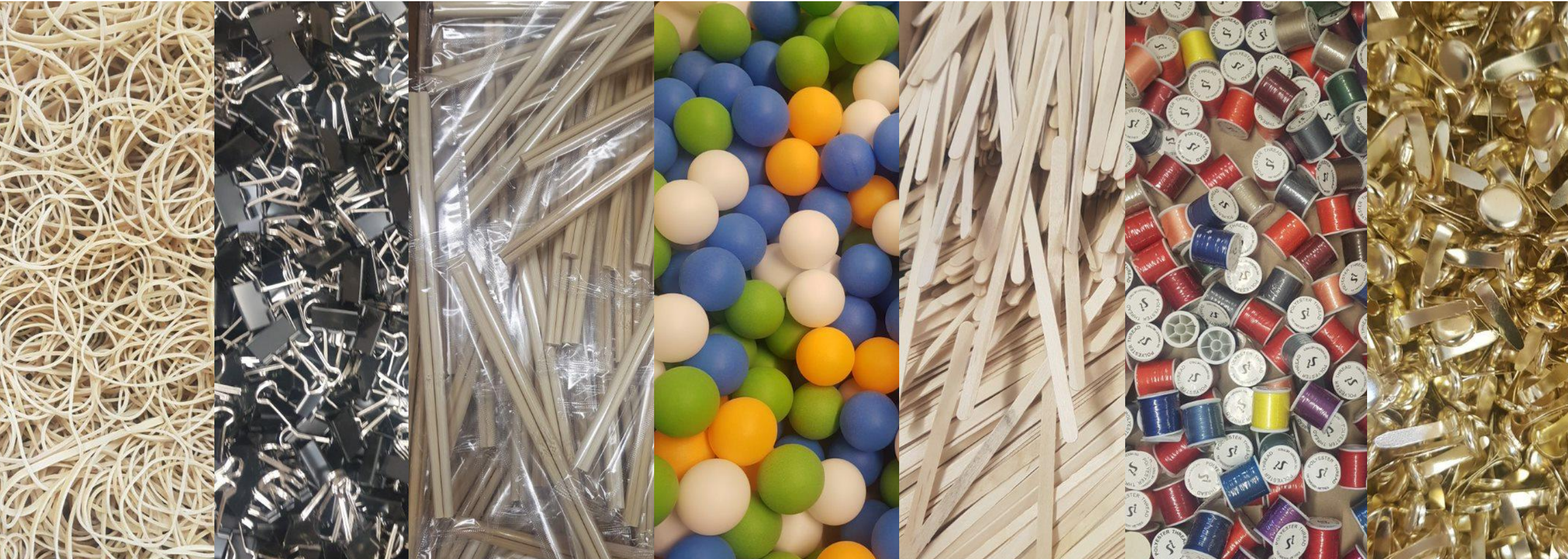


# Talking about children & education: Connecting Kids



# The context

- **2016 figures from The End Child Poverty coalition 3,863 children (25.5%) are living in poverty in the Lancaster and Fleetwood parliamentary constituency, and 5,087 in Morecambe and Lunesdale (26.4%).<sup>1</sup>**
- From 1st January - 31st December 2019 Morecambe Bay Food Bank gave out 8,152 emergency three-day food parcels with 3,357 of these going to children.<sup>2</sup>
- “The scale of the problem [lockdown] is staggering...**pay-as-you-go customers without the means to buy data are finding themselves shut in their homes, facing social isolation with no means of communicating with the outside world.**”<sup>3</sup>
- “We live on just over £100 a week and before lockdown I was spending around £10 a week on top-up data and now it is costing around £30-40 every week...We only have one phone between the three of us and I have to limit the time that they are online because I can’t afford any more”<sup>4</sup>
- “The closure of schools is likely to have a considerable impact for all pupils, but **the largest impact is likely to fall on those from the poorest families.** Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are already twice as likely to leave formal education without GCSEs in English and maths compared to their better-off classmates.”<sup>5</sup>
- Sutton Trust research found, in 2018, that **just over a third (34%) of parents with children aged 5-16 reported their child does not have access to their own computer, laptop or tablet that they can use to access the internet on at home.**<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/news/shocking-new-statistics-show-almost-quarter-lancaster-district-children-live-poverty-658165>; <sup>2</sup> <https://morecambebay.foodbank.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/146/2020/02/Chair%e2%80%99s-Report-Morecambe-Bay-Foodbank-2019.pdf>; <sup>3</sup> <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/about-good-things-foundation>; <sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/28/digital-divide-isolates-and-endangers-millions-of-uk-poorest>; <sup>5</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Social-Mobility-1.pdf>; <sup>6</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/internships-pay-as-you-go/>





