

Project Report

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Project Title

Voice activated access to information - phase 1 implementation

This question is read only.

Please provide a short summary of the work that was completed as part of this project / research *

While the Alexa roll-out was impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown and volunteers were not able to get out to clients' homes to assist with set up, installation and training, we were still able to send out devices to people who had the internet and someone on hand who was sufficiently tech-savvy to set them up. When we reached level 2 we were able to resume our volunteer-assisted roll-out.

At the end of June we received a one-time contribution from Ministry of Social Development that enabled the purchase of 3,500 Echo Dot Alexa smart speaker devices. Following this we were inundated with calls from people seeing the media articles about this and requesting a device. We sent out a mass communication by email and to library users on their audiobook CDs letting them know about our Alexa skill. We received hundreds of responses to this and are currently sending out about 30 Echo Dots a day to clients. Since the communication went out we have sent out over 650 Alexa smart speaker devices and now over 2,000 people New Zealand-wide have devices on loan. Approximately half of our clients are able to set themselves up using the resources provided.

Between April and 30 September we had 50 requests for volunteers to assist with establishment of devices.

We have made a commitment to retire our CD delivery library service by 30 June 2021 so are actively replacing DAISY CD players with Alexa smart speaker devices. Because of the large number of devices to establish within a relatively short timeframe, we entered an arrangement with Noel Leeming to contract their services for this. They have 74 stores in communities across the country, are already working with Age Concern clients to assist with installation of electronic devices so have experience with older clients and the expertise to undertake the work.

We are continuing to enhance the Alexa Library Skill to provide additional data and are now developing an Alexa Service Delivery Skill to enable access to the information and services that are on our website.

Describe the 'who, what, where, when and why' of your initiative

Timing

Is your project / research complete? *

Yes No

If your initiative is still in progress, pick 'no'

When do you anticipate that your project / research will be completed?

Must be a date.

Leave blank if this is an ongoing initiative or if finish date is unknown

Milestones

What have been the major steps / stages (i.e. milestones) involved in delivering your initiative to date?

Milestone	Description
Project planning and establishment	The Alexa library skill was developed and released and with the establishment of the volunteer coordinator role, resources were created and tech-savvy volunteer candidates were brought on board. Roll out to Palmerston North and Auckland were the initial tranche and now there are 77 volunteers across NZ establishing devices in people's homes.
Increased accessibility of resources - 1 June 2020	The training modules have been instated on the intranet so that staff can provide support and training where required. Resources have been created in braille, large print, e-text and audio for all users setting up Alexa to support them. These instructions also cover setting it up through the website and also setup through the iOS and android apps. In addition we have created podcasts and Youtube videos supporting clients, which are available through our website.
Increased capacity for technical support - 1 June 2020	Brought on board an additional 2.5 FTE contact centre and trained them to provide technical support. Now 7.5 FTEs spend 20% of their time dealing with Alexa enquiries, troubleshooting and technical support.
1,500 users by 1 July 2020; 2,000 by 30 September 2020	On 30 June MSD announced a contribution of 3,500 devices for clients which attracted extensive media coverage. The offer of devices was sent to all clients with email addresses on 31 July and on CD for library users without email. As a result approximately 30 devices are being shipped to clients each day
CD retirement group established - 1 September 2020	There are six members in this project group which was set up to coordinate CD retirement by 30 June 2021. We have split the country into three regions with three members of the project group looking after the members in their area. This included arranging for either staff or volunteers in their area to go out and help clients that need this additional support.

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Expanded library skill and new service delivery skill - 30 September 2020	We are currently building access to newspapers into the library skill which is at the Beta-testing stage. We are also developing a skill for service delivery which will provide access to the information and services provided on our website.
Evaluation - 30 September 2020	An Alexa user survey is sent to clients a month following establishment. Non-responders are phoned to see if they need further support.
Noel Leeming installations underway - 30 September 2020	Agreement with Noel Leeming to undertake Alexa installation service - 1 September. Where there are no volunteers or staff available to get a client established with an Alexa device, we contact the closest Noel Leeming store to provide the service.
e.g. planning; major activities; evaluation	

Outcomes

What outcomes were generated as a result of this project / research?

