



Digital Families

How do we support families better online?



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Part one: Introduction



1. Background

Digital Families was created by Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (Scottish Families) with the main aim of finding the answer to 'how do we support families better online?'

After a review in August 2018 of our website www.sfad.org.uk and online services (e.g. webchat, forum and chat room) we found there was a low engagement rate across the entire website. The forum and chat room were introduced in a website redesign in April 2018. The intention of both online support services was to create an online community of peer support. However there was a delay between the website redesign planning and the actual delivery of the design, during which time, forums and chat rooms were moving out of favour with people.



Digital Families is therefore a research and evidence-based project. We have researched online services from other charities and have collected data through a range of activities from our key audiences including an online digital survey and one-to-one website user tests. These activities will help us understand the digital skills and needs of our audiences and to adapt our website and online support services based on their recommendations and insights.

2. Context

There are many people in Scotland who are living with the impact and consequences of someone else's alcohol or drug use. These individuals have nowhere to go for support for themselves and feel stressed, stigmatised and alone. The advantage of online support services is that individuals can find information and support for themselves sooner rather than later and do not have to travel to a service or group. There are however some barriers to this.

2a. Barriers of going online



Getting online requires basic digital skills of being able to search, navigate and use a range of websites and online services. It requires a device that connects to the internet and a high quality, reliable broadband connection. There is also the extra skill of having to understand how to use social media channels. People need to have knowledge about staying safe online and having the right cyber security skills. All of these digital skills are necessary for someone looking to use an online support service.

Digital technology has become ingrained in all of our lives, whether it be reading news, viewing train times, booking holidays, signing up for a course, buying your shopping, etc. There are many everyday things that we all do that now requires you to use the internet. Even though many things are now online, there are reportedly 4.3 million people (8%) in the UK with no basic digital skills at all (Lloyds Bank, 2018).¹

Another barrier of going online is that it costs money. The average household monthly spend on

¹ UK Consumer Digital Index 2018, London: Lloyds Bank

communications services (broadband, mobile phone contracts, etc.) is £124.62 (Ofcom 2018).² It is said that around one in ten adults have had difficulty paying for communications services.³ Citizens Advice Scotland ran a survey and found that two of the three most common barriers preventing people from using the internet related to money.⁴

Money is one major barrier to going online, but there are still places throughout the UK that cannot access a basic broadband service, even if they can afford it. According to Ofcom, 2% of the UK cannot access a fixed broadband service and this increases to 12% in rural areas (Ofcom 2018).⁵

‘Those in rural areas can struggle to access even basic broadband, as connections can also slow due to increased demand resulting from heavy use of video, high numbers of users at peak times, and even weather problems’ (Bowyer 2019).⁶

Taking all of this information into account lets us know that when thinking about designing an online support service, you need to know that the three main barriers are:

- Knowledge
- Location
- Costs

2b. Aim of Digital Families

Through our activities we gathered supporting evidence from individuals on these three barriers and their thoughts about going online and using an online support service. The groups we targeted were:

- People affected by someone else’s alcohol or drug use
- Organisations who support families/people with alcohol or drug problems
- Family support groups

These groups will help us understand the digital skills, needs, and the attitudes and opinions of online support services. Through this collection of data, we will redesign our website and our online services so that they answer to a person’s digital needs, and allow anyone to reach out for support and connect with others in a similar situation.

3. Methodology

A number of online and offline activities were carried out to gather as much informative evidence as possible.



3a. Digital Families activities

Online Digital Survey
71 responses collected



Support Group Facilitator
Social Media Training
8 attendees



Contact organisations for
conversations about online
services
4 organisations



One-to-one website user
tests
4 tests completed from people
with different levels of digital
skills



Collected between January 2019 – March 2019

- The survey was created on SurveyMonkey and was sent out to subscribers on our mailing list, posted on our website and posted across our social media channels.
- A paper-copy was also created and sent to our family support groups.

Delivered on the 25th February 2019

- The training was advertised through our mailing list and social media channels. It was tailored specifically to support group practitioners who felt they needed training on how to engage with their audiences.
- 8 people attended from a range of services and groups including: [Families Outside](#), [Step Together Family Support](#), [My Support Day](#) and [VOCAL](#).

Collected between November 2018 – January 2019

- Four organisations were contacted about their online support services.
- We had conversations with: MS Society, Adfam, Nacoa and Addaction.

