



MARGE

Scottish Book Trust

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**What's the story? An independent evaluation of the Digital
Storytelling Residences**

August 2019

Executive summary

This executive summary shares the key headline findings from the main independent evaluation report.

About the project

More than one in five adults in Scotland lack basic digital skills¹. This is often due to poverty, lack of educational qualifications, disability and age. In response to this and funded by the Scottish Government, a Digital Storytelling in Residence project was devised and delivered by Scottish Book Trust (SBT) between September 2018 and July 2019. It took place in five library services: Leisure and Culture Dundee, East Ayrshire Leisure, Falkirk Community Trust, Inverclyde Libraries, and Orkney Library and Archive.

Through careful selection in each location and by taking a collaborative approach between library services, community and cultural partners, the project intended to engage participants who were not digitally-confident, introducing them to online culture in a way that built skills and emphasised personal relevance. Each library service hosted a Digital Storyteller, recruited by Scottish Book Trust and the library teams, to support selected groups to create digital stories about personal experiences important to them. Digital stories were then archived and shared with the public online.

An evaluation framework was developed collaboratively with the project team. A range of quantitative and qualitative methods were employed over nine months to enable the collection of a broad and robust range of data. The findings presented in this report are a result of in-depth, independent analysis of the available evidence, building on the previous interim report provided to Scottish Book Trust in April 2019. The evaluation is led by insight - providing *interpretation* rather than simply *information*.

Key headlines

Participants [see main report pages 13 - 66]

- A total of 495 workshops were delivered across the country, engaging 704 participants. Of 363 participant stories produced, 224 have been shared.
- The project engaged a wide range of participants in terms of reach and demographics, including just over a quarter who reside in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland.
- SBT's willingness to be flexible with project design, the choice of project name, and utilising existing contacts were critical factors for the successful delivery of workshops. Clarity of quality over quantity also gave digital storytellers the confidence to approach vulnerable groups which often involved fewer participants and more workshops.
- The project collectively engaged with 107 groups, although 63 out of 189 groups approached chose not to engage (a success rate of 57%). Whilst barriers for group and participant engagement need further investigation, the report suggests a range of potential reasons for non-engagement, including a 'fear factor' (of sharing

¹ 21% of the Scottish population lack basic digital skills. (Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations report, 'Tackling Digital Exclusion in Scotland'. August 2017)

personal stories or digital) and misunderstanding of what digital storytelling involved.

- The project has helped libraries to engage with a diverse range of participants, including those from vulnerable groups who would not ordinarily have access to this type of opportunity. Nearly a third of participants were not currently library members, suggesting that those who took part were potentially exposed to library service offers they were not previously aware of.
- The report finds that the project has provided a viable opportunity for libraries to promote services to non-users and encourage potential future members - with group outreach by the digital storytellers playing a key role. Further measures need to be put in place to more robustly track engagement with library services post-project.
- The approach has demonstrated to participants that libraries can be inclusive - but it has also shown how it takes time to build trust; with participants initially preferring to take part within their safe and comfortable group settings, rather than in a library.
- Findings indicate that participants developed a propensity to participate digitally in the future. This change is attributed to an increase in confidence around using technologies. But it is also due to the approach taken by the digital storytellers, who used the interests of participants to 'spark' enthusiasm for digital technology.
- The report suggests that a longitudinal research study would be needed to robustly assess whether the project has had a direct impact on digital participation behaviour. Whilst propensity to engage exists, actual behaviour may look very different.
- Although 85% of participants completing the project survey have access to the internet from home, future access to technology used in the workshops may be problematic for some. Financial barriers, poor connectivity and lack of access to touchscreen technology / tablets (including in their local library service) are just some of the barriers cited by participants which may prevent post-workshop independent engagement.
- Despite the barriers, the report highlights various suggestions and ideas being developed by library services to support and encourage participants to continue their digital journey beyond the life of the project. These include ensuring that the digital kits are available to borrow, signposting participants to the library's digital offer and embedding digital storytelling as part of staff roles.
- Across quantitative and qualitative data sources, insight suggests that participants have improved their digital skills. For example, over three quarters of survey respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that their digital skills had improved as a direct result of the workshops. Two-thirds either strongly agreed or agreed that they would like to record more digital stories. And participants independently reported a vast range of new digital skills learned, from simply turning on an iPad, through to more technical skills such as using bespoke apps and editing content.

