



MAKING IMPACT MATTER

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DIALLING UP DIGITAL: THE NEXT LEVEL

LEARNING FROM THE MINISTRY
OF JUSTICE SPECIALIST FUND

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We, at Making Impact Matter, are so grateful to all twenty-three funded partners who, took the time to tell us their stories, and explain what they need. We also want to thank DOT PROJECT and the Comic Relief programme team for giving us their time, their valuable insights, and their encouragement.

Making impact matter (MIM) is a UK based, monitoring and evaluation consultancy committed to partnering with the charity sector to create a world of social innovation. We help organisations value their programmes, their outcomes and their impact. This supports sustainable, long-term, strategic growth and social change. Dedicated to making a difference that matters, we support our clients to innovate, to learn and to thrive.

Our goal is to 'increase the impact, the value and the influence of the community sector'. Impact. We get it.

**If you would like to make impact matter with us,
we would love to hear from you.**

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

We want you to be able to read and understand this report as clearly as possible. Here are some key terms we use throughout the report, and our understanding of them.



Funded Partner

A specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisation in England or Wales which is led by/with and for communities facing racial inequality, disabled people or LGBTQ+ communities and are supported by the Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund



'By/with and for' organisation:

An organisation meeting Comic Relief's eligibility criteria in section 4 of applicant guidance that 'promotes the rights of survivors/victims who experience additional injustice, due to being from communities facing racial inequality, disabled people and/or LGBTQ+' as their primary mission.



DOT PROJECT

The expert technical partner supporting funded partners to work through a structured support programme. Did we agree on 'digital support partner'? Or at least I think this description needs 'digital' in it (i.e. they weren't offering wider organisational capacity building support)



Domestic abuse

We use Women's Aid definition of domestic abuse as 'an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer.



Digital capability

Digital capability is the term we use to describe the skills and attitudes that individuals and organisations need if they are to thrive in today's world.

Making Impact Matter — Dialling up digital: The next level

Executive summary

The Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund programme

The *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, delivered by Comic Relief in partnership with the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, invested in twenty-three specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations across England and Wales who are led 'by/with and for' communities facing racial inequality, disabled people or LGBTQ+ communities.

Launched in June 2021, twenty-three organisations, at different stages of digital capability and readiness, received funding of between £20,000 and £120,000 between October 2021 and March 2022. In addition to the funding provided, funded partners were also supported by DOT PROJECT, an expert technical partner, to work through a structured support programme. The programme worked towards increasing organisations' digital capability and infrastructure; and strengthening prospects for future funding.

The evaluation investigated the impact of the funding for funded partners, the value of different aspects of the funding model, its implication for funders, and the opportunities and

challenges of digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector.

Key findings

1. What this funding enabled for funded partners

Overall, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* was a successful experience for funded partners because the funders got so many things right.

In particular:

- The accessible application process, tailored support and the phased structure of the funding model worked well overall for this cohort.
- The scoping phase enabled funded partners to adapt projects and budgets in light of evolving understanding of their digital needs and priorities, plus a huge amount of valuable learning and planning.
- Funded partners experienced the technical expertise and support from DOT PROJECT as a welcome, unique and hugely valuable element overall, in particular for better understanding, budgeting for and prioritising their technological and digital needs.

In the short term:

- The cohort invested in and developed an even greater number and wider range of digital products and services (60 digital products/services and over 240 pieces of hardware) than initially envisaged at the application stage.
- All funded partners reported development in organisational digital capability, with the biggest shifts reported by organisations at the beginning and emerging stages of their digital journey.
- Some funded partners reported organisational culture shifts, change management learning, increased staff ownership and engagement, and an emerging 'bigger picture' view of digital development by the end of the six months.

In the medium term:

- Most funded partners were confident that their investment in technology/digital services would streamline work processes and increase time/resources available for service delivery.

In the longer term:

- Many funded partners were planning their next developments as a result of having embedded core digital services during the programme.

Our findings conclude that, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, delivered by Comic Relief, **enabled all funded partners to increase their digital capability and infrastructure**, and many funded partners felt confident that their investment in digital capability and infrastructure would enable them to develop and/or expand their services for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

2. The value of this flexible, needs-led funding model

Overall, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, was a successful funding model for funded partners because the funders got so many things right; and recognise that there is always room for improvement.

In particular:

- The flexibility in terms of evolving budgets and addressing funded partner-defined priorities proved to be useful and empowering, particularly for organisations nearer the beginning of their digital journey.
- The focus on core digital funding proved to be unique and very valuable for this fund's 'by/with and for' domestic abuse and sexual violence sector funded partners.

- Funded partners need more time to make the most of investments and be successful in digital capability building.

Our findings conclude that, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, was a **unique and exceptionally valuable funding model that was flexible to this fund's 'by/with and for' domestic abuse and sexual violence sector funded partners' needs** and, the learning from this evaluation will support future iterations to be even more valuable.

3. The opportunities and challenges of digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector

Overall, funded partners' experience of the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* has highlighted **key learning on the opportunities and challenges of digital** in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector and how funders can continue to support smaller, specialist organisations to build digital infrastructure.

In particular:

- **Domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations are well aware of the potential opportunities and challenges of digital for their sector**, including the efficiencies that digital can bring and the potential to develop social tech

products to safely support service users remotely. Funders have the opportunity to have great impact here through appropriate investment and support.

- **Developing a more nuanced approach to support depending on starting digital capabilities may lead to a more positive experience for future funding iterations and could help make the most of limited time and resources.** This could be achieved using a simple and proportionate digital capability tool, as well as expert digital support, before or during application.
- **Developing digital infrastructure has the potential to free up staff time for more frontline work,** increase accessibility and extend reach to support more people experiencing abuse. In addition, it can foster autonomy of marginalised users to support their engagement.
- **Digital capability and infrastructure need long-term support and financial investment to develop sustainably.** Funders can support this through proportionate, flexible, and most importantly longer-term investments that offer organisations the support they need to develop sustainable digital-capability-building projects.
- **Specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations need improved consideration and support** to maximise their involvement and outcomes in

digital capability programmes. Funders need to recognise the impacts that digital skills gaps and accessibility issues have on smaller, specialist organisations abilities to apply, engage and learn from programmes.

Our findings conclude that there are significant opportunities and challenges in continuing to invest in digital capability in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector. This learning can support and inform the development of similar funding programmes and the role that funders can play in continuing this digital capability journey.

Recommendations for the development of similar funding programmes

Our learning provides the following recommendations:

Provide longer-term support and funding for specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations digital capability building projects, particularly for those at the early stages of development. Digital capability building takes a long time, and specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations need even longer to get it right because their valuable capability is focused on supporting survivors and victims of abuse.

Ensure applicants and funded partners are aware of the support available from the start and throughout the programme, particularly for those with increased accessibility and language needs.

Continue to offer flexible, needs-led funding models, with embedded training and ensure capability building support from expert technical partners is bespoke to make the most of funded partners time and resources.

Provide proportionate and appropriate programmes of investment and support for specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations that include people who understand the context and challenges of working in their sector, with their communities.

Consider providing applicants and funded partners with a guide or case studies covering expected outcomes, or key considerations before designing their project.

Review sustainability plans of digital projects after the funding programme, including the ability to 'front end' annual subscription costs and the opportunities for shared products and learning as well as opportunities for continued funding for digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector.

Conclusion

Overall, the funding model was valuable and a worthwhile investment programme for the funded partners, but it was not without challenges.

Specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations are experts in their communities, but they are chronically under-resourced, over-stretched and under-funded. Developing their digital capability will help reduce their time away from the frontline, increase their reach and strengthen the support they offer to survivors and victims of abuse.

Investing in digital development in the long term will increase the capability, resilience and influence of specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations so that a greater number of survivors and victims of abuse receive the support they need.

Introduction

The Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund programme

The *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* was a six-month programme designed to provide specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations in England and Wales with funding and bespoke capability building support to improve digital and remote capability and infrastructure, with the purpose of supporting funded partners to provide continuity in support and enhance future sustainability.

In 2021, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, delivered by Comic Relief in partnership with the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, invested in twenty-three organisations who are led 'by/with and for' communities facing racial inequality, disabled people or LGBTQ+ communities. This was part of a £40 million funding boost announced by the Ministry of Justice in February 2021, for specialist support services to support survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

¹ Please see Annex C for a full breakdown of the organisations being funded.

The programme received fifty-five proposals, **twenty-three organisations**¹ were selected to participate in the programme. Each organisation received **funding of between £20,000 and £120,000** between October 2021 and March 2022. Supported by a technical partner (DOT PROJECT), organisations at different stages of digital capability and readiness worked through a structured support programme towards achieving the outcomes of the programme:

1. Increase organisations' digital capability
2. Strengthen prospects for future funding

Learning from funding previous digital research and grant programmes since 2016², has highlighted several challenges for developing digital services for those working in the domestic abuse sector, including the importance of up-to-date internal organisational digital infrastructure. While Comic Relief has a strong track record of funding service and product innovation, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* approach to invest in digital capability and infrastructure is a relatively new approach for Comic Relief.

Many specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations have limited opportunity to invest in their digital priorities. Digital infrastructure projects that can optimise and

² Snook, Chayn and SafeLives. Tech vs Abuse: Research findings (2017); SafeLives, Snook and Chayn. Tech vs Abuse: Design Challenges (2017); Think Social Tech, Snook and SafeLives. Tech vs Abuse: Research findings (2019); Tech vs Abuse 1.0 Tech vs Abuse 2.0

enhance service delivery often do not start or are not successful/sustainable because of limited confidence, limited skills, or insufficient funding. In recognition of this, and the programmes' capability building nature, the programme was led by funded partner's needs - **full project plans or budgets were not expected to be submitted at the application stage.** Instead, organisations were asked to focus on articulating their current service delivery challenges or **'pain points' that could be improved by digital infrastructure investment.**

In addition to articulating digital needs, funded partners were asked to demonstrate that their organisation operated **'by/with or for' domestic abuse and sexual violence survivors or victims who experience additional injustice, due to being from communities facing racial inequality, disabled people and/or LGBTQ+ as their primary mission.**

This approach was in recognition of the ways that these, often smaller more specialist organisations, have historically faced systemic injustice in funding processes, often competing against larger organisations and overlooked by funders³. In addition, specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations are best placed to support their communities but are often over-subscribed and historically underfunded. Covid-

³ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Fragile-funding-landscape-the-extent-of-local-authority-commissioning-in-the-domestic-abuse-refuge-sector-in-England-2020.pdf>

⁴ https://829ef90d-0745-49b2-b404-cbea85ffifteenfda.filesusr.com/ugd/f98049_a0f11db6395a48fbbac0e40da899dcb8.pdf

19 has exacerbated these issues⁴. The *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, is designed to help redress this imbalance and was a welcome approach by the sector.

Application process

Open between 22 June 2021 and 20th July 2021, applicants were asked to complete a short application form, which used language that was easy to understand due to the technical nature of the fund. Zoom Q&A sessions, along with personalised support via email, were offered to enable organisations to apply. All organisations were also asked to complete DOT PROJECT's 'Technology Discovery survey' at the assessment stage, in order to enable the DOT PROJECT team to match mentors for the cohort and ensure that their contact had the maximum value over the six month programme⁵. Initial assessments were completed by external assessors from Comic Relief's pool of assessors, before being reviewed by the assessment panel formed of Comic Relief, DOT PROJECT and the Ministry of Justice representatives.

The initial maximum budget available per applicant was £70,000. At assessment, the panel awarded each of the twenty-three funded partners a budget uplift of between 20-40% on

⁵ Due to the timeline, all 27 organisations at the assessment stage were asked to complete the survey. One did not complete the survey (organisation not funded) and three completed the survey, but were not recommended for funding.

their original request. Considering changes to the level of funding at assessment is standard grant making practice across Comic Relief. Budget uplifts were recommended to support full cost recovery in recognition of considerable uncertainty both in terms of funded partners' digital needs and the costs of potential solutions available to them, as well as the challenges ongoing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Programme structure

Supported by DOT PROJECT, organisations worked through a structured internal strengthening support programme split into two phases:

- **During the scoping phase (October – December 2021)**, DOT PROJECT worked with each organisation to prioritise their needs, explore appropriate solutions and create realistic implementation plans for cohort learning sessions on digital capability.
- **During the delivery phase (January – March 2022)**, DOT PROJECT provided mentoring and coaching to organisations to support the implementation of their digital solutions, as well as provide cohort learning sessions designed in response to common issues and

challenges funded partners were facing covering three topic areas.

Evaluation approach

In February 2022, Making Impact Matter (MiM) were commissioned to undertake a retrospective evaluation of the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* programme.

The evaluation aims to understand the role of digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector by exploring:

- the impact of the funding for funded partners,
- the value of different aspects of the funding model,
- The implications for funders.

The evaluation methodology⁶ included a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods:

1. **Secondary analysis** of available data, thematic mapping exercise related to key learning questions, and iterative refinement of learning questions based on available data throughout the project. Gap analysis of existing data to identify any additional data collection needed.
2. **Primary data collection** to fill gaps and deepen insight, with funded partner final debriefs (1.5 hours Zoom calls with

⁶ A more detailed evaluation methodology can be found in Appendix B

twenty-three funded partners) the introduction of the MiM Digital Capability Tool, 2 x 1-hour Zoom calls with Comic Relief team and DOT PROJECT.

3. **Creative stories of change** case studies and six filmed interviews (30-40mins from 5 funded partners and 1 DOT PROJECT), including most significant change (MSC), cohort-wide thematic storytelling and collation of key lessons learnt.

Digital capability implications

It became apparent early on in the evaluation process that the digital capability of funded partners varied across the programme. Initial data queries highlighted differences in funded partners' experience of the programme based on their digital capability at the start of the programme.

