



Improvement

Customer led transformation programme

Case study – Kirklees Council

Kickstart your career mobile solution

Contents

About Kirklees	3
Background	4
Objective	5
Approach	5
Roundtable discussions	8
Requirements workshop	8
Questionnaires	9
Video diaries	9
Clever money week	10
Findings	14
Outputs	15
Outcomes	15
Benefits	17
Governance and resourcing	18
Challenges and lessons learnt	20
Next steps	23

The Customer Led Transformation Programme

Kirklees Council's work has been funded under the Customer Led Transformation programme. The fund aims to embed the use of Customer Insight and Social Media tools and techniques as strategic management capabilities across the public sector family in order to support Place-Based working.

The Customer Led Transformation programme is overseen by the Local Government Delivery Council (supported by the Local Government Association).

The fund was established specifically to support collaborative working between local authorities and their partners focused on using customer insight and social media tools and techniques to improve service outcomes. These approaches offer public services bodies the opportunity to engage customers and gather insight into their preferences and needs, and thereby provide the evidence and intelligence needed to redesign services to be more targeted, effective and efficient.

About Kirklees

Kirklees is a Metropolitan Borough in West Yorkshire, situated on the eastern slopes of the Pennines. It is made up of both urban and rural communities within towns and valleys and covers Huddersfield, Dewsbury and the surrounding towns of Holmfirth, Batley, Spen Valley and Cleckheaton. It has a population of just over 400,000, with one in eight from an ethnic minority. Huddersfield is the largest settlement of the district, and its centre of administration.

Kirklees has a high-tech, knowledge-based economy with a manufacturing core. The economic output is £5.5 billion; and a fifth of the borough's residents are employed in manufacturing, twice the national average. However, there is poverty as well as prosperity. In the less well-off areas many people are in poor health, earn low wages or are out of work and lack education and skills.

The percentage of people between the ages of 16 and 18 not in employment, education or training is within the worst 20 per cent of single tier and county local authorities in England. Average earnings per employee in the Kirklees area falls in the lowest 20 per cent of single tier and county authorities in England. Achievement of a Level II qualification by the age of 19 is also in the lowest 25 per cent.

Background

The main aim of this project was to reduce the number of NEETs in Kirklees through the use and application of mobile technology. NEETs are people aged between 16-18 years old who are not in employment, education or training. Evidence shows that spending time NEET is a major predictor of later unemployment, low income, depression and poor mental health.

Economic pressures

The latest research places the proportion of 16-18-year-old NEETs in the UK at 162,000 (8.5 per cent). Between 2008 and 2011, the percentage of NEETs in Kirklees averaged approximately 9.5 per cent.

Figure 1. Percentage NEETs in Kirklees

Jan 2008	Jan 2009	Jan 2010
8.8%	9.7%	9.6%

In response to these higher than average figures, Kirklees Council called a NEET Summit in March 2010, attended by a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in reducing the proportion of NEETs in the local community. Key participants at the NEET Summit, and subsequently on the smartphone project, included:

- Kirklees Council
- Connexions Kirklees (including Calderdale & Kirklees Careers)
- Kirklees College (senior management)
- Job Centre Plus.

The summit and subsequent meetings resulted in 'Kirklees NEET Strategy 2011-2015', which comprised a range of initiatives designed to ensure that every young person aged 16 to 18 is in education, employment or training by 2015. For further details of the NEET Strategy Group, see the section on 'Governance'.

Kirklees NEET strategy focuses on providing:

- personalised support and guidance to young people, including access to information. With this purpose, Connexions Kirklees (a service subcontracted to Calderdale & Kirklees Careers) developed a database of local job and apprenticeship opportunities accessible to young people through their website:
<http://www.workabout.org.uk/>
- flexible learning and employment opportunities. Using mobile technology offers the opportunity to promote personalised support and guidance in a flexible and accessible way.

Financial pressures

Just as the recession has driven rising demand for Connexions' services, financial pressures have led the government to substantially reduce the funding that supports the services. As a result Kirklees Council has had to decommission some of the local Connexions services. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of personal advisers available to provide one-to-one support and guidance to young people. In this context, this project investigated the opportunities that mobile technology offers to reach this group and provide them with the information and support they needed.

Objective

The stated objectives of the project were to:

- create a mobile service designed for and focused on the NEET community in Kirklees
- help reduce the number of NEETs in Kirklees by giving them access to key services, content and data to encourage them to help themselves
- analyse and understand whether the use of mobile phone technology can aid and assist both clients (NEETs) and their support networks (Personal Advisers, Youth Workers, etc.)

The mobile solution is one element in a raft of initiatives aimed at reducing NEET numbers in Kirklees to 7.6 per cent by January 2011. Kirklees Council has set subsequent local targets for NEET reduction to 7 per cent by 2012 and to 6 per cent by 2013.

Approach

Project instigation

The project kicked off in August 2010 by holding exploratory meetings with a range of partners to discuss potential options and opportunities to use smartphones and smartphone apps to improve outcomes for young people “not in education, training or employment”. The key participants at these meetings were Kirklees Council, Looking Local – a service owned by Kirklees Council that provided project management support and technical solution development – and Calderdale & Kirklees Careers, the company the council commissioned to provide the Connexions service to the Borough.

These initial requirements gathering exercises took the form of a series of focus group meetings and workshops. This enabled the project team to understand wider business and operational issues raised by service managers as well as the more practical “on the ground” concerns voiced by staff (the Personal Advisers) dealing with NEETs on a day-to-day basis.

