



SOCIAL CARE DIGITAL INNOVATION PROGRAMME DISCOVERY PHASE REVIEW



EXPLORING THE PROBLEM

- There are approximately 6.5 million unpaid carers in the UK saving the economy £132 billion a year. Carers are unpaid and often unacknowledged. Yet many have given up their own lives, careers and health to take up their caring role.
- Many carers need support to help them stay in work, are suffering from loneliness and social isolation, and are facing their own health problems as a result of their caring role.
- There are over 35,000 adult carers in Richmond and Wandsworth. Approximately 20% of these are registered with local carers centres and are receiving support.
- The reasons why carers don't register with local services are varied – some don't need the support, others don't identify themselves as carers while others don't realise that support is available.
- Both carers centres have noticed an increasing trend for carers to choose not to formally register with the service. Instead they prefer to “dip in and out” of contact, accessing information and support as and when they feel they need it.
- This is one of the key market segments that a better digital offer will appeal to and although it is difficult to put a concrete number on this cohort, anecdotally it could be as high as 30% of all unpaid carers.
- Our research has shown that carers have different needs at each point of their journey.
- Our research has shown that individuals who are new to caring are particularly vulnerable and often need practical, financial and emotional support. For example, they may need help understanding their responsibilities as a carer, building a support network, learning about the challenges of the condition of the care receiver, as well as balancing work commitments.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Market Research

Competitor Analysis and Benchmarking to understand the current offerings on the market.



User Research

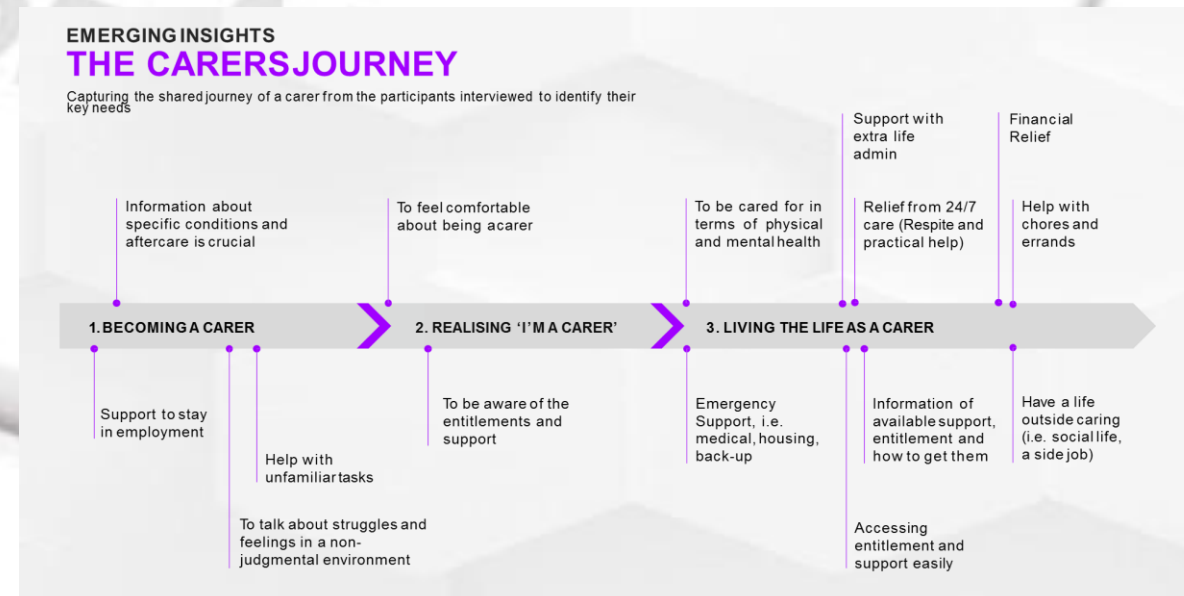
To understand who the informal carers are, their needs and pain points, to identify problem areas and opportunities.

