

November 2021

Upskilling local authority contact centre staff

**Adult Social Care
Digital technology and skills review**

Ipsos MORI, Institute of Public Care and Skills for Care



Ipsos MORI



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This case study supports a review of technology and digital skills in adult social care, undertaken by Ipsos MORI, the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University and Skills for Care on behalf of NHSX. Further information is available on the [study webpage](#).

Problem to be solved

Following the migration of local care and support information onto publicly accessible directories, East Sussex County Council recognised a need for staff in their Adult Social Care (ASC) contact centre to be trained to access the large volumes of information held on the online directories quickly. The contact centre deals with about 300 calls per day and employs 80 members of staff to provide members of the public who have care and support needs, and their carers, with practical support to lead an active life. Accessing information held electronically, and knowledge management is integral to the role of staff in the call centre.

The project

The Council collates local information and maintains three online directories which are available to staff (including contact centre staff) and the public via the local authority website:

- 1Space: Care, support and wellbeing directory offers information about local care and support available.
- ESCIS: Directory of community groups and clubs contains community information about services like social groups, charities, and local events.
- Support with Confidence: Directory of accredited personal assistants which have been vetted by Adult Social Care and Trading Standards

To embed best practice working models, staff in the contact centre were offered in-house training by the information, guidance and insight team on how to use the three online directories efficiently. This was not only to provide contact staff with the knowledge and skills to use the online information, but also to assist with improving staff confidence and the culture change needed to move from the ad hoc information managed by the contact centre to the central information managed electronically by other departments.

Implementation

Training sessions were set up to teach staff how to search for information needed on the directories and which directory was best used for which type of enquiry (e.g. finding a personal assistant versus finding a community group). The in-house training was particularly successful because it provided staff with real-life scenarios. The staff being trained needed to learn which directories to use to find the right information, what search terms to use, and how to filter results. The in-house trainers were also looking for consistency; everyone should get the same results when the training scenarios were completed, which meant that consistent information would be provided by the contact centre, regardless of who took the call.

Outcome and impact

Appropriate training coupled with the use of online resource systems was instrumental in empowering staff to search efficiently for relevant and up-to-date information, which could be passed on to people contacting the local authority, ensuring the quality of advice and signposting provided is up-to-date and consistent.

The Council identified benefits including increased staff satisfaction leading to reduced turnover, and decreased complaints from people who approach the local authority for information, in turn reducing staff workload. Positive qualitative feedback from contact centre staff who had undertaken the training sessions is used as the key success metric for the training programme.

“They received such fantastic feedback [about the digital training], it was really resounding.”

Trainer and content manager

A positive secondary consequence of this project has been the bridges built between teams internally, and, as a result of increased contact with other teams, a recognition of the wide-reaching knowledge that frontline contact centre staff hold. Consequently, contact centre staff are now consulted for their input and expertise when new digital tools are being designed by the web team, as it is acknowledged that frontline staff are well placed to advise on behalf of people with care and support needs and their unpaid carers.

“It makes us feel a bit more cohesive as a department...we all have the same goal really, and that’s to support residents and our clients and carers to access services and get the best service they can.”

Trainer and content manager

Lessons learned

The experience of upskilling frontline contact centre staff on use of the digital directories, as a replacement for locally held information, has shown the importance of training existing as well as new staff in new systems, even systems which may be considered user friendly and intuitive. The benefits are not just in improving frontline staff members’ digital and technical skills, but also in helping staff to adjust to new ways of working.

Through the training and resulting building of relationships between teams, the benefit of back-office support staff working with frontline staff has been recognised; the knowledge that the frontline staff have is invaluable and everyone benefits from working together.

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