

TALKING HEALTH AND HOUSING SUMMARY REPORT - AUGUST 2019



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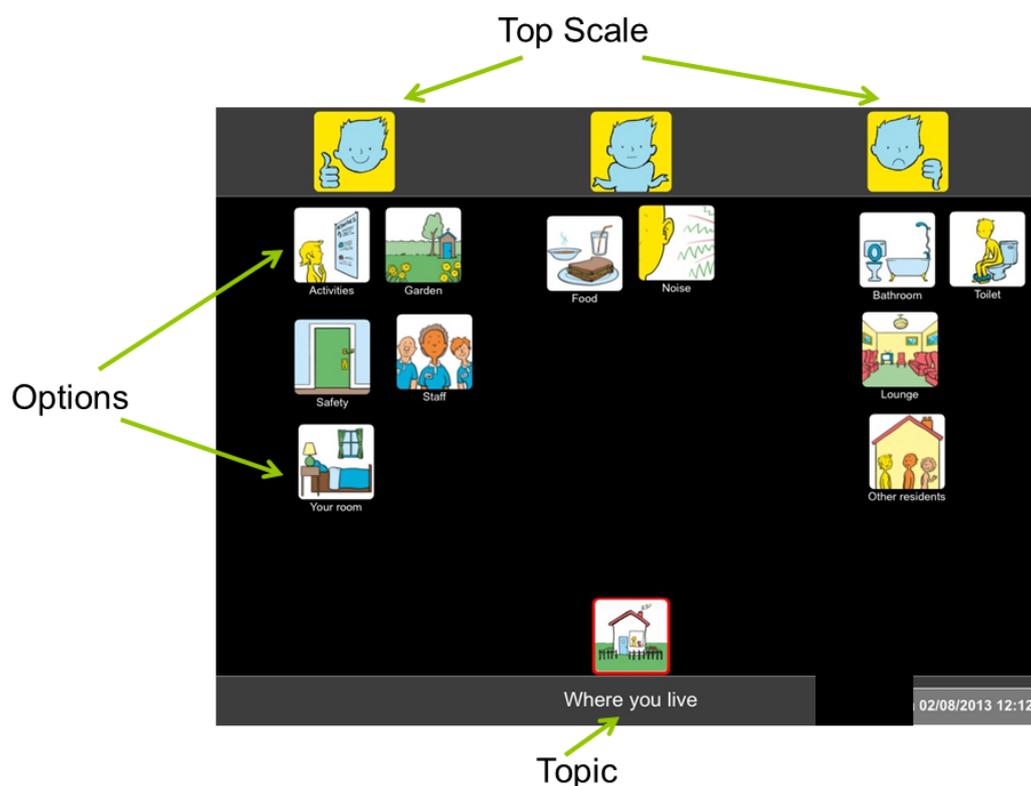
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Introduction

This project funded by *Innovate UK*, was a collaboration between Talking Mats (Ltd), the University of Stirling, Edinburgh Napier University, the Wheatley Group and Age Scotland. The aim of the project was to co-design, implement, evaluate and deliver a visual digital care management App for Housing Association tenants, in particular for those who find communicating their health needs challenging. We hoped that the App could improve housing and healthcare outcomes for people with communication difficulties and extend the efficiency and effectiveness of three key public services: Health, Social Care and Housing. The context for testing the new App was with Loretto Care (part of the Wheatley Group), which is a non-profit Housing Association.

Background

Talking Mats is an interactive resource that uses three sets of picture communication symbols – topics, options and a visual scale – and a space on which to display them. This can either be a physical, textured mat, or a digital space. Once the topic is chosen e.g., ‘activities’ or ‘people’, the participant is given the options one at a time and asked to think about what they feel about each one. They can then place the symbol under the appropriate visual scale symbol to indicate what they feel.



Effective communication is at the heart of holistic healthcare. Enabling people to talk about their needs and concerns is the first step in providing care that addresses these concerns, supports recovery and self-management. Technology is a potential enabler

of communication between individuals and those in their informal or professional care network.

Methodology

The development of the Talking Mats App combined expertise in communication, housing, health and technology. The evaluation of the new housing-orientated Talking Mats tool was conducted by the University of Stirling and Edinburgh Napier University.

