



How Charities Can
**Drive Digital
Transformation
Through
Chatbots**

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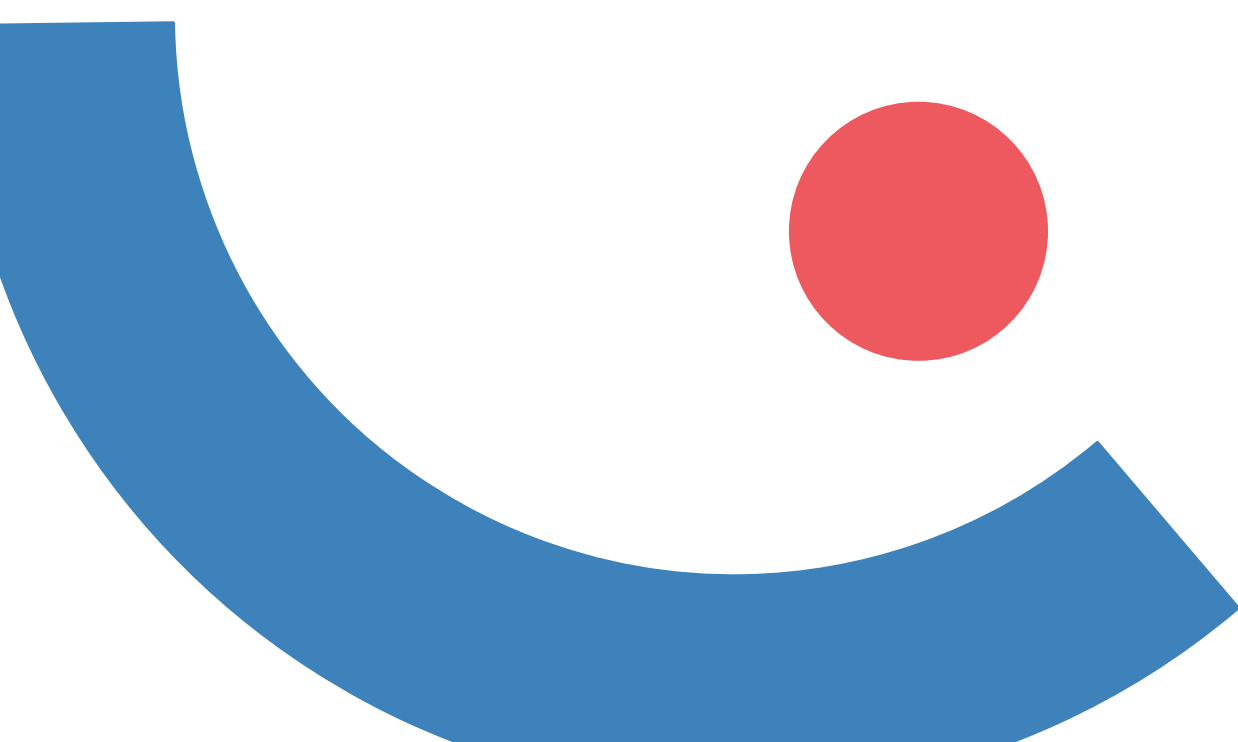
How charities can drive digital transformation through chatbots

The pandemic dealt a heavy blow to nonprofit organisations and charities worldwide, hitting them where it hurt most — funding. According to a [2020 survey by the Nonprofit Leadership Center](#), nonprofits identified fundraising as the top challenge during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, a [survey by Independent Sector](#), a coalition of nonprofits, foundations and corporate giving programmes, found that 83% of organisations in 2020 saw their revenues decline compared to the previous year. By April 2020, these organisations reported a 47% reduction in jobs.

However, despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic, [research by Charities Aid Foundation \(CAF\)](#) shows that people in the UK gave more to charity in 2020 compared to the previous year. Total donations reached £11.3 billion in 2020 — up from £10.6 billion in 2019.

What's more, whilst economic pressures and the uncertainty around COVID-19 may have led to a decline in the number of people giving to charity, those who gave, gave more — particularly at the start of the pandemic.



The Impact of COVID-19 on Large and Mid-Sized Nonprofits

About the Survey

Independent Sector partnered with Washington Council Ernst & Young to conduct this online survey of mid-sized nonprofit organizations between May 27 and June 9, 2020. The survey was sent to a broad group of mid-size nonprofit organizations (nonprofits with between 500 and 5000 employees) and responses were generated from 110 organizations, including human services, arts, youth development, workforce development, health, religion, and environmental organizations.



