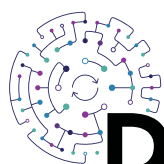




DICE NETWORK+ CASE STUDY

Donate IT: Closing the Digital Divide through Device Reuse in the South West

August 2026



DICE
NETWORK+

DIGITAL
INNOVATION
& CIRCULAR
ECONOMY



Engineering and
Physical Sciences
Research Council



University
of Exeter

DICE Network+ Case Study

The **Digital Innovation and Circular Economy (DICE) Network+** is a three-year UKRI EPSRC-funded programme that seeks to leverage the power of the digital revolution to drive a circular economy across sectors and value chains. Led by the University of Exeter, our expert academic team comprises eleven investigators from nine UK universities. We are creating an inclusive, connected community harnessing interdisciplinary collaboration and research to guide industry partners, government bodies and policy makers towards a digitally enabled sustainable and circular economy.

Our work is focused on two key challenge areas:

- **EMBED:** Embedding sustainability and circularity within the design and development of digital and communication technologies.
- **ENABLE:** Realising the potential of the digital revolution to enable a circular economy across sectors.

By adopting a network of networks approach, harnessing interdisciplinary collaboration, research, and technological innovation, our network will be a beacon for change, inspiring and guiding industries, policymakers, and communities towards a digitally enabled sustainable and circular economy.

Authors: Diego Bermudez PhD and Georgie Hopkins
August 2026

For and behalf of the **DICE Network+**



1. Introduction & Summary

The **global digital transition** has fundamentally restructured the requirements for socio-economic participation; while at the same time **creating a barrier to access for the digitally disconnected and precipitating an environmental e-waste crisis**. Donate IT, a Somerset-based charity¹ founded in 2021 by IT professional Simon Barfoot and former Somerset Councillor Sarah Dyke² as response to the COVID-19 educational emergency, addresses this tension by deploying industrial-grade reverse logistics to enable a regional circular economy for electronics.

Since then, the charity has matured into a sophisticated regional hub for device reuse³, processing thousands of assets through a strategic partnership with specialist IT asset disposition (ITAD) firm Blackmore UK⁴. The charity processes decommissioned hardware as high-value assets requiring secure, auditable lifecycles. It integrates high-tier data sanitisation with a federated network of community partners to address the “digital divide”; defined as a division between people who have access and use of digital media and those who do not, while significantly reducing the environmental impact of technology by extending its lifetime through refurbishment and reuse, and retaining value at its highest level until end of use in order to be recycled⁵.

As of June 2026, **Donate IT has redistributed nearly 3,250 high-functioning devices to schools, families, and refugees, whilst diverting over 15,000 electronic items from landfill**. The model’s significance extends beyond hardware provision; it represents a systemic intervention in public health, education, and environmental stewardship, recognised by the Big Sustainability Expo 2025 Award and featured nationally on the BBC’s The One Show.

This case study, conducted by the DICE Network+, examines how the charity leverages commercial-grade infrastructure to deliver professional refurbishment and redistribution services addressing the specific needs of users. By treating decommissioned hardware not as waste, but as high-value assets, Donate IT proves that a circular economy is achievable through the marriage of professional security standards and robust community logistics.



¹ Donate IT website, donateit.co.uk, accessed February 2026.

² Somerset Council, ‘Empowering communities through tech: The story of Donate IT and Blackmore UK’, govdelivery.com, April 2025.

³ Donate IT operates from a 4,000-square-foot, 24/7 high-security facility near Wincanton.

⁴ Blackmore UK, ‘About’, blackmoreuk.com, accessed February 2026.

⁵ See UK’s Defra Guidance on Applying the Waste Hierarchy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-applying-the-waste-hierarchy>

2. The Challenge

A circular economy for electronics requires complex, decentralised reverse logistics to track, verify, sanitise, and redistribute unique hardware (across specific Stock Keeping Units (SKUs) with varying histories of data sensitivity and physical wear), tackling a dual crisis created by a linear economy that only optimises for forward distribution.