These discussions also helped to identify appropriate ways of engaging with NEETs, particularly as it was felt that trying to bring together a new NEET focus group was unrealistic given that most of them did not feel they belonged to a particular cohort and much less enjoyed discussing their issues as part of a “disparate” community. The project therefore began to look for appropriate existing programmes or courses involving NEETs (see New Beginnings & Chrysalis below).

Desk research

One of the first tasks was to collect all the data available on NEETs and their circumstances, and the information resources, including databases and websites, which were available to them and could be potentially accessed via a smartphone.

Calderdale & Kirklees Careers began by providing the project with data, including social demographic data that would describe typical NEETS (eg male, white and below level II qualifications). However, the project quickly realised that – over and above data – they needed intelligence, and some understanding of what the data was telling them in terms of NEET behaviours. With this in mind, Looking Local began working with Calderdale & Kirklees Careers to plan a series of engagement activities with both NEETs and their key workers.

As part of their work as local Connexions service providers, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers also offered an extensive website called workabout.org.uk which aggregates and presents information on job vacancies, training and careers. This included a database of local vacancies which key workers and NEETs could query via the website. Looking Local, working with Calderdale & Kirklees Careers, decided to develop apps that would query these job vacancy and apprenticeship databases and present the results on a smartphone.

New Beginnings & Chrysalis

Working with Calderdale & Kirklees Careers, the project identified user groups of NEETs and their key workers and conducted a series of engagement exercises to explore the potential of using smartphones. These twenty NEETs were drawn from two support programmes run by the National Children's Centre in Huddersfield – New Beginnings and Chrysalis.

These were chosen as they were established groups which met regularly and offered the project the opportunity to interact with NEETs face-to-face and learn what issues NEETs encounter on a day-to-day basis and what information and functionality might be useful. The project team had regular contact with these two NEET groups, and key workers, between November 2010 and February 2011.

The “Pen Portraits” of NEETs below illustrates the chaotic and challenging background to many young people attending New Beginnings.

The programmes' Key Learning Outcomes are:

- improving Self Confidence & Esteem among NEETs
- preparing students for the transition to a positive progression
- broadening their interests (includes visits to other training and education providers and work placements).

Connexions Key Workers

The project also worked with Connexions/ Calderdale & Kirklees Careers staff and key workers who conducted ad hoc interviews with their NEET clients regarding their daily challenges and use of smartphones as part of their daily caseloads. While this evaluation was less structured than the activities with New Beginnings and Chrysalis, it still provided input into the design phase of the project and potential use of the smartphone and apps to aid NEETs in their objective of finding a job, college course or training opportunity.

As well as providing direct feedback from NEETs themselves, working with Connexions/Calderdale & Kirklees Careers also gave the project the opportunity to consult with their staff to evaluate the solution. This was important to the project because one of their objectives was to analyse whether the use of mobile phone technology can aid and assist both clients (NEETs) and their support networks (Personal Advisers, Youth Workers, etc.)

Pen Portraits of New Beginnings learners

1. Young lady, very traumatic history, but came out of the other side and engages very well, very respectful and polite. Lives independently.
2. Young lady, has self harming issues, domestic violence history, is in the process of leaving an abusive relationship. Has health issues and lives independently.
3. Refugee from Kurdistan, referred by leaving care team. Has had to leave all family, lives alone and struggles with English as his second language. Finds writing and reading difficult, but pleasant and tries hard to engage. Lives independently.
4. Has recently broken up from an abusive relationship, living successfully and an independent liver. Struggles with Finance, some history of Drug misuse. Pleasant learner.
5. History of being bullied. Artistic and musical. Intelligent, but very shy, finds it difficult to engage in group discussion, but will willingly engage in group activities and practicals. Lives with mum.
6. Recent starter, lengthy learning difficulties, reading age of 7 yrs. Very shy but can be challenging. Supportive mum, who she lives with.
7. Very shy, lives with mum. Learning difficulties, reading age of 6 yrs. Struggles with reading and writing, spells out words phonetically, letter formation poor. Judge what he says, rather than quality of written work. History of being bullied.
8. Lives with mum, many learning difficulties and special needs, anger management problems. Is on three lots of prescribed medications for his behaviour. He has some history of bullying others. Self harmer.
9. Self harmer, lives with family, mum abusive, but learner does not want to press charges. Learner has been given contact details of Pennine domestic violence. She has been offered counselling support, awaiting appointment. Mental health issues.

Requirements Gathering: Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)

The project pursued a range of primary and secondary lines of enquiry through the data collection, design and evaluation stages.

Primary Key Lines of Enquiry

- Can mobile phone technology empower young people so that they can help themselves find further learning opportunities, employment or training?
- Does mobile phone technology provide another channel for effective management/ support of NEETs for Personal Advisers,

Youth Workers or other agencies responsible for providing advice, information, training or job opportunities to NEETs?

- Can a social-media solution provide NEETs with a positive network with which they can actively discover opportunities for productive experiences?

Secondary Key Lines of Enquiry

- If mobile phone technology proves a positive benefit to NEETs, by extension can this help reduce the number of young people classified as NEET?
- Are smartphone apps appropriate for delivering services to NEETs?
- What types of smartphone apps are most appropriate to deliver services to NEETs?
- Can access to mobile web browsing act as an additional tool or alternative to apps therefore providing NEETs with additional support/information 'on the fly'?

Requirement Gathering: Engagement Techniques

The project used a range of techniques and procedures to gather evidence relating to these KLOE.

