Hull charity narrows the Digital Divide for children in East Yorkshire

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Hull-based charity, Hull and East Yorkshire (HEY) Children's University, has helped 800 children get online this lockdown by donating devices which allows them to access online lessons and resources.

HEY Children's University started their "Stop the Digital Divide" campaign at the beginning of the third lockdown after reaching out to schools in Hull and East Yorkshire to see how many families were currently without a laptop or tablet in their homes. The total number of requests the charity received from schools was a startling 865.

A study conducted by Deloitte found that 1.8m children in the UK did not have access to a laptop or tablet at the start of lockdown and more than 800,000 households did not have access to the internet. This is much more common in low income households, with 18% of them not having a device other than a mobile phone.

The Sutton Trust found that teachers in the most disadvantaged schools reported that 1 in 5 of their pupils were lacking devices, compared to just 5% at the most affluent state schools.

"This Digital Divide" is set to widen the gap in attainment between disadvantaged children and those from more affluent areas as many children are unable to access their online lessons.

The Government has pledged to distribute 1.3m laptops to disadvantaged children and whilst they have currently delivered just over 800,000, there are many children that are still waiting for their device.

Natasha Barley, Director of HEY Children's University, set up a Go Fund Me Page which allowed supporters of the charity to donate funds to purchase devices that would then be distributed to schools to give to the families that they identified as in need.

She said "We realised that urgently sourcing 865 devices was going to be a huge task so we asked for donations of funds as well as donations of used devices to try and get them to the schools as quickly as possible."

The charity was part of the BBC Make a Difference Give a Laptop appeal resulting in 158 second-hand machines being donated to the campaign. Local business Primary Tech has assisted the charity in wiping the machines so that they are ready for use. Volunteers have been picking up and delivering devices on the charity's behalf which has meant that schools have received them much faster.

Natasha explained how funds were raised for the remaining laptops:

"This was clearly an emergency situation so we used some of our emergency funds to purchase devices. Additional to our Go Fund Me donations, we also received funding through grant making organisations and philanthropic supporters."

Another issue that the charity wanted to tackle was the lack of internet access as many of the families would not be able to access online learning once they received their laptop due to them not having a Wi-Fi connection. Local tech company ThingSIM donated 86 Wi-Fi dongles to help these families get online.

The "Stop the Digital Divide" campaign has raised an incredible £100,398.77 (over £12,000 of this on the Go Fund Me page) since the beginning of January and has delivered a total of 800 devices to 49 local schools and 96 WIFI dongles.

HEY Children's University would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for supporting the campaign: BBC Radio Humberside, BBC Look North, Nurture a Child, HEY Smile Foundation, Hudson Property, The Two Ridings Foundation, John Armitage Charitable Trust, The Lord Lieutenant of the East Riding of Yorkshire, Primary Tech, The Francis Arthur Brookes Charitable Trust, KCOM, AAK, Primary Tech and ThingSIM.

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