- **The Digital Poverty Crisis:** Approximately **1.7 million UK households lack internet access⁶. 1 in 5 children and 1 in 7 adults in the UK experience digital poverty** as a daily reality, disproportionately affecting low-income families and older adults, which has become a primary driver of poor educational and health outcomes⁷. In the rural geographies of Somerset and Dorset, this exclusion is exacerbated by patchy connectivity and limited public transport, making access to digital services a critical determinant of socio-economic mobility.
- **The Environmental Toll:** Around **23.9 kg of e-waste per UK person** are wasted annually (2nd highest globally), with 155,000 tonnes disposed of via household bins⁸. This e-waste, or Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), often contains functional devices that could be refurbished. **Traditional recycling, while preferable to landfill, destroys the embodied value of functional hardware; for example, the vast majority of a laptop's footprint (75–85%) occurs during manufacturing,** not during its actual use¹⁰. Before Donate IT was founded, a “trust barrier” kept functional personal devices locked away in “drawers of doom” because individual donors feared data breaches. While commercial ITAD companies were not addressing community needs, local charities lacked the data-destruction capabilities to safely redistribute hardware.

⁶ Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA), ‘Building Better Futures’, digitalpovertyalliance.org, 2024.

⁷ NCFE, ‘Digital poverty: 3 factors and how society can tackle it’, ncfe.org.uk, citing Ofcom data.

⁸ Business Waste, ‘E-waste Facts and Statistics’, businesswaste.co.uk, February 2024, citing UNITAR Global E-Waste Monitor 2024.

⁹ Material Focus, ‘UK e-waste data trends 2018-2024’, materialfocus.org.uk, April 2025.

¹⁰ Circular Computing, What is the Carbon Footprint of a Laptop?, May 2026, <https://circularcomputing.com/news/carbon-footprint-laptop/>

Estimates of the materiality breakdown gathered from different sources can be seen in the following table¹¹.

Metric	Laptop estimates
Carbon Emissions (kg CO₂eq)¹²	286.1 Production Phase (81.9%) 59.4 Use Phase (3-5 yrs replacement cycle) (17%) 3.5 Disposal (1.1%) 349 Total (100%)
Water Usage¹³	190,000 litres
Critical Minerals¹⁴	500g total
Mass of Materials	1.5–2.5 kg

Table 1. Estimates of the materiality breakdown for laptops

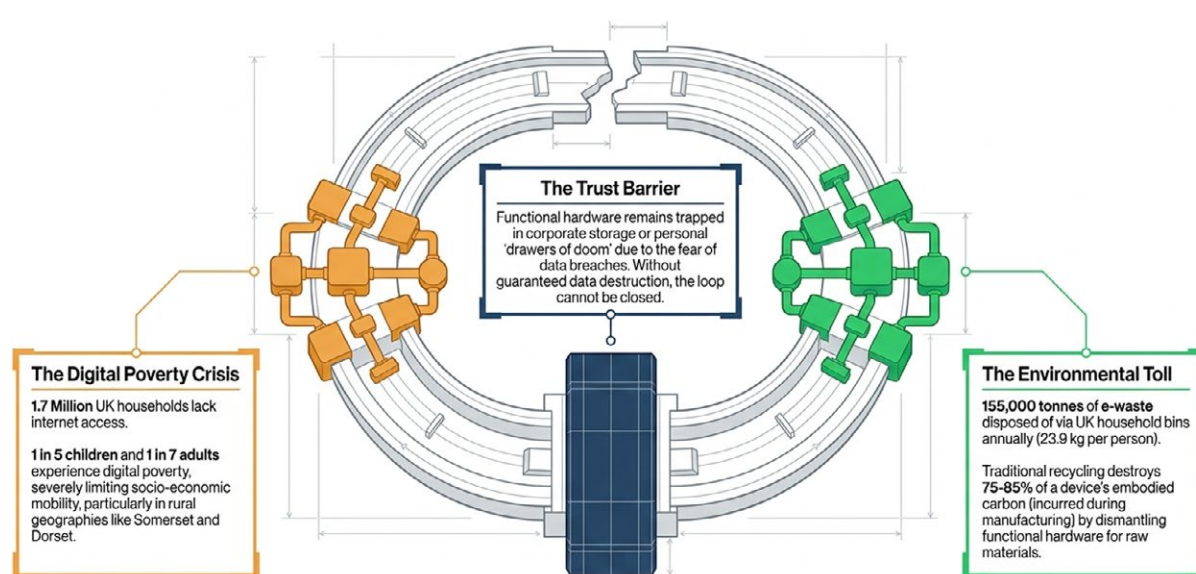


Figure 1. Closing the 'Trust' Loop for Electronics

¹¹ Some of the numbers were found online but were not warranted by Life Cycle Analysis or more rigorous studies. Depending on the models and locations these numbers will vary.

