

Safeguarding and promoting independence for people with learning disabilities using telecare

The challenge

Recent years have seen more social care budgets put under pressure with financial challenges relating to the rising demand for services and costs associated with them, meaning that councils have had to examine different ways of delivering care and support to people with learning disabilities.

How has Gloucestershire County Council's specialist telecare team worked with other stakeholders such as the council's learning disabilities support team and Tunstall Healthcare to use technology to enhance care, increasing cost effectiveness and enabling independence?

“Telecare makes such a difference to people's lives, making sure people are safe at home, but independent too. We are continually evaluating and growing the service, keeping pace with changing technology and finding new ways to help people stay out of hospital and residential care and remain active and included in their communities

Holly Gittings, Specialist Telecare Service Manager, Gloucestershire County Council

What we did

The telecare team works with individuals with learning disabilities, their families and other relevant services to incorporate technology into packages of care in order to improve quality of life, enable choice and control, and safeguard the people they support at home and in the community.

A range of solutions can be used according to the needs and wishes of the individual, including:

- **Medication prompts and dispensers**

Lifeline home units can be programmed with audible messages to not only remind individuals to take their medication but other prompts such as 'don't forget to go to the day centre today' or 'remember to drink plenty through the day'. Dispensers can be filled with up to 28 days of medication and will alert the user each time medicine should be taken. If the user fails to access the medication, an alert is raised to the monitoring centre or carer so that action can be taken to ensure that the medication programme is maintained.

- **Purposeful walking devices**

These small devices enable a person to be found if they have become lost using GPS tracking. 'Safe zones' can also be created for each individual which will raise an alert if they leave a particular area. Devices can also be used to alert if the user leaves their property during certain times; or give reminders such as 'remember to take your keys'.

- **Epilepsy sensors**

Placed under the mattress, these sensors can raise an alert with an onsite carer if it detects a seizure. The system can include an under-pillow vibrating pad to wake sleeping carers if required.

- **Fall detectors**

A choice of fall detectors is available which will raise an alert with a carer or monitoring centre if it's detected that the wearer has fallen.

- **Home safety**

Smoke, gas, heat and flood detectors can link to a monitoring centre via the Lifeline home unit, supporting users as they adjust to independent living with the safety net of an appropriate response being on hand in the event of a potential emergency.



Results

Including telecare as part of care packages has enabled many individuals with learning disabilities in Gloucestershire to become more independent and manage aspects of their daily routines without the need for support. The systems can also reduce the amount of formal care needed by discreetly monitoring for potential risks 24 hours a day; for example falls, using gas appliances, becoming lost.

You can find out more about how telecare has helped to achieve a balance between safety and independence for some people with Learning Disabilities below.

Liam

Liam lives in supported housing with a small number of other residents and has been diagnosed with epilepsy. He is in his early twenties and enjoys activities during the day and interacting with staff and residents alike. Liam is able to communicate well, however his seizures were starting to increase during the night when he was not able to call for help. He was therefore unable to alert staff that he had had a seizure and access any help he needed.

An epilepsy sensor was installed that picks up the distinct body movements which indicate a seizure. If a seizure is detected, an alert is raised on a pager and vibrating pillow pad for sleeping night staff, and also to the Monitoring Centre in the unlikely event of carers being unable to respond. Liam was also provided with a discreet fall detector so if he should have a seizure during the day and fall to the floor, the alarm would be similarly raised.

Having the equipment in place made Liam feel confident in “getting the help needed” in response to an emergency situation and Liam can continue to live independently as normal. The sensor also enabled Liam to be monitored by sleeping rather than waking staff at night, saving £60.30 each night, which equates to a saving of £21,949.20 per year across the people sharing that night time support.



Photos have been posed by models to protect individual's privacy.

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Tracy

Tracy has a mild learning disability and difficulties with her short term memory. She lives in sheltered accommodation, with carers onsite to assist if needed. However, Tracy is keen to maintain her independence as far as possible and complete daily tasks herself. Previously, Tracy has had assistance from carers to manage her medication as she had some difficulties using the blister pack, such as getting the tablets out the compartments. On a number of occasions she had accidentally taken too many doses of her medication.

Tracy has been provided with a Pivotell medication dispenser which has a small flashing light and beeps to alert her that it is time to take her medication. The Pivotell holds all the medication in compartments so it will only dispense the correct dosage at the set time intervals, ensuring that Tracy does not take too many tablets by mistake. The Pivotell is linked to the Monitoring Centre via a Lifeline home unit, so after a set amount of time if the tablets have not been taken the Monitoring Centre will be alerted and will contact a Responder to advise them of the situation.

The equipment has enabled Tracy to become more independent in managing her medication, reducing the amount of support her carers need to provide. The Pivotell has also made her safer at home due to the lower risk of overdosing. Tracy says that she is very happy with her equipment, and “would not be without it”.

