

# Working with councils on the largest and fastest roll-out of care technology to keep people connected during COVID-19

Helping people use, trust and love technology.





**In March 2020 as the country was slipping into lockdown, RETHINK Partners were commissioned by Essex, Kent and Suffolk County Councils, together with technology company Alcove, to deliver 5,000 Video Carephone devices to vulnerable people, as part of their response to the COVID-19 outbreak.**

**Our brief was to support councils to deliver the Video Carephones at pace, and to help people to embrace and benefit from the video communication devices.**

The strategy was to identify key groups of people, with the most need, to help them stay connected with their friends, family and health and care services during the COVID-19 outbreak. We were working with and through social workers, care professionals, therapists, commissioners, care providers, community and NHS partners – trying to get close to the frontline and to the people who know service users best in what was a highly dynamic situation.

Across all three councils we reached out to a wide range of people: older people, adults with learning disabilities, people living with a mental health condition, carers. We particularly targeted people who don't have access to mainstream consumer technology and whose loneliness and isolation during COVID-19 was increased because they were also digitally excluded.

Our end-to-end service meant we were involved from the very start, helping

to navigate some of the hard barriers that sometimes hinder technology adoption – governance, data protection, benefits modelling – and also importantly tackling the softer people issues from the outset – helping people understand the potential of the technology to improve lives and keep people safely connected to essential services. We knew we needed to shift mindsets and find our champions if we were to move as quickly and purposefully as the situation demanded. This took a lot of time, tenacity and many conversations across a diverse range of stakeholders.

Throughout, we tailored our approach with providers and partners and helped them to adapt services to make best use of the Video Carephone. We have also captured feedback on people's personal experience and scrutinised the information and data available to identify people who would continue to benefit from using the device.

In a few short weeks, we have watched the programme flourish as the number of referrals have increased and the volumes of calls has multiplied. There have been many pivot points, where we had to carefully analyse

and respond to an evolving picture: balancing national guidance and predictions with real-time local need. Each council required a nuanced range of support to reflect the nature of its commissioning and provider landscape.

Most importantly, we've had some amazing feedback and heard touching stories about how this work has made a difference to people's lives; "life-changing" is a phrase we have heard time and again from people, professionals and families. And the mind-blowing numbers now speak for themselves – what started as a mission to help vulnerable people stay connected and safe during COVID-19 has turned into the largest and fastest roll-out of care technology that has ever occurred. We are all deeply proud to have been part of this work – and to share the lessons and impact so that other councils can prevent isolation and loneliness and bring joy to people's lives, particularly as we all prepare for the challenging winter ahead.

**The largest and fastest roll-out of digital care technology that has ever occurred: in just 16 weeks**



**111,000** individual calls made through the Video Carephones - with 70 per cent of these being video calls

**5,000** friends and family, care and support workers connected

Over **3,000** devices delivered



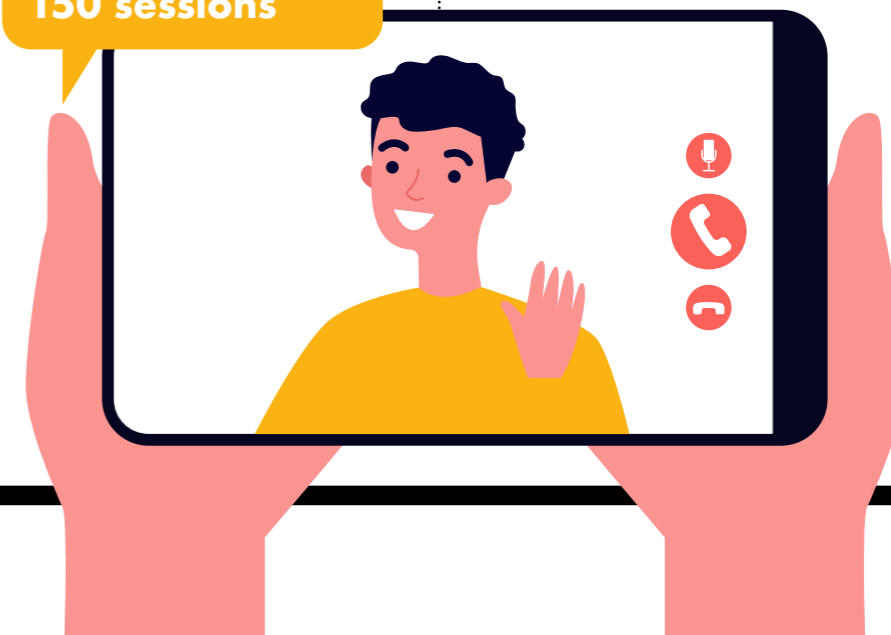
**350,000** minutes of voice and video calls made through the Video Carephones – that's 243 full 24 hour DAYS of solid video and voice calls between users, their loved ones and their health and care professionals