INDEPENDENT
SECTOR

To learn more, please visit
independentsector.org/resource/covid19-survey



83% of organizations experienced a reduction in revenue



71% have responded with a reduction in services or available operations



47% total reduction in nonprofit jobs reported when comparing April 2020 to prior years

67% have furloughed employees since the start of COVID-19

51% have laid off employees since the start of COVID-19



53% of organizations had a reduction in individual giving



When asked what types of assistance would be the most helpful,

92% suggested additional loan options such as forgivable loans

Image from Independent Sector

The paradigm shift in giving caused by COVID-19 represents a turning point for charities. As social distancing guidelines and a decline in cash donations forced nonprofits to fundraise in digital environments, charitable organisations now have to embrace digital transformation to avoid losing touch with donors and stakeholders.

This is where live [chat and chatbots](#) for charities come in, introducing a toolset that drives digital transformation in charities and other nonprofit groups.

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What is digital transformation in the charity sector?

Digital transformation is a broad term referring to any instance of digital technology permeating any aspect of an organisation's operations and fundamentally changing its processes and ability to deliver value.

In other words: it's technology changing how an organisation operates.

While digital transformation is often associated with for-profit enterprises, its relevance in the charity sector has come under focus over the past two years.

For starters, COVID-19 disruptions demonstrated the need for agility and resilience in the face of furloughs and limited funding; it's why [40.5% of nonprofit leaders](#) identify adaptability as the most important factor to their organisation's success — a need that technology can help fulfil.

This new digital imperative also comes in the wake of new consumer habits. As social distancing rules forced billions of people worldwide to stay home, the share of digital customer interactions naturally increased from [36% in 2019 to 58% in 2020](#) — an accelerated growth rate equal to three years of pre-pandemic growth. Things were much the same in the UK, where [internet usage doubled in 2020](#).

This mass migration to digital channels also had a knock-on effect on the way people give to charity.

For years, cash has been the most popular way to support charities in the UK. Case in point: 51% of donors gave using cash in 2019, according to CAF's [UK Giving 2021](#) report. This number shrank to 38% in 2020 and plummeted further to 7% in January 2021.

Apart from the shift to virtual fundraising, donors were concerned about the hygiene issues of using cash — CAF notes that six in ten people believe it's more hygienic to use contactless cards.



Digital transformation to the rescue?

For charities, these challenges underscore the importance of being more agile and swiftly responding to your stakeholders' changing needs. Digital solutions, such as chatbots and live chat for charities, offer a way to transform your processes and core service delivery model without incurring high additional costs.

As the centrepiece of your digital transformation project, chatbots can be deployed at scale, adapting to your charity's needs as:

- It adds more customer-support staff
- Grows its volunteer base
- Engages more donors
- Engages more beneficiaries.

But how exactly do chatbots provide value to charities and nonprofits?



5 Chatbot use cases for charities

At [Futr](#), our chatbot and live-chat platform offer the simplest and most practical way that charities can digitally transform their stakeholders' experience. With their ability to automate routine processes and engage more people in virtually any digital channel, chatbots for charities offer many benefits.

1. Digital-first donor engagement

Limited face-to-face interactions caused by the pandemic had a dramatic impact on the ability of charities to raise awareness, engage donors and solicit donations. Fortunately, there are ways to bring fundraising online.

