



Go4IT Scheme Evaluation

Conducted by

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September 2015



www.advicenorthsomerset.org.uk

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Introduction

Advice North Somerset is funded under BIG Lottery and Cabinet Offices' Advice Services Transition Fund (ASTF) to create a network of advice providers and support organisations to help. The partnership for Advice North Somerset consists of:

- Age UK Somerset
- Alliance Homes Ltd
- BME North Somerset
- North Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau

Part of the remit of the Advice North Somerset project was to think of new ways in which advice can be delivered in the wake of legal aid cuts and the continued reduction of public sector money. In parallel to this, it was important to recognise that there has been a digital agenda being implemented, both from the central and local governments around the country. For example, North Somerset Council now expects for the majority of residents to claim council tax support and housing benefit applications to be made online.

In recognition of this and in line with the project's commitment to provide public access IT, I set up the Go4IT scheme in order to provide IT provision to organisations who may have clients who require help with claiming benefits online. There are two main benefits to providing IT provision to these types of organisations. The first was that these organisations would be able to provide the necessary support for their clients to access information online. The second was that they already had existing client groups, which meant that the utilisation rate for the provision would be high. In addition to the main aim, it was also recognised that organisations would be able to get full utilisation of the IT equipment through existing activities such as job searches or gaining qualifications such as City and Guilds.

As part of the agreement for providing IT provision, organisations were asked to keep a record of the people they helped and encourage their clients to complete a short questionnaire about their experiences. This report provides the results to date, discusses the implications, and makes recommendations.

Methodology

The feedback provided represents the first round of applicants that were successful in the Go4IT scheme. The first round was set up in April 2015 and few months were given in order to allow the equipment to be successfully implemented into each organisation. It should be noted that there have since been two more rounds with the Go4IT scheme and these will be monitored by whoever continues Advice North Somerset beyond October 2015.

There were a total of four organisations that benefited from the Go4IT scheme in the first round. These were:

- **Addaction:** An organisation set up to help people with substance misuse issues, including but not limited to alcohol, smoking and drugs (illegal, prescription, & over-the-counter). The service provides a holistic approach that includes (but not limited to) IT skills training and the opportunity to gain City and Guilds qualifications. Their website is <http://www.addaction.org.uk/>.
- **North Somerset Training:** An organisation that provides the necessary skills to use a computer and the internet safely. It is also a member of the UK online centres and provides opportunities for qualifications such as City and Guilds. Their website is <http://www.northsomerset-training.org/>.
- **Pathways Support and Community Association:** An organisation set up to provide second and third stage accommodation and support to those who are committed to an abstinent lifestyle and wish to move towards independent living. Their website is <http://www.pathways.uk.net/>.
- **Vision North Somerset:** An organisation that provide a number of services to visually impaired people, including (but not limited to) information and advice on benefits and issues specific to visually impaired people, social and activity clubs and befriending through their home visiting service. In addition, they also provide help to people with hearing impairment. Their website is <https://visionnorthsomerset.wordpress.com/> .

The other organisations that have benefited from the scheme in rounds one and two include:

- Backwell Meeting Point
- Nailsea Disability Initiative
- North Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau
- Somewhere To Go

As these additional organisations implement their IT equipment, they will be able to contribute to monitoring in the future.

In order to assess whether the IT equipment was being utilised, organisations were asked to keep a record of the people they have helped and what they have helped them with. July was used as a sample month and it is anticipated that figures will increase month-on-month as schemes from rounds one, two and three are established.

As well as establishing the utilisation rate of IT equipment, it was also important to find out what impact the scheme has had on clients. In order to assess this, a short internet-based questionnaire was set up and the link to this questionnaire was added to all Go4IT computers, laptops and tablets. The questions focused on clients rating their experiences, finding out if they could have dealt with their query without additional help and to provide them with an opportunity to provide some comments. As there are two elements of support being provided (IT equipment and support), these were separated in the questionnaire.

