designing better services together
A bit about us

Age UK Newcastle and Quality of Life Partnership have been using design for the past two years to help improve services for older people.

We have been engaged in a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP), which is a UK-wide programme enabling organisations to improve their competitiveness, productivity and performance by introducing new skills and expertise with the support of an academic institution.

Through the KTP, Northumbria University’s School of Design has been helping Age UK Newcastle and Quality of Life Partnership to use Service Design to develop and implement a coherent, sustainable suite of services that provides a better experience for their customers and volunteers.

Northumbria University’s School of Design applied their knowledge and expertise to embed Service Design processes within the organisations. Establishing a more creative, user-focused practice ensured that the organisations could continue to develop and provide high quality, customer-centred services after the completion of the KTP.

There have been many successes throughout the project, and whilst we don’t have the blueprint for the perfect service, we have some great examples of how design has helped the organisations to be more responsive, sustainable and customer-focused.

We share some of these examples in this report, and hope that it will inspire you to consider how we all might be able to use Service Design to design better services together.

Fran O’Brien,
Head of Business Development (Quality of Life Partnership/Age UK Newcastle)

A foreword about Service Design

We have come to think of ‘services’ as the offerings of big public and private sector organisations to people as patients, users and customers. But of course the thing that fundamentally characterises a service is the nature of the interaction between two individuals, giving and sharing values and experiences.

The quality of any service is based on this principle and it is this that also characterises the nature of the working relationship that has been built and reported here between Age UK Newcastle and Quality of Life Partnership and Northumbria University, School of Design.

Professor Robert Young,
Chair of Design Practice, School of Design, Northumbria University
### The project in numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>Older people engaged in research into Age UK Newcastle’s café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Editions of a new information campaign, ‘Just What I Need’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Organisational blueprint for ideal customer experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>New Service Design partnerships established in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Isolated older people introduced to social networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>People joined new activity classes as a result of new brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Product Inspiration and Creativity Kit to help stakeholders to use Service Design tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New brand identity for Quality of Life Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New partnerships formed as a result of ‘Just What I Need’ information campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>New ‘Just What I Need’ volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New look annual report for Age UK Newcastle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Successful partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500+</td>
<td>Papers published in international journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000’s</td>
<td>Photos taken by staff adopting a visual research approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£6000</td>
<td>Worth of funding gained as a result of Service Design work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>New strategic principles for Age UK Newcastle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Staff now trained in creative writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Conference presentations to national and international audiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following sections of this report describe each stage of a design project process: ‘Discover’, ‘Define’, ‘Develop’ and ‘Deliver’. Although there are four distinct stages, it is an iterative process. This can be seen in the diagram to the right, which is an adaptation of the ‘Double Diamond’ diagram that was developed by the UK Design Council to illustrate the design process.

In this report, we have described how three different projects were conducted at each of these stages, and how using a Service Design approach added value in each case.

The three case studies are as follows:

**Story 1: Service Design in Principle**
This case study describes how project stakeholders were introduced to the different stages of the Service Design process and taught about the principles and value of the approach.

The ‘Staff Safari’ activity was conducted with Age UK Newcastle staff to help them to think from a customer point of view and consider the experience that they provide. It was an important activity that helped staff to contribute ideas and opinions, and demonstrated the value of Service Design.

**Story 2: Service Design in Practice**
This case study demonstrates how Service Design methods were applied to a working service to help develop it to be a more customer-focused offer.

A Service Design approach was used to help the Befriending Service at Age UK Newcastle to re-assess its services, and identify possible development options to suit the changing needs and aspirations of older people.

**Story 3: Service Design for the Future**
This case study describes how the Service Design approach was used to help Age UK Newcastle understand how it might need to operate to meet the needs of future customers.

We wanted to uncover and understand the customer service expectations of current and potential customers of Age UK Newcastle and other older people’s services. By understanding these expectations, Age UK Newcastle could then try to respond to these in the services that they offer currently, and those that they develop in the future.
**Discover** is a really important stage in a project as it helps the team to understand the problem area; it can help to identify the specific issue, opportunity or customer need that should be addressed. The activities help the project team to get to the root of the issue, and understand all the aspects that affect it so that a refined, appropriate solution can be produced.

