

GEO Nova  
Scotia's



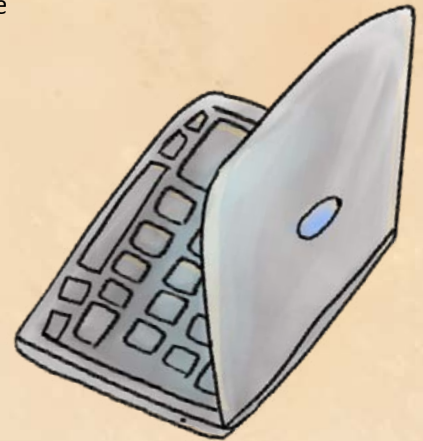
Story of  
Transformation



# What is a story of transformation?

We began this journey thinking we were developing a theory of change for GEO Nova Scotia's work. As we thought about it together, we realized that we were looking for something more. We wanted something that reflected our focus on changing the way all the parts of the system interact with each other, and we knew we needed to work collectively and at multiple levels for digital inclusion. We also knew that relationships are the magic ingredient of our work, and we wanted to work from a place of love and kindness. We were actually talking about transformation! And we understood that this was more than a theory - it was the story of our work. That's how this became our Story of Transformation.

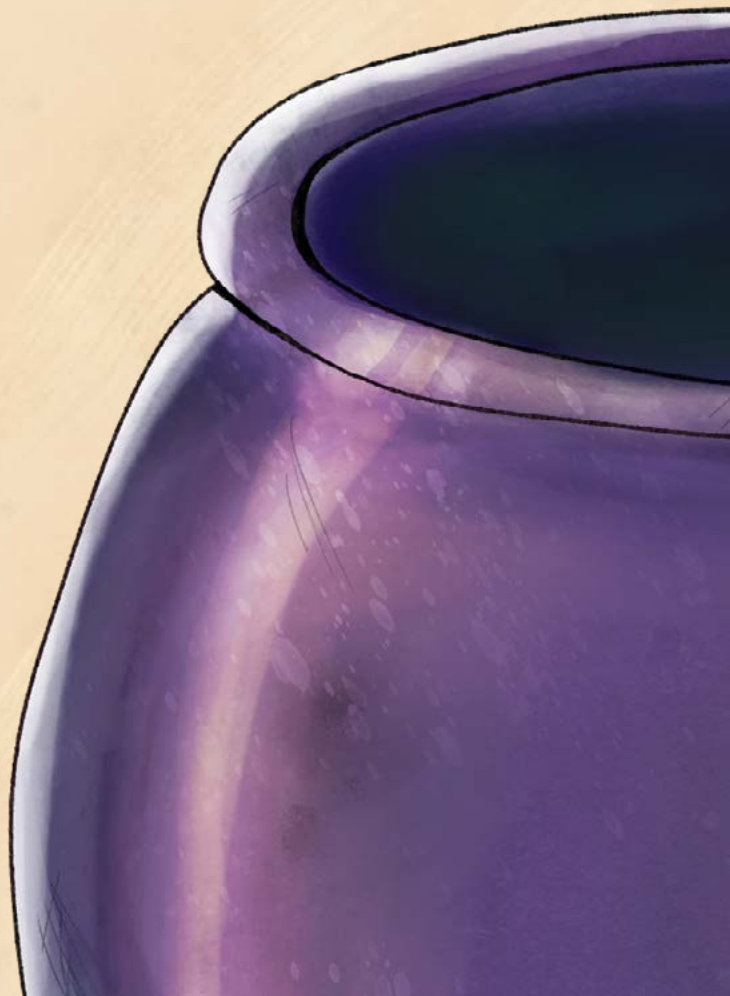
We draw on the story of **stone soup** because it shows the power and beauty of everyone coming together, contributing what they can, and all being nourished by what we have created collectively.



## How to use this story

We will use it for many different purposes, including:

- **Communicating about our work with others** - this story helps us describe our work, and can help others see the part they might play in the story
- **Planning our work** - the story will help us see where we are in the process, what might be next, and how we might need to adapt our path (or update our story)
- **Keeping track of our story** - we can reflect on our journey by connecting it to this story, and by writing new chapters to the story
- **Reflecting on and evaluating our work and its impacts** - we can draw on the story to look at where we are on the journey and what we were hoping for - see our successes and understand what we need to change



# Acknowledgements & Credits

This work has been a labour of love from the very beginning. It is the result of many groups of people coming together to share their thoughts, ideas, perspectives, and wisdom in an iterative process to co-create our collective story about achieving digital inclusion in Nova Scotia. This process demonstrates the power of our work together. We have created something powerful and shared by working together, And this is the energy we are channeling towards social justice in Nova Scotia.

