Digital Health Devon

Torbay & South Devon Care Home Resident Digital Wellbeing Project

2021 - 2023

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Background & Introduction

Engaging Communities South West (ECSW) is a not-for-profit organisation offering a range of services, including community voice, facilitation of engagement events, data capture and analysis, report writing, communications and digital support, training and service/project evaluation and review.

ECSW also manage the contract for award-winning independent health & social care community champion Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay (HWDPT) and run a number of different projects in the community, including their flagship e-learning project, Digital Health Devon. Digital Health Devon is an award-winning, NHS-supported e-learning tool created to show people how to access local health, social care and wellbeing services using the internet, including video consultations, e-referrals and prescriptions.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant the need for online services became a vital lifeline for communities, and there was a realisation that one key vulnerable sector of the community - care home residents - were particularly impacted by the pandemic. They had become increasingly isolated from family, friends and loved ones due to their lack of digital skills and available technology. This need for more digital support was identified by HWDPT, the local authority, the NHS and care home managers.

Torbay and South Devon Care Home Project

This project is jointly funded by:

- **Public Health Torbay** to improve care home resident connection with friends and family, especially during COVID-19 lockdowns.
- **Enhanced Health in Care Homes** (EHCH) through the Ageing Well programme to support care element 3 of the national NHS EHCH framework - which states: *"develop existing and new community assets to support residents to improve their ... wellbeing*".

HWDPT requested their managing organisation ECSW commission Digital Health Devon (DHD) to work with care homes to improve the skill and understanding of smart technology as a solution to overcome resident isolation. DHD was chosen given its proven track record of delivering digital initiatives in the community.

This approach used learning from an initial Test and Learn project In Torbay to scope the issues faced by care homes and residents' families. The Test and Learn identified early adopter families and homes who might act as champions and provide peer support. The main findings from this were lack of confidence to implement this technology and variable broadband coverage both to the home and to resident rooms.

This project is designed to support care homes and their residents to use smart interactive technology in Torbay and South Devon. Devices such as Alexa can help people with limited mobility regain some of their autonomy, with the potential to use their voice to control their environment, operate light switches and temperature, set medication reminders, select certain music and even video call their friends and family.

The project targets physical, mental, and cognitive wellbeing for care home residents by increasing community participation through digital connection, embedding the use of smart technology in care homes and sharing that learning across the care home network. This project is intended to provide “an extra pair of hands” for care home staff, with a priority to maintaining connection with residents’ friends and family.

This report provides an outline of the project, with an aim to use the learning within to inform future decisions from health and social care commissioners and providers.

Project Executive Summary

- This project - jointly funded by Public Health Torbay and Enhanced Health in Care Homes Ageing Well - was designed to support care homes and their residents to use smart interactive technology in Torbay and South Devon, in order to reduce social isolation among residents and increase the skills and knowledge of care home staff to benefit the physical, mental, and cognitive wellbeing for residents. Digital Health Devon achieved this by offering devices to care homes with access to socially connecting services and a variety of enrichment tools, alongside training and support on how to use them.
- The project has surpassed its original target of 37 care homes engaged with the project in Torbay and South Devon (25% of all homes), with 40 homes engaging with this project. All milestones, objectives and aims were achieved, with the exception of establishing a network of Digital champions throughout care homes. This was due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resultant virus protocols in place across the whole care home network.
- The feedback received from all participating care homes has been extremely positive with all homes expressing a keen interest in having more Amazon Alexa devices specifically for residents that are restricted to their bedroom. All those involved in the project suggested that the devices offered via this project had improved the physical, mental, and cognitive wellbeing for residents in some way.
- Every respondent to each of the care home resident, family/friend and care home manager survey stated they had seen an improvement in their quality of life of either themselves, their loved one or their resident via this project. 75% of family/friend survey respondents said the devices allowed them to have contact at a more convenient time and communicate with their loved one at least once a week.
- Project adaptations based on participant feedback included the introduction of a project YouTube channel and new online resources to enrich residents use of the technology offered, working with other organisations and projects such as the HIVE (Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust's training platform) and the Hydration Project (supplying care homes with tools to ensure its residents regularly drink) and improving the digital offer to include smartphone devices.
- Challenges that impacted on project delivery included the COVID-19 pandemic, internet connectivity issues (particularly broadband and network coverage in rural South Devon), the need for additional digital support and equipment beyond the scope of the project and the need for more feedback direct from residents.
- In the interests of this project's sustainability, consideration should be given to ongoing asset and software update management, the device capabilities of using WhatsApp and AttendAnywhere (hospital video consultation software for planned hospital appointments) and the ongoing maintenance of the project YouTube channel.
- Recommendations for future projects such as this include added budget put in place to cover additional digital support, asset security, device storage & monitoring, travel expenses, a more robust approach to Steering Group Meeting attendance and the need for more participant (particularly resident) feedback. **This report should be used by key stakeholders, including the Devon Care Home Collaborative, to share the learning contained within to benefit the local care home community.**

Project Objectives

The key Project Objectives outlined in the Project Service Level Agreement were as follows:

1. To reduce the level of social isolation through improving communication and participation of residents who have suffered dramatically from the infection control restrictions associated with the pandemic.
2. To increase the skills and knowledge of care home staff about the creative possibilities of smart voice enabled technology to support resident wellbeing.
3. To inform and invite all 148 Care Homes in Torbay and South Devon into the project, with a view to providing support for as many as possible within the time, resource and budget restraints. *(**NB.** This was with the pre-expectation that not all will participate due to other commitments, pressures, and limited capacity)*

Project Aims

In order to achieve the objectives, it was expected that the project would target physical, mental, and cognitive wellbeing for residents by:

a. Using smart technology to communicate effectively with friends and family for residents who have suffered dramatically during Covid lockdowns.
b. Increasing community participation through digital connection.
c. Embedding the use of smart technology in care homes and enabling the sharing of that learning across the care home network.
d. Learning about opportunities on appropriate learning platforms including digital skills.
e. Utilising the expertise and knowledge base of an independent Project Advisory Group, who will also monitor project progress.