The project was conducted in a phased approach:

Phase 1. Two focus groups were held to co- design the new resource. They included 5 tenants, 1 staff member from Loretto, 3 frontline health and social care staff and 3 project partners. The discussions resulted in 3 topics, each with approximately 20 options:

Home



Well-being



Support people



Talking Mats staff then tested the App with 6 tenants in one of the case study sites. Feedback was extremely positive, with participants very willing to use Talking Mats.

Phase 2. Two Talking Mats staff trained 11 Housing Association staff from case study sites and 3 researchers. The case study areas were specially selected to include tenants that may have difficulties with communication such as people with learning disabilities, dementia and alcohol related acquired brain injuries. There were 29 tenants who participated. The total number of mats completed was 38 as some tenants did more than one mat.

Phase 3. Data collection and analysis was conducted by the university researchers. The design of the App allowed the tenants to email their completed and anonymised Mats directly to the researchers. All participants used pseudonyms.

Qualitative data was then also collected from the staff via focus groups and semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with both the health and housing professionals who had been trained to use the new Talking Mats App.

Phase 4. The new App was launched in January 2019 in the Scottish Federation of Housing Association offices with over 40 attendees. There are plans for a number of presentations in the coming year and a marketing plan is being developed to take the new resource into the wider housing market.

Findings

Key Themes emerged from Talking Mats conversations using the App.

The Future

Eighteen of the participants chose to focus on discussions about the future of their housing and health. This was one of the most popular themes that was generated from the Talking Mats discussions. The discussions focusing on the future were a mixture of housing and health outcomes such as about moving, improving health and increasing independence in the future.

In this example, Judy connects moving with a wish for more things to do, transport links and the availability of tenancy information.



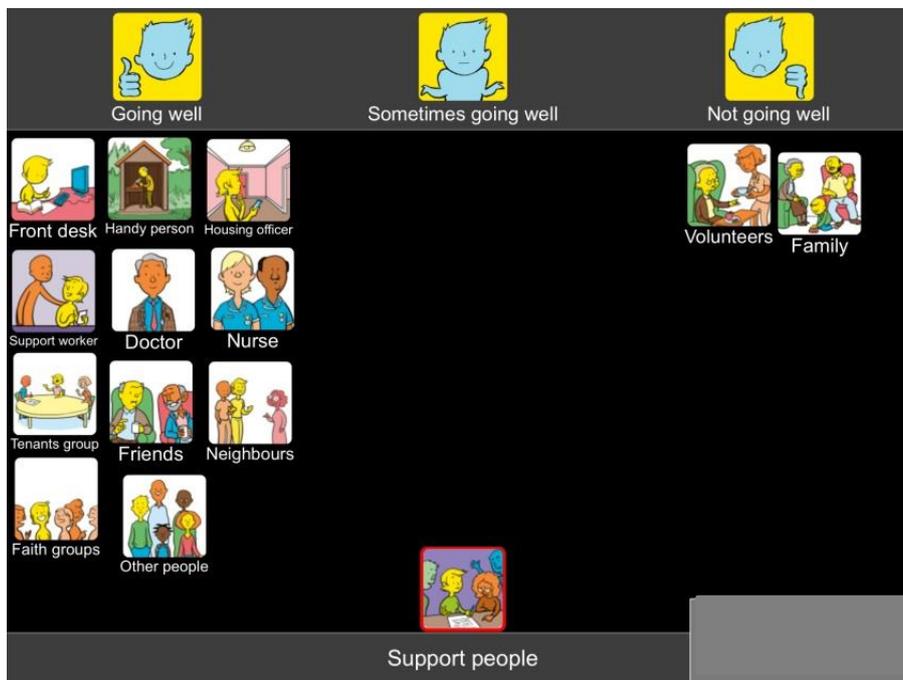
Support People

Friends and family were one of the most consistently positive themes of the Talking Mats conversations. Most participants were happy within their family circles, placing these relationships as both positive and important. When comments about family and friends were positive, the Mat itself seemed to lean more positively such as in the following mat:



I have a new social worker and he seems to be fine. I am with daily contact with my family. Have friends that I enjoy.

However, others spoke about relationships that were not so positive.



Have a son who works but the relationship with him is not well at the moment. Like to leave the relationship as is now. Not looking for to build or improve this relationship in future.