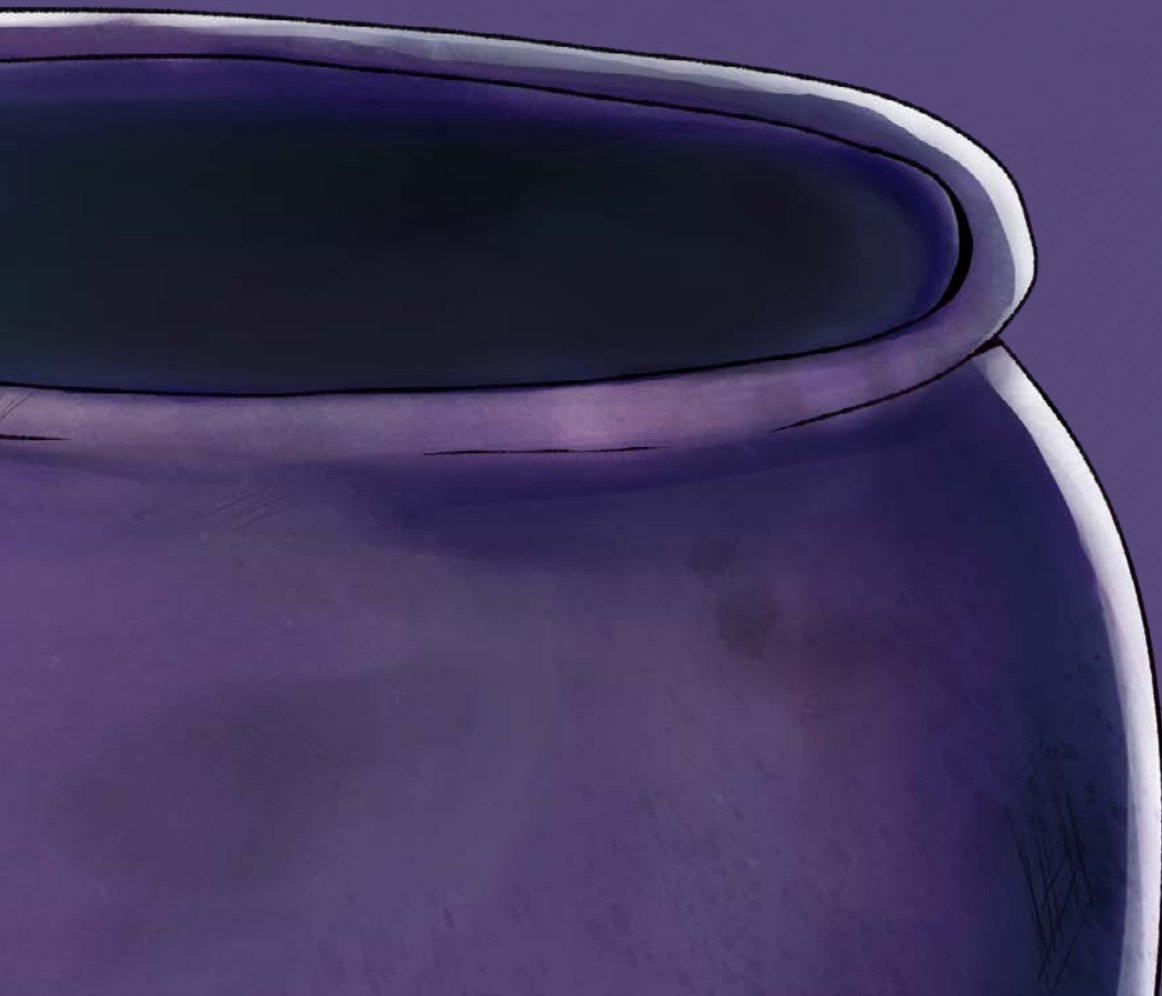
Thank you to everyone who has participated and contributed their magic: Participants, Referral Partners, Digital Champions, Project Partners, Supplier Partners, Government Champions and Partners, GEO NS Board members, GEO NS Insight Team members, and the GEO NS Staff Team.

Thank you to GEO NS Learning & Evaluation Lead Cari Patterson for writing this beautiful story and inviting everyone to contribute.

Thank you to Jodene Dunleavy for sharing leadership for this process as she worked on GEO NS's Strategic Plan.


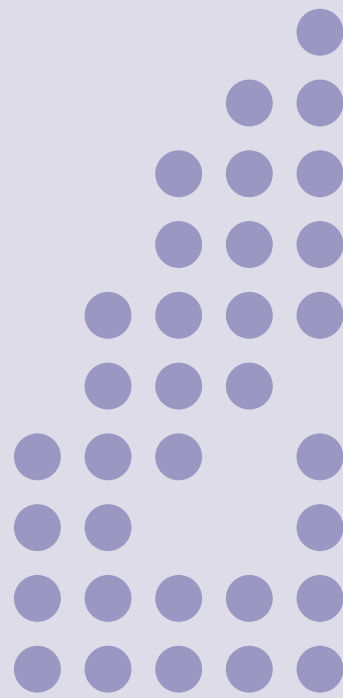
Thank you to Neela Spurway for the amazing illustrations that bring the story to life.

Finally, thank you to Dean Gallant for creating the design to bring it all together.