An average of **185 referrals** per week across the three councils; at the peak we processed **340 Video Carephones** in 5 days. Most care technology programmes achieve less than 20 referrals a week

**400** health and care organisations involved

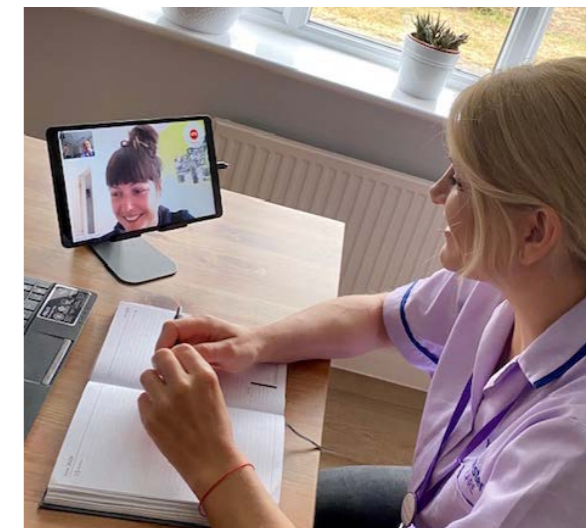


Over **750** health and care professionals individually trained over **150 sessions**





Vera, Notting Hill Genesis residential housing, Writtle



Edita, senior care practitioner at Westminster Homecare in Kent

## More importantly, here is some of the difference the work has made to people's lives:

- ♥ Kitty lives in sheltered accommodation; she and her sister are inseparable but were unable to meet under COVID-19 restrictions. Both sisters were provided with a Carephone and now they talk three times a day.
- ♥ Marianne is a ninety-year-old bed bound resident at an extra care scheme in Essex. She used to see her son regularly but he was unable to visit her as she is shielding. Marianne was finding their contact being restricted to phone calls extremely difficult. The Video Carephone has enabled her to talk to her son - and see his dog whom she loves - via video several times per day.
- ♥ George, 90, was unable to visit his day centre and became moody and withdrawn. However, now he is able to do exercise sessions twice a week and have regular contact with the centre – improving his mobility and making him much happier.

- ♥ Jess, who has a learning disability and lives in an independent living scheme, uses her Video Carephone to do activities with her support worker such as cooking and planting flowers; it has improved her mood and confidence significantly.
- ♥ Neil has a learning disability; he was very sociable before lockdown and really missed his friends and family. Now he is able to call his carers, support workers and his two sisters. His sisters say they have never been able to engage him on the phone and this has made a massive difference.
- ♥ Robert, who has MS and struggles with keyboards and buttons, can now speak to his friends and physio without having to try using passwords and logins; he loves his Video Carphone.
- ♥ Florence, who is 104, loves her Video Carephone and is very impressed at how easy the tech is. She would love for 'everyone she knows' to be added to make calls. She has never used technology before.
- ♥ The family in Australia, who managed to talk to and see their uncle Tommy before he passed away.
- ♥ Jeni who hasn't seen her family in Derbyshire for months, managed to see her grandniece walk for the first time – on video!

- ♥ Mrs O was very low and contemplating self-harm - she rang her daughter on the Video Carephone who managed to talk her down. It allowed her family to see her and to be able to calm her.
- ♥ Fred had a stroke a few years ago and now lives in sheltered accommodation. His family can't understand him over the phone so have to drive for over an hour, whenever they are worried about him, just to see if he is okay. Now they can video call him and it gives them all great peace of mind.

**These are just some of the many, many people whose lives under COVID-19 have been enhanced through the Video Carephones – connecting them to loved ones and linking them to essential health and care services whilst keeping everyone safe. People with little or no previous technology experience and without access to Wi-Fi and consumer tech have been included in the digital revolution that COVID-19 has triggered. Most importantly, the Video Carephone gives them autonomy, peace of mind, and independence – they are in control, and they love it.**

## Our approach – a wrap-around programme to bring people and technology together

At RETHINK Partners we are passionate about the potential for care technology to improve people’s lives. And we also know that technology is not the limiting factor – it is the organisations and people within them who will make the difference as to whether a care technology programme thrives or fails. Our work with local authorities, the NHS, communities, families and citizens has taught us how essential it is to consciously wrap a change programme around any care technology roll-out – one that tackles both the hard and soft barriers that inhibit scale take-up. This is our passion and our expertise.

During COVID-19, our aim was to work with the councils to support health and care services to reach vulnerable people, continue their involvement with them and help people to stay connected with their friends and family. The challenge was the speed in which we had to set-up and deliver the programme remotely, in tricky circumstances.