Roundtable discussions

The project conducted introductory meetings with two groups of NEETs to outline the purpose of the project, introduce smartphone technologies, and begin to build a rapport with the young people. Interestingly, the project scheduled an initial one-hour discussion with the NEETs to explain what smartphones could do – and were surprised to find that although they did not own smartphones most participants were familiar with their functionality.

Requirements workshop

Before the project commenced, Looking Local had been advised there was every possibility that NEETs might not be receptive to their questioning of their requirements since it is inevitably focussed on issues related to their lifestyle and the challenges they face. However, the vast majority of participants were enthused by the introduction of smartphones into their programmes and responded very positively to the discussions the programme team instigated.

The project team met the NEETs frequently over the course of their 12 week programmes, and sought to integrate use of the smartphones as tools into the sessions that were planned for the groups. To this end, NEETs from the Chrysalis programme were each given a smartphone to take home and use. The workshops included specific exercises designed to use all the functionality of smartphones to demonstrate how they can be used effectively in 'real life' to accomplish key tasks, such as looking after their children or planning their travel. For example, the facilitators illustrated how you could use a smartphone to research information on NHS Direct.

The programmes included a week dedicated to managing money and budgeting called "Clever Money Week" (see below), in which the facilitators integrated use of smartphones into the learning tasks that they worked on with the NEETs.

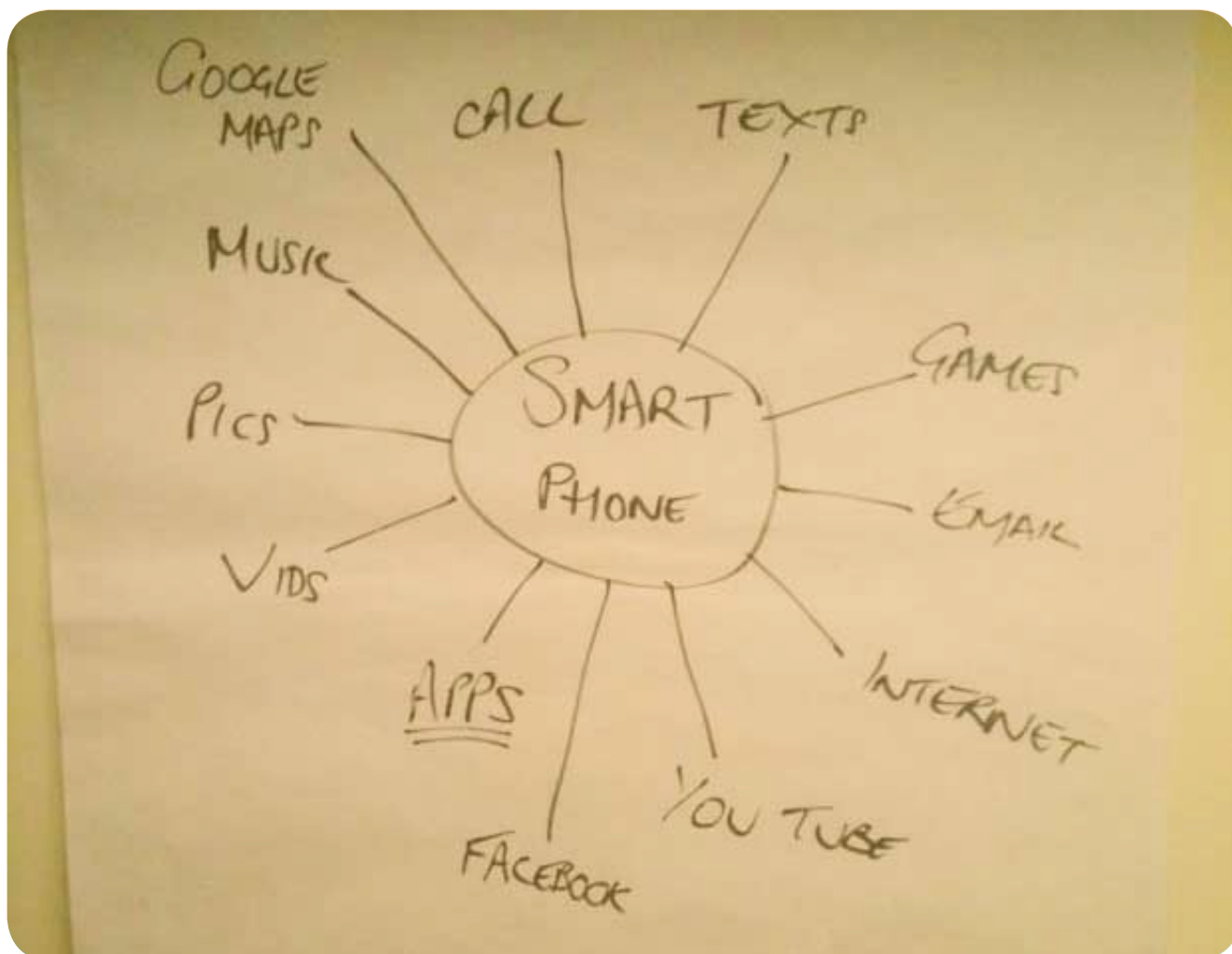
Questionnaires

Initial discussions between Looking Local and Connexions staff highlighted a high percentage of NEETs with having some form of learning difficulty – in most cases this is dyslexia. Therefore, the project designed questionnaires to be basic in format and language as well as being simple to complete. Rather than use of smartphones to complete the questionnaires, the project kept things simple and made them paper-based. For an overview of the results of the questionnaire, see “Findings”.

