



## QI Project Case Study – Digital Exclusion

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For this month's Quality Improvement Case Study we recently spoke to Jayne Hughes, Clinical Specialist Team Leader with the Older Peoples Intervention Pathway (OPIP), about her project that is looking to improve access to digital technologies for service users in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Hey Jayne, thank you for taking the time to speak to us about your project! How did you come to be involved in QI and this project?**

In March 2020, an operational decision was taken to stop all face to face early intervention contact being delivered by OPIP clinicians. This included the provision of cognitive stimulation therapy groups (CST), and self-management (SMP) groups. In the necessitated absence of this provision, and in recognition of the potential negative impact of the consequences of COVID-19 on people living with dementia, OPIP transformed their contact with people. From the onset of the pandemic, there has been a swift and encompassing revolution in the use of digital technology to conduct UK health service business.

Ability to benefit from effective access to digital technology is not a level playing field. Many service user groups are at risk of being excluded from digital participation. Therefore, in order to support service users to build skills and enhance motivation and access to the relevant technology to participate in interventions we decided to undertake this project.



### **What are the issues you are trying to address? How did they inform your aim?**

The main issues we were trying to address were primarily to understand who is digitally ready, and the barriers for those who weren't, to reduce the impact of technological barriers such as lack of wifi or equipment, to mitigate personal factors such as motivation or lack of knowledge, and for staff to be in a position to make best use of the technology available and to use this knowledge to deliver interventions and support service users to access them. Together, these issues informed our aim of supporting service users to build skills and enhance their motivation and access to relevant



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technologies. These issues informed the aim by identifying the different areas we, as a team, needed to assess in order to achieve our desired outcomes.



**How are you using the Model for Improvement to plan and move the project forward?  
Can you describe a couple of the PDSA's you have planned?**

1. Introduced a digital readiness assessment to ascertain the digital needs of new service users

The aim of this PDSA was to understand the barriers service users' experience. To use this information to inform the areas the project needs to focus on and to identify the actions needed to support the service user to access the virtual groups.

The digital readiness form went through a number of iterations. The form was shortened and the wording of some of the questions was altered to ensure clarity. As some staff lacked some knowledge about what some of the questions were about, guidance was created support further questioning when service users didn't understand what was being asked.

This is now part of the assessment process for all service users referred for an intervention.

2. Team training

There is variation in team skills and knowledge in the use of MS Teams to deliver a group intervention. The aim of this PDSA was to support all of the team to develop the skills that would allow them to set up and run group. Training was developed which took place in small groups. Skills were demonstrated and each group member then had an opportunity to practice that skill.





A small group worked as it allowed lots of opportunity to learn from others “mistakes” and questions. However if the group was too large there wasn’t enough opportunity to practice the skill, and this was felt to be really important.

Written instructions were also created and the group reported how useful these were to act as a reminder after the training.

### 3. Working with third sector

A number of organisations were contacted to investigate third sector support to loan / provide equipment. All of them offered training and support to help the public access the internet, however none supplied actual equipment.

More recently a chance encounter by a project member led to a connection with Northfield Neighbourhood Network, who has now developed a lending library for both tablets and laptops. This service has teaching and support available as part of the offer, as well as technical support. To date, one service user elected to buy a tablet to access a group but accessed the support from the network to get him set up and ready. He successfully joined the group with this support.

The project group are setting up a meeting with the lending library to create a firm link to ensure that this is an available option for sign posting when either of the two devices are in use.

### **How important has it been to have staff feedback inform your project?**

- Training has been offered to all team members to build their skills in the technical side of running a virtual group. Those who participated in the training have become adept at using Teams and continue to build their confidence around this
- Meeting weekly to discuss progress updates, feedback from questionnaire, feedback on training

Throughout the project it has been invaluable to meet weekly as a team. This allowed us to discuss feedback from the digital readiness questionnaire, the progress of within-staff IT support, and any other personal experiences with the use of IT equipment including any troubleshooting solutions to common errors. The feedback gained from these meetings helped identify various avenues to explore when moving forward with the project.

Were there any opportunities to learn from how other teams and services have tackled this issue?

- Links have been made with the Neighbourhood Networks who have digital lending libraries. One service user used the lending library for training and was able to access the group with a device he had purchased
- Liam Laughton from SOLAR attended a meeting to discuss how his team had introduced technology as part of their service delivery.
- James Reed attended meetings to help troubleshoot issues we faced with technology.





## **How has COVID affected the project? What difficulties have you had to work around? Did it present any opportunities?**

Covid affected the project in a number of ways. For example, due to the covid-19 pandemic, some staff from the OPIP team were redeployed elsewhere across the Trust. Therefore, there were less staff present to work on the current project. Furthermore, Covid-19 had a massive impact on the NHS budgets. As a result, due to changes in available budgets for the OPIP team, we were restricted in the amount of devices we could buy and provide to Service Users. In order to work around this we attempted to obtain devices another way. This opened up opportunities to collaborate with other organisations, such as the Lending Library and the Neighbourhood Network Scheme, to see if they could assist in providing technological devices for our use.

Due to the pandemic, OPIP staff were quite restricted in their ability to carry out home visits to Service Users. This made it difficult to offer technological support to Service Users when they were experiencing a problem. This was because often times Service Users struggled to describe the error they were experiencing and staff couldn't see the error either. It was also difficult for staff to talk through the resolution of an issue due to barriers in understanding (such as terminology, language etc.).

## **What are the next steps for the project?**

- Two charitable bids have been submitted for money to buy more devices. Unfortunately one wasn't successful as we're not a charity and therefore excluded. We are still awaiting the outcome of the bid to BSMHFT Caring minds fund.

The team now have 2 devices, one cellular and one wifi enabled, that we can loan out to service users. A loan agreement has been created for both of these devices that will be used when the devices are loaned to Service Users.

- Now have a virtual CST group that is scheduled to run until at least April 2022
- Lending library and Neighbourhood Network Scheme
- Staff training is an ongoing process that will be continued for the foreseeable future. This is to ensure staff are supported in their needs. It also aims to keep staff updated and confident in their ability to deliver virtual interventions.
- Knowledge and learning has been shared with other services and teams within dementia and frailty with regard to the digital readiness questionnaire amongst other

