



Near Me in Social Work Learning Report

July 2022
V1.1

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1 Executive summary

- Near Me is a video consulting service which uses the Attend Anywhere platform. It is a web-based system that enables health, social care & public sector services to offer video calling as a means of accessing their services.
- This report summarises the work undertaken to date and shares lessons learned from the Duty Social Work programme.
 - Phase 1 – IRISS pathfinder
 - Phase 2 – Care Home care reviews
 - Phase 3 – Duty Social Work
- The Duty Social Work programme has been slow to progress due to:
 - Early process mapping failing to identify benefits of video calling within Duty Social work, leading to changes in scope within the workstreams
 - Extreme service pressures
- Though call volumes have been low (753 consultations across all Social Work services during the period Sept 21 – May 22), benefits to Relationship Based Practice have been highlighted. These include:
 - Ability for family member, advocate or other professional to take part in a call
 - Improved communication and relationship building with the GP Practice or Care Home
 - Reduced anxiety for families
 - Support flexible working including self-isolation or remote support
 - Improved access to services
- Feedback from clients, captured by an end of call survey, was generally positive with 94% of respondent stating they were satisfied or very satisfied.

Summary of Cumulative Lessons Learned

Where it is most appropriate to use Near Me in Social Work?

- As a communication tool within Social Work, particularly where the addition of a third party
- Supporting continuity of service caused by staff isolating, vacancies, providing remote support

- Where process are established for proactively managing referrals, including scheduled follow up appointments by Near Me.
- Link to the emergency medicine Flow Navigations centres.

Where could Near Me be scaled targeted for maximum input?

- Where travel can be reduced for both the client & social worker, particularly within islands and remote & rural areas.
- The use of Group Consulting to support multi agency meetings that include the client or client's representative

When is Near Me not appropriate?

- Where Near me adds no value or risks creating additional process steps.
- For some first-time appointments with clients or/and families.

What are the challenges to sustainable scale up & spread?

- Staff capacity and case load prioritisation when faced with urgent issues.
- Demand and pressure within Social Work.
- Culture shift in how clients want and choose to communicate with the Social Worker.
- Culture shift in how Social Worker communicate with Clients
- Sponsorship & Leadership

Recommendations and Next Steps

- Use the learning to influence the role & responsibilities of the new SWS TEC Lead including:
 - Scope the appetite for use of Near Me within Social Work
 - Explore the barriers and challenges to implement Near Me
- Further embed Near Me within the Digital Approaches in Social Work programme
- Better understand the systems where multiagency communication is required
- Continue to support the TEC funded programme in Fife HSCP.
- Explore the use of group consultations within Argyll & Bute and South Ayrshire.

2 Introduction

Near Me is a video consulting service which uses the Attend Anywhere platform. It is a web-based system that enables health, social care & public sector services to offer video calling as a means of accessing their services.

It is funded by the Scottish Government with a £3.4 million annual commitment¹ to support its spread in health, social care, and wider public services. Strategically it is driven both by the Digital Health and Care Strategy² *“Digital options are increasingly available as a choice for people accessing services and staff delivering them.”* and the (Technology Enabled Care) Digital Citizen Delivery Plan³.