In order to analyse the differences fully we undertook the following process:

1. **Categorisation of digital capability** – using available programme data from funded partner applications and DOT PROJECT's 'technology discovery tool' the MiM team coded funded partner data into four categories of digital capability development.

These were:

- Beginning - little to no activity
 - Emerging - some activity
 - Developing - some success
 - Achieving - highly effective
2. **Funded partner digital capability self-assessment** – during debriefs fifteen funded partners were asked to complete a digital capability tool (DCT) and 100% of them returned the data for analysis. Results from this were cross-tabulated with our original assessments and adjusted accordingly.

About the Making Impact Matter Digital Capability Tool (DCT) pilot

MiM developed a pilot Digital Capability Tool (DCT)⁷ to measure progress through the programme. Making Impact Matter developed the DCT through an iterative process that combined insights from Burmann and Peter's 2019 '[Review and Comparative Analysis](#)' of Digital Transformation Maturity Models and Frameworks' with the categories of digital development and scoring process that [NCVO](#) uses for their [digital maturity matrix](#). To these we also brought insights about the sector-specific needs of domestic abuse and sexual violence

⁷ See appendix D for full digital capability tool guide.

organisations in relation to digital transformation, from having considered the emerging data from the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund 2022*, plus past Tech vs Abuse reports.

We progressively simplified the tool, before piloting a version with fifteen funded partners who voluntarily used the tool to assess and report on where they were before and after taking part in the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*. We introduced the tool to fifteen funded partners during debrief conversations during April 2022, and 100% returned the completed question sheet.

The DCT enables organisations to measure their digital capability across eight key areas:

- Leadership and Strategy
- Staff expertise and Capability
- Technology
- User Experience
- Content
- Communications
- Data and MEL (monitoring, evaluation and learning)
- Cyber-security

Calculating total scores for each of the eight areas of digital development enables the generation of an accessible visual snapshot of the organisation's digital development.

Three key statements have been formulated under each of these key areas. These statements combine insights about what digital development looks for all third sector organisations, with sector-specific insights that have emerged from several rounds of resourcing digital development within the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector.

Digital leads and managers were asked to consider each statement in turn before agreeing which of the following descriptors fits where the organisation is in relation to that statement. Each descriptor also correlates to a score from 0-3:

Beginning - no activity yet: 0

Emerging - some activity: 1

Developing - some success: 2

Achieving - highly effective: 3

By adding up the scores for each area, a total score is generated for that date or before/after moment for that area of Digital Capability. The scores are then transferred to a progression chart, which produces a visual image of the current level of digital development and/or distance travelled for each area.

This framework is used throughout the evaluation to explore the relationship between digital capability and programme experience and learning.

Learning-led approach

Comic Relief are a learning-led funder and try to create an environment in which funded partners feel able to test new ideas, make mistakes and learn through delivery and scoping. Through this programme, they promoted learning in several ways:

- 1. Supporting organisations to identify capability and digital infrastructure gaps.** The funding could be used flexibly and there was recognition that much of the impact of this programme is likely to come far beyond the funding period. Organisational learning for both funded partners and Comic Relief was prioritised, over trying to measure the impact of the funding at cohort, funded partner level or beneficiary level. Funded partners' reporting to Comic Relief centred on learning, scoping and testing –funded partners were not held to rigid targets, outputs or outcomes.
- 2. Funded partners were framed as the experts by experience.** It was recognised that funded partners know their work, their context and their target groups far better than the funder does. With that in mind, the learning was led by them, and this evaluation seeks to surface and synthesise key lessons and recommendations for future funding.
- 3. The programmatic learning and evaluation went beyond focusing solely on Comic Reliefs or funded partners' achievements, accountability, and impact.** Comic Relief truly want to promote learning internally, within and amongst funded partners and across spaces more widely. In recognition of the learning-led approach, this evaluation seeks to reflect on and learn from funded partners' experience and accomplishments, as well as Comic Relief's' own internal fund-making practices.

At a practical level, the learning presented here looks forward to what can be done differently in future – both in how and what is funded - rather than simply assessing whether something worked. Also, in order to be genuinely useful for key audiences our approach considered creative ways to tell stories of change through this programme and how the funded partners have been strengthened. We recommend this report is considered alongside the additional evaluation outputs created by Making Impact Matter, targeting two main audiences:

For specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations: tangible and long-lasting products sharing programme learning, including:

- **Case studies** – including illustrated quotes for use digitally and to share best practice telling stories of most significant change and learning for other organisations.
- **Learning visual infographic tool** - of main changes for smaller domestic abuse and sexual violence orgs.
- **Digital capability development measurement tool** - designed specifically for the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector with accompanying toolkit, guide and outcome graphic.

For funders: Products to advocate and influence future funding opportunities of this nature for the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector, including:

- **Audio-visual change stories** – six-twelve min audio-visual stories focused on individual funded partners and cohort-wide stories of change; one 2-3min social media friendly versions.
- **Policy brief** - synthesised learning and recommendations.

1. Delivering Digital:

Understanding the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* experience and impact for specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations

We wanted to understand how the programme was experienced by funded partners, to share learning with future specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations.

1.1 Programme experience

This section explores the programme experience for funded partners, from application to implementation, grant management and digital support package provided by DOT PROJECT.

1.1.1 Application (July-September 2021)

The application process was, for the majority, easy and accessible, with non-technical language and a short and concise form to complete. Funders said this was *“like night and day compared to the bureaucratic red tape of prior funding bids.”* In addition to being more accessible and proportionate, the

Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund was so different because it deferred funded partners project design and details until after the funding was awarded. This was a fundamental shift in Comic Relief's standard assessment process and enabled the programme to be led by, and be adaptable to, funded partner's own needs.

The external assessment call proved to be particularly valuable as it enabled constructive self-reflection and refinement of the organisation's digital needs. However, DOT PROJECT's 'Technology Discovery survey' and some of the technical language proved inaccessible and overly complex for smaller organisations in the earlier stages of digital development. It is worth noting that applicants were asked to complete the survey prior to knowing if they had been awarded funding – it may be worth considering introducing a shorter, more accessible digital capability measure at application stage and then a more in depth discovery post award.

In addition to the Zoom Q&A sessions with applicants, some funded partners had internal digital leads, or made use of prior relationships with external digital partners, and others felt they could reach out to the Comic Relief team directly to ask for clarity and support to complete the application. This was more common when they had a prior funded partner relationship with Comic Relief.

Also, those funded partners with prior experience of digital development funding had a better understanding of what could be achieved within the six-month programme timeframe, making them more realistic about how long development takes and how much to budget for each element. *"I was very careful from past experience, what we needed. Because if we fall short of resources we know that in a six months fund you could have problems."*

Many were motivated to apply to this fund by the COVID-19 pandemic having transformed the use and urgency for digital products and service delivery across the space. *"We suddenly became very big, very big, receiving big donations. This ticked every box. What was needed at that time. We needed to have a digitalised system that fitted what the organisation was about. We had to catch up to have that provision for our service users."*

1.1.2 Scoping (October – December 2021)

The overall experience of this phase of the programme was positive. Across the cohort, the clarity ensuing from receiving expert technical advice was experienced as valuable, as was having the time for more detailed planning, user consultation and roadmap development than previously experienced in digital projects. Several respondents described the additional planning time as having considerably improved the products/services in development and reduced the bumpiness

of their launch, as well as enabling their own confidence and readiness in relation to launching them. *"The workshops... provided us with a better understanding as to what was available to us and what we could actually do ourselves in terms of educating us as well..."* and what *"I found useful was the workshops with DOT because it obliged us to look at our processes, because there was an external body, asking us questions and making us reflect and think about our own gaps"*.

There was a definite capability issue across the cohort, with no time on top of day-to-day service delivery to attend and absorb the learning sessions. Some needed to employ new staff to cope with the increased workload. And although the whole cohort found the expert technical advice valuable, it was most useful for those beginning their digital capability building journey. Both those beginning and those emerging on their journeys felt they learned a lot in the short timeframe.

Emerging and developing groups found that it was good to attend the learning sessions with colleagues and to engage with the programme as a team, where possible. However, there was a considerable amount of learning to fit into the short three-month timescale. Added to the internal capability issues of running an organisation, this proved to be challenging for the majority of funded partners, which impacted their ability to get the most out of the available support.

In terms of suggested improvements there were requests for increased guidance on the content and purpose of the workshops and training in advance, so time/resource-stretched organisations knew who should attend, and which workshops would be most relevant to them. *"Would have been useful to know more about what would be provided in training. More clarity needed. Training itself was very useful nonetheless."*

1.1.3 Implementation (January-March 2022)

The experience of this phase was more intense than the scoping phase across the cohort. Whilst funded partners found the technical expertise and recommendations helpful, overall the timescale was too intensive for this phase of the programme and this made capability issues even more challenging for the cohort. Organisations reported that they were *"stretched, stressed"* and *"shattered"*.

It is worth noting that the timing of this phase may have added to the challenges, coming directly after the Christmas break, as well as January being well known as the busiest time of year for domestic abuse and sexual violence services due to increases in

incidents over the Christmas period⁸. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic resurged, adding to staff capability and service user demand.

However, even without this added pressure, three months to implement new digital technologies and infrastructure would never have been long enough, according to the technical experts who suggested *“twelve-eighteen months is recommended systems and new processes. Can get it [digital developments] initiated in 3 months.”* In addition to giving funded partners more time to plan, this additional time is needed as project lead in time for external suppliers and for agreeing legal decisions. In addition, demand for digital products and services increased during the pandemic and remains stretched, a longer timescale would have been more appropriate.

Despite the challenges, there were also many positive experiences during this time, particularly the support from DOT PROJECT in writing and developing specifications for external suppliers, and mediating between partners as needed, particularly in relation to agreements. In addition, funded partners continued to prioritise this programme and their digital development and the cohort **invested in and developed an even greater number and wider range of**

digital products and services (six digital products/services and over 240 pieces of hardware) than initially envisaged at the application stage. This is testament to the determination of these organisations, and to their recognition of the importance of digital development to their growth, their sustainability and their reach.

1.1.4 Extension (April-June 2022)

Although out of scope for this evaluation, in response to the ongoing technical support required by the cohort and as an example of the flexible nature of the funding model, **Comic Relief agreed to contribute £100,000 of unrestricted funding to extend DOT PROJECT’s support April - June 2022.** Funding is for an extension of DOT PROJECT support only, and funded partners have not received additional project funding. Extended DOT PROJECT support has been offered to twelve funded partners in the cohort who were particularly impacted by the timeframe, external supplier implementation delays and/or limited capability. DOT PROJECT support will include, but not be limited to, embedding changes as a result of the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* that will have significant value for the organisation and filling critical tech-related

⁸ [Domestic abuse services brace for surge in victims seeking help in first week of January | The Independent](#)

capability gaps in organisations. Funded partners shared their appreciation for *“doing a digital safeguarding course with Dot, the opportunities are continuing beyond the project... it’s not just ending sharply as some funding opps have.”*

1.1.4 Digital support

As outlined previously, on top of financial funding, each organisation was supported by the digital support partner - DOT PROJECT. This additional support was used to guide, support and facilitate improved knowledge and skills for funded partners. This support proved to be not only a vital part of the programme’s success, it was also incredibly valuable to the organisations involved. The overall experience of having this expert technical support was *“incredible”, “great”, “fantastic”* and *“can’t speak highly enough about DOT.”*

This is an important aspect to carry forward into future iterations, often funded partners referred to *“not knowing what they did not know”* within the digital tech space. The addition of an external, supportive digital expert was invaluable in guiding project recommendations and having the knowledge to fill in these gaps of what is possible for the cohort. *“One of the fundamentally important, and different aspects about this from the industry was the support we had in identifying what we needed.”*

Many funded partners appreciated the time DOT PROJECT took to understand their organisation. They valued an approach to support which allowed them to lead and to find their own solutions, which they found empowering, alongside appropriate scrutiny and challenge where needed. The coaching and learning input helped funded partners to think and see digital capability building, as well as often their own organisational infrastructure, in new ways.

For some funded partners, DOT PROJECT was the best part of the programme, which transformed their internal processes and in turn their delivery. For others, the flexibility of the support was the crucial part, ensuring that their time was used in the most efficient way. *“One of the values of having that technical partner is they can help you to see what you maybe don’t know is possible, because you don’t know enough about the kind of tech side of stuff”*

Some funded partners noted the different experience they had with DOT PROJECT than on previous digital programmes and how previous bad experiences affected their expectations, which were alleviated. *“So we are the best people and our service users are the best people and we didn’t want external people coming in and pulling it apart simply because it’s their role - they need to be up to listening to us as well.... DOT was very supportive. I felt they did actually sit and listen, allowing us to direct where we’re going ... Hasn’t always been the case with*

external tech partners and they've been a hindrance - been thrown off track before."

There were differences in the experience depending on the level of digital capability of the organisation and on whether they felt confident, or had the awareness to ask for more tailored support from DOT PROJECT. The achieving organisation quickly realised that the technical support and workshops on offer were not as relevant to their needs. They were able to ask for more specific leadership coaching for the CEO, who found this incredibly valuable and a beneficial use of her time.

