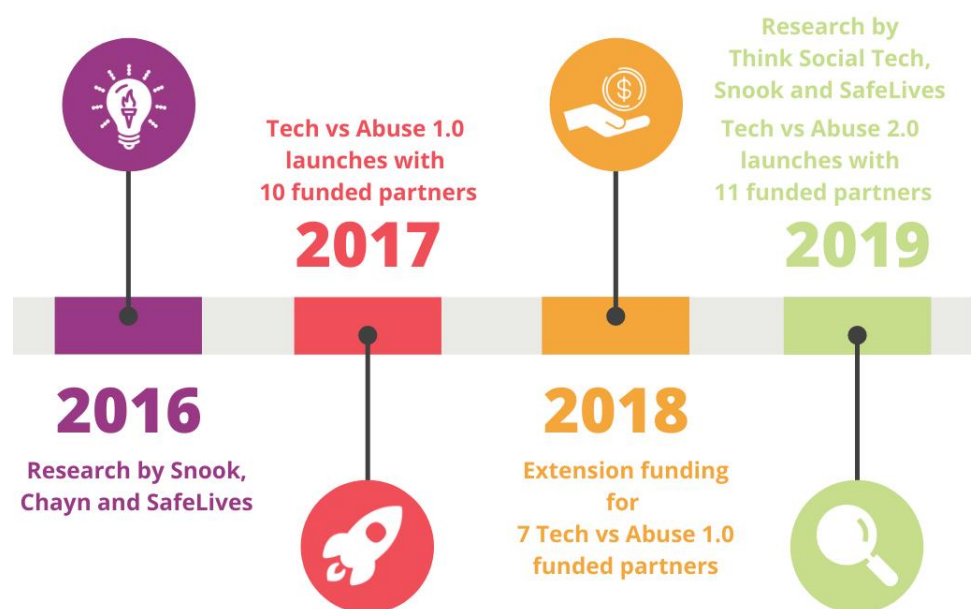
1.1. Background to the Tech vs Abuse programme

Tech vs Abuse is a funding and capacity building programme designed to support non-profits in the United Kingdom to develop creative digital solutions to improve the safety of people affected by abuse, and improve service delivery.

In 2016, Comic Relief commissioned a **collaborative research project to understand the role digital technology plays in helping to support people affected by abuse** and how to minimise its associated risks.¹ This research informed the Tech vs Abuse 1.0 grant initiative in 2017-18, funded jointly through the Tampon Tax Fund. Ten organisations were supported to develop digital products and services and address five design challenges arising from the research.² Seven of the ten Tech vs Abuse 1.0 funded partners went on to receive additional extension funding from Comic Relief in 2018-19 after the initial 12-month period.

Tech vs Abuse 2.0

In May 2019, a second round of sector-focused research was published which explored the common priorities, problems and opportunities to better support those affected by abuse.³ The aim of the research was to find out how the landscape had changed since the original research in 2016. This research led to a broadening of the scope beyond women and girls, with a more inclusive definition of abuse to include other groups affected such as friends, family and people who perpetrate abuse.⁴



¹ Snook, Chayn and SafeLives. *Tech vs Abuse: Research findings* (2017).

² The five design challenges were 1. Fifteen-minute window to provide information for women experiencing abuse, 2. Effective real-time support services, 3. Safer digital-footprint, 4. Accessible legal and financial information, 5. Realising it's abuse. Read more in SafeLives, Snook and Chayn. *Tech vs Abuse: Design Challenges* (2017).

³ Think Social Tech, Snook and SafeLives. *Tech vs Abuse: Research findings* (2019).

⁴ A perpetrator of abuse is a person that has caused harm to another person. Often, people are abused by someone known to them or in a position of trust; this can include a partner, relative, friend or child; neighbour or someone from the community network; and another vulnerable adult. Read more [here](#).

It also set out four key design challenges intended to encourage innovation in the design and delivery of services for people affected by abuse.⁵ The design challenges are outlined below:



Guided by these research findings, Comic Relief, in partnership with Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and The Clothworkers' Foundation, [launched Tech vs Abuse 2.0 in June 2019](#). Eleven organisations received funding between November 2019 and October 2020:

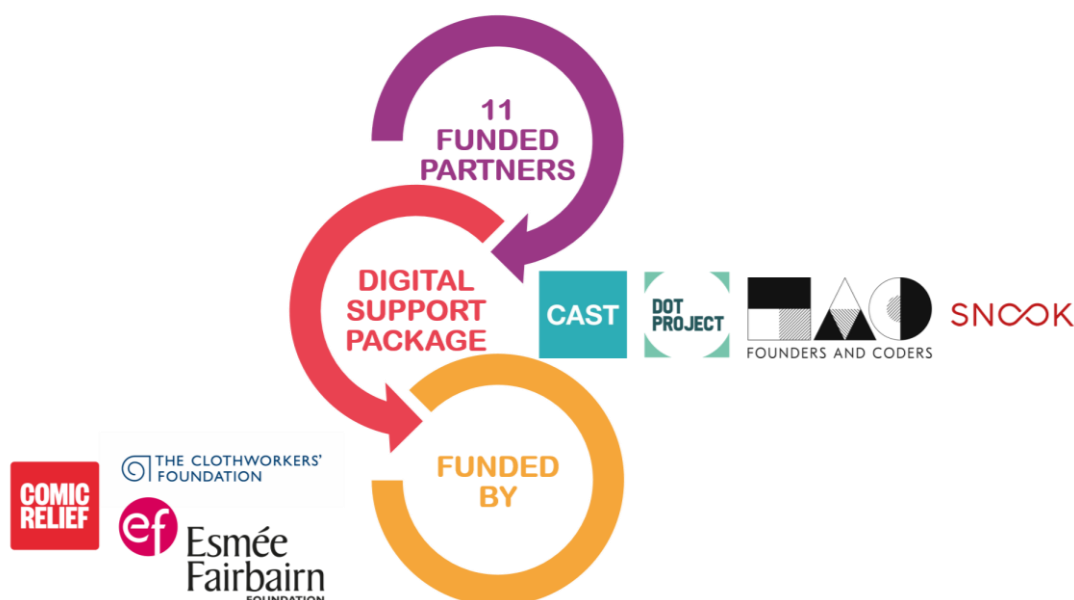
- [Aanchal Womens' Aid](#)
- [Against Violence and Abuse \(AVA\)](#)
- [British Institute of Human Rights](#)
- [Circles South East](#)
- [Deaf-initely Women](#)
- [On Our Radar](#) and [SafeLives](#)
- [Respect](#)
- [Surviving Economic Abuse](#) and [Money Advice Plus](#)
- [Tender Education & Arts](#)
- [The Haven Wolverhampton](#)
- [Women's Aid Federation of England](#)

⁵ Read more about the four key design challenges in Think Social Tech, Snook, and SafeLives. *Tech vs Abuse: Design Challenges* (2019).

Further details about the organisations that received funding and their projects can be found in Appendix C, along with three more detailed case studies in Appendix D.⁶

Support provided by Tech vs Abuse 2.0

Funded partners received between **£50,000 and £75,000 discovery funding** to undergo an **early stage discovery research process and develop a Minimum Viable Product (MVP)**. All funded partners were supported by a **digital partner**: some applied with a digital partner already confirmed; some had a digital partner in mind from their existing network; others were supported by the programme to find a digital partner after being accepted onto the programme.



In addition, **funded partners worked closely with a consortium of digital agencies providing specialist technical support and on-going mentoring and coaching** around user research and product development. The digital support offer was coordinated by the [Centre for the Acceleration of Social Technology](#) (CAST) and delivered in partnership with a diverse set of organisations with varied expertise: [DOT PROJECT](#), [Snook](#), and [Founders and Coders](#). CAST are experienced in designing and delivering support to charities developing digital services. DOT PROJECT coach organisations to explore ways to use technology responsibly; Snook are experienced in research and service design; and Founders and Coders run peer-led training programmes in web development and digital services.

Tech vs Abuse 2.0 application process

The funding call for Tech vs Abuse 2.0 was open between June and July 2019. Applicants were invited to submit a video about their proposal along with an application form. Applications were considered regardless of whether or not they had a digital partner in place at the point of

⁶ To allow for the disruption to projects caused by COVID-19, some funded partners were given project extensions, going beyond the ending of the formal digital support offer in October 2020. Funded partners were able to access limited coaching time as well as free CAST resources during the project extension period.

applying. The initial assessments were completed by internal staff from Comic Relief and external assessors. Staff from the other Tech vs Abuse 2.0 funders also took part in the initial shortlisting process, and shadowed the subsequent interviews with shortlisted applicants. As part of this, assessors arranged a time to discuss the organisation's proposal in more detail on the phone or via video link.

Of the twenty-seven organisations that applied, sixteen were shortlisted and encouraged to attend a 'discovery day' hosted by CAST. The aims of the discovery day were to share information about the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 project cycle as well as best practice and common challenges experienced when developing a digital tool. CAST also organised a preparation kick-off workshop for confirmed funded partners in November 2019 in line with successful projects formally starting.

