



Call to create the largest free to use Open WiFi network

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In response to COVID-19, Community Organisers and community partners have launched #OperationWiFi – a campaign to create the largest free to use open WiFi network for communities during the outbreak.

Over 15 million people are either not online or cannot get online regularly due to low income. As coronavirus cases increase, and Government takes further measures to reduce its spread, more and more people are going to face restricted movement and opportunities to connect. With school closures facing England on Monday 23rd March, the use of technology for learning is going to be ever more important.

Starting in Hartlepool, Stockport, and Birkenhead, a team of community organisers are mobilising a national campaign that hopes to get the attention of key Government ministers and civil servants who can open up the airwaves.

Sacha Bedding, CEO of the Wharton Trust in Hartlepool, has been supporting the community to respond to the coronavirus by providing StayingWell packs for the community dropped on people's doorsteps.



Community
Organisers

www.corganisers.org.uk



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He explained, “We know that at this time, access to the internet is invaluable, in fact, in order to stay safe, stay connected and stay informed, it’s as important as any core utility. We also know that for many people in the Dyke House area of Hartlepool it is beyond reach. They simply cannot afford broadband connections and rely on mobile data services, predominantly from a pay as you go provider. Access in this way is expensive and often piecemeal as the upfront costs for an accessible level of data is way in excess of what is affordable. £30 worth of data or £30 worth of food; is not a choice that should have to be made now.”

The same is being heard in Birkenhead, Eve Barrett reported how in conversation with local mums, concerns were raised about how parents with limited or no access are going to keep their children engaged with schoolwork over the coming weeks. Eve said, “more and more of school learning is going online with the use of iPads and technology in school, parents do not have access to the technology or the broadband to enable them to replicate what they do at school”.

Nick Gardham, CEO of Community Organisers, said, “since hearing about the challenges that many of our network are facing with getting online we have been talking to partners from across the voluntary sector to mobilise people and build a powerful voice that Government can listen to. There is the technology to do this, there just has to be the will”.

If you would like to support the #OperationWiFi campaign, please visit our 38Degrees petition: <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/free-open-wifi-network-connecting-communities-during-covid-19>

ENDS

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Notes to editors:

Community Organisers is a national charity, and the membership body and training organisation for community organising in England:

www.corganisers.org.uk

#OperationWiFi – Free, open WiFi network connecting communities during Covid-19 – The petition to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: [#OperationWiFi on 38Degrees](#)

The [#OperationWiFi website](#)