Video diaries

As well as gathering requirements from the participants, the project also sought to give young people a voice and an opportunity to use the smartphones’ video recording capabilities to give their opinions and suggestions using their own words and in their own time. In cases where young people could not be trusted to take smartphones home, they were encouraged to take part in a supervised ‘Big Brother Diary Room’ task so that their thoughts could be captured.

Figure 3: Smart Phone capabilities spider diagram



Clever money week

This was a week-long series of sessions that sought to teach attendees independent living skills. This included budgeting and planning for the future. During the sessions, the advisers worked with young people to:

- Explore their aims and aspirations, while also
- Working through practical problems such as searching for a job, and linking that with the qualifications required and which local colleges offered appropriate courses. This also touched on a number of financial issues such as applying for a range of benefits (ie jobseekers allowance, income support or a crisis loan).

Regarding aspirations, the facilitator worked with the young person to help set real goals and a trajectory – using the metaphor of a ladder with the top rung being where they aspire to be in 10 years' time and each rung equates to the steps they would need to take to reach that goal.

The advisers then worked with the NEETs discussing how the smartphone could be used as a tool to help them take practical steps towards these goals. For example, if they wish to become a nurse they could use a jobs and training app to search for opportunities as well as discover what intermediary qualifications – such as NVQs – they needed. Subsequently, they could use the smartphone's browser to search local college websites for courses that offered those qualifications – and the entry requirements for those courses.

The smartphone could also be useful for basic tasks such as calculating their weekly wage or for searching for ways of travelling to job interviews (and calculating whether they could afford to make the trip).

Some of the participants had low levels of basic numeracy and literacy skills, and in one instance the adviser used the smartphone to explain how the 24-hour clock worked (see text box).

An adviser was working with a young person who indicated that they did not understand the 24-hour clock. Since bus and train timetables usually appear in 24-hour format, the advisor asked how they planned their trips. The attendee replied that they would stand at the bus stop and wait – even if the bus only came hourly. The smartphone proved to be a handy tool for helping this young person understand the 24-hour clock.

Developing and testing the apps

Based on the input and feedback from practitioners and NEETs, the project team developed three prototype smartphone apps:

- Calderdale & Kirklees Careers – an app for searching job vacancies and training opportunities in Kirklees and Calderdale (powered by Calderdale & Kirklees Careers' Workabout.org.uk website)
- Do-it.org – an app for searching for volunteering opportunities throughout the UK (powered by YouthNet's Do-it.org website)
- JobCentre plus – an app for searching job vacancies held on the JobCentre plus database (UK-wide).

To facilitate social networking between participants in the Chrysalis group, the project used an off-the-shelf social networking tool. The idea being that participants would be able to continue to contact each other outside classes and provide peer-to-peer support. This private forum had a focus on pregnancy and young mums; members were able to contact and pose questions to their personal advisers, who would also respond over the network. This could be used as a forum so that the entire group could see any question and answer, but was moderated by a member of staff so that posts of a personal nature could be responded to privately and any inappropriate comments removed.

Field-testing the apps

Prototypes of the apps were tested by Calderdale & Kirklees Careers staff, whose advisers used the app in their sessions with NEETs both at the Connexions centres and as part of their outreach work visiting schools, job fairs and in some cases NEETs' homes.

In some cases, the app transformed the work that advisers could do with young people. For example, staff working at Calderdale & Kirklees Careers in Halifax frequently visit a college in Todmorden to work with young NEETs. Prior to obtaining smartphones staff found it difficult to access the vacancy database from their laptop. However the smartphone apps and the connectivity of the device enabled the adviser to show and talk to young people about live vacancies available in their area. This was the first time the advisers had been able to do this.

Personal Advisers found the smartphones so useful that they now take them out on a regular basis. The ability to show young people the vacancies encouraged further contact with staff and in some cases to NEETs downloading the app themselves. For more information on the benefits of using smart phones in the field, see "Outcomes".

Refining the app

Feedback also led to the specific refinement of the Calderdale & Kirklees Careers app. The initial version only allowed users to search the job vacancies by occupation whereas the improved version allows searches by occupation and location. However, based on comments made by advisers the project considered but then ruled out, using postcode searching as that narrowed searches too much and produced too few results. Although postcode searching would have been relatively easy to implement, part of Calderdale & Kirklees Careers' role is to broaden people's horizons in terms of what type of work they are looking for and where they may be able to work. In the view of the advisers, adding postcode searching would have limited their options and could be counter-productive. The team also changed the colour scheme to improve the app's usability, look and feel and provide some branding identity – the colour change was in conjunction with Calderdale & Kirklees Careers' corporate colour scheme.

The Calderdale & Kirklees Careers Jobs & Training app has now been released on the Android marketplace, and is free to download. The project envisages customers accessing the application via:

- smartphones which the advisers take into the field
- friends and family smartphones
- their own smartphones.

Figure 4. Screenshots of Calderdale & Kirklees careers' workabout app



Promoting the apps

Since the revision and enhancement of the apps, the project has taken a number of steps to market and promote use of the apps to young people in the area.

