

Peterborough innovation project

NHS 10-year plan shift: analogue to digital

Problem

Results from the local Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework review in Peterborough revealed that only around half of the carers in the area said they found it easy to find information and advice. The council also recognised the need to identify and understand more about local carers.

Innovation

Peterborough has implemented a digital AI tool to identify and support carers, including local signposting, useful events, videos, health advice and direction to national services and information, and other support platforms.



Project overview

Bridgit Care is an online platform devised by national digital provider Bridgit Care, that gives carers access to personalised support. 'Ask Bridgit' is an extension of this platform, a 'virtual carer coach' chatbot that provides carers with instant answers to their questions, personalised guidance and local information. Available through a website or WhatsApp, the platform also refers people to relevant information from various trusted sources, including the NHS, Age UK and Carers UK.

Peterborough is working alongside 'Caring Together Charity', a local carers charity with whom they had an existing partnership, and Bridgit Care to deliver this project. The charity organisation 'Working Together for Change' was commissioned to lead on co-production and engagement of those with lived experience to redevelop Peterborough's carer strategy, which has fed into the rollout of the platform across the entire Integrated Care System (ICS) area, covering both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Peterborough City Council aims to increase the "independence and wellbeing of service users and carers, reducing their reliance on formal care and support".

"I was a bit dubious when I first looked at the Bridgit platform as I was unsure how useful it would be. However, I have been heavily involved in the platform content and making the information personalised to meet the needs of our Peterborough carers, which has been great. I champion Bridgit and tell anyone who will listen how useful it is. I am amazed at the positive responses we have had to the platform in such a short space of time and how many carers it has already helped. A very good investment to help support our dedicated carers."

Karen Kelley, Strategic Operational Lead for Carers, Peterborough City Council

This project aligns to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICS co-produced 'All-Age Carer Strategy', most notably:

- reaching and identifying carers, including young carers and parent carers
- ensuring easy access to information

As well as improving identification, the platform provides the local authority and partners with valuable data around carer demographics and activity, helping them to understand carer behaviour and shape future services, maximising their benefits.

"At a very early level, this is giving us a much deeper understanding of who are our carers, where they are, what they need and when they need it."

Affy Wajid, Transformation Consultant, Peterborough City Council



Key project activity

- A pilot of the Bridgit online platform, run with the local family carers network to gather feedback and help shape the service offering
- Onboarding of the local voluntary and carers organisations to support the platform launch, supplied with relevant information and marcomms resources
- A targeted Google ad campaign launched to increase engagement
- Provision by Bridgit of admin portal training for local authority (LA) project leads, so the council has ownership over the platform interface and can adapt as needed
- Rollout of the campaign to GPs, strengthening the connection between health and care in the area
- Creation of 'community champions' by the council, working together to translate resources and tools into multiple languages, so the platform can be diversified

Emerging learnings and insights

"The rollout of Bridgit shows that Peterborough is 'not running away from [technology]' but 'running towards it.'"

Karen Kelley, Strategic Operational Lead for Carers, Peterborough City Council

- By embracing technology, local authorities can improve existing services.
- Collaborative approaches that bridge health, care and voluntary, community and social enterprise create a wider benefit.
- Collaborating with experts and taking a partnership approach reaches successful outcomes.

"GP engagement has been a big success. Right at the beginning, health colleagues were dubious, but now they are working collaboratively with us. Sometimes all you need is someone to see the opportunity around a project, which changes the atmosphere of it completely."

Affy Wajid, Transformation Consultant, Peterborough City Council

"Working with Peterborough City Council has been a great example of how local knowledge and digital tools can work together to make a real difference... The platform isn't here to replace face-to-face help - it helps scale it. By finding carers earlier and linking them to the right services, we're helping local teams focus their time where it's needed most... It's partnerships like this that help make sure no carer is left behind."

Catilin Witherwick, Project Manager, Bridgit Care

Emerging impact

Since going live, the project has identified 838 unpaid carers across Peterborough. Feedback from carers has been positive, saying that the service has been able to give them advice on demand, helping to relieve stress and avoid crisis.

"I really like the fact that I can access it at any time. Before you would have to call for support which was never open evenings and weekends when you need advice the most."

Maria, fulltime carer for her husband in Peterborough

Through collaborating with health colleagues, there is now a consistency in support and advice for unpaid carers across both health and care sectors. This project promotes prevention and early intervention methods to support unpaid carers before they reach crisis point.

"This was a leap of faith, providing a one-stop shop for carers in the hope that it would open them up to accessing additional supporting and preventing carer breakdown."

Affy Wajid, Transformation Consultant, Peterborough City Council

As the project develops, the local authority will be evaluating demand management by looking at the data around how many carers have requested an emergency support package, how many long-term care packages are being developed, and the impacts of this on the social care budget overall.