Collected between January 2019 – February 2019

- Two tests were carried out with four different people. With the first test, people were asked to complete seven separate activities on finding information and navigating the Scottish Families website.
- On the second test, people were asked to give their opinions on the website and its content.

4. About Scottish Families

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs is a national charity which supports anyone concerned about someone else's alcohol or drug use in Scotland. We give information and advice to many people and help them with confidence, communication, general wellbeing, and we link them into local support. We also help people recognise and understand the important of looking after themselves.

We support people through our helpline, bereavement support service, Telehealth (one-to-one support), and our family support services in Aberdeenshire, East Dunbartonshire and Forth Valley. We also deliver workforce development through our training courses, communications and campaigning work, our young person's project in East and West Dunbartonshire, and wider community development including our Connecting Families programme.

We work to five main outcomes:

- Families are supported
- Families are included
- Families are recognised
- Families are connected to communities
- Families are a movement for change.

[Our strategic plan 2017-2020 'It's All Relative'](#)

[Our impact report 2018/19](#)



5. Current data from Scottish Families website

For a clearer understanding of how people currently access and use our website, we monitored the website monthly from 1st April 2018 (the month the Scottish Families website was relaunched) to 1st April 2019 for a 12-month evaluation.

After the website redesign, there were a few issues with the Google Analytics tracking code. An updated sitemap was not submitted to Google and there were many broken links that were not given redirects. Because of this, the analytical data for April and May 2018 was non-existent.

Average/Total for 01 April 2018 - 01 April 2019

Page Views	96,594
Visitors	38,440
Average time on page	00:01:44
Bounce rate	71.90%

Glossary of terms	
Page Views	The total number of pages that people have visited
Visitors	The total number of people who have visited the website
Average time on page	The average total of how long a person viewed a page
Bounce rate	The percentage of people who go to the website and do nothing on the page they have entered from

Having a high bounce rate can mean three things:

1. The quality of the page is low. There's nothing inviting to engage with.
2. Your audience doesn't match the purpose of the page – it isn't relevant to them.
3. Visitors have found the information they were looking for.¹

It is very noticeable that we have a high bounce rate on our website (71.90%) and we are still figuring out ways to understand if this is a good measurement or a bad one. As a good measurement, our webchat and helpline contact details are the first things people will see if they come in through our main page. If this means that people are getting the information they need instantly and are leaving to contact us, then the high bounce rate is a good metric. If it is a bad measurement, it means that our website does not have the correct search engine optimisation and correct content that our audience is looking for, or it is not easy to find or user-friendly.

¹ <https://yoast.com/understanding-bounce-rate-google-analytics/>

Breakdown of online services pages:

Page	Page Views	% compared to overall views (96,594)	Average time on page	Bounce rate
Homepage	17,176	17.79%	00:01:46	47.04%
/service-directory	8,770	9.08%	00:01:40	53.73%
/communities/ message-boards (forum)	761	0.79%	00:01:12	55.10%
/register (site registration)	232	0.24%	00:01:10	20.00%
/communities/ blog-spot	194	0.20%	00:00:49	60.00%
/communities/ chat-room	194	0.20%	00:02:19	16.67%

When we consider the 96,594 overall page views, it is disappointing to see only 0.79% of those views visited the forum, and 0.20% the chat room. There are links to both of these services on the main page but they are not getting the views that we would like. From the 761 views to the forum, only 2-3 of these views became a forum post.

The heat map below of our website shows the tabs at the top of the site are the most used, and anything under the main photo banner is not getting picked up by visitors, including the forum tab. We have not included the full heat map image because there were zero clicks below the four tabs.

