



Embedding user voices in accessible digital service design

Session review

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Going digital is a positive movement for health and care services, so long as they are fit for purpose of providing accessible health and care support for everyone accessing services online. Inclusion now more than ever must be at the heart of what we do, those in service design and the third sector have a duty to ensure that health and care developments in an inclusive manner.

What we wanted to achieve

While making plans for research into the digital accessibility of the ALISS system, we realised that there are many considerations that need to be taken to begin the design process inclusively and in an accessible format, let alone implement suggestions later on. We wanted to hear from people with lived experience of limited access to digital services, through sensory loss, dementia and other conditions that conflict with typical site access. This led us to the panel, where our intention was to provide a platform where people with lived experience could reflect on their experiences of accessing digital health and social care services, and answer questions on how to better implement inclusive service design.

What we heard (and who from)

We were joined for the conversation by Leanne Tuckwood, Deafblind Scotland member and part of the Touching Lives, Dare to Dream project.

Leanne was followed by Kirin Saeed, a visual impairment campaigner who works for Site Scotland - a leading charity for vision-impaired people in Scotland.

Our third member to join was Martin Robertson who is a digital citizen panel member with About Dementia at Age Scotland.

The members of the panel were invited to discuss their experiences of accessing digital services from their perspective of living with deafblindness, blindness, and Posterior Cortical Atrophy (PCA) dementia.

Consistency, training and affordability

When we asked about tools used for reading sites, and the support required for their use, we heard that tools such as Dolphin Guide and Jaws are frequently used. While the software vary in complexity, resources for training are available for those looking to use them. However, training should be more readily available for those needing it in their local communities and through social support. Increased awareness of the software and functions should be widespread, so that those designing services can take into account the functionality that is required for the service and software to work together efficiently. Regular updates to software also increases the financial pressure of acquiring support tools, plus can decrease consistency of site compliance to the software – requiring users to spend more money and seek more training or receive less information from the site.

Simplify and standardise to improve access

Across sites and through communication, it was frequently mentioned that simplifying information and presentation is key to improving access to digital services. An example of inaccessible communication were online surveys, for which screen readers and other tools struggle to enter information. Furthermore, consistency across sites and pages is essential for smooth access to services. While this improves the access for the user, it also improves the standard of the site overall – meaning the service is likely to be used by more users over time. This point reinforces that there are a triad of reasons for inclusive service design; there's a legal case, a moral case and a business case.

The gold standard: alt text, audio description and integrated software

Looking to the future of accessible digital services, there are both small and large structural changes that need to be made to improve site design. Leanne and Kirin both agree that consistent alt text function and audio description are simple but

effective ways of improving site access. Looking to a larger structural scale, Martin discusses the prospect of integrated devices (laptops, tablets and phones) with built in supportive software. Doing this places the responsibility on the designer to be consistent with software, and decreases the financial responsibility put on the individual accessing the internet. Above all, what is unanimously agreed is people and services must actively listen and incorporate the views of those experiencing sensory loss and dementia in the design phases, right up to the site implementation phase to improve the accessibility of the digital platform.

What's next?

[The session was recorded and can be viewed here.](#) We hope the findings will engage people further with the topic and improve the future of inclusive service design in health and social care digital services. We hope this will encourage digital services and third sector services to use research and knowledge exchange cohesively, to improve digital content and accessibility for groups seldom heard online.

A follow up briefing will be published where the panel members return to conversation, to discuss questions put forward by the audience which were not answered during the session.

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