However, the beginning and emerging groups, on occasion lacked the same level of confidence or knowledge to ask for more personalised support. Here there were reflections of feeling that there were too many meetings, and that although the support was useful it was too resource-intensive for them to access fully. There was a feeling that the support wasn't as 'needs-led' for grassroots organisations as other elements of the programme, and that perhaps there was a mismatch here with the approach to digital support. *"Meetings for meeting sake. The meetings were all the same. Needs to be more solution focused. E.g. there's a system called this that people use, this is what it does, try it. It was more information sharing. Wasn't 'needs led' enough. Felt like looking for something but didn't know what it was."*

Many reflected that once they understood, they prioritised the meetings and wished they had more time to work with DOT PROJECT and capitalise on their support further. For one funded partner their experience involved a process of trust building, respect and establishing areas of expertise. They felt there was *"over worry about whether we're able to do some things, so there was almost a sense that, you know, you not trusting us to understand what kind of approaches to undertake when we are consulting with our services"*

Funded partners really appreciated having DOT PROJECT technical experts during the programme: *"knowledge we've gained working with DOT was priceless and takes us forward"*. However, improvements could be made by ensuring the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector receives longer term technical expert support: *"support from DOT long term would have been really useful, powerful and less stressful"*.

Initially, funded partners were offered the same structured support programme, but in recognition that funded partners were at varying stages of digital capability and readiness at the start of the programme, DOT PROJECT recommended and was able to adapt the approach to match their varying needs. Funded partners appreciated this, and they wanted even more adaptability when it comes to support, especially taking into

account the different stages of digital development they were at.

1.1.5 Grant management

Overall the supportive grant management from Comic Relief was really appreciated across the cohort. *"the funding hasn't been pressured in terms of we haven't had that pressure where it feels like all Comic Relief is on our neck 24/7, what we got was we got the support, and we'll let you choose which support we felt would be best to work with."*

The Comic Relief internal team also valued the flexibility of the programme and the needs-led approach, enabling them to be more supportive and nuanced in their management of the grant and in funded partner relationships.

Many funded partners mentioned the fund manager by name, *"Abbie was really communicative and supportive, we want to convey that, with our thanks"*. The importance of this sense of trust and support across the whole cohort should not be underestimated, particularly for under-staffed and stretched funded partners who were undertaking massive organisational change.

The level that funded partners felt comfortable approaching Comic Relief staff varied across the cohort. Funded partners felt

very positive about previous funding relationships with Comic Relief, which motivated them to apply and to trust they could approach the team for application support.

For those new to Comic Relief, the supportive relationship that developed during the programme came as a surprise, *"different to other funders"*, and proved to be a most welcome and invaluable aspect of the funding model.

While the majority found the application process easy, for a few it was still too complex, this is where the supportive relationship made a massive difference to enabling smaller, specialist organisations to access the fund and apply. *"At first we ignored it [the application]. It looked very complex. The digital language. We thought we would give it a miss. We thought we were too small... the funding brief was inaccessible and complex- did not feel confident to apply at first. Struggled a lot with the language. We know what we need, what users need but language was a bit difficult... Abbie's support was invaluable- made it possible by dissecting funding into small understandable chunks- as a small charity needed a lead to identifying solutions."*

1.2 Programme impact

Our programme impact evaluation found that, whilst outcomes are not the focus of this learning report, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, delivered by Comic Relief, did achieve several

the outcomes articulated in the programme theory of change. Funded partners invested in and developed an even greater number and wider range of digital products and services than initially envisaged at the application stage.

In addition, the programme enabled all funded partners to increase their digital capability and infrastructure, and many funded partners felt confident that their investment in digital capability and infrastructure would enable them to develop and/or expand their services for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

1.2.1 Digital capability development

As outlined above and detailed in appendix D, MiM developed a pilot Digital Capability Tool (DCT) in order to measure progress through the programme.

As part of the evaluation we piloted a version of the DCT with fifteen funded partners who voluntarily used the tool to assess and report on where they were before and after taking part in the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*. We introduced the tool to fifteen funded partners during debrief conversations during April 2022, and 100% returned the completed question sheet.

The results of this pilot are presented here:

- At the start of the programme, in total **ten of the fifteen funded partners (67%) scored themselves in the**

beginning stage of their digital capability journey, meaning they were doing little to no digital activity across their organisations. **Five funded partners (33%) scored in the emerging stage**, meaning they had some digital activity across their organisation before the programme.

- After the programme **five funded partners (33%) scored themselves in the emerging stage** and **ten scored themselves in the developing stage**, meaning they are having some success in their digital activity across the organisation.
- In addition, **ten funded partners increased their digital capability by one stage** (5 from beginning to emerging; and 5 from emerging to developing), and the remaining **five funded partners increased their digital capability by two stages** throughout the programme - from beginning to developing.

Whilst pilot DCT results should be treated with caution, the data suggests that the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* was **successful in increasing funded partners digital capability**.

Figure 1: Funded Partner’s digital capability journey



Figure 1 is a distance travelled measure illustrating the fifteen funded partners’ combined organisational digital capability journey across all eight key areas.

Looking at this pilot data we can see that:

- **100% of funded partners reported development in organisational digital capability** during the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*.
- **Technology proved to be the area that grew the most across the cohort**, with Staff Expertise and Capability,

Leadership and Strategy around digital, and Content not far behind.

- **Those at the beginning or emerging stages of digital capability reported the highest overall change** (six funded partners all reporting a 30+ overall points increase). This was irrespective of organisation size, specialism and the budget received.
- **Six funded partners reported high levels of change** in relation to the parts of their proposals that were of **most importance to them** (as self-identified in the initial DOT PROJECT’s ‘Technology Discovery Survey’).

In addition, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* enabled funded partners to reflect on leadership during sessions provided by DOT PROJECT. Several funded partners felt affirmed and motivated to discover they were on the right track. Others acknowledged having the space *“to celebrate the wins.”* One funded partner reflected on their leadership journey *“leading a growing organisation on subject matter that can be traumatising, the leadership coaching helped me reflect on how well I’m doing, plus helped in the reframing of negative thought patterns and to think about ways to improve as a leader”*.

A number of funded partners experienced resistance to digital capability changes implemented across the organisation, particularly those at the beginning stages of development.

Ultimately this was overcome, with support from DOT PROJECT and increased knowledge and confidence, and increased time to work through these challenges would be welcomed. *"I didn't anticipate the levels I had to go to, to understand what we needed to do. Getting to terms with Zoom, understanding breakout rooms. We underestimated the resistance to using technology... We've experienced a lot of hostility. Challenging fitting to the time scales in the middle of the pandemic."*

In overcoming resistance to practical and cultural change within their organisations funded partners reflected on learning about the need to strengthen digital infrastructure, as the programme progressed, and they increasingly saw the benefits that change would bring in the longer term. *"We've learned through the programme just to be a bit more curious and a bit more open."*

Funded partners felt more able to adapt to emerging technologies. *"We had been saying for a while we needed to move to a cloud-based server but our IT staff were resistant for our organisation to move... and they finally recognised the value of cloud-based working."*

Many funded partners described experiencing a shift in their thinking and understanding of the foundational importance of digital systems, and the role they can play in transforming both internal operations and external service delivery. *"The CRM is integral to everyone's jobs, as a structural piece to change systems... As an organisation, we have a much better idea of the*

work we're doing...the project has provided us with more of a focus on the bigger picture."

Funded partners described how their confidence in their ability to understand and scope technological and digital needs grew after taking part in the programme. *"We now have confidence that we know what steps we need to take..."* A number of funded partners reflected on developing an established culture around embedding and managing changes needed to support digital working. *"This project has proven to be a tool for learning how we can manage change as a team. How we respond to challenges, and how we would do it again next time... reflecting on the culture of the organisation when big changes are taking place"*

Some of those organisations that were just beginning or emerging in terms of their digital development expressed surprise at this growing understanding. They felt that this change in organisational culture and engagement with digital during this programme was easily as valuable as the adoption of the new products and solutions themselves. They also grew in terms of their capability to adapt to emerging technologies. *"We had been saying for a while we needed to move to a cloud-based server but our IT staff were resistant for our organisation to move... and they finally recognised the value of cloud-based working." And 'We know what actions need to be done to ensure we get the best deal, particularly for our organisation and to protect the unique specification regarding our clients."*

Funded partners felt empowered, across a variety of roles, throughout the programme with increased understanding and ownership of their digital development needs. *“The programme has given the staff more confidence in their digital work.”* The benefits for funded partners spread to service delivery and to service users. Practical changes such as centralised information sharing and shared workspaces have streamlined collaboration and made remote working easier for staff teams at organisations that implemented them. *“This funding has empowered us to do things for ourselves, upgraded knowledge e.g. how to work smarter... this has saved time and upgraded staff skills in using cloud-based technology effectively.”*

Participation in the programme has allowed many organisations to move beyond fragmented and ad hoc digital development and gain clarity on what they are doing and how they can sustain it in the future. Several funded partners have been able to use this learning to develop digital strategies and governance alongside the services they are developing, some with the support of DOT PROJECT. The funded partners realise that as they grow and take up the opportunity to *“diversify and modernise”* that digital has presented to them *“they have more of a focus on the bigger picture”*.

⁹ The Theory of Change for this programme is available here, highlighting **short, mid and long-term outcomes** of the programme. [Theory of Change - Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund.pdf \(ctfassets.net\)](#)

Using the programme theory of change⁹, this section articulates what this funding has enabled for funded partners in brief.

1.2.2 Programme Outputs

The *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* aimed to increase the digital capability of specialist DA/SV organisations by:

Aim: Funding of up to £120,000 over six months for strengthening digital infrastructure.

Achieved: twenty-three organisations were selected to participate in the programme. Each organisation received funding of between £20,000 and £120,000 between October 2021 and March 2022.

Aim: Technical expertise, coaching and capability building support from a digital partner.

Achieved: DOT PROJECT delivered 2,000 hours of mentoring and coaching to organisations to support with implementation of their digital solutions, as well as cohort learning sessions on digital capability.

Aim: Adaptive application process, where applicants are not expected to submit fully refined project plans.

Achieved: Full project plans or budgets were not expected to be submitted at the application stage. Organisations were asked, instead to focus on articulating their service delivery challenges or 'pain points'. This was used to guide the support offered to each organisation to strengthen their digital infrastructure.

Aim: Phased programme, with the first phase focussing on scoping/prioritising needs and the second phase focussing on implementation.

Achieved: During the scoping phase, DOT PROJECT worked with each organisation to prioritise their needs, explore appropriate solutions and create realistic implementation plans. Supported by DOT PROJECT, organisations worked through a structured internal strengthening support programme.

Aim: Flexible funding mechanisms, which allow budgets to adapt to findings

Achieved: The programme structure was flexible, in recognition that organisations funded were at different stages of organisational digital capability and readiness. In some cases, scoping determined changes were needed to digital plans to ensure the right approach to the problems identified.

1.2.3 Programme outcomes

In the short term:

- The cohort invested in and developed an even greater number and wider range of digital products and services (60 digital products/services and over 240 pieces of hardware) than initially envisaged at the application stage.
- All funded partners reported development in organisational digital capability, with the biggest shifts reported by organisations at the beginning and emerging stages of their digital journey.
- Some funded partners reported organisational culture shifts, change management learning, increased staff ownership and engagement, and an emerging 'bigger picture' view of digital development by the end of the six months.

In the medium term:

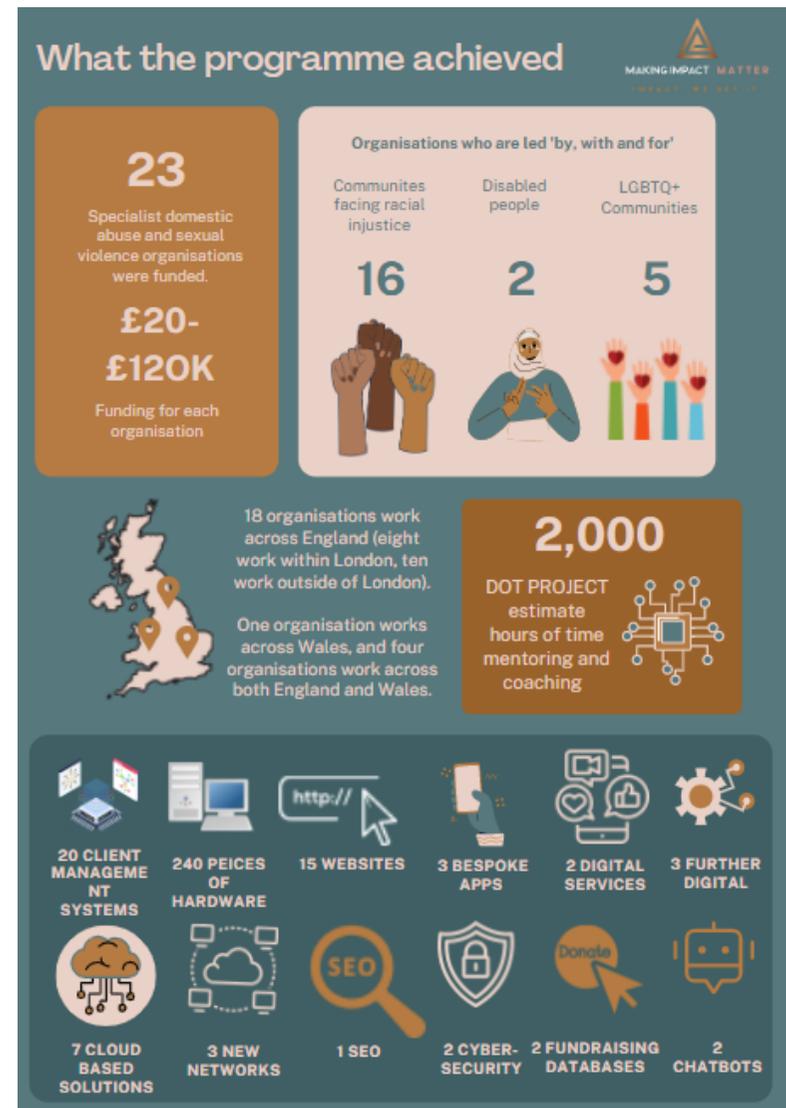
- Most funded partners were confident that their investment in technology/digital services would streamline work processes and increase time/resources available for service delivery.
- Many funded partners were planning their next developments as a result of having embedded core digital services during the programme.