Number of Care Homes Engaged

One of DHD's first actions was to set up a Project Advisory Group. This consisted of project staff, Care Home Managers, Dementia specialists, lay representatives and other relevant stakeholders, including members of the Devon Care Home Collaborative and South West Care Home Network.

Following guidance from the advisory group and an initial research and discovery phase looking into the type of devices and support that could be offered to Care Homes, including the cost per care home, an internal target of supporting 37 homes (25% of all care homes in Torbay and South Devon) was set.

This was completed within the required timeframe, and thanks to savings against equipment costs through stringent budgetary control and sourcing refurbished warrantied devices, it is anticipated that 40 local care homes in total will be supported in person as part of this project.

A further 15 Care Homes engaged with the project but were unfortunately unable to be supported due to falling outside the geographical area being funded via this project.

Devices Available through this Project

The devices below were made available to care homes as part of this project.

Following extensive research the devices below were chosen to be made available to care homes as part of this project to have the most impact on physical, mental, and cognitive wellbeing. This was because these devices would provide access to:

- The four most frequently used video calling applications (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Zoom and MS Teams), thus improving social connection with friends and family.
- Other applications for enrichment such as YouTube for videos on local history or elderly exercise routines.
- Live local webcams to view local beaches, global landmarks or even animal enclosures at Paignton Zoo.
- Popular streaming services such as Netflix or Discovery (subscription fees were separate to our offer).
- Specialist services via Alexa devices like the RNIB Talking Books service, providing access to over 37,000 fiction and non-fiction books in multiple accessible formats.

Amazon Alexa Show 8 - 2021 Release

- *8” touchscreen*
- *13MP camera*
- *Wi-Fi & Bluetooth connectivity*
- *Subtitles, Screen magnification, Colour inversion abilities*
- *Multiple language options*
- *Ability to connect to other devices on the same network*

Meta Facebook Portal - 2022 Release

- *10” touchscreen*
- *Camera which pans*
- *Wi-Fi & Bluetooth connectivity*
- *Subtitles, Screen magnification, Colour inversion abilities*
- *Multiple language options*
- *Access to WhatsApp, FB Messenger, Zoom & MS Teams*

iPhone 6/6s

- *iOS smart phone*
- *Comes with Vodafone sim pre-loaded with 20gb data, unlimited texts and calls for 6 months.*
- *Compliments the social connectivity aspect of the project by offering video calling/standard calling via WhatsApp, Messenger, Zoom or Teams*
- *Wi-Fi Enabled*
- *Alexa App compatible*
- *Accessibility functions (language, subtitles, screen enlargement and colour inversion)*

Our Additional Digital Offer

Digital Health Devon would oversee the installation and basic training of these devices for a member of Care Home staff, who in turn would cascade this out to residents and other staff members. A member of Digital Health Devon was also available beyond this initial visit for further support, troubleshooting and device assistance throughout the duration of the project.

Milestones Timeline and Performance against Objectives

The following table sets out the key milestones achieved by the project and how that relates to each of the objectives and/or aims set out on the previous page.

Phase	Key Task / Action	Related Objective/Aim(s)	Target Date	Date Completed
Discovery *(Sep 21 – Nov 21)*	Market research on available devices, their functionality and associated costings	**1, 2, a, b, c**	Oct 21	Oct 21
	Create database of care homes, inc. contact details	**3, b, c, d**	Oct 21	Oct 21
	Creation of a survey to gain an understanding of care home requirements and results analysis	**1, 2, 3, a, b, d**	Nov 21	Nov 21
	Engage with the Care Home managers in south Devon Maintenance of market knowledge	**2, 3, b, c, d**	Nov 21	Nov 21
	Release initial email, marketing and link to survey to the first cohort of prospective participants	**2, 3, b, c, d**	Nov 21	Nov 21
	Based on results of the survey, device proposition refined for target audience	**2, a, c**	Nov 21	Nov 21
	Maintain the development and support of an effective **Project Advisory Group** to steer the project	**3, e**	Throughout Phase	
Planning and Preparation *(Dec 21 – Mar 22)*	Purchased first batch of devices for testing, useability research and user guide creation	**2, a, c**	Dec 21	Dec 21
	COVID contingency planning *(to be led by Government guidelines and Care Home protocol)*	**1, 3, b, e**	Dec 21	Jan 22
	Review of current processes to identify efficiency and streamlining opportunities	**ALL**	Dec 21	Jan 22
	Sourcing storage for devices in Exeter	**2, a, b, c**	Dec 21	Jan 22
	Implementation plan for South Devon expansion	**ALL**	Jan 22	Feb 22
	Create simple pre and post questionnaires for care home staff/residents receiving support	**1, 2, 3, a, b, d**	Feb 22	Feb 22
	Reporting template creation for South Devon aspect	**2, c, e**	Mar 22	Mar22

Phase	Key Task / Action	Related Objective/Aim(s)	Target Date	Date Completed
	Create new e-Learning module guides on DHD e-Learning website to show care home staff/residents how to use equipment and enrichment resources available via the devices	**1, 2, 3, a, b, c, d**	Mar 22	Mar22
	Create Project Page on the DHD website with links to new module guides and enrichment resources	**1, 2, 3, a, b, c, d**	Mar 22	Mar 22
	Liaise with ALL Care Homes in the South Devon area to promote project and encourage involvement	**2, 3, b, c, d**	Throughout Phase	
	Maintain the development and support of an effective **Project Advisory Group** to steer the project	**3, e**	Throughout Phase	
Implementation *(Mar 22 – Feb 23)*	Implementation of smart technology into the internal target of 37 care homes	**1, 2, 3, a, b, c, d**	Feb 23	Jan 23
	Purchase continual batches of smart technology equipment required to share with care homes, including any additional enabling equipment (e.g. Wi-Fi extenders, voice activated smart plugs etc.)	**2, a, b, c**	Throughout Phase	
	Continue to monitor and fix any website errors, and add new eLearning resources for staff/residents	**1, 2, a, b, d**	Throughout Phase	
	Continue to obtain written testimonials surrounding the impact that the project has had	**1, c, e**	Throughout Phase	
	Collate regular project data/stats/feedback, including up to date records of all activities, schedules, website training modules, public surveys, expenses and remote support sessions	**1, c, e**	Throughout Phase	
	Liaise with ALL Care Homes in the South Devon area to promote project and encourage involvement	**2, 3, b, c, d**	Throughout Phase	
	Maintain the development and support of an effective **Project Advisory Group** to steer the project	**3, e**	Throughout Phase	
Monitoring *(May 22 – Feb 23)*	Mid-implementation review to gain an understanding of whether our approach was working and how the project could be adapted to ensure objectives/aims are met *(inc. new YouTube channel)*	**ALL**	May 22	Jul 22
	Evidencing usage of smart devices supplied, protection of Digital Health Devon's assets and creating a clear geographical picture of our reach across the Torbay and South Devon area.	**2, 3, b, c**	May 22	May 22
	Produce and circulate final report including outcomes, impact, case studies and any other learning	**2, c, e**	Feb 23	Feb 23