- There were typically no improvements suggested by participants, however those who made suggestions commonly asked for more time in the sessions - especially groups who only had one digital storyteller to 'share' between everyone.
- The team should be proud of their commitment to inclusive digital skills training. The approaches taken by digital storytellers made sure everyone had an equal opportunity to learn, no matter what their need or ability.
- The report finds that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' measure of success for improving digital skills. This is attributed to: previous engagement with technology, what individuals could realistically achieve overall (due to their limited/mixed abilities), and what the digital storytellers could realistically achieve within the time-frame. Rather than focusing on improving specific digital skills, the project became much more about increasing confidence in using digital technologies.
- Findings indicate that participants did not only increase their confidence in using digital technologies, but positively increased their personal confidence, self-esteem and communication skills too.
- Powerful examples exist of participants continuing or sharing digital storytelling, for example a participant in East Ayrshire reported that they want their digital story played at their funeral. Over two-thirds of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that they would like to record more digital stories. And there are various reports of partners already contacting or booking out the digital kit from library services to continue digital storytelling with groups.
- There are striking findings related to health and wellbeing outcomes, especially in terms of reducing social isolation, for example participants have made new friends, and socialised for the first time in many months as a direct result of being involved.
- One of the most powerful outcomes of the project has been the influence of digital storytelling on participants' general confidence and self-worth. There are numerous examples where participants have reportedly gained a sense of purpose by sharing their experiences to help others in similar situations (such as dealing with addiction, relationship breakdowns, or health issues). By cathartically sharing their experiences, participants have recognised that their story (and life) are valued.
- The project successfully provided a mechanism and ultimately a platform for sharing unheard stories and was inclusive to the needs of those most marginalised or 'othered' in society.
- 71% of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that being involved in the project has made them prouder of where they live, which provides some indication that the workshops fostered a new or refreshed pride of place. But participants were most proud of their own achievement in sharing their story, and ultimately felt they were worthwhile telling - with 84% of survey respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing that it is important to record stories like theirs.
- Celebration events played a key role in contributing to participant pride and demonstrating that stories were valued. They were also useful strategically; for

example, on lobbying, changing perceptions of libraries and introducing community partners to one another.

- The storytelling aspect of the project was equally compelling for participants as the digital side - it was a crucial motivational 'hook' to learn digital skills and made the project stand out from other 'digital workshops' on offer locally.
- There were several unintended outcomes for participants, including learning a range of other new skills, such as creative writing. The project also gained a range of unexpected media coverage across both broadcast and print outlets.
- Participants consistently reported high levels of satisfaction and enjoyment with their experience. Words to describe the project include fun, enjoyable, fantastic, inspiring and emotional. The greatest challenges of participation were commonly cited as sharing a story in front of others and getting used to digital technology for the first time.
- The digital storytellers were pivotal to participant satisfaction. Their skills, approach and personality positively contributed to the sense of enjoyment felt by participants, and they often went 'above and beyond' their role to help those involved.
- A series of practical recommendations were made based on the resulting evidence - these can be read on pages 57 - 61 of the main report.

Digital storytellers [see main report pages 67 - 75]

- Digital storytellers reported a range of new skills / knowledge gained. These commonly included digital skills, administration skills, problem-solving, inclusive working, and new approaches/methodologies such as using Social Stories, Story Books and Story Circles.
- An unexpected area of need and learning for digital storytellers was self-care. It became evident that through some of the very personal stories told, digital storytellers needed and wanted to be equipped to deal with (and support others in dealing with) difficult stories. SBT proactively responded to this by financially supporting and encouraging attendance of Mental First Aid courses. This unexpected requirement also raised questions for SBT and the digital storytelling team around editorial responsibility and safeguarding processes.
- Other unexpected outcomes included getting to know their local area and the context (which in turn helped them understand their participants' situations more readily); being re-commissioned by library services to continue working on projects, and gaining a sense of privilege, pride and enjoyment in being involved.
- A series of practical recommendations were made based on the resulting evidence - these can be read on pages 75 - 76 of the main report.