- Funded partners increased their understanding of the opportunities for service delivery change and longer-term this will increase the capability of specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations to support a greater number of survivors, often excluded from mainstream domestic abuse and sexual violence services.

In the longer term:

- Funded partners were positive that in the longer term, practical impact of improved digital infrastructure will be rewarded by reductions to the administrative load, leaving staff with more time to focus on supporting survivors.

In addition, our findings suggest that the impact of improved digital infrastructure will have a positive impact on future funding prospects for specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations. Leading to their increased capability to support a greater number of survivors who are often excluded from mainstream domestic abuse and sexual violence services. Digital capability development will make specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations more resilient and help to enable them to sustain and grow in the long term. *"We now have a future proof infrastructure that is so agile and this gives us a platform for looking at other ways of working moving forward. We already have three potential future projects to elevate. We couldn't even consider doing that until this core platform was in place."*



KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* was a successful experience for funded partners because the funders got so many things right.

In particular:

- The accessible application process, tailored support and the phased structure of the funding model worked well overall for this cohort.
- The scoping phase enabled funded partners to adapt projects and budgets in light of evolving understanding of their digital needs and priorities, plus a huge amount of valuable learning and planning.
- Funded partners experienced the technical expertise and support from DOT PROJECT as a welcome, unique and hugely valuable element overall, in particular for better understanding, budgeting for and prioritising their technological and digital needs.

In the short term:

- The cohort invested in and developed an even greater number and wider range of digital products and services (60 digital products/services and over 240 pieces of hardware) than initially envisaged at the application stage.
- All funded partners reported development in organisational digital capability, with the biggest shifts reported by organisations at the beginning and emerging stages of their digital journey.
- Some funded partners reported organisational culture shifts, change management learning, increased staff ownership and engagement, and an emerging 'bigger picture' view of digital development by the end of the six months.

In the medium term:

- Most funded partners were confident that their investment in technology/digital services would streamline work processes and increase time/resources available for service delivery.

In the longer term:

- Many funded partners were planning their next developments as a result of having embedded core digital services during the programme.

Our findings conclude that, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, delivered by Comic Relief, **enabled all funded partners to increase their digital capability and infrastructure**, and many funded partners felt confident that their investment in digital capability and infrastructure would enable them to develop and/or expand their services for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

2. Funding Digital:

Understanding the value of the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* funding model for funders

This section examines the value of this type of flexible funding model, with a focus on learning, organisational strengthening and understanding need. As well as how this funding model can be improved to better resource digital capability development in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector.

2.1 What worked well

2.1.1 The funding model was needs-led from the start

To support digital capability development, the programme was led by the funded partners needs throughout. Instead of being asked to decide from the start what the money would be spent on, funded partners were given the opportunity to explore their digital 'pain points' – or 'the things that could be helped by investment in their digital infrastructure'. The things to take them to the next level.

This approach was completely different to other funding models and funded partners loved it! As they learned more about their digital needs throughout the programme, the

solutions they needed changed as well. They just wanted more time to work through these changes and get everyone on board.

As funders Comic Relief frame funded partners as experts by experience, recognising that funded partners know their work, their context and their target groups better than funders. This approach supported the agility of the model to adapt to funded partner-led changes and demonstrates the importance of establishing and building trust and good relationships between funders and funded partners. *"This has been the best funding process that I've ever been involved in... Been totally transformative for a small organisation like ourselves... to be trusted as an org is quite novel- raises your self-esteem as a founder and operations manager."*

A number of funded partners shared their appreciation for being able to include staff time and recruitment within the initial budget, noting that recognition of the stretched capability of smaller, specialist organisations is often missed within digital funding programmes. This enabled funded partners to recruit staff with digital capabilities to focus on the programme, and one funded partner was also *"enabled to increase hours for staff"* which provided additional support for the delivery of their project and to *"generate buy-in of staff"* within the organisation.

Meanwhile, under-investment within a sector experiencing growing need overall creates barriers to focusing on digital development: *"Funding, especially salaries is scarce... adding digital into the mix with staff who are already working at stretched capability because there's not enough money for full time salaries is a no go. Even just spending the energy writing an application for an expensive digital project when we didn't have salaries, that just wasn't going to happen"*. The needs-led approach enabled funded partners to allocate the budget to the areas they needed most, and they did.

2.1.2 The funding model was supportive of core digital funding needs

In addition to being needs-led, Comic Relief has learned from previous programmes that it's not enough to invest in digital products and services alone. In order to really make progress, and take organisations to the next level, there needs to be investment in developing digital capability and infrastructure as well.

This focus on digital core funding was an incredibly positive aspect of the funding model. *"This was our first time because most funders will not give you that specific digital, I mean, the most they would give you would be laptops, purchasing laptops, for the project, etc. But really providing this kind of in depth,*

which was not just the funding, but also the development support. That was phenomenal."

Digital development funding within the sector is scarce; *"lots of pilot funding, less ongoing,"* and funding for core digital infrastructure is even more unusual: *"funding is usually frontline oriented, we need ongoing software and hardware costs."* Without investment, organisations face ineffective service delivery or even closure: *"funding digital can improve service delivery, for example one partner without funding would have broken".*

For specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations, the chance to have core investment in digital development was an exceptional opportunity but it came with challenges. For example, one funded partner had never had funding over £10k before. They were over the moon, but also daunted at the prospect of spending £six0k within six months, however the support they received throughout enabled them to succeed. *"I don't think I could have done this without this funding, and without their support. All I know I couldn't, I couldn't have done it. Beyond my capability, and actually beyond any of the members of my team's capability to do that."*

This programme has enabled funded partners to get their foot in the door to core funding. For many this is the first type of flexible funding they have received therefore it is too early to

say for certain that this programme will enable sustainability of digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector. Funded partners recognised that they still have a long way to go but appreciated that this funding has kick-started their digital journey: *"we don't agree with 'digital transformation' as 'transformation' suggests it's finished and it never is. But looking at where we were two years ago until now, we are a different organisation, and a "digital journey' is closer to the reality".*

2.1.3 The funding model was flexible

The flexibility of the funding model was universally appreciated across the cohort. Funded partners valued the needs-led approach and being able to change the budget to meet their evolving priorities. They particularly welcomed the unique aspects of this model, including embedded expert technical support, uplift funding, and there being no outcomes requirement. This reduced the feeling of pressure, whilst providing greater flexibility as to what could be done.

There was some change in the digital solutions developed by funded partners over the course of the programme. In particular, more CMS/CRM systems, more website development and more services migrated to the Cloud than initially envisaged. DOT PROJECT technical experts stated that a majority of funded partners *"were really candid to say we know we need something but don't know what it is"*. This funding model was unique in giving funded partners freedom to

articulate their digital needs. However, there may be room for introducing technical support prior to funding being awarded process to support exploring the possibilities of digital solutions, particularly for funded partners at the start of their digital capability development.

The investment also needed to be flexible, to match the adaptability of the programme and the needs-led approach. And it was. Funded partners and the funders recognised that there was a lot of uncertainty at the start, on how much potential digital solutions would cost, and if these would change throughout the programme. The sector was also still battling with the challenges that COVID-19 was bringing, and no one really knew how long, or how much that would continue to cause an impact.

Not only were budgets large, at up to £70k per applicant, they were also given an uplift of 20-40% in recognition of the challenging unknowns being faced. In addition, DOT PROJECT, using their expert digital knowledge, supported funded partners to reallocate their original budgets once they had a clearer idea of the digital solutions they needed.

2.1.4 The short timescale enabled changes to be made swiftly, and the programme was prioritised

It is important to note that whilst the timescale remained intensive, a few funded partners also recognised the benefits of

this short programme and the urgency of implementing essential digital improvements. The shorter timescale helped organisations to focus on the digital projects, and enabled them to implement the work they needed quickly, the *"experience has been really really good for us as an organisation that previously didn't have a lot of thinking around the digital interventions and language... and milestones that had to be achieved in six months jumped us into action"*.

We discovered an overall urgency amongst funded partners around developing digitally. Many valued prioritising and investing time in digital development during the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, as they saw it as an investment in the future. Organisations are motivated to make the most of timely opportunities that can support them to digitalise. This is driven in response to pandemic restrictions and exploding need, but also by growing recognition of the value of digital solutions for the sector *"appreciate quick turnaround, needed tools yesterday... [but it is] not practical to juggle people's capability in 3 months."* And *'without a shadow of a doubt it's been worth it 100%. The short timeframe and intensity - is it better to get it done like that even though we would prefer it stretched out over a year... I don't think we would have our new system ready to roll out and we'd still be waiting.'*

And they said it was DOT PROJECT's support that meant they could do it in six months, by pulling them back to drill into essentials and get the foundations right. *"Wouldn't change it,*

would advise that this kind of funding comes with a health warning that it should be this challenging... It shouldn't be easy. Easy would mean we wouldn't have got as much out of it. Time has been an issue but every time we've attended another meeting or workshop it's been worth it. Has to have that core of challenge in it."

In addition, the achieving group and one developing organisation stated they found the timescale fine for them and managed to keep their projects on time and on budget. This suggests that having more experience of digital capability building at the start is an advantage in planning, scoping and implementing digital projects.

2.2 What can be improved

In order to support learning and improvement, this section outlines the most significant challenges of the funding model as experienced by the funded partners.

2.2.1 Support needs to be accessible to all

While many found the programme and support easy to understand and access, as outlined above, due to the specialist

¹⁰ Much guidance exists including the UK association for accessible formats, the RNIB produces a guide on accessible application forms for blind and partially sighted people, as

well as the Government's guidance on accessible communication formats for those with visual impairments, learning disabilities, hearing, and coordination difficulties.

make-up of the cohort there were some struggles for funded partners.

The organisations led 'by/with and for' Deaf and disabled people reported that those with learning difficulties struggled with the technical language and, for those with visual impairments the font size was too small and there was need for more accessible formats¹⁰.

The programme did include guidance from Comic Relief at the start, stating: *'We understand that many small, specialist organisations struggle to find the time and capability to explore the ways in which technology could enhance and improve their service capability and reach. We know that the language of tech can also feel confusing initially.'* Perhaps additional support for organisations led 'by/with and for' Deaf and disabled people could be made clearer by funders going forwards.

Extra consideration during the scoping phase was requested for older and non-technical attendees who may find it harder to adapt, learn and absorb the information being shared. *"Consideration should be given for people (older) who did not grow up in an IT era. It was fascinating but overwhelming. I'm very proud now of what I've learned during this time."* A longer timescale, coupled with a nuanced approach to support by digital capability level, may have enabled the additional support needed for those at the beginning of digital development.

well as the Government's guidance on accessible communication formats for those with visual impairments, learning disabilities, hearing, and coordination difficulties.

There were also significant additional needs for funded partners working with communities facing racial injustice, particularly those working with women with no recourse to public funds. This was about recognising the need for security, and time to build trust-based relationships. One funded partner asked *“How do we communicate to this org the lack of trust and fear the black and brown community have in using the technology? They thought going online would mean the system would find them – in light of this they may be deported, bank accounts attacked.”* This is a real issue for communities experiencing racial injustice and funding models need to be framed meaningfully to support and allay these legitimate fears.

In addition, the capability of these funded partners was impacted disproportionality by the pandemic making it harder for them to find the time to apply and take part in the programme. *“Timing was an issue to apply for this. We had a 400% increase in enquiries during COVID because we deal with black and brown referrals and there’s only 4 of us. So doing the application was hard.”*

There is a clear message that support that is reflective of the needs of specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations is needed. While this funding model went a long way to take account of these additional needs, there was a significant factor limiting the amount that could be done – that factor was time. The next sections address the impact the timescale had on programme experience and delivery.

2.2.2 A longer timescale is necessary

The six-month timescale was by far the most challenging aspect of this funding model. This was true for funded partners across the cohort, with the rigid timeline making it harder to achieve goals, understand digital needs, and implement digital transformations for all levels of digital capability. *“Time has been the biggest issue throughout. We knew it’d be a big job. We had some experience between us, but no - we were not prepared. Like having a child. We didn’t really know!”*

The short timeframe applied huge pressure for delivery to everyone involved in implementing digital development projects. This was further exacerbated by the surging Covid-19 rates across the UK which saw increasing demands for frontline services and high absenteeism. Across the board funded partners, technical experts, tech partners and software suppliers were working under *“unprecedented demand for services far beyond what they had anticipated”*. As a result of this, funded partners experienced delays *“to get the final contracts agreed and implemented”*. This impacted to some extent on the final products and services developed.

The timeframe was especially challenging for one funded partner who *“had to close the waiting list due to capability in the organisation”*, in order to *“juggle so many things at once”*

including finding specialists but also, making sure it's the right kind of support, understanding service user's needs, staff feedback all the while ensuring we spend the funding by March... and that was on top of everything that was happening to everybody in the organisation". Even though the funding allowed the cohort to develop their digital capabilities, the timeframe put an insurmountable amount of pressure, sometimes jeopardising service delivery and in order to manage the budgets and ensure partners were developing digital infrastructure that would add value to their organisation.

Having a less rigid timeline and increasing the timescale to 8-12 months was by far the most common recommendation from funded partners. Learning from previous iterations of longer Tech for Good and Tech vs Abuse programmes¹¹ recommended that the timescales should be extended beyond twelve months and DOT PROJECT's expert technical advice substantiates the need for a more realistic and achievable timeline of six months for scoping, and one to two years for implementation. However, there does need to be a balance between the urgency of need, and being realistic about the amount of time digital capability development takes.