- ❑ 16 interviews with carers
- ❑ 8 expert interviews
- ❑ 1 moderated focus group
- ❑ 1 visit to a peer support group
- ❑ 4 workshops with staff, voluntary sector partners and residents from our co-production groups.

Consultation

To reach out to a wider group of carers to better understand what technology carers are using, what the barriers are and what they might find helpful.

30 carers responded to our online consultation and 12 of those agreed to be involved further either through interview or workshops.



EMERGING INSIGHTS AND FINDINGS

1. Navigating The System Is Hard

Carers find it frustrating accessing relevant information, dealing with assessments, and interacting with social care and health professionals. They slowly lost trust in the system.

2. Discovering Information

Caring responsibility normally just 'happened to' the carer. Carers often expect information from health professionals when they realise 'it happened'. However, the lack of crucial information about the aftercare makes it difficult for the carers to adjust.

3. Stigma Around The Title 'Carer'

Many were unaware they are carers and some rejected the label. This became a barrier for the unidentified carers to access the support they need or are entitled to.

4. Lack Of Care For The Carers

Many carers struggle to find the time to run personal medical errands and take time for their own leisure. This has a negative impact on the carers' mental and physical health.

5. A Restricted Lifestyle

Carers tend to organise their day to day activities around the care receiver, or are always 'on call' to in case of emergency situations. In consequence, the carer's lifestyle are often location-bound and restricted.

6. Family and Care Circle

Caring is not done alone. It's a team sport. Carers rely on their family and friends either financially, emotionally or for practical support. The situation is especially difficult when there's no support. The biggest impact would be no respite for the carer.

7. Community and Peer Support

Community and peer support is highly valued for two reasons: information sharing and a sense of belonging. We see experienced and former carers continue to care for others and contribute to the community, even after their initial care duties are concluded.

8. Forced Into Unemployment

We spotted a trend that many carers had to give up employment to care. Some expressed their interests in finding flexible work while still caring.

9. The Burden Of Life Admin

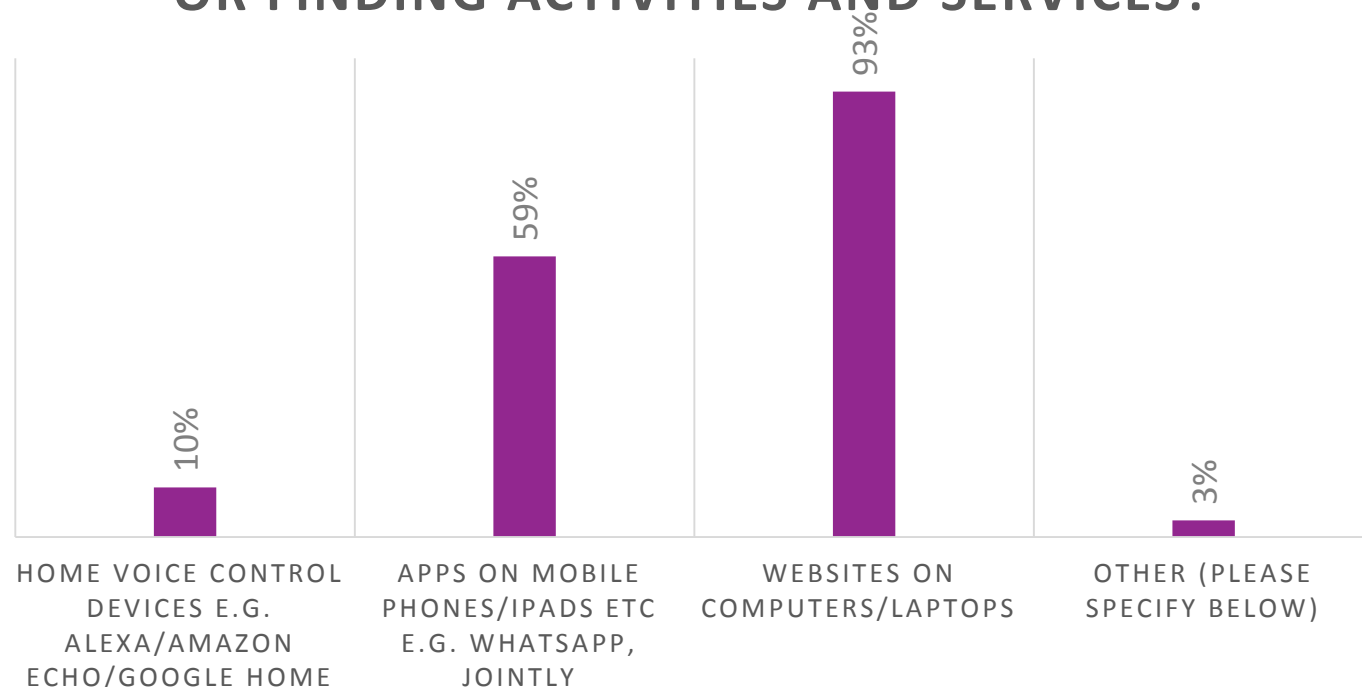
On top of the care receiver's physical and mental wellbeing, the carer also needs to take responsibilities of their life admin such as finance and housing with little or no help.