Original Milestone Planned Vs Actual

The following table sets out the original key milestones planned before the project started and when these where achieved (or not).

Digital Project Work Plan			
Area of work	**Key Task**	**Milestone**	**Actual**
Staffing	Recruit part-time project officer to work with Care Home managers plus any support staff required	Jul-Aug 21	Oct-21
Website & Equipment	Ensure accurate up-to-date modules on smart technology are available on the Digital Health Devon website, and that relevant technology and equipment is purchased to support care homes	Oct-21	Oct 21- ongoing
Building a Network	Establish a network of champion expertise in smart digital technology to support care home residents	Oct-21	Did not happen due to resource and COVID
Project Marketing	Design/distribute/promote project information through alternative methods	Dec-21	Oct 21 - ongoing
Admininstration	Maintain the project administration needs	Nov-21	Oct 21 - ongoing

Adapting the Project

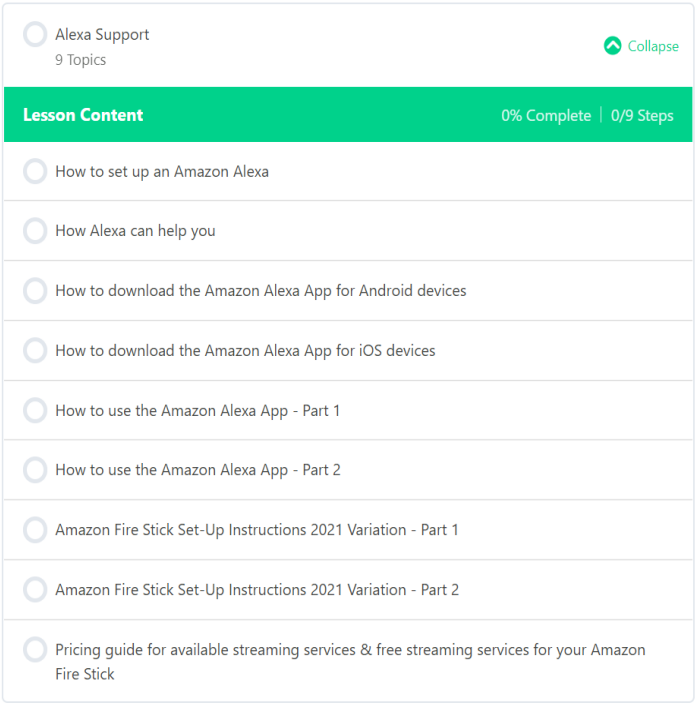
Throughout the project, Digital Health Devon conducted regular reviews with project participants and the Project Advisory Group to gain an understanding of whether our approach was working and how the project could be adapted to ensure the objectives and aims are met. This led to a number of adaptations to project delivery, including those below.

YouTube

To complement the SMART technology within Care Homes, ECSW launched a new YouTube channel, accessible via these devices, at Digital Health Devon - YouTube. This YouTube initiative was introduced 3 months into the project aimed at providing residents with an additional entertainment channel. Current channel content includes videos on historical sites throughout Devon told by local historian Dr Kevin Dixon, informational videos on historical events in Devon donated by John Tomkins at Emberlense Productions and the Ageing Well Torbay programme at Torbay Community Development Trust. To date take up for the new channel has been encouraging. The average user age is 65 or above and our busiest 48 hour period the channel had 1,200 engagement clicks, with the content being predominantly viewed on Smart TV's, iOS (Apple) and Amazon devices.

Creating new enrichment resources

To further complement the SMART Technology within care homes and increase community participation through digital connection, an 'enrichment' page was added to the Digital Health Devon website showcasing live webcam links to county and overseas attractions such as Paignton Zoo animal enclosures and local beaches. From January 2022 to December 2022 this page has had nearly 300 (293) page views. Specific online modules and guides for care homes using the SMART devices that made up our offer were also created and shared with homes (see screenshot, right). Since these were created in October 2021 they have attracted 235 page views. Links to these online resources and the enrichment age were added to the HIVE - Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust's training platform, which has a care providers' page and a featured links section, where courses and information covering current themes in healthcare are highlighted.



Changes to equipment and digital offer

Participant feedback suggested that the original Android devices we offered to complement the SMART devices may not have been as user-friendly or as easy to navigate as they could be. There were also reports of issues being experienced whilst trying to contact family and friends using the Amazon Alexa Show 5/8. To combat this and driven by care home feedback, we swapped android devices with refurbished iPhones. After undertaking extensive market research, we determined that the Meta Facebook Portal was the most suitable option for ease of use when video-calling friends and family. Since this device has been implemented, we have received excellent feedback and minimal difficulties have been experienced. It was important for

longevity of all the devices we offered to implement smart devices which have ongoing manufacturers support.

Cross Working Opportunities

As part of the project the Digital Health Devon team have met with other organisations running similar projects in the community. The Hydration Project, run by Victoria Wicks of Torbay and South Devon Foundation NHS Trust, supplied care homes with the necessary tools to ensure its residents regularly drink to reduce the number of Urinary tract infections (UTIs) and subsequent hospital admissions. The devices available in our digital offer are capable of producing verbal reminders for residents to drink via the Amazon Alexa App. This is something that was shown to every care home we visit and so far has been widely well received and excellent feedback has been obtained. Victoria was kind enough to promote our project to her cohort of 60 homes and provide us with their contact details to make initial introductions.