Others commented on other support people rather than family:

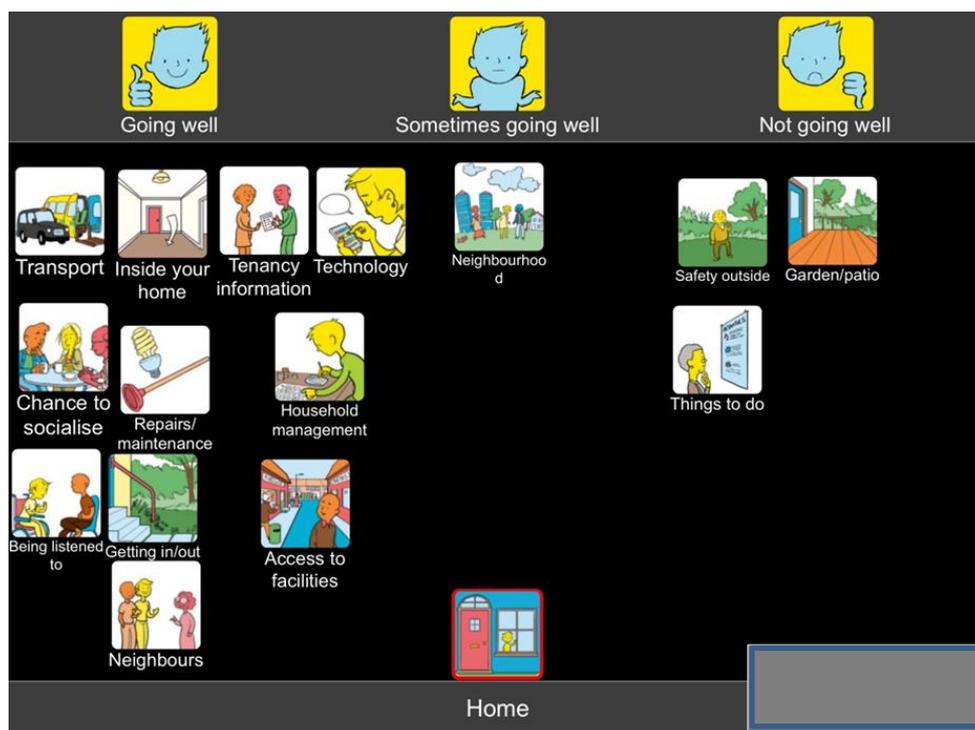
I don't like the doctor I like my old doctor better, since moving flat, the old one is too far away, also I would rather have a woman doctor. With support workers sometimes they are annoying and I want peace and quiet sometimes. Sometimes they say they have other people to see instead of me."

Outside, neighbourhoods and safety

Outside spaces, such as gardens and wider neighbourhood spaces were frequently categorised as 'Not going well' by tenants. Neighbours and the wider neighbourhood were identified as areas of anxiety in terms of social interactions. Neighbourhood relationships were also a key discussion point. Many participants discussed their social relations outside the home, most wishing them to be stronger.

There were clear examples of the impact of interventions that link to both housing and health. For example, one tenant noted her worry and anxiety about going outside. On giving more detail, she discussed the 'slanty bit' outside that limited her and other tenants from venturing out too much due to worry of slips and falls. On being able to feed this back, a quick and easy housing solution was implemented to fix the 'slanty bit'. This both addresses and feeds into the preventative agenda, improves tenant mobility and anxiety, and has the potential to increase overall well-being.

Safety outside also emerged as a key concern for other tenants as we can see from the two mats below.





In this 'Home' mat 'Adam Adams' explained that his front door was broken which was referred to the housing officer for repair. This is a standard repair service in social housing association provision. However, the Talking Mat highlighted that this feeling of safety is more than just about the front door. He also noted the things that were not going well including 'safety inside', 'safety outside' and technology, followed closely on the items he was not sure about, these included 'neighbourhood', 'neighbours' and 'not being listened to'.

Even when feeling safe, participants still did refer to feelings of safety, which highlights the importance of safety for this group:

keeping fit is important go Monday and Friday like living here compared to other place feel safe here when going outside like to go as a group go to clubs together

(Adamadams) above also did a 'Well-being' Mat, and things that were not going well included 'mobility', 'vision' and 'communication'. This provided more depth about why feelings of safety inside and outside have been compromised - there is a clear health link in this support need. So, although the tenant has reported a specific housing-related item - a door repair - the Mat gives a much more nuanced picture of the respondent's support needs. Supporting issues around mobility and vision may make the tenant feel safer and more secure in their neighbourhood.