A lot of information is normally gathered at this stage; it is important to interrogate thoroughly the issue and not discount any line of enquiry early on. All of the ‘Discover’ activities should help the project team to keep their perspectives wide to allow for a broad range of ideas and influences and contribute new information to the project space.

**Discover in principle:**

**Staff Safari Fortnight Kit**

To help staff to connect with the service they were providing at Age UK Newcastle, we organised a Staff Safari Fortnight. Everyone was provided with a disposable camera and asked to take photographs of things that represented good customer experience and customer experience that needed to be improved, both within and outside of Age UK Newcastle. Participants were also asked to take photographs of things that they would like to see in the organisation.

The activity was designed to help staff to see their service from their customer’s perspective, and also to think of what they value about customer experience in other environments.

Staff were also given a guide to help them use the camera and a space to write notes to remind themselves of the photos they had taken, and why. They also had permission forms for people to sign if they took photographs of individuals.

**Discover in practice:**

**Social Contact User Research**

The project team wanted to get to the root of the issues that lead to someone becoming socially isolated and lonely. Each research activity was carefully designed with the staff team, focusing on the needs of the participants, and how best to elicit the information whilst providing an enjoyable experience for them.

First we invited people currently receiving Befriending to come to an event to share their experiences and opinions. To prompt discussion, we introduced two fictional characters and asked participants to suggest things that could improve the characters’ quality of life. By creating characters in familiar circumstances and asking participants to consider what they may need and how we could help them, this allowed people to think about their own needs without feeling embarrassed in the group setting.

To get the opinions of people on the waiting list, and those who couldn’t travel, we visited people in their homes. Participants were asked to complete a diary sheet to share with us what they usually did on a day-to-day basis, and this formed the basis of an interview. Interviewers had conversation tips, feeder questions and visual prompts to help them be truly responsive to the participant, whilst gathering the necessary information.

We also asked participants if we could film the interview, and take photographs of them and the things that were of value to them. Almost every older person involved agreed to this, and actually enjoyed the attention being paid to them and their belongings, making for a rich, interesting conversation.

*An example diary sheet*
Discover for the future: Research to Understand Customers of the Future

To find out what older people wanted from a service provided by Age UK Newcastle, both now and in the future, we organised a series of workshops with current customers and potential customers of older people’s services. To gain a broad spectrum of insights, we held 10 workshops with participants of varying ages, ethnicity, backgrounds and abilities.

In these workshops, we asked participants to imagine that they owned or ran a service, and asked them what they would do to make it the best service possible e.g. ‘if you owned a Post Office, how would you make it the best Post Office in the world?’ We posed this question about a Post Office, a Library and then finally an older person’s group, to uncover the themes behind good customer experience.

By discussing everyday services, all participants were able to contribute to the discussion, and we uncovered what people wanted and expected from a customer experience in different contexts, including services that people pay for, and also those that are free.

We created a very relaxed environment, and worked with existing groups, so that people felt comfortable to share their opinions. The workshop was also relatively unstructured so that we could probe interesting comments as they came up in the conversation. We used prompt photographs of the example services from across the world and throughout history to help people recall their different experiences. To encourage people to be as imaginative as possible, we also set no limitations in terms of size and resources available, so that people could truly express their ideal version of each service.
The Define stage helps the project team to form a specific question to address, based on the research and knowledge gathered in the ‘Discover’ stage.

During the ‘Define’ stage, the team filter the information gathered and analyse the findings to help, ‘Define’ and refine the problem areas that need to be addressed. Decisions are taken at this stage in order to formulate a brief with actionable tasks on which a service development can be based.

Define in principle:
Staff Safari Feedback Workshop

In the weeks following Staff Safari Fortnight, each service team was involved in a workshop to share their photographs.