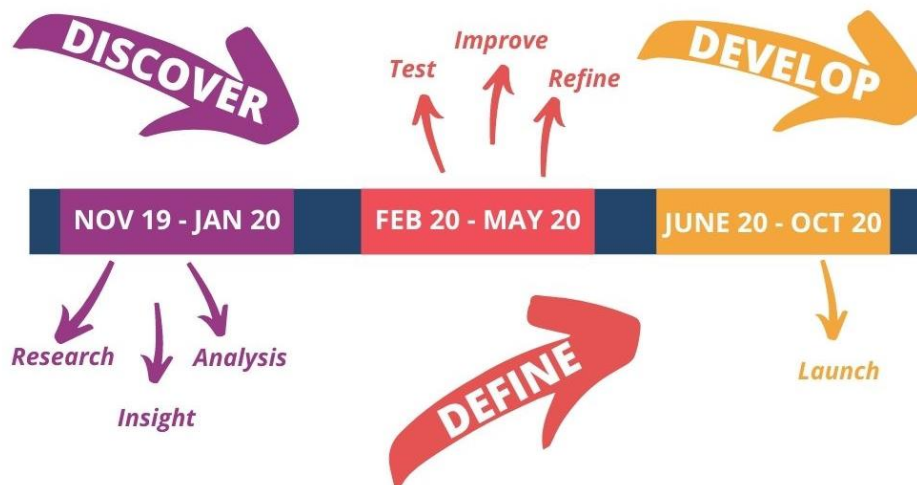


The focus of funded partners was wide-ranging. The Tech vs Abuse 2.0 cohort included organisations working on the **prevention of abuse through educational programmes; advocacy and campaigning;** and those providing **frontline services**. In the same vein, the service users of these organisations include both people who have experienced abuse and those who have perpetrated abuse. This is particularly important to highlight given that Tech vs Abuse 2.0 encouraged organisations to prioritise their own users' needs, whether those users are victims, survivors, professionals, people that perpetrate abuse or other organisations.

Programme support structure

The Tech vs Abuse 2.0 **programme structure followed the CAST playbook**, based on iterative and user based development methodology, which captures the stages and processes of how they work with charities to create and deliver digital products and services.⁷ Funded partners went through the same process described as 'Discover', 'Define' and 'Develop':

⁷ www.playbook.wearecast.org.uk



- In the **Discover stage**, funded partners **solidify their understanding of the problem space from the perspective of their user group**. The types of activities involved in the Discover stage include user and desk research, and validating the user's problem.
- During the **Define stage**, funded partners **work out what problem they are solving for the user and how they are going to do it**, building on what they have learned in the first stage. The activities here include generating ideas about how the service might work, testing ideas with the target user group and iterating based on feedback. Amongst other activities at this stage, funded partners build a MVP and create a testing and piloting plan with key metrics.
- By the end of the **Develop stage**, funded partners have a **working digital product** and a plan for how they will test and pilot it with real users. Activities at this stage include writing a pitch deck which summarises their work to date as well as a testing/piloting plan.

The timescales in the diagram represent an ideal scenario to help the project build and maintain momentum and were adjusted according to the needs of funded partners.

Through CAST, funded partners could access Fusebox, an online tool for planning and reflecting on the development of a digital tool. Fusebox was introduced to funded partners at the kick-off day and was intended as a useful tool for funded partners and their coach at CAST to track their progress and capture the process of iteration. However, there was no obligation for funded partners to use it and take-up was mixed.

1.2. Evaluation aims

Renaissi, in partnership with mySociety, were commissioned to evaluate Tech vs Abuse 2.0 in October 2019. The evaluation had three key areas of focus: understanding the fund's **process**, **outcomes** and **wider impact**:

- The **process** strand explores how Tech vs Abuse 2.0 has been designed, including the **application process**, **grant management** and **digital support package**, and explores what worked well and less well for funded partners. These findings are explored in chapter two of this report.

- The **outcomes** strand explores the extent to which Tech vs Abuse 2.0 has achieved its aim to build funded partners' **digital capabilities** and **improve outcomes for people affected by abuse** (their service users). Indicators that these outcomes have been achieved include evidence of funded partners making **good design decision**, **embedding digital skills** and **improving their services**. These findings are explored in chapter three of this report.
- The **wider impact strand** looks at the **key learning** from Tech vs Abuse 2.0 to inform the **design of future funding initiatives**. These findings are explored in the conclusions of this report.



The diagram below shows the key areas of focus for the evaluation. A more detailed evaluation framework and research questions can be found in Appendix A.






1.3. Evaluation approach and methodology

The section below provides a brief summary of the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 programme evaluation methodology. It also highlights changes to the methodology made over the course of the evaluation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evaluation used mixed qualitative and quantitative research methods:

	A rapid review of internal and external programme documents to develop our understanding of the programme's history, what the programme aims to achieve and refine our methodology.
	Telephone interviews with eight funded partners, funders and digital support agency with a first round in February – March 2020, and a follow-up in December 2020 – January 2021.

	<p>Three case study visits to funded partners, which included interviews and observations with staff and, where possible, service users. Three additional telephone interviews were conducted as in-person visits were not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
	<p>One workshop with funders to share initial key findings and another workshop to review the Tech vs Abuse Theory of Change.</p>
	<p>An online survey for wider stakeholders in the social tech and abuse sectors. Respondents included unsuccessful applicants to Tech vs Abuse 1.0 and 2.0, as well as Tech vs Abuse 1.0 alumni funded partners. To further build our understanding, we also conducted two interviews with unsuccessful applicants and two with alumni funded partners.</p>

A more detailed evaluation methodology can be found in Appendix B.

1.4. Context and limitations

This evaluation report focuses on the findings from the start of the funding initiative in November 2019 until January 2021. In March 2020, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak hit the UK, and the impact of this was felt by funded partners about halfway (6 months) into the programme. We have also produced a detailed learning paper on the impact and response of COVID-19 on Tech vs Abuse 2.0 and also refer to the impact of the crisis throughout this report.

The impact of the pandemic on funded partners was wide-ranging and despite the challenges funded partners faced, almost half of funded partners chose not to change their product development plans or budget. Funded partners also cited some ways in which the pandemic had presented opportunities due to the need to adapt to remote working. Overall, funded partners expressed that the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 support had been proactive, flexible, accessible and understanding of their organisational needs. There were mixed opinions on whether involvement with Tech vs Abuse 2.0 had put funded partners in a better position to respond to the pandemic; funded partners highlighted the benefit of the opportunity to build and develop a digital tool when restrictions meant face-to-face contact with service users was no longer possible.

Due to delays caused by the pandemic, funded partners were offered flexibility in how they used the funding and extensions to their original project timelines. At the point of the second round of evaluation fieldwork, between December 2020 and January 2021, some funded partners had not completed the programme. Case study visits were not possible in the second round because of COVID-19 restrictions. However, we conducted three additional telephone interviews with project staff and in one case we spoke to a service user. One case study was changed because the funded partner's organisational capacity was limited following COVID-19 and they needed to divert funds away from developing the digital solution that had originally been planned.

2. Findings: Tech vs Abuse 2.0 design and process



This section explores the application process and guidance, grant management and digital support package provided by Tech vs Abuse 2.0.

2.1. Application process

Prior experience and involvement with digital technology to improve service delivery or support those affected by abuse varied across the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 cohort. The **initiative attracted funded partners who already had some experience of developing digital products or delivering services digitally, as well as those who were just starting out.** Amongst those with more experience, three were alumni of Tech vs Abuse 1.0.

“For us, it was particularly interesting. The reason we made this application [is because] in the prior 19 months we did a similar project... When we had done the launch of that, so many people said we need a project like this for all other areas.”

Project lead, funded partner

Motivations to apply

Motivating factors to join the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 programme included the following:

- A desire from funded partners to **increase their reach and accessibility** by bolstering their services through digital means.
- An ambition to develop a tool that would **enable funded partners to provide real-time support**, which would have an immediate impact on their service users, especially where physical access to the service is not possible.
- A desire to **raise awareness** about abuse, **empowering people** to recognise abuse and **signpost** to relevant services.
- The **opportunity to learn more about their service users by monitoring their engagement with online services**, such as the search terms they use, and to learn more about digitally facilitated abuse.



These **motivations to apply align with the design challenges** outlined above, particularly the ambition to provide real-time support and desire to raise awareness so that people are able to recognise abuse.

Although pre-existing relationships between Comic Relief and applicants are not a prerequisite for a successful application, one supporting factor in the motivation to apply was a **perception of a good fit between the organisation and the funder**, such as a pre-existing good relationship with the funder and/or clear alignment between the fund aims and organisation's aims.

"[We have] always had a good relationship with Comic Relief so it was natural for us to apply to them."

Staff, funded partner

The **explorative and iterative nature of Tech vs Abuse 2.0** was attractive to some funded partners who wanted to discover new ways to use digital technology, recognising that digital technology is an integral part of modern life in the new digital age.

"[We applied to Tech vs Abuse 2.0 because it is] something that we had discussed a long time ago. [We were conscious of] tech [being an] integral part of young people's lives. [They are the] first generation growing up [who have] never known a world without [technology and we] thought we should expand into it."

Project lead, funded partner

The programme was also **attractive to funded partners because there are limited funding opportunities available for investment in social tech** and Comic Relief is one of the leaders in this area. For example:

- Some funded partners commented that they would not have been able to continue their project plans without the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 funding.
- Others explained that whilst they would have continued to pursue their project it would have likely been 'pigeonholed' due to other organisational priorities. One funded partner had begun to capture information about their chosen issue area, but recognised that without the funding they would not have had the capacity to continue their research.

Preparation to apply

Funded partners engaged in some or all of the following measures in preparation for applying to Tech vs Abuse 2.0:

- **Internal discussions to situate the opportunity to apply in the context of the strategic direction of the organisation** and explore concepts and ideas.



