

Cllr Jim Millard: Hello Talk Richmond listeners and welcome back to another edition of our podcast. In this week's episode will be unpacking everything there is to know about care technology. I'm joined by Wendy who is Digital Project Manager in the Adult Social Services and Public Health department at Richmond Council and by Kerri Senior Operations Manager at Alcove who provide care technology solutions that make independent living possible.

Cllr Millard: So, before we dive into all things care technology, it would be good to start with a bit of a definition. So, Wendy, if you could, what exactly do we mean by care technology?

Wendy: So, thank you. Care technology is any technology which is used in a person's home or in the community that will assist them with any aspect of care that they might have. Technology is changing so rapidly that it's an ever-growing list of things that we would include in this all-encompassing phrase called care technology, and we might think about things like smart home technologies such as smart plugs and smart light bulbs and robot vacuums and any other smart devices. There are home pods such as a Nest or an Alexa. We have smart watches which may have an app which help people in their day-to-day living, and it might be linked to these smartphones, and people are using tablets and laptops and there are other devices such as the devices that Kerri's company, provide the Alcove carephone.

Cllr Millard: That's fascinating, I've heard a bit about this before because I'm vice chair of the adult Social Services Health and Housing Committee and you've been presenting various stages of the implementation of this to us, and it is fascinating to hear, but I don't want to presume too much so you know, just to get us a bit started again. This might seem like a bit of an obvious question, but who mainly uses care technology?

Wendy: Anybody can use care technology. It's anyone who finds that there might benefit from using it in their daily life. What we want is to help residents to remain independent and in their home for as long as possible and hopefully to the end of their lives and so any technology that's available to help people achieve that would be somebody who uses care technology - so it could be a carer, it could be a resident who needs a service from adult social care and they're making contact with us for the first time, it could be somebody who wants to use technology to prevent a deterioration, so that they don't need to seek further help from adult social care. It has been very successfully used as part of our reablement service to discharge people from hospital, and it is also used for people who are already receiving a service from adult social care, and we would look at including care technology as an extra service that they would receive as part of the care that they receive from us.

Cllr Millard: OK, yes, thank you. Well, that's very clear, and I suppose the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns obviously created a huge sudden demand for more home-based care. And I know the Council began offering the Alcove video carephones to vulnerable people during the first stages of the pandemic and that was in partnership with Alcove, and this this is a piece of technology that is designed to be really easy to use. It's a video tablet that lets people with little technology experience who might be really daunted by that sort of thing speak to their family and friends and care workers in a two-way video call. So, I just wondered, Kerri, can you kindly talk us through the technology a bit more. What does Alcove offer and how do these devices like video carephones and the in-home sensors, how do they allow people to be independent in their homes?

Kerri: Yeah, of course. So, the video carephone itself, it is just a Samsung tablet, so it's a mainstream piece of equipment or technology, so it doesn't look different in anybody's home. It does just look like a normal tablet. But what Alcove have done to keep it really simple is we've uploaded our software onto it and then we lock the tablet down so it cannot actually be used for anything other

than the video carephone software and how that works is we have the screen is always up on with your callers displayed and then it's locked down so you can't swipe off and get onto anything else on the tablet. What it also means is that you can't disrupt it and get confused and it to become a bit more complex for the person, so keeping it locked down keeps it simple. What it also doesn't do is it doesn't go to sleep or require pin codes or swiping to access the software either - the screen will always stay lit up. And then what happens is as you add your callers onto the screen they are displayed in a tile or a box and in that box will be the name of the person along with a picture of them, if the person wishes to include a picture. So, then what happens with the user is they simply press the name and the picture of the person on the screen and that's what makes the video call. So, it's really, really simple and easy to use, and they're always displayed so you don't get confused having to swipe on anything or find out where they are in a list or a phone book or anything like that. You don't need to know telephone numbers; it is just a one press solution which is great.

CLlr Millard: And so, as part of the setup, would the with the potential people that the person wants to call be sort of added for them? Or would they be assisted, or you know helped to do that?

Kerri: Yeah, so when we get our referrals in from Richmond for example, we ideally have a list of contacts that they want to have included on their device and that just involves a name, a contact telephone number and an email address for that person. And then what Alcove do is we will contact that person and arrange for them to be on boarded, we'll email them and they just sign up and create a password so then to access the device and to access video calling they have to download an app on their mobile phones so it's called Alcove Connect and they simply have the app and their password and their email address and that's what they used to log in and that's the platform that the video calling goes through on. So, all of that is done behind the scenes. And doesn't require the user to get involved in any of that and get involved in any of that complexity.

CLlr Millard: OK, that sounds brilliant. Very user friendly for the person it's destined for. And what about the in-home sensors? Can you tell us a bit about that?

