Tech to Connect

Tackling isolation through innovation

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Challenges

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

The Tech to Connect Challenge ran from April 2019 to March 2020 and aimed to help civil society develop their early stage ideas for tech to enable more or better interactions between people. Technology can be alienating or divisive for those that are isolated, but it doesn't need to be that way. Tech to Connect was all about supporting civil society to translate their knowledge into good ideas for new ways to connect people.

The challenge prize helped ten finalists develop their ideas into working prototypes and plan for their implementation. The £1 million prize was split into £500,000 of business support with the other £500,000 being awarded as financial support – £25,000 grants for each finalist, plus a winning prize of £100,000 and two runner-up prizes of £75,000.

Finalist of the Tech To Connect Challenge

CONNECT by The Proud Trust

FINALIST

Location

Lancashire, with reach across the country

Our idea

A digital platform to enable connection with a safe, trained LGBT+ adult mentor for support, including options for face-to-face local support for young lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or questioning people who are socially isolated.

Who do we want to reach?

We are hoping to reach young LGBT+ people in the North West of England to offer them the support they need. We have designed this support to be easy to access, confidential, run by people who understand as they are LGBT+ people, and will help LGBT+ young people feel more connected. They will be able to share their worries, and a trained adult mentor can listen and answer questions through the app/website. They will also be able to access support guides and films through the app/website, including therapeutic and coaching tools to help them take control of their life and make positive decisions.

The story so far

The pilot phase has demonstrated that this can be a free at source service for young people, which it will need to be to ensure access. This is because often those who need it most might be from strict traditional families and will therefore not have access to their own funds, and/or will have these funds scrutinised by parents. Therefore, they could not risk being 'found out' by parents by paying fees.

Based on our work with Manchester and Salford CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), it is clear that there is a disproportionate number of LGBT+ young people accessing their services, and often by the time they reach them they are at a crisis level. Through feedback from the pilot

phase conducted during the Tech To Connect Challenge, we decided to have clusters of mentors in an 'online support centre'/'phone bank' style set-up, who are volunteers and do shifts supervised by a paid manager. We will also partner with sister organisations such as Kooth and Childline to ensure that resources can be pooled where possible, to ensure cost effectiveness.

What's next?

Once the app is ready it will be implemented in the North West first of all and, if successful, the mentoring training will then be rolled out through each of the hubs. The app will then be extended through a national marketing campaign so that all regions are contributing adult mentors to the scheme, which will provide national coverage for LGBT+ support. We will also explore licencing the technology behind the app to other charities who have isolated beneficiaries, so that they can benefit from the technology too – this might include mental health charities and disability charities.

"Tech can and must be used for social good. The LGBT+ community has always been dispersed and marginalised and as such have often learnt to be early adopters of technology as a tool to link in and find one another for support and acceptance. It's not about whether the new wave of tech is good or bad, that ship has sailed – it just IS, and it's our job to harness that for good ends."

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