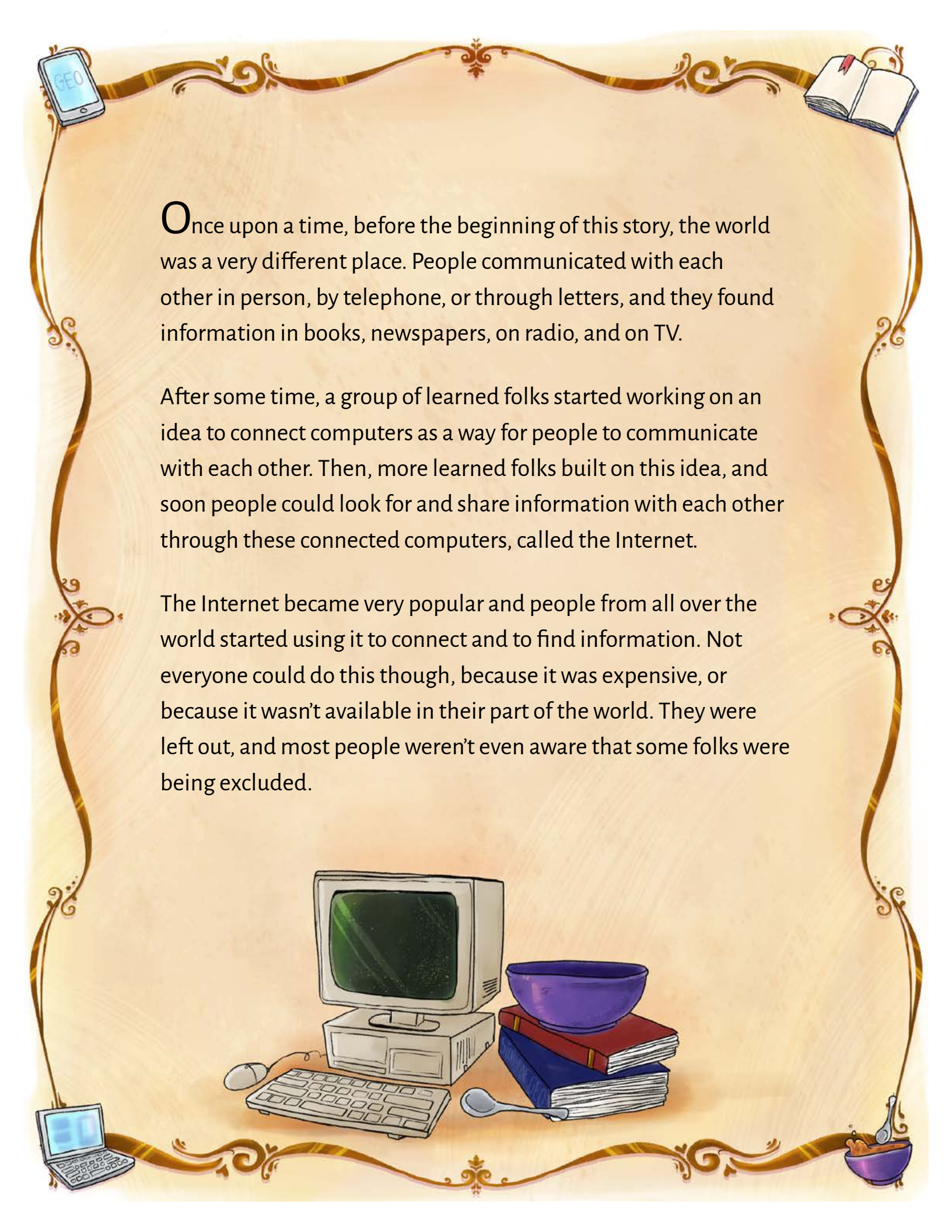
# Dedication

We dedicate this story to everyone who is working for digital inclusion in Nova Scotia, with a promise to those who are currently excluded that we will continue to do our best to reach you, listen to you, and connect you. We value you and want to hear your voices.