- Drawing on the research carried out in 2019, which was **useful in affirming or discounting their assumptions**.⁸ The design challenges were also beneficial as they allowed funded partners to see the types of projects Tech vs Abuse 2.0 was willing to fund.
- Gained confidence in their application if they **saw a clear connection between the design challenges and what they hoped to achieve with their project**; however, funded partners suggested that both the research and design challenges could have incorporated a stronger focus on working with people who perpetrate abuse.



Funded partners appreciated that the **written application was very light-touch** and noted that most of the preparation for the application was developing the three-minute video.

Video application

There were mixed responses to the process of submitting a video application:

- Some funded partners were positive about the format and saw it as **fostering teamwork** as they could involve more of their organisation in the process.
- It could also be a **challenge in terms of staff reluctance to make the video due to feeling uncomfortable about the format**.
- In one case, the process of **submitting a video application was used as a development opportunity**. One funded partner asked a student on placement to create the video application and fed back to their school that they had contributed to the successful grant application.



Given the focus of digital technology on Tech vs Abuse, the funded partners commented that **video application was in keeping with the ethos of the Fund**.

“We found [the application process] really positive, we found the initial application form very straightforward. [We] enjoyed the opportunity to submit a video, we decided we would like to do as it is a tech-based funding programme.”

Project lead, funded partner

Funded partners appreciated the ease of making a video:

- They reflected that it was more **accessible and less time consuming than a detailed written application**. They could do it on their phone and it did not have to be high quality.
- Compared to written formats, funded partners commented that the video application was a more **effective way to communicate their passion and**



⁸ Think Social Tech, Snook and SafeLives. *Tech vs Abuse: Research findings* (2019).

enthusiasm for the project. Funded partners noted that it can be difficult to communicate the nuances of the proposed project in written form.

Feedback suggested that it would have been **useful to have a detailed written record of the proposal** for the decision-making panel, and for funded partners when implementing the project.

Discovery day

The offer of a discovery day to shortlisted applicants as part of the application process was well-received:

- Funded partners expressed that a pre-assessment discovery day was not something regularly offered by funders, and **welcomed the opportunity to network and get to know others** who were applying to the fund. The discovery day also set the tone for Tech vs Abuse 2.0, in that it kicked off the project with an opportunity to share experiences.
- Following the discovery day, applicants and funded partners described having a **better understanding of Tech vs Abuse 2.0** and had **learned more about the different uses of digital technology** from the case studies presented.



One unsuccessful applicant highlighted that there is **cost implication for prospective funded partners attending the discovery day** because of the travel and staff costs and this should be taken into consideration.

Clarity and transparency

Funded partners were **generally clear on what was required and expected from the application process.** The offer of the discovery day fed into this sense of clarity.



2.2. Grant management

Clear and flexible grant management

Funded partners tended to have **positive relationships with their grant manager.** When there was a change in grant manager due to maternity leave, funded partners felt the handover period was smooth and did not have a negative impact on their experience of the programme.

Feedback suggests that **grant management has been clear and flexible to the funded partners' circumstances** both at project and organisation level. This includes an understanding that project plans can and are likely to change based on what is learned from the Discovery stage.



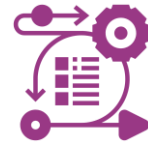
"[Comic Relief have been] quite understanding about [how] things might change, there is flexibility there... not all funders are like that."

Staff, funded project

Agility of programme design

Tech vs Abuse 2.0 has embedded agility at the core of its design.

- Funded partners were asked to have a detailed budget plan for the initial three months of the project with an understanding from grant managers that after this period plans could change.



In response to COVID-19, funded partners on Tech vs Abuse 2.0 were provided with a flexible funding offer.

- This meant that funded partners could repurpose and divert their existing and agreed budgets to where they were most needed as per their charitable mission.
- Our Covid-19 learning paper found that funded partners perceived the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 crisis response as proactive, accessible and understanding of organisational needs.

If necessary, funded partners could change direction based on their emerging understanding of the needs of the project.

- Tech vs Abuse 2.0 facilitates **an environment where funded partners can take the time to research, test and learn about what solution is appropriate for their problem.**
- Co-design is a key feature of Tech vs Abuse 2.0 and an important part of the learning process for funded partners. There is an understanding, therefore, that **funded partners could change direction** in response to feedback from their service users.
- Although the aim of Tech vs Abuse was to test and validate assumptions and undertake user research to create an early prototype (MVP), there is an acknowledgment that **pressuring all funded partners to complete the programme with a finished product is not conducive to the development of sustainable long-term digital solutions.** Funders were clear that taking the time to do adequate discovery work was more important, especially in the context of COVID-19, with learning then feeding in to organisations' future funding bids where they were not able to get to MVP stage.

"[We have been encouraged] to work in an agile way. [We did not] to have to race into the fund with a fully-fledged end project, [it is] much more meaningful... [and has] allowed us to gather so much more information, than we could with a set idea."

Project lead, funded partner

Together, these findings suggest that the fund has been flexible and responsive to the needs of funded partners.

2.3. Grant size

Generally, there were mixed responses about the appropriateness of the grant size. Overall, the funding was enough to make some significant achievements, but not to achieve as much as

some funded partners wanted or felt was needed. This is partly because funded partners did not appreciate at the start of the project how costly the required level of support from a digital partner could be.

Costs of engaging with Tech vs Abuse 2.0 support for funded partners

Funded partners tended to underestimate the full costs of developing a digital product, including the staffing costs for engaging with the support package through workshops, mentors and coaches. For some funded partners, it was helpful to realise this themselves.

“[We were] a bit frustrated that Comic Relief had not come back and said you will never do that for £6k but it was actually really helpful to learn it ourselves. If they had come back at the grant stage and said you will not be able to do all that, we might not have understood.”

Project lead, funded partner



Other costs associated with developing a digital tool included recruitment of service users, and the costs associated with changes to project plans and delays. A contingency budget for unexpected costs would have been helpful for some funded partners. In some cases, funded partners were able to access pro-bono support which mitigated against unforeseen costs.

“[There] needs more emphasis on costing [the project by the funder]... [It is important] to factor in the different expertise needed [and ensure that it is] properly costed, for all involved.”

Project lead, funded partner

2.4. Grant reporting

Funded partners reported that reporting processes were **clear, proportionate and flexible**. Partners were required to submit a start-up form, provide a project plan following the user research phase, as well as report back at 6 months and upon completion of the project at 12 months.

Value of telephone and written reporting

There was **no clear preference towards phone or written reporting methods**, with funded partners identifying the benefits of both:

- **Phone calls** were viewed as an opportunity to **provide granular detail** that may not be evident from written reports. Funded partners also commented on the importance of ensuring the contents of phone calls are recorded to supplement further learning.
- **Written formats** for the reporting **allowed the wider team to feed in**. Importantly, funded partners preferred that written reporting should be kept as limited as possible.



Funded partners **appreciated being able to use both methods of reporting**, because they were able to use the method that was best suited to them.

Fusebox was viewed as a useful reporting mechanism by those who engaged with it. To make the most use of Fusebox, funded partners noted that it could have been introduced earlier in the programme and used as the primary form of reporting, particularly as the COVID-19 outbreak had reduced capacity. There were also other access points for reporting and reflection such as coaching, mentoring and conversations with the grant manager.

2.5. Digital support package

The following section explores the effectiveness of the digital support package, including partnership working, mentoring and coaching.

Mentoring and coaching

Generally, funded partners met regularly with their mentors and/or coach and found the support was valuable:

- The mentoring and coaching support was a **resource which funded partners could draw on as a sounding board**.
- Funded partners had an external and independent perspective on their product development from their mentor and coach, which **made them think differently as mentors and coaches encouraged consideration of additional questions**.
- Mentors and coaches could be drawn on for their **expertise and network**.



“...working with [our mentor] has been fantastic. He is very good at asking me pertinent questions...”

Project lead, funded partner

However, one funded partner noted that they became resistant to support from their coach. They described that the relationship took more of a reporting style rather than being a point for support. This suggests that the **coaching support provided was not always consistent**.

“Sometimes we became resistant to [the coaching], because it was not helpful, we had to update them rather than them supporting us.”

Project lead, funded partner

Mentors and coaches also **fostered collaboration** within the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 cohort:

- They facilitated connections between **funded partners to share learning**. For example, two funded partners were brought together because of overlap in the target service users identified for their products.
- In one case study visit, we observed a check-in session between a funded partner and their mentor where they discussed their approaches to the testing phase. The mentor suggested **calling on other funded partners in the cohort to cross-recruit for service users in the testing phase of the project**.



Despite these positive examples, funded partners felt the **peer learning opportunities could have been better designed** for example by more proactively connecting funded partners delivering projects with a similar focus. However, there was an understanding that COVID-19 had limited the extent to which this was possible.

Strength of expertise and skills in the digital support consortium

A strength of the digital support consortium is the range of expertise provided by the four partners. The range of skills, expertise and networks each digital agency brought meant that the four partners were able to deliver different parts of the support based on their expertise, and this meant that the **funded partners received a higher quality support package**.



“I think in some areas it has been really beneficial, in terms of the variety of skills and knowledge that has been available across the consortium...I think it would have been difficult to secure that range of skills. It has been so useful just having access to people in specific specialisms.”