The benefits of doing both a Housing and Health-related mat that compliment and give insight to each other, indicated solutions to tenant needs.

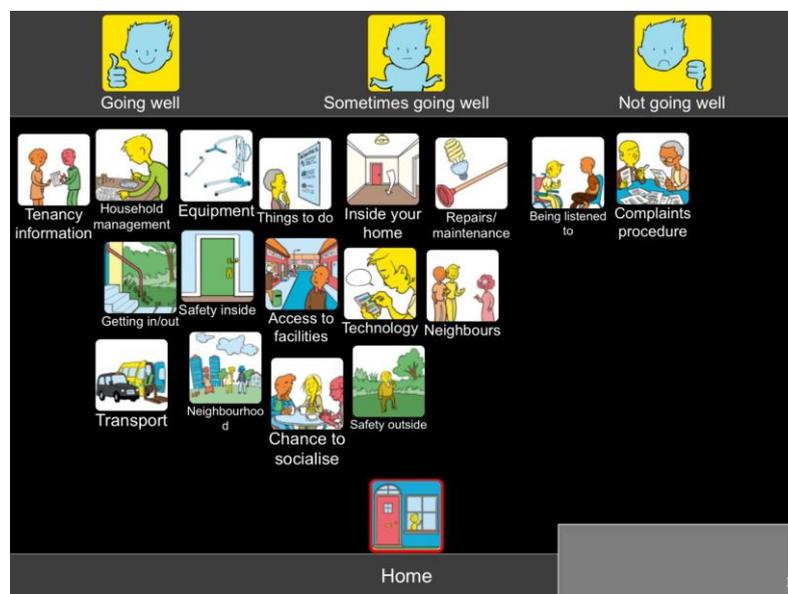
Communication

There were several requests by participants to form or be part of tenants' groups, one of the main mechanisms in the housing sector for tenants to provide feedback and make changes.

“good session, tenants’ group would help the building”



People also indicated that they wanted to be listened to more

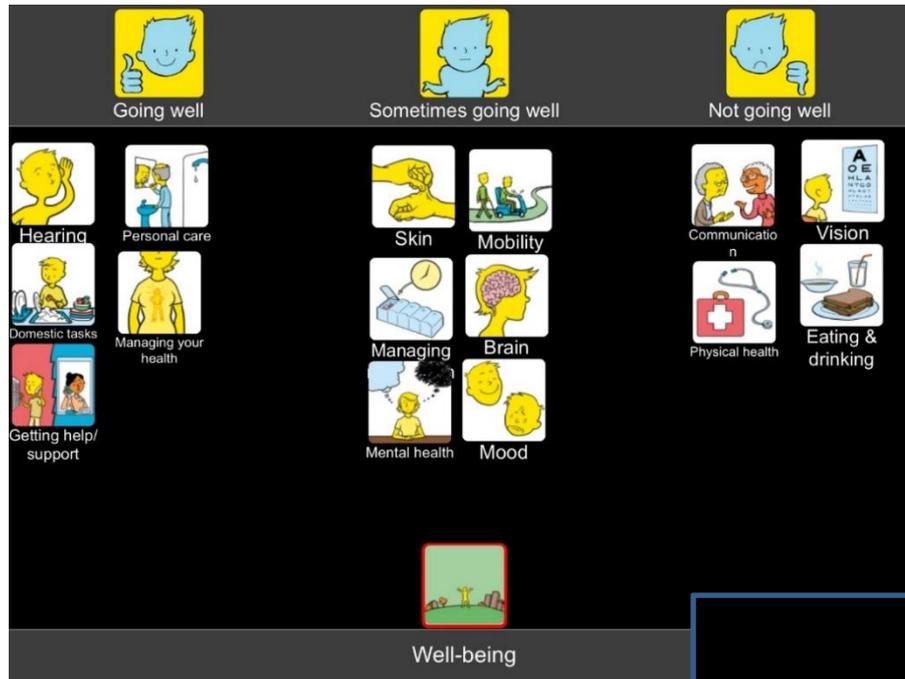


The findings indicate that housing and health were integrated elements in tenant lives. Support solutions included both health and housing interventions which are now explored in more detail below.