¹¹ Snook, Chayn and SafeLives. Tech vs Abuse: Research findings (2017); SafeLives, Snook and Chayn. Tech vs Abuse: Design Challenges (2017); Think Social Tech, Snook and SafeLives. Tech vs Abuse: Research findings (2019); Tech vs Abuse 1.0 Tech vs Abuse 2.0

2.2.3 Time to learn and reflect is important

During the scoping phase here was a considerable amount of learning to fit into the short three-month timescale. There was a definite capability issue across the cohort, with many finding no time on top of day-to-day service delivery to attend and absorb the learning sessions. The cohort wanted more time to reflect on the learning and get the most out of the available support. *"Timing was very tight. Ideally would have liked longer to reflect and move things forward. To find the time/space to absorb and reflect on those."*

The amount of time it can take for digital learning to be implemented and become embedded can be considerable, which should be taken into account in future iterations of a similar funding programme. DOT PROJECT's recommendations included increasing this phase to six months, this may enable stretched funded partners to make the most of the support on offer.

2.2.4 More time for implementation is necessary

The timescale was too intensive for the implementation phase of the programme and this made capability issues even more challenging for the cohort. Organisations reported that they

were *'stretched, stressed'* and *'shattered'*. Funded partners found there was not enough time to implement the work they wanted to do. *"At this point to have something fully implemented and in three months, especially starting with the varying levels of digital literacy and trying to bring everybody along in that process who would be using these tools and platforms, to be really successful and to make sure they're sustainable, we need the time for the training we need the time for the buy in, which is a bit tricky I think in the time frame given."*

It is worth noting that the timing of this phase may have added to the challenges, coming directly after the Christmas break, as well as January being well known as the busiest time of year for domestic abuse and sexual violence services due to increases in incidents over the Christmas period¹². In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic resurged, adding to staff capability and service user demand.

However, even without this added pressure, three months to implement new digital technologies and infrastructure would never have been long enough, according to the technical experts who suggested allowing twelve-eighteen months for implementing new systems and processes. The felt that three months was only enough to get the process started.

¹² [Domestic abuse services brace for surge in victims seeking help in first week of January | The Independent](#)

In addition to giving funded partners more time to plan, this extra time is needed as project lead in time for external suppliers and for agreeing legal decisions. Furthermore, demand for digital products and services increased during the pandemic and remains stretched, which added to external capability barriers.

2.2.5 It takes time to build trusting relationships

Throughout the programme, an important challenge emerged around the time needed to build trust, understanding and shared language in new relationships. For a number of funded partners, particularly those at the beginning and emerging start of their journey, they felt they did not make the best use of the digital support on offer from the start due to not understanding the value, or the need for this input. DOT PROJECT echoed these concerns, reiterating the time it takes to build successful, trusting partnerships.

In addition to building relationships internally between funded partners and DOT PROJECT, there were some examples where funded partners prior external digital relationships caused conflicts of interest and tension during the programme. Ensuring that technical partners are involved earlier in the

programme could resolve some of these conflicts in further iterations of the model, as well as having longer to work through and unpick technical arrangements.

The addition of an external, supportive digital expert was invaluable in guiding project recommendations and having the knowledge to fill in these gaps of what is possible for the cohort. And ultimately, these issues were addressed and worked through successfully. However, a large portion of the support time was taken up in resolving these differences, and with the limited time available overall, this had a significant impact on the project. The learning from this experience is vital to understanding the amount of time investment it takes to develop digital capability, particularly for this sector.

2.2.6 Organisations need more time for recruitment and training of new staff

Some funded partners needed to employ new staff to cope with the programmes increased workload. Although there was budget set aside for recruiting new staff to support capability, it was difficult to recruit, train and support good staff within the short timescale.

In addition, staff in these organisations were struggling excessively due to the pressures of the pandemic and increased

demand for services. For organisations being led by, and for, at-risk disabled people and older people, increased vulnerabilities to the COVID-19 pandemic made this challenge even more intense. This is important learning to carry forward into future iterations.

2.3 Implications for Comic Relief's internal operating procedures

2.3.1 Internal operational processes need to develop to support flexible, needs-led programmes

Comic Relief are a learning-led funder and try to create an environment in which to test new ideas, make mistakes and learn through delivery and scoping. Through this programme, the programme team acknowledged learning around internal operational processes in the following ways:

1. **Internal structures need development to support flexibility in the grant making assessment stage** – funded partners were encouraged to apply for undefined budgets and projects, and Comic Relief tried to keep the application process as light touch as possible. The grant making stage focused on investing in the organisation as a whole, rather than at a purely project level. This is different from Comic Relief's standard funding process and, whilst the approach was welcomed, there is some way to go internally to operate

within this level of uncertainty when it comes to targets, outputs and outcomes. The programme team felt they could have been even more adaptable and flexible to funded partners needs if internal structures had allowed.

2. **Grant managers need enough capacity to provide appropriate and meaningful support** – smaller, specialist organisations across the cohort had a wide variety support needs. Comic Relief worked with funded partners to deepen understanding of, and skills in delivering, the requirements of applying for and reporting on UK Government funding (particularly funded partners new to Government funding). Comic Relief also recognises the wider organisational transformational changes that can result from digital capacity strengthening. For example, during the programme, it was identified that two funded partners would benefit from additional financial support. In order to meet these needs they were provided with support from an external financial consultant. The Comic Relief team recognise that having capacity to support funded partners in bespoke ways was key to the successful relationships and providing valuable support to funded partners.
3. **Throughout the investment life cycle, funders need to be flexible with funded partner’s budgets** - Comic Relief truly want to provide flexible funding, within this

programme and across their programmes more widely. To facilitate this Comic Relief’s internal funding structures, need to be supportive of agile budgets that can be allocated flexibly to funded partners as needs arise through the course of a programme. Grant managers suggested having a ‘pot’ of funding that could be allocated in this way, along with exploring more creative ways to better support funded partners with undefined budgets.

The programme team findings and experiences presented here are offered - both in how and what is needed internally – to support continual programmatic learning and development. In order to be genuinely useful for Comic Relief, and other funders, we recommend further exploration of the ways internal operational practices and infrastructures can be strengthened to promote flexible, needs-led funding for specialist organisations. We look forward to what can be done differently in future.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, was a successful funding model for funded partners because the funders got so many things right; and recognise that there is always room for improvement.

In particular:

- The flexibility in terms of evolving budgets and addressing funded partner-defined priorities proved to be useful and empowering, particularly for organisations nearer the beginning of their digital journey.
- The focus on core digital funding proved to be unique and very valuable for this fund's 'by/with and for' domestic abuse and sexual violence sector funded partners.
- Funded partners need more time to make the most of investments and be successful in digital capability building.

Our findings conclude that, *The Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*, was a **unique and exceptionally valuable funding model that was flexible to this fund's 'by/with and for' domestic abuse and sexual violence sector funded partners' needs** and, the learning from this evaluation will support future iterations to be even more valuable to specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations going forwards.

3. Dialling up digital:

Key learning from the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* for funders

This section explores key learning of the **opportunities and challenges of digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector**, as well as learning on **how the funding sector can support smaller, specialist organisations to build digital infrastructure**. The intention is to add to discussions around how digital development is resourced across the specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence sector.

3.1 Opportunities

3.1.1 Sharing the learning provides new efficiencies

Emerging and developing groups found that it was good to attend the learning sessions with colleagues and to engage with the programme as a team, where possible. This also helped increase internal efficiencies relaying information within the short timescale. The *"whole team came to meetings to reduce time to go back and explain to the team what's happening. Also a place for us to sit and reflect, which we don't often get to do - especially in a six-month contract. It was nice in the fast pace to*

use the time as a team to come back and reflect on what has been achieved so far."

The ability to involve people from across the organisation in the process, in particular survivors, with the design and testing of new digital infrastructures, was mentioned as being particularly positive for building buy-in and enhancing digital learning and wider cultural change. *"It's really, really nice to have service users involved. It's like giving them another platform to engage and they were really excited giving their input. That was a nice surprise element to what level they engaged and kept on moving that journey outside this project as well so it really empowered them."*

In addition, funded partners recognised the importance of sharing learning externally to strengthen their sector as a whole, and ultimately ensure that people experiencing abuse are supported effectively by whichever organisation is providing the support.

Funded partners were keen to pass on their learning from the programme to similar organisations in the sector. They wanted to know what digital solutions similar organisations were using. *"For the work to be bigger than us, we have to share with similar organisations from this sector on setting up a digital DA service"*

There are also valuable potentials for economies of scale through sharing learning and resources. As DOT PROJECT highlighted; *"half of the funded partners had designed something similar with the same digital provider,"* therefore having; *"one blueprint for organisations to start with and share learning so they don't start from scratch"* would be most beneficial.

Currently the sector is fragmented, as *"nobody is working together, so no one shares best practice"* and there are *"few opportunities to share information, expertise, learning and innovation"*. However, funded partners recognised an opportunity to bridge digital divides within the sector by *"bringing organisations together... national, grassroots etc. to collaborate and share the best tools and the best tech for good"*.

Funded partners also described how data collected and collated by organisations working in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector could be better shared to link up services and safeguard survivors, and also to streamline services. They highlighted the need for a sector-wide discussion to balance the need for information sharing systems that facilitate more seamless working, with safeguarding concerns and adhering to GDPR requirements. *"Across the UK there's no one single case management system, with data comparing experiences across the UK and outcomes and trends for victims' experiences of violence. A database needs to be set up so we can compare across organisations and areas."*

This shared learning would enable the sector to work more collaboratively to tackle abuse as *“perpetrators move across Boroughs, but often the data doesn’t. Police have a National Computer, this sector doesn’t. There’s a need for a wider conversation about GDPR and gatekeeping, about localities all working off different systems - would be refreshing to have spaces to explore ways to get on the same system so data requests could be made - and harness the momentum from conversations to make changes.”*

Within this programme the short time frame prohibited funded partners convening specifically to share learning with other specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations (though some connections were made and sharing enabled during opt-in learning workshops). *“We feel that it has been a learning process and feel that on this opportunity we haven't had organisations coming together and sharing their experience on how this has been and that is a critical part of learning. I think if Comic Relief was to form a programme in the future, coming together and having some sort of workshop and sharing our individual experience would be useful.”*

Collaborative working ensures an increment in knowledge and understanding of digital for the whole sector so they can *“scope and reach out or go to discuss all the things that we don’t know”*.

Funded partners believe *“It would be good if Comic Relief can set up a sort of consortium so that we can work together because we are based in different areas in the UK.... it would be great to share learning and work together to build up capability.”*

3.1.2 Investing in digital capability and investment increases organisational capacity

Specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations recognise the potential opportunities and challenges of digital for the abuse sector, including the efficiencies that digital can bring and the potential to develop social tech products to safely support service users remotely.

The way that domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations deliver services is changing at a rapid pace. Funded partners described using digital in a *“more holistic way to people coming in for support”*. There was consensus across the cohort that during the pandemic, the sector has *“switched outlook on engaging remotely with users, and that is not going back”*. A key goal for funded partners was to strengthen, improve and streamline their internal systems, with the aim of improving their capability for frontline service delivery.

For organisations aiming to reach more survivors, particularly those excluded from mainstream support, digital also offers

novel and accessible ways for survivors to engage. *"Using tech to streamline and develop more accessible services for clients; for example, our idea is everyone we see referred in takes a Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and 'Honour'-based violence Risk Indicator Checklist (DASH RIC) assessment... we could do this on tablets in spaces chosen by the client rather than online via Zoom/Teams and on Salesforce."*

Remote and digital engagement enables the sector to cast a wider net through survivors being able to access support from anywhere. *"Extending reach gives minority groups a platform and we can respond and access specific communities and have a national impact for all Tran's people."* Remote digital capability has given survivors and victims of abuse a *"sense of autonomy that comes with online work, tech is empowering if you can't turn up in person...we are abler to meet users where they are and to do more in parts of the community who may not usually engage ... we are abler to due to tech"*

Funded partners across the cohort recognised the importance of strengthening their data management and this was reflected in their investment¹³ in Case Management Systems (CMS) and Client Records Management (CRM) systems. Funded partners

reflected on having efficient new systems that were *'fit for purpose'*, and the benefits these would bring for internal processes, as well as staff time and ways of working going forwards. *"Having..., a new system that makes recording of work easier and allows reflection on practice in a sensible and understandable way. It's going to change the experience of frontline staff, managers and reporting to funders."* And the *"Potential in these systems to put complex information into the system and generate detailed reports. We save staff time and focus more on frontline service delivery"*

Funded partners recognised that technical roles widen the potential for digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector: *"...having a dedicated data manager - what a privilege to have that within our sector; someone with dedicated responsibility for data"*. Funded partners also recognised that *'data brings lots of opportunities'*. Examples included using CMS/CRMs to source potential partners and sector champions and to connect people, including survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence, in empowering ways and the *"Potential in these systems to put complex information into the system and generate detailed reports. We save staff time and focus more on frontline service delivery"*

¹³ 19 out of twenty-three = 83% of funded partners

As well as using CMS' to improve internal data management, funded partners increased their ability to demonstrate their impact with funders and were enthusiastic about the possibilities this brought for fundraising and reporting. *"We never had a CRM for donors... we are at the start of our fundraising journey, this will allow us to report and understand the fundraising. We now have a really good system set up to do that."*

Funded partners were positive that in the longer term, the practical impact of improved digital infrastructure will be rewarded by reductions to the administrative load, leaving staff with more time to focus on supporting survivors. *"The CRM system will pay big rewards by reducing the need for administrators and more time for staff to focus on delivering frontline services more."*

Meanwhile internal resources have also increased through developing manuals and guides which reduce human error, reducing the time staff spend on repetitive manual tasks, and through working more efficiently. *"Our emails don't fill up and we don't have to spend hours deleting emails to free up space-freeing hours to focus on service users."*

Funded partners across the cohort reported that service users will benefit from the digital developments supporting improved service delivery. One funded partner reflects on the impact of

their new Chatbot: *"moving from domestic abuse to a more holistic conversation about violence and abuse so service users are not pigeonholed into little things they have experienced...it creates more of a journey into [the] organisation... provides a buffer space for people not ready to talk to somebody until they are ready to go and access services."*

A number of funded partners invested in website development, recognising the importance for service users in terms of accessibility and security. *"We are able to use the website much more extensively than before. Looking at the safety of the website... DOT helped us with that. That's now updated and the website is a safe place."* These investments were, for many funded partners, absolutely vital to their organisational growth and development. *"It was a dream come true... we never ever imagined that we were actually going to get that money for a website. It just was a huge help, because it gave us all the possibility to implement all our ideas and ensure that we have the exact result that we were thinking of."*

3.2 Challenges

3.2.1 Digital capability and readiness impacts on the type and length of support needed

Whilst some of the funded partners had received prior funding for digital work, the overall majority were new to digital development. It is clear that funded partners who had previously received or invested in digital development were more able to foresee what was achievable within the six months' timescale and set themselves more realistic objectives within the programme time. They had more experience and greater awareness of both their own digital capabilities and capability, and the length of time needed to develop digital tech and infrastructures.