With funding for the project ending in April 2011, but with Easter and Summer holiday promotions in mind, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers and Kirklees Council have been running marketing campaigns to promote their app to young people in Calderdale and Kirklees. This has included:

- Posters and Flyers designed by Kirklees Council's Design Team
- Posters and leaflets have been sent (along with a Calderdale & Kirklees Careers Covering Letter) to Calderdale and Kirklees schools (75), local training providers (35), local libraries (27) and young people centres/services (11)
- Each Personal Adviser has received a promotional card and posters are being displayed in all Calderdale & Kirklees Careers/Connexions centres
- Calderdale & Kirklees Careers staff are expected to have the poster and cards present at any events they attend
- Kirklees Council are promoting on their website and Facebook page as well as the September edition of their residents' magazine
- Calderdale & Kirklees Careers are also using Quick Response (QR) Codes in their marketing of the app. This is a specific matrix barcode that can be scanned and directs the user to the app in the Android market. The QR code enables users to download the app from the Android marketplace instantly

- Details on the app and QR Code are displayed prominently on the home page of Calderdale & Kirklees Careers' Workabout website (<http://www.workabout.org.uk>)
- As part of their app promotion activities, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers' Recruitline team have been running a Twitter campaign. This has involved tweets to their partners and followers promoting use of the app via text and images
- Calderdale & Kirklees Careers have used local press to advertise the app.

Calderdale & Kirklees Careers outreach workers are also using smartphones out in the field where previous connectivity issues made it impractical to use laptops.

Monitoring uptake of the app

Throughout the project's evaluation activities and field trials, all apps developed were only released to a controlled user group. Following a successful evaluation period with this user group, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers's Jobs & Training app and Do-it.org's Volunteering app were released to the Android marketplace for anyone to download.

Calderdale & Kirklees Careers plan to further evaluate the contribution the app is making to their wider work with young people. This evaluation is due to take place after the October half-term 2011 to allow the current app promotion they are pushing through Personal Advisers to young people to gain traction.

The design of the Calderdale & Kirklees Careers app ensures that once the user identifies job opportunities they are interested in, they contact a member of the Connexions staff rather than applying directly for the position. This will enable Calderdale & Kirklees Careers to monitor usage of the app by measuring the volume of job opportunity enquiries over any given period.

Local jobs and training on your Android phone

Calderdale & Kirklees Careers

Get the latest jobs and training opportunities from Calderdale & Kirklees Careers direct to your Android mobile phone – search for 'C&K Careers' on the Android store.

Not got an Android phone? You can still find out about job and training opportunities at:
www.workabout.org.uk
 the website of C&K Careers

Findings

Young people will engage through technology

Through the initial workshops, the project discovered that while all attendees to New Beginnings and Chrysalis had mobile phones, they mostly use them to access Facebook and send text messages rather than to make phone calls. Somewhat surprisingly – due to the high cost of acquiring a smartphone at the time of the project – a couple of the attendees from each core group already had smartphones. Virtually all attendees were also familiar with Instant Messenger services.

However, although they were familiar with technology and interested in using the smartphone, they were not aware that they could access information, advice and support relating to education, employment and training via the device.

The project worked with 20 young people on the New Beginnings and Chrysalis programmes although only 10 completed questionnaires were returned, providing the following results:

- all users knew what they wanted to do after they'd completed their current course – and 9/10 said that using a smartphone had helped inform their choice of progression
- 10/10 users agreed that other people in the same position as them would benefit from being able to use a smartphone in their search for information on jobs, training or further education
- all the apps the project built received favourable responses from the user group. The jobs apps proving particularly successful. While the volunteering app perhaps was seen to have less value, it still received a favourable response

- connectivity and access to the internet was seen to be an important factor contributing to the smart phone's success in this project – particularly when the user required additional information beyond that provided by the apps.

Smartphones offer the cohort a handy and attractive tool for accessing such services. Calderdale & Kirklees Careers only have one public computer at its Centre and the Internet connection is often very slow. Calderdale & Kirklees Careers staff have laptops, but cannot use them with NEETS due to data protection laws. Smartphones can help fill the gap.

There is one major caveat – the attendees at the Chrysalis workshops were emphatic that they did not want to use the Facebook social networking site to connect with their peers on the course or their Connexions advisers. They strongly indicated that they did not want to mix their interaction with Connexions peers and staff with their “personal life” on Facebook.

Technology is only part of the solution

The majority of NEETs cannot afford smartphones, and although prices are constantly falling, they will not become affordable to most NEETs in the near-term. Of the eight smartphones lent to members of the Chrysalis group as part of the project, two of them were either lost or stolen. The personal adviser suspected that they had been sold by the participants.

Furthermore, the project also recognises that the barriers to entering employment, education or training facing young people are often more fundamental than a lack of access to information and support. The Personal Advisers who worked on the project highlight that a lack of self-esteem or self-awareness, or basic numeracy and literacy skills, or housing or parenting challenges prevented people progressing into training or

work. New technologies will have little effect in the near-term on this “hard-core” group of NEETs.

Rather, offering access to information and support is more likely to be productive with NEETs who were motivated and sufficiently skilled to seek it either independently (through downloading the apps themselves to their or their parents phone) or when meeting with their Personal Advisers.

“The Pregnancy Tracker app was really good – the bits about my baby, how it’s growing and how big it will be.”

Chrysalis member

“You can use it in your own time – when you want and wherever you want. You don’t have to go to the Job Centre.”

New Beginnings member

Outputs

The project has developed and released three apps for Android devices:

- C&K Careers job app (powered by Workabout website)
- Do-It app (Volunteering opportunities)
- Worktrain Job app (JobCentre Plus).