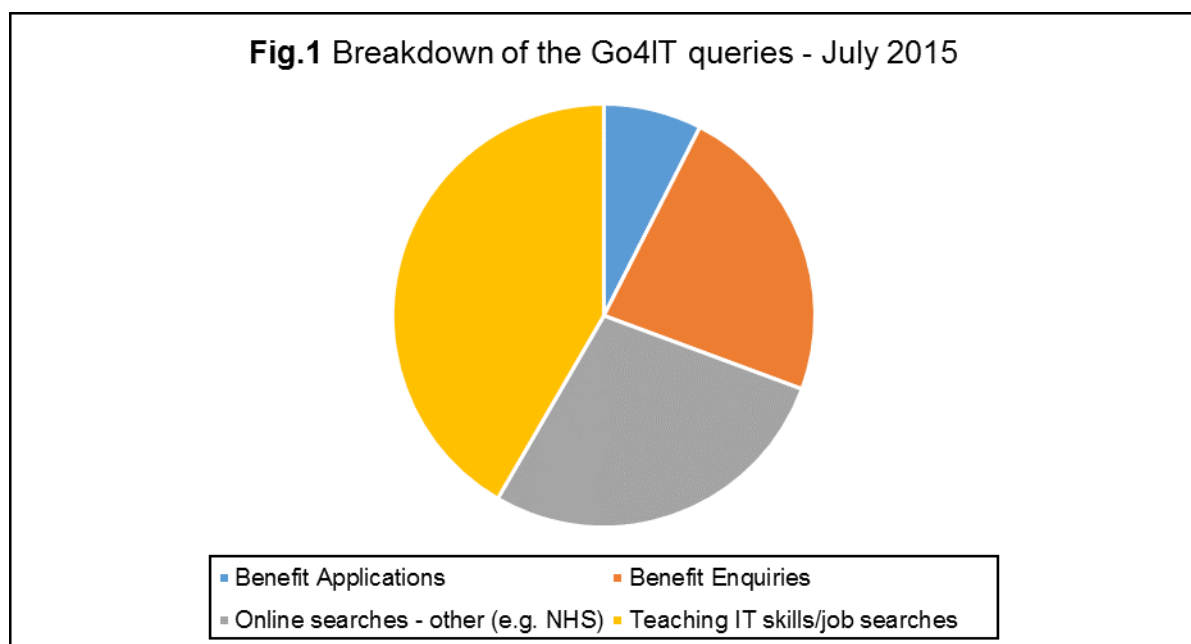
Feedback Results

As stated, organisations that benefited from the Go4IT scheme were required to meet a number of commitments in order to demonstrate that the equipment is being used and feedback from their clients. The results are discussed below.

Go4IT Monitoring

All four organisations from round one have provided the monitoring figures. Due to allowing time for equipment to be set up and implemented, only July 2015 has been provided to show what use of the IT provision provided. It is anticipated that these figures will increase as the organisations from round one get established and those from rounds two and three are implemented.

A total of **173** queries were dealt with in the month of July by the four organisations mentioned. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of queries presented.



Go4IT User Feedback

There have been a total of 27 respondents and it is anticipated that feedback will increase as the Go4IT applicant organisations from rounds two and three begin to assist their clients.

Ratings were taken in three different areas; these were the overall experience (Fig. 2), the IT equipment (Fig. 3) and the assistance they were given by the representative from each organisation (Fig. 4). The results demonstrate that users of the equipment were positive in all three domains. For the overall experience, 78% of the users were either happy or very happy; for the IT equipment, 85% were either happy or very happy; and for the additional support, 89% were either happy or very happy.

Despite the overall ratings being positive, there were two results in each figure 2, 3, & 4 that had rated that they were very unhappy. Further analysis revealed that the two sets of low ratings came from two respondents. The first respondent stated they found the experience to be “Helpful, relaxed and friendly” and that nothing could be improved. The second respondent stated that they liked the computer support and thought that nothing could be improved. This would therefore suggest that both respondents may have provided negative ratings by accident.

The respondents were then asked to confirm whether they would have been able to deal with their query without the use of the equipment (Fig. 5) or with the additional assistance (Fig. 6). Results demonstrate that the majority of people would not have dealt with their query without the equipment or the assistance. Furthermore, it is clear that more respondents felt that the assistance was slightly more important than the IT equipment itself.

In addition to ratings, respondents were also asked to provide comments about some of the barriers that they might have if the IT equipment and support was not available. Here is a selection of comments of what respondents had to say about why they needed access to the IT equipment:

“...I do not have a computer at home and I am not used to using computers. I am doing a UK online course here.”

“I do not have a computer, so coming here is good.”

“I wanted to complete the form properly and send it off quickly as I don't have a computer at home it was easy to bring into Addaction and get someone to help me as I hate filling out forms.”

