

Former child refugee helps connect digitally excluded elderly, refugees and homeless in Lockdown through free laptops

Initiative receives backing from charities, including Age UK, British Red Cross and Centrepont, and business leaders

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Former refugee Peter Paduh, whose life was transformed when he received a free computer as a child, has been helping hundreds of people stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Laptops for the Homeless and Elderly Initiative has seen 1,000 people receive a free laptop or tablet since its launch, as Peter Paduh's social enterprise SocialBox.Biz has been working with charities to serve those in need. Charities include Age UK London, the British Red Cross, The Passage, C4WS and Centrepont.

SocialBox.Biz founder Peter Paduh, who now lives in London, said: "I was there once, as a refugee from the Balkans in England, with no way to contact people or even speak the language. I want to help people who have nothing by providing them with access to the internet. That way, they can contact relatives, register for apartments, and even apply for jobs."

As the UK heads into a second nationwide lockdown, SocialBox.Biz and the charities involved are calling on more companies and individuals to step up and start donating their old unused technology.



The lockdown has highlighted the issue of digital exclusion more than ever, as the country has relied on technology to stay connected with loved ones, and the vulnerable ordered food and medication online.

Certain groups of people, such as the elderly, the homeless and refugees, do not have readily available access to technology though. For example, according to Age UK, more than half (51%) of digitally excluded people are over the age of 65.

Emma Blair, Senior Bursary Coordinator, CentrepoinT said: "Many of the homeless young people CentrepoinT support rely on visiting their place of education to gain access to technology and complete their work. That's not been possible for a lot of this year, as lockdowns and social distancing laws have meant they have been unable to attend college or university.

"We are so grateful to Peter and SocialBox.Biz for their free laptops. Thanks to them, and despite the uncertain future ahead, the young people can use these laptops to ensure they're able to go on learning and getting ready for university and the world of work."

Ember Hibbert, Young Refugee Services Manager at British Red Cross said: "The laptop and tablet donations we've had from SocialBox.Biz have literally been a life changer for many of the young people we support. For unaccompanied children, a social group that already faces isolation, who are without family or social and support networks in the UK, the lockdown restrictions really exacerbated this separation and loneliness even further.

"Having access to these devices enables young people to get online so they can access education like college and school classes, as well as appointments for health and legal support. Really importantly, it means the young people can take part in support groups, including the British Red Cross Life skills workshops, and be in touch with friends and family. It allows these young people to rebuild their lives, and continue to pursue their dreams."

The free laptops initiative has also received the backing of business leaders, with the CBI recently calling for an overhaul of procurement policies to help deliver social value.

Felicity Burch, Director of Innovation and Digital at the CBI said: "The crisis has shone a light on the digital divide in the UK. Access to technology is vital for supporting vulnerable communities and business has a crucial role to play."

Most companies simply sell their old technology for scrap or export markets, which then gets shipped around the world and adds to the UK's carbon footprint.

Peter Paduh said: "With so many corporations that don't need their outdated laptops anymore, it only makes sense that we work to connect the dots by helping organisations meet their sustainability goals while giving those who have nothing.

“We believe that a small ongoing shift in procurement policies for old technology can make a huge impact and reduce digital exclusion. Reusing old technology locally would also mean a reduction in emissions. This is a real opportunity for businesses as it is proven that CSR can also boost share price and customer loyalty.

“Regular social interaction is fundamental to our mental and physical health, and for many people on their own in lockdown the only way to do that safely is online.”

SocialBox.Biz is currently looking for new organisations to partner with. More information can be found at <https://www.socialbox.biz/>.

ENDS

Notes to editor

For further information, please contact Ian Morton:

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SocialBox.Biz is a community interest company (CIC) improving the local community by providing innovative tech solutions.

SocialBox.Biz launched in 2014 to take unused and outdated laptops from businesses, organisations, and other agencies and wipe them clean before donating them to those in need. Today, the company is working towards larger donation milestones. In order to ensure all reused laptops are used to their fullest, SocialBox.Biz works with accommodation services and charities that monitor usage of the electronic.

Media Pack:

<https://www.socialbox.biz/socialbox-biz-media-pack/>

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