**“ Love is an action:  
never simply a feeling ”**

*-bell hooks*

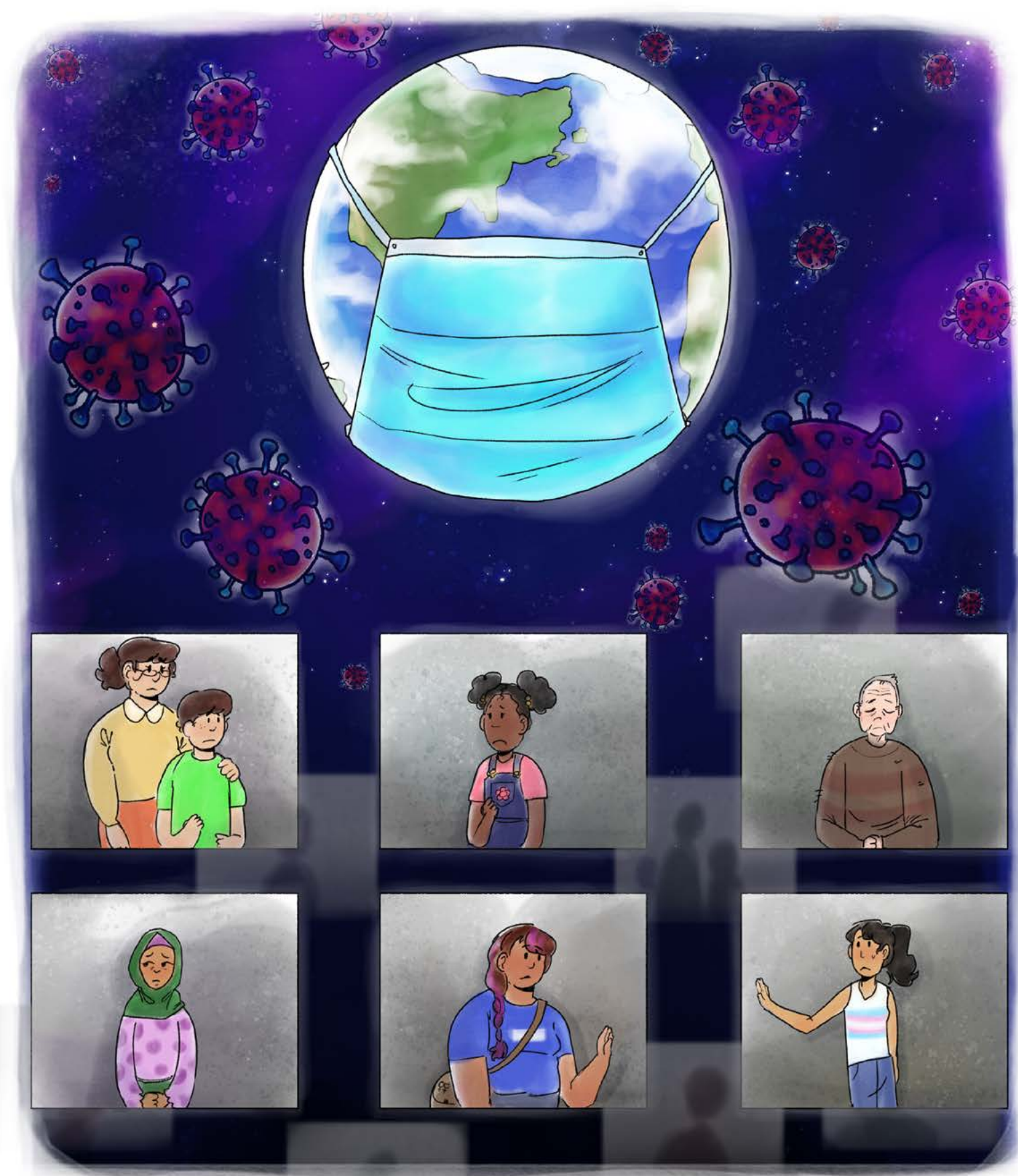


Once upon a time, before the beginning of this story, the world was a very different place. People communicated with each other in person, by telephone, or through letters, and they found information in books, newspapers, on radio, and on TV.

After some time, a group of learned folks started working on an idea to connect computers as a way for people to communicate with each other. Then, more learned folks built on this idea, and soon people could look for and share information with each other through these connected computers, called the Internet.