Storage

In February 2022 a storage unit for SMART devices in Exeter was rented which had better access to the M5 and A30 than an existing storage unit in Torquay, reducing travel costs for the Exeter-based Project Team and mitigating the risk of theft/loss when the devices. The unit in Exeter was temperature controlled to ensure contents were not damaged, and as it was centrally positioned it also allowed for a better-placed base of operations should the project's geographical coverage be extended.

Friends and Family Event

In order to support residents' family and friends with how to connect with their loved ones digitally, on Saturday 29th October 2022 we invited friends and family of local care home residents to a special event at Paignton Library to learn more about how the project devices work and view live link ups with care home residents. Although marketed via all care home networks, the event was unfortunately poorly attended. However, the library expressed a great interest in hosting similar 'digital' events on a much larger scale to benefit the local community and share good digital practice.

Project Challenges & Learning

COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic has affected the project in a number of ways. Care homes wanted to participate in the project but were hesitant because of the impact of the virus on residents, staff and visitors. Ongoing care home staff shortages understandably meant that the majority of care home staff had to direct all of their time and attention on the resident's care. Despite this there has been broad acknowledgement from care home staff that smart technology is the future and that the associated benefits would improve the residents overall experience and any low morale. It should be recognised that the pandemic caused significant delays with delivery of technology into care homes in the early part of the project - in some cases it had to be left outside and the staff completed the set up on their own. Follow up meetings had to be held online via MS Teams to mitigate transmission. For face-to-face visits, the Digital Health Devon team were completely led by Care Homes on their own virus control protocols (as there were some differences) and adhered to any testing required or the wearing of personal protective equipment (P.P.E).

Government iPad Scheme

A Government scheme was run at the beginning of the pandemic which aimed to provide all care homes with brand new iPads. Feedback was received from participating homes that iPads supplied by the government at the beginning of the pandemic were viewed as troublesome and onerous because they were controlled by a third party and involved a lengthy and complex app download process before use. As a result of this the iPads ended up being disregarded or solely used to run staff rotas using the pre-installed calendar. Despite this, care home staff were more open to using Apple devices such as the refurbished iPhones we sourced, rather than the Android devices we initially offered.

Internet Connectivity Issues

During the implementation phase it was evident that there were internet connectivity issues such as zero broadband coverage, very slow data speeds and negligible 4G mobile network coverage in South Devon. Circa 80% of participants in this project had broadband contracts with BT. Most of these networks were unable to effectively support HD Video streaming or handle multiple devices video calling simultaneously. In some cases it was seen that the home had multiple broadband contracts with BT in an attempt to have internet access across the entire facility. These buildings are not suitable for a domestic network and to ensure full coverage they require a hardwired network to be installed. We trialled several network providers including EE, O2, GiffGaff, Tesco and Vodafone. Vodafone seemed to the most viable 4G mobile network provider using a smart phone or a 'Gigacube' – an expensive mobile WiFi device kindly donated to us by Devon Libraries providing an acceptable 65mbps download speed.

Technical support

Routinely throughout this project care homes have experienced teething issues and technical failures with their devices. This has required constant support via email, telephone and physical visits. This has delayed the delivery of the project as in some instances days have been spent visiting sites on numerous occasions to address issues.

Longevity

Participants of this project raised queries over what happens once the devices are no longer supported or if they break. At present Digital Health Devon have advised that it will be the participants responsibility to repair the device(s) if they are damaged. If the device is no longer supported and has become out of date, it will be the participants responsibility to update the device themselves. There is a clear demand for the technology provided and based on the evidence gathered from this project, this demand will only increase.

Asset Security

During the discovery phase of the project it became apparent that we did not have any means of tracking the devices that have been deployed or evidence of their usage. Our solution to this was linking all associated Apple devices to an iPad held by Digital Health Devon to monitor their geographical location, whether the devices were accessing the internet and to ensure they remained at the participants residence. We have no current method of tracking Amazon Alexa Show devices or Meta Facebook Portal devices. We also identified the need to issue an example GDPR policy to give participants guidance to manage content and user security.

Budget Requirements

Although we were astute with the equipment line and were able to purchase more devices than planned by focussing on refurbished models with warranties, it was still challenging to cover some other core expenses such as travel costs. The number of follow up support visits Care Homes required became more frequent than originally planned due to further need for additional face-to-face support after installation. This resulted in additional travel expenses such as parking and mileage for follow up visits and commuting to sites that were difficult to reach easily, particularly those in the more rural areas of South Devon. There were also additional expenses that were not completely taken into account at the time of costing this project such as marketing, storage and device management.

Equipment required outside the original scope

During the mid-implementation review we were asked by participants whether we could provide support with purchasing smart TVs, smart-enabled watches and activity interaction tables. In addition to this we were approached by a large care home group (Peninsula Care Homes) and were asked whether we could source a funding stream to pilot a project using smart watches as it was felt that this would improve the residents overall experience in the care setting. It was reported by the front-line staff in the care home that the residents felt the daily observation procedure was intrusive. They stated that smart watches would relieve pressure from care staff considerably. The stated outcome was to have the facility to monitor the resident's health metrics automatically over a protracted period, which subsequently would increase the accuracy of the data needed for paramedics or hospital staff in the event of a medical emergency. We conducted market research for the wearables and submitted our findings to the wider advisory group for consideration. The cost of the activity interaction tables was excessive (£5000 per unit) and did not comply with the terms set out in the original service level agreement (SLA) of our care home project.

Digital Health Devon Website Limitations

We did receive some feedback that our Digital Health Devon website may not have been that easy to navigate for some people or that information about the project and the associated user guides may not have been that easy for others to find. The format, functionality and target audience of the Digital Health Devon website has changed a number of times over the course of the last few years. It was originally designed for the user to register to gain access to the free online courses, to then cascade the knowledge gained to others. This stance was then reviewed and the website was opened up to the wider public at the beginning of the

pandemic to ensure there was access to guides, such as: how to book an online food delivery. A plan has been put in place to gather further feedback to help understand the future direction of the website.