Kerri: Yep, so as well as the video carephone, you've got the video calling and you've got other features like reminders and stuff that can be utilized on the device that all feeds into the Alcove app, so you've got data collected from the core usage as well and then we have our sensor equipment, so we have a movement sensors and door sensors. Again, they feed into the same platform as the video carephone data so you can have a really wide broad sort of picture of someone's day to day routine patterns behaviours. You can start to unpick very quickly sort of changes to someone's routine. You know if someone is using the bathroom too frequently, it might indicate that they've got an infection for example, so then you could possibly explore that quickly before it gets to the point where they've had the infection for too long, and that's when they stopped displaying sort of unusual, confused behaviours, for example. So, the sensors collect data they store it in our system alongside the video care phone data as well, but you can actually be quite proactive with them and set up alerts so these alerts are just sent to an allocated person as a text message on a device, so it's quite discreet, there's no big alarms or sirens ringing, letting you know somebody's got out of bed for example, or they they've opened their front door. It can discreetly tell somebody that the front door has been opened for example, in the middle of the night. So, you know somebody is a wonderer they might get out up and out of bed and go out over the house. And that's not OK for them to do that. That's not safe, so we can trigger a text message to an allocated person to let them know. So, this could be friends, family, neighbours, anybody really that's in that person's support network to notify them that something out of the ordinary has happened. But the data is there for the evidence gathering. You know. So, if you're looking to support in place, you can really see the

data to see what their day-to-day routine looks like. And you can start to map their support needs around that as well. So really useful information.

Cllr Millard: Mm-hmm that sounds like that's probably useful to care staff, is that right, Wendy?

Wendy: Yes, it's very useful. We've actually got some sensors in use with one of our residents, a younger person, and it's certainly it's very useful because it alerts staff to when they need to go and assist the person and as Kerri said, it's a very unobtrusive. So, for the person they are not necessarily aware that the care staff are aware that they need to come and assist the person and the person just goes about their normal day to day routine quite happily.

Kerri: Just to add on to that about the nonintrusive sensors. They are just sensors. They don't track any visuals or any audible information, so you can't see or hear the person at all. It is just simply lines on a chart to showcase where, when and where the movement has occurred. So yeah, it's very it's nonintrusive completely.

Wendy: The other advantage of the sensors is that you can also set them to tell you when somebody isn't moving, so where somebody hasn't moved and you're perhaps worried that there might have had a fall in the lying on the floor. The device can send an alert to the person in their network to say we're a bit worried because somebody hasn't moved.

Cllr Millard: That's fascinating, and it's very well described by both of you and you have illustrated very clearly some of the ways that that could be very useful, and I imagine you know, touching on the concerns about privacy and things like that to be very clear that it's just certain open doors or movements that tracked and not everything, because there must be some wariness I imagine some of us love new technology and embrace it enthusiastically, it might be called what's called early adopters, but other people are more wary of it. How do you find people are and what do you do if people are a bit wary of it? Is there a process for helping them to sort of come to terms with the use of technology and feel more confident?

Kerri: Yes, absolutely. So yes, you're right. Some people do fear or get a bit worried about or new technology and implementing it; what's it going to, what do I need to do? You know what you want, you know, is it something completely new? Am I going to get it as well? Like sometimes the responders or the support network worry as well, but it's we always say give it a try and we we've tried to do a lot of work just showcasing some of the equipment in advance like this is what it looks like. This is what it can do. This is how it can work. And showcasing some sort of dummy data. I suppose in a way, just to say this is how nonintrusive it is. It's simply a line on a chart, so we can't see you. We can't hear you. And always give it a try. The beauty of this technology is it is battery powered devices, so they're wireless, so it doesn't require any hard drilling in. It can just be a plug and play solution that can be tweaked and updated over time.

Cllr Millard: That sounds that sounds brilliant. And you know you've already touched a bit on some examples, but I wonder if there are any other examples you want to share with us of where these care technologies have successfully supported people.

Kerri: Yeah, absolutely. So, the COVID pandemic was our big one and we had lots of people that wasn't able to go out and about. So, what we did is we sent out a video carephone in the post, so nobody had to go into the property. We pre-configured it so it had all of their callers on the screen before it arrived, so they simply had to take it out the box and turn the device on, and it comes with a stand along charging leads. So, they just popped it in the stand, plugged it in, and put it on charge, and then at least they were able to get some of their support delivered virtually. So, we would have

carers call into the devices, just to do those welfare checks or medication prompts. Just watching them take their meds. The beauty of the video calling was that the phone call is lovely, but you can't see someone's body language, their facial expressions, the way they look, you know, do they look kept? Are they well groomed? What's their background looked like? Are they living in a, you know, a state of disarray, is the house tidy and you can really get a lot from that. The video the actual footage is quite powerful, so being able to deliver some of that care virtually just to check in on these people. And when there were concerns, they would be raised and dealt with as needed.