CAST

Lack of clarity on the roles of digital support agencies

There were some challenges with the coordination of the digital support package, including:

- Initially, **funded partners were confused about the roles of the different digital agencies involved**. This was compounded by the fact that one of the consortium agencies, Snook, was also a suggested digital partner.
- Initially, funded partners were not clear on what support was on offer and the expertise of each digital agency. For example, one funded partner indicated that it would have been **useful to know earlier in the programme how they could save money on external consultants and make use of the knowledge available from the consortium**.
- The **timing of events offered and the expectations from CAST in terms of milestones** were sometimes considered misaligned with project activity. As explained earlier, Tech vs Abuse 2.0 followed the CAST playbook. This meant the programme followed clear and distinct stages and the support offered on the programme did not always match what funded partners needed at different points in time.



As lead partner, CAST recognised that there were many access points and components of support in the consortium and this created challenges for funded partners to understand and access the support offer. Funded partners **acknowledged that this support became better coordinated** as the project developed.

“What we have learned from the whole process of working in the consortium is that there needs to be one clear contact for the participants.”

CAST

Lack of capacity to engage with the digital support package

Funded partners highlighted that **aspects of the digital support package were resource-intensive** and sometimes put a strain on organisational capacity:

- The frequency of check-ins could be too much at points.
- There were several opportunities for funded partners to attend workshops and they were not always clear on which ones were compulsory. Comic Relief staff attended most workshops and **funded partners felt that there was an obligation to attend.**
- Funded partners found it challenging when aspects of the digital support package, such as workshops, were announced at short notice.



The challenge funded partners experienced with attending the workshops was noted. CAST recognised the ways that they could adapt their support in the future to reduce the burden on funded partners.

“[A] real learning for us [is] to be more transparent around the commitment that is required by project leads right up front, but also to make sure they have the support in house from senior stakeholders, who can deal with blocks, and to make sure their time is available to deliver the needs of the projects.”

CAST

Appropriateness of digital support package

Generally, funded partners felt **that the support was pitched at the right level**. However, given Tech vs Abuse 2.0 attracted a variety of organisations with a range of experiences with digital technology, some funded partners needed more or less support:

- Some **funded partners could have benefited from additional specialist support**, such as legal expertise and advice on intellectual property.
- Those who had experienced similar programmes to Tech vs Abuse 2.0 before, felt **that they were already familiar with some of the content**.



“We have attended several training sessions and found that they covered information and skills we already had, although we are still grateful for the reminder... We feel it would be good to add in some more specialist or higher-level information/training so that all grantees can get the most out of the programme.”

Project lead, funded partner

Challenges of user testing in the abuse sector

There was a feeling amongst funded partners that the **digital support agencies needed to better understand the specific challenges of engaging with service users for user testing in the abuse sector**.

- The **need for regular iterations**, for example, could trigger service user trauma if not handled appropriately.
- It is, therefore, **important to ensure that the digital support agencies are well-informed on the processes and practicalities of working in the abuse sector**.



“[The digital support agency] are proposing software development, which is agile and rapid turnarounds, but [that is] not right for this space. We cannot easily contact service users – you can’t just contact people in the same way you might contact a customer – you can’t just test an assumption or theory. Being agile is incompatible with service delivery [in our context].”

Staff, funded partner

The programme did respond to feedback from funded partners, for example by implementing additional support on safeguarding and search engine optimisation.

“Tech is something that can often be part of abuse. With the safeguarding, it was great the responsiveness to that, work was done and new guidance issued.”

Project lead, funded partner

2.6. Digital partners

Overall, the **relationship between funded partners and their digital partner tended to be a positive working relationship**. The digital partner is a valuable addition to the social tech development process because they can:

- Provide funded partners with **tailored support to overcome challenges**.
- Bring **new perspectives and points of view** which supplements the development process and could help save time and money.
- Provide **solutions to the funded partners’ problems** based on their knowledge and experience. For example, one digital partner identified and utilised an existing platform to provide a solution to their problem.

“[The funded partner] wanted to build their own chat service so that users could chat in a specific way – like Slack but a custom one...They did not realise there were some solutions already.”

Digital partner

Digital partners also played a role in increasing confidence with tech development and digital skills of funded partners. In addition to this, funded partners were **optimistic about continuing their relationship with the digital partner** after completing Tech vs Abuse 2.0. A noteworthy example is from a funded partner who has contracted their digital partner on a consultancy basis since completing the programme.

“We had [the digital partner] come and do lunch and learn. It was people who had already shown an interest. Then we had an all-team meeting and she presented again – to embed it. [We] talked about agile working, [user centred design] approach and what we’ve been doing.”

Staff, funded partner

Some funded partners commented that the **costs of engaging a digital partner were often higher than expected**. For example, funded partners who applied without a digital partner later realised that what they originally wanted to achieve was not possible with the budget they had available. The digital partners recommended by CAST were also perceived as too expensive. This suggests that funded partner expectations of what they can achieve at application stage may not always be realistic.

Key findings



- Funded partners were **clear on what was required and expected from the application process**. There was a clear **link between motivations to apply to Tech vs Abuse 2.0 and the design challenges**.
- Opinions were mixed about the video application format, however, funded partners highlighted that the **video application was true to the focus on digital technology of Tech vs Abuse 2.0**.
- Grant management was clear and flexible to funding partners’ needs. Additional flexibility was offered as a result of the pandemic, and funded partners felt that the **response to COVID-19 was proactive, accessible and understanding of their needs**.
- The **size of grant available was not enough to allow all funded partners to achieve their original aims**. This is partly because funded partners had unrealistic expectations about what could be achieved within the budget available.
- Overall, the digital support package worked well. A key learning was the importance that **digital support agencies understand the additional practicalities, considerations and challenges** of developing a user-led tech project in the abuse sector.
- **Digital partners played a valuable role in the digital development process, and increasing the skills and confidence of funded partners** in relation to social tech development.

3. Findings: Outcomes of Tech vs Abuse 2.0



The following section looks at the extent to which funded partners have met their aims on the programme including: making good design decisions; improving their services to better support those affected by abuse, including the development of an MVP; developing and embedding digital skills; collaboration amongst funded partners, and the legacy of the project.

3.1. Making good design decisions

Funded partners were able to make well-informed design decisions, taking into account the usability and usefulness of their digital product based on knowledge gained from solid user research, sector scoping and market analysis.

Following the discovery phase in February 2020, CAST identified that funded partners:



The most **frequently used research methods were focus groups, interviews and surveys**. From conducting research, one funded partner found that young people do not tend to identify with the term 'domestic abuse', instead using terms such as 'toxic'. Another funded partner conducted one-to-one interviews with survivors asking them how they use technology to find information about abuse.

By July 2020, funded partners were beginning to enter the 'develop' phase of the programme, meaning that most had:

- Designed a user needs statement for their target audience.⁹
- Identified key learning from their research which influenced their decisions and next steps.
- Created a hypothesis for the testing phase based on evidence gathered so far.

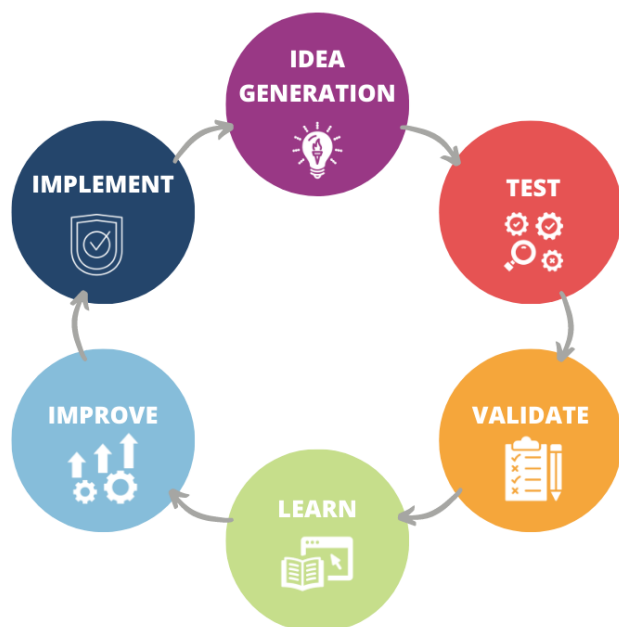
⁹ A user needs statement is an actionable problem statement used to summarise who a particular user is, the user's need, and why the need is important to the user.

"Initially, we thought it was about changing the resources that we had developed, but I think we have come away from that idea because that was just our idea and maybe not what people wanted."

Staff, funded partner

Iterating and improving product ideas

A key aim of funded partners' projects was to **generate ideas, test, validate, learn and improve**. Importantly, **funded partners iteratively tested their assumptions with service users**. For instance, one funded partner generated over thirty ideas from the research process.



The research was synthesized into three proposals for the testing phase. The funded partner also triangulated findings from research with perpetrators, survivors and staff to test the strength of the evidence gathered.

"[The programme is] designed for us to be able to pivot if the evidence and the work and the process said 'actually, you have got this wrong and should be doing something else'."

Project lead, funded partner

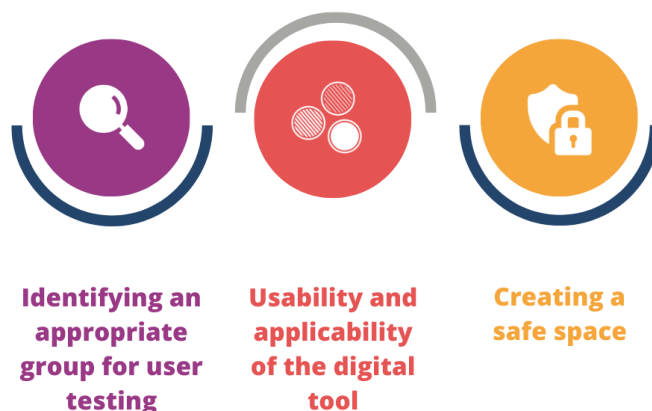
Funded partners reflected that the way the project developed did not always reflect what was in the application because they had a **unique opportunity in Tech vs Abuse 2.0 to research and test their assumptions**.