Outcomes

New channel

Ultimately, the smartphones coupled with the apps provide a new channel to communicate with NEETs. This new channel benefits both lead workers and NEETs themselves. One of the major challenges that outputs of the project help to address is that NEETs are often either unwilling or unable to come to the Centres – and so outreach work in the community, in schools and even in individual’s houses is an essential part of the work.

This new ability to access to information on the move has proved particularly important to Calderdale & Kirklees Careers Personal Advisers working in some of the more remote and less “connected” areas of Calderdale and Kirklees. Indeed, one PA reported that the smartphone and apps worked really well in Todmorden College:

“What a miracle, as we can’t use laptops with dongles in there!”

This is great news for the project but even more so for PAs who are now able to help more young people right across Calderdale and Kirklees, and not just the larger towns. This has led Calderdale & Kirklees Careers Chief Executive Gerald Hey to tell all staff they must support the use of the app.

In addition, many young people find the cost of coming into the Centres prohibitive. There is also a stigma attached to attending. So being able to check vacancies via the phone could, if they have access to one, save them money whilst enabling them to keep in touch in a way that suits them. They are also much more likely to be able to afford a smartphone before a laptop or PC.

A Personal Adviser at the Huddersfield Centre observed that the introduction of the Calderdale & Kirklees Careers app meant that NEETs were much more willing to search for jobs and training opportunities in their own time rather than spending half an hour on the Connexions Centre PC to search for and print out vacancies. Using a smartphone is much more instant and interactive – something that the young people of today expect from emerging technologies and innovative services.

Furthermore, the social demographics of NEETs are changing as a result of the recession with young people from families with medium and high incomes are now also becoming NEETs. Though they may not own a smartphone themselves, they may have the option of downloading the app to parents' or friends' phones. As of January 2012, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers' Workabout app had been downloaded from the Android Marketplace 223 times.

Interactive tool for keyworkers

The smartphone app offers lead workers the means of taking practical steps in real-time to support NEETS, principally through their outreach efforts. In the earlier phases, some of the geographical areas covered by the project had poor internet connectivity, the technical architecture of the app – with a lighter data footprint – means that the lead worker can access information using a smartphone which a laptop connection would not support.

“It’s basically like having your own Job Centre at home.”

New Beginnings member

“It’s like a baby laptop.”

New Beginnings member

One such Calderdale & Kirklees Careers key worker fed back to the project how brilliant she thought the smartphone and apps were. Having used them with a young person looking for vacancies in Hebden Bridge he was motivated enough to apply for two jobs straight away. In her words:

“I just wanted to say having worked in the area for more years than I care to remember it’s the only piece of technology that has ever worked here properly. So I am eternally grateful for the use of the smartphone.”

Furthermore, smartphones are designed with portability and intuitive usability as a priority – unlike a laptop they take no time to boot up, and do not erect a barrier between key worker and NEET.

Motivation can be a key factor in NEET engagement. It appears new technology that is relatively familiar to young people can help bring down some of the barriers usually associated with a lack of motivation. This was made clear within ten minutes of demonstrating the smartphones and job apps to the New Beginnings group, when one girl started to phone prospective employers using contact details provided by the JobCentre Plus and Calderdale & Kirklees Careers apps. This was the most engaged the New Beginnings staff had seen her since she joined the course in early January.

“I did a presentation to a Year 11 assembly at Holmfirth High school. Afterwards one of the Year 11s asked about a vacancy that he had found using the App. The vacancy required someone immediately but it demonstrated that the young person had seen our publicity and already downloaded the App and was using it to look for vacancies.”

Recruitline team member (Calderdale & Kirklees Careers)

These conductivity and usability factors mean that key workers can go from talking about job vacancies, to showing NEETs real-life job vacancies in a matter of seconds. The key worker could then support the NEET to take action straight away towards contacting the employer or finding out more. The outreach staff and other professionals will find this a quick, easy and relevant way to engage young people in the art of job hunting.

A related benefit is that usage of the app by key workers scales readily – the app leverages the usability inherent in the platform resulting in the staff training required to use the app being minimal.

Benefits

Supporting the reduction in NEETs

The smart phone project is one of five projects aimed at reducing the number of NEETs in Kirklees.

Statistics released towards the end of the Kickstart Your Career: Mobile Solution project in February showed NEET figures in Kirklees measured 7.1 per cent (this represents 893 individuals) for January 2011, compared to 9.6 per cent (1,265 individuals) the previous year.



“I have found the app very useful it enables me to use other services such as Profile and the app at the same time whilst taking notes and looking for jobs or apprenticeships for young people.

It is also quicker to navigate through the vacancies and I do not have to switch between internet browser and Profile whilst obtaining details for roles.”

Jobs Without Training worker (Calderdale & Kirklees Careers)

This also exceeded the local target for NEET numbers in Kirklees Council’s Education Plan which was set at 7.6 per cent by January 2011.

From April 2011, the DfE changed the way they count and report on NEET statistics. Previously, this was recorded by actual age (16 to 18) and location where educated post-16, but this is now logged by Academic Age Y12, Y13 and Y14 (effectively including some 19 year olds) and location where resident post-16.

These changes to the way numbers of NEET young people are reported has inevitably led to a rise in the figures – most notably brought to the public’s attention in national media headlines throughout August. However, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers have been able to provide the latest statistics using the old data type alongside actual numbers (see table below).

