Doing things differently

Part of the series of articles focusing on technology, members of the Technology Enabled Care team at North Somerset Council share their current projects and how they are having a positive impact on participants

This TEC series has focused in on the leadership of projects that seek to embed technological innovation for the purposes of service improvement and client experience.

It is apparent from the examples that members have shared with RCOT that leadership is required at all levels. A member of the team who is an enthusiast about technology is in an ideal position to work alongside those who access services and staff to experiment with settings and features of technology, while your service leads have an important role in supporting wider change management interventions, such as the procurement of different technologies.

There are a wide range of opportunities for occupational therapists who are looking to develop their wider leadership skills as well as those that focus specifically on technology innovation.

These include:

- funding for continuing professional development, research and education through the Elizabeth Casson Trust and RCOTs annual awards for learning, development and research;
- digital fellowships, such as Tolpol, NHS Digital Academy and the NMAHP digital health and care leadership programme in Scotland; and
- informal opportunities, such as joining RCOTs digital network, as well as an allied health professions-wide digital forum hosted on FutureNHS collaboration platform.

Contact Suzy England at RCOT to discuss or share a digital project: *suzy.england@rcot.co.uk*

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A great deal of reflecting occurs in the Technology Enabled Care (TEC) team at North Somerset Council (NSC). This might be considered unusual, but when you know the team consists of three occupational therapists it is not such a surprise.

ICES contract and team manager Laura Cresser, TEC co-ordinator Jane Blinco, and TEC project lead Fiona Shergold, come from a variety of backgrounds and are guided by their personal values, occupational therapy skills and processes.

They acknowledge that regularly reflecting on their work, either individually or as a team, is an important part of staying real and true to their shared enthusiasm for occupational therapy.

The team is currently managing seven diverse TEC projects (see page 22), with aims and interventions that vary in complexity. The primary driver for each is to improve services for clients, ensuring the focus remains firmly on individuals and not on the technology itself.

The TEC team is supported by the head of contracts and commissioning at NSC, who is passionate about innovative TEC solutions and how they can support people in their everyday lives.

Influences

Technology and innovation are reshaping every aspect of modern life, presenting new possibilities for prevention, care and treatment. There are several national drivers influencing TEC innovation at a local level.

The RCOT strategic intentions position the profession for the 21st century and enhance the profile of the profession to a range of audiences, while the government's digital strategy sets out how government will redesign its digital services so well that people prefer to use them.

In addition, while digital transformation of the NHS is a long way off, the NHS Long-Term Plan anticipates that technology will ensure people have more control over the care they receive and more support to manage their health, to keep themselves well and better manage their conditions, while assisting carers in their vital work.

Considering these drivers against a back drop of rising demand and decreasing resources, NSC acknowledges TEC interventions are an important part of its vision for adult social care.

This aims to promote wellbeing by helping people in North Somerset to be as independent as possible for as long possible. The council feels that it is essential to make the most of new technologies and ensure that the systems, processes and services are there to support this.

Project work

Some of the projects are funded externally by government programmes. One successful project bid provided the opportunity for engagement with external organisations to learn project management methods.

These included completing a discovery phase, developing logic models, identifying outcomes and impacts.

The team was also introduced to government digital strategy service standards. These help teams to create and run public services by setting out guidance for project delivery.

It became obvious there is a clear link between the core skills of occupational therapy, these methods, and the personal values held by the team members (see figure below).

Reflections

While working alongside the project participants, Jane realised just how many occupational therapy skills and approaches were being used.

She says: 'Environmental adaptation, rehabilitative and compensatory approaches, collaboration, and problem solving, all facilitated participants', family members', friends' and carers' engagement in the project'.

Completing an MSc in Occupational Therapy taught Laura about action research and the value of listening to and learning from the people who use services. Acknowledging that she would not give as much emphasis to disabled people leading and being involved in research if it was not for these seminal experiences, she says: 'It is an absolute privilege to be able to continue to work with disabled people on technology projects.'

Fiona has completed action research projects whilst studying for an MSc in Rehabilitation at UWE, Bristol, and is committed to working alongside individuals to gain actionable learning from their first-hand experiences of using services. The new knowledge created is then used to inform how those services are provided in future.

The team appreciates its unique position, to be able to work from the bottom up, while simultaneously benefitting from a top down decision-making approach.