Outcomes are the changes that have occurred for the beneficiaries of your initiative. Generally outcomes can be framed as an increase or decrease in one or more of the following:

- Skills, knowledge, confidence, aspiration, motivation, (these are generally **immediate** or short-term outcomes)
- Actions, behaviour, change in policy (these are generally **intermediate** or medium-term outcomes)
- Social, financial, environmental, physical conditions (these are generally **long-term** outcomes)

Immediate outcomes occur directly following an activity (e.g. within 1 month); intermediate outcomes are those that fall between the immediate and long-term (e.g. between 1 month and 2 years); and long-term outcomes are those we expect to see years later (e.g. 2, 5, 10 or 50 years after the activity).

We also want to learn more about how you tracked the outcomes of your initiative - what you measured and how.

If you need more help understanding what outcomes are, read the help sheets at www.ourcommunity.com.au/evaluation

List your initiative's outcomes and attached information in the following table. Leave blank any fields that do not apply to your project.

Outcome	Were these outcomes anticipated?	Timeframe	Indicator	Verification Method
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Increased access to audiobooks and information	Anticipated	Immediate	Users' waiting time between requesting and receiving reading material - from up to ten days to seconds	Measurement of actual timeframe
People are exercising more flexibility and choice over their reading	Anticipated	Immediate	The number of books/magazines borrowed vs number completed, number of different genres borrowed	Library skill analytics
Increased independence (around accessing information)	Anticipated	Immediate	Users were increasingly interacting - number of utterances and commands made	Library skill analytics
People are utilizing the internet more	Anticipated	Immediate	Users report their growing confidence finding things they are interested in on the internet	Follow up phone calls
People have decreased feelings of isolation	Unanticipated	Immediate	Users report that interacting with Alexa provides a sense of companionship and comfort	Follow up phone calls
Outcomes are the changes that you believe were generated or influenced by your initiative. See information above.	Choose from the list	Choose from the list (see description above)	What you used to measure this outcome - e.g. 'change in teenage pregnancy rates from x to y'	e.g. survey; interviews; focus groups

What (if anything) did you change in your approach and practices as your project research proceeded, and why? *

When we first started the project, we thought we could roll through the regions rapidly, but the practicalities of working with volunteers means that it does take time to find, train, and set up the before volunteers are ready to be deployed. This also taught us that it is best to have largely set up that volunteer infrastructure before marketing to users, instead of expecting we would be able to set up the infrastructure at the same time as responding to user interests. This will help us create a better customer experience. When COVID-19 hit we were not able to send volunteers out to clients but people were still able to receive devices. As a result we created instructions in multiple formats so that people had the best chance of being able to set up the devices - braille, large print, electronic text and audio. These

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instructions also cover setting it up through the website and also setup through the iOS and android apps. In addition we have created podcasts and you-tube videos supporting clients, which are available through our website.

With the injection of funding from MSD and a large number of Alexa devices, we were able to offer the devices to all clients, not just those who were interested in using the library skill. The media coverage and mass communication has increased demand exponentially and, as approximately only half of our clients could get the device set up without external assistance, we had to consider how we could grow our capacity.

We noticed the same questions cropping up with new users regularly so we have provided a selection of commonly asked questions and solutions so that staff can quickly resolve clients' issues. If the initial staff member dealing with the client can't answer the questions then we have a support tree in place. They can transfer the issue through to our project team. We have also created a page for staff to add in any requests from clients for changes and improvements. These are assessed by our library and IT team.

We may use this information to help inform others undertaking similar work

What did you learn as a result of undertaking this project/program? *

We found that it was very difficult to get support into more remote communities where clients lived when they were some distance from where we had volunteers available. As a result we have contracted Noel Leeming to establish the devices nationwide where volunteers are not available or demand is heavy. This effective in a number of ways:

- They have experience setting up electronics in older people's homes from working with Age Concern
- They have the technical expertise.
- Branches are nationwide so our clients are all within driving distance of a local store.
- Using the Noel Leeming network of stores enables us to get the volume of devices out into people's homes in a short timeframe.
- We are supporting businesses in local communities, during uncertain times and an economic downturn.
- Using local businesses provides the opportunity for them to grow their understanding of how to provide information and support to people who are blind or with low vision.
- We have been able to negotiate a reduced price for the devices

The upskilling of contact centre staff in technical troubleshooting was extremely effective but resolving issues is time-consuming and it was resulting in a backlog of calls waiting to be answered. As a result, we have grown our staffing numbers to 7.5 FTE. We found that around 20% of contact centre staff time is spent on Alexa device support calls.

