

Good Practice Example - Improving access to ICT in adult social care setting

IDEA DETAILS

To introduce computers and internet access into day centres for people with dementia. To work with day centre staff to test a model of working with people with dementia and computers, and to refine training materials.

What do you base this on?

- Many organisations of this nature have a little of limited access to ICT, this applies to staff and service users, “the available evidence suggests significant constraints in terms of lack of ICT hardware, lack of connectivity, lack of skills on the part of both learners and educators, and a lack of organisational awareness”
- There is a common misconception that people with dementia cannot learn new skills, or be able to benefit from being involved in interacting with computers.

ICT: information and communication technology; an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as the *worldwide web*

What views were expressed by service users and carers?

The project found that the ‘human interface’ – i.e. the skills used by care staff to enable people with dementia to engage with computers – is the most important aspect when encouraging people with dementia in day care settings to interact with computers at any level.

Who are your other key stakeholders and what do they think about your idea?

Other key stakeholders were the care staff who took part in the training days around using computers with people with dementia in day care.

Most staff were enthusiastic about the idea. Some were worried about time pressures, others that they had tried to use computers before – not that successfully.

OUTCOMES WANTED

What are your intended outcomes and how will these be measured?

- Set up pilot computer projects in two dementia specialist Housing 21 Day Centres to test out the model developed by Innovations in Dementia and investigate the best ways of supporting people with dementia to use computers.
- Provide training and support to staff to enable them to carry out this work.
- Evaluate this process and assess outcomes for people with dementia, staff and Housing 21.
- Develop evaluation tools that are appropriate for use with people with dementia.
- Develop accessible training materials for use with people with dementia.

ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN TO ACHIEVE THE OUTCOMES

The actions I undertook to achieve my outcomes and whether stakeholders find these acceptable?

We set up training days at both day centres to cover such subjects as accessibility settings on the computer, using PowerPoint, using Word and using the internet. The training sessions were informal and involved people with dementia as much as possible. Staff were encouraged to give their own ideas about what might work.

Possible outcomes of the project were identified as:

Benefits for people with dementia including:

- satisfaction and pleasure from learning or re-learning a new skill
- increased sense of self-worth
- increased conversation and engagement
- increased willingness to try new things
- resumed connections with distant family members (via email and webcams)
- those involved in the project will act as role models, providing encouragement to other people with dementia who currently have very few positive examples to draw on.

Benefits for day centre staff include:

- seeing people with dementia in a new light
- having the opportunity to talk to people individually
- gaining satisfaction with a new activity with which to engage with people with dementia
- increased confidence with their own computer skills; enjoyment at learning a new skill.
- Evidence about the best ways to support staff to set up and run computer projects for people with dementia.
- A training and support package based on this evidence to guide and encourage others to provide and support computer activities for older people with dementia.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED?

Briefly describe outcomes you achieved. Were there any that were less successful?

This project has shown that people with dementia can successfully engage in computer work and that both they and staff can gain many benefits from doing so.

The evidence gathered during the evaluation of the project gave strong indications that the expected outcomes for service users were achieved. These are shown below with examples,

- satisfaction and pleasure from learning or re-learning a new skill
“X thinks the computer is wonderful – she really did enjoy this session”
“She said she would like to listen to *“with a song in my heart”* by Doris Day. Then sat with me close to the computer and said *“that was too good to be believed”*”.
- increased sense of self-worth
“Only when she saw her own photograph did she become animated and happy, and remained so till the end of the session, She was saying “Look! Look at me! Aren’t I beautiful!”
“She said she loved it because it was all about her”.
- increased conversation and engagement
“One lady was very shy. We had been trying to do some life history work, but we only had one page. Doesn’t seem much does it, for someone’s life? But then we started to look at a few pictures from her past on the internet, and before we knew it we had 12 more pages”
- increased willingness to try new things
“She said she couldn’t believe you could paint on a computer”
- those involved in the project will act as role models, providing encouragement to other people with dementia who currently have very few positive examples to draw on.