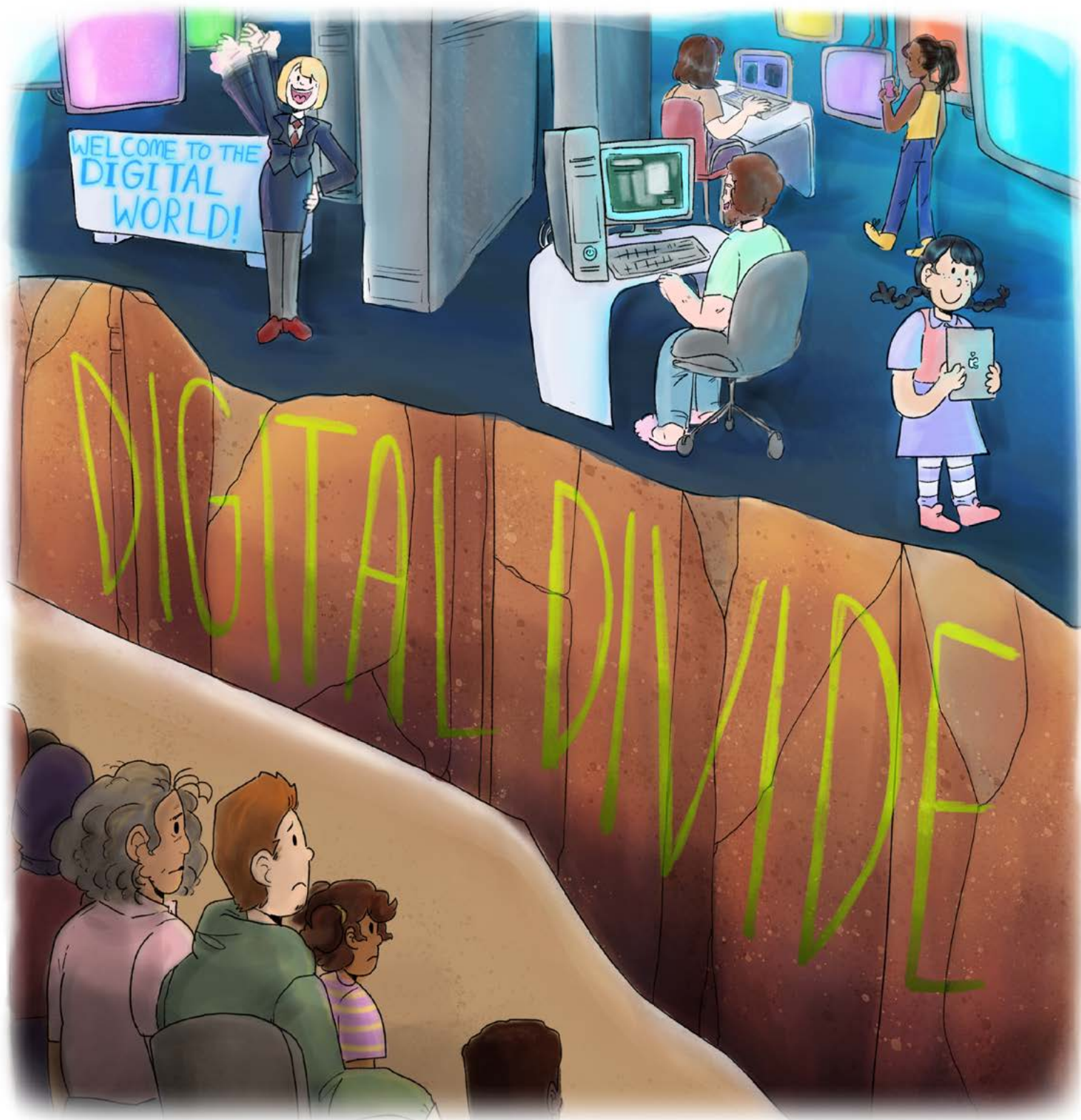
The Internet became very popular and people from all over the world started using it to connect and to find information. Not everyone could do this though, because it was expensive, or because it wasn't available in their part of the world. They were left out, and most people weren't even aware that some folks were being excluded.





Then not so long ago, a pandemic hit the whole wide world. Suddenly information, services, and connections with family and friends went online, and nearly everyone had to stay home.

People who couldn't afford computers or Internet access were now completely excluded and instantly even more isolated. They struggled to connect with others, find work, go to school, access healthcare, go to appointments, find housing, participate in their communities, or even get information about what they were supposed to do to stay safe. Even later, when people could go out again, a lot of information and services stayed online, and a lot of people continued to work from home and go to school from home. The pandemic brought these inequities to light.





A caring group of people in Nova Scotia realized that many people were being excluded and isolated, and they got together to do something about it. This group included community organizations, businesses, and government. They wanted to make sure everyone could get online, which they called “digital inclusion”. And they knew that some folks – like those who lived in poverty, Black people, Mi’kmaw people, seniors, people living with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIAP+ people, youth, people in rural areas, and newcomers were being left behind in this time called the digital age. They recognized that digital inclusion was not just about providing devices and Internet access, but also about building digital skills and confidence, addressing systemic barriers, and promoting social inclusion.

These folks started calling their work GEO (for Getting Everyone Online), and they used the fable of Stone Soup as a metaphor for their approach. Just as the villagers in the fable all contributed what they could to create a nourishing soup, GEO invited everyone to contribute what they could so that together they would have a greater impact than they ever could by working on their own. This way, they would create a version of digital inclusion stone soup that would feed everyone.



