Fire services working in partnership using telecare

The challenge

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) is one of the best performing yet lowest costing fire and rescue services in the country. Although its focus continues to be on fire safety, the Service also works in the wider areas of community health and wellbeing, recognising that the needs it identifies as a fire service are often the same issues that public sector partners are looking to address.

How has using assistive technology such as telecare helped SFRS to work collaboratively with partners to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in the county?

What we did

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service is committed to the strategy that prevention is more effective and cheaper than cure, and as a result has a programme in place to identify priority groups for fire safety such as older people and those with long-term health or care needs.

In April 2011 a Community Risk Reduction Specialist and Assistive Technology Lead was appointed to work in conjunction with local health and social services teams in South Staffordshire to advise on fire safety and proactively assess risks in people's homes. The lead assesses for and installs stand alone and monitored assistive technology (telecare) systems for people who are most at risk from fire in the area.

As well as installing smoke and heat detectors to guard against the risk of fire, other sensors such as fall detectors and bed occupancy sensors can be chosen according to the needs of the user. In many cases the system will be linked to a 24 hour monitoring centre at Stafford and Rural Homes who will respond if one of the sensors detects a problem and raises an alert. They may contact a relative or neighbour or send the emergency services depending up on the nature of the alert. Where there is a carer living at home the sensors can be linked to a pager system for use inside the home. The systems are also being used in grouped living environments to support professional carers.

> "Assistive technology has a significant role to play in realising the vision of making Staffordshire the safest place to be. We are the only Fire and Rescue Service in England to take this proactive approach, using technology to support independence, and this is evidence of our innovative and holistic approach to delivering the highest standard of service to our communities.

Chris Dowding, *Community Risk Reduction Specialist and Assistive Technology Lead, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service*

Highlights

- The only partnership of its kind in the UK (Fire Service and social services)

- Supports integrated working between public services

- Increased independence and quality of life for service users

- Makes Staffordshire a safer place to live

- Cost effective solution

Case study

Emma, John, Stephen and Andrew* have all recently moved to a supported living scheme in Wombourne, leaving the residential scheme that was home to them for more than 20 years. Their new home is a bungalow with annexe that has been refurbished to meet their needs by Independent Future, South Staffordshire Council's social services team. Emma, John, Stephen and Andrew all have learning disabilities and complex needs, and prior to transitioning to their new home, SFRS's technology lead visited them on several occasions to learn more about them and to show them some of the telecare equipment that might be useful for them in their new home.

Affinity Trust delivers care and support to Emma, John, Stephen and Andrew, with two members of staff on duty at all times, and one waking and one sleeping during the night. Care staff use a CareAssist pager which vibrates and creates an audible alert if it receives an alarm from a telecare sensor. The CareAssist will display the type of sensor activated and its location or the name of the person using that sensor, enabling staff to respond quickly.

The scheme has been equipped with environmental sensors such as carbon monoxide detector, heat detector and smoke detectors to protect the people living and working there from fire and carbon monoxide poisoning. Property exit sensors have also been fitted on all doors to alert staff of the people they support leaving their bedrooms during the night, or exit the property.

Other telecare sensors are being used according to the individual's needs:

- Emma has epilepsy and tonic clonic seizures, and so wears a fall detector on her belt which will alert staff if she falls without them nearby

- John is hearing impaired so has a vibrating underpillow pad which will wake him if the fire alarm is activated whilst he is asleep

- Andrew's behaviours include removing the bath panel and putting toilet paper in the toilet, and property exit sensors on his bedroom and the bathroom door will alert staff to enable them to offer support if Andrew enters the bathroom. A flood detector has also been provided.

- Stephen has a history of falls and wears a pendant on his wrist to enable him to call for help if he needs it.

Results

The delivery of telecare support by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, working with its partners, is the only scheme of its kind in the UK. It helps SFRS deliver on some of its eight core objectives, including reducing deaths by fire and making Staffordshire a safer place to live. The success of the service has gained interest from other service around the UK, who visit the Bilbrook AT home demonstration centre to find out more about the benefits of telecare and multi-disciplinary team working from SFRS.

The use of telecare to help support Emma, John, Stephen and Andrew has enabled them to be much more independent. When in residential care they were almost always closely accompanied by a member of staff in order to safeguard them. Using technology such as the property exit sensors means staff can offer support and ensure safety but still allow freedom. This new model of care is also a more cost effective solution.

Although Emma, John, Stephen and Andrew are largely non-verbal, changes in their behaviours indicate that they are much calmer and happier in their new environment. They have begun to undertake more tasks independently such as dressing themselves and cooking their own meals with help. They also feel confident to undertake individual activities which interest them such as gardening and walking into the local village accompanied by staff, improving their quality of life.

> " It's been remarkable to see the change in Emma, John, Stephen and Andrew as they've adjusted to the freedom of living in their new home. Telecare enables staff to support their increased independence in a safe and efficient way; without it we'd need a larger care team to be able to deliver the same level of support. It's an amazing tool.
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> **Karen Hipkiss**, Support Manager, Affinity Trust

*Names have been changed.

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