For the majority of the cohort their experience with, and readiness for, digital learning and development was far less advanced. The benefits for these funded partners with a full package of expert support, plus funding for time and the resources to develop their digital capability, were high. However, to get the most out of the benefits on offer, these funded partners needed a much longer timescale than the funding model enabled.

There were increased accessibility issues for those moving from paper-based to digital, and staff capability limited opportunities to attend and engage in support. There was also a lower baseline of digital skills amongst the smaller staff teams. *"Next time we've learned we'd like to get the organisation to a baseline in terms of digital literacy first, before getting the tech in place. Not everyone can just pick up the hardware and new ways of working."*

Funded partners described a sector which in general lacks *"know-how"* in terms of navigating the tech space, plus *"capability and attitudes to adopting digital are a challenge"*. Specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations focussed on frontline delivery tend to struggle with confidence with digital technologies and infrastructure. Meanwhile, senior managers across the cohort reflected that without expert support, they tend to focus on *"what they know"*, which limits their potential to develop digitally. One digital expert funded partner commented that in general *"charities don't understand what's feasible, they try to custom build things rather than buy off-the-shelf. There's a lot of bad tech advice about, and lots of wasted and unambitious proposals"*. Changing this dynamic requires; *"a lot of ... radical thinking, but we don't often have a lot of time to do that..."*

It is also important that funders recognise *"not everyone is tech savvy or feels confident using and being in the digital environment"*. Funding programmes can be designed to *"to properly train people so they are confident and know what they are doing,"* leading to reductions in *"fear of understanding tech and low confidence"*. domestic abuse and sexual violence leaders need to be supported to find time and space to develop technical knowledge and confidence and become the owners and drivers of digital capability building within the sector.

It was agreed across the cohort that funders have the opportunity to drive digital capability building by being specific and intentional about funding specific roles as; *"funding senior tech people in post [will] allow resilience and scalable services".* Investing in funded partners' internal knowledge and skills in this way, could *"shift the power"* imbalance between delivery organisations and the wider digital sector. For many funded partners there were significant learning and technical language barriers to overcome, often funded partners referred to *'not knowing what they did not know'* within the digital tech space. At times this power imbalance caused tensions that took time and sensitive support to work through.

Funded partners were clear that they are the experts in their sector and what they need are digital partners who understand, respect and trust their knowledge. *"domestic abuse and sexual violence is a specialist area, not everyone understands it including developers... it's important in this sector that those developers really understand this sector and can really make their case for that as well."* And *"We know our service users. We know how to support them. But in order to support them in the best way to use digital we needed people who understand that area, and who can guide us or advise us."*

They also know that they need experts when it comes to digital, but that guidance needs to be sensitive, respectful of each other's' strengths, and accessible. *"We are a small BAME charity*

with women fleeing from domestic abuse. Pitching the funding brief at that level would help. The language was very technical. Digital is a whole different thing for us. If you stated things clearly that would help. For example, 'this fund will help your service user involvement, it will enhance your email and IT systems'."

Funders have an important role to play when designing funding; *"to sit with DA services and find out what the priority is"*. This creates spaces and networks for organisations to partner with others in the sector, and increases knowledge of both the priorities in the sector and what funding opportunities are available. One funded partner pondered if *"Comic Relief could help to generate a central portal for survivors"* as a valuable resource for the sector.

Funded partners highlighted an interesting shift: *"from supplementary to statutory to central during the pandemic, in terms of getting the important messaging to communities. We now need to be listened to in return"*. This shift highlights the need for domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations who are experts on their communities to have a seat at the discussion table.

In addition, funders and organisations need to focus on digital development together with essential frontline service delivery.

There is a need to ensure that gaps between digital capability decrease, so that the efficiency benefits of technological advancement can be realised.

3.2.2 Managing digital risks are key concerns for domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations

For domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations the safety and security of survivors and victims of abuse is always a priority. With the emergence and increased reliance on technology this has become even more important within digital development. *“Tech abuse is one of the most serious things in the sector. From a digital perspective issues have increased – [victims are] tracked on gadgets, phones synced without knowledge, GPS, different types of tracking on social media.”*

Remote service provision offers more opportunities to connect with service users, but for domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations the digital challenge is *“how do we safely communicate with people needing support when communicating with them brings risk”* and; *“how do you ensure the safety of women when we have no choice but to work with women in their home?”*

For many funded partners, addressing safety concerns was at the forefront of their digital solutions to improve service

delivery for survivors. Funded partners expressed increased understanding of the gaps in their service delivery around the safety and wellbeing of survivors through the programme. They considered ways to safeguard survivors, acknowledging that perpetrators might be present when service users look for support and identified ways to circumvent possible safety concerns. *“We wanted to address the safety of the victims... there is an exit button on each page of the website... they just click that button, and then they're able to exit and the website will not be saved in the history.”*

It is also important that technologies and infrastructure designed and developed for the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector are trauma-informed, or there is a risk they feel *“quite tick boxy capturing the trauma, complexity, capturing the journey”*. Funders need to understand and recognise this need, and work with the sector to facilitate the most appropriate digital development processes.

There are also challenges around cybersecurity and a perception of increased risk for service users when services become cloud-based: *“hard files are under lock and key in the office. Going online there are challenges with risks of hacking, firewalls, and passwords can get compromised.”* Mitigating cybersecurity risks is crucial in a sector where potential breaches could be life-threatening. Moreover, organisations reducing their reliance on third party intervention in order to

"safeguard and increase understanding of how to mitigate cyber security risks" frees up resources and strengthens the sector. Funding programmes need to allow time for organisations to navigate these risks and ensure they are fully understood.

Funded partners viewed investment in education around safeguarding and cybersecurity in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector as vital for *"organisations to understand the digital world and how to help keep people safe."* Funded partners highlighted that through increased understanding of digital technologies and the risks inherent to using them, they were better able to inform service users to help them to remain safe as they engaged with technology at home and when accessing services.

The domestic abuse and sexual violence sector faces complex, multi-layered challenges in developing its digital capability. Funders must develop clear messaging around the benefits of digital development for enhancing frontline services. Despite the potential for digital to improve access, *"not everyone can access digital due to exclusion"*. This brings many challenges when service users: *"do not have devices and language. Most of our users are non-English speaking"*. The common experience shared by funded partners is that many service users do not have *"access to the digital world especially if they are living in poverty"*. The domestic abuse and sexual violence sector faces challenges to offering digital services as they *"don't want to*

isolate people who feel left out by the digital divide" and lack *"access and skill to even use it"*.

Funded partner highlight
Organisation Specialism: Racial Inequality

One of our programme aims was to extend the capacity of our app, to include with custom features such as creating a safe place to journal with a hidden vault to store memories and photos relating to domestic abuse.

During the programme, we carried out user research with survivors for our prototype, then we iteratively designed a new version of the wellbeing journal and released it for testing and learning before releasing the final version.

We received positive feedback from survivors who took part in the user research. One survivor said it's like having "a friend in your pocket... feeling of immediate connection with chat team at push of button"

3.3 Sustainability and the future of digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector

3.3.1 Digital capability and infrastructure need long-term support and financial investment to sustainably develop.

There is a strong desire for funded partners involved within this programme to continue their digital journeys and sustaining them through continued learning '*from new developments. Feel the fear and do it anyway, we will keep taking steps forward as change services*' as funded partners acknowledge the importance of continual learning to '*help shape our next steps*'.

Funded partners want, and need, this type of funding to continue as '*This is a sector that wants to give everything to service users but they do not have a lot of money or digital resources which are not cheap*' and '*This sector hasn't had core investment in building their digital infrastructure compared to mainstream organisations*'. Funded partners are aware that '*technology is always an area in the voluntary sector which requires updating and refreshing. We never seem to catch up with the latest technological developments, end up spending a lot more time on staff, doing things manually or doing things in*

a way that actually, their efficiency and productivity could be enhanced through technological changes and innovations.'

Additionally, funded partners urged that ongoing digital investment into the sector is needed at a critical level especially as '*there needs to be recognition that there's no alternative to investment in digital projects like this or change won't happen*' and the sector needs funding to maintain digital and ensure safety whilst using tech.

However, just because the programme has ended does not mean the journey has stopped and many funded partners plan to continue and develop their digital capability and training '*we plan to do a focus group after the launch to see if it's all ok. and training staff how to use the website, how to update, upload*'.

Funded partners are committed to sustaining their digital journey and the majority are applying for and securing longer term funding: '*looking for funding elsewhere and ensure management costs covered, subscriptions and upgrade fees*' whilst one of the funded partners has already had success with securing further funding as a result of the programme '*This funding has left us ready to show what we have developed and helped us get more*'.

Funded partners are more aware of the opportunities and challenges that come with digital and they have started to think of ways they can use this newfound knowledge as they continue embedding digital in their organisations for future sustainability. Some of the funded partners have developed digital strategies that are embedded to take them forward into their digital journey. One funded partner is *“committing to two staff members to keep up with evolving fast paced digital developments”* and some have embedded digital products so they can *“generate income”* to enable them to cover ongoing fees in the future.

One of the funded partners who started on the programme at an achieving level of their digital capability journey said *“digital is all we do. It’s already embedded.”* For them sustainability is an area they’re working on and they are looking at ways for *“income generation from corporates”*. They have embarked on business development as a priority during this year and during the funding period so they can build relationships to support them in the future of digital within the sector. They are looking for multi-year funding for core, like this programme but bigger. This will give them freedom to really expand their free resources, support the wider sector, and their influencing work.

Funded partners identified that Comic relief have an important

role in advocating for longer term investment into the sector which is historically underfunded and working at stretched capability, this makes it hard for the sector *“to turn down pots of money but if it’s not really what the sector needs there needs to be pushback.”* The domestic abuse and sexual violence sector could be transformed by receiving long term digital core costs funding.

Funded partners highlighted a need for investment into knowledge and skills within the sector: *“need a way to provide training for information and survivor security, simplified at different versions and levels. There’s a bottleneck in terms of finances for that. We need an option to design them at policy or government level so organisations can tap into expert knowledge and expertise. It’s about putting that into one package for the sector. It’s something for funders to look at and ring fence funds for DA providers”.*

Ongoing investment is also crucial because of the high turnover in the sector and rapidly developing digital solutions which the sector is unable to keep up with without investment. *“Things are always changing in small organisations and ongoing resourcing is invaluable... there’s always new workers, new people and new software”.*

Short term funding, albeit flexible, does not guarantee sustainability and the future of digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector. One funded partner stated *“it’s not ok for funders to give a short term chunk of investment without ongoing funding”*. Comic Relief grant managers realise the need to *“manage transition at the end of funding”* so that partners are not left *“on a cliff edge”*. To be in a position that they can offer longer term flexible funding to the sector, Comic Relief have organised and are facilitating a learning event ensuring *“key players”* from *“government departments, grant making organisations, trusts and foundations, or anyone intending to fund this type of digital work”* are all present. The hope is that this event will get the message to a wide network *“to ensure we are funding in a way that is valuable to the sector”*.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, funded partners’ experience of the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* has highlighted **key learning on the opportunities and challenges of digital** in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector and how the funding sector can continue to support smaller, specialist organisations to build digital infrastructure.

Funded partner highlight Organisation Specialism: LGBTQ+

We are a small, specialist DASV organisation providing support to the LGBTQ+ community. We faced a number of digital capability growth challenges during the programme. Our internal digital knowledge and understanding of tech is little to none: “people are focused and committed to doing the work, they don’t often come with digital backgrounds and confidence in that”. Our digital knowledge is very limited and “we only know what we know. We may not know what we need”.

The DASV sector has lots of smaller organisations with limited capacity so we “don’t have tech specialists or lots of admin or backroom support and we prioritise frontline work... organisations need space and time to do the cultural change before the tech change”. We know we find it hard to understand the possibilities of tech because of “a perception that tech and processes create barriers and aren’t trauma informed and doesn’t necessarily allow for the interpersonal stuff that’s so important within the sector”.

Leaders within DASV organisations decide if tech is prioritised and they don’t always have “the confidence... It’s hard to explain what it has been like leading an organisation in this sector over the past couple years... thoroughly exhausting.”