Library and community partners [see main report pages 77 - 99]

- A total of 29 digital storytelling training sessions were delivered to 66 library staff and 81 partners. 95% of trainee survey respondents rated the training as 'excellent'.

- Despite the high levels of satisfaction, library staff, partners and digital storytellers made various suggestions to improve the training - so that it more readily meets the needs of those attending in the future. These included: more time, differentiating the content, greater clarity on expectations of trainees post-training and building top-up training into future budgets.
- Findings demonstrate that libraries and partners are committed to sharing stories from their communities: both those captured through the digital storytelling project and in the future. For example, Inverclyde have a new postholder within programming who will continue digital storytelling work, and Stromness Museum will share their digital stories at the Scapa 100 conference in October 2019.
- 98% of trainee survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they had developed new digital skills as a result of the training (with a main benefit being increased confidence in 'not breaking' technology). However, the report finds that community and cultural partners have a greater propensity to independently deliver digital storytelling sessions post-project than library partners. This is attributed to confidence, capacity and time.
- Training played a key role in increasing motivation for digital storytelling, especially with those who were initially reticent. Being able to see other participant stories and create their own stories as part of the training sessions were crucial factors for developing excitement in using the method. The report highlights various examples of how library staff and partners intend to continue using digital storytelling, such as Hoy Kirk Heritage Centre starting 'Story Fridays'.
- The report finds that library staff and partners have found other ways to use digital storytelling which may indicatively have an impact on strategic aspects of the service including marketing, audience development, communication and evaluation.
- Half of trainee survey respondents cited time to continue/time to find potential partners as the main barrier for continuing digital storytelling. The report highlights the ongoing challenges of library teams who are facing restructures, budget and staffing cuts. As a result, the findings demonstrate the important role that community partners have in continuing the legacy of digital storytelling.
- A range of legacy training resources were suggested by survey respondents, including how to guides (printed and film) and a trainer trainer toolkit. The report finds that additional interventions such as these are likely to be needed to increase confidence in both library staff and partners to deliver digital storytelling independently.
- A high-quality digital kit is now available to borrow in each library service area, and measures are being put in place to promote this to the community. Positively, teams are already reporting that the kit is being borrowed by partners, for example Dundee have already booked their kit out for the whole of the summer. This is one of the most important legacies of the project for local authority areas.

- Library staff and partners reported high levels of satisfaction with the project, describing it as inspiring, innovative, revelatory and fun.
- There were several unexpected outcomes for library staff and partners. These included: being inspired to share skills learned e.g. running training themselves with volunteers; a positive impact on staff team-building through coming together at the training workshop; and having a rare opportunity to network with other local community partners.
- A series of practical recommendations were made based on the resulting evidence - these can be read on pages 99 -100 of the main report.

Project team [see main report pages 101 - 109]