Participant Feedback

We engaged with care home managers via Teams calls and surveys to gain an understanding of what their current infrastructure was, how we could enhance or complement it and asked what technology they thought would be most useful for them, their staff and their residents. During this process it was clear that their capabilities with digital technology and functions were limited. This indicated early on that significant assistance and support would be required throughout the project lifecycle.

The results also revealed that the majority of homes either had similar technology in situ but were not aware of their full functionality or that they had residents who already possessed these devices because they had been supplied by family members however again the residents often did not know how to use them. On site the care home generally delegated all responsibility for the devices that Digital Health Devon supplied to an Activities Manager or similar. It was often the case that some of these members of staff did not have sufficient knowledge or expertise in this area so this subsequently meant that they had to access our website resources to mitigate this situation. There was a noticeable hesitancy amongst care home staff to learn new skills in the digital arena due to staff shortage, COVID and an unwillingness to take on additional responsibilities.

Further project opportunities identified

The original project scope encompassed South Devon and Torbay however the project was featured in the Devon Care Home Collaborative and the South West Care Home Network's WhatsApp groups and quarterly meetings which generated huge interest across the entire South West from South Gloucestershire to the Isles of Scilly. As a result Digital Health Devon had to defer 18 requests to participate until such time as they can be accommodated. Within this 18 there are homes that are owned and run by large care home groups that operate on a national and regional level. These groups expressed interest in rolling out this initiative across all of their sites. Interest was received from:

- Adjuvo Care (national)
- ADL plc (national)
- Ark Care Homes (regional)
- Carmel Care (national)
- Christadelphian Care Homes (national)
- CoActive Care (regional)
- Cream Care (regional)
- Devon Care Group (regional)
- GrayAreas (regional)
- Harbour Healthcare (national)
- Keychange (national)
- Notaro Homes Ltd (regional)
- Optima Care (regional)
- Peninsula (regional)
- SeaMoor Care (regional)
- SIS Care (national)
- South West Care Homes (regional)
- Stone Haven (regional)
- Volorum Care Group (national)

This exercise highlighted the need to maintain a database of care homes and their contact details for further digital project opportunities that may arise in the future. This will be integral to seeking further funding and developing new partnerships.

Sustainability

Currently the project is not funded beyond March 2023, and the following should be considered in order to make the project sustainable and its legacy remain.

Technology

We know that most technology has a shelf life of 2-3 years before it becomes outdated and is no longer supported. Once the technology becomes out of date there is the opportunity to collect the old devices, recycle them and reinvest any funds back into the project to supply new devices to the existing homes that are participating. Consideration should be given to ongoing asset and software update management programmes to ensure devices are secure and operating optimally.

Support

We have had to support homes with technological queries throughout the entire project lifecycle, either online via MS Teams, through phone conversations or by physical face-to-face visits. Following the conclusion of the project this support will no longer be readily available and other models of ongoing digital support should be explored – for example, a dedicated help desk for care homes.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is being widely used by GPs to communicate with care homes – directionally it appears that this will be the new approach for communication with patients (saving time and mitigating risk of infection transmission). The devices we have deployed are capable of accessing AttendAnywhere (hospital video consultation software for planned hospital appointments) so could form part of the solution.

YouTube

The Digital Health Devon YouTube channel was an initiative brought in to complement this project and support the residents with an additional avenue of entertainment. The question of who will maintain the channel, continue to upload content for the public and ensure that there is content available for this target age range needs to be considered.

Project Feedback & Case Studies

Throughout the project we gathered feedback about its impact on care home residents, their friends and family, and care home staff. This section includes survey feedback and case studies from participants of the project.

The feedback received from all participating care homes has been extremely positive with all homes expressing a keen interest in having more Amazon Alexa devices specifically for residents that are restricted to their bedroom. Some direct quotes from care home managers regarding this project are below:

Case Studies

Roz Wills (General Manager of Mallands Residential Home in Abbotskerswell):

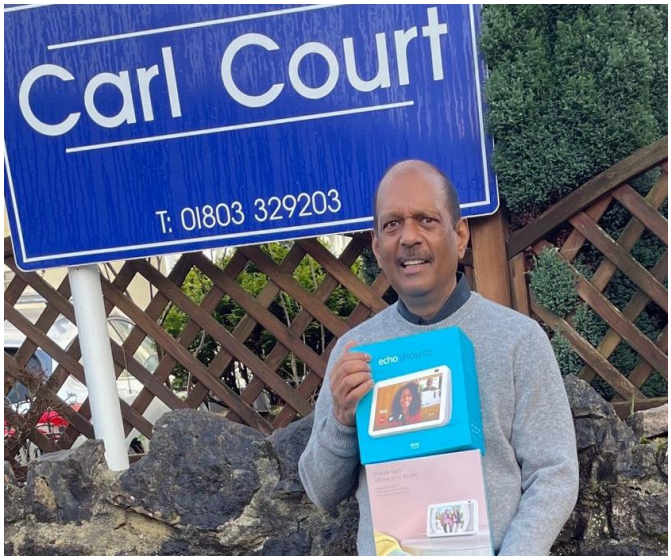
"The Amazon Alexa Show devices have been of great benefit to the residents, it has allowed them to listen to their choice of music and explore all topics of interest. The Facebook Portal has been a godsend allowing our residents to contact their family and friends."

Roz stated that the project had a huge impact on her residents and had provided them with the means to contact their loved ones locally and overseas via video call.

Roz felt that this project had been a gift. Pre-pandemic her residents had been able to have face to face interactions with their loved ones, however they had not had the opportunity to communicate with family and friends who reside overseas.

A further video of an interview with Roz can be viewed via this link https://youtu.be/azopi0PISIk.

Farzand Mungar (General Manager/Owner of Carl Court Residential Home in Torquay):



"We are very happy to work with the Digital Health Devon Team and take them up on the offer of receiving smart devices to benefit our residents.

They are going to be really helpful in supporting us to assist and entertain our residents who are very excited about starting to use them and reap the benefits.