In particular:

- **Domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations are well aware of the potential opportunities and challenges of digital for the abuse sector**, including the efficiencies that digital can bring and the potential to develop social tech products to safely support service users remotely. Funders have the opportunity to have great impact here through appropriate investment and support.
- **Developing a more nuanced approach to support depending on starting digital capabilities may lead to a more positive experience for future funding iterations and could help make the most of limited time and resources.** This could be achieved by the use of an easy to use and proportionate digital capability tool, as well as technical support from the start of funding programmes.
- **Developing digital infrastructure has the potential to free up staff time for more frontline work**, increase accessibility and extend reach to support more people experiencing abuse. In addition, it can foster autonomy of marginalised users to support their engagement.
- **Digital capability and infrastructure need long-term support and financial investment to sustainably develop.** Funders have the opportunity to support this through proportionate, flexible, and most importantly

longer-term investments that offer organisations the support they need to develop realistic, sustainable digital capability building projects.

- **Specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations need improved consideration and support** to maximise their involvement and outcomes in digital capability programmes. Funders need to recognise the impacts that digital skills gaps and accessibility issues have on smaller, specialist organisations abilities to apply, engage and learn from programmes.

Our findings conclude that, there are significant opportunities and challenges to continuing to invest in digital capability in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector. This learning can support and inform the development of similar funding programmes and the role that funders can play in continuing this digital capability journey.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations for the development of similar funding programmes

Our learning provides the following recommendations:

Provide longer-term support and funding for specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations digital capability building projects, particularly for those at the early stages of development. Digital capability building takes a long time, and specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations need even longer to get it right because their limited capability is focused on supporting survivors and victims of abuse.

Ensure applicants and funded partners are aware of the support available from the start and throughout the programme, particularly on for those with increased accessibility and language needs.

Continue to offer flexible, needs-led funding models, with embedded training and ensure capability building support from expert technical partners is bespoke to make the most of funded partners time and resources.

Provide proportionate and appropriate programmes of investment and support for specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations that include people who understand the context and challenges of working in their sector, with their communities.

Consider providing applicants and funded partners with a guide or case studies covering expected outcomes, or key considerations before designing their project.

Review sustainability plans of digital projects after the funding programme, including the ability to 'front end' annual subscription costs and the opportunities for shared products and learning as well as opportunities for continued funding for digital in the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector.

Conclusion

Overall, the funding model was valuable and a worthwhile investment programme for the funded partners, but it was not without challenges.

Specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations are experts in their communities, but they are chronically under-resourced, over-stretched and under-funded. Developing their digital capability will help reduce their time away from the frontline, increase their reach and strengthen the support they offer to survivors and victims of abuse.

Investing in digital development in the long term will increase the capability, resilience and influence of specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations so that a greater number of survivors and victims of abuse receive the support they need.

Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation and learning framework

Learning questions	Aims	What do we want to find out?	Key areas to explore	Data Sources
<p>Theme 1: Understanding the value of this type of flexible funding model</p>	<p>Understanding the experience of funded partners with this early-stage, flexible, needs led funding model that focuses on organisational strengthening and understanding need.</p>	<p>Did this early-stage, problem-focused approach add value for funded partners?</p>	<p>Problem focused:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the approach help funded partners apply for the things they needed – their 'digital pain points'? <p>Flexible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the funding model enable funded partners to adapt to digital learning if necessary? <p>Early stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What stage of digital maturity were funded partners at when they applied? How did their digital readiness impact on their ability to apply, engage and learn from the programme? 	<p>Participant assessment (Applications; DOT PROJECT Survey; Interim reports; Dashboards; DOT PROJECT mentoring support reports)</p> <p>FP Debrief interviews</p> <p>Participant self-assessment on MiM Digital Development measure</p>
		<p>How did funded partners experience the funding, from application to implementation?</p>	<p>Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What led funded partners to apply to this fund? How accessible and helpful was the application process for this fund? What work did funded partners do in order to prepare for this fund? (Did they have external expert technical support? Did they have a digital lead internally? Have they been involved in previous tech for good/tech vs abuse programmes?) 	<p>Participant assessment (Applications; DOT PROJECT Survey; Interim reports; Dashboards;</p>

			<p>Design and scoping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the course models provided relevant, useful and helpful? How could this be improved for them? • How far did funded partners original needs change after the scoping process? • To what extent did funded partners value the learning focus of this programme? <p>Implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the successes and challenges for funded partners of the implementation phase? <p>Internal investment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was enough clarity provided at the start on how much time/resource would be needed to commit to the project? Was the amount of time/resource grantees ended up committed the right amount? • Was the amount of funding asked for in the application the right amount? • Did funded partners feel the amount of time/resources committed was equal to the amount of value they received from the programme in terms of money, support, organisational digital development and learning? • Did the amount of time/resources required surprise them? In what ways? <p>Technical support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did funded partners find the technical support relevant, useful and helpful? (During design phase, and implementation) • How could the technical support be improved? 	<p>mentoring support reports)</p> <p>FP Debrief interviews</p>
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			<p>Did this vary by ministry group specialist organisation or other demographics?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did experience and outcomes vary by sub group – racial inequality; LGBTQ+; disabled people To what extent did experience and outcomes vary by sub group – organisation size; location; digital readiness 	
		<p>What has this meant for internal funding mechanisms and resources to assess, select and support funded partners?</p>	<p>Internal experience with funding model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does this funding model compare to other models used by Comic Relief? How does it compare to previous Tech programmes? How did internal grant managers find the flexibility and problem focused approach of the funding model? (in terms of management, assessing, understanding needs, resources needed) How flexible was the funding to adapt to evolving understanding of funded partner needs? How were support needs understood and provided for by the technical partner? 	<p>Background research</p> <p>Funder interviews</p>
<p>Theme 2: Understanding what this funding has enabled for funded partners</p>	<p>Understanding the funded partner's experience of the programme, what they have learned about their digital needs and maturity, and the needs of the people they serve.</p>	<p>Did change happen in the way articulated in the programme Theory of Change?</p>	<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What changed for funded partners as a result of their participation in this programme? To what extent did these changes happen as expected? What were the most significant changes? (the biggest/least; the best/worst; most surprising/expected; most/least important) 	<p>FP Debrief interviews</p> <p>Most significant change synthesis workshop</p>
		<p>What has changed in organisational strengthening and digital maturity?</p>	<p>Organisational strength:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have funded partners learned about their organisation, their ways of working and the needs of the people they serve? What benefits/challenges did this programme bring to other areas of the organisation? 	<p>FP Debrief interviews</p> <p>Most significant change synthesis workshop</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which areas experienced the most significant changes? (the biggest/least; the best/worst; most surprising/expected; most/least important) <p>Digital Maturity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What stage of digital maturity were funded partners at one the programme ended? Which areas experienced the most significant changes? (the biggest/least; the best/worst; most surprising/expected; most/least important) 	Participant self-assessment on MiM Digital Capability measure
		What could be improved to better resource digital in the DA/SV sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What improvements could be made to the programme to better resource digital in the DA/SV sector? <p>Sustainability and the future:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is next for funded partner's digital development? (How do they plan to sustain and continue to fund changes made? Do they feel this is a place they need/want to continue to invest? Why and in what ways?) Do they need further funding to continue their digital development? What funding plans do they have? What do funded partners feel they need to succeed on this journey? 	Participant assessment (mentoring support reports) FP Debrief interviews
Theme 3: Understanding the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation in DA/SV sector	Understanding the significant opportunities and barriers that smaller, specialist DA/SV organisations currently face	Which are the significant opportunities and barriers to digital maturity in this sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do funded partners consider are the most significant opportunities and challenges for smaller third sector organisations building digital infrastructure? (the biggest/least; the best/worst; most surprising/expected; most/least important) In what ways do these affect smaller, third sector organisations' ability to build digital infrastructure? (including chronic underfunding) 	FP Debrief interviews Technical expert interviews
		How and which challenges can be addressed by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does focusing on digital capability begin to address some of these? In what ways did this programme address these challenges and present opportunities for digital capability? (convening, learning, influencing) 	FP Debrief interviews

	in developing their digital maturity.	digital capability development		Technical expert interviews
		To what extent do the ToC assumptions hold true?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent can we expect longer-term improvements to DA/SV services from programmes like this? (increased capability to support a greater number of survivors who are often excluded from mainstream DA/SV services) 	Findings synthesis

Appendix B: Methodology

Our approach

We proposed monitoring and evaluation approach was comprised of the following three elements:

1. Secondary analysis of available data, thematic mapping exercise related to key learning questions, and iterative refinement of learning questions based on available data throughout the project. Gap analysis of existing data to identify any additional data collection needed.
2. Primary data collection to fill gaps and deepen insight, including funded partner final debriefs (1.5-2hrs x twenty-three funded partners), potential focus groups or semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. In addition, potential repeat of DOT PROJECT's 'Technology Discovery Survey'.
3. Creative stories of change case studies and sixteen filmed interviews (30-40mins x 4 representatives from 4 funded partners), including most significant change (MSC), cohort-wide thematic storytelling and collate key lessons learnt.

We identified the following strands of research that could be applied to meet the aims and objectives of the evaluation. This was developed with the project team, to ensure it was appropriate to generate robust evidence about the experience of and value of this Comic Relief digital learning project.

Strand 1: Theory of change and digital audits

We designed a measurement framework using the programme theory of change and funded partners' initial digital audits. The framework was used to support data analysis at both project and programme level, with indicators that are relevant to the project. It was also used to facilitate additional primary data collection, using existing data wherever possible.

We recognised the challenges of attributing changes in social outcomes (such as ending gender based violence and abuse) to relatively short-term projects. We worked with the Comic Relief project team to finalise this as part of the key learning questions related to the Theory of Change.

Strand 2: Outcomes and learning

Our proposed approach to measurement did not seek to try to measure long-term impact directly, but instead to explain how the project will contribute to the longer-term outcomes. We

proposed the following methods to analyse the learning from this project.

Existing data analysis

We utilised the data already produced including the theory of change; funded partner applications interim reports; DOT PROJECT's technology survey and audits; dashboards; and mentoring support reports collected throughout the programme. Examples of the types of data that we analysed includes funded partner's initial support needs; organisational demographics; organisational experiences and stories of change; barriers to support and types of digital support received. Additional information recorded included the time spent with each organisation, types of digital transformations undertaken, as well as the challenges that digital capability has addressed and how.

For comparison purposes we collected data on funded partner's experiences with other funding mechanisms, previous non-flexible funding and support received. Recording negative experiences where examples of rigid funding mechanisms have hampered or stalled capability building and details of the

¹⁴ [1]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/3371673twenty-three_Action_Fields_of_Digital_Transformation_-_A_Review_and_Comparative_Analysis_of_Digital_Transformation_Maturity_Models_and_Frameworks

challenges were also deemed to be interesting if achievable within the scope of this evaluation.

Funder partner final debriefs

To provide more insight into the experiences of organisations through this programme, we hosted and led the funded partner final debriefs each lasting 1.5 hours. Data from this was collected in the form of qualitative thematic analysis and case studies. We hosted discussions on the subject of the three learning questions, the programme process and expected outcomes contained within the programme theory of change and how the support can develop going forwards.

MiM 'Digital Capability Tool'

In addition to the data captured above, we developed and utilised a bespoke digital distance travelled measurement tool to understand more about the funded partner's digital readiness and infrastructure. The digital capability tool (DCT) has been developed based on Buman and Peter's Digital Transformation Framework¹⁴ and NCVO's Digital Maturity Matrix¹⁵, and enables organisations to assess their digital capability and infrastructure at the start of the project and after

¹⁵ https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/tools-resources/the-digital-maturity-matrix?gclid=CjwKCAiAvaGRBhBIEiwAiY-yMMxcgyPzhvlpF1JgrlqOsjlmqVMbXOF6WTc7GL-Y4xDyVM3aMnPZhoCrF0QAvD_BwE

the support has ended to understand more about their experience. This was completed at a time convenient for funded partners after introducing it during the final debriefs.

Strand 3: Most significant change assessment

Most significant change (MSC) approach involves capturing and analysing different accounts of change from the extremities of those with most to least, or more positive to least positive change, to determine what is most significant. MSC was deemed to be particularly helpful here to understand how change has happened (process and causal mechanisms) and in what contexts and situations this occurred. It was useful to support the development and testing of the programme's Theory of Change.

In line with MSC and learning led evaluation we sought to help Comic Relief understand:

- Organisational accounts of change and which accounts are significant to learn about the similarities and differences in what different organisations value within digital capability building, and this type of funding model.
- The values held by different organisations when it comes to digital infrastructure support.

- Any unintended consequences, both positive and negative.

MSC was to help different stakeholders involved in this evaluation to understand the different values that organisations have in terms of what success looks like for this programme. We also plan to use these stories in an audio-visual format to share EBE's journeys on the programme.

MSC Synthesis workshop – Tuesday 5th April 2.30-4pm

The MSC technique was used to frame a synthesis workshop with the Comic Relief programme team and representatives from DOT PROJECT project. During this workshop, we:

1. Reported back our research findings to the team.
2. Shared stories of the changes that happened, for different organisations, related to the three learning questions themes.
3. Determined the biggest and least amounts of change; the most positive and least; the most surprising and least to identify the most significant changes for this programme.
4. Created a story of the most significant changes experienced, to frame the audio-visual interviews, to give a learning journey of the programme as a whole.

Audio-visual change stories

In order to visually share the story of the most significant changes created by the project we filmed, edited and produced three short films, plus three social media appropriate trailers. Interviews were conducted with key individuals who told the stories in their own words, demonstrating the highs and lows of their experiences in the project and the learning that has been gained through this process. This cohort-wide thematic story-telling will be a shareable learning product that Comic Relief and Ministry of Justice can use to continue to create change in the funding sector after the programme itself has ended.

