

## **icare in Walthamstow: Multi Media in Action**

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Here in Waltham forest, East London, we have been experimenting with the use of multimedia in our work with people living with Dementia. We support people in day services, residential care and within the community. We want to share with you what we have done so far in our project “icare”, our learning and our hopes for the future

The power of music with people living with Dementia is well documented, and we wanted to develop this and to look at the possibilities of other technology available such as Mp3 players, laptops, tablets, phones. This project started as we were awarded some money as an outcome from a “Dragon’s Den” type event from the local Council -our Lead councillor, Angie Bean, had to convince a panel of Councillors and members of the public to invest in the project. The competition was fierce, and one of the reasons we won is that Cllr. Bean has a keen interest in Dementia, having personal experience as a carer. We had already embraced learning from person centred approaches across all client groups based on the pioneering work done by Helen Saunderson<sup>1</sup>- we are not perfect but the principles are there. For example, a Manager of a Care Home had done a “Passion Audit” to look at what passions the staff held, what passion each individual resident had and matched the two together. Skills and passion sharing followed- including gardening, singing, beauty treatments, and music.

We started buying a limited range of equipment and trying it out, to learn about what worked and what did not work, we wanted all service users and staff to try out a range of gadgets. To kick start the project, we employed a Multi Media worker on a short term basis. This post was essential- and we deliberately recruited someone with basic IT knowledge and with strong values around personal centred approaches. A key element has been that the successful recruit-Gill McDermott- has “can do” approach, has shared her enthusiasm and energy nurturing staff confidence and competence along the way. Gill’s passion is around music, and she brought in a range of turntables and vinyl records. We guessed that the best way to introduce older people to Mp3 players was via their favourite music. Vinyl records are tangible, the covers got people talking and engaging with the project. One challenge for staff was to find out individual’s favourite music- it would take time to find out personal favourite tracks, as we all have favourite artists but it is usually specific tracks that have personal significance or a cherished memory.

After people listening to vinyl records, Gill started to use Mp3 players, with personal playlists established. Individuals had a wide range of tastes. Forget any stereotypes of what music older people want to listen to – our most requested track is Marvin Gaye’s “Sexual Healing”!

The impact of personalised playlists was instant. A couple of people were sensitive about their preferred choices in music, as the norm had been listening to radios in the communal lounges of care homes as that had been the only option available. Choice of music could now be real,

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Saunderson: see <http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/>

individual, private and accessible. When I walked into a Care Home Lounge and witnessed Ivy<sup>2</sup>, a 103 year old resident, being given a Mp3 player and within a few minutes had learnt how to use it, I knew that the project could make a difference. Ben, another Care Home resident, was able to initiate listening to music in the privacy of his own bedroom, other than waiting for staff to put on music in the Lounge, and his reaction was “Oh Boy “. Ben is currently being supported to use Skype so that he can see his sister who lives in Jamaica and who he has not seen for years. They phone each other and now Skype will enable Ben to be an equal partner in the conversation.

Throughout the project we have videoed and used photos to document our work, our successes and our learning. This has also meant that we have a catalogue of photos to share with referrals, to show what sort of work we do, what individuals can do for themselves. At Reviews, the individual can use photos and videos to share with social workers and families- the individual remains in control and centre to their Review.

Videos are made by service users- recently we have supported people living with dementia to make a film about memories. We have also used videos to demonstrate how to use gadgets, what we are doing, how we are doing it, so the examples above have video evidence to show what a difference the project is having both on individuals and as a collective force to change how we work. By viewing videos staff and managers understand the power of what we are doing, and how we can change what staff offer within services and therefore change people’s lives.

There have been people further on in their personal journey living with Dementia, who had become withdrawn and sometimes “challenging” to work with. Esther would walk around and would tend to sit only for a few seconds. With a Mp3 player, and a personalised playlist, she is now sitting down for several minutes at a time, and is visibly calmer. The impact has been staggering. Raj is blind and gets very disorientated. The music from a Mp3 player and a record player has also had a similar affect – he is a very private man and wishes to listen to music on his own, and on his own terms. He was a musician and within weeks of starting to listen to his personal playlist, he started to play the piano again. When he recently listened to a soundtrack he loved, he got up and danced and exclaimed “The music was so strong, for a moment I thought I could see again. Thank you”.

We encourage service users from day and community based services to borrow equipment and take it home. As a result, some family members will buy or pass on their MP3 players or laptops. When Victor started to wear headphones in a particular way, and we found out that his grandson was a DJ and had taught him the “proper way” to wear headphones. When younger people visit their loved ones in Care Homes or in their own homes, they now have something to share and talk about. Music, photos and videos are a great talking point.

Our Dementia outreach team have embraced working with the technology whilst supporting people living with dementia in their own homes. All staff had Smart phones, so that videos and photos and the internet were all accessible. When Beryl one day started to talk about The Great Wall of China, the staff member used her phone to access photos of The Wall and used this as a starting point to

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<sup>2</sup> Names have been changed

put together a multimedia catalogue of Beryl's travels in her younger days. This was extended to a multimedia rummage bag- full of postcards, photos, objects- which she can attach to her walking frame and can be shared with anyone. Another staff member during the heat wave used her smart phone to show other staff how she had left some cooling cucumber for a service user- a photo that was downloaded in an instant and gave other community based staff idea of how to support people to eat well and keep cool in the hot weather.

We have also used tablets and laptops are useful in showing photos and also for sourcing items for individual and group reminiscence work. One man living with advanced dementia has been able to tell his tale of piloting a seaplane in the War, through the use of a laptop. His worker was able to find a video and photos online of his Seaplane. Laptops and tablets place the individual in control, and can be used in any location. Recently we have started to support someone from a day service to access a free mainstream animation group for the over 50's, she has already made several friends and is remaining connected to her local community through a shared interest.

We established a Project Group and invited a mix of managers, staff and service users. At the first meeting, 20 people turned up and we have harnessed this interest- the service users and staff have become "champions" in their services. We use multimedia within the project group meetings, so that the meetings are accessible and fun whilst also addressing the issues. For example, a mixed working group looked at consent and internet access, to develop multimedia guidelines.

Most of all, it has been the enthusiasm and commitment of staff that has made the project successful. We started this in January 2013 and we are still learning and hope that we can build upon our success and make 2015 a year to remember.

#### **Our learning:**

Create individuals playlists and a central playlist of popular choices. We have just had a successful series of "Summer Proms" themed on playlist choices- such as MoTown, Indian and Classical Music.

Develop playlists for communal areas in Care Homes.

Staff to find out preferred individual tracks.

If staff ask for "training ", turn this around and ask staff if they had a mobile phone and how did they learn to use it? We learnt that most staff learn from experimenting, and that was our approach to developing staff skills and confidence in using the gadgets.

Trust staff and service users to borrow equipment and return it. Gadgets need to be visible and accessible.

We initially tried to use digital photos frames, but actually found that they are getting harder to source and digital TVs are better. So in each reception area of each Care Home we are installing a small TV screen that will show photos and footage of what we have done and what we are planning.

We sourced different types of Mp3 players, and found that the iPod was the easier to use.

Staff need to feel comfortable using the technology, and we found that the majority of our staff, who tended to be from an older generation themselves, were anxious about learning new technology. So we encouraged staff to “play” with the gadgets- in team meetings, at home, and on the job.

Teach people only what they would actually use- so if someone was only interested in taking photos we would teach them exactly that, or if they were only to use a Mp3 player to listen to music we would show them how to do that.