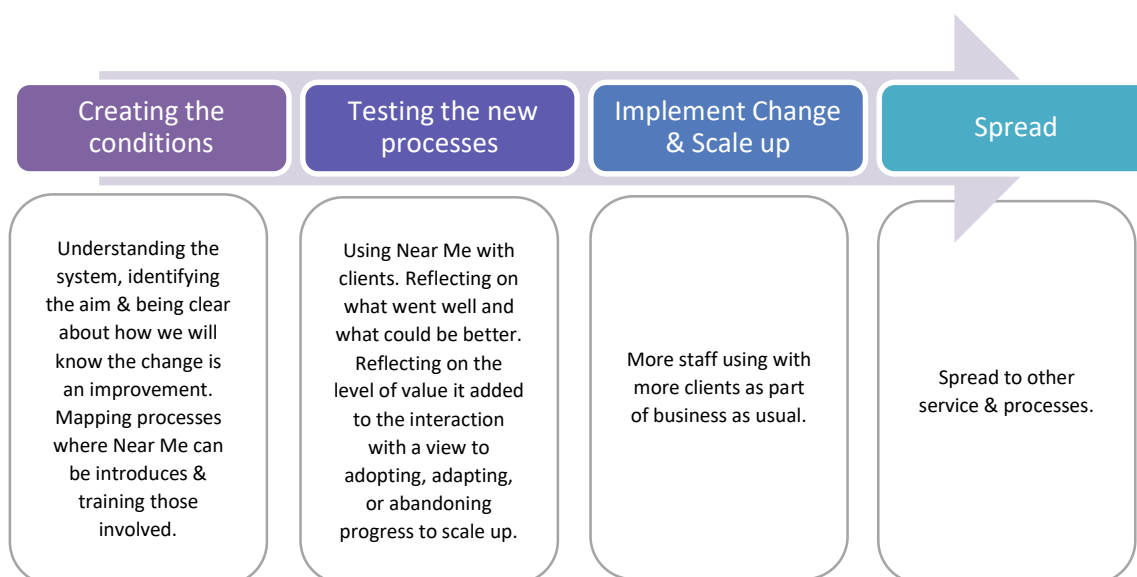
¹ [Programme for Government](#) p24

² [Enabling, Connecting and Empowering: Care in the Digital Age 2021 – Scottish Government & COSLA](#)

³ [TEC \(Technology Enabled Care\) Digital Citizen Delivery Plan](#)

The introducing of Near Me to Social Care & Social Work has used an improvement collaborative approach as described in Figure 1. This brings a number of project groups together to share learning through the improvement stages below.

Figure 1 Improvement Collaborative Approach



Approach

The rollout of Near Me within Social Care had been progressed through 3 phases.

Phase 1 Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (Iriss) Social Care project (September 2020 – Mar 2021)

Iriss was commissioned by the Scottish Government's Technology Enabled Care programme to lead the work in partnership with the National NHS Near Me team. Enabling five Social Service organisations to embed the use of Near Me. The five project groups used Near Me with a variety of services:

- community justice.
- supporting adults with alcohol induced brain damage.
- young people with learning disabilities.
- enabling information gathering & assessment within Duty & Response.
- facilitating service reviews by care managers with residents & families.

Though call volumes were small, two service have continued to use Near Me.

Details of the programme can be found at <https://www.iriss.org.uk/news/feature-articles/2021/02/04/near-me-social-services>

Phase 2 Care Home Care Reviews (December 2020 - February 2021)

A joint programme with the Scottish Government's Office of the Chief Social Work Advisors and the Near Me Programme (Digital Health and Care Directorate), was established to support the use of Near Me in care home care reviews. This was in response to a national requirement to accelerate care reviews for all people living in Care Homes during the period of Covid19 visiting restrictions. Two improvement collaboratives were established, with teams from 11 HSCPs (Health & Social Care Partnership). Guidance on the use of Near Me in this context was developed and published.

A copy of the Near Me in Social Work Progress Report, July 2021 can be found at <https://tec.scot/programme-areas/near-me/our-programme/workstream-updates>.

Phase 3 Duty Social Work (September 2021 – June 2022)

Following successful scale up with the care home care reviews, the potential to spread both the learning & processes to Duty Social Work was recognised. HSCPs were invited to join a funded programme, with up to £40k available per organisation. Five HSCPs took part.