Each team member was given their photographs and asked to write a brief description on a Post-it note if the picture wasn’t clear. They then stuck their photographs onto the wall underneath the category they represented.

The teams then talked about the photographs they had taken, sharing what they each thought represented good customer experience, and experience that needed to be improved, in different contexts. Having visual reminders allowed the staff to recall the thoughts represented good customer experience, and experience that needed to be improved.

The teams then used the profiles to ensure we created solutions for real people; drawing out the important information to help us to develop new ideas that would address their needs.

The project team considered all the data gathered simultaneously to help pinpoint progression; enhancing the existing offer and more volunteering roles, and used these to inform the ‘Develop’ stage of the work.

Define in practice:
Social Contact Research Findings

To capture each participant’s personal story, we used the photographs we had taken to create profiles of each older person. They helped us to capture data such as family and friends, their typical week, and hobbies and interests in a visually stimulating way. The profiles helped the staff to remember details of interviews, and effectively communicated the content of interviews with other team members.

We then used the profiles to ensure we created solutions for real people; drawing out the important information to help us to develop new ideas that would address their needs.

The project team considered all the data gathered simultaneously to help pinpoint commonalities and differences in our findings, threading the information together to form a more cohesive understanding of what we had discovered. We translated the findings into four distinct areas we needed to address: connecting people with genuine friends; customer progression; enhancing the existing offer and more volunteering roles, and used these to inform the ‘Develop’ stage of the work.

Synthesising the research findings

*Staff sharing the photos they had taken

*Some of the photographs and accompanying notes

*An example participant profile
Define for the future: Customer Service Aspirations

The ‘Discover’ approach helped us to understand where services work well, and also where things need to be improved, allowing us to unpick what people felt were the characteristics of a good service. The order in which the improvements were discussed also showed us the elements that people see as most integral to a service.

To help us look at all of the information gathered simultaneously, we wrote down every point onto a Post-it note, and then grouped similar points together to help us to see the patterns in the information.

From this activity, we found that people’s expectations of customer experience varied depending on many factors including their background, area, income and lifestyle. However, there were a lot of common themes to the views that people expressed, for example, the importance of helpful staff.

Within these common themes, there was still a level of variation in the customer experience people expected. To help communicate these, we translated these standards into four different levels; the lowest level represented the baseline demand that everyone described, and the highest level was the highest expectation expressed by some participants.

We found that even the baseline expectation could still be a high standard of customer experience, but less complex or comprehensive than the highest expectation. In most cases, the higher expectations were expressed more by younger older people we spoke to (50-65 years old), who are historically used to a higher level of choice and customer experience in all services. It is therefore possible that older people’s services are going to see more people demanding services that meet the highest expectations in the future. We decided that Age UK Newcastle and other older people’s services needed to aspire to achieve these expectations when developing new offerings.

*An example of customer expectations

---

Helping people make difficult decisions

Helping people make difficult decisions is critical when it comes to important life events such as moving home.

Having a meeting where all sorts of issues, and further support, can be arranged for.

Developing a programme to target the children to have the conversations with their parents.

Advice tailored to the person, and offered by an expert in the field.
The **Develop** stage of the project sees the refinement of one or more concepts that address the problems or issues identified during the ‘Discover’ and ‘Define’ stages.

Design development methods used here are focused on creating the best solution to meet the defined need, refining it so it can be realised and then bringing this to fruition. At the end of the ‘Develop’ stage, the idea should have the required backing and resources to test the service on a small scale.

**Develop in principle:**

**Making Small Changes**

As a result of observing the service from a customer’s perspective, staff realised there were small changes that could be made to their offer that would have a big impact. More importantly, it also gave staff permission to start making these changes and testing their different ideas.

One such example was the Insurance Office at Age UK Newcastle. By taking a photograph of the entrance to the office, the department staff had realised that it was very difficult to identify what it was, if it was open, and that it was a customer access point. The posters were also covering the only window allowing customers to look in and see that anyone was in the office.

