Do digital programmes work with individuals that have committed offences?

Jonathan Hussey, Operations Director, Red Snapper Managed Services (part of the Red Snapper Group) - reports on the results of The Intervention Hub digital intervention being used on 10,000 people with lived experience of the CJS.

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven a growing interest in using digital interventions. This may be due to a variety of reasons including:

1. the ability to maintain social distancing during delivery.
2. the ability to continue to offer a consistent service.
3. they can be cost effective.

Moreover, there is a growing body of research showing effectiveness when working with the general (i.e. non-offending) population. For example, research directly comparing Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CCBT) with face-to-face Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) indicates that CCBT can be as effective as conventional CBT, with no statistically significant difference between the two (Andersson & Cuijpers, 2009). Bishop (2020) found that interventions delivered via digital means can improve access among young people, that anonymity facilitates private access to support which minimises stigma, as well as affording benefits such as being available without travel, restrictions or waiting lists. In addition, digital interventions can be cost and resource effective and empower individuals to address their own needs. More recently, we have seen digital methods being used successfully to complement supervision and programme delivery in a pilot of the 'Skills for Relationships Toolkit', and inclusion of such Probation Practitioner toolkits within the Target Operating Model of the new unified Probation Service (Morris 2021). The question is, however, whether digital interventions are effective in addressing offending behaviour.

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As of August 2021, Red Snapper Managed Services (RSMS) has provided digital interventions via the [Intervention Hub](#) to over 10,000 people with lived experience of the CJS in the U.K. The Intervention Hub programmes can be used as a self-help tool or within a professional relationship during one-to-one supervision. Additionally, they can be used on any device such as smartphones, computers, games consoles and internet-enabled televisions. The content of the Intervention Hubs is based on the cognitive behavioural model although they are also informed by other relevant theoretical perspectives where relevant.

The Intervention Hub hosts a series of 19 programmes including:

1. The Thinking Skills Hub	11. The Strength Based Hub
2. The Victim Awareness Hub	12. The Avatar Hub
3. The Domestic Abuse Hub	13. The Shoplifting Hub
4. The Cannabis Awareness Hub	14. The Thinking Skills (Strength Based) Hub
5. The Emotional Wellbeing Hub	15. The Female Domestic Abuse (Strength Based) Hub
6. The Anger Management Hub	16. The Emotional Wellbeing (Strength Based) Hub
7. The Alcohol Awareness Hub	17. The Cannabis Awareness (Strength Based) Hub
8. The Women's Programme Hub	18. The Anger Management (Strength Based) Hub
9. The Youth Programme Hub	19. The Substance Misuse Hub.
10. The Education and Employment Hub	

The sheer volume of people that have used the Intervention Hub means that this is the largest known sample of people with lived experience of the CJS to have used digital interventions.

The results of RSMS research provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence including feedback from people with lived experience of the CJS and professionals.

An overview of the quantitative research shows that:

- 76% of people with lived experience of the CJS showed a positive change in their thinking and attitudes (using pre and post questionnaires);
- 50% completed a programme on their own;
- 86% of people with lived experience of the CJS would recommend them and found it useful;
- 96% of professionals said they believed that the hub helped their people with lived experience of the CJS.

Qualitative feedback indicates:

- The courses are clear, concise and informative and the people with lived experience of the CJS find them easy to access and helpful, individuals have been

happy to complete these by themselves, then discuss afterwards;

- As the people with lived experience of the CJS can undertake the work at home which is a huge benefit when access to the office has been restricted (e.g. COVID), the work can then be reviewed together;
- Some people with learning difficulties would find it difficult completing alone;
- Digital programmes have been brilliant for cases who are isolating;
- The programmes generate a summary of areas that need further work which helps for future intervention planning;
- Some people found the language complicated at times for young age groups;
- Resources such as these allow Officers to work flexibly and efficiently, alleviating some of the pressures around delivering a quality and effective intervention during the pandemic. The platform is reliable and compliments remote supervision of offenders. It affords remote delivery of intervention which allows reflective space for those who struggle with literacy or interpersonal skills, allowing them to complete the work at their own speed and in a comfortable and familiar environment. The report provided upon completion allows Officers to review work that has been completed and challenge accordingly;

- People could “race” through the programmes if they did it alone;
- The activities are not overwhelming and the mix between being able to listen to the questions or read them is helping with concentration;
- One subscribing Police Force stated ‘It provides us with a targeted intervention as part of our diversionary scheme’.

There are limitations to this evidence. As a private company, RSMS does not hold personal identifiable data of people with lived experience of the CJS and to date we have not been able to conduct a longitudinal study on whether completion of a programme is correlated with a reduction in reoffending. From a theoretical perspective, a positive shift in thinking and attitudes has the potential to impact on the resultant behaviour but this is not enough to demonstrate a substantive link with reduced reoffending. The conclusion drawn by Webster (2021) around the potential for digital interventions to extend the reach of desistance-focused messaging to a broader audience in all criminal justice settings is perhaps an inevitable progression and certainly a vision RSMS share. We would argue that digital interventions have huge benefits, for example:

- They can be completed in a relatively short period of time compared to other longer interventions;
- They have measurable outcomes;
- They provide structure;
- They can be delivered in a number of different formats;
- They can be engaging and contain content which is suitable for various learning styles.

That said, there are a number of important limitations. For example:

- You need to be able to commit yourself to the whole process from start to finish;
- It often requires individuals to do extra work outside of sessions;

- It is not always appropriate for people with more complex needs.

So, do digital interventions work? Our data suggest that digital interventions can be effective for low-medium risk service users.

References

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