"I do not have a computer at home and benefits and coursework has to be done on a computer so cannot do my claim applications without it and the library is always booked when I want to go there and the library has time limits which Addaction do not impose and let you finish what you need to do."

Here is a selection of comments of what respondents had to say about why they needed access to additional support:

"I hate forms and they scare me because if I fill them in wrong, time gets wasted as they get returned."

"Felt I needed assistance to navigate around the site."

"Not used to using a computer"

"Would not know what to do."

Respondents were then asked to provide comments about what they liked about their experience. Here is a selection of comments about what respondents liked:

"Helpful, relaxed and friendly."

"Made to feel welcome and supported whatever my IT capabilities."

"Friendly and efficient facilitators who were more helpful and mindful of my situation and took the time to explain things than some of the bureaucrats one sometimes comes across."

"The people are friendly and don't judge you but help you."

Respondents were also asked to comment on any improvements that could be made. All but two comments were "no", however, the two improvements were not relevant to the scheme itself (one was humorous and the other referred to a process that was provided by a website rather than the scheme).

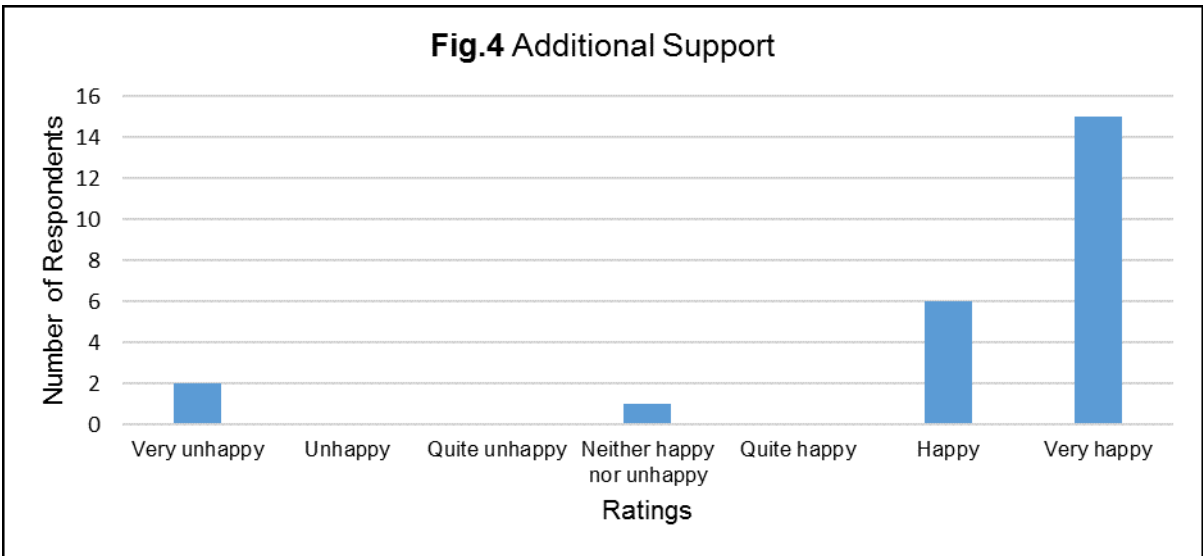
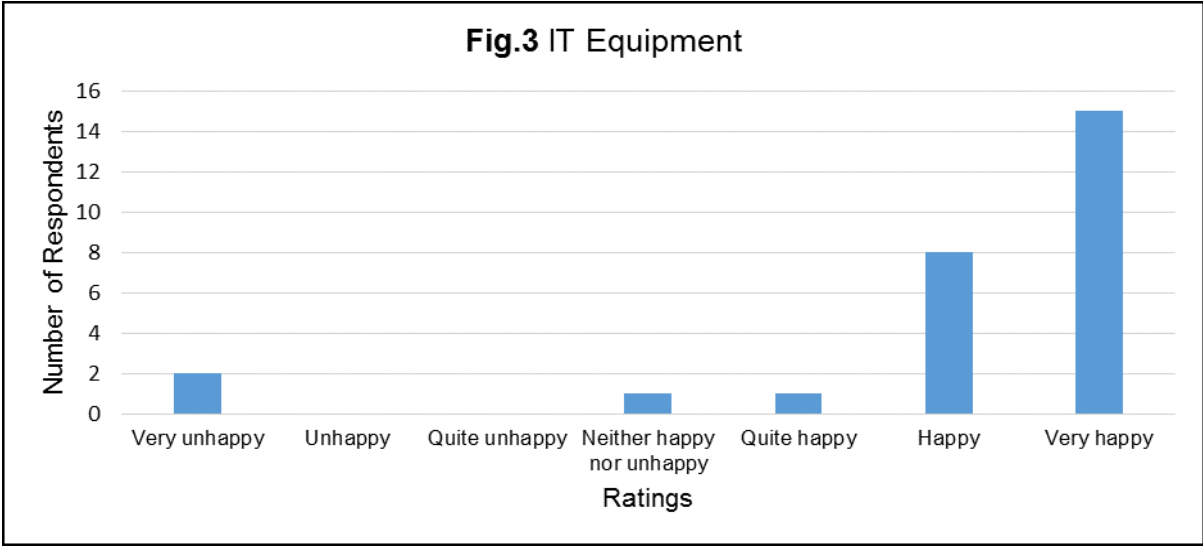
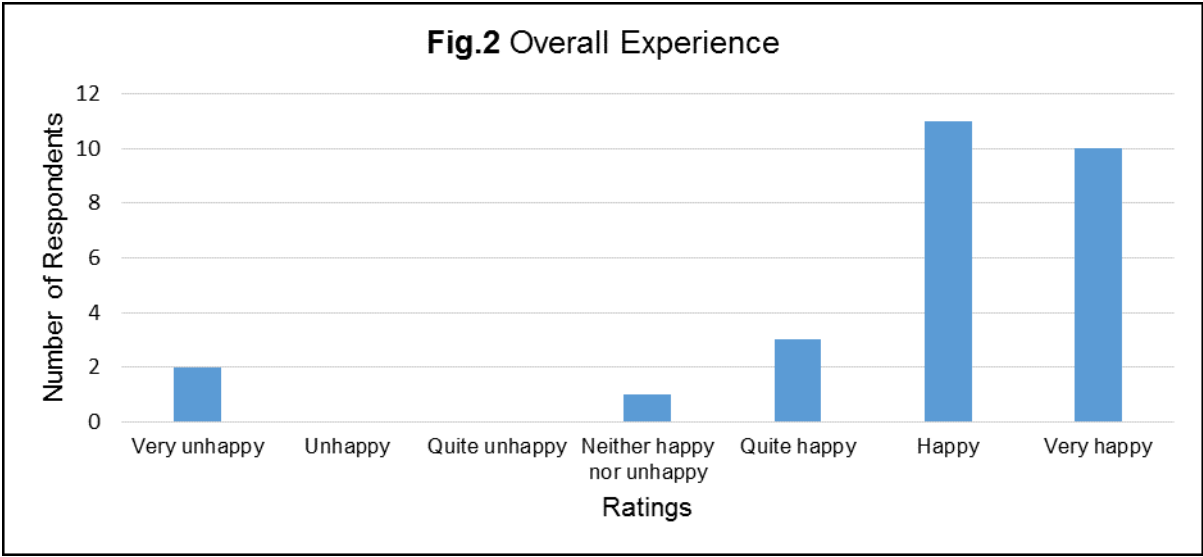