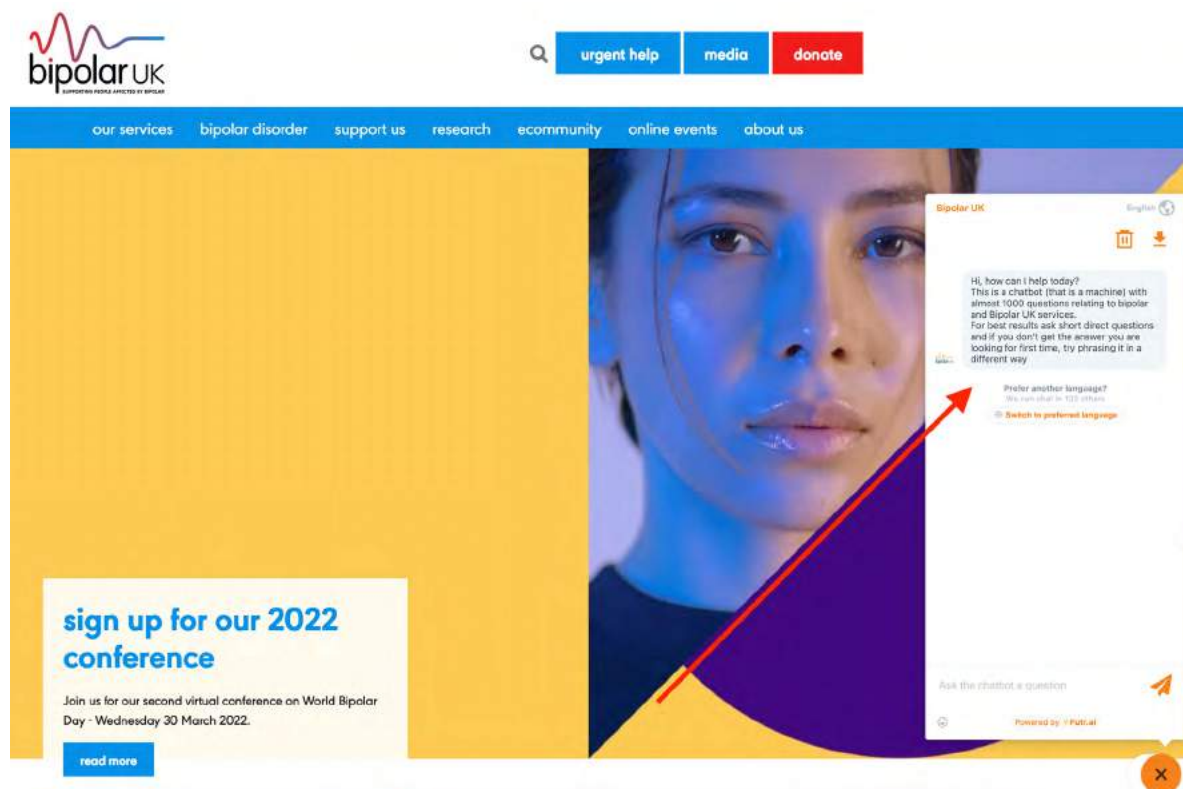
Blackbaud's [The Status of UK Fundraising](#) report shows that [60% of charities](#) turned to virtual fundraising during the pandemic — of that number, 75% did it for the first time.

Charity chatbots enable you to automate donor engagement and fundraising on the digital channels your prospective and existing supporters use, whether it's social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter or messaging apps like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

They're particularly useful at helping you overcome people's most common objections to donating, automating responses to questions such as:

- How do I donate?
- How much can I donate?
- Where do the donations go?
- Where do I learn more about your cause?

This may not seem much, but every query resolved by a chatbot represents time and cost savings for charities. For example, [Bipolar UK](#), the national mental health charity dedicated to supporting individuals who have bipolar disorder, partnered with Futr to ease pressure on their employees and volunteers.



Bipolar UK's website and live chat function

For Bipolar's team of 11 employees and 200 volunteers, who are responsible for engaging 100 support groups and an online community of over 20,000 members, managing demand and providing one-on-one phone and email support was already a tall order, even before the pandemic.

“We receive over 12,000 calls and around 5,000 emails each year — with a huge number of common questions.”

Simon Kitchen
Chief Executive Officer, Bipolar UK

However, many of the queries Bipolar receives relate to a handful of recurring topics. According to Simon Kitchen, Bipolar UK CEO, the organisation needed an out-of-the-box SaaS solution to enable self-serve and respond to the large volume of frequently asked questions (FAQs).

Futr’s live chat and chatbot solution for charities offered a complete toolset that comprises live-chat APIs and AI-powered chatbots, enabling Bipolar to provide self-serve functionalities through chat and speed up the resolution of user queries.

Bipolar UK — Chatbot and live chat impact in the first 8 months

24,082 Answered questions	193 Hours of call time saved	36 Languages supported	£87,000
Annualised non-urgent and repeat questions that were previously served by a call handler	Automated live-chat responses enabled contact centre staff to focus on the users who needed them most	Futr’s multilingual chatbots answered service users’ questions in the languages they were most comfortable using	Savings generated in the first eight months of deploying Futr’s chatbot and live chat platform

Related reading: [Read our Bipolar UK case study](#)

All Bipolar had to do was upload a database of FAQs to begin matching questions to relevant answers and reducing demand on the charity’s support team. Bipolar also uses Futr’s “Improvement Areas: Functionality” feature to get more insight into users’ questions and train their chatbot to understand the context of new queries.

