



We have been helping people in Stoke-on-Trent to use technology to manage their long-term conditions. By understanding how local people use digital technology apps and online tools we can help people to manage their health and review their lifestyle habits.

Why did we do this?

A programme to help us understand local people's perspectives began in October 2017 as a wave 2 pathfinder awarded by The Good Things Foundation.

We know that the health and wellbeing of people in Northern Staffordshire is generally worse than the UK average. Many conditions, particularly depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke and obesity are more common here. People in our area tend to be less active, smoke and have higher rates of alcohol-related harm than the national averages. Older people tend to have more long-term, complicated illnesses than the national average.

This programme gives people the information and tools to manage their (or their loved ones') health conditions through technology. We wanted people to feel empowered to make changes to their lifestyles. We wanted to start discussions about health and, if useful, create virtual support groups for particular health conditions.

This will help us to deliver more technology enabled care that most people have in their pockets, and use it to help transform health and wellbeing.

On the road: visiting local communities

Digital delivery of care can bring huge benefits for everyone. But those who are furthest away from it feel it's "not for them".

That's why a 'mobile classroom' was perfect for reaching out to different communities and meeting with local people.

It was a positive environment for local citizens to learn about digital technologies:

- We showed older people how to use online shopping, online banking and social media. This in turn reduces their feeling of isolation and improves quality of life.
- We showed people (and their carers) with long-term conditions how apps and other online tools can help them to manage their health.
- We promoted and demonstrated how technologies that people already have can aid and improve their wellbeing.

Getting to the heart of the matter

On the NHS's 70th birthday (5 July 2018), we took the 'mobile digital classroom' to Hanley Tesco. We spoke to people about what we have been doing, and showed them free health apps and tools they might like to try.

Shoppers were also offered free heart age checks and healthy refreshments:

- Over 73 people visited our van set up by Wavemaker, and 55 people had their heart age checked. Clinicians were there to explain changes people could make to their lifestyle (like diet or exercise) which could improve their score.
- We also showed people a range of apps and online tools that could help them look after their health and wellbeing.
- A questionnaire helped us understand how capable and confident people are with everyday technology like mobile phones and the internet. People told us how they felt about the heart age test.



Creating a safe space to talk about health

The internet and social media can really help people to find information and network with others.

But you can't always be sure that the information is correct or up-to-date. This is particularly risky when it comes to health advice. Unofficial ('organic') online groups are often not well moderated and can sometimes become a place where people are negative about their care or their condition.

We created closed Facebook groups overseen by individual nurses to give patients a place where they could find trusted information to help them manage their health conditions:

- During the 12-month programme, we connected with 680 people through the closed Facebook groups.
- We supported and educated local nurses on how to manage and grow the closed Facebook groups. They can talk to patients about their health condition(s).
- We provide clear guidance about what can or cannot be shared in the group and patients have to agree to this before they join.

Spreading the word at workshops and meetings

We organised workshops, engagement meetings and events, and also attended dementia cafes and met with local voluntary groups. We chatted to people about how they currently use digital technology.

We also showed them some of the free apps and online tools that could help them to manage their long-term condition or make healthier lifestyle choices:

- During the 12-month programme, we met 321 Stoke-on-Trent citizens directly through these activities.
- We took the time to understand each person's needs and preferences, and also how confident they were with using technology. We could then suggest the most suitable digital health tools to help them.
- We supported and guided people to understand and use social media, apps and resources that could help them get involved in managing their own health.
- We told people about the Patient Online website where they could read more about their health condition(s).

Our legacy for local people

- We have established a closed Facebook group to provide support and information for people who want to learn more about using digital technology for their health and wellbeing. It will run for 12 months, allowing us to continue engaging with the community beyond our events and workshops. An online community for all individuals who have participated in the programme, it is also available to local patients and their carers who want to receive updates and support to use digital solutions to manage their health.
- The Facebook page is managed by Wavemaker (Wavemaker.org.uk) – a Tech-For-Good organisation who specialise in sector-specific engagement. Even though they are experts in technology, people are always at the heart of what they do – whether it be education, business or health.
- Our Patienttech.co.uk website features 'how-to' videos to help people develop their digital skills. These will also be shared on our Facebook page along with details of new health apps, events and other relevant articles.