

Combining telecare with outbound calling to support wellbeing

The challenge

The winter months see a higher proportion of older people requiring A&E assessment and stays in hospital. It's estimated that 3.6% of patients, mostly frail or elderly people, account for over a third of all bed capacity in acute hospitals, often because alternative accommodation and care is not available, despite their medical treatment being finished.*

How has Birmingham City Council's (BCC) Birmingham Telecare Service (BTS) combined a telecare service with a programme of outbound calling to provide proactive, preventative support to its citizens and help to alleviate winter pressures on health and social care?

What we did

The Birmingham Telecare Service was established in 2011 with the aim of supporting residents of the city to remain living independently in their own homes. The service combines a response service with a range of telecare solutions to support older people and those with long-term needs. There are currently over 16,000 people benefitting from the service.

In winter 2015/2016 BTS began an outbound calling Winter Chills initiative. Temperature extremes sensors were included in telecare systems for all hospital discharge referrals, and these service users, along with those already using temperature extremes sensors as part of their telecare package, also received a copy of Age UK's 'A Guide to Keeping Warm this Winter' and a room thermometer. Recipients of this Winter Chills service, approximately 1,300 individuals, also received two telephone calls from BTS operators, spaced 2-3 weeks apart:

- **Call 1** – Aimed to ensure they had received the Age UK guide and to highlight the key messages and signpost / escalate to appropriate services where required
- **Call 2** – To follow up on the recorded outcome of Call 1 and reaffirm the key messages and signpost /escalate to appropriate services where required, as well as recording the results of any actions taken following the first call

* Winter Pressures: What's Going On Behind The Scenes?, QualityWatch, Elizabeth Fisher and Holly Dorning, February 2016

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“ The Birmingham Telecare Service helps us to support people's independence by managing risks to their safety. By expanding the service to include proactive outbound calls we are also able to offer them practical advice and emotional support, and signpost them to other services which they might not otherwise access.

Chris Brothwood, Project Manager –
Equipment and Technology Enabled
Care Services, Birmingham Better Care

Highlights

- **981 service users** contacted by telephone
- **3,406 calls made**
- **29% increase** in safe and healthy service users (first to second call)
- **125 escalations** from calls resulted in interventions that could have prevented a hospital admission with a potential cost **saving of £178,000**

 **Birmingham City Council**



How it works

The outbound calling service aimed to help older and vulnerable citizens to be prepared for the winter, and provide them with reassurance throughout the colder weather. It covered a number of topics including:

- **Preparing for winter:** checking when the heating was last serviced, smoke alarm checks, ensuring basic food items are available
- **Staying safe and healthy:** asking service users if they have recently had the flu jab, if they are eating well, tips on protecting against chilblains etc.
- **Keeping warm** indoors and out
- **Keeping your home warm:** hints and tips on heating the home efficiently
- **Signposting to other services:** checks for eligibility of benefits or discounts

Alerts from telecare sensors, including the temperature extremes sensor, were responded to according to normal protocols eg, alerting a nominated contact, family member or emergency services as appropriate.

- 1252 users were identified as recipients of a Winter Chills package as part of their telecare service, 8.2% of all BTS service users
- Operators successfully contacted 981 of these by telephone
- A total of 3406 calls were made – including calls 1 and 2 and attempted calls

Results

Comparing the first and last calls there was a 29% increase in service users stating they were safe and healthy

- Only 13% (128) of the service users opted out of the calls
- 61 service users contacted had passed away and no notification had been received
- 41% users (403) raised concerns, such as struggling to heat their home, during the call which were escalated for action
- 37% (363) concerns raised by service users addressed by non BCC services; meaning queries were resolved without requiring council resources.



“ We’ve had so many people say the calls have improved their lives, and that they wouldn’t have known where to turn to for help if we hadn’t advised them. Several people also said it made them feel that someone out there cared about them.

BTS operator

Case studies

Mrs A is in her sixties and lives alone. Osteoarthritis means she has little use in one arm, and this has meant that she finds it difficult to prepare food. As a result of her condition worsening, in part due to the colder weather, she has lost almost two stones in weight in recent months, and she has become run down and depressed. Mrs A has no family or support, and wasn't receiving any formal care. She has a small income and was finding it difficult to afford to eat and heat her home, and so had switched off the heating in most rooms. The operator signposted Mrs A to the Home Heat Helpline, directing her to the phone number in the Age UK booklet. The operator also escalated Mrs A to Birmingham City Council to be referred for an assessment for home care. Three weeks later the operator called Mrs A again, and found that she had been given the Warm Home Discount of £140 towards her energy bills. She also had an appointment for her care assessment. **Mrs A expressed her gratitude for the call, and the difference it has made to her life.**



Mr B had lost his wife a few months before receiving the call from BTS. He had become depressed, lost his appetite and stopped socialising. He said he felt that he had 'given up on life'. The operator referred him to The Silver Line where he was able to receive regular calls from trained volunteers to help alleviate his loneliness and isolation. **The second call found Mr B to sound 'like a different person'. He had made new friends as a result of The Silver Line, and was going out meeting friends and on day trips and feeling much happier.**



Mr C is registered blind and was struggling financially. As a result he wasn't eating properly and was finding it difficult to pay his heating bills. **The operator ensured Mr C received the details of the Home Heat Helpline in Braille and he has since received a Warm Home Discount of £140.** He was also provided with information regarding other services and support organisations that may be useful to him in Braille. In addition, Mr C was able to access and receive the flu vaccination as a result of the Winter Chills programme.

Mr D has very poor mobility and was struggling to get upstairs to use the shower. **The operator referred the call to BCC which has now scheduled a downstairs shower to be installed in Mr D's property.** Mr D was also referred to Age UK for advice on other support available to him.

Mrs E lives in an end of terrace house, and the drains had failed. She was very distressed as waste was accumulating around her property, and also rising up through her toilet and sinks. Her calls to the relevant water board had not yet resulted in any action. **The operator referred the call to BCC and Mrs E was temporarily rehoused whilst the drains were fixed.**

Outcomes

The majority of service users were happy to engage with operators, with only a small percentage (13%) opting out of future calls. Upon understanding the reason for the call, most service users were pleased that the Council had been proactive in calling to see how they were. Comments included that the calls made them feel cared for and valued, and that they were grateful for the thermometer and found it useful.

Many calls resulted in educating people on entitlement to help with fuel bills, care and support services or aids and adaptations, particularly for people with long term conditions and disabilities. For those people aware of support, many had enquired some time ago but not revisited it, or their circumstances had changed and they were now entitled to help which they were unaware of. Many people were struggling but simply didn't know where to turn and were grateful to be signposted to other services. Particularly for people without relatives close by, the Winter Chills service gave them an awareness of, and contact with, support services which they would otherwise not have had access to.

Service benefits

- Identifying which service users are feeling healthy and well can help to support effective caseload management, enabling the focus to be on priority cases
- 356 users raised concerns that could be addressed by other support service providers, making effective use of Council resources
- 68 users were identified as deceased with no notification received previously, enabling the Council to proceed accordingly
- 125 escalations resulted in interventions that could have prevented a hospital admission, representing a potential cost saving of £178,000 (based on an average admission cost of £1,424)



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