¹² See Ferreira, M. et al. (2025). A review of self-reported laptop life cycle assessments (LCAs) across different providers revealed carbon footprints ranging from 325 to 585 kg CO₂eq for identical specifications, highlighting inconsistent manufacturer methodologies and the need for standardised carbon accounting. The method used was life-cycle costing (LCC).

¹³ Circular Computing (2026) What Is The Carbon Footprint of a Laptop? Accessed July 21, 2026. <https://circularcomputing.com/news/carbon-footprint-laptop/>

¹⁴ Toon Vos (2025) Visualizing the Raw Materials in a Laptop. Accessed July 21, 2026. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/cp/visualizing-the-raw-materials-in-a-laptop/>

3. The Approach

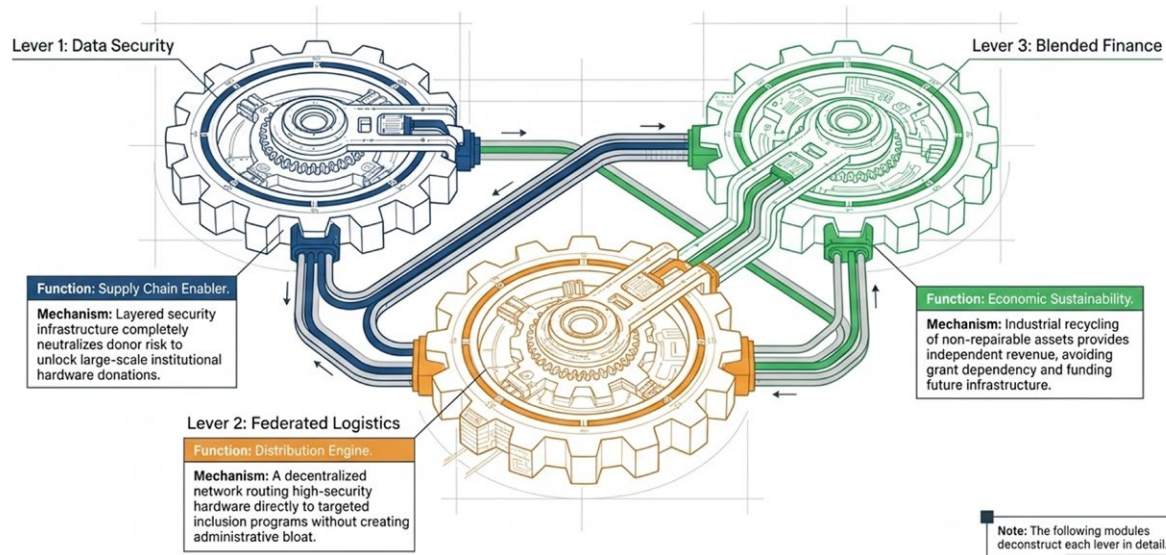


Figure 2. The Donate IT Operating System

Donate IT's strategy relies on building a **complete circular system** that combines:

1. Data Security: Donate IT builds this by leveraging Blackmore UK's ADISA Standard 8.0 DIAL 3 certification (with Distinction)¹⁵; a sophisticated framework recognised by the ICO under the UK GDPR Certification Scheme. The DIAL 3 rating **guarantees high-security handling via GPS-tracked transit, vetted staff, and fully auditable data sanitization logs**. By implementing a "Swiss Cheese Model" of security; layering multiple independent checks to eliminate single points of failure, Donate IT mitigates donor risk. This infrastructure completely neutralises devices before they enter the refurbishment pipeline, providing the absolute traceability and compliance required to unlock large-scale community donation.

2. Operational Flow & Ecosystem: A professional infrastructure is integrated with a shared network of partners. This system allows the charity to operate as the "brains" of a regional reuse ecosystem, while partners provide the "hands" for collection and redistribution.