10. Mental Overload

Throughout their informal caring responsibilities there is a mental strain on how they feel, this is due to their constant management of the other individual's life.

MORE INSIGHTS AND FINDINGS

WHICH, IF ANY, OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU EVER USE TO HELP YOU WITH DAILY ACTIVITIES SUCH AS ORDERING SHOPPING OR FINDING ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES?



- 70% of carers told us that technology could help them find information and support
- 73% said they find it difficult to take a break
- 63% said they find it difficult to manage their own health problems alongside the care receiver's
- 50% said they refrain from using technology because they are not prepared to pay for apps on mobiles/tablets
- 50% said feel unable to get out socially
- 96% said have access to a laptop/smartphone/tablet

COLLABORATIVE IDEATION

CREATIVE MATRIX



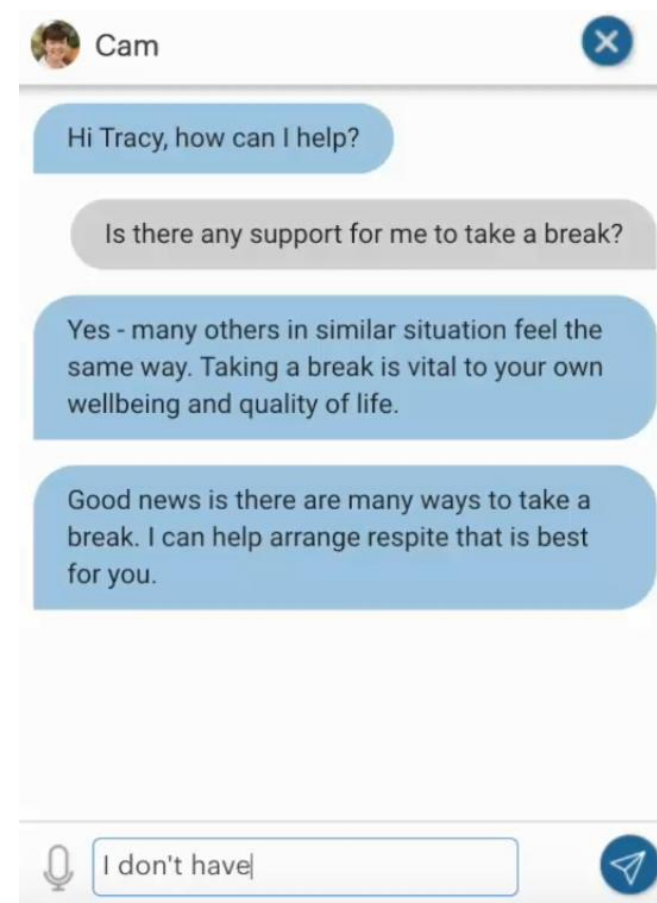
CREATING IDEAS TOGETHER

OUR SOLUTION

- Our solution provides an easy way for carers to ask their questions 24/7 using a multi-channel virtual agent, to signpost them to support and services that they may benefit from, connect them to their local communities and support them on their journey.
- Our aim is to develop an intelligent information platform for carers that gives personalised advice to its users. The platform could be accessed through multiple devices to best suit the carers' lifestyle e.g. mobile, desktop and voice. It would use artificial intelligence and machine learning to populate the tailored suggestions, capturing data from a range of different data inputs; such as informal questionnaires and more advanced voice capture.
- Our chatbot would start to capture information through a series of simple conversations with a carer. As the carer's profile develops (based on the frequency of interaction), the chatbot's suggestions will become more tailored. It will capture inputs on caring responsibilities, the care receiver's medical conditions, location details and levels of wellbeing.
- It will then provide tailored information including "people like me" testimonials; community events that the carer may enjoy; local contacts that they can speak to about regular support groups; and advice surrounding contingency plans and local respite services.

“A VIRTUAL AGENT FOR CARERS”

- The simple and intuitive feedback feature will be integral to the project, quickly helping to improve future suggestions.



BENEFITS OF OUR SOLUTION

- Throughout the Discovery Phase, all stakeholder groups have prioritised fixing the challenges of navigating the system and having a single access point for information. Carers at all stages of their journey may struggle with finding the right information, understanding the financial support that they are entitled to, and connecting with a community support network. For new carers this experience can be particularly overwhelming. Our solution is a starting point that signposts carers to a potential next step.