Connection between health and housing solutions

The comments and actions coming from the sessions were linked to both housing and health solutions:

When participants were discussing their health needs, there was a linked theme around communication. Something 'going well', 'not going well' or sometimes going well' seemed to be linked to the relationships they had with people around them.



Doris Day's Mat (above), identified the following as not going well: 'communication', 'physical health', 'vision' and 'eating and drinking' with the added comment that she

Hopes to speak to someone if feel I need to.

Health referrals and interventions were one of the most common actions recorded from the sessions. Actions included:

'Making a 'medical appointment on next Monday to check my brain though this is a general check-up'

'keep my brain active through reading, doing puzzles and other activities such as music and painting'

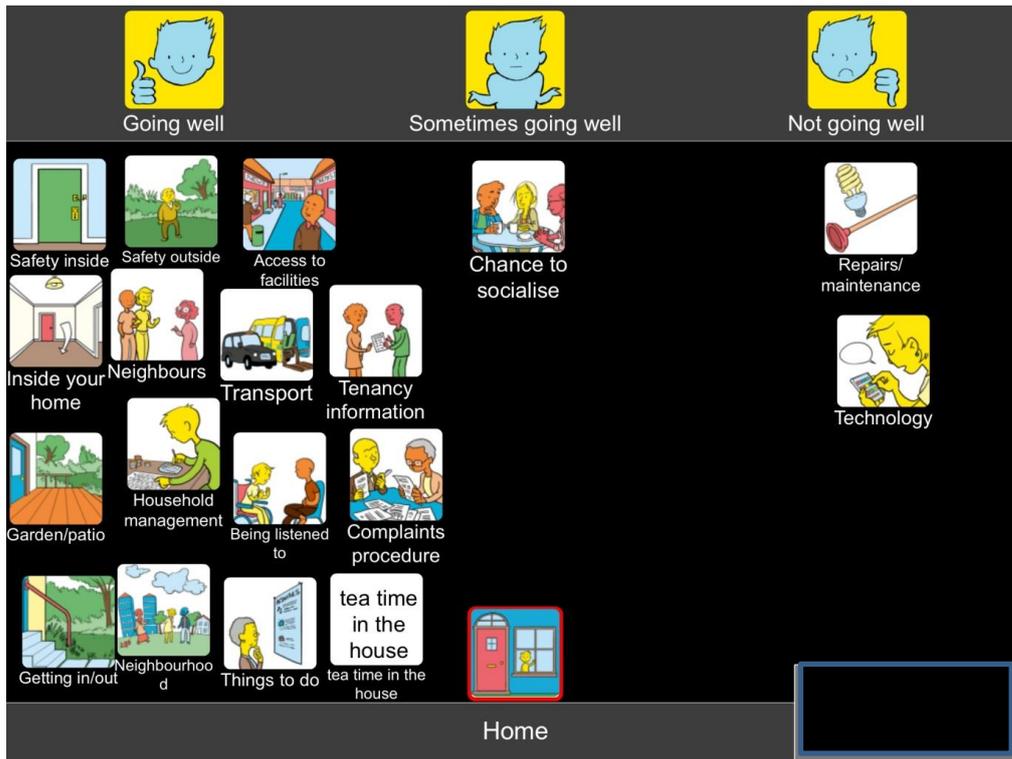
'Staff support to speak to GP surgery about changing to a female doctor - revisit in 1 month end of Sept 2018'

These plans seemed to be important to participants.

