

SCDIP Discovery Phase – Southwark Council

Falls can have a devastating impact on an older person's life, causing physical injury and a loss of confidence and independence. This project aims to improve prevention and management of falls to reduce the impact on older residents and the health and social care system.

Fall prevention and management

The context

As a preventable health issue which affects about a third of over-65s annually, Southwark Council has been exploring how a digital app could provide a joined-up and cost-effective approach to falls management and prevention.

The challenge

The rate of falls-related injuries in Southwark are amongst the highest in London. With the over 65 population predicted to rise by 40% over the next ten years, this preventable health issue will cause pressure within the health and social care system, as well as distress and poor health outcomes for residents. Southwark Council developed the following problem statement: *“How can we improve prevention and management of falls in Southwark to reduce the impact on local residents and the wider health and social care system?”*

What did the project involve?

The project team began with a research phase to gain a greater understanding of local services, the current experience of users and opportunities for improvement. The team's research partner – the Health Innovation Network (the Academic Health Science Network for South London) supported the council with their initial user research, before exploring the digital marketplace for potential concepts and tools. Three solutions were identified and explored in a stakeholder workshop. An app (Safe Steps) which combines a risk stratification tool with a personalised action plan to monitor fall risks was chosen. This app is currently used in residential care, and the project team want to develop a version which can be used by professionals in the community to conduct risk assessments. This would standardise the risk assessment process, as well as generate detailed action plans to address risk factors. The app would also include local information about services to support awareness, navigation and referrals, and potentially include an automated referral function.

Stakeholder engagement and user research

The project held an internal meeting to map stakeholders and draft an engagement plan.

The following engagement activities were organised as a result:

- **focus groups:** three focus groups were facilitated by Southwark Carers and Age UK Lewisham and Southwark to explore residents' beliefs, thoughts and experiences of falls, falls prevention, exercise and technology
- **survey:** a survey of five people was conducted at a local supermarket of mobile older residents deemed to be at low risk of falling
- **service mapping workshop:** a workshop was held with 18 colleagues from across NHS, local authority and voluntary sector to understand the current landscape of services involved in prevention and management of falls in Southwark
- **professional stakeholder survey and interviews:** an electronic survey of 12 relevant health and social care professionals to explore issues with existing provision, use of technology and areas for improvement, followed by nine in-depth interviews with staff
- **low and high-risk personas:** the project team developed 'personas' to better understand the user-journeys of low and high-risk residents
- **in-depth interview with 'low-risk' resident:** to challenge the project team's assumptions and sense check their interpretation of a 'typical' journey.

Benefits of the proposed solution

The council has identified the following benefits as a result of the discovery phase:

- increased awareness of falls prevention strategies: "*Falls have now been put on the agenda as something for all staff to consider*"
- identification of risk factors and prevention strategies for individuals at both a low and high risk of falls
- council teams (including adult social care) already have tablets and phones to use the app.

In the implementation phase, the council proposes to achieve the following benefits:

- 25-30% reduction in the number of falls (based on similar outcomes evidence by the care home version of the app)
- consistency across teams when completing falls risk assessments
- improved access to falls prevention services (e.g. strength and balance)
- decreased ambulance call-outs and decreased conveyances to hospital for this cohort
- improved service user experience.

Key strengths of the project

1. **Collective decision making within the team:** this was prompted by events attended by a range of stakeholders and a multidisciplinary project team. As the team commented, *“people were really excited that we were coming together to discuss these things and not someone just sat in an office somewhere deciding something”*.
2. **Good practice shared across the council:** the team feel that the skills developed at the workshops and through the SCDIP process can be transferred to other workstreams. They described this as an unexpected outcome, and that *“the more people we have that are committed to this way of working, the more likely we are to spread that across the departments”*.
3. **Those at risk of falls more likely to be detected:** previously, there was no way of preventing people at risk of falls from deteriorating. This project will use existing data and services to recognise and action a falls risk assessment – for example, by connecting older people to exercise classes such as strength and balance.



The potential impact

During the discovery phase, the council developed a logic model to guide the implementation phase and to help in quantifying the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts which are likely to result from the delivery of this project. From this, a number of key outcomes and measures of impact have been identified as follows:

- improved quality of life for older people, as measured by reduced emergency admissions due to falls and increased awareness of prevention activities
- creation of a community falls app, which would include risk assessments and detailed action plans
- a preventative approach to falls that reflects stakeholder views, concerns and wishes
- increased cross service and cross sector engagement and working, measured by multi-agency workshops.

Challenges to delivery and lessons learned

- **identifying the right stakeholders:** the project team experienced challenges reaching out to lower risk individuals, as older people who were at the greatest risk of falls were often known to the council, and they were keen to broaden the scope further than service users
- **the topic of falls is large** and had the potential to alter the focus and scope of the research

What would you do differently?

- narrower scope at the beginning of the project would have made the research more manageable for the team
- the project team would have liked to have been involved in more of the user-research, for example observing the focus groups

Next steps, including sustainability and spread

The team will set about co-designing and developing the community app. They have arranged a two-year licence to trial the app within a number of teams within the council. They anticipate that these timeframes will enable them to collect robust data regarding the impacts/ benefits it delivers, so that it can be rolled out to other parts of Southwark Council and partner organisations.

Going forward, the app could be rolled out to other councils across the country. This would require the app to be tailored to the local health and social care needs, e.g. linking it to locally available projects.

Contact details

Chloe Harvey: Chloe.Harvey@southwark.gov.uk

Link to relevant documents

Southwark Council Discovery Phase review report:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/1%20%20Discovery%20Phase%20Review%20SO%20UTHWARK.pdf>