"[The] idea is to focus on [developing] digital solutions on identifying [abuse that are] backed up by the research done [through Tech vs Abuse 2.0]."

Project lead, funded partner

Challenges in the research process

- 1. Identifying and engaging with an appropriate group for user testing.** For example, some people may not know that they are experiencing abuse. One funded partner commented on the challenge of engaging young people experiencing domestic abuse at a relationship and familial level.
- 2. The usability and applicability of the digital tool for a diverse range of service users** was an issue for some partners. It could be challenging for



products to be equally appropriate for different languages, cultures, same-sex relationships and neuro-atypical people.

3. Creating a **safe space to gather the information needed without re-traumatising service users**. This required funded partners to think carefully about how to engage service users appropriately and to have support in place if needed.

3.2. Improve services to better support those affected by abuse

For the most part, it is too early for funded partners to comment on whether their product had an impact on improving services to better support those affected by abuse. However, there are some **early indicators of impact**.

There is evidence from funded partners that service users have benefitted from **increased access to support**. For example, one funded partner stated that their service users had expressed a need for the tool, specifically a safe and immediate access point for support.

“[The digital tool is] much more immediate, rather than [service users] phoning somebody... it diffuses the situation rather than people ruminating on their anger and stress.”

Project lead, funded partner

One service user stated that they **appreciated contributing to a process that would be beneficial for others**. The opportunity to draw on their experience as a way of informing future support services was particularly valued.

“That was me as an expert by experience able to work with other experts by experience. It was wonderful as we were able to draw on our own experience but also look outside our own experience to look at how that could be used practically for others... The sessions were targeted, focused, practical.”

Service user

Some funded partners had not launched their product but noted that they received positive feedback from service users on prototypes.

Robust evidence that the tool meets the targeted need

Through Tech vs Abuse 2.0, funded partners increased their knowledge and understanding of their service users. Funded partners **used robust evidence**, including market research and user testing, **to show that their prototype or minimum viable product met the intended need for service users**.



“What ended up coming out of [the grant] felt like a direct response, [we created a tool that is a reflection of the research done with young people], [where] people could learn in their own time and spaces.”

Project lead, funded partner

Evidence of changes to ways of working

One alumnus of Tech vs Abuse 1.0 reported that through their digital tool they have been able to supplement their prevention work and engage with employers in new ways. These findings, while preliminary, suggest that there has been some **evidence of changes to ways of working which could lead to improvements in service delivery or ability to scale services.**

3.3. Developing and embedding digital skills

Increased digital competency

As a result of the support from Tech vs Abuse 2.0, through the mentoring and coaching offer and external support from the digital partner, funded partners described increasing their competency and confidence with digital processes. Some funded partners were motivated to use their new knowledge and understanding to explore and engage with the possibility of developing digital innovations for the wider organisation.

“Organisationally, I think it has been great for us, we have been able to take confidence from team members to put that into other areas. We are much more digitally confident now. We feel more confident in our social media presence and doing things digitally.”

Project lead, funded partner

Our COVID-19 learning paper also found some evidence that involvement in Tech vs Abuse 2.0 improved digital capabilities putting organisations in a better position to respond to the pandemic.

Funded partners gained more confidence in using technology as part of their service design

- Their **familiarity and understanding of the processes** surrounding tech development increased.
- Funded partners **learned about how to keep their service users safe online.**

“For my role, [it was] helpful to hear about how to keep someone safe online... learning about how perpetrators are getting into survivor’s emails – knowing about digital services – [digital services] need to be as safe as possible...”

Staff, funded partner

Overall, the barriers surrounding the use of tech amongst the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 cohort seem to have been reduced.

Funded partner organisational skills audit

Across the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 cohort, there has also been **increased awareness of the digital skills available and gaps within the project team and wider organisation**. In considering the accessibility of their tool, one funded partner expressed that their branding used traditional marketing. Tech vs Abuse 2.0 acted as a catalyst in making them think about how to ensure that the accessibility of the tool is mirrored in the organisation and any future developments.



“This injection of funding has forced us to look at things like that. It will stand us in a good position for all we want to do – which now is all online!”

Project lead, funded partner

Synergy of Tech vs Abuse 2.0 and funded partner organisations

There was some **synergy across Tech vs Abuse 2.0 and other projects occurring within the funded partner organisation**. For example, one funded partner highlighted that the learning from their research had been transferable to the redesign and redevelopment of their website and resources.



Tech vs Abuse 2.0 seemed to demonstrate the importance of incorporating digital processes in the wider organisation. For instance, one funded partner had been piloting the feasibility of incorporating the digital tool into their core model.

Challenge of cascading learning to the wider organisation

Notably, the **time and resource available to cascade learning outside of the project team** is a barrier to developing and embedding new knowledge and practices to the whole team. When asked if there was anything they would have liked to do differently, one alumnus of Tech vs Abuse 1.0 said:

“One thing was it probably was a bit siloed internally. When I started there was a project manager and a couple of other people. We could have got more out of the programme through the wider organisation’s exposure to it. It was a bit of a shock internally when people realised it was going in a different direction.”

Tech vs Abuse 1.0 Alumnus, funded partner

3.4. Collaboration amongst funded partners

Funded partners were actively encouraged to collaborate with others in the cohort, and the evaluation found some evidence of collaboration, partnership and sharing of learning including:

- Two funded partners **submitting collaborative proposals**.
- Funded partners being connected with each other through **six peer learning online sessions, three playback sessions at key programme milestones** and **fifteen online workshops**.



- Funded partners **understanding the overlaps in what they are trying to address and supporting each other**. For example, one funded partner sought support from another in their recruitment of service users.

“We work with [two funded partners]. They developed this brilliant resource... They approached us about the possibility of being able to promote it. We found it really useful to now know that we can recommend that as a resource for young people. We know it feels well designed and safeguarded...”

Project lead, funded partner

There was a call amongst funded partners for more direct opportunities for collaboration across the cohort. However, there was an understanding that the COVID-19 crisis and other factors have meant this has not happened as much as hoped. It was noted that it is particularly **important that opportunities for collaboration are accessible to the needs of all funded partners**, for example ensuring that communication needs are catered for at cohort events as well as for one-to-one peer sessions.

3.5. Tech vs Abuse 2.0 products

After 12 months of being involved in the programme, i.e. by November 2020:

- Six funded partners had reached the Develop phase of the programme. This means that they had **developed a digital service which they could deliver within the context of their organisation**, and created a plan on how they would sustain and improve it further.
- The remaining funded partners had reached the Define phase, with some progressing towards the Develop phase. This means that they had **designed and tested multiple prototypes, and had a validated solution to solving their problem**.

The kinds of products funded partners had developed include:

- A platform with a secure log in function for people that have experienced abuse to access mutual support, a virtual library and e-learning to enable them to rebuild their lives.
- A messaging app to connect service users with support from volunteers outside of meetings. The pilot testing its usability had shown a positive impact on reducing emotional isolation of service users, and that it adds value to their model which emphasises strong relationship between volunteers and service users.
- A mobile tool co-designed with young people that allows them to anonymously learn and share about experiences of abuse in their relationships, increasing awareness about the definition of abuse, as well as an activity pack for schools to use the platform as a learning tool.
- A prototype of a game to help young people develop their knowledge and confidence to have healthy, equal relationship. The game was tested amongst schools and families,

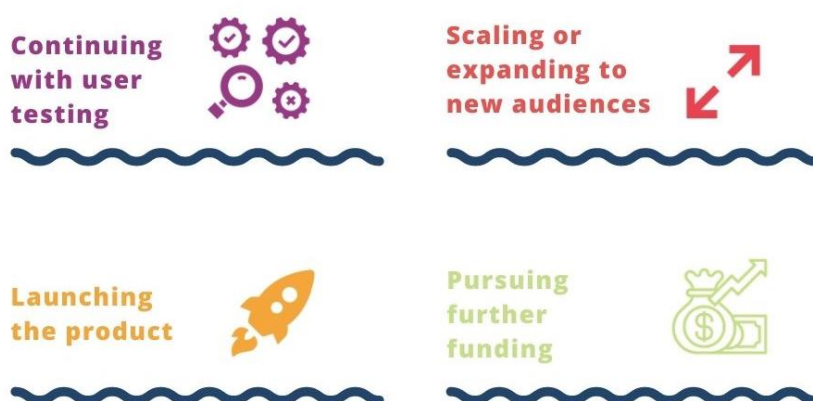
and successfully received funding to develop the full game which aimed to be completed in March 2021.

- A self-advocacy tool covering three human rights to empower people experiencing abuse to understand their rights and rebuild their lives.

More detailed case studies of three of the funded partners' projects can be found in Appendix D.

3.6. Legacy

Following the completion of the programme, funded partners aimed to, or considered:¹⁰



Some funded partners noted that launching a product aimed at people who experience abuse is challenging. The launch needs to be sensitive to who the product is aimed at so that it does not reach those who perpetrate abuse.

“Also, we have started looking at how we are going to launch it and dissemination. It is more complicated than a lot of other issues. If you were creating an app for people with diabetes, you can stick it on the TV, you want to get awareness to as many people as possible. With this sector you cannot do that, you will then be alerting people you don’t want to know about it.”