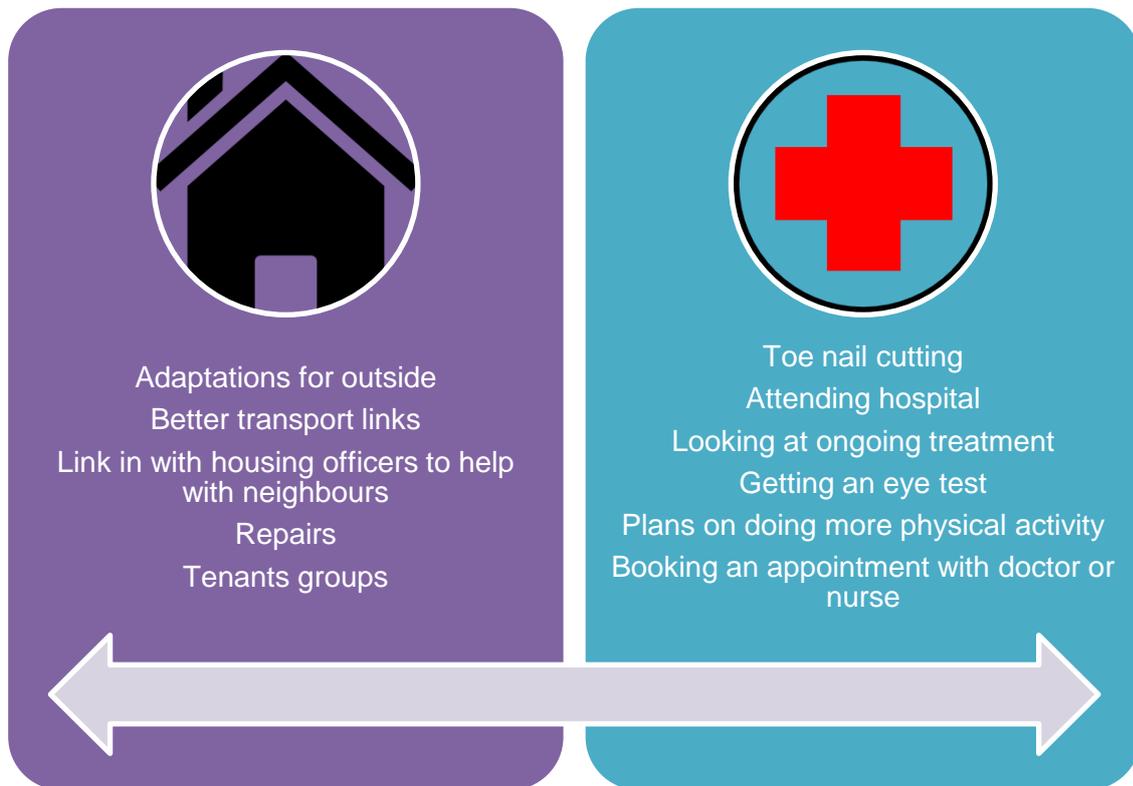
'it's about control and confidence... [which was] very important central to everything, included central to future plans'.

Repairs were an important housing-related theme, especially when connected to elements of safety. There were several participants looking at door security but there were wider elements such as cold taps, toilets and uneven ground. The Mats showed clear actions and plans for repairs that were discussed. In the mat below the tenant noted that repairs were not going so well, and this mat resulted in the following action:

'Staff support to request a repair - follow up mid Sept. Happy for it to be shared with staff too'



In summary, here were the most common housing and health related interventions:



Interviews with Housing and Health staff

Individual interviews and focus groups were held with both the Housing staff involved in the project and health staff interested in the App. Discussions focused on:

- Current communication within and between each organisation as well as communication between staff and tenants.
- The Talking Health and Housing App

The following were main themes:

Training

Overall staff felt the training was useful and the videos were seen as particularly useful to allow staff to observe the Mats in action with a range of tenants.

It is quite self-explanatory, isn't it... on the booklet you gave us. I still got my booklet. It is a great tool, absolutely that will benefit so many people" - Interview with housing staff"

The Talking Health and Housing App

Staff felt that tenants like the technical aspects of the App which made it enjoyable to use

“The clients that I worked with were really, really receptive to it and actually thought it was quite good fun. One lady even said oh I’d love to show my granddaughter I was doing this” – Interview with housing staff,

There was some critical feedback about some technical aspects of the Talking Mats application that did not work as well as expected. This included minor problems with using the application if the symbols were not touched for long enough.

“It’s taken a couple of goes to realise to keep your finger on the icon as you move it but ya, they seem to get it quite quick!” – Interview with housing staff”

There was occasional disinterest in using the technology particularly from some older adults.

“The gentleman wasn’t really interested in technology at all” – Interview with housing staff

Steps for further development of the App were discussed. These included improving the design and functionality of the App and creating more symbol to allow for the creation of ‘sub -mats’ to gather more in- depth information.

Understanding tenant needs

This theme focused on how the Talking Mats application helped staff understand the needs of tenants who created a Mat. The app facilitated conversation between staff and their tenants in a comfortable and safe way.