We can all see how incorporating this kind of technology into our daily routines could improve the wellbeing of our residents and we're extremely grateful to be part of this project. On behalf of our residents and staff I can't thank Digital Health Devon enough for their support".

This quote was used in a press release to launch the project which featured in a local newspaper (Torbay Weekly) and via other local online media outlets, which subsequently generated enquires around participation in the project from other local care homes and members of the public offering their old devices to be donated.

A further video of an interview with Farzand can be found at: https://youtu.be/WTP5fscMn_8

Roy Pearce, 96 (Resident of Mallands Care Home in Abbotskerswell.:

Roy said he uses the portal to speak with family up country he can't visit anymore and uses the Alexa Show to play his favourite old Glenn Miller Orchestra songs, even playing them during the summer for the residents in the garden and taking requests through his window!

Digital Health Devon Project Manager Max Burrell said:

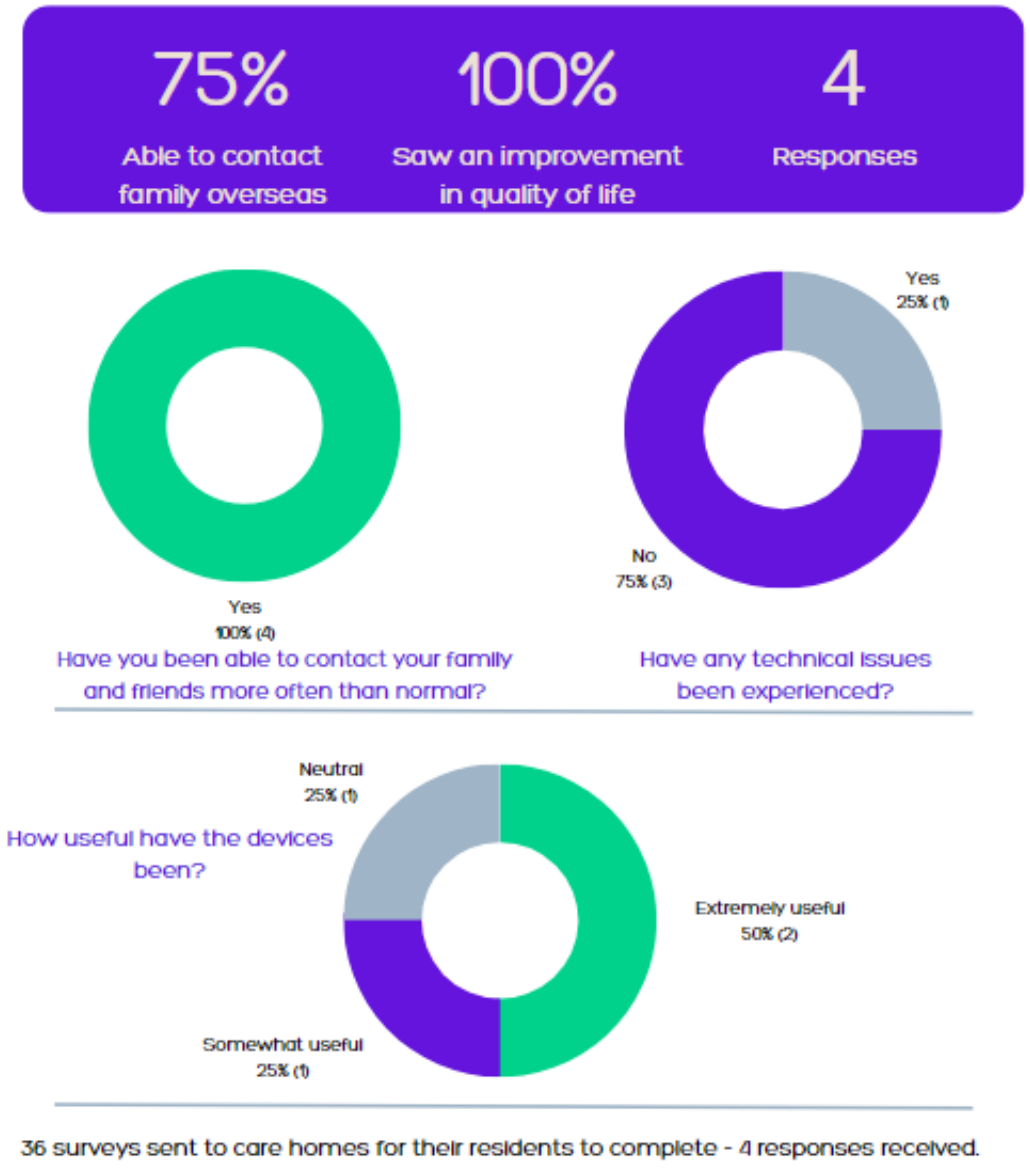
"Roy was a pleasure to meet and it was so rewarding to visit care homes and physically see the devices we donated being used by both residents and staff to improve their everyday lives and experiences.

This has been a fantastic project enabling us to support care home residents in South Devon and Torbay, making their lives richer, fuller and more inclusive in terms of the local and wider communities. It's so good to see the use of technology to add value to residents by removing their sense of isolation and increasing their wellbeing through things like WhatsApp where they can video call loved ones all over the world. I would like to see the project be broadened to provide this opportunity to as many care homes as possible."