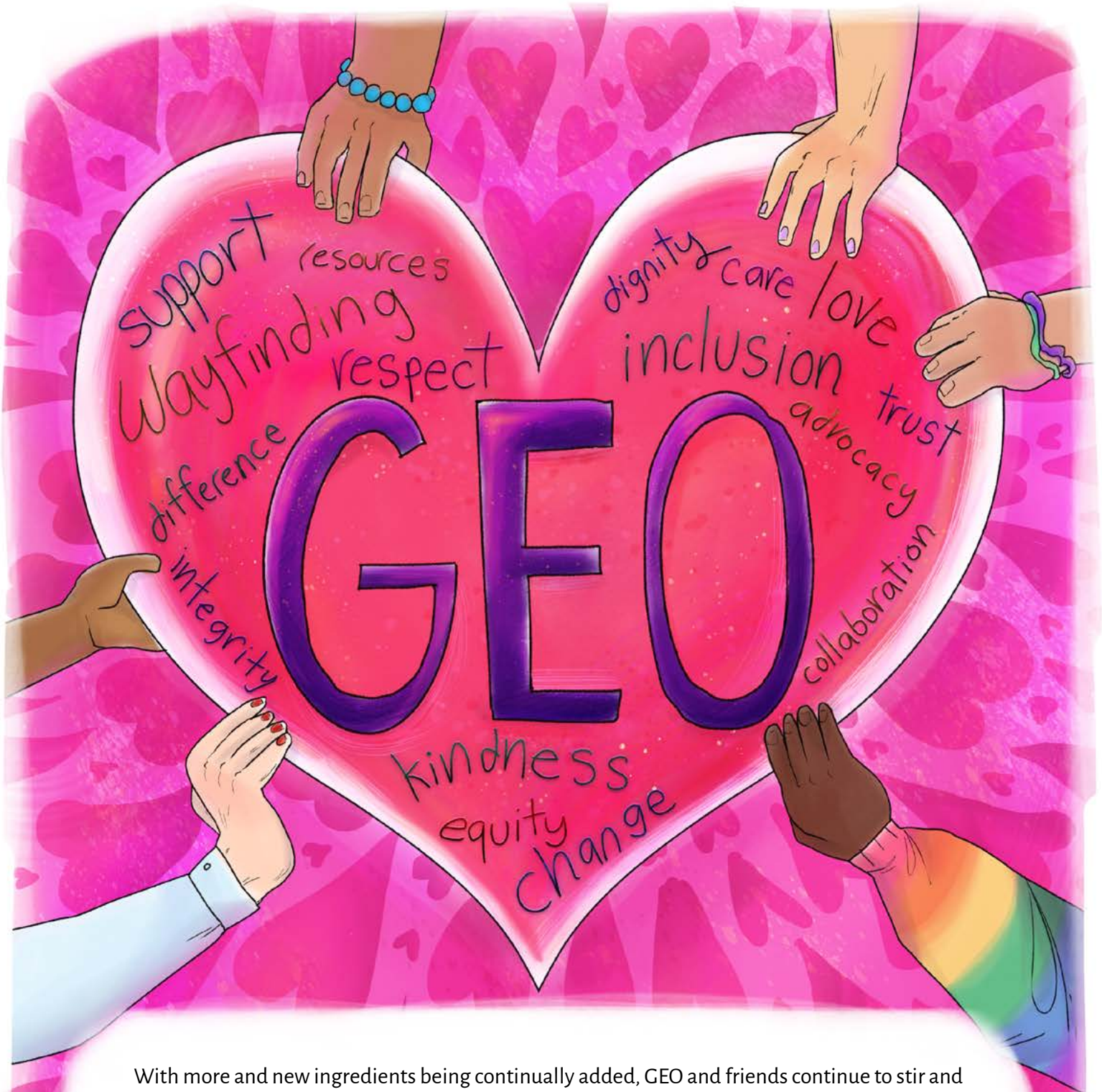
GEO and friends began to cook the soup together, with everyone adding unique ingredients that are needed to make digital inclusion a reality. Community organizations contributed their relationships with community members, their knowledge of local needs, connections to their networks, and their workers' and volunteers' time; businesses provided advice and made devices and Internet access more affordable; government officials contributed funding and support; and community members contributed their information, experiences and feedback. GEO even found a partner in Scotland to contribute their expertise in training Digital Champions to teach digital skills to community members.

**As the soup simmered, people could see things begin to transform, and they realized that everyone who was contributing to the soup was also being fed by it. They saw that people's lives were being touched in big ways:**

- **Community members** who had been excluded **now had devices and access to the Internet**. They also had help to build their digital skills and confidence. They became empowered to use digital tools to connect with their communities, access information and services, and find work.
- **Community organizations developed more skills** to provide digital support, they could reach out to people more effectively, and they were better equipped to serve their communities.
- **Businesses no longer had to worry** about whether people could pay their bills, and they had more access to customers and employees.
- **Education, health care**, and all kinds of other **important services** could be provided to many more people who needed them.
- People with mental health and addiction challenges could **access virtual mental and physical health supports**, which improves social inclusion and well-being, and reduces transportation barriers for people who live in rural or remote communities.
- **People got more involved** in strengthening their communities.
- **GEO developed incredible partnerships** with everyone and learned about good ways to connect respectfully with different communities all across the province.
- Government officials made it a priority to **support digital inclusion** work with equity-deserving communities in Nova Scotia.
- **People were treating each other with love and kindness** and working together with compassion and care – together they were all learning how good it felt to be seen, heard, and valued. They were eager to deepen this loving approach and use it in all of their work.

