

Improving Person Centred Technology for disabled people in Europe

ImPaCT in Europe is a European project exploring how Assistive Technology, used in a person-centred way, can benefit people with disabilities. The three year project, which Learning Disability Wales worked on alongside eight other disability organisations from around Europe, is now coming to a close. Steve Barnard from Hft, one of the project partners, reports on its aims and achievements.

We are in the middle of a technological revolution that sees technology being increasingly used to provide solutions to existing issues - and even some new ones! How can the increasing number of people with disabilities or dependencies and their carers benefit from this revolution?

'ImPaCT in Europe' (Improving Person Centred Technology in Europe) has been trying to answer this question. The initiative grew out of a UK based project which showed how specialist and mainstream technology could be combined to provide a whole array of new technological solutions for people with disabilities at home, on the move, for leisure and in employment.

This project, TATE, (Through Assistive Technology to Employment) developed the concept of Person Centred Technology (PCT) which brings



together the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), EAT (Electronic Assistive Technology), Tele-care, Tele-health and Tele-medicine by putting the user at the centre in designing the technological solutions to meet that individual's needs.

Raising awareness of PCT

ImPaCT in Europe was launched in January 2009 with the objective of raising awareness on the benefits of PCT for people with disabilities across Europe and of creating a "space" for the different stakeholder groups to come together to take the agenda forward. The project began just as the recession started to bite. This has encouraged the use of PCT because often it is a cheaper solution for service providers. The recession has certainly raised the profile of the challenges that all countries will experience in relation to age and disability. ImPaCT was very timely in this sense, and it has allowed us to reflect upon and understand some key issues during the lifetime of the project.

The ImPaCT partnership is made up of nine disability organisations from across Europe, all with a

passionate belief in person-centred services. The ImPaCT partners are: AIAS Bologna onlus – Ausilioteca team (Italy), CECD - Mira Sintra (Portugal), Centre de la Gabrielle - Mutualité Fonction Publique (France), FAIDD – Access and participation for diverse people (Finland), Hft (England), Learning Disability Wales (Wales), Modem (Belgium) and Nottingham Community Housing Association (England). The project has been co-ordinated by the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), based in Brussels, Belgium. All the partners in ImPaCT use PCT in their services while the two umbrella organisations in the project, EASPD and Learning Disability Wales, promote the person centred use of assistive technology and have members who use PCT in their services.

The project included several pieces of work aimed at pushing forward the understanding and use of PCT. We conducted a survey, mapping the use of PCT across Europe and identifying current challenges and areas of opportunity to promote a broader use of PCT across services in Europe. A Training Needs Analysis was carried out in the partners' prospective countries, to assess the need for training in PCT and how training can advance the awareness and good practice of PCT. And an Ethical Framework was developed, which highlights the ethical argument that underpins the person-centred use of assistive technology. The project also expanded networks throughout the partners' countries, taking forward the case for PCT to a wider audience, and held nine

seminars on how PCT can impact on the lives of disabled people, through training, education, employment and communication. Reports on all our seminars and more information on the project can be found at <http://www.impact-in-europe.eu/>.



Ethical Framework for the Implementation and Use of PCT

The split of mainstream groups with access to mainstream technology and the 'dependent' groups with access to specialist technology is detrimental to the growing opportunities that PCT can provide. The ImPaCT Ethical Framework has highlighted core values of ethical behaviour both within society and in the care profession that are based on a democratic approach, focussing on user rights, underlining the desire for a user-led model that would impact on design, access, availability and use of technology.

The stages of this development vary across the EU member states with the UK probably taking the lead with its relatively new 'Mental Capacity Act' that assumes capacity rather than incapacity.

There are also variations in the interpretation of concepts such as 'consumer led' or terms like independence. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' has yet to be seen to make an impact in this area. The Ethical Framework developed within ImPaCT suggest a check list of questions that should help to identify the best PCT solution, how it is used and for what purpose. The Ethical Framework can be downloaded at <http://www.impact-in-europe.eu/images/downloads/impact-ethical-framework.pdf>

Mapping the usage of PCT

We carried out another research to understand where, how and why PCT is used in Europe to support persons with disabilities. It identifies current challenges and areas of opportunity to promote a broader use of PCT across services in Europe.