Further Project Survey Feedback

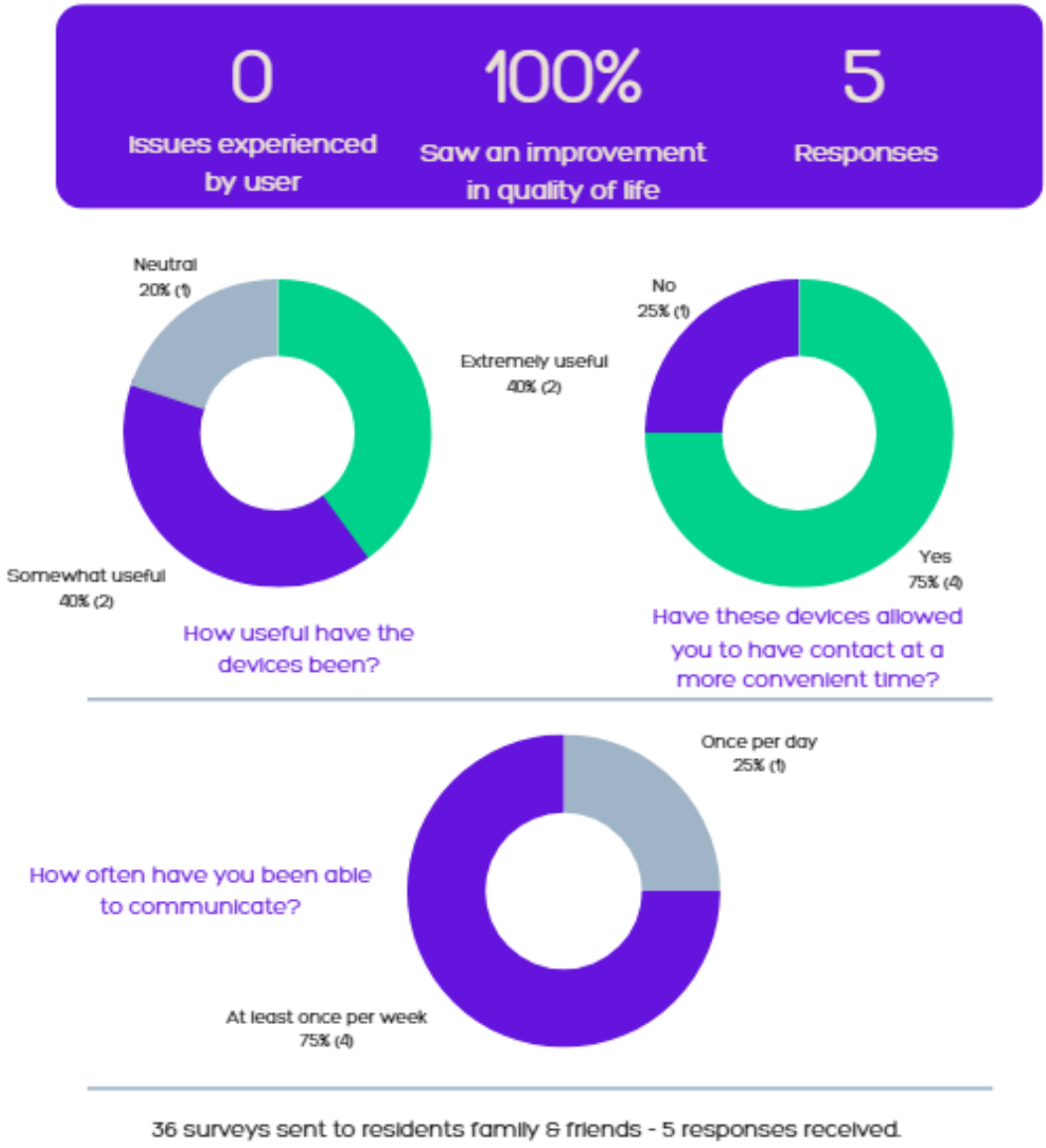
In addition to these case studies, 3 different types of surveys were distributed to the 36 Care Homes who fully participated in the project, one for residents, one for residents' family and/or friends and one for care home managers. Although responses were limited, the results of these can be found on the next few pages.

Care Home Resident Feedback:



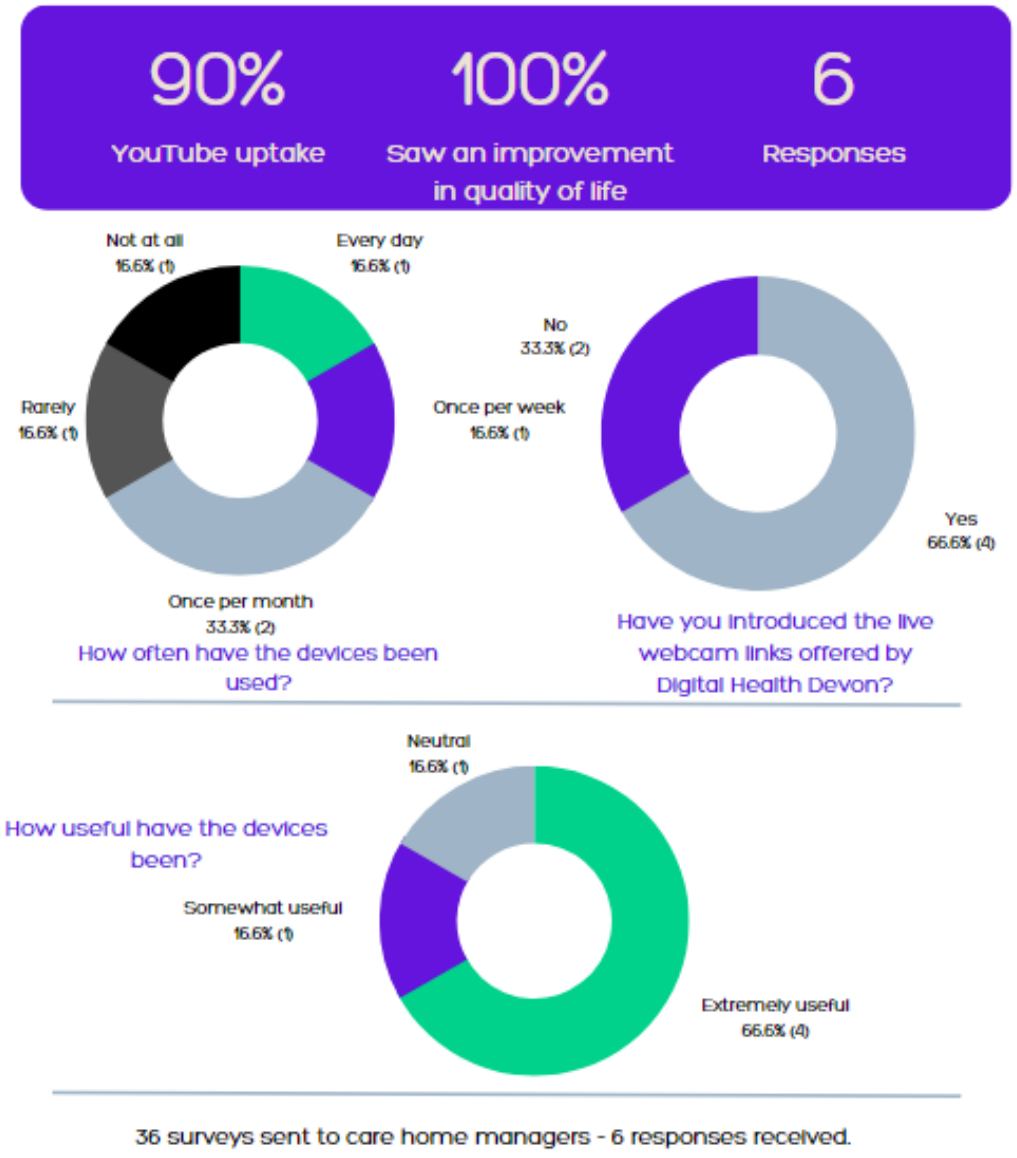
Summary – Every care home resident survey respondent stated they had been able to contact their family and friends more often than normal and every respondent stated they had seen an improvement in their quality of life via this project. 75% of respondents found the devices either 'extremely' or 'somewhat' useful.