# Teachers told us “pupils need access”

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- Engagement in online learning environments prior to the DfE scheme and Connecting Kids initiative in years 8 and 9 was hovering at about 30% of students engaging daily, and 45% weekly.
- **Provided 489 laptops** to children in high schools who were not eligible for the DfE scheme (i.e. not in year 10 or without a social worker). Every secondary age pupil who fell outside of the Department for Education scheme who was without a suitable device in the home would now have one.
- **368 of these devices came with free unlimited internet** for four months courtesy of Vodafone
- “This has solved a problem that has been with us for 20 years. Words can’t express what a huge contribution this is to the future of those young people and the wellbeing of our district as a whole.” *Cllr Caroline Jackson, Lancaster City Council*



“We contacted our families during the first few weeks of lockdown to check in on their emotional well-being initially and then to see how they were coping with home learning. We anticipated that some would be without a device but we uncovered massive barriers; families without devices, families with one device being shared with many siblings and parents working from home and households with no WiFi or broadband. The provision of devices and ability to access the internet has had a massive positive impact on so many families. Not only have children been able to get stuck into their home learning, but they’ve also been able to contact teachers. **This contact has been a vital lifeline for emotional as well as academic support.** Today a teacher told me she had received an email from one of her previously disconnected students, ‘**I have really missed you, Miss.** It was so soothing to hear your voice on that PowerPoint you made for our home learning.’”

*Victoria O’Farrell, Acting Principal at Lancaster Central High School*



# But they needed much more than that...

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- Fast forward 6 months and monthly interviews with participating school staff (part of the ongoing project evaluation) show that online engagement in one school is up to 92%. The laptops have played a valuable role in that: They have enabled access.
- But it is the tireless effort and skill of teachers and youth workers who have made allowances for the circumstances of children, young people and families. This has included provision of short digital skills courses, the school day and timetable being replicated online, live feedback sessions with teachers and learning assistants, and drop-in sessions for parents and carers. “Most importantly, it has included a recognition of the difference between home and school”.<sup>1</sup>
- The CEO of Raspberry Pi (who have distributed vast numbers of raspberry pi computers throughout covid-19) sums it up well: “This wasn’t just about shipping hardware **(that’s the easy bit).**”<sup>2</sup>
- Lancaster University Students’ Union, as part of the project, delivered a mentoring pilot to 40 pupils. This has since been rolled out across the district through the Student’s Union and has now been integrated into their ongoing outreach and widening participation activities. The pilot was critical to securing a further funding to deliver mentoring across Lancashire and Cumbria with the other local universities.

1. <https://srheblog.com/>

2. <https://www.raspberrypi.org/blog/closing-the-digital-divide-with-raspberry-pi-computers/>



# They needed much less\* too...

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- “It’s easy and often preferable to provide an answer to a question you weren’t asked. The question was how do we enable kids to learn outside of school? **‘Laptops’ was part of the answer but there were also several further answers that needed to converge if we wanted to solve the problem**” *Nik Marsdin, Students Union and Morecambe Bay Curriculum*
- Primary schools told us that they needed pens, pencils and colouring crayons much more than laptops. So far we have delivered **2,300 stationary packs** to primary aged pupils.
- Children from better off households are **more than twice as likely to have had more than £100 spent on their education since the shutdown**, (19% of middle class children v 8% of working class). March 2020, Sutton Trust
- Alongside this, **‘Project in a Box’** was born.