“The people that I did them with, I had so many conversations in the past. But, just, I was able to get so much more [information] of the person in a much more meaningful way. Really, really great conversations in one person particular. I really felt like connected with that person in a much reliable [way] and he described as been therapeutic. Felt like he is really been listened to” - Interview with housing staff

Health

Health problems such as mobility and pain were identified by tenants through using the App.

“One of the women was talking about not walking down to one of the clubs and I was you know I hadn’t asked why not but she didn’t want to say she needed her toenails cut which is basically a really small thing but we wouldn’t have known until she kinda of came out with that [on the mat] when she was talking about mobility and getting out and about” –Interview with housing staff

Housing

Specific housing needs around security and safety in the home and local community were also highlighted by tenants when using Talking Mats, which enabled staff to raise this issue with the appropriate provider to ensure it was addressed.

“So, it [Talking Mats] brought up that one of the tenants said she doesn’t feel safe in her flat because the main door is always broken. So, that was something else I could take back and say this lady feels unsafe in her flat because that doors been broken” – Interview with housing staff

Active Involvement

Another need that Talking Mats helped identify for tenants was a desire for more active involvement in the running of their building and control over how it operated. Once staff were aware of this, they were able to discuss it with management in their organisation about how this could be facilitated.

“So that gave me the kind, the kind of I dunno the start to approach [housing association] and say listen, the ladies and gentleman have been great with this Talking Mats and all three of them have said that they’d like more involvement in the running of the building” – Interview with housing staff

Partner organisations

Staff discussed how the app might be used in relation to facilitating understanding between partner organisations and their needs. Some believed Talking Mats could be used to highlight issues that tenants faced and that individuals Mats could be sent between Health, Social Care and Housing agencies to share useful information about tenants needs.

“We could send mats to other agencies certainly within care, within services” – Interview with housing staff

Implementation

This theme focused on what is needed for tenants, staff and the wider organisation to continue to be able to use the Talking Mats App in the future.

Although all health and housing staff received training on how to use the digital application, some staff recommended that a refresher may be useful in the future to ensure staff had up to date knowledge and skills to use the tool effectively with tenants. One point made by a housing staff member was the importance of staff being given dedicated time to receive training on the App and being supported to incorporate it into their day-to-day work.

“Think across ‘care’ in general at the minute and housing as well, I guess. It is finding the time to invest in staff and even staff to invest in themselves wee bit. Take a step back and think... right...on what I need to improve on what I am doing. It comes back to that thing where staff can be so busy and

so many things to do. It's actually if you take a step back and receive a bit training, it could help you do all those things that all you got to do... in a much better more effective way" – Interview with housing staff.

Within the organisation, a member of staff has gone on to complete Talking Mats Accredited training which allows him to train other staff in the organisation and offer on-going support in using the App and helping to embed its use across the organisation.

"If I'm going to be an Ambassador, I think we'll be training everybody at the service" – Interview with housing staff

Other useful suggestions were put forward such as creating 'roadshows' and visiting a number of sites over a period of time to speak directly to staff and tenants about their needs and how Talking Mats technology could support them with these. It was also felt that the App would work well within the mental health services that the housing association provided and that it could be used as an action planning tool.

Finally, several participants also saw the potential to integrate Talking Mats with the standardised outcomes that are used to evaluate the services they provide within social housing,

"It aligned really well without difficulty with Outcome STAR. Taking Mats can be alongside that helping to have those conversations around different points along the STAR" Interview with housing staff".

Conclusion

This project explored the feasibility of developing a Health and Housing App for a new audience to bring health, housing and social care professionals together. From this partnership working, we have developed a new app, trained and collaborated with key partners and evaluated and disseminated the tool.

Overall, the App was well received by the tenants and Housing staff and the benefits of how it can support tenants were identified. There was more of a focus on how this can support tenant's voices being heard rather than using the app as a way to facilitate communication between partner organisations. However, the individuals felt that the app would highlight issues for tenants which can then be highlighted to other professional groups/organisation as necessary.

The data has shown that many support solutions for social tenants are inter-related between health and housing. The Talking Health and Housing App has provided a tool to support people with communication difficulties to self-manage their own health and housing needs.

Effective communication is at the heart of all care and support, so it is important to extend use of Talking Mats to a much greater range of professionals and to people

whose voices are not always heard. The impact on tenants can only be positively enhanced when Housing and Health services work together.

Acknowledgements

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For the full report please contact: vikki.mccall1@stir.ac.uk

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