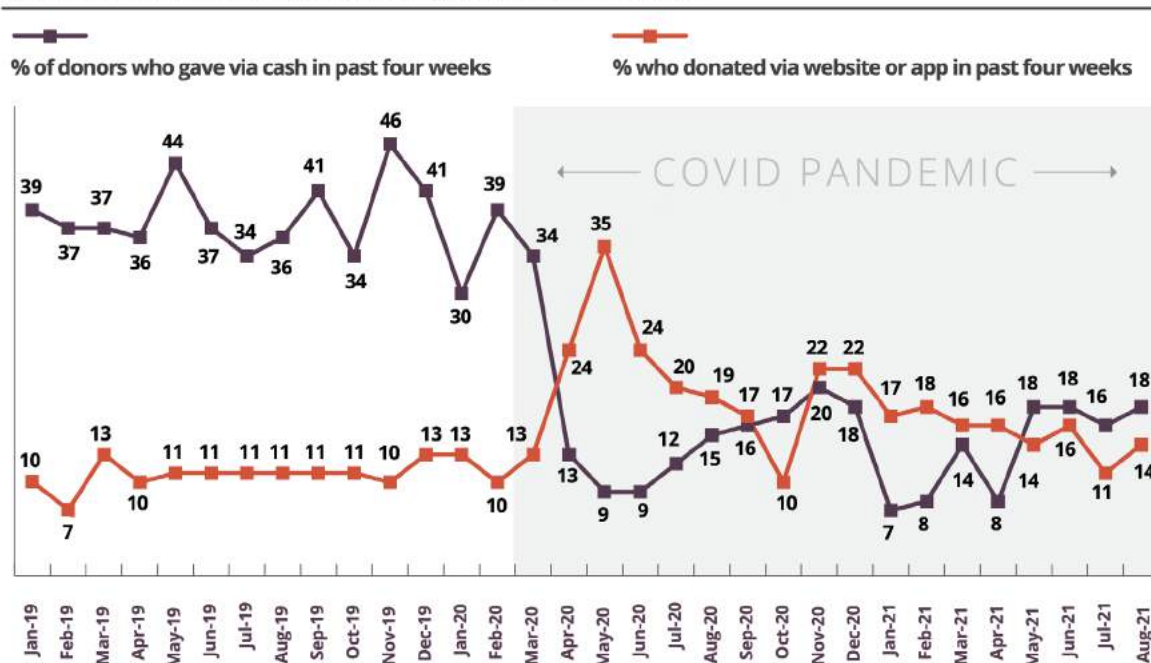
2. Supporting cashless giving

The pandemic had a clear impact on fundraising: preventing opportunities for face-to-face interactions severely affected charities’ ability to engage potential donors and solicit donations.

As a result, cash donations, historically the most popular method of giving, plummeted. [CAF’s analysis](#) shows that despite the gradual easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the share of cash-based donations fell to single digits in 2021 from a high of 51% in 2019.

However, contact-free and cashless methods of donating surged during the spring of 2020 (around the same time as the first UK lockdown). By April 2020, the share of donations via a website or app reached a year-high of 35%.

Figure 8: Proportion of donors each month giving by cash and by website/app



Base: All adults 16+ who have donated money in the past four weeks c. 350 per month (total n=11,173).

Image from [CAF's UK Giving Report 2021](#)

CAF also found that around half of people who donated via an app or website in 2020 did so directly through a charity’s website, and 17% did so through social media.