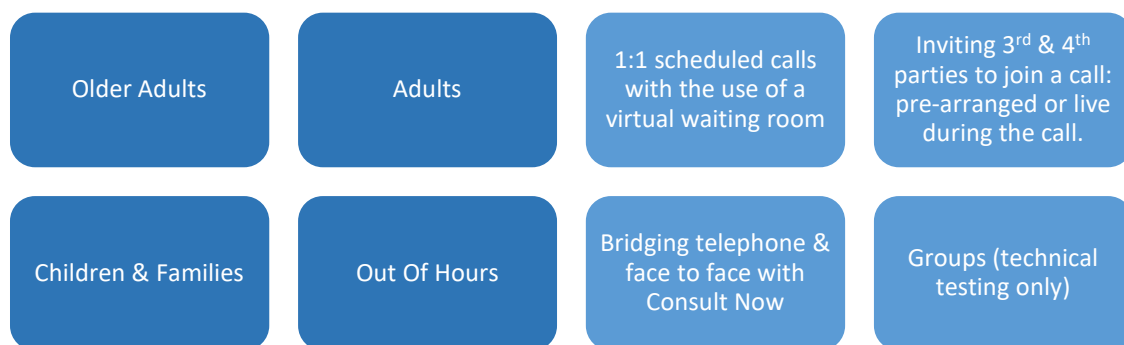
This report provides an overview of the Duty Social Work programme, assesses progress and provides recommendations for next steps.

3 Duty Social Work

Overview

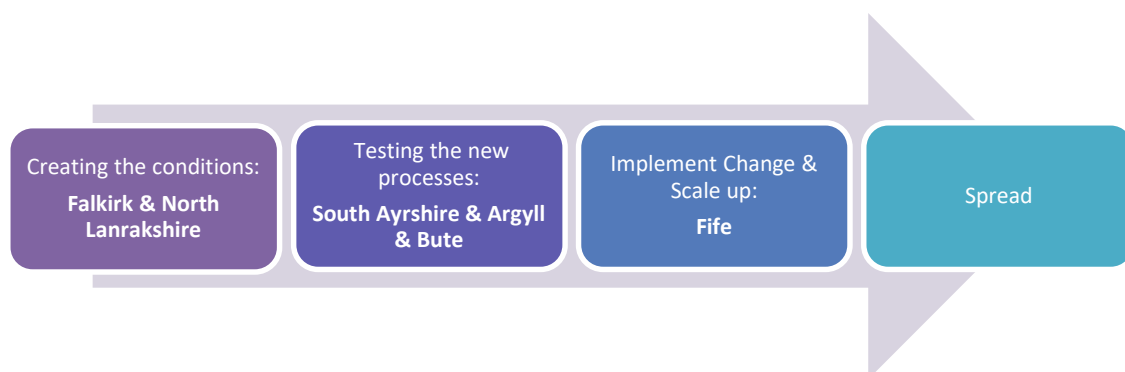
The Duty Social Work programme has been undertaken during a challenging period. A reduction in COVID restrictions had reduced some of the perceived benefits in using Near Me at a time where services have been under extreme pressure. As a result, progress in some areas has been severely delayed.

Figure 2 Functionalities used by Service



Progress to date

Figure 3 Progress



The maturity of Near Me in Social Work has to be recognised within the context of Near Me in Health. Launched in 2016, uptake in Health was gradual. Creating the conditions and initial testing in NHS Grampian and NHS Highland paved the way for scale up & spread through 2018 & 2019 with supported projects in all 14 health boards. This created the systems, leadership & infrastructure,

which formed the foundation for the rapid scale up in March 2020. Scaling up and sustaining change takes time and needs leadership, systems and the infrastructure in place.

The use of Near Me within Social Work is reminiscent of the pre-pandemic position within Health. There is appetite and enthusiasm to use it, with recognition of both its limitations and potential to add value.

Phase 3 has been slow to progress. Although the initial aim was to introduce Near Me into Duty in some areas early discussion and process mapping failed to identify enhanced outcomes for people or staff. Partners noted that the nature of the initial information gathering via phone and email at Duty was not improved by video calling. This led to a redefining the scope and aims within all of project groups.

The impact of operational workload was also recognised. The availability of operational leadership and staff capacity to support the projects has severely affected the pace of the work at a time when in-person visiting was resuming with Covid restrictions easing. This removed a significant impetus for prioritising the scale up of Near Me video calling.

