

Alcove / East Thames Group

Using the Internet-of-Things to revolutionise care and support

Alcove is a care technology business founded in 2014. Our solution was co-designed with older and disabled residents, and care and support professionals, at East Thames Group.

With offices in Stratford and Reading, Alcove has quickly grown to a 14-person team and is delivering software and hardware as a service to a number of local authorities, social housing organisations and private homecare providers.

We developed Alcove to help providers deliver more and better care for less; improve quality of life for services users, formal and informal carers; and improve safeguarding.

We have shared office space with East Thames Group since Nov 2014, sitting with their care and support and business development teams, to create a solution to some of their most pressing care and support problems.

What we wanted to achieve

We wanted to help East Thames improve its service delivery; provide digital inclusion for its residents; digitally upskill support workers; improve management oversight; engage families and push workflow to concerned neighbours, family members, and the community.

We also wanted to change common one size fits all practice, which may not always meet the needs of the people needing care and support. For example, replacing the pull cord and

pendant alarm approach which is hardwired, not interoperable and creates a stigma (people often don't want to wear a big red button around their neck).

We wanted to prove a model to keep people living independently for longer – out of residential care – or enabling them to be more independent in supported living environments.



We wanted to engage family members and help the formal and informal care networks work better together.

We also wanted to produce evidence of contract compliance – light touch monitoring of support workers to see what they are doing when – to evidence to commissioners that the care commissioned is being delivered (or more / less is needed). Improve safeguarding – a better

safety net so if people can't call for help by pushing a button or pulling a cord, they will still be found in an emergency.

What we did

We worked closely with Alcove to identify different care and support schemes and different beneficial uses for the technology.

In an older adults extra care scheme, we used wireless in-home movement and door sensors to establish normal behaviour patterns and set up personalised alerts for each resident to signal when something happened that may be of concern. For example, where there has been an exit from the property late at night, no use of the fridge for 24 hours, increased bathroom usage (often first signs of a urinary tract infection) etc.

We also used a tap in / tap out carer monitoring solution to evidence to the commissioners the amount of support being provided. We gave residents the option of keeping their daily checks or not (as the Alcove system knows you're up and about) – and all but one chose to remove them.

positive risk taking for other individuals, acting as a backup support system and light touch monitoring solution. For others, it was used to support self-medication – alerts being set up if people had not opened their medication cupboards in certain time windows every day.



We are thoroughly enjoying working with Alcove. The system has so many benefits & gives us so much information about our service users. The service users love the gadgets & have mastered using them very quickly. It won't be long before we are saying we don't know how we managed without it!

Michelle Dunham, Community Services Coordinator, supported living service, Barnet

We also worked in an independent living scheme for people with moderate learning difficulties. Here, the technology was used to help the transition from a 24-hour service to a weekday 9-5 and security guard evening shift. The security guards were alerted when front doors opened in different parts of the large building so could be aware of any potential need for them. Additional sensors were used to support

Finally we deployed technology in small supported living scheme with 4 adults with learning disabilities, challenging behaviour and autism (all originally from a residential care setting). Here we facilitated the transition from a waking night to a sleep-in, using sensors to send real time alerts to wake support workers only when residents left their rooms (except when they just went to their bathroom). We also deployed a range of sensors which gave us insight into residents' behaviour – enuresis sensor to gather data and manage incontinence; bed occupancy sensor to look at how behavioural interventions affect sleep conditions; movement sensors to look at episodes of anxiety and how these might be predicted and prevented in the future to reduce challenging behaviours.

What we achieved

We made significant progress to delivering truly person-centred care and support, going beyond traditional reactive support to bespoke, adaptable and preventative approaches. 92% of staff thought Alcove had helped to improve safeguarding and increased their knowledge of residents' behaviour. We removed daily welfare calls where people chose to opt out knowing that the new system knew they were up and about and would alert if something was wrong. Data helped client plan support better; was available for use in serious incident

investigations; used to monitor and improve staff performance.

We improved performance monitoring – produced quantitative evidence of good/bad practice for use in appraisals, reward/recognition and service improvement. We also taught staff new digital skills and gave family members access so they could have greater visibility of their loved ones condition and the care provided.

We created cost efficiencies by replacing a waking night with a sleep in, evidencing ability to reduce care package, reducing day time 1-to-1 support, and supporting transition from 24/7 to weekday day time staffing only.

Train staff using the actual technology they will be using – we trained staff at one scheme using a desktop computer and then expected them to use an operator mobile phone as their key digital tool. It proved very difficult to unlearn logging into the computer in the office every morning rather than utilising the mobile device from wherever they were in the scheme.

We are using Alcove to help us ensure our deployment of workers is optimised and organised at times that suit our customers so that our services are offering real value for money.

Leila Hill, Area Service Manager, Care and Support, East Thames Group.

Alcove has enabled far greater protection against safeguarding concerns; as a preventative and early intervention tool but it also provides a robust audit system which evidences who did what and when if things do go 'wrong'.

Leila Hill, Area Service Manager, Care and Support, East Thames Group.

What we learnt

Co-design is essential – identify what problems you are trying to solve, and work with people who will use your system, as well as the wider stakeholder network. There are an awful lot of stakeholders involved in the ultimate purchasing of a product like Alcove – OTs, social workers, scheme managers, support workers, care and support managers (local and regional), finance, development etc. Good to have awareness, if not buy in, from the outset.

Site visits – these can be incredibly intrusive yet everyone wants one. Identify someone or somewhere that would be good for others to visit – a resident that is happy for you to bring professionals round and talk about their experience of the system; a staff office that isn't so manically busy for staff to be able to give a good account of the system and its benefits to them.

Change management is the key to successful adoption and sufficient training, combined with staff being aware of what happens if they misuse or do not use the technology provided (by signing up to an organisational assistive technology policy) is essential for proper use. Using a call centre connection as a final point in escalation also works well to ensure good usage (even if only as a temporary measure) as call centre staff call onsite staff when alerts are not resolved and have been automatically escalated after a variable time delay.

For more information please visit

www.youralcove.com

<http://www.east-thames.co.uk/>

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Skills for Care recommends

Skills for Care has produced a range of resources to support organisations to benefit from technology and digital skills.

Assisted Living Technology

We have produced a resource hub and guidance on how to choose and commission the right technology.

<http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Topics/Assistive-living-technology/Assistive-living-technology.aspx>

Digital Skills

We have developed guidance, best practice examples and ways and means to establish digital champions within the organisation.

<http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Topics/Digital-skills/Digital-working.aspx>

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