Month (2011)	Percent NEET	Actual No
February	7.1%	853
March	7.4%	897
April	7.2%	Not available
May	7.4%	Not available
June	7.8%	858

According to research¹ undertaken in July 2010 for the Audit Commission by York University's Department of Social Policy & Social Work and Department of Health Sciences, the life-time cost of NEET can be estimated as follows:

- a) The average individual life-time public finance cost of NEET (for example, welfare payments, costs to health and criminal justice services, and loss of tax and national insurance revenue) we estimate as **£56,300**.
- b) The average life-time resource cost (loss to the economy, welfare loss to individuals and their families, and the impact of these costs to the rest of society) is **£104,300**.

It is clear then that any reduction in NEET figures can greatly affect the public purse. Taking as an example the reduction of 372 individual NEETs in Kirklees between January 2010 and January 2011, we see:

- A potential public finance cost saving over a life-time of £20,943,600.
- The average life-time resource cost saving would be £38,799,600.

On a month by month basis, the average life-time resource cost saving for reducing NEET figures by just 40 people (ie January 2011 = 893, February 2011 = 853) would be £4,172,000. This obviously assumes that the reduction is sustained.

While the practitioners involved in the project indicate that the project has contributed to these reductions, given the package of support that was provided, it is impossible to attribute an exact figure to the smartphone project alone.

¹ See page 16 of "Against the Odds" report: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Downloads/20100707-againsttheoddsfull.pdf>

Governance and resourcing

The NEET Strategy Group oversaw the programme of work, and contributed members to the Project Board. The NEET Strategy Group in turn reported the outputs and outcomes to the Kirklees Partnership. (Before the removal of the National Indicator Set, NI117 had been a priority of the Kirklees LSP and its LAA.)

The Project Board's structure was derived from project management best practices, and was as follows:

Executive:	Assistant Head of Service (Business Strategy & Access) at Kirklees Council
Senior User:	Head of Service, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers (providers of the Connexions Service)
Senior Supplier:	Commissioning and Contracts Manager, Directorate for Children & Young People at Kirklees Council
Senior Supplier:	Head of Business Development, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers
Project Manager:	Project Manager, Looking Local, a technology project delivery company owned and managed by Kirklees Council
Financial Control:	Finance Officer from Kirklees Council

The Project Manager provided project progress reports to the Project Board on a monthly basis and ensured communications between members remained strong throughout each stage of the project.

The level of authority of the Senior User and Senior Suppliers from within key stakeholder organisations meant that decision making could be made at the highest level. This was particularly important in the case of the Senior User who was able to provide the Project Manager with relevant contacts from within Calderdale & Kirklees Careers – this ensured the project was able to progress with the involvement of the most appropriate people.

Senior Suppliers provided a support role in ensuring the project was sufficiently informed about data sources and intelligence on NEETs. The Senior Suppliers also delegated quality assurance activities to other managers within their organisations, providing the project with acceptance criteria from key staff working with NEETs ‘on the ground’.

The NEET Strategy Group meets every quarter and Highlight Reports were provided to them by the Senior Supplier (Commissioning and Contracts Manager, Directorate for Children & Young People at Kirklees Council) who is also the Chair of the Kirklees NEET Strategy Board.

A range of staff from Calderdale & Kirklees Careers contributed to the delivery of the project – particularly in relation to the engagement of NEETs themselves. Their contribution includes:

- providing initial data on the user group
- providing the project with the data that the app accesses,
- supporting the engagement and evaluation phases
- promoting the apps going forward.

“None of my friends go to the Job Centre, but they would use the Job Centre app if they had a smartphone.”

Chrysalis member

“The smartphone can make a difference.”

New Beginnings member



“Seeing is believing...”

There was some scepticism of a project as to what contribution simple technology could make to solving challenges complex as NEET. And I think it was only at the conclusion of the project, when the stakeholder group saw a demonstration of the smartphones in the app functionality, that we have a clear view of how useful these tools can be in engaging young people. Moreover, the project has set us thinking about other things we could potentially do using these technologies and the people involved have become more imaginative, creative, and technologically minded as a result of this project.”

Steve Collins, Director, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers

“Some of my clients have been successful in finding training opportunities via use of the App and I’ve seen at least one get an interview for a job after seeing a position posted on the App.

I also think the App will get downloaded more when older 19+ people start looking for higher apprenticeships.”

**Jobs Without Training worker
(Calderdale & Kirklees Careers)**

The total economic cost is estimated at £120,000, with a percentage breakdown by activity as follows:

Activity	Percentage
Local NEET/community liaison	5%
Initial workshop (full team)	1%
High level spec and requirements definition	5%
Technical development, testing and user acceptance	43%
Project management	25%
Communications	4%
Provision of hardware/ top-up cards for NEETs in Huddersfield	5%
Evaluation activities and reporting	8%
Local travel and subsistence	1%
Other project expenses/ contingency	2%

Challenges and lessons learnt

Direct engagement

The project would emphasise the value of working with end-users directly to understand their requirements. In the early development stages of the project, initial requirements were set out by those who deal with NEETs regularly – such as key workers and personal advisers working for Connexions and Calderdale & Kirklees Careers. However the project found that it was only when they began to work with NEETs directly that they began to gain a clear understanding of their needs and issues. Building a rapport with end users directly also helped when the project returned to evaluate the outputs.

Prototyping can help non-technical partners see the benefits

At the beginning, the project team encountered a “chicken and egg” problem whereby:

- the service providers (Connections, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers) needed to understand the technical possibilities to inform their thoughts and an idea for a solution.
- the technical supplier (Looking Local) wanted to have a clear set of requirements before committing to a technical design.