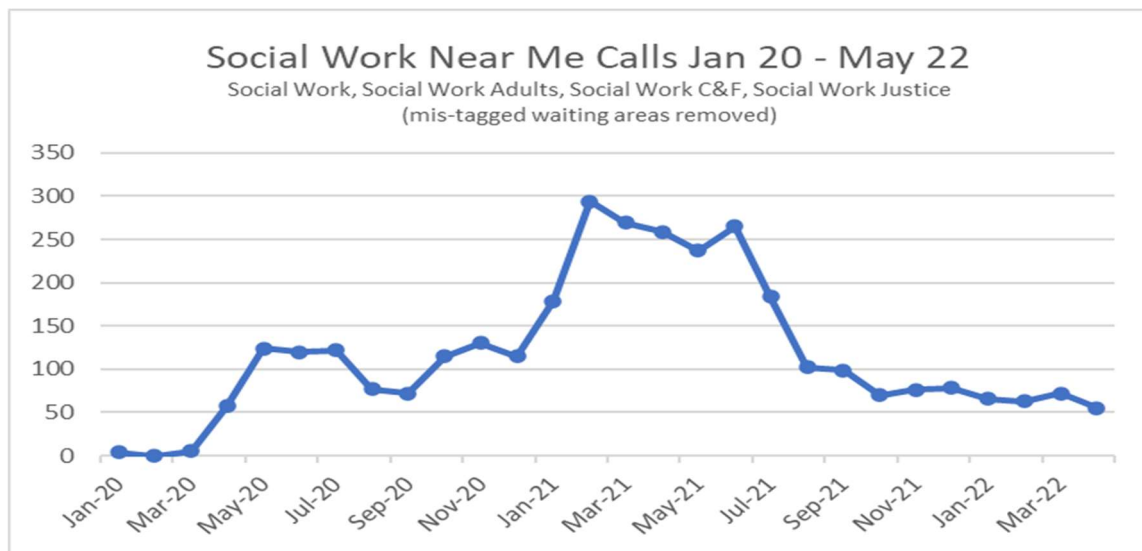
It was also recognised that there was a significant decline rate from the clients when offered Near Me at initial contact. Clients choose to use other methods e.g. telephone. The contact centre in Argyll & Bute reported this as more than 90%. Principally due to:

- The essential information required was appropriate relayed by telephone or email.
- The client's query was answered on the telephone.
- Some callers simply wished to remain anonymous and impart their information quickly.
- Clients who had been waiting in a telephone queue felt apprehensive about transferring from telephone to Near Me Consult Now. They were concerned they may have to call back and re-join the queue if they encountered technical difficulties.

The outcome of the collaboratives cannot be defined by numbers alone. It is about the wider learning from activity ie targeting use, importance of leadership, setting realistic timescales and creating a supportive context all ways to enable shift to Near Me.

4 Results

Figure 4 All Near Me Calls within Social Work



The number of Near Me calls, as recorded through the call platform, has been an important measure in identifying both progress and challenges. Figure 2 shows the number of Near Me calls tagged as *Social Work, Social Work Adults, Social Work Children & Families & Social Work Justice*.

The activity grew between March and May 2020 during the Phase 1 collaborative with Iriss. In parallel, the mPower⁴ programme used Near Me to support virtual visiting in Care Homes in the Western Isles and one Care Home continues to use it.

The large growth in calls between Jan & June 21 is associated with phase 2 – the Care Reviews in Care Home programme. Call numbers dropped, as Covid restrictions eased and there was progress through the backlog of reviews. Three of the 11 HSCPs continue to use Near Me to support the participation of relevant third parties or family members.

Near Me activity in social work plateaued from August 21. The low call volumes highlight challenges in both sustaining change and scale up.

It is also important to recognise the impact of Covid, both as a driver for change and the challenge it has brought to services faced with high demand with reduced staffing capacity.

5 Reported Service Improvements

Relationship Based Practice (RBP)

Through all the improvement collaboratives, relationship-based practice has been a common theme. Social Workers have told us that having the word “Social” in their professional title is indicative of the fact that relationships are at the heart of practice and that effective relationships are central to successful outcomes. Traditionally, practice has been supported by in-person visits, meetings, and telephone calls. The examples below highlight where Near Me was used and supported RBP.