- The solution offers a single 24/7 access point that the carer can interact with as frequently as needed and at a time that is convenient to them. As a virtual agent, it can offer support to multiple concurrent users, and is not restricted to working hours, so that advice can be provided whenever the carer needs help.
- We propose to take an iterative approach, starting with a virtual agent that will provide carers with answers to the most commonly asked questions. As the proof of concept develops through regular testing and feedback cycles with end users, the agent can proactively make suggestions based on the carer inputs rather than the carer having to search in a reactive way, such as for support and contingency planning and facilitating peer support networks.
- Longer-term, the solution will provide an improved channel for carers to access to key information and ability to self-help, which should reduce reliance on statutory services.
- Throughout the implementation phase, we will maintain a user-focused approach, evaluating the success of the project through the qualitative and quantitative impact of the digital tool on carers' lives.
- Our two key priorities will be carers' access to personalised advice and their opinion on the digital solution. Where we are conscious that softer priorities such as raising public awareness about carers may be harder to tangibly evaluate, we will be able to accurately measure our key priorities through the use of existing health and social care services.

KEY LEARNING

- Our problem statement is very wide. We really struggled with that for a while but we think we found a solution that starts to tackle the wider issues for carers.
- Capacity to deliver was one of the biggest challenges we faced. Everyone is under pressure and getting engagement from the key stakeholders was difficult at times. We really wanted to get people together to share ideas, which worked out great when it finally happened but took much longer to plan than we expected.
- We learned a lot about each other. Many of the staff, partners and carers involved in the project have known each other for a while but we still learned things about and from each other.
- Our main workshop to form our idea was a really good day and everyone had the opportunity to contribute and learn something new. Even better, we came up with a number of ideas which we are keen to look at in future.
- We struggled to get a research partner on board initially despite contacting several companies with our proposal. Next time, we would spend more time on making contact with potential partners and start the process much earlier on.
- Reaching carers to work with us was also quite a challenge. We have access to existing groups and networks but in order to reach different carers we had to be patient and wait!
- Discovery work takes a lot of time and effort and you have to be open to that you find rather than sticking to your pre-conceived idea.
- Co-production also takes time and it can be difficult sometimes to give others space and time to develop their own views and not influence their thinking too much.

Overall, we have really enjoyed our discovery and are looking forward to the future!