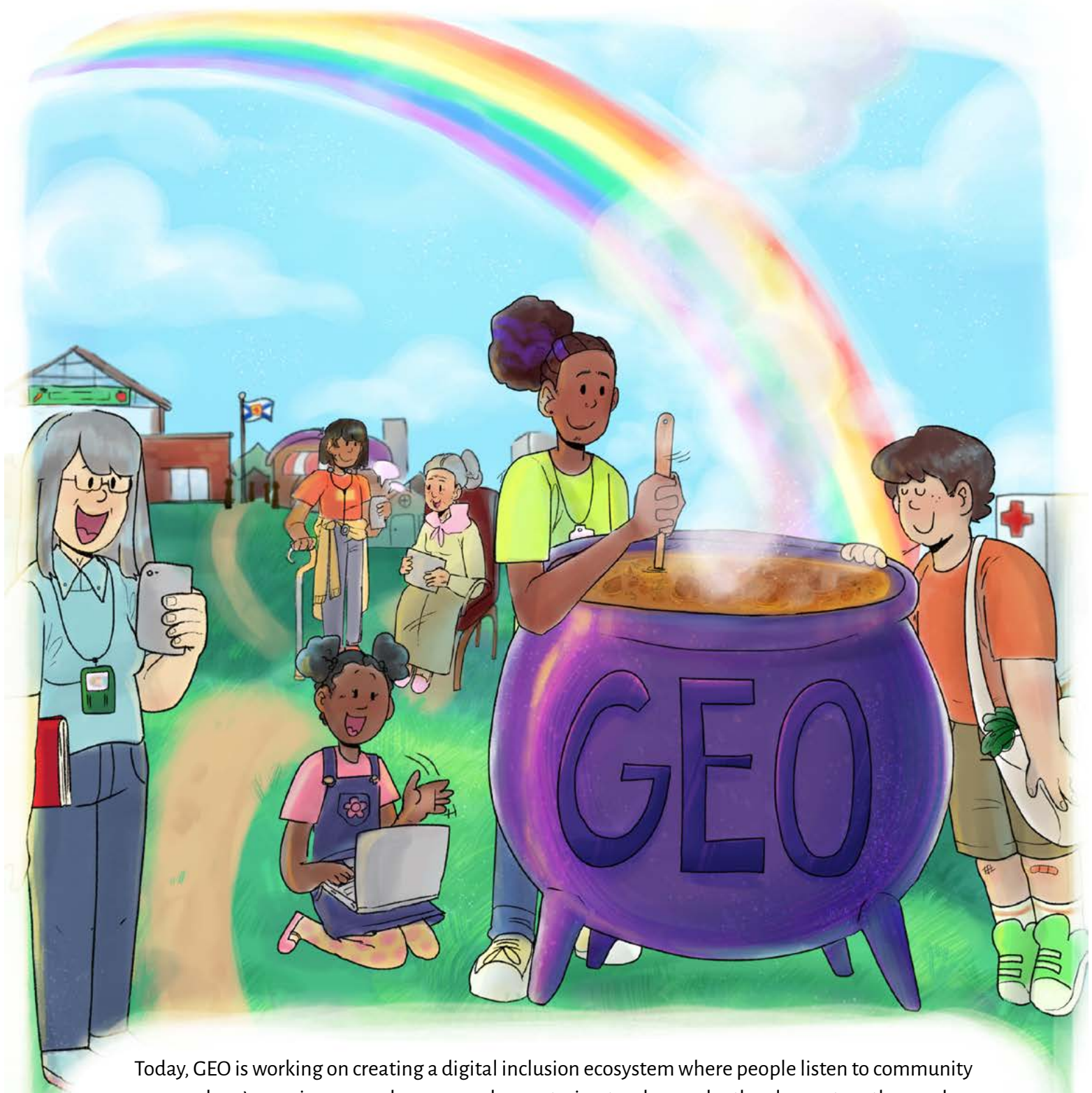






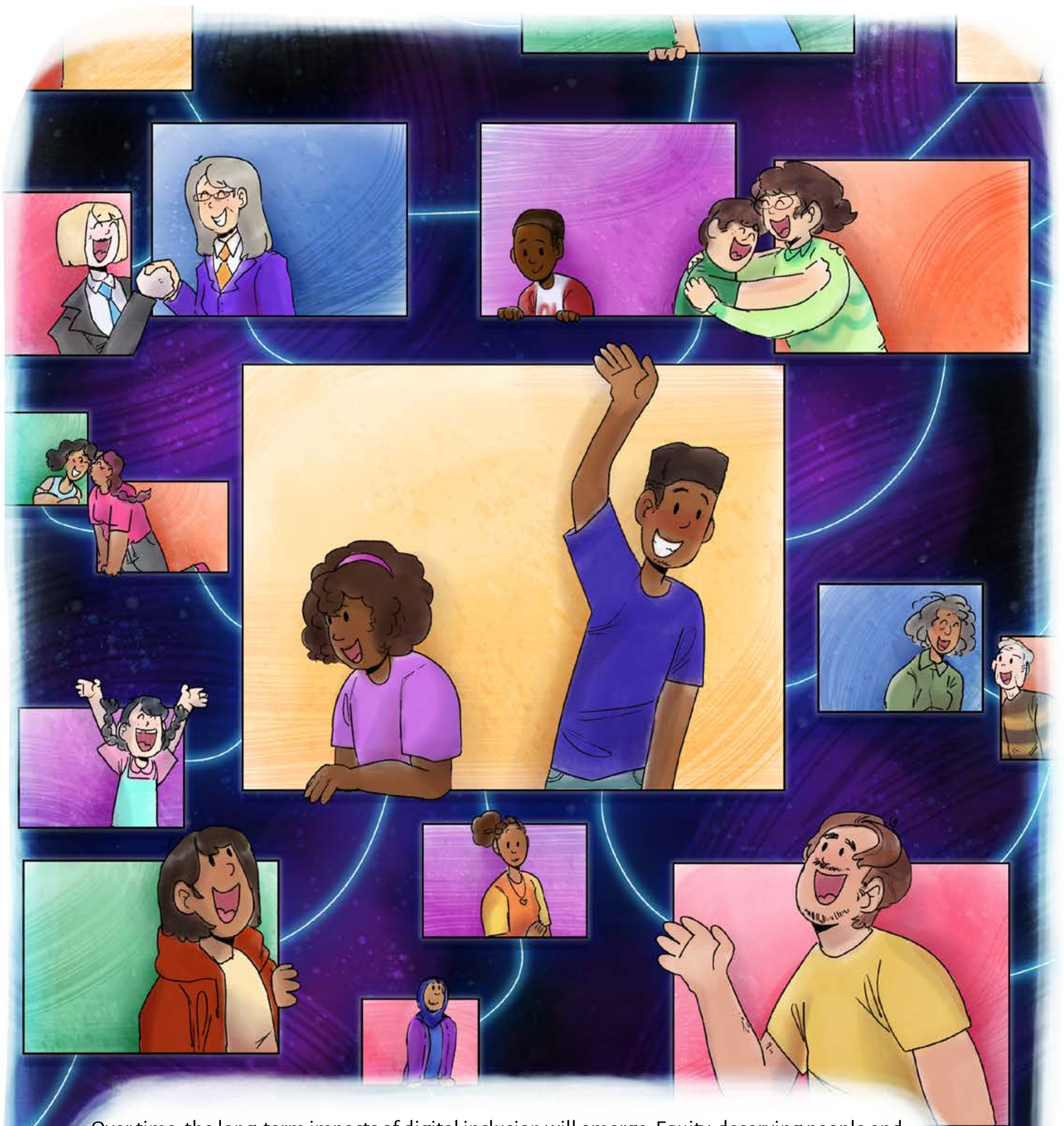
With more and new ingredients being continually added, GEO and friends continue to stir and season the digital inclusion soup with wayfinding, advocacy, community building, resource and knowledge sharing, sharing and learning from stories, and working with love and kindness.

At the core of GEO's work is a belief that the way people make the soup together is as important as the soup itself. They make it a priority to be inclusive and loving to every single person, no matter what their background or experience; working collectively and with integrity to make a difference; and making sure that everyone feels seen, heard, respected, and valued. They focus on treating people with kindness, compassion, and human dignity because they know that doing this creates a culture of collaboration and mutual support that leads to transformative change.



Today, GEO is working on creating a digital inclusion ecosystem where people listen to community members' experiences, and everyone shares stories, teaches each other, learns together, and strengthens their collective capacity and knowledge. Everyone is also learning from trying new things and paying attention to see if they are making a difference in the right way.

And just as the soup brought the community together in the fable, digital inclusion builds connections and strengthens relationships in our communities. GEO and friends are planning to share the story of digital inclusion in Nova Scotia so that everyone can learn from it and use their shared wisdom to work toward social justice. As government officials and businesses see the impact of their investments, they will ensure that GEO and friends have the resources to continue their efforts long into the future, and Nova Scotia as a whole will become more connected and resilient.