⁴ <https://mpowerhealth.eu/>

5.1.1 Adults & Older People

- Supported the care review process in care homes by being able to include family members, advocates, and other professionals. Safely and easily enabling them to join the review, regardless of their location with example of family members joining from abroad.
- Family members remained on the video call after the review was finished which supported socialisation between family & resident.
- Created a direct video link with GP Practices to improve direct assess for referral & case discussion.
- In preparation for care home care reviews, Near Me was used to plan the review schedule & discuss which residents it was or wasn't going to be appropriate for. Staff reported that this helped develop a better relationship than when discussing it over the phone.

5.1.2 Children & Families

- Near Me not only supported a family to join the appointment from their own home but by being able to see the Social Worker helped reduce the family's anxiety about Social Work involvement.

Flexible Working; supporting a blended approach to delivering care

The social workers involved in the collaboratives agree that Near Me is not a one size fits all. The ability to have Near Me as an additional tool in the toolbox is useful. Recognising that while not always suitable it does present new opportunities to supporting flexible and blended working.

5.1.3 Adults & Older People

- Near Me was used to liaise with the key workers of Care Home residents when their shift scheduling or emerging priorities prevented them from attending the review.
- Preventing multiple phone calls and potential visits Near Me supported joint assessment for long term care with the community psychiatric nurse. Subsequently the funding request was completed jointly and timelier, over Near Me.

5.1.4 Children & Families

- A Social Worker has been able to attend a joint Antenatal appointment with a midwife and prospective parents, via Near Me. This would normally have involved two separate appointments.
- A Social Worker who was isolating with Covid was able to support their care leaver on moving into their first flat, so enabling continuity of care & relationship.

Improving Access

Throughout the collaboratives there has been strong emphasis on the 'Right Person, Right Time Right Care'. Teams have explored new pathways to improve access to their service.

5.1.5 Adults & Older People

- A process was established allowing members of the public to bypass the council contact centre and directly access Social Work via Near Me.
- Direct Near Me processes were established between both an urgent care Flow Navigation Centre and GP clusters. Both enabling more proactive than reactive access to Social Work.
- There are plans to be able to use Near Me to support a "good conversation" with those clients who do not meet the criteria for Social Work involvement. This would present an opportunity to transfer the client to the Living well hub for community & self-managed support.

5.1.6 Children & Families

- Social Workers have been able to cover Islands where there is little or no Social Work presence because of staff vacancies.

5.1.7 Out of Hours Duty

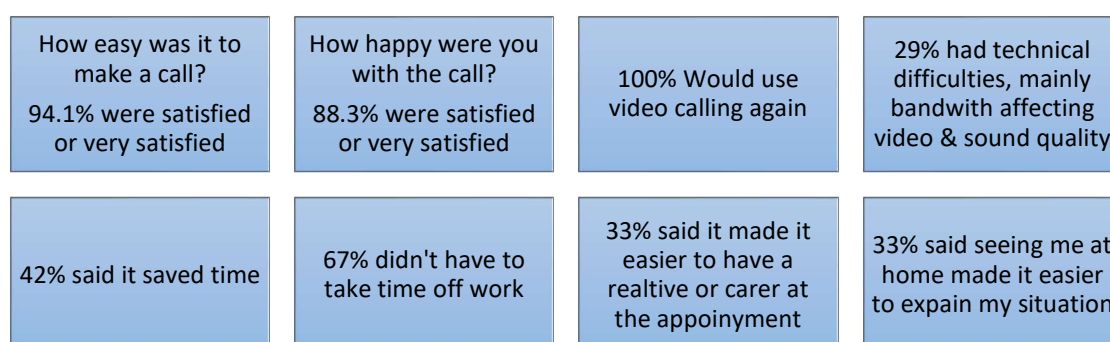
- Consult Now has been enabled with an Out of Hours duty, to allow staff the reflexivity to transfer quickly from telephone to video call.

6 Client Feedback

An end of call survey was applied to all Near Me waiting areas in the Duty Social Work collaborative. 17 responses were received, representing a response rate was 15%.