- **Professional Infrastructure:** While DonatelT leverages BlackmoreUK's 22,000 sq. ft. industrial-grade hardware processing facility in Warminster as an entry point for donated devices¹⁶, it operates from a **4,000-square-foot, 24/7 high-security facility** near Wincanton. Once devices have been sent to BlackmoreUK or DonatelT facilities, **50 and 5 staff members** respectively in rural technical roles oversee getting devices ready for donation. This includes four

¹⁵ ADISA Standard 8.0 Certified ITAD DIAL 3 (Distinction), Blackmore UK, accessed March 18, 2026, <https://blackmoreuk.com/2026/02/06/adisa-standard-8-0-certified-itad-dial-3-distinction/>

¹⁶ This high-volume operational engine delivers the scale and automation that grassroots centres lack, and handles 250,000 to 300,000 items annually (since 2022), spanning enterprise servers to personal smartphones.

neurodiverse staff members (i.e., ADHD, OCD, dyslexia) previously classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), who leverage their high technical skill sets in a low-stress, purpose-driven environment. Every donation is logged into their proprietary system, tracking its entire journey from receipt at Donate IT offices through certified data sanitization, repair, and delivery to the referral agent.

- **Shared Partner Network:** Instead of establishing a centralised bureaucracy, Donate IT operates a **decentralised “network of networks,” connecting over 113 community drop-off hubs** (libraries, schools, and town halls) via an [interactive online map](#). This ecosystem relies on key strategic partnerships to solve distinct logistical and social challenges:
 - **The Fixy Project (Mobile Circular Logistics):** Run by Resource Futures in partnership with Somerset Council, this initiative uses a touring van to collect rural donations. Since 2022, it has **diverted over 7,000 devices (nearly 11,000 kg of tech) from landfills** directly into Donate IT’s pipeline¹⁷.
 - **Spark iT (Health & Connectivity Last-Mile):** An initiative by Spark Somerset, Spark iT scales digital inclusion across 36 community hubs using digital champion volunteers. Supported by an NHS-funded role treating connectivity as a health determinant, the program provides devices, digital wellbeing training, and data SIMs (via the [Good Things Foundation](#)). From 2023 to 2026, the project expanded from 2 to 36

locations, **delivering 8,419 1-on-1 sessions, distributing 300 Donate IT devices, and generating 30,464 new NHS App registrations** (See Appendix for extended partner impact figures).

- **Community Amnesties:** High-impact “tech amnesties” with local authorities unlock hidden urban hardware. A January 2025 event with Frome Town Council^{18 19}, collected **over one tonne of equipment (527 devices²⁰)** in a single day, while partnerships with Share and Repair Bath garnered national BBC One Show coverage.
- **Targeted Inclusion:** Partners like the Shaftesbury Refugee Group and Able 2 Achieve (Yeovil) route refurbished hardware directly to specific vulnerable groups, including displaced families and neurodiverse learners.

Donate IT ensures equity and impact by routing devices through a web-based pipeline of verified referral agents, including schools, social workers, and NHS staff. **Agents match specific hardware (laptops for students or smartphones for refugees) to exact client needs.** This professional integration ensures that hardware distribution is paired with critical wraparound social support and digital skills training, drastically increasing the success rate of the digital inclusion intervention.

3. The Circular Financial Model: Devices failing refurbishment are responsibly recycled, providing a primary income stream that allows the charity to maintain operational independence without heavy grant reliance (See Figure 1 for a detailed breakdown).

¹⁷ Burnham-on-Sea.com, ‘Fixy expands tech donation network to boost digital inclusion along Somerset coast’, September 2025.

¹⁸ The Somerset Leveller, ‘Frome event sees more than 500 electrical devices donated for reuse or recycling’, somersetleveller.co.uk, February 2025.

¹⁹ Frome Town Council, ‘Pay it forward in 2025 - donate to the tech amnesty’, frometowncouncil.gov.uk, December 2024.