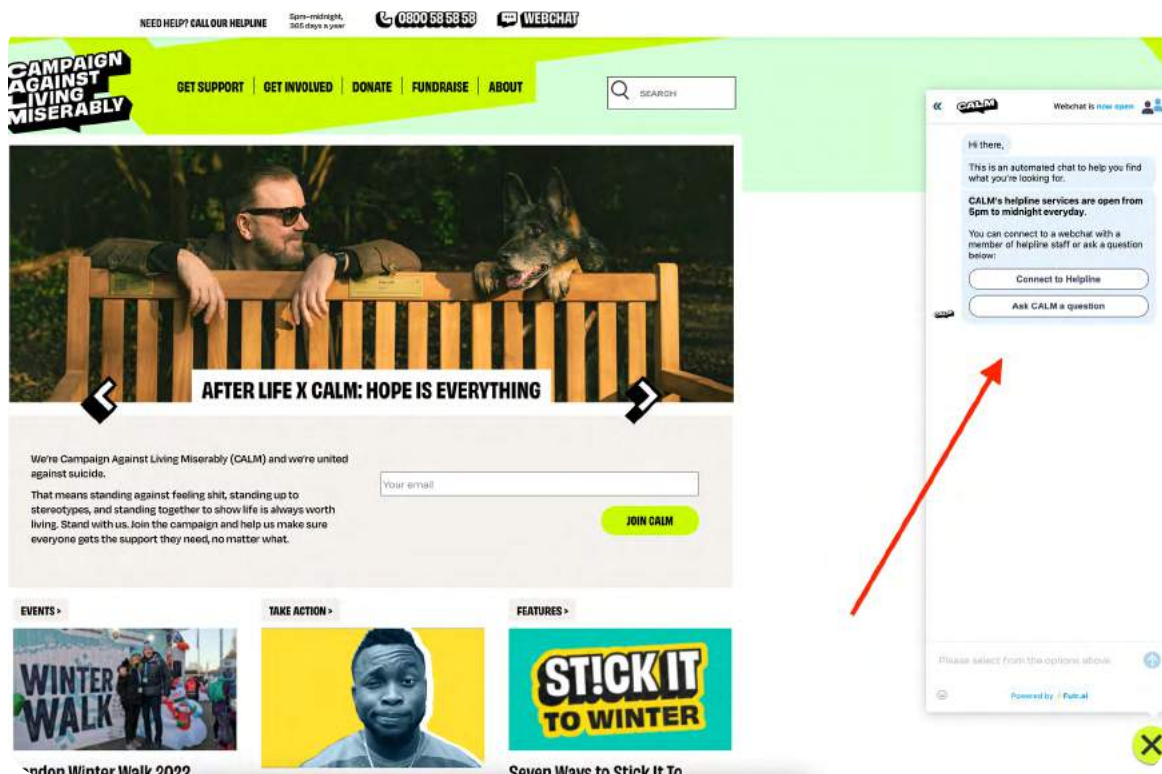
Charities have an opportunity to leverage technology to optimise fundraising through digital channels. At Futr, our chatbot platform offers [seamless integrations](#) with payment platforms like Stripe and PayPal, allowing bots to raise donations within the conversation itself. Your chatbot can show donors their giving options, where the money goes and how they can share stories about your cause and charity online.

However, this doesn’t mean chatbots can replace the role of charity employees and volunteers. The process of raising awareness and rallying people to your cause will always require a human element. This is why our chatbots give users the option to escalate the conversation with one of your live agents.

3. Assisting with core service delivery

Digital technologies can also help charities deliver their core services to their beneficiaries.

For example, the [Campaign Against Living Miserably \(CALM\)](#), a suicide prevention charity, uses a Futr chatbot to support people in need, lending an ear when they need it the most.



CALM's website and live chat function

Using a chatbot in a sensitive niche can seem like a detached approach to helping people with very particular needs. But Futr's advanced machine-learning algorithms can help critical support teams by triaging queries, allowing them to focus their attention on people who need them most.

It also enables CALM to support users outside of service hours, ensuring anyone with a question can be signposted to the right information.

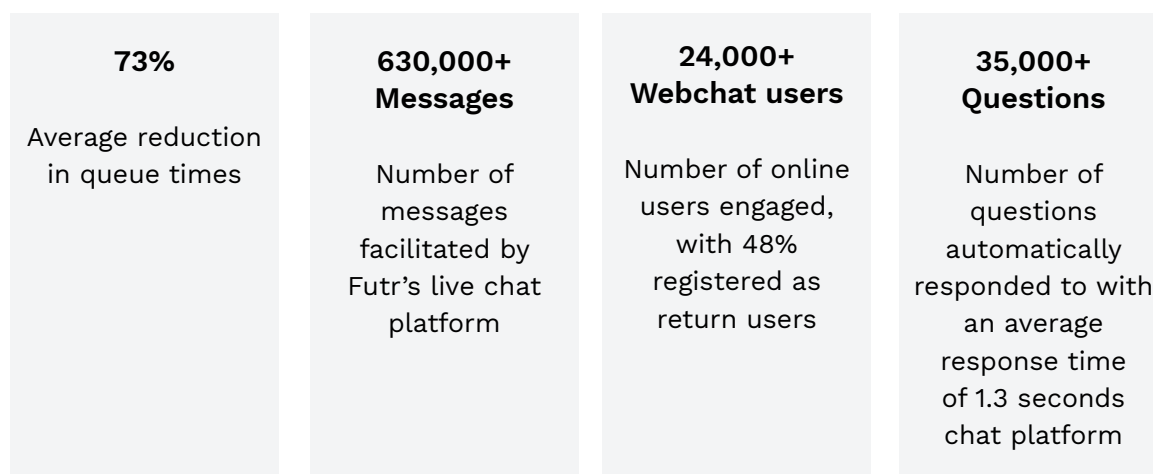
“The ability to provide our users with support in and out of live service hours has been critical for us. Whether it is via live chat, Q&As or through our content, it is the first step in providing a best-in-class that suits our individual user needs.”