In general, feedback was positive and was in line with previous surveys. However, the level of technical issues was higher. This likely represents use within a group of service users and providers less familiar with video calling technology. We have learned from other programmes that staff confidence in offering Near Me appointments and managing simple trouble shooting is proportionate to the number of calls they have made. The number of calls made through the Duty Social Work programme is still relatively low.

Figure 5 Summary of Caller Feedback (17 respondents)



7 Learning

Where it is most appropriate to use Near Me in Social Work?

- As a communication tool within Social Work, particularly where the addition of a third party (e.g. a family member, teacher or health professional) adds person centred value to the outcome of the discussion.
- Supporting continuity of service where staff are having to isolate, where there have been vacancies and cover has been provided remotely from another team has a role in enabling hybrid working.
- Processes established for proactively managing referrals, including scheduled follow up appointments by Near Me.
- Link to the emergency medicine Flow Navigations centres.
- The flexibility of the use of Consult Now, to transfer a telephone call to a video call instantly, has been used for regular client contacts.

Where could Near Me be scaled targeted for maximum input?

- Where travel can be reduced for both the client & social worker, particularly within islands and remote & rural areas.
- The use of Group Consulting to support multi agency meetings where it is more person centred to include the client or client's representative to join. e.g. Adult with Incapacity, Child Protection meetings; Initial referral discussions or Connect meetings with foster carers.

When is Near Me not appropriate?

- Near Me is not a one size fits all. It is not appropriate for every situation especially if it adds no value or risks creating additional process steps. Early findings indicate that this is the case for initial contacts with Social Work given the breadth of requests and needs presenting.
- It was recognised that for some first time appointments with clients or/and families, Near Me was not appropriate.
- Near Me was found not to be appropriate for large meetings e.g. case conferences or child protection meetings. However, the development of Near Me Groups Consulting, which has the capacity to support up to 60 participants, presents further opportunities.

What are the challenges to sustainable scale up & spread?

- Staff capacity and case load prioritisation when faced with urgent issues.
- Demand and pressure within Social Work.
- Culture shift in how clients want and choose to communicate with the Social Worker.
- Culture shift in how Social Worker communicate with Clients
- Sponsorship & Leadership

8 Recommendation and Next Steps

- Use the learning to influence the role & responsibilities of the new SWS TEC Lead including:
 - Scope the appetite for use of Near Me within Social Work
 - Explore the barriers and challenges to implement Near Me
- Further embed Near Me within the Digital Approaches in Social Work programme
- Better understand the systems where multiagency communication is required
 - Role of Microsoft Teams
 - Role of Near Me Group Consulting
- Continue to support the TEC funded programme in Fife HSCP.
- Explore the use of group consultations within Argyll & Bute and South Ayrshire.

9 Appendix 1 Progress by HSPC

Fife – Older Peoples Duty

Current Use:

- Direct referral transfer to the Kirkcaldy & Glenrothes Duty team from the Contact Centre.
- Processes established with NHS Fife Flow Navigation Centre to directly link to a Social Worker via Near Me.
- Cluster of 10 GP (General Practitioner) practices can directly link with a Social Worker via Near Me.
- Public direct access to a Duty Social Worker via Near Me on the HSCP website.
- Comms development – joint posters between Health & Social Care.

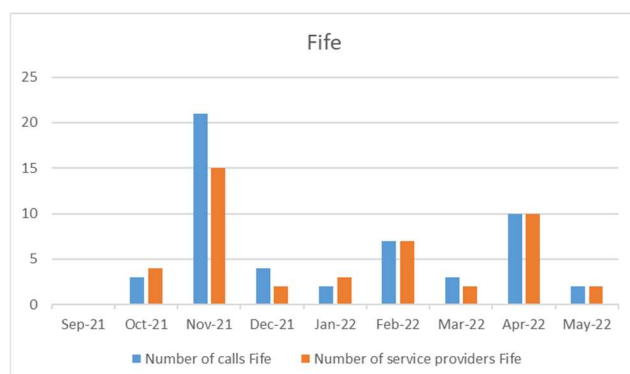
Enablers:

- Head of Service involvement and operational leadership.
- Project Team consisting of Senior Practitioners & Information Governance Lead.
- Innovative project team members who have embraced the improvement approach of iterative testing, reflecting, adapting & adopting.
- Near Me is now a standing agenda item in management meetings.
- Recognition of the culture change required to support sustained change and further growth.
- Governance structure in place.
- Openness to liaise with and social work peers in other project HSCPs.
- Collaboration with the NHS Fife Near Me lead.
- Dedicated program & project management is currently being recruited, to support scale up & spread.

Spread Plan:

- Near Me into Adult Services.
- A&E - Emergency Care including processes to support Hospital Duty staff to link with the Duty Social Work Older Peoples Team.
- Public direct access to Duty Social Worker via Fife Council website
- Explore the use of Group Consulting for Adult with Incapacity Meetings (AWI) cases.

Uptake graph for Fife demonstrates ongoing use with a spread of staff using it. There were more service providers than calls in October 21 & January 22, this indicates that there was more than one social worker in the same call. This was likely staff training but highlights how more than one professional can join the same appointment.



Argyll and Bute – Children and Families

Current Use:

- Near Me is being offered to exiting clients as part of their day-to-day engagement.
- Used to support antenatal appointments, participation from both midwives and prospective parents.
- Currently testing the Group Consulting functionality.

Challenges/Barriers:

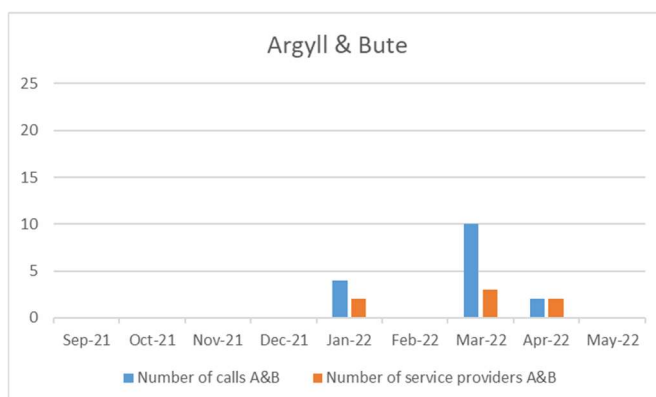
- Clients at initial contact with Duty declined the offer of Near Me.

Enablers:

- Practice Leads involved with a spread of staff including admin.
- NHS Highland (Argyll & Bute) Near Me Lead support.
- Support with data collection.

Spread Plan:

- Day to day Duty - especially families living on islands.
- Emergency duty (Out of Hours).
- Use of Group Consulting – supporting foster families.



Uptake chart reflects training in January and live calls with clients in March & April. It does not capture the calls through antenatal services; however, these have been the catalyst to explore the group functionality further.

South Ayrshire - Children & Families

Current Use:

- Continuity of service whilst staff have been isolating with Covid.
- Day to day contacts with existing clients.

Challenges/Barriers:

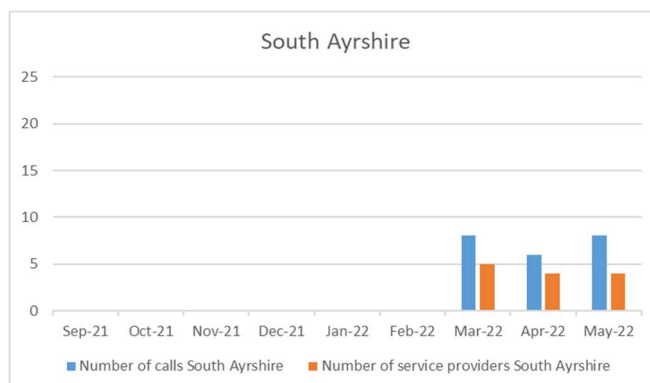
- Project Team not identified at the start of the program and Project Lead leaving post.
- For first time appointments/conversations, video would not be appropriate.