Over time, the long-term impacts of digital inclusion will emerge. Equity-deserving people and communities will be connected, empowered, and engaged. They will be able to participate more fully in what is going on in Nova Scotia, and they will be accessing healthcare and social services. Their well-being will be enhanced, and they will be able to pursue their goals and dreams. The digital divide will close, and Nova Scotia will be a more equitable and inclusive place for all.

In the end, the digital inclusion stone soup is a symbol of the power of collective action and the possibility of transformation. Everyone who had been separated by the digital divide—community members, community organizations, businesses, and governments—will be together as part of a stronger, more connected Nova Scotia.

# Our Commitments

- Inclusion - human-centred design
- Integrity
- Love, kindness and compassion
- Innovation - learning to think forward together
- Collaboration
- Making a difference
- Diversity



# Assumptions

- The private sector will continue to innovate the technology we need
- We can make things better for everyone
- Social safety nets will always be needed
- Community-based organizations and participants have an interest in increasing digital inclusion in their communities
- GEO Nova Scotia has the resources, expertise, and capacity to lead and coordinate digital inclusion efforts
- Government funders and champions are committed to supporting digital inclusion in equity deserving communities
- Access to digital technology is essential for economic, social, and personal development
- Digital inclusion can be a catalyst for change and create opportunities for equity and well-being
- Collaboration, partnerships, and human-centered design are critical for the success of the initiative
- Kindness, respect, love, human dignity, and care are essential values that underpin the initiative's success
- Building a network of partners and working collectively is essential to creating a strong digital inclusion ecosystem
- Innovation and flexibility are necessary to adapt to the changing digital landscape & meet people's needs



# GEO NOVA SCOTIA

getting everyone online

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