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What Matters Most App

Adult Social Care
Digital technology and skills review

Ipsos MORI, Institute of Public Care and Skills for Care

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'What Matters Most' App

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

"The team went to a service manager and asked 'how can we help you have more time?' and they turned round - they were in their office, a registered care home - and they said 'do something about this!' as they pointed at this wall of lever arch files and a desk full of paper and folders." Business Improvement Manager, Mencap

Mencap embarked on a project to understand how they could better support their managers to help improve staff retention and wellbeing. The main problem managers identified was the amount of paperwork and time spent searching for records and information, which impacted on their ability to perform other key duties. To help free up service managers' time, a programme to digitise care and support records was undertaken.

Digital recording also aligned with other Mencap aims. Digital data collected would help Mencap become a more insight-led organisation. Digital recording would remove intrusive paper and files from people's homes thereby supporting Mencap's 'homes not hospitals' principle.

The project

"It became clear … it wasn't just about giving people digital tools; it was about actually supporting them to gain confidence in working in a new way." Business Improvement Manager, Mencap

Digital versions of paper records were initially created using Office 365 tools, but this still meant staff needed to fill out and access multiple different documents held in different places. A workflow automation solution which attaches to the document storage and management platform SharePoint was trialled, but was found to be unsuitable for Mencap's specific needs.

The solution settled on was building an app in-house. A purpose-built app would give Mencap exactly what they wanted in terms of content, language, usability and being able to link quality of support with the information being recorded. The app was named the 'What Matters Most' app to mirror Mencap's What Matters Most principles[1] and practice framework.

The app was built using a low code platform, which did not require coding experts. The prototype of the app was built in 4 weeks with the help of a developer working on-site at Mencap. Since then, Mencap has developed the app, paying for additional development support as and when needed.

Mencap knew that many of their frontline workforce were not digitally confident and so organised a digital technology skills and confidence programme to sit alongside the introduction of new tools and technology. The move from creating paper records to entering information onto a web-based or smartphone app was a major cultural change. From the start, the project team ensured they provided

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[1] What Matters Most principles https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/our-services/what-matters-most

reassurance, coaching and mentoring support to workers to help them embrace the new working practices.

Implementation

"We had some willing participants but also some very, very scared people who weren't used to working with digital." Project Lead, Better Faster Digital, Mencap

The app was developed in 'bite sized' chunks. A prototype of the app was first trialled in a small service; 15 support workers were given tools (smartphones and laptops) and face-to-face training, and connectivity at the service was checked. This was followed by further trials and over time more capability was added to the app. Crucially, the app was developed in an iterative way; rather than waiting for review dates, it was continually updated in response to feedback. However, one of the challenges of working in this agile way was effectively communicating the constant changes to the services.

Only a few months into the trial the project team began to think about how to deliver remote training. The advantages of this were that it could be delivered at scale and would allow support workers to learn at their convenience and repeat the training if necessary. Additionally, as it was delivered remotely, the COVID-19 pandemic did not disrupt the training programme.

The first at-scale roll out in July 2020 revealed that implementation took longer than planned. Services took longer to carry out the requisite data cleanse before uploading data onto the app. The project team had also under-estimated the training needs of staff and to overcome this, the team engaged with service managers to help them support their staff, asked managers to nominate digital champions who could help less confident colleagues, and developed extra learning focussed on basic digital skills. Through providing this additional support, Mencap achieved its target for all 8,000 operational staff to be using the app by November 2021.

Poor connectivity in some services was identified as a barrier to implementation. The solution to this was providing wireless routers or supporting providers to install broadband cables. By November 2021 all services had the required connectivity.

To help with implementation, Mencap created a Universal Support Model working group which included representatives from across Mencap, as well as the change team and app delivery team. Regular meetings enabled problems and risks to be resolved early, and made the whole organisation feel part of the project.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that planned methods of measuring the impact of the project had to be revised. Instead, a digital maturity model was devised, whereby staff were asked to assess their level of digital maturity at the start of their training, then again when they were actively using the app, and then 6 months later. Another measurement of success was qualitative feedback from the services. Data from the app was also being looked at to see if there were improvements in the quality of recording and progress towards care outcomes.

Outcome and impact

"(One of the service managers) told me 'this has made the biggest difference to people of any project ever in Mencap.'" Change lead, Better Faster Digital, Mencap

The app gave managers more time as they no longer needed to travel to services to drop off and collect paper records, and they did not have to spend time searching for information on paper. They were better able to monitor the quality of service and had more time to coach and support their staff. They kept up to date 'at the press of a button' and could immediately identify problems. At the more senior level the information readily accessible in the app aided oversight and investigations.

It was still early days, but support workers were starting to report that the app was saving them time because information was easy to find and all in one place. This meant they could spend more time with the person they support, and managers could better enable and support workers to provide the best possible service to the people Mencap support.

The notification element of the app shared important information such as a change in support needs or an appointment. The notification function was hailed as exemplary by service managers in ensuring communication is as good as it can be between support workers, and nothing is missed.

Digitally enabling support workers made them more engaged with the organisation. It was reported that support workers were using Mencap's intranet and messaging app to reach out to each other, and the learning aspect of the project made them feel they were receiving continuous development.

A single recording tool across the organisation meant that a support worker could easily work at any Mencap service. Creating a digitally enabled frontline workforce also meant that staff were able to complete training and have meetings online, and digitally confident support workers were better able to help the people they support with assistive technology.

There were many examples given of how the project benefited individuals in their personal lives through improved digital inclusion, for example, moving to online banking.

It is hoped that, in time, the data collected by the app will enable Mencap to become more insightful. Data, patterns and trends will be useful for senior managers, for Mencap as an organisation and for the social care sector as a whole.

Lessons learned

"It's given me confidence that with the right team, the right support, the right conversations … and with the right solution, you can shift a workforce in this way." Change lead, Better Faster Digital, Mencap

The main lesson learnt was not to under-estimate the amount of cultural change required by a project of this nature. It was important to think about cultural change alongside practical change. A lot of time had to be invested to engage people, help to overcome their fears, and raise their digital skills and confidence.

The project also revealed the value of co-creation; by learning from people on the frontline and giving service managers autonomy to organise the training it helped them feel part of the process. Working with the whole organisation from the outset was another important aspect of its success.

An iterative, agile and flexible approach was important. It enabled the project to not only be effective at adapting the app in a responsive way but also adjust the timetable and still meet the final delivery deadline.

Communication was key. In the early days there was a need to respond quickly to critical feedback in a proactive way to keep a positive aura around the project. There was also an early lesson on the need to present the practical benefits of the app to users by clearly setting out what's in it for them, as well as communicating improvements to the technology.

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