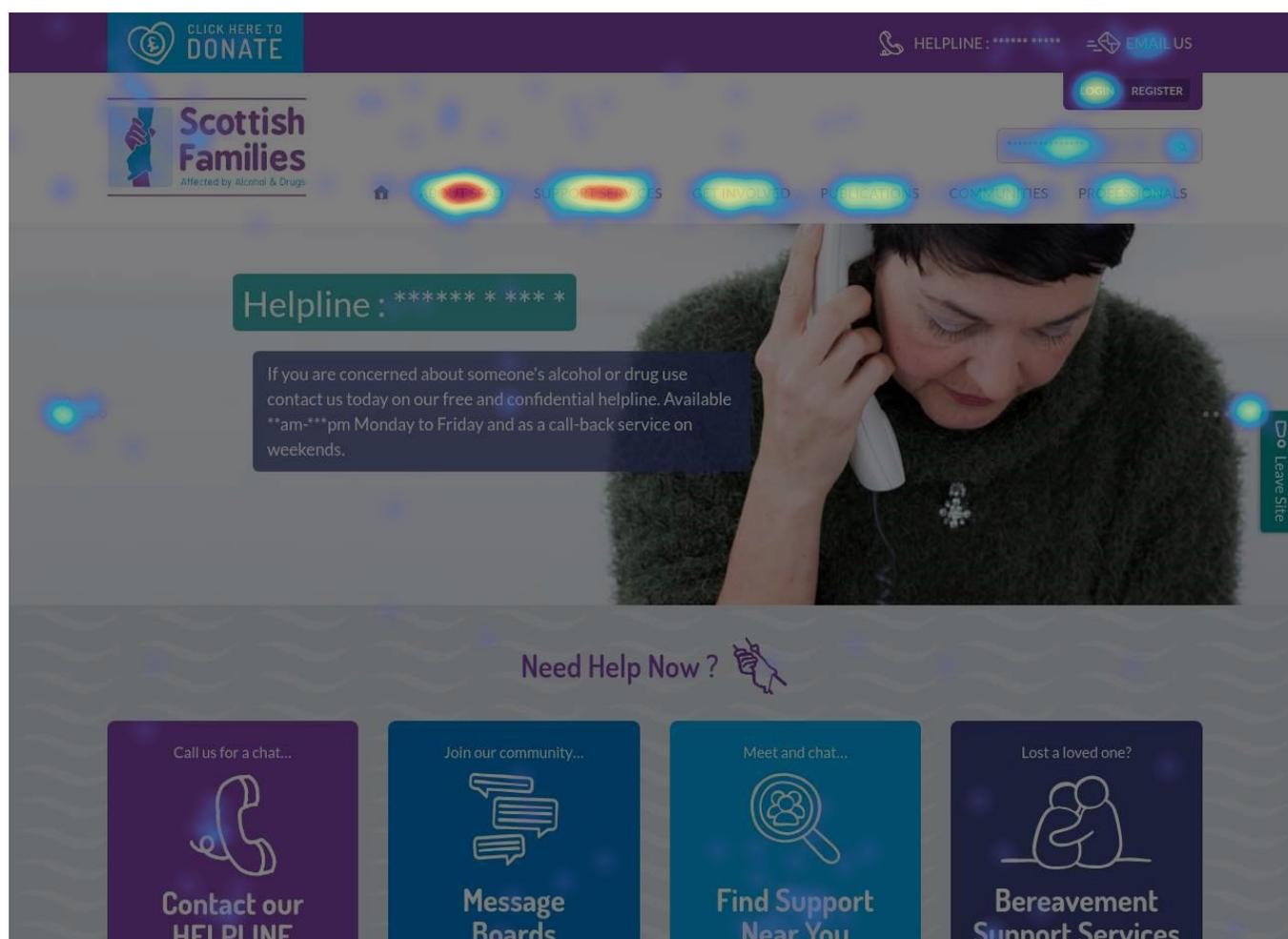


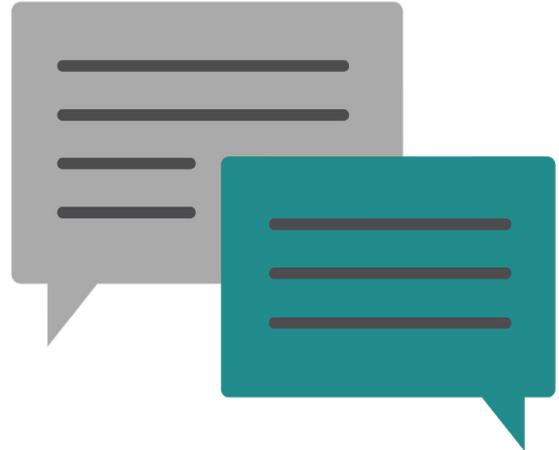
Figure 1 – Heat map of Scottish Families Website (total of 2000 views)

It is difficult to consider the views to the forum and the service directory as all being individual users coming to our website as we have helpline advisers who use these services regularly when they are taking calls, emails and webchats. The page views will be a mix of adviser views and individual visitor views.