Core occupational therapy skills

- identifying and assessing occupational needs;
- analysing and prioritising occupational needs in co-operation with service user;
- facilitating occupational performance/ engagement; and
- evaluating, reflecting and acting on occupational outcomes.

Figure 1: Comparison of core occupational therapy skills and service standards

Service standards:

- **understand users and their needs:** understanding as much of the context as possible gives you the best chance of meeting users' needs in a simple and cost-effective way;
- **make sure everyone can use the service:** government services must work for everyone who needs to use them;
- **agile working:** using agile methods means getting your service in front of real users, observing and generating data on how they use it, and iterating the service based on what you've learned;
- **iterate and improve frequently:** respond to changes in user needs, technology or government policy so the service stays relevant; and
- **define what success looks like and publish performance data:** means that you will know whether the service is solving the problem it's meant to solve.

EVIDENCE LINK

Gaber et al (2019) conducted a cross-sectional study of older people with and without dementia to explore their participation in public spaces in relation to everyday technologies (ETs) used. People with dementia (n=35) and a matched control group with no known cognitive impairment (n=34) were interviewed using the Participation in Activities and Places Outside Home Questionnaire and the Everyday Technology Use Questionnaire. Data analysis used modern and classical test theory. Findings included: both groups participated in a number of places, but participation and relevance of ETs were significantly lower for the dementia group. The authors identify the need to address the complexity of participation within an increasingly technological society and suggest there is a role for occupational therapists in enabling participation for older people with and without dementia.

Reference

Gaber SN, Nygård L, Brorsson A, Kottorp A, Malinowsky C (2019) Everyday technologies and public space participation among people with and without dementia. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 86(5), 400-411

Engagement with individuals and collaboration across the health and social care sector have been invaluable to the success of the work of the TEC team.

It has also resulted in the team being offered several varied opportunities to showcase their work at various technology events, and in an interview with Emma Britton for Radio Bristol, 'Technology in Tamar'.

The future

As far as the team is concerned, it plans to: continue to ensure

that individuals are the focus of all TEC projects; work with academic institutions to prove the cash and non-cash benefits of TEC interventions; continue to develop project management skills; learn from failures and successes; and continue to build collaborative cross sector partnerships.

For the profession, it aims to promote the value of occupational therapists and the profession in TEC project design and methodology, build the evidence base for occupational therapists working in TEC, and share best practice.

Laura, Jane and Fiona are an enthusiastic team. They actively seek funding opportunities for future projects, aiming to improve services through the implementation of TEC, while working on current projects.

They would encourage other occupational therapists to do the same whenever opportunities arise, and recommend everyone should take a leap into the unknown.

References

Royal College of Occupational Therapy. (2018) Strategic Intentions 2018-20123. Available at: *www.rcot.co.uk/about-us/governance/strategic-intentions* [accessed 6 November 2019]

NHS England (2019). NHS Long-Term Plan. NHS England. Available at: *www.longtermplan.nhs.uk* [Accessed 7 December 2019]

Government Digital Service (2019) Service Standard. Available at: *https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2019/05/09/welcome-to-the-updated-service-standard/* [accessed 9 December 2019].

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Current projects

Technology in Tamar Court, extra care housing: smart speaker technology.

Pizey Avenue, respite care for people with learning disabilities: smart home technology.

Uphill Links Court, supported living (LD): supporting carers to work efficiently.

Hydration Innovation: preventing dehydration in care home residents.

Winter Wellness Service (WWS): relieving winter pressures.

Acoustic monitoring in care homes: reducing intrusive night time checks.

Tovertafels (magic tables): interactive stimulation for people with dementia and learning disabilities.

The following comments from participants show the projects are having a positive impact:

The hydration project focused staff over the very hot summer, and it meant residents were well hydrated.

I've missed having a smart speaker to talk to, I'd like to have it back please.

The magic table has brought people together, groups that may not usually interact have been engaging in joint activities.

I really like the smart speaker, as I used to be organised and she helps me do that.

Having the smart speaker has made a difference, because it's there I'll use it. If it wasn't there, I wouldn't make the effort. It's brilliant, and although I struggle, I'm determined to keep practising. There's an improvement in my speech and four different people have noticed. At the end of the day everything that helps me, I will do.

I feel better when I've video-called my family.

The table has also been used as a distraction for one person from an activity that frequently leads to behaviours that challenge. This has meant that he has been able to stay at baseline and continue to engage positively with support and peers.