# Project in a box

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“There has been a wonderful response to the [project in a box] boxes from both children and parents. Just what you would have wanted! **It has really sparked their interest, as well as making them feel valued.** I have treasured the interactions – some quite tingly moments! These are mainly children and families that I have had little or even no personal contact with - you can see how they have felt a bit lost and have now been given a special opportunity. All pass on their thanks. Children were keen to get home and get creating, so I am really looking forward to meeting back up with them.”

*Linda Pye, Head Teacher at Ryelands Primary School*



# A completely non-digital box of bits, bobs and prompts

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- A high quality tool box full of craft tools, art resources and the sort of items that many of us might have in your 'drawer of doom' and take for granted but that these children are much less likely to have lying around
- Accompanying these items were a large number of open ended prompts to spark creativity and learning but not dictate how that learning must happen. The majority of these inspired by ideas provided by contributions from Lancaster University academics
- Children were then encouraged to bring back stories and pictures of what they did with their boxes to their teachers
- So far feedback has included:
  - Children commented on how, to paraphrase: it challenged them because things could go wrong and they could make mistakes.
  - We have heard stories of it being one of the few things children were able to work on together with siblings, parents and grandparents.
  - While also many have said it was important that the box was theirs and only theirs.



Connecting Kids

# BUILD A BRIDGE

A child is sitting at a table, using sticks and string to build a bridge over a gap. A yellow duck is on the table next to the bridge.

Connecting Kids

# USE WATER

A child is standing on a small orange stool, pouring water from a bottle into a bowl. A yellow duck is in the water.

Connecting Kids

# SPIN STUFF

A child is spinning a top, and another child is holding a bottle. A beach ball is also visible.

Connecting Kids

# CREATE A ROBOT

DRAW IT

BUILD IT

WHAT CAN YOUR ROBOT DO?

Connecting Kids

# FOLLOW A BUG

A child is following a bug with a magnifying glass. Another child is sitting on the floor with a drawing of bugs.

Connecting Kids

# SEND A MESSAGE

A child is sending a message with a paper airplane. Another child is holding a stick with a message on it.

Connecting Kids

# BUILD A CITY

A child is building a city with blocks and a milk carton. Another child is holding a sign that says 'CITY'.

Connecting Kids

# MAKE THINGS. BUILD THINGS. PLAY AND HAVE FUN!

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY  
LANCASTER UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION  
imagination  
CC BY-NC-SA

# Co-designed with the community:

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- “The Box Project set itself a stiff set of evaluation criteria. The boxes needed to support children stilled by lockdown in returning to their former thinking, moving, creative selves. They needed to reawaken learning in children whose worlds had shrunk and whose opportunities for growth had seized up. They needed to excite the imagination, leave space for collaboration and foster the focused engagement that correlates with intellectual development. There could be no cookie cutter outcomes. For the boxes to meet these criteria for children of multiple age groups and living in a diversity home environments, the boxes had to offer multiple pathways to success.” *Dr Diane Potts*
- A particularly exciting element of 'Project in A Box' is that it is just the start of a longer term co-designed project. Academics from Beyond Imagination and Linguistics, local teachers and youth work professionals collaborated to design the first boxes. But now the children are involved it is going to the next level! The children who received the first 500 boxes have fed back and made suggestions.





**A HUGE THANK YOU TO THE PARTNERS, DONORS AND SUPPORTERS  
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**ALLWAG PROMOTIONS**

**BANKS LYON MEMORIAL TRUST**

**EDF**

**EDEN PROJECT LEARNING**

**ASCENTIS**

**FRIENDS OF LANCASTER UNIVERSITY  
IN AMERICA**

**IMAGINATION LANCASTER**

**LANCASHIRE ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP**

**LANCASHIRE YOUTH CHALLENGE**

**LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL**

**LANCASTER DISTRICT CVS**

**LANCASTER UNIVERSITY**

**LANCASTER UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION**

**SANTANDER UNIVERSITIES**

**THE LEARNING FOUNDATION**

**TECH HUB**

**WEST LANCASHIRE FREEMASONS**

**WILKO**

**VODAFONE**