Ever since the redesign of our website, the page views and visitors have been steadily increasing month by month with the main referral path being organic search. (Organic search is people finding us naturally without paid advertisement). Our website is being viewed more, but our chat room and forum are just not of interest to anyone visiting. We believe this may be down to our webchat service which is used daily by people on our website - people favour it more than the message boards and chat room.

Monthly breakdown of webchats:

Month	Chats
Apr-18	24
May-18	19
Jun-18	50
Jul-18	47
Aug-18	49
Sep-18	19
Oct-18	37
Nov-18	54
Dec-18	24
Jan-19	64
Feb-19	40
Mar-19	34
Total	461



Our webchat service and helpline email (helpline@sfad.org.uk) has overtaken the number of helpline phone calls in our monthly reports as more people are going online looking for support. We collect this data monthly through our helpline key performance indicators. It is possible that because of the webchat, people feel they can ask a question through this platform rather than going through the registration process and then publically sharing their posts on an online forum or a chat room.

It is possible that there are too many ways to get in touch with Scottish Families but only a few ways which don't require registration or sharing your thoughts with others (our helpline email and webchat).

Conclusion

- We are not getting the engagement we would like to see on our website, online forum and chat rooms.
- We would like people to visit more pages on our website but this is currently not happening.
- Our webchat continues to grow every month which is very positive.
- Our page views and monthly visitors to our website continue to grow.

Part two: Research



6. Organisation Research

For a better understanding of well-engaged online support services in action, four organisations were contacted for a conversation about their online service and how it is structured, used and advertised.

We specifically looked for services who worked similarly to our own and who had similar online support services such as a forum or a webchat service. We were unable to make contact with an organisation with a successful chat room.

In each conversation we asked a number of questions on the online service including:

- The initial research and planning stages
- How the service is moderated
- How it is advertised

The organisations chosen for conversations were: MS Society, Addaction, Nacoa and Adfam.

6a. MS Society

Organisation: MS Society

Online Service: Forum

<https://community.mssociety.org.uk/forum>



MS Society is a charity that supports people diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) throughout the UK. In the conversation with MS Society, they said the online forum on their website was well established and has been active for a number of years. The person currently in charge of the forum mentioned that it was already thriving before they joined the organisation.

MS Society currently have a helpline and no webchat on their website.

Understanding the forum:

- It is well established but currently (end of 2018) it is not very accessible to users and is going through a redesign.
- The main traffic to the forum comes from mobile devices but the website isn't optimised well for mobile phone users.
- The forum is self-facilitated and has very little moderating from a member of staff.
- People engage with each other on the forum but don't engage with the charity.
- The forum has been running for 10 years and was built from scratch.

What was understood from MS Society was that their forum has grown organically. People with multiple sclerosis are searching for information online and through careful search engine optimisation they find the forum and are able to go and start conversations with other people living with MS.

There was no evidence for the beginnings of the forum and how it was created so it is not clear

to how the forum has become the well-used online service it is today. However if we consider the time frame, 10 years ago (2008/09) online forums were one of the most popular platforms on the internet and before the rise of social media. One major point that was raised was that people engage with each other on the forums but they do not engage with the charity. This was seen as positive as people were able to find peer support in an online community and this was the intention of the forum.

6b. Nacoa

Organisation: Nacoa

Online service: Forum

<http://www.nacoa.org.uk/messageboards/>



Nacoa is a charity who supports everyone affected by parental alcohol use in the UK. The Nacoa forum has been around for a number of years and is well established. Compared to MS Society, the Nacoa forum is moderated by volunteers who speak directly with the people who post on the forum.

Nacoa currently have a helpline and a helpline email. They do not have webchat on their website.

Understanding the forum:

- The forum was inherited from another organisation who were set up so everyone affected by parental drug or alcohol use could feel less alone.
- The forum is promoted through the Nacoa website, helpline volunteers and the Nacoa Facebook page, and other social media channels.
- The forum is moderated by a team of volunteers. Each volunteer has a separate log-in so that they can reply as themselves, not as Nacoa.

'By responding as themselves and not as Nacoa, volunteers do not need to present as an expert.'

- Volunteers receive an email a day to tell them of new discussions on the forum.
- Nacoa mentioned they would be revising their forum categories as part of an ongoing review, but most of the traffic to the forum currently goes to the alcohol category.
- The forum is moderated. Brand new topics are to be approved of first and go through an initial check.
- Nacoa consider the forum to be slow and steady, and say this is because of the extremely high call numbers on the helpline phone and email.