²⁰ 240 phones, 99 laptops, and 94 tablets

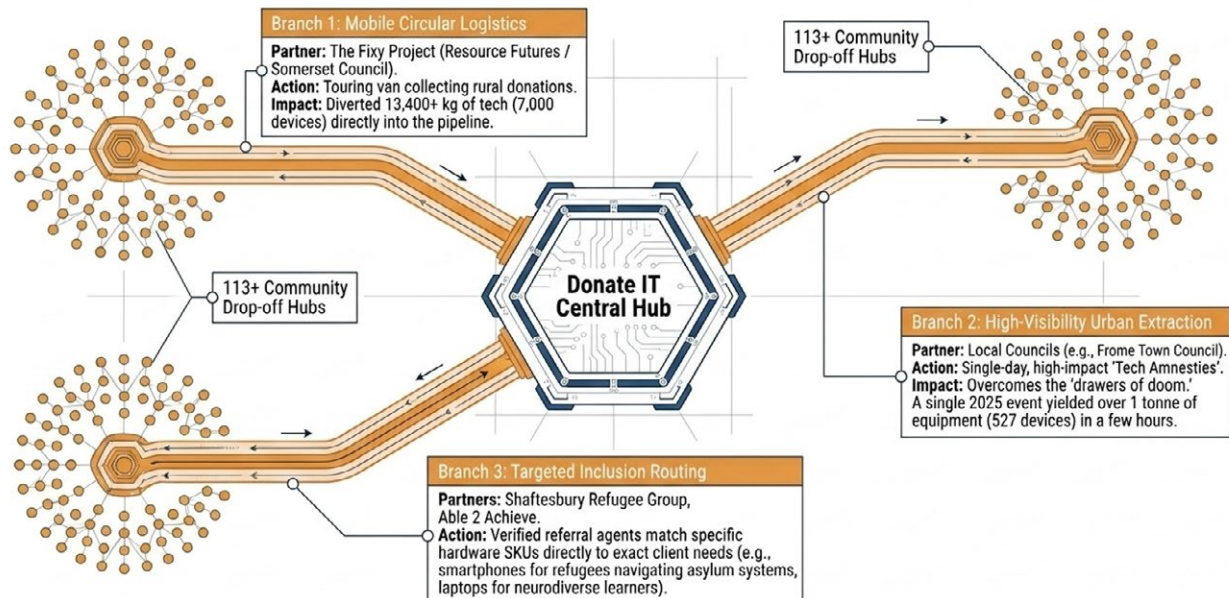


Figure 3. A Federated 'Network of Networks'

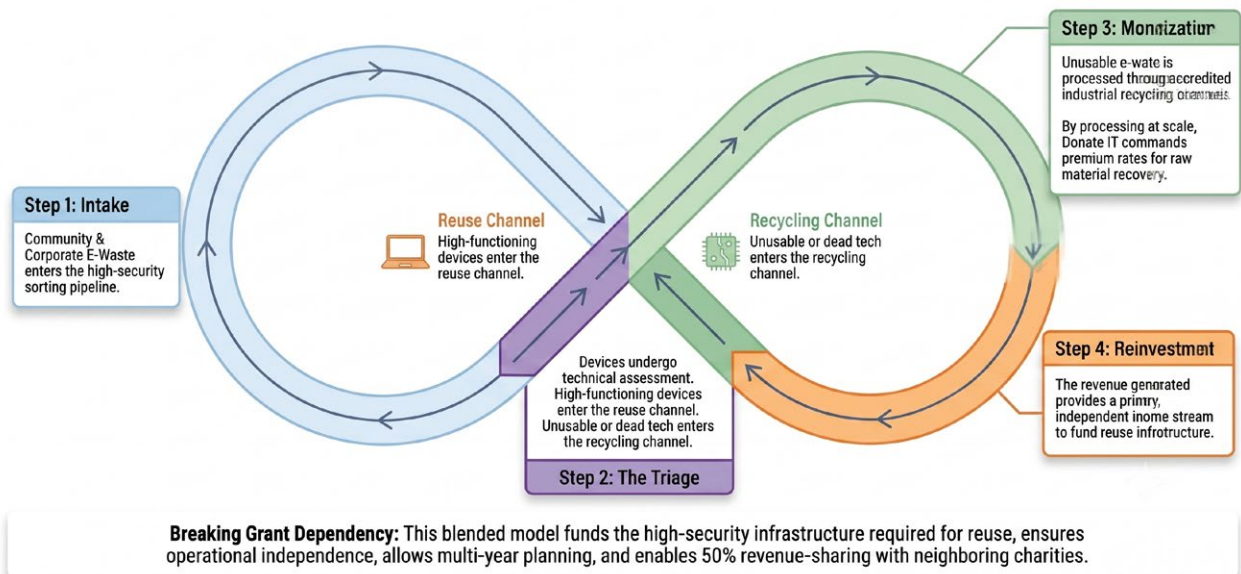


Figure 4. Circular Financial Model Breakdown

4. Unexpected Outcomes

Demand for devices has consistently exceeded supply, revealing that digital poverty in Somerset and Dorset is deeper than anticipated.