Enablers:

- New project leadership with an IT (Information Technology) development background.
- Multiple teams testing Near Me.
- Governance structure established.

Spread Plan:

- Link in with 3rd Sector Organisations.
- Exploring how Near Me could support:
 - Mental Health Teams
 - Care at Home services
 - Occupational Therapy



South Ayrshire has been slow to start but with a change in leadership, it has gathered traction. The majority of calls have been with clients.

North Lanarkshire – Out of Hours Duty (OOH)

Current use:

- Team trained to use Consult Now in Out of Hours duty.

Challenges/barriers:

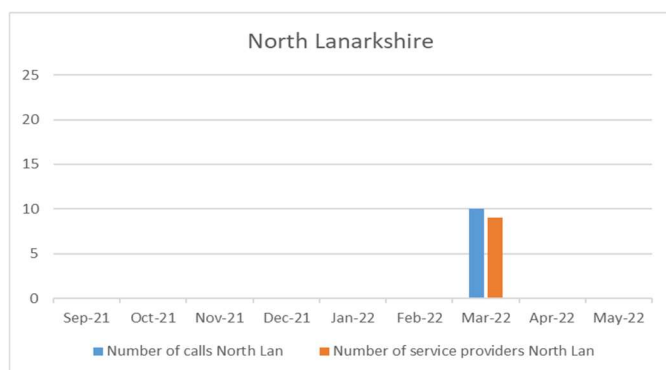
- Core staff who are familiar with Near Me not always on OOH duty.

Enablers:

- Learning from Day Duty (ACCESS) use of Near Me.
- Recruitment of a Project Manager.
- Recognition that from an ongoing governance perspective there was a local need to move waiting areas ownership from NHS Lanarkshire to North Lanarkshire Council.
- Staff recognise the potential although use has been low.

Spread Plan:

- Desire for Near Me to become a wider corporate tool.
- Plan to train other staff within Social Work services.



The data for North Lanarkshire reflects the time spent in developing their model for delivery and enrollment of a project manager. The activity shows training only.

Falkirk - Adults Services

Current use:

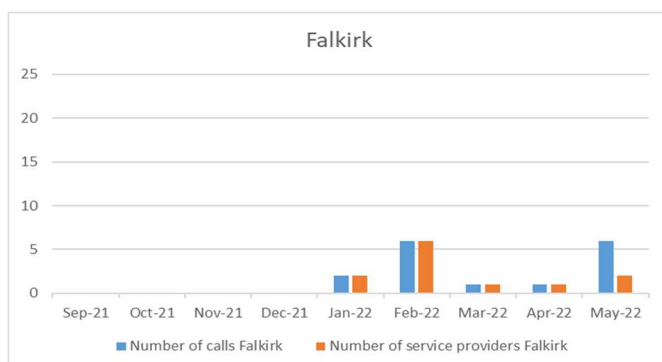
- Familiarisation and Training sessions are currently ongoing in all Localities.
- Focus is on the use of the “Consult Now” functionality.
- A performance reporting tool is being used to monitor and communicate use of the platform.

Challenges/Barriers:

- Security permissions restricting the use of webcams over the local authority network. Now resolved.
- Service pressures on Social Work from vacancies, absences and the recovery from the COVID pandemic has impacted on social work capacity to participate.

Enablers:

- Shared learning from the Fife Operational Leads. This informed Falkirk’s approach going forward.
- The development of a reporting template and process to share data monthly with Locality and Team Managers.
- Governance and decision-making processes..
- The project benefited from learning attained through the Living Well Falkirk Advice Hub pilot project, which used Near Me to deliver drop-in community led support appointments.
- A Social Care Officer champion who has shared their experience Spread plan:
- Recruit two roles for project scale-up.
- Develop of case studies to be used as good practice examples.
- Develop waiting room processes.
- Further training and support.
- Wider spread including the potential for use in Care at Home services and in combination with the Living Well Falkirk platform to support individuals awaiting a Social Work package of care.



Data reflects staff training and testing of the Consult Now function in February. All May calls have been live with clients.