The Nacoa forum has been built organically. The helpline and email support receives higher volumes of engagement compared to the forum, but the current users of the forum find it positive and worthwhile.

A big takeaway from Nacoa's forum is that it is moderated by their volunteers. They encourage volunteers to engage across the forum, even by starting new discussions or replying to old comments to try and start the conversations again.

6c. Adfam

Organisation: Adfam
Online Service: Forum
<https://adfam.org.uk/>

Adfam is a charity based in England who support families and friends affected by someone else's alcohol or drug use. Through a phone conversation, we learned that their forum has grown organically and has been around for a number of years. Adfam redesigned their website in 2018 and added extra categories to their forum as it was originally one category of 'share your story' which was one of the most popular parts of the website.



Adfam currently have no helpline or webchat. They have a service directory on their website.

Understanding the forum:

- There has been no specific advertisement around the forum and getting people to use it.
- Originally there was one forum category of 'share your story', but now there is 'drugs, alcohol and mental health' and 'bereavement'.
- The bereavement category was added because of a specific project Adfam carried out.
- The forum is named 'chat to others' rather than message boards or online forum.

'It was the most human way to say it. Message boards sounds too business-like and serious.'

- The forum is moderated by a member of staff for safeguarding purposes.

Adfam's forum has grown greatly, especially since their website redesign in 2018. It is all organically grown but because of the specific keywords and language use, people find the option to 'chat to others' easily on both the Adfam website and through search engines.

6d. Addaction

Organisation: Addaction
Online Service: Webchat
<https://www.addaction.org.uk/>



Addaction is a UK-wide organisation that supports people with alcohol and drug problems. It also supports families and friends. The Addaction webchat service has grown greatly since its launch and a lot of research and time was put in to developing the right platform for their audience.

Addaction currently have a webchat and service directory and no helpline phone or email.

Understanding the webchat:

- Live Chat (a webchat platform that can be attached to websites) was chosen after a hired design company did some research on webchat systems and Live Chat was found to have the most benefits.
- Chats begin with a short privacy statement. There is also a dropdown option to see what support people are looking for e.g. 'referral, alcohol, families, etc.'
- There is a Bot Engine (automated response) that will answer specific dropdown options such as finding a local service, self-help information, specific tools or guides, etc.
- The webchat uses pictures of real advisers who are currently online.

'Pictures make it look more real and look like you're talking to a real person, which you are.'

- Webchat hours are specifically 10am – 4pm and 6pm – 9pm on weekdays. It is 11am – 4pm on weekends. Having consistent hours work better for advisers and for people looking for support.
- Five members of staff cover the webchat.
- Advisers can download Live Chat onto their phone and take webchats from there.
- There is a post-chat survey to let people comment on their experience of the webchat.

Addaction spent a great deal of time researching for their webchat and secured an amount of funding specifically for the research and creation of the service. A lot of functionality has gone into the webchat and it is proving to be working well. A major takeaway from the conversation with Addaction is the consistency of the webchat hours. By being online every day at the same time, it creates a reliable support service for both new and returning visitors to the website.

Conclusion

- All of the organisations with an online forum said the service has grown organically but had been around for a number of years (some 10 years+) which was before the likes of social media (Facebook groups, WhatsApp, etc.) became popular.
- All of the organisations that use an online forum do not have a webchat platform on their website.
- Adfam do not have a helpline service or webchat which may be the reason why their online forum performs so well.
- Nacoa have seen a drop in the activity of their forum and have said they believe this is because their helpline and email support is being used more frequently.
- MS Society mentioned that their forum was getting engagement due to celebrities speaking about their diagnosis of MS and the storylines in some television programmes that were highlighting people living with MS.

7. Our Online Digital Survey



One of the first activities we carried out for Digital Families was a digital survey. There were a number of questions and they were categorised under the headings:

- How you get online
- How you use the internet
- Your opinions of online support services
- Scottish Families online support services

The survey was sent to our mailing list, posted on our social media channels and website, and a paper-copy was given to our family support groups. 71 people responded to the digital survey. The graphs below represent the number of people who responded to each question, not an overall percentage.

7a. How you get online

The first question we asked respondents were their age. There was quite a diverse range but the majority are 36 years and above which means the survey did not collect a lot of information from a 'young person's perspective'. In contrast, our website is visited mostly by people in the age range of 25-34.

