Housing LIN
Connecting people, ideas and resources

Let's get Digital - A whole new world of possibilities to transform the technology-enabled home

Kevin Alderson, Sales and Marketing Director at Tunstall Healthcare, discusses the challenges and latest thinking surrounding digital/IP technology

Last month I was lucky enough to spend a day at the South West Housing LIN (Learning and Improvement Network) workshop at Somerset County Cricket Club, Taunton, followed by a visit to Taunton Borough Council Extra Care facility Kilkenny Court, to see the scheme and tour the Deane Helpline.

It's an exciting time for technology as we move into the digital world, but it is a challenge to understand what it actually means for housing providers. Technology is moving towards fully digital/IP based systems and there is limited understanding of what "the art of the possible" actually is.

The workshop tried to answer this conundrum with 50+ individuals from the sector. We discussed **"You don't know, what you don't know"** and tried to paint the art of the possible in terms of digital/IP technology. We then had a working session with the audience entitled "all the things you wanted to ask about a technology-enabled home, but were afraid to ask" and importantly we then had a "making it happen" session – working through the answers together and discussed ideas around building an online resource pack.

The discussion unearthed some real concerns for people.

There was a big debate about new technologies which perhaps were untested. For example, the NHS says there were 125,000 new health apps developed last year alone but only 125 have been tested. Some innovations (such as Uber which is about finding a taxi easily) are not regulated, but are still extremely popular. Other things which are available include geo-tagging, which define the area a vulnerable person is in, (linked to Google maps), and if things go wrong for example if mum travels more than 10 miles per hour, or goes outside the safe-zone, you can be alerted.

Another key issue involved listening to people's needs. It was put to the group that we don't listen to our customers. An example is 72% of people die in hospital even though most people say they want to die at home. Surely technology could help here? In fact we know that it can.

General public awareness was highlighted. A problem may be that dad comes down at 2am, puts the bacon on the hob but forgets the frying pan. Or mum wanders and gets lost. We have no idea where to look for useful technology to support our loved ones, and how to make the right choices. Start with the problem and work towards the right technology.

It was pointed out that the whole reason for the visit to Kilkenny was to show just that. The original technology was 30 years old. It didn't meet the needs and aspirations of tenants. So Taunton Deane invested so that they are now able to start consulting on the specific needs for individuals, whether that's through the use of a personal budget or other funding.

So what does the technological future hold?

I claimed that the next 5 years will be much more transformational than the previous 50 years in terms of technology in Care. We're very keen to get on that road and to work with organisations to get on that pathway and learn what will provide the best outcomes.

The IP transformation is enormous for this sector as it allows you to do so much more. I used the example of how trains allow you to go from A-B but 8-lane motorways have transformed speed, flexibility and ease of travel. However, you have to bear in mind there are some disadvantages which need to be dealt with eg IP enabled devices cost more and their reliability and resilience needs to be handled well.

Tunstall is committed to IP as being the future of our industry. It's not advantageous just to buy IP enabled equipment as equipment alone will produce the same outcomes as before but at higher cost. You need to work with a provider who will make sure it works reliably in every circumstance - it's about a broader service offering delivering more benefits, including reliability.

In the home of the not too distant future, you will have potentially hundreds of IP enabled devices. Bringing the home to life through digital connectivity is where the future lies. If you get your infrastructure in place, your motorway into the home will go on to achieve outcomes, efficiency and productivity gains.

Link to White Paper:
www.housinglin.org.uk/_library/Resources/Housing/Support_materials/Other_reports_and_guidance/Revolutionising_technology_enabled_housing_with_care_white_paper_final.pdf

Link to the workshop's presentations:
www.housinglin.org.uk/download.cfm?file=%2E%2E%5Csecure%5Cem%5Cevents%5C841%5CSW%5FHousing%5FLIN%5Fworkshop%5F1%2E7%2E15%2Epdf

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