We have a group calling feature that we built in during lockdown. That was a big task for us, but we have achieved it which was lovely and so it allows a host to log into the Alcove platform and call out to multiple care phones at the same time. So, we had day centres for example delivering some of their support virtually to multiple people at the same time. All of these people who don't have zoom or teams or Facebook or WhatsApp, they didn't have a device to even make video calls. So, to be able to connect these people together was quite powerful and they did cooking, singing, music, all sorts of things completely remotely. Uh, and also connecting families together as well. That was another big one. Especially people that are in care homes that we couldn't have people going in for obvious reasons and people were missing out on their family time and seeing grandchildren for the first time virtually or sadly, having to say goodbye to their loved ones via the video carephone during this difficult time, so it really there was quite a lot of different stories and different types of way it was used.

Cllr Millard: Yes, thank you, Kerri, that will that's so clear and you touched on, you know that experience of the pandemic, which we all felt. And there was this issue that those people who are able to access technology were able to be much less isolated. So, it's clearly so important that we embrace that for our adult social care users. And my question is for those who don't necessarily have a connection to broadband and what can we do about that?

Kerri: I'm glad you did ask that, actually Jim, because that's a really important part of this project. So these devices we don't actually only just provide the device itself, we actually provide it with a SIM card already inserted in it, so there is a 4G SIM card in the device before it's posted, so when it's turned on, there is no Wi-Fi connection necessary. It's got the connection that it needs to work already put in it and activated. So, anybody can use this and everybody is included in this. We don't exclude anyone because of no connection.

Cllr Millard: Oh fantastic, I'm really pleased to hear that. That's fantastic and this is all sounding so positive and I've, you know I've had the honour to be able to speak to some users and seen for myself how clear the benefits are of technology for them for users, for their families, for their carers and providers. And I think the other question the other side of the coin is you know, we value the role that this has had in sort of reducing isolation, actually. But we also want to make sure that it doesn't become a replacement for human contact. Because that's also important, isn't it that high quality one on one care? So, Wendy, what is the impact on person-centred care?

Wendy: So, there is never an intention to reduce people's interaction with other people. It is meant to be a service that is in addition to face-to-face contact with people. So, people the first thing as I said earlier, is what we want to do is keep people independent in their own homes. And if this technology enables them to do that, then that's first prize and we've achieved what we want to do. Some residents do you get services from adult social care, they might receive a direct payment, they might have a package of care already, the care technology will be as service in addition to what we already offer our residents. So, we will not be replacing face to face care with care technology. It will be an added service to what we already offer. And we will also use it in a way which would be a

preventive measure. So, where we can prevent people from coming into adult social care because of a bit of simple technology will enable them to continue to manage independently, we're more than happy to actually assess and ensure that people have the right technology to do that.

Cllr Millard: That sounds fantastic Wendy and I know it's so important to maintain independence as long as possible. And I'm sure a lot of people listening will be very interested and think, you know, like me, this sounds very good and would like to know more. Where can people go to get more information on this care technology and how it could help them or a loved one?

Wendy: OK, so the normal process for contacting adult social care would be the same process you would use, so to please contact our access team on 02088917971. You can also find some literature on our website on the borough's website. If you go to the adult social care section, there will be a section on information and advice and there will be a link to technology to help you to stay independent so you can access information for yourself. Or you can phone into the access team, and they will decide which route you go from there.

Cllr Millard: Thank you, well that is fascinating. I hope that is helpful to people. Kerri and Wendy, it's been fascinating talking to you. Is there anything before we finish that you would like to say?

Kerri: No, thank you very much for having us. It was a pleasure, really lovely to talk to you both.

Wendy: Thank you very much for having us. We look forward to helping people to remain independent, so please feel free to get in touch.

Cllr Millard: Absolutely well. Thank you so much. Thanks for sharing your expertise on care technology. I've certainly learned a thing or two. I hope our Talk Richmond listeners have as well. What we've discussed today is exciting. Technology can give people more control over their health, safety and wellbeing, and support people to be more independent and as we've heard to feel less isolated, which is so important, particularly with this sort of lockdown experiences we've had, and the challenges we may continue to face. So, for more information on today's topic, please visit the show notes. And as always, if you've enjoyed this episode, please do leave us a sterling review. I would consider that to be a very caring use of technology from my perspective and do subscribe. Don't forget so you don't miss an episode. As ever, I'm Jim Millard, thanks for listening.