Strand 4: Synthesis of evidence, recommendations and lessons learnt

We utilised all of the evidence from the different strands to provide an overview of experiences of the funded partners and lessons learned around the process of the programme. This included reporting on the lessons learnt for partners, stakeholders (including the EBE individuals) and the funding and VAWG sectors in using relatively short-term funding to support digital capability building

Appendix C: Programme cohort

Organisation name	Specialism	Summary of problem to be addressed (from application)
Aanchal Women's Aid	Racial Inequality	<i>Increasing digital access to help for survivors of domestic abuse:</i> The organisation has clearly been on a very proactive journey through the pandemic. They will increase reach and access through a multilingual website functionality and developments to their existing mobile app.
Africa Advocacy Foundation	Racial Inequality	<i>Safe community hub:</i> The organisation is working with a community facing digital exclusion. They want to create a digital platform to enable the delivery of accessible, safe and secure VAWG services, including peer support, mentoring and group activities.
Bawso	Racial Inequality	<i>Providing services to victims of abuse through secure and safe digital platforms:</i> IT is hosted on a shared infrastructure which has a combination of performance, resilience, and security risks. Additionally, the website is unresponsive and outdated.
Chayn CIC	Racial Inequality	<i>Digital feminist infrastructure for deepening impact on abuse survivors:</i> Internal systems are not fit for purpose and core digital infrastructure is not reaching full potential. This is leading to the organisation facing restrictions in reach and efficiency.
Cohort 4	Disabled people	<i>Secure case management IT system:</i> The organisation has demonstrated a need for a secure, affordable case management system.
Diversity	Racial	<i>Digital diversity matters:</i> The organisation supports service users where English is not their

Matters North West	Inequality	first language, presenting barriers to access. They have identified a need to be able to better connect with their target audience through multilingual platforms. Issues with digital infrastructure are preventing remote working and there is a need to resolve issues with data storage of case management data.
FORWARD	Racial Inequality	<i>Strengthening digital capability & resilience:</i> The organisation transitioned from in-person support services and training to online delivery at pace, but with limited technical skills within the organisation. Staff and volunteers do not have access to the necessary equipment. Working remotely has impacted their ability to conduct outreach with their audiences in the community.
Galop	LGBTQ+	<i>Pride in insight - ensuring informed support for LGBT+ victims of abuse:</i> Service users face additional barriers to accessing help. A chatbot was created through previous Further enhancement is needed to extend referral pathways.
LGBT Foundation Ltd	LGBTQ+	<i>Domestic abuse support:</i> Through the pandemic the organisation has seen a 38% increase in referrals. The organisation continues to need improvement in digital capability. A growing team requires appropriate equipment and software licences. Service users do not all have the necessary access.
London Black Women's Project	Racial Inequality	<i>Black and minoritised women: Improving Lives through Technology:</i> Since lockdown, the organisation has implemented measures to improve digital capability by purchasing laptops and installing Wifi in refuges. However, the current digital infrastructure is limiting their digital ambitions.

Maa Shanti	Racial Inequality	<i>Digital inclusion:</i> The organisation does not have the digital/technology capability to grow their organisation and services to meet demand for supporting women.
Muslim Women's Network UK	Racial Inequality	<i>Improving data analysis, collection and storage:</i> Monitoring and reporting on case work is a lengthy process, with data requiring frequent cleansing. The organisation is not yet able to use this data to proactively identify trends to improve service delivery. Additionally, the organisation does not have secure storage solution for confidential HR documents and partner meeting notes.
PHOEBE	Racial Inequality	<i>Infrastructure development:</i> The organisation is predominantly a paper-based organisation, limiting the ability of staff and volunteers to work and deliver services remotely. Technology infrastructure is lacking (e.g. no CRM).
Roshni Birmingham	Racial Inequality	<i>Strengthening digital:</i> The current case management system does not have required functionality needed to support changes to service delivery since lockdown. Many service users are digitally excluded, with no access to equipment to engage with digital services. The pandemic has limited the ability of the organisation to conduct outreach in the community, particularly with schools and community centres.

Roshni Sheffield	Racial Inequality	<i>Digital support programme:</i> The organisation is limited by ability to analyse data effectively, leading to poor outcome reporting. The organisation is not enabled digitally, and old infrastructure needs replacing. The organisation's service users struggle with illiteracy and limited access to equipment to engage online.
Sistah Space	Racial Inequality	<i>Transitional Online Service to Independence:</i> The organisation's core service users are between 40 and 8six. Older service users are experiencing challenges in digital access, and a lack of trust in digital.
Somali Development Services	Racial Inequality	<i>Digital empowerment:</i> The organisation is experiencing increased demand from service users experiencing sexual abuse and domestic violence through the pandemic. The organisation is unable to provide faster support due to poor internal tech infrastructure to support their work. This is due to paper-based processes, reliance on spreadsheets, lack of appropriate devices for staff and service users.
Southall Black Sisters	Racial Inequality	<i>E-inclusion for equality - gender justice through digital advocacy and outreach:</i> The organisation is experiencing barriers to service delivery through the pandemic due to digital exclusion, lack of access and low digital skills of their service users. Alongside this, there is a lack of digital competencies within the organisation.

Stay Safe East	Disabled people	<i>Accessible website design and development:</i> Demands are increasing on their services. All staff are disabled people and have significant issues with internal infrastructure and inaccessible software. The website is twelve years old and lacks accessibility compliance which is preventing service users from accessing information and support.
Stonewall Housing Association	LGBTQ+	<i>Building digital capability:</i> The organisation has an out-of-date digital infrastructure, which is impacting the effectiveness and timeliness in delivery of their services. Existing platforms need enhancing and there are issues within information management. The website is difficult to maintain and not sufficiently supporting service users.
Switchboard	LGBTQ+	<i>LGBTQ domestic and sexual violence, a community of practice:</i> The organisation is launching a domestic abuse service and require support in embedding digital service delivery to ensure access and reach. As well as to make the necessary adjustments to their infrastructure to support this service.
The Emily Davison Centre	LGBTQ+	<i>Loving me! Transgender online support services for victims of domestic abuse:</i> Trans and non-binary communities are active online and there is currently a lack of digital reach for the organisation's services. The organisation will launch an online domestic abuse advice service for trans and non-binary communities.
The Halo Project	Racial Inequality	<i>Building links and bridges:</i> The organisation has resorted to paper-based data collection in some cases, due to the complexity of managing within their existing systems. Staff are at due to the inefficiencies of paper-based administration.

Appendix D: Digital Capability Tool (DCT)

Monitoring Digital Transformation of specialist DA/SV organisations in the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund* programme

Introduction

The Digital Capability Tool (DCT) has been developed by Making Impact Matter as a simple and effective way for domestic abuse and sexual violence (domestic abuse and sexual violence) sector organisations to assess their distance travelled towards 'digital capability'. It is also hoped that implementing a DCT during funded digital capability-building programmes will begin to build up an evidence base which clearly demonstrates the value of funding and support for cohorts of domestic abuse and sexual violence sector organisations.

Organisations can assess their own strengths and pain points, celebrate their achievements and identify areas that are most in need of further development. The Digital Capability Tool encourages domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations to embed a monitoring and evaluation process that is focused on digital transformation.

Benefits of the Digital Capability Tool:

- Enables senior managers and trustees to track and assess their organisation's progress towards digital capability;
- Enables senior managers and trustees to assess the effectiveness of digital development across their organisation;
- Helps digital leads to identify gaps and focus in on the areas of infrastructure that are most in need digital development;
- Helps senior managers and digital leads to strategically target time and resources on the areas of digital infrastructure that will be most effective for organisational development;
- Encourages digital development to become more coordinated across the organisation;
- Measures the total benefit of any digital capability building;
- Provides a strong evidence of what has been achieved with funding, so as to build a stronger case for further investment.
- Enables funders and tech experts to provide more tailored support to FPs;
- Provides a participatory approach for FPs to contribute to programme-wide evaluation of funded programmes;
- Enables funders to monitor cohort-wide change, cross-cohort variations and shifts in particular areas of digital capability by the end of programmes.

How does the Digital Capability Tool work?

The Digital Capability Tool has been developed specifically for the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector and can be used by funded partners in two ways:

- 1) To provide a before/after assessment for digital development during a funded programme, as during the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*;
- 2) As a standalone assessment providing a current snapshot of digital development, which can be repeated periodically.

The Digital Capability Tool enables organisations to measure how well they are doing across eight key areas:

- Leadership and Strategy
- Staff expertise and capability
- Technology
- User experience
- Content
- Communications
- Data and MEL (monitoring, evaluation and learning)
- Cyber-security

Calculating total scores for each of the eight areas of digital development enables the generation of an accessible visual snapshot of the organisation's digital development (see below).

Guidelines for using the Digital Capability Tool

Three key statements have been formulated under each of these key areas. These statements combine insights about what digital development looks for all third sector organisations, with sector-specific insights that have emerged from several rounds of resourcing digital development within the domestic abuse and sexual violence sector.

Digital leads and managers should consider each statement in turn before agreeing which of the following descriptors fits where the organisation is in relation to that statement. Each descriptor also correlates to a score from 0-3:

Beginning - no activity yet: 0

Emerging - some activity: 1

Developing - some success: 2

Achieving - highly effective: 3

By adding up the scores for each area, a total score is generated for that date or before/after moment for that area of Digital Capability. The scores are then transferred to a radial chart, which produces a visual image of the current level of digital development and/or distance travelled for each area. We suggest that teams also record internal discussion notes around each area and statement each time the tool is used, to document their learning and journey towards digital capability.

How did we develop and pilot the Digital Capability Tool?

Making Impact Matter developed the DCT through an iterative process that combined insights from Burmann and Peter's 2019 '[Review and Comparative Analysis](#) of Digital Transformation Maturity Models and Frameworks' with the categories of digital development and scoring process that NCVO uses for their [digital maturity matrix](#). To these we also brought insights about the sector-specific needs of domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations in relation to digital transformation, from having considered the emerging data from the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund 2022*, plus past Tech vs Abuse reports.

We progressively simplified the tool, before piloting a version with fifteen funded partners who voluntarily used the tool to assess and report on where they were before and after taking part in the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*. We introduced the tool to fifteen funded partners during debrief conversations during April 2022, and 100% returned the completed question sheet (see below).

What have we learned about the tool during the pilot?

The majority of organisations engaged fully with the process, suggesting the DCT is accessible and user-friendly. Several organisations told us that they welcomed the use of a simple sector-specific DCT - in particular to take an overview of areas of digital capability they needed to address, plus provide support for measuring their distance travelled in addressing them. One respondent requested that the question sheet included areas for detailed notes on learning around digital capability building, to support their internal process.

What have we learned about digital development during the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*?

Looking at the pilot data we can see that 100% of funded partners developed across all eight key areas of digital capability during the *Ministry of Justice Specialist Fund*. Technology proved to be the area that grew the most across the cohort, with Staff Expertise and Capability, Leadership and Strategy around digital, and Content not far behind. The six funded partners reporting the highest overall change (all reporting a 30+ overall points increase) were all organisations beginning or emerging on their digital transformation journey as the Fund commenced, irrespective of organisation size, specialism and the budget received. We also used the scores to confirm that these six FPs reported high levels of change in relation to the parts of their proposals that were of most importance to them (as self-identified in the initial DOT PROJECT survey).

Recommendations for Comic Relief / the Ministry of Justice and other domestic abuse and sexual violence sector funders

- Trial the DCT with the full cohort during the next digital development funded programme;
- Stipulate that FPs use the DCT before and after implementing their digital development projects to ensure consistent data collection;

- Use FP's scores from the start of funded programmes to help tailor support where appropriate;
- Ensure FPs understand there is no right or wrong level of development at any given juncture, and that scores may grow or recede as FPs better understand digital capability;
- Collate all DCT data from the start and end of funded programmes, in order to evidence the value and impact of digital capability-building programmes;
- Treat the statement questions and areas of digital capability as fluid and emergent as the sector develops, and continually return to them to reflect, adapt and add more questions, and more complex questions, over time.

If you have any questions about using the Digital Capability Tool, please contact:

Email: helloe@makingimpactmatter.org.uk



Areas of digital development

Funded Partner self-assessment

	Beginning – no activity yet	Emerging – some activity	Developing - some success	Achieving - highly effective
Example - statement		Before	After	
Leadership and strategy				
Digital development and technology are central to our organisational strategy				
Our organisation's leaders understand and champion the importance of digital and technology				
We can balance the need for digital development against our time and resource constraints				
Expertise and capability				
Our team of staff and volunteers have the digital skills and knowledge that they need				
We work well with technical partners and specialists to grow our digital skills and services				
We bridge unequal access to digital skills and technology for our service users, staff and volunteers				
Technology				
The technology we have helps us work remotely and to provide remote services				
We understand and budget for the ongoing costs of maintaining and updating our technology				
We write clear briefs detailing our needs to help us choose technologies and suppliers that best fit				

User experience				
We conduct user research to ensure our digital services meet users' diverse, and changing, needs				
We continually assess risks for service users accessing our services, and adapt them for safety				
We ensure users have an easy, seamless experience of our digital services when they need them				
Content				
We organise and structure our online content by understanding how users search for and access it				
We regularly review how well our content is performing and have processes for updating it				
We continually assess and improve the accessibility of our content for diverse audiences				
Communications				
We understand how service users want to interact with us and each other				
We tailor digital communications to our audience, making sure they are relevant and beneficial				
We measure and evaluate how our digital communications perform, to improve our future work				
Data and MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning)				
We have a clear, measurable plan for how we gather and use data to improve our work				
We have streamlined digital case management and monitoring systems (CMS / CRM) in place				
Data is easily and safely available to the right people				

Cyber-security				
Leaders understand cybersecurity and take ownership of managing the risks				
Our delivery team and volunteers understand their responsibilities for keeping data secure				
We have clear plans in place to respond to cyber-security breaches				
Your name:				
Role:				
Organisation name:				
Date:				

The Digital Capacity Tool - visual diagram





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