- Health as a Primary Driver:** Initially focused on education, Donate IT's primary demand driver is now health and wellbeing. Operating through Spark IT's NHS-funded framework, a refurbished device serves as a vital clinical intervention to reduce isolation and enable telehealth. Backed by the NHS Health Connectors 1-2-1 programme, **data shows that 77% of beneficiaries reduced their GP contact once digitally connected**²¹. By shifting patients toward digital care pathways, Donate IT directly lowers primary care transaction costs and relieves systematic pressure on local NHS infrastructure. In Figure 2, the NHS led the Adoption of the NHS app to benefit from the *Health System Relief*, while the *Network Expansion* was led by Spark IT, in collaboration with Donate IT to deliver *Economic Value*.
- Scale of Latent E-Waste:** Single-day community amnesties have revealed a massive, underreported volume of latent

e-waste. For example, a single event in Frome, Somerset²², yielded over one tonne of equipment in just a few hours. Access to these evident 'drawers of doom' has prompted **a strategic shift toward frequent, high-visibility community events over static drop-off points alone.**

Growth has been entirely organic, driven by incoming regional partnerships with organisations like Share and Repair Bath, the Fixy Project, and Blackmore Vale Rotary. The model's community impact is clear: a refurbished laptop provided a newly relocated Syrian refugee student with immediate social inclusion, enabling both schoolwork and connection to networks. **Following a feature on BBC One Show that drove a 40% surge in donations**, Donate IT is transitioning to an "open-source" scaling strategy. The charity is **developing "white-label" consumer interfaces and proprietary asset-tracking systems** to share with regional collaborators, providing them with the robust impact-reporting data needed to secure independent grant funding.



Figure 4. Circular Financial Model Breakdown

²² Frome Data Portrait (2024) Report for the Frome Town Council. Accessed May 2026. <https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Frome-Data-Profile-July-2024-by-Locality-2.pdf>

5. Key Learning

The development of the Donate IT model offers strategic insights and replicable lessons for the DICE Network+ and other circular economy practitioners.

- **Trust as a Supply Chain Enabler:** Data security is a foundational requirement, not a secondary feature. Donors will not part with devices based on charitable intent alone; they require the **“audit-ready” evidence proof of data destruction**. To deliver this resource-efficiently, Donate IT uses ADISA-approved Aiken Workbench software²³; meeting the UK ICO-recognised NIST 800-88 wiping standard. For industrial-grade processing, formal ADISA Standard 8.0.4 accreditation is provided through Blackmore UK. Without this level of compliance, functional hardware remains locked in corporate storage.
- **Blended Financial Sustainability:** Relying on a **“recycling-to-fund-reuse” loop** avoids total grant dependency. By securing large-scale industrial market rates for non-repairable components, Donate IT generates predictable revenue for multi-year infrastructure investments and splits 50% of recycling profits with regional network charities.
- **Federated Partnership Scaling Over Bureaucracy:** Rather than constructing a capital-heavy centralised operation, the **model scales by embedding with established hyper-local specialists** like Fixy and Spark iT to efficiently secure community hardware pipelines.
- **The Digital Inclusion Triad:** Resolving digital poverty requires bundling **Hardware + Data + Skills**. Maximised social impact occurs only when devices are directly paired with connectivity (Vodafone/Spark iT SIMs) and structured digital literacy training (Able 2 Achieve).
- **Value Retention Hierarchy: Reuse must strictly precede recycling.** While recycling recaptures baseline raw materials, it destroys the high embodied carbon and functional value of working tech (~75-85% of embodied carbon); a strict “reuse-first” mandate ensures hardware operates at its highest utility for as long as possible.