Do you have a phone?

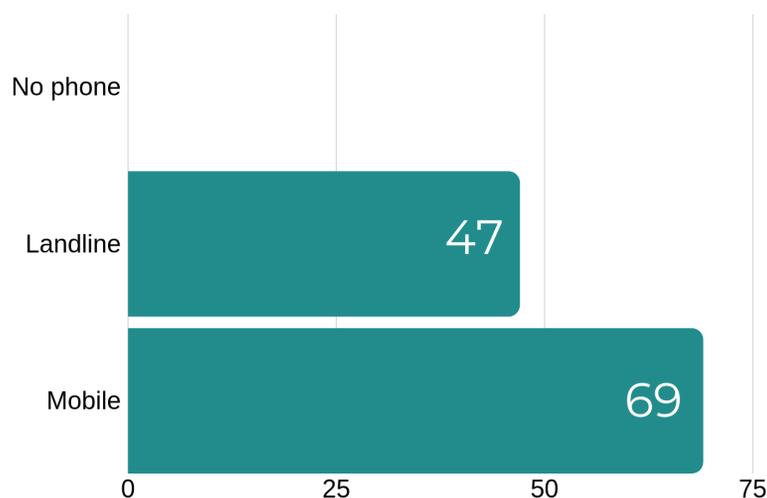


Figure 2 Survey responses to question: do you have a phone?

There is an assumption that most people do have access to a phone but we know through our support services that there are a percentage of people who don't. In our survey, everyone responded to having access either to a mobile or landline, with mobile being the most popular. Some people had both but there were a number of people who either had a mobile and no landline, or no mobile and a landline.

Through our website analytics for 01 April 2018 – 01 April 2019, the most common device used to access our website was a desktop/laptop at 49.88% but very close behind was mobile at 42.87%. Mobile optimisation is in very high demand and due to the rise of smartphones, online support services **must** be easily viewed and used on a mobile.

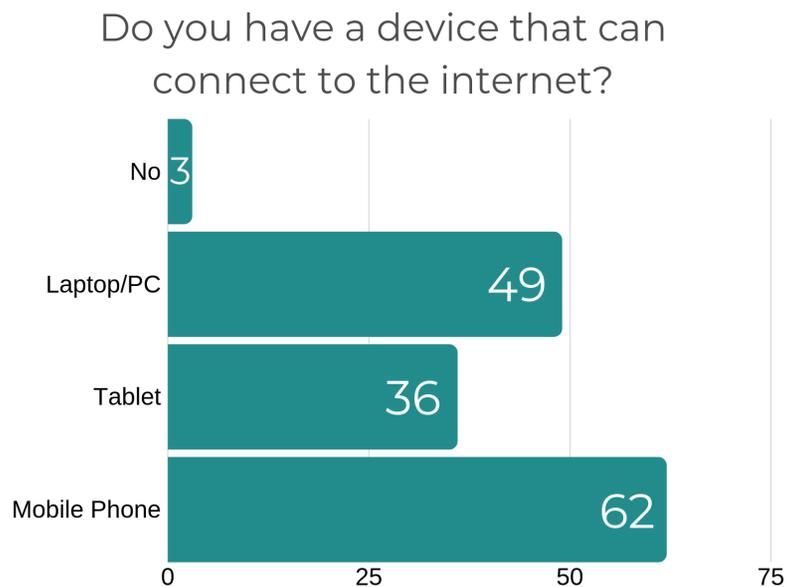


Figure 3 Survey responses to question: do you have a device that can connect to the internet?

Three respondents out of 71 said they did not have any device that connects them to the internet. The majority of people said they had a phone that could connect to the internet which again illustrates the demand for mobile optimisation on the website.

7b. How you use the internet

To understand more of what people would be looking for in an online support service, we asked a number of questions relating to how to get your information online, using social media and if you have experienced any problems.