With the positive response and high uptake, we made a commitment to expand the Blind Low Vision NZ functionality and we are undertaking additional library skill development to provide better metrics as well as enabling the newspaper to be delivered via Alexa. Also, a service delivery skill is being developed so that people can access the information and services available on our website. Ultimately, we intend to utilise the Alexa devices as our primary form of communication with our clients.

We are particularly interested in lessons that may help others undertaking similar work. Think about what you learned about your inputs (money, skills, personnel, time - too much; too little; about right?); your assumptions (were they 100% right, only partly right, or were the results a complete surprise?); and the context of the project/program (timing; targeted beneficiaries; geographic settings - were they right; wrong; about right?)

How will you share your learnings from this project/research? *

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We are involved in an international network of blind and low vision organisations and our technical specialists meet via Zoom to discuss innovations and issues, sharing learnings and best practice. Since there is a travel-ban due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international conferences are not proceeding so we are unable to utilise that forum to showcase the project.

What mediums were used to share the learnings? Have you reached the audience you expected?

We'd love to see some visual and audio representations of your work. Please share below.

Upload files:

Filename: Alexa Volunteer Blanche with Elizabeth Nutall.jpg
File size: 4.5 MB

Filename: SueFraser-BlindFoundation-122.jpg
File size: 2.6 MB

and/or

Provide web link:

<https://blindlowvision.org.nz/alexa-skill/>

Must be a URL

and/or

Provide additional details:

The two photos are of people receiving training after their Alexa device has been set up and installed. The weblink has several tutorials and information about the Alexa devices. Here's a Youtube clip about the Alexa library skill roll-out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCIJmWFUPCw>

Please include captions, if relevant

Can we use your media content in our own communications?

Yes No Please contact us first
e.g. in our annual report

Financial Report

*** indicates a required field**

Project Income & Expenditure

Please provide details of any project income (funds received) and project expenditure (funds spent) to date.

Use the 'Notes' column to provide any additional information you think we should be aware of.

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Income Description	Income Type	Confirmed Funding?	Income Amount (\$)	Notes
Internet NZ	Philanthropic Grants *	Confirmed *	\$20,000.00	Thank you!
Ministry of Social Development	Government Grants	Confirmed	\$76,252.50	One-off grant
Ministry of Social Development	Other Income	Confirmed	\$5,000.00	Contract for delivery of library content
Other fundraising	Donations	Confirmed	\$29,488.00	Undesignated gifts

Expenditure Description	Expenditure Type	Expenditure Amount (\$)	Notes
Project coordination	Salaries and Wages *	\$15,000.00	Recruitment, training and supporting volunteers
Technical troubleshooting and support	Salaries and Wages	\$39,488.00	0800 pathway - 6 months = 1462.5 hours @27/hr
650 Echo Dots	Infrastructure and/or Hardware	\$32,493.50	@ \$49.99 each
Solution maintenance and development	Project and Production	\$43,759.00	Skill enhancement - outsourced

Income and Expenditure Totals

Total Income Amount	Total Expenditure Amount	Income - Expenditure
\$130,740.50 This number/amount is calculated.	\$130,740.50 This number/amount is calculated.	\$0.00 This number/amount is calculated.

Have you experienced any issues with your intended project budget to date? If so, please explain reasons for any major variances or for providing incomplete information:

The project is ongoing and gaining momentum. The period covered is the six months from 1 April until 30 September.

Certification and Feedback

Feedback

You are now nearing the end of this form. Before you review your application and click the **SUBMIT** button please take a few moments to provide some feedback. (If you would rather provide anonymous feedback, please go to **{{ Grantmakers: provide a link to an anonymous survey or delete this sentence }}**)

Please indicate how you found the acquittal process:

Very easy Easy Neutral Difficult Very Difficult

How many minutes in total did it take you to complete this form?

600

Estimate in minutes (i.e. 1 hour = 60 minutes)

Please provide us with your suggestions about any improvements and/or additions to this form that you think we need to consider:

It's only difficult to access the information from the different areas of the organisation that are managing different elements of the project. Otherwise, the form is straightforward.