Project lead, funded partner

Funded partners felt not having an offer of continued funding for the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 cohort was a missed opportunity. The main reasons they wanted further funding were to continue developing their digital product, scale or pilot their digital product to new areas and/or to cover the costs of the upkeep of the product.

“We also really want to develop the tool itself into at least the version we originally designed. That is the biggest crunch for us at the moment. That is the biggest challenging thing about sustainability. [The] funding world [has been] turned upside down, almost everything is about COVID-19 and crisis [response]... [We are] looking to see additional grant funding to fund the next iteration of the project. I don’t know how successful we will be with that. I feel

¹⁰ Four funded partners had not completed their project when the research took place in January 2021.

pessimistic, outside of Comic Relief I'm not sure who else will see the value of this in the current context..."

Project lead, funded partner

"I wonder if there is something about the sustainability of what is developed and reassurance of support after. I have seen so many different things that are brilliant...but how do we make something sustainable if we cannot get funding? You end up losing all the richness with no sustained support..."

Project lead, funded partner

However, some funded partners had successfully applied for further funding.

"[We were] really lucky from May onwards as we started getting more funding... because of that we have been able to develop a lot more of the [digital tool]... We [changed the digital tool] from something we would use in our workshops to something we wanted [other organisations] to access independently."

Project lead, funded partner



Key findings



- **Funded partners achieved interim outcomes** such as gathering evidence from user research, sector scoping and market analysis.
- Funded partners made **good progress with their project but some needed more time and/or budget to continue the development of their product**, in some cases due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the complexity of the project.
- It is **too early to determine whether longer term outcomes were met**, such as whether products developed by funded partners have improved services for those affected by abuse, although there have been some **promising early indications** of the potential value of products under development.
- Funded partners **increased their digital competencies and confidence with using technology as part of their service delivery**.
- Funded partners had **considered how they could continue gathering evidence for, launch, sustain and scale their product following completion of the programme**.

4. Conclusions and recommendations



Tech vs Abuse 2.0 has provided funding to a range of organisations working with different groups affected by abuse to develop exciting, innovative and effective social tech solutions. However, this programme was not only designed to support service improvement or better outcomes for service users. It was also intended to be experimental – to test out new ways to support the development of social tech products in the abuse sector, and draw out **wider learning** that can **inform the design of similar programmes** in future.

This section of the report summarises the key findings about the programme's design, processes and key outcomes, and concludes with some reflections on wider impact and learning that can be applied to similar initiatives in future.

Programme design and processes

Overall, the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 programme was well-designed to progress funded partners' aims and provide appropriate support. The flexibility of the fund, and the tailored expert digital support available, were particularly valuable.

- Funded partners were **clear on what was required and expected from the application process**. Preparation to apply was generally light-touch and there was a clear link between motivations to apply to Tech vs Abuse 2.0 and the design challenges.
- Although opinions were mixed about the video application format, **funded partners highlighted that the video application was true to the focus on digital technology of Tech vs Abuse 2.0** and enabled them to convey their enthusiasm and passion for the project.
- The **grant management was clear and flexible to funding partners' needs**. Grant reporting processes received positive feedback as funded partners could choose the method that suited them best, i.e., phone calls or written formats. Additional flexibility was offered as a result of the pandemic, and **funded partners felt that the response to COVID-19 was proactive, accessible and understanding of their needs**.
- Overall, the digital support package worked well, although there were some teething issues around the lack of clarity on the roles of digital support agencies and strain on funded partners' organisational capacity earlier on in the programme. The specialist expertise provided by the digital support package was appropriate. A key learning to emerge was that the **digital support agencies need to understand the additional practicalities, considerations and challenges of developing a user-led digital project in the abuse sector**.
- Digital partners played a **valuable role in the digital development process, and increasing the skills and confidence of funded partners** in relation to digital development.

- The **size of grant available was not enough to allow all funded partners to achieve their original aims**. In some cases, this is because funded partners had unrealistic expectations about what could be achieved within the budget available. The costs of engaging a digital partner also exceeded some funded partners' expectations. This reflects the relative expense of product development where intensive and/or highly specialist digital support is required.

Outcomes

Overall, the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 programme has supported funded partners to improve their understanding of the social tech development process, conduct valuable user research which has informed wider organisational planning as well as the product development process, and develop prototypes which in many cases have shown promising results.

- Generally, funded partners achieved interim outcomes such as **gathering evidence from user research, sector scoping and market analysis** to identify appropriate solutions and better understand their service users' experiences and journeys; and **generating, iterating and improving solutions with service users**.
- After 12 months, **six funded partners reached the Develop phase of the programme** (i.e., developed a digital service which they could deliver within the context of their organisation) and **the remainder had reached the Define phase** (i.e. designed and tested multiple prototypes and validated a solution to solving their problem). Funded partners therefore made good progress with their project but some **needed more time and/or budget** to continue the development of their digital product, in some cases due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the complexity of the project.
- It is **too early to determine whether longer term outcomes were met**, such as whether products developed by funded partners have improved services for those affected by abuse. However, there were some promising indicators of early impact on service users and funded partner organisations, for example prototype tools which have enabled increased access to support for service users.
- Funded partners **increased their digital competencies and confidence with using technology as part of their service delivery**. Whilst COVID-19 presented new challenges as social distancing restrictions meant that face-to-face engagement with service users was no longer possible, it also highlighted the potential value of digital products designed to support service users remotely.
- Funded partners had **considered how they could continue gathering evidence for, launch, sustain and scale their product following completion of the programme**.

Wider impact and learning for future initiatives

The Tech vs Abuse programme provides a unique and relatively niche offer. Opportunities for investment in social tech are limited, and to have a fund dedicated to the abuse sector was seen as particularly valuable by funded partners. Indeed, the programme is ground-breaking in its

focus on social technology given justified fears within the sector about the potential role of technology in facilitating abuse.

The experience of delivering Tech vs Abuse 2.0 has highlighted some key learning with wider applicability for the funding sector:

- **Social tech products need long-term time and investment to sustainably develop;** funded partners tended to under-estimate both the capacity and budget needed to progress their product development. This has implications for the **amount of funding on offer, the flexibility of funding needed, the project length** and the **support needed by organisations to develop realistic plans.**
- The importance that all partners involved in the programme **understand and recognise the specific challenges, nuances and complexity of developing digital products in the abuse sector**, given the sensitivities and practical challenges associated with technology as a potential tool of abuse.
- Social tech development is a relatively **specialist area**, and non-specialists or those who have not been involved in similar projects previously **require expertise and high-quality advice** to support their development. This is helped by offering clear guidance and information sessions (such as the pre-assessment discovery day), as well as **help to navigate and understand the support on offer.**
- **The value of combining highly tailored support provided by each funded partner's digital partner, as well as the 'core' centralised support offer** provided by the consortium led by CAST. Both elements of digital support added value to funded partners' projects and supported their development in different ways, however the support was more helpful where it was **complementary, joined-up and well-targeted at the project's particular stage of development.**
- Because the social tech product development process is grounded in user research, **flexibility and understanding the iterative and user-led nature of the process** is particularly important.
- Tech vs Abuse 2.0 has incorporated **some examples of good funding practice** which have been well received by funded partners, including the pre-assessment discovery day, the video application process, choice in reporting mechanisms, and opportunities for funded partners to network and collaborate (although this was hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and some felt it could have been more proactively facilitated).

It is also important to note that **learning from this programme cannot be isolated from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic** which has had a significant impact on how the programme developed. Tech vs Abuse 2.0 has highlighted new opportunities and challenges just as the impact of COVID-19 on the abuse sector has been brought to light. The pandemic has simultaneously:

- **Diverted funded partners' attention and resources** in the short-medium term, reducing their capacity to engage in more strategic development work, and in some cases delaying their projects and/or requiring funds to be redirected to other priorities;
- **Escalated the problem of abuse and shone a light on the urgent need to provide more and better support** to both survivors and perpetrators;
- **Highlighted the need and opportunity for social tech products to support service users remotely**, particularly where opportunities for in-person engagement are severely limited.

More than ever, **the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the value of accessible online support for people experiencing or perpetrating abuse**. Part of the legacy of Tech vs Abuse 2.0 must be to inform and influence future funding opportunities to ensure that organisations in the abuse sector have the investment they need to empower people experiencing abuse to access support whenever they need it.

Recommendations for the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 programme

Application process

- ✓ Continue to offer applicants the option of submitting a **video and written application**.
- ✓ **Cover the staff and travel costs** for shortlisted applicants attending the discovery day or any other pre-assessment engagement opportunities.
- ✓ **Provide support to applicants and funded partners on how to budget effectively** for social tech development projects, particularly for those with little experience in this area.

Fund design

- ✓ **Provide guidance and advice to funded partners on what can realistically be achieved** within the level of grant available and the 12-month programme timescales.
- ✓ Provide Tech vs Abuse applicants and funded partners with information about the frequency and structure of workshops and meetings with mentors and coaches in the early stages of the programme, to ensure organisations are **well-informed about the capacity needed to engage** and at what level.
- ✓ Ensure that the funding provided within the grant for **funded partner core costs** covers the full level of capacity needed to engage in the programme (for example, staff time spent engaging with the digital support package and managing the product development process) **as well as guidance on realistic project costs** (including direct costs of developing a social tech product e.g. contracting a digital partner).
- ✓ Provide a **contingency budget** to cover unexpected costs, for example if funded partners experience delays or unexpected challenges with their project.

Technical support

- ✓ Continue to experiment with ways to **simplify accessing and understanding the broad range of technical expertise** and support available, to make this easier for funded partners to navigate.
- ✓ **Offer training or support to the digital support agencies** to ensure that they are fully informed about the practicalities and considerations of **developing digital products in the abuse sector**.

