



Telecare and Telehealth – Centres of Excellence

SMaRT ways of working with telecare



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Ask any young person who's been homeless and they'll tell you how traumatic it can be. Not knowing where to turn everyday life can seem hopeless. But thanks to the way in which Care and Support was remodelled in Supported Housing at Nottingham Community Housing Association, where planned support is complemented by 'SMaRT' (Support Management and Response Team), young people are getting the 24hr support they need. Other vulnerable people are benefiting too from integrating this approach of using telecare and remote monitoring of CCTV to provide personalised services that are proving to be effective and efficient. Consultation with service users before this approach was introduced revealed that they did not want staff living in their homes.

"We want our independence and we want support only when we need it, but we still want to be safe and secure" was their message.

Nottingham Community Housing Association launched SMaRT 5 years ago neither knowing quite how successful this service would be nor fully comprehending what challenges it would need to overcome. The service utilises assistive technology, remote monitoring of CCTV and a dedicated support worker team to provide a rapid response service. This innovative service transformed traditional support services (where staff were on site at schemes) to an inspirational and effective service which responds to needs, improving the lives and independence of people who need support as well as providing safety and security. Service users can call trained and experienced support workers if they have a problem. Straight forward inquiries are dealt with empathetically over the system whilst a mobile response team responds swiftly to emergency calls in SMaRT cars.

One of the major successes of using telecare has been the amount of people successfully moving on from supported accommodation to independent housing, and Peter was one of them. In the winter of 2006 Peter was homeless, frequently sleeping in doorways or on a friend's sofa. With alcohol dependencies Peter was desperate for help. He was referred to one of the NCHA Supported Housing schemes from the Drug Alcohol Action Team. With his own flat and now fully involved in planning the support he needed to get his life back on track Peter said:

"I don't think I would have survived without the Support Management and Response Team on hand. SMaRT provides a 24 hour hot line which I could call if I needed help when support workers couldn't be on site. I was suffering with depression and sometimes self-harmed. On one occasion I called the SMaRT team who thankfully got to me quickly enough to get an ambulance out and provided first aid whilst they arrived. It was good to know they were there for me yet they supported me to make decisions for myself."

Vulnerable people often have low morale and little self-esteem, yet they have become more confident and have turned away doorstep callers, including drug dealers, because they know there is the back up of SMaRT to make them feel safe.

We recently celebrated the fact that Brian, who had learning disabilities, was able to move on to his own accommodation safely with minimal support. His confidence to do things for himself had been empowered through telecare and his success through personalised support plans. The self-reliance he had developed through accessing telecare helped him to increase his independence further.

Following a horrific attack by her partner Brenda snatched a few things and left what had been home with her 18 month baby. Some hours later that night, following treatment and advice, she was referred to NCHA's SMaRT service. SMaRT were able to meet Brenda and ensure she arrived safely at the accommodation that SMaRT had identified for her and help her settle in. SMaRT explained that if she was at all frightened or in need of anything she could simply call through using the assistive technology where they would be on hand to help. As time went by Brenda gained in personal strength from the planned support that she received and was able to make decisions about what she wanted for her future. Before she left, Brenda said that knowing SMaRT was there 24 hours a day had really helped to make her feel safe and confident again – particularly in the early days knowing that they could see who might be outside on the CCTV.

By understanding from the outset that telecare technology changes the way in which services are delivered, rather than being an 'add on' to existing services, SMaRT demonstrates vision and commitment, putting the independence of the customer and their right to choice, dignity and respect at the very centre of what it does.

The service model provides value for money as demonstrated through the positive outcomes illustrated. It is funded through the remodelling of services as staff no longer sleep in. SMaRT offers service users a bespoke service as part of their care package so the whole diversity of needs, culture and preferences can be considered. The uniqueness of SMaRT shows that telecare is not just for people who have deteriorating health or long term conditions. The evidence of successful outcomes in our experience shows that it has a vital role to play in the future of social care provision across the whole spectrum of needs.