As a result, the staff members created a larger sign identifying the room as the Insurance and Trading office. They also removed the majority of posters and created an ‘Insurance Office Open’ sign to be displayed prominently on the door. These small changes made an immediate impact on the look and feel of the office, and ensured that customers would find it easier to locate the right department.

Other changes that could not immediately be made were shared amongst staff and helped to form the framework for the next stage of the organisation’s plan and research.

The generated ideas were then shared with staff members from across the organisation to get their opinions on which ones should be a priority to develop. From this feedback, and the knowledge gained through the previous stages, the team developed a ‘Telephone Neighbourhoods’ concept. It suggested a way of connecting customers with other customers by forming a ‘neighbourhood’ that contact each other by telephone every week, and the group is supported by a volunteer. It was suggested that once the network was established, the volunteer would gradually withdraw and the network would then self-sustain.

The ‘Telephone Neighbourhood’ concept was well received by staff across the organisation. Some of the other generated ideas also provided inspiration for other departments and inspired them to review their current offers to older people and create more appropriate options.
Develop for the future:
An Organisational Proposition

To help develop ideas to address the service aspirations highlighted in the ‘Define’ stage, we held a workshop with key people from Age UK Newcastle, Quality of Life Partnership and Northumbria University’s School of Design.

During this ‘creativity day’ we brainstormed ideas around different scenarios for future customers to stimulate thinking about how the organisation needs to develop and respond.

After the event, all of the generated ideas were disseminated in their original format so people could draw inspiration from all ideas, before the project team went on to filter them.

A strong theme that arose from the day was that there is a need to challenge people’s preconceptions of the organisation and make it easier for them to access our services. To respond to this, we developed an organisational proposition that created an informal front for the charity by having the first access point laid out like a café. The staff in the café would all be properly trained to signpost customers to the correct part of the organisation, and much of the less sensitive information would be given out in this relaxed, friendly environment. It was also suggested that we could use a takeaway business to produce another income to support the charitable work of Age UK Newcastle, as well as provide some great marketing opportunities through the packaging material.

This concept, and the suggested supporting services, were shared with the senior management team and received very positive feedback that gave the green light to develop this further.
The Deliver stage of the project process is where the final concept is taken through final testing, approved by stakeholders, and then finally launched.

The activities at this point ensure that the concept successfully addresses the problem identified during the ‘Discover’ stage. It will include testing the idea out on a small scale to ensure it works as intended. It also puts in place processes for gaining feedback to inform the development of the service in the future, and that of any complementary services.

**Deliver in principle:**

**Customer Checklist**

Although the Staff Safari had resulted in some small changes and contributed to future plans, we still wanted to capture the great ideas that staff had found on their Safari.

We produced a 20-point checklist of ‘things that make for a great customer experience (as decided by Age UK Newcastle staff). The list was written in the first person to remind staff that these were the things that were important to them as a customer and that they should try to emulate when providing or developing services. Every member of the organisation got a copy of the list, and was asked to display it at their work station so that they could refer to it, and be reminded of what they had observed, on a daily basis.

To explain to everyone where each point had come from, and share some of the great stories that accompanied it, we created a presentation that was shown at a meeting of all Age UK Newcastle staff. It gave everyone the opportunity to see what other people had observed, and be inspired by the different examples of great customer service they had found.

To test how the service would work in practice, and to see how it would affect capacity, we decided to pilot it with a small group. We created a ‘Neighbourhood Pack’ that includes all the information that members would need to introduce them to the Neighbourhood and their fellow neighbours. The monitoring and feedback processes were also carefully designed to capture the information that will show if the service is effective and efficient, and will give the project team the opportunity to refine the model before launching at full scale if appropriate. The Neighbourhood will be tested in Autumn 2011.

**Telephone in practice:**

**Telephone Neighbourhood**

To check that the Telephone Neighbourhood would work for the older people in receipt of Befriending and on the waiting list for the service, we invited them in for a coffee morning to share our idea.

We used an illustrated customer journey to explain how each step of the service would work. We gained very positive feedback for the participants, and as a result, four people said they would like to join a Neighbourhood.