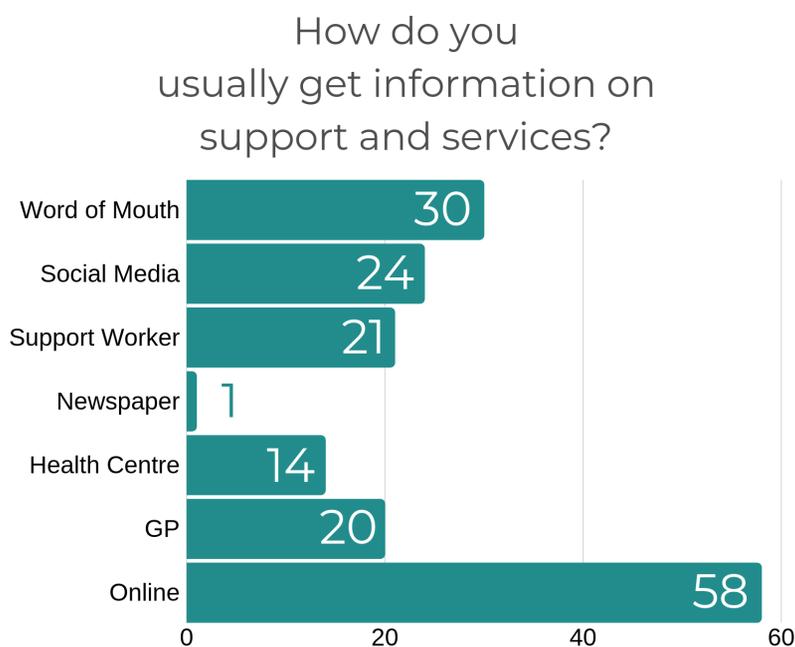


Figure 4 Survey responses to question: How do you usually get information on support and services?

From the above question, most people answered that they would use some form of the internet to find information. However, health centre, GP, support worker and word of mouth is all mainly

offline.

The people that said they found information from their support worker were already engaging with services offline so may have felt that online support was not necessary for them.

One question which had an interesting outcome was asking respondents if they sent personal messages through social media, email, text message or WhatsApp. Text message and WhatsApp was the most popular which may in turn show how support can be taken 'online' through the means of instant messaging.

Respondents were also asked if they had ever used a webchat platform before. There was a divided response with 31 people saying yes, and 30 people saying no. Several of the 'no' responses came from a support group setting with older women who said they had never used webchat to solve their problems.

There was also an interesting response to the question on whether you prefer speaking to a person face-to-face or speaking to a person online (webchat, email, etc.) Most respondents said they preferred speaking to a person face-to-face, but 22 people said they preferred email or webchat. This reflects the feedback that we have had from people who contact our helpline. Of the 461 people who used our webchat between April 2018 and April 2019, 65% said they would not have contacted us by phone if there was no webchat available. 20% said they may contact and only 3% said yes they would contact by phone.

Do you use social media?

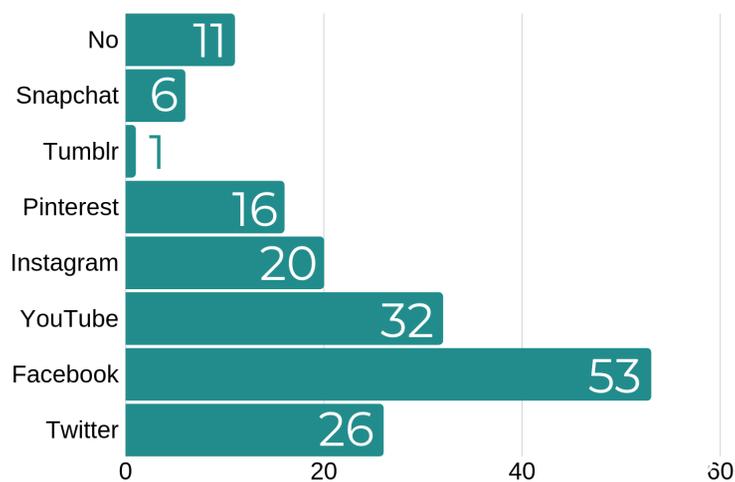


Figure 5 Survey responses to the question: do you use social media?

A high number of people continue to use Facebook. We see the most engagement from our audiences on Facebook which supports this response. YouTube is surprising, and it has been called the second most popular search engine (Google owns YouTube). Scottish Families does have a YouTube channel but no presence and no plans to further this, but from this feedback, it may be an opportunity for video resources. 11 people also said they do not use social media. There was no average age range attached to this data.

We asked respondents if they have experienced any problems looking for information online and there was a close 50/50 split between yes (48%) and no (52%).