Future planning

- ✓ **Review the Tech vs Abuse programme priorities and focus in the light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the abuse sector**, including the enhanced need for effective remote support services and the importance of continued investment in social tech product development in this context.

Appendix A: Research framework

Evaluation questions		Key areas to explore	Data sources
Outcomes To what extent has Tech vs Abuse 2.0 achieved its aims to allow grant funded organisations tackling domestic and sexual abuse to:	Access flexible early stage funding?	Access: How accessible for grantees is the application process and subsequent funding support offer of Tech vs Abuse 2.0? Flexible: Does the way the Fund has been designed enable grantees to change direction if necessary? Early stage: Do grant funded projects fall into one of the following two categories? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas at the earliest, concept stages of development • Early stage prototypes that require significant re-design and development in response to user needs, or to enable other organisations to adopt the solution 	Interviews with funders Case study visits Grantee interviews
	Make good design decisions surrounding their development and use of tech?	How far do grantees make design decisions based on knowledge gained from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid user research • Sector scoping • Market analysis 	DSA interviews Case study visits Grantee interviews

	<p>Develop and embed digital skills in their team?</p>	<p>To what extent do grantees develop and embed digital skills in their team, for example the Better Digital Services¹¹ principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with user needs, and keep them involved • Understand what's out there first • Build the right team • Take small steps and learn as you go • Build digital services, not websites • Be inclusive • Think about privacy and security • Build for sustainability • Collaborate and build partnerships • Be open <p>Which digital skills do grantees hope to develop, and do they match those actually developed through the programme?</p> <p>Have new knowledge and practices affected the whole team or just a few individuals?</p>	<p>DSA interviews</p> <p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p>
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¹¹ Other relevant frameworks may also be referenced.

		<p>What (if any) is the role of the digital partner in supporting grantees to embed these skills?</p> <p>For alumni grantees, how does the digital learning in this round compare to the skills developed in the previous round?</p>	
	Find the right digital partner?	<p>Do all grantees commission digital partners at the appropriate point in the development of their product (excluding grantees which come to the programme with an established digital partnership)?</p> <p>To what extent do grantee relationships with their digital partners reflect the qualities that make them work¹²:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and clear communication • Trust and fit • Mission alignment • Flex and mutual learning 	<p>DSA interviews</p> <p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p>
	Take their first significant step forward with developing a digital tool or service?	<p>This will be self-reported by grantees as the 'first significant step' is likely to look different depending at what stage grantees are at on their journey. Grantee opinions will be triangulated by those of the DSA.</p> <p>Potential 'first significant steps' include:</p>	<p>DSA interviews</p> <p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p>

¹² How to make charity & digital partner relationships work, CAST, November 2019

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantees significantly shifting the problem they are trying to solve or the solution to it in response to user research findings • Grantees producing a minimum viable product • Grantees finding an existing tool it would be appropriate to use 	
	Improve their services to better support those affected by abuse	<p>The digital tools developed by grantees may only reach prototype and may not be in direct use by their intended audiences. Hard evidence of improvements for service users is outside the scope of this evaluation. However, early indicators may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust evidence that the prototype/MVP meets the need it is targeting • Grantees articulating early impact on beneficiaries • Feedback from user testing that highlights initial impact • More targeted reach through improved SEO/digital marketing • Evidence of changes to ways of working which could lead to improvements in service delivery or ability to scale services 	<p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p> <p>Online survey for service users</p> <p>DSA interviews</p>
	Lead to greater collaboration, partnership or sharing of	This could include evidence of:	Interviews with funders

	learning amongst organisations working in the domestic and sexual abuse sectors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantees submitting collaborative proposals, as encouraged at application stage • Grantees sharing learning from user research • Grantees open sourcing solutions • Grantees being connected with one another via cohort events, peer learning, show and tell calls, organisations grouped in 'circles' by DSA, and Fusebox among other opportunities • Grantees understanding where there are overlaps in terms of the challenges they are trying to address, and supporting one another if appropriate • Any changes in perception or design grantees feel they have made as a result of peer learning • Grantees showing appetite for co-owning solutions or sharing platforms 	<p>DSA interviews</p> <p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p> <p>Online survey for wider sector stakeholders</p>
	Plan for life after grant funding and the sustainability of their project	<p>Where do grantees plan to go next (e.g. further development needed? Further marketing/building referral pathways needed? Official launch? Scaling or expanding to new audiences? Other?)?</p> <p>How have they considered the sustainability of their project?</p> <p>What further support do grantees need after the funding?</p>	<p>Grantee interviews</p> <p>Case study visits</p> <p>DSA interviews</p>

		<p>Do they plan to continue working with their digital partner?</p> <p>Have they already applied for further funding? If so, with whom and have they been successful? If unsuccessful, why were they unsuccessful?</p>	
<p>Process</p> <p>What are grantee views and experiences of the Tech vs Abuse 2.0 application and delivery design?</p> <p>Do key stakeholders (grantees, funders and the digital support agency) identify any changes which could have increased the effectiveness of the programme?</p>	<p>The application process and guidance</p>	<p>Particularly focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What led grantees to apply to the fund? • What work did grantees do in order to prepare to apply? (With a particular focus on those who are new to TvA funding vs alumni, and those applying in partnership vs alone) • How did grantees find the process of submitting a video application? • Did grantees find the Discovery Day useful? • How could the application process have been improved? • Was enough clarity provided at the outset as to how much time/resource would need to be committed to the project? Was the amount of time grantees ended up committing the right amount? • Research and design challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Were the research and design challenges useful at the application stage or later? 	<p>Review of application forms and videos</p> <p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p> <p>Interviews with funders</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Did taking part in the research make organisations more likely to apply to the fund? ○ What could make them more useful? 	
	Their grant management	<p>Particularly focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The flexibility of the fund • The support grantees receive from their grant manager • Grantee views on grant management reporting (particularly if the funder decides to pursue 6 monthly calls rather than written reports) • How could grant management have been improved? 	<p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p> <p>Interviews with funders</p>
	The support package offered by a Digital Support Agency	<p>Particularly focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were grantees offered the right level of technical support? • How were grantees supported to find a digital partner? • How useful did grantees find the extra support on SEO and safeguarding, commissioned after the beginning of the funding period in response to need? • Was support well-coordinated across the different organisations making up the support agency? 	<p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p> <p>Interviews with DSA</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective was the mentoring/coaching aspect of the support? • Were more specific needs by specialist projects well met? • How could the support package have been improved? • How useful is the support from the DSA for alumni grantees compared to newer organisations?¹³ 	
Wider impact What can we learn about Tech vs Abuse 2.0 which could inform the future design of either this programme, or other social tech programmes in the future?	Can we develop and refine the Tech vs Abuse theory of change which was developed as part of the evaluation of Tech vs Abuse 1.0?	Can it be made appropriate to share with the wider abuse and social tech sectors? Can it be linked to the Tech For Good theory of change?	Interviews with funders Interviews with DSA Interviews with social tech researcher Theory of Change workshop Observation of TvA 1.0 extension evaluation workshop

¹³ Alumni organisations will have received similar support before, although there have been some changes since TvA 1.0.

	<p>What can TvA 2.0 teach us about partnership working in the social tech sector and beyond?</p>	<p>How do the experiences of grantees working in partnership differ from those that applied for funding alone?</p> <p>How could funders encourage applicants to work in partnership in the future?</p> <p>Was the amount of funding right for supporting partnerships? (£75k vs £50k for single organisation)</p>	<p>Interviews with funders</p> <p>Interviews with DSA</p> <p>Case study visits</p> <p>Grantee interviews</p>
	<p>Does Tech vs Abuse 2.0 contribute anything else to the wider social tech and abuse sectors?</p>	<p>How useful are the following things for the wider sectors?</p> <p>the research and design challenges</p> <p>the Tech vs Abuse website</p> <p>the learning from evaluations, previous (CR currently deciding how best to share content) and current</p>	<p>Online survey for wider sector stakeholders</p> <p>Interviews with social tech researcher</p>

Appendix B: Methodology

Set up and scoping (November 2019 – February 2020)

Desk-based research

To develop our understanding of Tech vs Abuse 2.0, we conducted a rapid review of available programme literature. This included documents in relation to the design and history of the programme, as well as literature available on the Tech for Good hub and Tech vs Abuse websites.

Scoping interviews

Renaissi then undertook introductory interviews with key members of staff across the Tech vs Abuse partnership to supplement the document review and to develop our understanding of the previous round of funding. mySociety conducted an interview with the digital support agency to better understand the digital development process.

Developing the evaluation plan

Building on our understanding of the programme in the scoping phase, Renaissi developed an evaluation plan which set out the overarching research questions and guided the overall evaluation processes.

Evaluation activities (February 2020 – January 2021)

Funded partners and service users

Our approach to engaging with funded partners was two-tiered:

1. **In-depth case study visits:** our associate conducted case study visits with three funded partners which included interviews and observations with staff and, where possible, service users.
2. **Light-touch approach:** the remaining eight funded partners participated in in-depth telephone interviews with a relevant representative of each organisation.

There were two rounds of engagement with funded partners. Round one was conducted early in the programme between February and March 2020. In this period we completed three case study visits, however were only able to complete five interviews due to the limited capacity of one funded partner as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. The second round took place between November 2020 and January 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were not able to conduct in-person visits in this period and instead conducted ten further telephone interviews. Three of these were conducted by our associate as case studies.