Fig.5 Could respondents have dealt with their query without the use of the IT equipment?

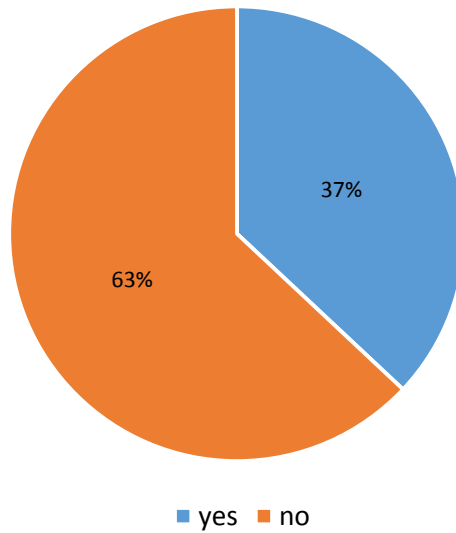
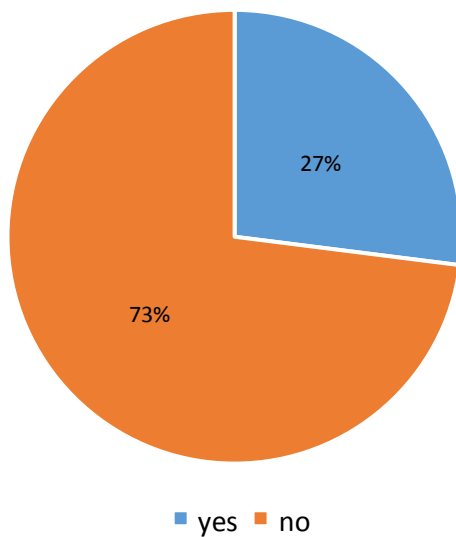


Fig.6 Could respondents have dealt with their query without the assistance provided?