²³ Aiken Software (2025) Data Erasing. Accessed July 27, 2026. <https://aikensoftware.com/index.php/features/data-erasing>

6. The Outcome

Donate IT's digital transformation of the tech reuse sector has delivered **measurable impacts across operational, environmental, and social dimensions**²⁴. Earning them recognition such the Big Sustainability Expo 2025 Award and shortlisted finalist for the Southwest Sustainability Awards (Community category)²⁵.

Operational Excellence

- **Processing Capacity: Over 15,000 items diverted from landfill since 2021.** Over 1 tonne of devices collected at a single Frome Town Council tech amnesty event.²⁶
- **Redistribution: 3,250 devices regifted** to individuals and organisations in digital poverty.
- **Logistics Reach: 113+ drop-off locations** across Somerset and Dorset.

- **Speed of Processing:** Professional ITAD protocols allow for the bulk scanning and wiping of batches, significantly increasing throughput compared to manual, hobbyist-led schemes.

Environmental Impact

The environmental benefits of Donate IT's "reuse-first" model are quantifiable through Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) data.

By extending the life of 3,250 devices, the charity has avoided the production of new electronics, which is the most carbon-intensive stage of a device's lifecycle (see table).

Device Type	CO2e Saving (per unit)	Environmental Equivalency
Laptop	~286 kg CO2e	Driving 1,846 km in a diesel car
Smartphone	~64 kg CO2e	Charging 37,429 smartphones
Combined Impact	850+ Tonnes CO2e	Taking 180 cars off the road for a year

Table 2. Estimated CO2e impact per device^{27 28}

Furthermore, the model **prevents the extraction of rare earth metals (eg., cobalt, lithium, gold)** by keeping existing materials in circulation.²⁹ **Every refurbished phone reduces e-waste by 89% compared to the linear scenario.**

Non-reusable devices are recycled and recovered via accredited and cost-efficient channels, ensuring responsible end-of-life management and generating the revenue that sustains the model, while returning the resources to the UK³⁰.

²⁷ For more information on the methodology used, see Fangeat et al. (2022).

²⁸ The Carbon Impact of Manufactured VS Refurbished Computers - Get Online @ Home, accessed March 18, 2026, <https://www.getonlineathome.org/2023/11/22/the-carbon-impact-of-manufactured-vs-refurbished-computers/> and <https://therestartproject.org/consumption/hidden-impact-devices/>.

²⁹ Finnish company refurbishes smartphones to cut carbon emissions - European Investment Bank, accessed March 18, 2026, <https://www.eib.org/en/stories/finland-refurbishing-smartphone-critical-raw-materials>

³⁰ EE business refurbished devices environmental claims substantiation, accessed March 18, 2026, <https://business.ee.co.uk/content/dam/eeb-site/reerefresh-2024/EE-Business-Refurbished-Devices-Environmental-Claims-Substantiation-August24.pdf>

Social and Community Outcomes

The social impact of Donate IT is documented through the success stories of its referral agents. Rural communities across Somerset and Dorset with no prior access to IT assets are now connected to education, employment, and public services.

- **Refugee Integration:** Shaftesbury Refugee Group provides devices to families from conflict zones, enabling them to navigate the UK asylum system and maintain family links.
- **Educational Success:** Collaborative training with Able 2 Achieve (Yeovil) helps low-income learners build digital skills, directly **improving homework submission rates** while eliminating “digital shame.”

- **Health Determinants:** Partnering with Spark iT connects NHS-supported individuals to digital care, reducing isolation. Notably, Frome Medical Practice achieved a **71% NHS App uptake** (significantly beating the regional average), stabilising primary care access.³¹
- **Job Creation:** The model creates local skilled employment in rural Somerset through refurbishment activity.

Enabling Partner Agency Success

Insight: *Delivering hardware is a complex logistic exercise. Yet, resolving digital poverty requires the deliberate and synchronised of Hardware, Data, and Skills.*

Partner	Outcome Enabled by Donate IT
Spark iT	Distributed 300 digital devices via DonateIT and connected 450 people through Vodafone SIM cards (valued at £81,000) for health wellbeing support.
Able 2 Achieve	Provided the hardware for ~40 learners to gain digital qualifications.
Fixy Project	Achieved 13,400+ kg of diversion through secure collection ³² .
Somerset Community Partners	Transformed 113+ drop-off locations across Somerset and Dorset, including libraries, schools, community venues, businesses, and partner charity hubs, into “Circular Hubs” with a high-level of engagement and footfall.