Funded partners and digital support agency

At the end of the funding period, we interviewed the same staff members from the three funders to gather their reflections on Tech vs Abuse 2.0 and conducted another interview with the digital support agency.

Wider sector stakeholders

We developed an online survey for wider stakeholders in both the social tech and abuse sectors. This included unsuccessful applicants to Tech vs Abuse, as well as alumni funded partners from Tech vs Abuse 1.0. To further build our understanding, we conducted two interviews with unsuccessful applicants and two with alumni funded partners.

Reviewing the Theory of Change

The Tech vs Abuse 2.0 theory of change was reviewed in a workshop with key members of Comic Relief staff, building on learning from this evaluation.

Analysis and reporting

As detailed above, the evaluation activities for the programme involved data from multiple qualitative and quantitative sources. Renaisi's researchers synthesised these findings using NVivo, to code and analyse qualitative findings from the fieldwork, and Excel, to analyse the programme and outcomes data.

To ensure the evaluation provided real-time insights to the Tech vs Abuse partnership, Renaisi captured and shared learning throughout the evaluation at presentations and workshops with the partnership. To share learning from the first phase of the evaluation, Renaisi hosted a workshop with staff from Comic Relief, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Clothworkers Foundation.

Organisations receiving Tech vs Abuse 2.0 funding were about halfway (6 months) through their grants when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. As a result, we produced a learning paper about the impact of the crisis on funded partners, their project and the effectiveness of support provided through the Fund which is published separately.

Appendix C: Tech vs Abuse 2.0 cohort

Organisation name	Aims of the project	Tech vs Abuse 1.0 Alumni?
On Our Radar and SafeLives	Develop a platform where young survivors of domestic abuse will be able to access a community, safely share their stories, and enable others to recognise abusive behaviour in their relationships.	
Surviving Economic Abuse and Money Advice Plus	Build on their economic abuse screening tool, to develop a questionnaire that will provide safe and up to date information to survivors of economic abuse as well as to professionals.	
Deaf-initely Women	Develop a digital hub in Derby and Derbyshire to reach deaf women locally, sharing peer-designed resources, increasing awareness on different types of abuse, and helping to fill the gaps in services.	
Respect	Test the concept for an app which can be used by specialist Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Services as a tool to support behaviour change alongside existing services	
Womens' Aid Federation of England	Adapt their online survivors' handbook to make it more interactive, accessible and optimised for digital use, in order to effectively reach more women at an earlier stage.	

Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)	Co-produce a digital product with young people with experience of domestic abuse, to support them to recover and address their trauma.	
Aanchal Womens' Aid	Design a digital platform for women from South Asian communities to access professional advice, connecting women with peers, ultimately reducing social isolation and rebuilding lives after abuse.	Yes
Haven Wolverhampton	Create a women's portal for current service users, managing their own user journey when they are accessing The Haven's existing services.	
British Institute of Human Rights	Develop a product to support women and practitioners to know their human rights and the duties of public services to respect and protect these, including useful information for meetings with housing staff, education, social workers, and police.	
Circles South East	Develop a product to build on the existing face-to-face Circles support offered in London, Hampshire, Surrey and Kent, to enable volunteers and professionals to support individuals in real time.	

Tender Education & Arts	Create a gaming-based digital tool to support neurodiverse young people and those with learning disabilities to understand healthy relationships, designed to work in conjunction with Tender’s existing abuse-prevention programmes.	
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Appendix D: Funded partner case studies

Case Study Tech vs Abuse

women's aid

until women & children are safe

With Tech vs Abuse support...

Women's Aid wanted to redevelop their Survivor's Handbook, an online resource offering practical support and information for women experiencing domestic abuse. They:

- **Conducted user research** in partnership with a digital agency to understand more about the search terms and language that resonates with women and how women access support.
- **Redesigned the content of the handbook**, developing the information architecture and testing the revised handbook with users for accessibility and usability.

What we learnt about what survivors need from us and the language, and the way we approach women who experience domestic abuse – that is huge for an organisation that has been around as long as we have, and for a project that has only lasted a year.
Project team member

About Women's Aid

Women's Aid is a grassroots federation working together to provide life-saving services in England and build a future where domestic abuse is not tolerated.

Outcomes

- **Increased digital skills** in the project team and more widely at Women's Aid.
- **User research has given Women's Aid valuable insights** into how survivors search for advice and the language that resonates with them. The communications team have adapted their practice as a result.
- For Women's Aid staff, this project has helped to **demonstrate the value of digital design processes**, overcome misunderstandings of what 'digital' means, **increase the level of buy-in** to digital work and secure funding for other digital projects.

Key challenges Cases of abuse increased during COVID-19 and staff were re-deployed. The handbook is not yet launched and it became challenging to consolidate new digital skills and embed learning in this period. Additional funding was needed for staffing and more digital support.

Key success factors

- ✓ **Support received from a digital partner** with prior knowledge of Women's Aid and a collaborative approach to working.
- ✓ **A mentor from CAST** was a key source of support in keeping Women's Aid on track and links to sources of specialised support.

Within our comms team and in management people are taking our learning seriously. We worked with lots of teams during the process... People are understanding it from the ground rather than us just saying this is what we have learnt.
Project team member

[The digital partner] really like to embed themselves and embed us with them – working on it together. We were in constant communication. They also really want to learn from us and our team.
Project team member



Tech vs Abuse supported UK charities to build capacity in digital, develop creative tech solutions for people affected by abuse and improve services.

This case study was developed by Renaisi, in consultation with Women's Aid, in February 2021.



Case Study

Tech vs Abuse

SURVIVING
ECONOMIC
ABUSE

With Tech vs Abuse support...

Surviving Economic Abuse wanted to produce an online tool to enable women experiencing economic abuse to identify and understand that they are experiencing this form of coercive control, and to have access to information and resources to support them. They:

- **Conducted initial user research** with support from a digital marketing consultant.
- **Hired a digital agency** to conduct further testing, **build prototypes** and **test the product with survivors**.
- **Worked closely with a group of survivors** (*Experts by Experience*) to ensure the tool was fit for purpose.

This is going to be helpful for women. I cannot tell you how wonderful that has been. You tend to be isolated. To be there and have your voice and input, and be useful for others. That is just fantastic.
Expert by Experience

Key challenges The biggest challenges during the project were delivering the project within the timeframe and resource available. They also struggled with adapting project activity to fit within COVID-19 restrictions.

Key success factors

- ✓ Hiring an **in-house project manager** and **engaging the Experts by Experience group**. Both added valuable expertise to the process.
- ✓ **Positive relationship with Digital Partner**.

About Surviving Economic Abuse

Surviving Economic Abuse is the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse and transforming responses to it.

Outcomes

- **Increased digital skills and confidence** in the project team and more widely at Surviving Economic Abuse.
- This project occurred at the same time as Surviving Economic Abuse was re-developing its website, so they used this opportunity to **feed in learning to enhance the accessibility of their website**.
- The **tool has been completed** and elements of it have been shared and well received by survivors.
- The user testing processes led to **increased knowledge and awareness in the team of the language, tone and images that resonate with survivors of different backgrounds**. This learning was incorporated into the tool as well as the wider work of the charity.

[The digital partner's] recognition of this area, safety considerations, thoughtfulness of how they approached the brief, ongoing constructive relationship where they were prepared to listen, be aware of language and nuances [was very helpful].
Project team member



Tech vs Abuse supported UK charities to build capacity in digital, develop creative tech solutions for people affected by abuse and improve services.

This case study was developed by Renaisi, in consultation with Surviving Economic Abuse, in February 2021.



Case Study Tech vs Abuse



With Tech vs Abuse support...

Circles South East wanted to develop a tool for people engaged in the Circles programme to be able to access to real time support in between their regular group meetings. They:

- **Conducted user research** with support from their mentor from CAST.
- **Engaged a digital agency to create a product.** In this process, they distilled the key aim of the project to focus on creating a messaging platform.

The data that has come back shows it [the tool] has changed the nature of users' ability to be in contact with each other.
Project team member

It has impacted other things we are doing in the charity...I learnt to say that if it is not fit for purpose, we need to scrap it and start again.
Project team member

About Circles South East

Circles South East aims to reduce the instances of sexual abuse by working with perpetrators of abuse and to assist those impacted by sexual abuse in their recovery.

Outcomes

- **Increased digital skills and confidence** in the project team and more widely at Circles South East.
- The team now has **access to ongoing external digital support** from their digital partner.
- **Service user engagement** has helped Circles South East to **challenge some of their assumptions about service users' needs.** They have taken this learning into their work.
- Early feedback from the pilot suggests that the tool is **enabling increased access to support for service users.**

Key challenges In the early stages of the project, the Circles South East team had unrealistic expectations of how much they could achieve with the grant compared to the actual cost of engaging a digital agency.

Key success factors

- ✓ **Using an existing platform.** This helped to minimise costs of the project, maximise efficiency and produce a tool that met the needs of the charity.
- ✓ **Positive relationship with Digital Partner** has led to a longer-term consultancy relationship with the charity.

I was a bit frustrated that Comic Relief had not come back and said you will never do that for £6k, but it was actually really helpful to learn it ourselves.

Project team member

They wanted to build their own chat service so that users could chat in a specific way – like Slack, but a custom one. They did not realise there were some solutions already.

Digital partner



Tech vs Abuse supported UK charities to build capacity in digital, develop creative tech solutions for people affected by abuse and improve services.

This case study was developed by Renaisi, in consultation with Circles South East, in February 2021.