Conclusions and Recommendations

This report provides an evaluation of the equipment with two specific outcomes. The first is to show how the IT equipment is being utilised, the second is to evaluate the impact it has had on the clients who use it.

The core purpose of the equipment was to provide an avenue for clients to claim benefits online; as well as being able to make benefit-related enquiries. The feedback reveals a high utilisation rate across all four organisations. In addition to the core purpose for the IT equipment, it has also been used for equally important activities, such as job searches, searches for further education, IT skills and health-related searches.

Feedback from the clients have been overwhelmingly positive. Many have indicated that they are happy with the IT equipment available and the assistance provided. More importantly, the majority of clients have stated that they would not have accomplished their tasks without the IT equipment and/or help provided. This demonstrates that there is a high level of need for this type of scheme to continue. It is likely that many of these clients, after a few guided sessions, will build up the confidence to complete these tasks themselves.

The Go4IT scheme is still in its infancy and the utilisation of it will continue to grow as organisations from the second and third rounds are established. Moreover, the demand for the access to IT provision and support will continue to grow as the North Somerset Council digital strategy is rolled out.

When considering the demographic profiles of clients in all organisations who have benefited from the Go4IT scheme, it is clear that it is reaching those people that need the help. The demographics that these organisations support include (but not limited to) people with disability issues, people with visual impairment, people with substance misuse issues, people with low levels of literacy, the ageing population and people in areas with low levels of IT provision. In addition to this, it should also be noted that two of our organisations have been able to provide a mobile service, reaching those clients who are unable to access public access IT equipment.

This report shows that the IT equipment provided was able to meet the needs of these organisations. It demonstrates that a relatively modest financial contribution can make a significant difference to the people that it helps.

Additional benefits

In addition to the direct benefits associated with a scheme like this, there have also been a number of unexpected benefits too. A partnership was created with Peni Palfrey from Liberata to arrange informal housing benefit & council tax support training for Go4IT applicants. During the training, the following benefits were provided:

- Informal training on the system
- Access to test system, both during and after the training
- Peni Palfrey as a direct point of contact for future enquiries
- Access to advocate status if necessary

In addition to training, organisations were able to make cross-networking links as a direct result of the Go4IT scheme. Currently, North Somerset Training is in talks with Liberata to use the Go4IT equipment and provide a mobile service to help people with housing benefit and council tax support. North Somerset Training are also in contact with Nailsea Disability Initiative (round two applicants) to arrange basic IT training for volunteers who have a low level of competence.

Recommendations

The number of organisations that were helped by the Go4IT scheme only scratches the surface of the assistance that could be provided to the organisations of North Somerset that help vulnerable clients. A larger scale more formal version of this scheme could be rolled out to help additional organisations with clients who need access to IT-based help.

There are a number of benefits that could be associated with a scheme like this. The first is that these organisations have already got existing rapport with their client base and are therefore already going to have access to people that need the help. This will ensure a high utilisation rate. The second reason is that for those clients that can be

helped by these organisations, it should cut down the demand for help required from North Somerset Council through more expensive channels such as telephone calls or face-to-face communication. Not only this, but supported self-help is far more likely to empower to deal with any queries themselves in the future; and can even lead to IT-based qualifications (e.g. City and Guilds).

As well as the IT equipment that could be provided to organisations with existing client bases, there could also be mobile floating IT-based support provided into the community. This in particular would address any IT needs that maybe in less populated areas. This service could be dynamic and adaptive to meet the needs of any particular area. As utilisation can be a problem, so working in partnership with social housing providers that already have community engagement may help to get the message out.

Conclusion

A lot of services are moving towards digitisation as it provides a service that can be much more convenient in some cases and offer significant savings. However, it is important to recognise that there are many who are at risk of digital exclusion. These types of services will be necessary to help them with any digital queries and, where possible, empower them to help themselves in the future.