“We see Smartphones as another chink in the armour to allow us to reach young people out in the community so we have a range of personal advisors who go out to provide one-to-one support. We also have a high street presence in terms of the Connexions centre, telephone helplines and so on. The Smartphone is welcome addition to help us work with young people.”

Graham Crossley, Commission and Contracts Manager, Kirklees Council

Ultimately, the project was able to move forward once the technical supplier had provided a statement of different approaches to developing a mobile solution. This involved three elements:

- provision of a smartphone and top-up credit
- social Network Integration
- app development.

However, the service providers still struggled to visualise how the final solution – particularly the apps – would look and work until a working prototype was presented to them. It was only then that the practical uses of a solution involving smartphone technology and all that goes with it (apps, social networking, connectivity, internet access) were truly understood and could be placed in an operational setting.

Decisions made at national level impact local projects

The Government's decision to scrap the Education Maintenance Allowance caused the project major problems in December 2010 when the majority of young people the project had been working with were fast-tracked onto other courses (in order to secure their EMA for 2011). Hence, from January 2011 the project had to begin their engagement afresh with two new cohorts on the Chrysalis and New Beginnings programmes. This impacted the continuity of the relationships that the project had built-up with NEETs, and put pressure on the timescales for evaluation and ultimately project completion.

Innovation involves taking risks

The character profile of the NEET cohort suggested that providing them with personal smart phones might be risky. The project recognised these risks, and made an early decision to allow only teenage parents in the Chrysalis group (which was seen as likely to be the more trustworthy of the two groups due to members' imminent parenthood) to take them home with them. Members of the New Beginnings programme only had access to the phones during the workshops.

Of the 10 phones that were provided to teenage parents as part of the project, two went missing. The project authorised O2 to block and bar the phones, and later learned that the NEETs in question had made attempts to sell the phones.

“The phone is great – before I didn't want to find a job but now I can do it easily using the job app.”

New Beginnings member

“Introduction of the smartphones has proved a great success to New Beginnings. We have not seen this level of engagement from some of our young people before.”

Course tutor

“The problem is with society – you can have all the technology and support in the world but it will always prove useless if there is no personal motivation to help yourself.”

Chrysalis member

“If the smartphone wasn't there I'd struggle to look for a job – I hate going to the Job Centre!”

New Beginnings member

However, it must be emphasised that the majority of the young people who participated (both members of New Beginnings and Chrysalis) responded to the project with enthusiasm and positivity and their participation has not been hindered by the actions of a minority.

Government agencies may not be welcome in customers' social networks

During the initial planning and requirement gathering stages, the project were confident that integrating Social Networking into the smartphone experience would be warmly received by the NEET user groups – particularly the young mums (and mums-to-be) on the Chrysalis programme. Indeed, the project's early engagement with young people suggested that they used their existing phones for two main things: Texting and Facebook.

In reality, while the user groups wanted to actively use Facebook on a smartphone, they did not want any involvement in a NEET Support Group on Facebook. Taking this into account, the project created a private Social Network Group site– which could only be accessed by the Chrysalis group and was focused on peer-to-peer support for young mums. However, this was not widely used. The main reasons given for this lack of interest were that NEETs:

- did not want other friends to find out they were part of a NEET Engagement programme
- preferred to use Facebook for fun activities rather than anything else
- did not recognise that they were part of a wider group known to 'adults' as NEET
- worried about cyber-bullying which some young people admitted to being a victim of previously.

It's not about the technology

While smartphone technology undoubtedly provides a mechanism for delivering services to NEETs, the challenges faced by NEETs are often more onerous than a lack of information or support or advice. While smartphones and apps may help many NEETs to access information or advice swiftly and thereby help to remove blocks and give them some impetus and momentum, other NEETs face more substantial challenges including low levels of literacy, housing problems, and mental health issues. These barriers remain irrespective of easy access to information and support.



Next steps

Smartphones

The Connexions Service recognises that many NEETS will not be proactive in coming forward. Therefore, the service is keen to reach out to them and that involves travelling to locations and venues such as community centres or even making home visits and in those contexts access to live information on careers and jobs would be valuable.

Hence, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers has set in motion plans to add the phones provided as part of the project to their equipment booking system to enable front-line staff to take them out to remote offices, events etc. Senior management have also indicated that it is likely that as phone contracts are renewed more 'outreach' staff will be provided with this type of phone.

The New Beginnings and Chrysalis programmes use smartphones as a learning aid during some of their workshops, namely:

- looking for jobs & training
- searching for a home
- research on money matters.

Apps

Having published the Jobs & Training app on the Android marketplace, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers and Connexions Service will continue to promote it on their website, on their shopfronts and in their interactions with NEETs. They will also continue to monitor usage of the app when collecting feedback from NEETs.

Looking Local has published the Do-it.org volunteering opportunities app to the Android marketplace making it available on a national scale.

Looking Local is also currently investigating the feasibility of developing and publishing the apps for Apple's iOS. Ensuring apps are available across all the app stores can be a costly process especially as there is significant work involved in writing new code for an alternative platform – Android is not compatible with iOS, and vice versa. Looking Local is investigating cross-platform application development tools that may make this easier.

“We're in an instant society where people want instant information. The app on the phone enables us to give that immediacy to people. You don't have to wait for a laptop to boot up or for a connection to kick in. Touch, touch, touch and you're there immediately.”

Julie Tree, Calderdale & Kirklees Careers (Kirklees Connexions Service)



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