To explain to everyone where each point had come from, and share some of the great stories that accompanied it, we created a presentation that was shown at a meeting of all Age UK Newcastle staff. It gave everyone the opportunity to see what other people had observed, and be inspired by the different examples of great customer service they had found.
After achieving staff buy-in, and sharing the idea with all project stakeholders, the café concept is now forming the foundation of the organisation’s future plans.

It was felt that a renovated space would act as a prototype for a café concept customer resource centre, with a plan to launch this on a bigger scale if successful.

To develop an existing space to work for the services that would be located there, the designer sketched out different options of floor plans based on the information gathered in the ‘Discover’ stage of various projects. They then used masking tape to plot out the space to see how the drawing would translate to the room dimensions. These suggestions were then shared with staff members, and they used the masking tape floor plan to act out different service scenarios to see if there was adequate space. Alterations were made using the masking tape as issues arose, until a final iteration was agreed.

The outcome of this Service Design and prototyping effort was a rich, user-centred brief which was used to engage an Interior Designer and Architect.

It is hoped that the new-look customer resource centre will be opened in early 2012.

What we’ve found

Engaging ‘service users’ in the work of voluntary and public sector organisations is both a concept and practice which many organisations embrace. However, terms like co-production and co-design are widely used, but not necessarily undertaken properly. There is often insufficient understanding of the quality and depth of the activity which needs to underpin these processes if they are to be successful.

We have found that using a Service Design approach has enabled managers, staff and service recipients to engage in service development in a different way by going on the journey together. The process provided a safe space for constructive feedback, opportunities to understand the subtleties of expectations and perceptions, and an approach for testing out new ideas as part of the design and development of services. We feel that Service Design offers both a rigour and creativity to service development, and complements more routine forms of engagement such as surveys, audits or focus group discussions.

The use of images and imaginative presentation as part of the Service Design process is very effective in enabling people to quickly get to the heart of the matter. In many existing engagement processes, the use of this type of imagery, be it photographs, video or illustration, may be regarded as a luxury rather than an essential. However, we have found that visualising an idea, process or system has a profound impact on a stakeholder’s ability to understand the content, and particularly their likelihood to contribute good quality feedback.

As public resources become tighter, the need for evidence-based practice becomes more important. We feel that Service Design offers a rigorous approach which provides the evidence base for service re-design and development.

This programme has had a wide-reaching impact that is making our organisations more customer-focused, more sustainable and more responsive.

We hope that our experience has encouraged more people and organisations to consider how they design their services in the future.

Barbara Douglas,
Strategic Director, Quality of Life Partnership
With thanks to...

All members of staff at Age UK Newcastle, Quality of Life Partnership and Northumbria University School of Design. Particularly, Fran O’Brien, Barbara Douglas, Mark Bailey, Matt Lievesley and Louise Taylor who have worked tirelessly to make the project a success. Thanks also to the Technology Strategy Board who supported this work through the Knowledge Transfer Partnership Scheme, and the invaluable guidance of Richard Parker-Smith, the KTP adviser for this project. Many thanks also to other partner organisations who have given their time and support to this work.

We would like to give special thanks to all of the older people who have contributed their valued thoughts and opinions throughout this programme.

Contact us

To find out more about how the project worked within the organisation, contact: Fran O’Brien, Deputy Chief Executive, Age UK Newcastle and Head of Business Development (Quality of Life Partnership/Age UK Newcastle)
Quality of Life Partnership, MEA House, Ellison Place, Newcastle, NE1 8XS
fran.obrien@qualityoflife.org.uk

To find out more about how Northumbria University can help to support your work, contact: Matthew Lievesley, Design Manager, Centre for Design Research, School of Design Centre for Design Research, Northumbria University, City Campus East, Newcastle, NE1 8ST
matthew.lievesley@unn.ac.uk

To find out more about tools or methods used during the project, contact: Laura Warwick, Service Designer
Quality of Life Partnership, MEA House, Ellison Place, Newcastle, NE1 8XS
laura.warwick@qualityoflife.org.uk