

Design in Social Care Programme

Halton Borough Council Project Summary

Improving people's experiences of receiving equipment at home

Context

Councils play a key role in supporting people's wellbeing and provision of community equipment can ensure that the home environment meets people's long and short term needs and help them to stay independent. Community equipment includes practical equipment / aids that can help with a range of areas including cooking and household tasks, access in and out of the home and getting out and about.

Halton Borough Council put forward a joint bid to join the Design in Social Care Programme with their home care provider Premier Care. They wanted to understand how people receiving care at home and using community equipment can be better supported and their experiences improved.

The challenge

In Halton there is one prime contractor (Premier Care) for provision of home care across the borough and the council is working closely and in collaboration with Premier Care to deliver improved outcomes for people.

One of the areas the team was keen to better understand was how people can be better supported with community equipment at home. At any one time in Halton there are around 600 people receiving care and home and increasingly care packages are including community equipment provision. This can often mean multiple professionals going in and out a person's home to assess, deliver, or review equipment and the Design in Social Care Team wanted to explore ways of improving this experience for people.



What they did

The Halton team set out to speak to people in their own home who were being supported through services provided by Premier Care as well as pieces of equipment. They visited individuals at home and had discussions with them about their lives, what was important to them and how they manage on a day to day basis.

In addition to the home visits, the team ran three workshops over a six week period with care and health professionals including care staff at Premier Care, social workers and

occupational therapists to capture their views and experiences of how care and support is being delivered.

Techniques from the Design in Social Care programme were used in these workshops to capture and understand these views. .

What they found

A number of key themes emerged from the research with users and professionals. One of the key insights was around roles and responsibilities of care and health professionals when it comes to equipment provision. It was often confusing for service users who might have carers, social workers or occupational therapists coming in and out of their home on a daily basis. There would often be repeat assessments by different professionals whilst the right equipment was found – even for more simple items of equipment. The discovery highlighted that whilst it is difficult to differentiate between all the different types of professionals entering into a person's home, what was most important to the person was that they were getting what they need – whether this was through a carer or occupational therapist (or someone else!).

A further theme emerged around managing expectations about the provision of equipment. For instance people didn't feel informed about equipment that had been ordered, what it looked like, how long it would take to be delivered and who would deliver it. The equipment provision experience was at times felt to be a confusing process.

Prototyping solutions and next steps

To help improve this experience for people, the council is using the insights above to consider moving to a trusted assessor model of community equipment. In practice this means that care staff with the right training would be able to issue more commonly used / simple items of equipment rather than needing to wait for an occupational therapist to come out and undertake additional assessments. Not only would this reduce unnecessary waiting time for individuals needing a piece of equipment, it would strengthen the role of care staff who are already known to and have valued relationships with service users.

As well as considering a trusted assessor model of equipment provision, the team is prototyping a number of practical 'equipment cards' to aid professionals when they speak to service users about pieces of equipment for the first time (including photographs of equipment being used in the home by users). This is to help with people's understanding of what they can expect when equipment is delivered, as well as what it looks like and how it can be used. The cards are being tested with users and initial feedback has been positive.

Although still at early stages of prototyping, the Design in Social Care programme has given Halton a range of tools and techniques that they can use in applying service design in in social care.