Seun Akindele

Head of Data and Innovation, Campaign Against Living Miserably

Drawing on our experience working with police forces, councils and the NHS, we designed CALM's chatbot to identify people with non-critical queries and signpost them to the charity's self-serve resources. This enables the bot to fast-track users to CALM's human experts.

CALM — Chatbot and live chat impact in the first 12 months



Related reading: Dive into our [CALM case study](#)

4. Digitising paper-based processes

Signing up to volunteer or donate to a charity should be a quick and painless journey. Nobody enjoys filling out forms — especially using pen and paper.

One way to do this is by making the entire process digital. But this can still be a slow and cumbersome process, particularly when using a mobile device.

Apart from facilitating digital payments, Futr's chatbots can help charities by making the process of joining their community, registering for events or signing up for a newsletter more engaging.

For example:

- When someone wants to volunteer with your charity, all they need to do is find your Facebook page and hit the message button to interact with a chatbot. The bot then asks for their personal information within the chat, making the sign-up process feel more natural.
- If they'd rather donate, the chatbot can display a list of payment options (e.g., PayPal, debit or credit card) and process donations without requiring the user to leave the chat.

Our [conversational forms](#) make filling out forms as seamless on mobile as on desktop — no more filling out paper or digital forms or responding to emails. Our government-grade security also ensures that you protect your users' data in compliance with GDPR legislation.

Digitising your paper-based processes is arguably one of the fastest ways to drive efficiency. It's also a sure-fire way to increase stakeholder satisfaction.

5. Multilingual chat support

At Futr, our chatbots come with [multilingual APIs](#) that auto-translate messages in over a 120 languages. Our technology allows your chatbots and live chat agents to be instantly fluent in the language that your donors, volunteers and beneficiaries are most comfortable using.

This can be a game-changer for charities with multinational stakeholders. Rather than using expensive translation services, our multilingual chatbot and live chat solution can enable seamless translation, whether users are conversing with a bot or one of your live agents.

“Futr’s chatbot comes ready for use out of the box. Deployment was as simple as a few clicks, and overnight it transformed our offering, making it available 24/7 in any language.”

Simon Kitchen
Chief Executive Officer, Bipolar UK

Multilingual support isn't just about convenience and non-UK languages. For Welsh organisations, it's a [legal necessity](#) to include the use of Welsh, alongside English, in the delivery of public services.

The strength of our off-the-shelf Cymraeg translation feature is part of the reason why the [North Wales Housing Association](#) currently uses our chatbot platform to engage their residents.

Download the Futr eBook: [The ultimate guide to chatbots in social housing](#)



Is your charity ready to embrace digital transformation?

Charities had to learn many difficult lessons during the height of the pandemic. But it's not been all bad news. Despite furloughs and reductions in disposable income, a [CAF survey](#) found one in five UK adults said they were happy to give more than usual. In contrast, one in seven people said they'd have to give less.

In other words, there continues to be a strong culture of charitable giving in this country. But amid the growing popularity of virtual fundraising and shift to digital payment methods, charities and nonprofits face the challenge of keeping up with the times and new giving behaviours.

It's here where digital technologies such as chatbots can help charities do more good for less. Chatbots can elevate your live chat facilities and drive more efficient methods of engaging supporters — all whilst improving communication and reducing outreach costs.



Interested in learning more? Get in touch with the [Futr](mailto:hello@futr.ai) team today at hello@futr.ai.

[Schedule a FREE demo](#) of our chatbot and live chat platform applications for the charity.

Futr's live chat and chatbot solution help charities and nonprofits drive digital transformation in their organisation. Be there for donors, volunteers, employees and beneficiaries 24/7 with self-serve features and automated responses to FAQs. Use chatbots to triage queries and enable your live agents to focus on helping users that need a human touch.