Care Home Family and Friends Feedback:



Summary – Every family/friend survey respondent stated they had seen an improvement in the quality of life of their loved one via this project. 75% of respondents said the devices allowed them to have contact at a more convenient time, with the same number stating they had been able to communicate with their loved one at least once a week.

Care Home Manager Feedback:



Summary – Every care home manager survey respondent stated they had seen an improvement in the quality of life of their residents via this project. 83.2% of respondents found the devices either 'extremely' or 'somewhat' useful.

Project Recommendations

1. Technical Support

Issue resolution has been entirely dependent on the level of capability and knowledge of the care home. Moving forward with a project such as this it is recommended that a technical support helpdesk be costed, consisting of two remote members of staff who hold full driving licences and access to their own vehicles to cater for the demand. The original cost modelling underestimated the level of follow up support required, including travel costs.

2. Asset Security

The interim solution to device monitoring that Apple devices were linked to an iPad held by Digital Health Devon was not a full fix for the issue. It is recommended that a licence for a device management application be purchased which would enable the automation, control and security of any smartphone, laptop, tablet or internet enabled device which has been donated. ***Please note****: this will not grant access to the content held on the device (photos, messages, application passwords, etc.) but would rather allow software updates to be installed remotely, erase and block devices that are lost or stolen and give a clear picture of their overall reach. GDPR would not be impacted by such a solution.*

3. Storage & Monitoring

Any storage unit to support Devon wide projects should be based more centrally to facilitate ease of distribution across rural Devon. The current storage unit in Exeter should be retained and the Asset Log devised by the project team should continue to be implemented with stock level checks completed once a month given the value of the equipment.

4. Budgeting

The original budget for this project didn't fully cater for some of the aspects of the project delivery, including some its adaptations. For example, where activity covered a large geographical area or additional care home support visits were required higher levels of travel expenses were needed, there weas also limited funds made available for project marketing, promotion and secure device storage. Future bids and budgeting for similar projects should address these areas. With inflation running at 10% we also saw a significant increase in costs during the project a cost of living crisis occurring it may be advisable to factor in a contingency fund to cover any unexpected costs in future. The scope of any future project may also wish to include the new types of equipment identified in this report, with budgetary allowance made accordingly.

5. Participant feedback

Although obtaining project feedback from Care Home Managers and staff was achievable, speaking with residents and obtaining their feedback on how the project benefited them directly was more difficult (largely due to COVID restrictions). We would recommend a more robust system in place of collecting

residents feedback, including face-to-face interviews and visits. This will allow the project to be tailor-made for having the most impact on a resident's physical, mental, and cognitive wellbeing.

6. Further project opportunities identified

To address the interest from other care homes outside the initial project area it is recommended that a contractor be engaged to explore the opportunity to partner with those care homes that expressed interest. The backing of a large corporate company (such as Sky, BT potentially) may be required to assist with funding. If we are to roll similar projects out in the digital space we should maintain the database of care homes that we have already created.

7. Advisory/Steering Group Attendance

The members of the advisory group were selected based on their expertise and their voluntary attendance and advice at meetings was very much appreciated. However, meeting attendance figures were intermittent and further advice and guidance throughout the project could have been more beneficial. We understand it is difficult for representatives to attend regular meetings (particularly busy care home managers) but would recommend a more robust approach to meeting attendance to ensure optimal project success. Perhaps reducing the frequency of meetings or offering a further incentive to attend (e.g. recognition in all project marketing) would help in effectively steering the project.

8. Sustainability

a. Consideration should be given to ongoing asset and software update management programmes to ensure devices are secure and operating optimally.
b. The capabilities of using WhatsApp and AttendAnywhere (hospital video consultation software for planned hospital appointments) should be explored to understand how to leverage the technology we have deployed.
c. Consideration should be made on who will maintain the YouTube channel, continue to upload content for the public and ensure that there is content available for this target age range needs to be considered, perhaps a social media dedicated resource could be looked into on a self-employed basis.
d. We recommend sharing this report with key stakeholders, particularly the Devon Care Home Collaborative to cascade key learning out through the local care home community and beyond.

Project Thanks

We would to sincerely thank all the care home managers, staff and residents who took part in this project and those organisations who have supported us along the way, especially Public Health Torbay and Enhanced Health in Care Homes (EHCH) for funding this project, Torbay Council, the Integrated Care System for Devon, Torbay and South Devon Foundation NHS Trust, Devon Care Home Collaborative and other members of the Project Advisory Group, including its Chair, Healthwatch Torbay Strategic Volunteer Pam Prior, Care Home Managers, Plymouth University, Libraries Unlimited, Exeter Diocese and others who kindly attended.

"Our Mission is to transform the way local services are designed and delivered: we help make communities heard and enable responsive, person-centred solutions for providers."

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