In order to ensure success, RETHINK Partners supported the councils with an underlying change programme which was embedded throughout delivery.



Kevin from Potsford Care Services in Suffolk, shows Bryan (right) the care farm through his tablet during lockdown - as Bryan missed seeing the animals.

- Our work began even before the Video Carephones were ready to go; **we worked closely with commissioners to support and unlock internal processes:** governance, business case development, communications and briefings to senior leaders, navigating information governance, procurement and legal checks and balances. We were hands on from the outset because we understand how councils work, and how important it is to get all these building blocks in place.
- Using the information available, **quickly identifying the groups of people who would get the most benefit from the devices** including those who were shielding, were in receipt of care services and those at most risk of social isolation and loneliness; we engaged heavily with commissioned care providers at this stage – they were on the ground and were essential in identifying people who were really in need in the early stages of the lockdown.
- **Mapping out how we reach those people** across all sectors, in order to provide a device and get them activated as quickly as possible; this involved a lot of talking and listening. We quickly realised how important it was to **get social workers, OTs and nurses involved** so spent time and energy upfront getting their support and buy-in.
- **RETHINK, Alcove and the councils jointly delivered briefings, training and wide spread communications,** across multiple organisations and channels to engage, inform and stimulate uptake; we quickly learnt that face to face and small, direct conversations work best to hook people in.
- **RETHINK acted as conduit between councils, providers, partners and Alcove** in order to manage deployment and to increase adoption; we learned that we need to target leaders and the frontline together if things are to move fast.
- **We captured good news stories and user experience** to adapt and change; we listened to staff using the devices and brought peers together to encourage spread. **Sharing powerful real-life stories** has helped people to adopt and use the devices more readily
- **We responded to the Covid-19 changing landscape** and adjusted our approach to act proactively; for example shifting the focus onto care homes and people in supported accommodation when it was clear they needed help as much as people living alone at home
- Supported internal teams to **ensure the roll-out continues and to capture learnings** for future care technology programmes. We worked hard to build strong relationships with partners and across internal teams; these will be an important legacy for more joint work in the future.



Our initial projections for how quickly we could get devices actively in use were over ambitious – but this was what the situation called for; the key limiting factor was identifying people and getting staff to generate referrals. We know that rolling-out new technology takes time to embed. Within weeks, however, we were able to identify what worked and what didn’t – and we were able to adapt our approach accordingly. This is all learning that we have developed together with the councils; they will be in a much stronger place in future to deliver ambitious care technology programmes as a result of this work.

## Get in touch

If you would like help with your digital care technology offer then we'd love to talk to you.

RETHINK Partners provides consultancy support to local authorities and health partners who want to be more ambitious about how health and care technology can promote independence, improve health and deliver savings. We work end-to-end - from strategy development, benefits modelling, pre-market engagement to delivery support and culture change.

Essentially we can help you make the case for care technology, accelerate progress and derisk delivery.



**Clare Morris**  
[clare@rethinkpartners.co.uk](mailto:clare@rethinkpartners.co.uk)  
[@Clare1Morris](https://www.linkedin.com/company/rethinkpartners/people/clare-morris)



**Irene Carson**  
[irene@rethinkpartners.co.uk](mailto:irene@rethinkpartners.co.uk)  
[@RethinkPartners](https://www.linkedin.com/company/rethinkpartners/people/irene-carson)



## About us

**RETHINK Partners is a health and care transformation consultancy that's uniquely placed to connect people, services and (where it makes sense) tech, for social good.**

We love solving challenging health and care problems and work closely with the public, private and third sector to understand their needs and discover where their big issues are. Our curiosity to understand the complexities of our clients often means uncovering surprising issues and opportunities along the way.

We have worked on the frontline and in leadership roles across health and care and carry out, strategy and hands-on delivery to help organisations better collaborate, innovate and deliver meaningful impact. Our first-hand experience in health and social care means we know how difficult it is to make changes to services, but we also know how great the rewards can be when we get it right.

Our approach is to wrap around the people at the heart of change, from patients, families and carers; to professionals, clinicians and decision-makers. We care deeply about unlocking and sharing value for everyone in health and care, the democratisation of ideas, experience, and insight into what helps people and what hurts them. We love meeting people from all walks of life; understanding their lives and finding ways to play back their lived experience, to help decision makers prioritise how they improve services, experience, working life, impact and outcomes. We work hard to unlock new value – and to explore, innovate and test ideas alongside our clients – to deliver impact where it really matters.

We care deeply about unlocking and sharing value for everyone in health and care, the democratisation of ideas, experience, and insight into what helps people live their best lives.