Table 3. Partner outcomes enabled by Donate IT



Figure 6. The Digital Inclusion Triad

³¹ Celebrating digital inclusion across the UK at the ISPA Awards 2025, accessed March 18, 2026, <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/discover/digital-inclusion-insights/digital-inclusion-insights-2025/celebrating-digital-inclusion-across-uk>

³² Fixy wins International Green Apple Award. Somerset Council, accessed March 18, 2026, https://content.govdelivery.com/landing_pages/54155/f9c87902140a393ce96e0fb5a79e6a15

7. Looking Forward

As of 2026, Donate IT's future strategy encompasses includes:

- **Geographic Scaling & Southwest Hub:** Moving from regional proof-of-concept to a national model, Donate IT is expanding into North Somerset, Bristol, B&NES, South Gloucestershire, BCP, and Devon. Partnering with the NextPath Consortium and DSIT, the charity aims to become the Southwest's circular electronics logistics engine and license its high-security reuse framework across the UK.
- **Tech-Enabled Transparency & Support:** Operational insights; encompassing lifecycle longevity, health metrics, and Scope 3 carbon avoidance, are as valuable as the hardware itself. Circular systems must design for data capture from day one. Future operations will integrate Digital Product Passports (DPPs) using blockchain to grant donors precise carbon avoidance data for corporate Scope 3 reporting³³. To maintain long-term inclusion, all distributed hardware includes a lifetime warranty.

- **NHS Social Prescribing:** Building on the Spark iT framework, discussions are underway to institutionalise device provision as a formal "social prescription," allowing GPs to prescribe refurbished hardware to combat chronic isolation and reduce acute care costs.³⁴
- **Policy Leadership:** Founder Simon Barfoot is collaborating with policymakers on the "Tech4Families" and "Tech4Youth" schemes to establish a national framework for "trusted device donation," pushing for ADISA-level security as the baseline for all government-backed inclusion initiatives³⁵.

By leveraging the power of industrial data security and community-led logistics, Donate IT has created a resilient, self-sustaining model for the circular economy; one that bridges the digital divide and minimises impact on the environment, one device at a time.

³³ Closing the digital divide. One device at a time., accessed March 18, 2026, <https://www.techuk.org/resource/closing-the-digital-divide-one-device-at-a-time.html>

³⁴ 15 Healthcare Statistics That Show Technology is Vital For the NHS - Spark TSL, accessed March 18, 2026, <https://www.sparktsl.com/blog/patient-experience-statistics-that-perfectly-illustrate-the-future-of-healthcare>

³⁵ Get support. Digital Poverty Alliance. accessed March 18, 2026, <https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/>

Appendix

Extended Data & Tables

Partner Impacts

- **Spark iT:** The following stats illustrate the scale and success of the Spark iT initiative:
 - **Network Reach:** Expanded from just 2 Digital Café locations in 2023 to **36 locations** in 2026.
 - **NHS Integration:** Facilitated **30,464 new NHS App registrations** in Somerset, helping to bridge the gap for the 40% of adults not yet registered.
 - **Support Volume:** Conducted **8,419 total sessions** with individuals at Digital Cafés.
 - **Confidence Boost:** **100% of participants** surveyed reported feeling more confident using the internet after receiving support.
 - **Connectivity Provided:** Distributed **300 digital devices** via DonateIT and connected **450 people** through Vodafone SIM cards (valued at £81,000).
 - **Volunteer Contribution:** Volunteers donated **5,916 hours**, creating an estimated **£79,275** in volunteer value.
 - **Economic Context:** Addresses a critical need, as those without internet access pay **25% more** for basic goods and services.
- **Able 2 Achieve:** Provided hardware for ~40 learners to gain digital qualifications.
- **Fixy Project:** Achieved 13,400+ kg of e-waste diversion through secure mobile collection.

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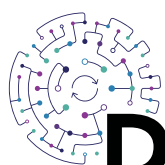
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