- The report finds that the resulting digital stories have been shared across a range of online channels including YouTube and Vimeo. SBT also launched a national platform on WordPress, which also includes the pilot project films too. The site has attracted 2388 plays / views of the films since launch. The available digital stories are hugely broad in both theme and tone.
- 61% of participant stories produced were shared, however there were several circumstances which prevented greater sharing of stories or restricted earlier sharing of stories. These included: participants choosing not to share (publicly), limited office-based time for digital storytellers to set-up sharing platforms, and the launch of SBT's national platform occurring at project completion.
- Any challenges with sharing stories were mitigated by teams finding other solutions, such as sharing stories in a physical rather than online space, and providing participants with USB's containing their story to share on their own social media channels and/or with friends/family.
- The findings show that the project team reaffirmed their understanding around participants' barriers to digital participation. These were found to include financial barriers, geography/rurality, access to Wi-Fi, fear-factor, unfamiliarity with touchscreen technology and a 'not for the likes of me' perception. The team also learned new knowledge - such as important local historical events - through experiencing participant's stories.
- Whilst we cannot robustly evidence whether the project has successfully broadened the range of voices in Scotland's archived heritage, the project has made a positive contribution to diversifying the range of available material for future research and documentation. The report suggests that the project is likely to have had an important and potentially underestimated role in supporting the wider archive/heritage sector strategic aim of diversifying collections.
- The main unintended outcome was that project teams had an opportunity to showcase the project and their learning at professional events, both inside and outside the sector. For example, presenting the project at a Reading Day for the Scottish Reading Strategy.

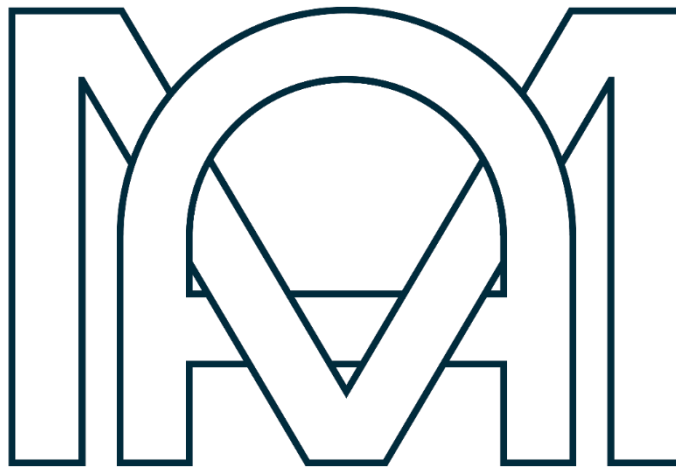
- A series of practical recommendations were made based on the resulting evidence - these can be read on page 109 of the main report.

Communication and partnership with SBT [see main report pages 111 - 112]

- The positive and open spirit of sharing models, ideas and experiences across the project between the digital storytellers, SBT project team and library staff strengthened the project.
- Having the flexibility and ‘permission’ to change course in response to the needs of stakeholders alongside the formative evaluation approach meant that changes happened ‘on the ground’, rather than waiting until the end of the project. This was viewed as a best practice approach.
- Digital storytellers and library teams commonly praised the management of the project, and SBT overall. They have truly valued the relationship with SBT and the opportunity to get to know the organisation better.
- Basecamp worked well as a communication and management tool to keep each other informed, but at times felt overwhelming.
- The digital storyteller role should be embedded in library teams - this approach works well and means they are not isolated from library staff (so both parties have a good idea of what is happening on the ground).
- Confirmed budget codes would have been welcomed earlier in the project.
- The reflection workshops worked well, however more time for library staff to discuss their own progress and challenges in one group would have been welcomed
- The reflection workshops worked well, however more time for library staff to discuss their own progress and challenges in one group would have been welcomed. It would also have been better if the reflection workshops had started later and finished later to enable less budget to be spent on accommodation.
- The project team reaffirmed their understanding of the challenges facing libraries and their staff teams, including the demands placed on front line staff.
- A series of practical recommendations were made based on the resulting evidence - these can be read on page 112 of the main report.

Project aims assessment

Project aim	Progress based on outputs and outcomes evidence
1. Introduce current digital non-participants to online culture in a way that builds skills and emphasises personal relevance	Achieved
2. Improve basic digital and creative skills amongst participants	Achieved
3. Ensure each participating library service can sustain the project after hosting a residency	Some barriers exist (primarily due to capacity, confidence and time of library teams) but efforts to mitigate are in place
4. Value the voices and experiences of a range of people from local communities traditional least likely to participate	Achieved
5. Contribute to a living, growing local history resource within the local library.	Achieved



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