The response to the Report on Mapping the use of PCT in Europe reminded us that, whereas technologies are widely used in some countries, the situation is very different elsewhere. This could be due in part to the different levels of understanding and interpretation of the term PCT.

The UK and Finland accounted for most of the responses which might highlight that these countries have been more active in the area of PCT. It was also very evident that the focus of most of the activity was with children, in the area of communication and in the use of ICT. The Mapping Survey can be downloaded at <http://www.impact-in-europe.eu/images/downloads/impact-mapping-report.pdf>

It is clear that in a time of economic recession with growing demographic pressures working together in a true spirit of partnership has to be the best way forward.



Training Needs Analysis

We carried out a survey among key stakeholders in the field to understand why training on the use and benefits of PCT is needed, and how this can be furthered to ultimately improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Our report outlines key reasons for promoting training in this field and issues recommendations for policy makers, service providers and professionals on how to make it possible.

It was clear that a comprehensive approach to training would be beneficial to all, but it is not happening due to a complex mix of reasons, such as resistance, funding issues, responsibility and the need for different messages. For instance, commissioners would see training in PCT as a means to reduce costs while user groups would see training as a means to enhance their quality of life. The Training Needs Analysis can be downloaded at <http://www.impact-in-europe.eu/images/downloads/impact-tna-report.pdf>

European Commission Digital Agenda

As the recession continues to negatively affect funding for people with disabilities and social services, decisions will be required as to whether this provides a good excuse not to continue to develop PCT or be a stimulus for its broader implementation. The latter is suggested and consistent with the Digital Agenda launched by the European Commission in 2010 (more information at <http://bit.ly/aNbiQA>) and should build on the ambition to provide an IT infrastructure with good broadband and internet access for all members of the community.

Independence & Personalisation

The partners of ImPaCT in Europe know that, thanks to technological innovations, they can deliver some of their services remotely, build safer and more functional environments, boost the independence of persons with disabilities and increase the outcomes of rehabilitation, training, employment or social inclusion programmes.

While realising that technologies can deliver cost efficiencies that can be scaled both up and down to meet changing needs in a demanding financial environment, their drive in a broader use of PCT is first and foremost personalisation and increased quality of life for persons with disabilities.

Working Together

It is clear that in a time of economic recession with growing demographic pressures working together in a true spirit of partnership has to be the best way forward. Users, carers, providers, commissioners, policy makers and manufacturers working together can really make a difference. We need to understand this is about our future and the people we care about!

ImPaCT has developed a glossary of technical terms, developed by the project, providing definitions of the most relevant terms used in this field: <http://www.impact-in-europe.eu/images/downloads/impact-glossary-technical-terms.pdf>

Steve Barnard Hft



ImPaCT seminar in Cardiff: Technology Works - Person Centred Technology in the workplace



Learning Disability Wales organised this conference in June 2011. It looked at the benefits of Person Centred Technology in the workplace, showcased good practice, highlighted policy and practice issues in Wales and the UK, and encouraged delegates to discuss how we can PCT can enable more disabled people to enter the job market.

Presentations included: the Rix Centre, University of East London, and their work with people with learning disabilities developing electronic CVs; the Digital Accessibility Centre's web accessibility service and how they use PCT in employing disabled people; Equality and Human Rights Commission's policy initiative on disabled people in the

workplace, 'Working Better'; Shaw Trust's experience with Access to Work; and an enlightening key speech by Steve Vaughan, Head of Assessment Commissioning & Partnership at Welsh Government.

In discussion groups, we asked delegates to think about what support employees and employers require and what strategies are needed to advance PCT in the workplace. The main outcomes of the discussions were:

What support do employees need?

- Work trials and try-outs
- Assess before job
- Develop multi-media C.Vs

What support do Employers need?

- Raise awareness

- Make recruitment processes more accessible
- Explain about costs of P.C.T.

What strategies are needed?

- Promotion of economic case
- Public sector lead by example
- Exploit digital inclusion policies

Learning Disability Wales presented these outcomes to stakeholders from across Europe during a workshop about Employment and PCT at the closing conference of ImPaCT in Europe, in Brussels, Belgium, November 2011. We will also take forward these outcomes in our work.

Presentations from Technology Works are available on our website

<http://www.learningdisabilitywales.org.uk/impact-in-europe.php>