Interviews with staff suggest that when other services users could see a service user using a computer, it sparked their curiosity and made them less nervous of approaching the computer themselves.

People with dementia using computers

People with dementia need to be encouraged to engage with computers at a level, and with activities, that suits them. The key to making sure that this happens is that staff be confident in their own computer skills and have ideas for how to use basic computer programs to produce engaging outputs for people with dementia.

It is important that people with dementia can understand that they can influence what appears on the screen. But it is not important that people with dementia are proficient in mouse or keyboard skills or that they understand how the computer works or is switched on.

If people with dementia cannot use the mechanical interface, the skills (both technical computer skills and support skills) of staff must be strong enough to maximise the potential for user control. But staff must also have the ability to connect and engage with the person with dementia and communicate effectively to maximise their role as supporter and enabler, rather than leader.

Recommendation: training is equally focused both on computer skills and on the skills necessary to facilitate people with dementia engaging with computers at any level

Use of computers within the day centre

This project has provided the evidence that a computer work is a valuable addition to day care activities. The computer is most effective when used as a tool by staff as an integral part of everyday activities in the day centre. Staff have been keen to stress the computer as a tool for doing other things rather than as an end in itself, and have shown great creativity in the ways in which they have integrated the computer work into the everyday life and activity of the centres.

This ability to think creatively about the potential for computers in work with people with dementia is one which has been carefully nurtured throughout the project.

Recommendation: training focuses on ensuring that computers are seen as a tool that can be used advantageously in a wide range of activities of the day care centre.

Training materials

It has been established that staff need training and support to ensure that any equipment is used to the full and that as many people with dementia as possible engage with computers and ICT at many levels. Training materials were developed for use in the project. These have been refined through the learning from the project.

However, staff time for training and learning has been established as a barrier for this work to succeed, therefore it is unlikely that printed training materials alone be enough. It is unlikely that care staff would have the time or motivation to work through a paper manual. Demonstration and hands-on examples would be needed to inspire care staff to try this work. The next phase of this project would ideally be to develop high quality training tools and resources and test ways in which these could be best delivered flexibly, and disseminated.

To ensure that the tools and resources that we will develop have the widest impact, the training package would be aimed at facilitators who will then work directly with care staff. This 'training the trainers' approach will allow the knowledge, expertise and best practice examples to be cascaded effectively through the organisation.

Possible dissemination routes could be: a purely paper-based package, purely face to face training, a purely web-based package, or a mixture of website, plus paper, plus face to face training.

Recommendation: A full training package based on the learning from this project is developed by Innovations in Dementia and possible routes of dissemination tested.

How did you draw on the experiences of service users and carers?

People with dementia were involved at all stages of the project – and contributed to training sessions with care staff. The abilities of people with dementia – for example keeping the ability to type – were very important in framing training materials and emphasising that computer work (as with all activities) needs to be tailored to the needs, skills and interests of the individual with dementia.

How did you draw on the experiences of other key stakeholders?

We collected the experiences and ideas of care staff throughout the training and feedback sessions. They were an integral part of the project and helped to test and refine the training materials and ways of involving people with dementia.

Were you surprised by what actually happened when you tested this good idea?

The method enabled staff to improve their own practice by finding their own solutions. We were surprised about how the care staff were able to integrate computer use into all activities within the day care centres – for example, art work, reminiscence, quizzes, music.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Do you think this practice is sustainable and why?

Why and how could this practice be taken up by others?

- The observation required careful planning and resourcing so, for a short time, implementing this can be staff intensive and has additional staff time costs
- Preparations are necessary for undertaking and recording observation, however, the actual implementation of the method is simple and effective
- Staff need to be reassured that this is a positive not a punitive exercise
- Food and occupational materials costs are likely to rise with considerable benefit to residents' physical and emotional health and staff morale

What is your evidence about its affordability?