Tech for Good

Matt Hawthorn, Reason Digital, Social Enterprise based in Manchester City Centre, – working in partnership with VCSE Organisations.

Reason Digital designed a private secure phone app in response to the number of attacks on sex workers, the app allows sex workers, to inform other sex workers and MASH of any potential or actual danger of attack so the word could be got out to a wider group of workers. A paper proto type of this safety application was developed and Reason Digital went out to have discussions with sex workers as a consultation exercise. As a result of the consultation, they developed a safety application which has resulted in the saving of a lives. Ugly Mugs – Learnt about how a perpetrator attacked four victims within the space of an hour.

Matt pointed out that it is not only about delivering services, tech for good can also be used in other ways. He gave a good example of work done with charity shops to enable people to get rid of their unwanted goods, and delivered to the charity shop. Reason Digital talked to the charity shop workers and volunteers and the app was designed to provide alerts to charity shops who have signed up, hat donations are available for collection. £1m worth of goods have been raised for charities as a result of the application. The next phase of this work, is to work with the charity shops around the infrastructure for collection and delivery.

Matt played a short video of Barbara, who demonstrated how effective technology can be to reduce isolation. Matt explained Reason Digital work with Age UK around loneliness. They had an existing service called "Call in Time", they wanted to digitise this and people can now match volunteers with lonely older people. They also wanted to set up a system where the phone rang in the older people's home, this was achieved and Age UK are now able to help

James Medd, The Landing – 3d Printing

We create products that don't exist yet using 3d printers (if you can draw it in a computer you can create it and hold it in your hands within a few minutes). James talked about an entrepreneur called Rachel who was trying to create tubs for tactile, light up objects, one was created through a 3d printer.

We work with Drake Music, a charity supporting people with disabilities, creating pathways using technology to enable them to make music. They looked at the problems and issues that people were facing and created devices to assist.

We are also working with Salford Royal Foundation Trust, taking data from a CT scanner or MRI and turn them into 3d objects. In the last fortnight (a world first) they have developed new medical technology to assist with spinal surgery. Using the Scanner, they are able to create a device to support spinal surgery. They are running a NHS Digital event at the landing at present.

Lesmond Taylor – Eagle Eye

Salford CVS have been working for the past two years, supporting people with Dementia. There has been a national challenge to better support people with Dementia. Les provided facts and figures about the number of people living with Dementia, their age profile (U65), number of carers, projected number by 2020 and the total cost to the system.

Why develop an App – Salford Dementia Action Alliance. Initially there were 60 organisations around the table wanting to support people with Dementia. There were no businesses around the table so the Chamber of Commerce and Business Group were approached to try and found out why businesses would not engage.

What the Alliance came up with was an App. The app was designed with the opportunity for businesses to send out notifications about offers they have. The Salford Way App – It is an opportunity for people in the City to identify what services are available for people with Dementia (that are Dementia friendly). There are 230 business involved and they are being trained to enable them to be more Dementia aware and Dementia friendly.

The businesses get a profile on the app and people with Dementia and / or their carers can call the business directly or can use the app to navigate directions on how to get there.

Why is this important?

People living with Dementia normally withdraw from society and this app helps them to keep engaged with society.

Questions/Next Steps

Q: From a technological point of view is there anything you can feedback about any challenges when working with the VCSE Sector?

Matt: Yes there are, these are around the VCSE Sector shifting their thinking, understanding and mitigating risks and the fast pace of technological change. He also talked about the VCSE sectors lack of budgets available for this type of innovation. He felt that many of the challenges can be overcome by using an agile approach like the example Matt gave around the paper based prototype consultation with the sex workers.

James: Technological people need to be guided by the charity, spending time explaining the needs/requirements of the organisation and or their beneficiaries is crucial

Q: What would be an ideal approach from a small to medium sized organisations

Matt: One of the most helpful things that people could come with is a hypothesis of what is needed. What are the needs of the beneficiaries, what problems they are trying to solve. Technology can be quite disempowering to the sector, it is more about the problem rather than the tech.

James: Identify what the problems are, and why the organisation feels it needs to be done.

Q: Apps for measuring outcomes – There are apps around that can be used for this by the beneficiaries directly, Marie spoke about Menti.Com as a good example of how this can be used to develop survey's etc. What Works Centre website has a number of things that could be accessed? One of the participants also talked Volunteer Management Database which can measure the impact volunteers make within organisations.