Most responses were to do with:

- **Poor website navigation**
- **Lack of content**
- **Out of date information**
- **Issues with website design**
- **Not being able to see contact information clearly**

'Wanted to find out what was wrong but couldn't see my problems listed.'

'Sometimes you are directed to page after page or website after website and don't get any further on looking for answers or a person to contact or phone number to actually answer your query or give advice.'

'Have to think of various ways wording the search.'



'Sometimes it is difficult to establish what is directed at professionals and what is directed towards the individual.'

'Some services have closed down but websites are still active.'

'There is often printable information which is no good without a printer.'

'Lots of information available but hard to tell what are the most trusted sources.'

'Got confused – don't know if the service is for people like me.'

'Sometimes who to contact and how you contact them is not immediately obvious.'

7c. Your opinions of online support services

The last few questions of the survey invited respondents to comment on specific questions relating to online support services; their thoughts, opinions and what they see the barriers are for people getting online.

We asked respondents what they thought online support services could do for people and key takeaways are:

- **Online support services will make people feel 'more comfortable'**
- **People will feel connected to others even if they live remotely**
- **Online support means information will be readily available**
- **Online support may make things impersonal**



'Help people who can't get help in other ways, or who don't want to get face-to-face help or come to a centre.'

'I think there are many things people could use online support for especially in this technological age as it's easier and quicker to contact groups, peers, share problems, etc. However, there is often limited information or out of date information in regard to services for many agencies or unanswered emails and questions. It's about finding what works for an individual.'

'Could be a readily available means of support when needed. Could encourage someone to take a first step in seeking support.'

'Offer support especially when it is unavailable from health service e.g. what to do next once a loved one is discharged without treatment after a suicide attempt.'

'I think it gives a lifeline for people who may not otherwise feel comfortable speaking to someone face-to-face. Also for people who live in rural areas who cannot afford travel costs to services.'

'Good for first line of contact where anonymity is a safety net, but only if it's via a person and not a robot.'

'I know it can help people but I don't feel comfortable using it.'

'Allow confidential support at times that suit outwith 'office hours''

'Be there for people who may not be able to go along to a group or service due to other commitments like working or looking after the kids.'

Following on from what is the best way to support people online, we asked what the potential barriers were. The key takeaways are:

- **Costs**
- **Internet access**
- **Lack of digital skills**

'Internet access due to financial problems and not wanting to use facility in public place.'

'It costs money, it can feel weird if you are used to speaking to people.'

'Don't always know how to use computers/phones. Costs of buying first phone, cost of accessing data.'

'For some it is having the hardware. For others it is the lack of experience. For some older individuals it could be the fear of the unknown and possible confidentiality breaches.'

'Confusion at all the jargon and finding the right information online.'

'I don't have a computer or smartphone – too costly and I can't be bothered learning to use them.'

'You don't know who's at the other end of the line. I like to know whom I'm talking to and what experience they have.'

'Money – it costs money to have internet fitted and keep running at home, and it costs money to have a device. Libraries are free but not always very private to allow chat.'

Respondents were also asked to share their thoughts on people living remotely and how online services could support them along with potential barriers. The key takeaways are:

- **Online support services may be the only support available to people living remotely**
- **Online support would reduce travel costs, etc. if people had to make their way to the closest city for support**
- **Internet access may be difficult and unavailable in remote locations**
- **People may lack digital skills**

'Living remotely I imagine is the same as someone who has no support network. Not as easy to get to main towns for support so someone online able to help.'

'Yes living remotely has its barriers, especially getting to support groups if there is a lack of transport although some people prefer online support.'

'They would find help at the touch of a button (by going online). Otherwise they might not be able to access help if not close to a community. An online community would help them.'

‘One to one gives body language and responses. People living in remote areas may already feel isolated. Maybe Facetime or Lifesize could be an option if they have internet connections.’

‘Internet connection may be an issue. People who live rurally experience the same issues as those who don’t. There tends to be less service available rurally to offer support.’

‘If people are remote they may not have a local support service so they don’t have anywhere to go. The online service may be the first place they ever get help.’

Another question that was asked focused on young people and if they would use an online support service. We do have to be clear in saying that there were only a few respondents of the survey who were under 25 years old so we have not managed to collect responses from this key audience.

Key takeaways are:

- Young people would definitely use an online support service

‘Yes if they have devices available to them through pointing them to the best online support would be important.’

‘Absolutely. For many young people today, face to face meetings can be overwhelming.’

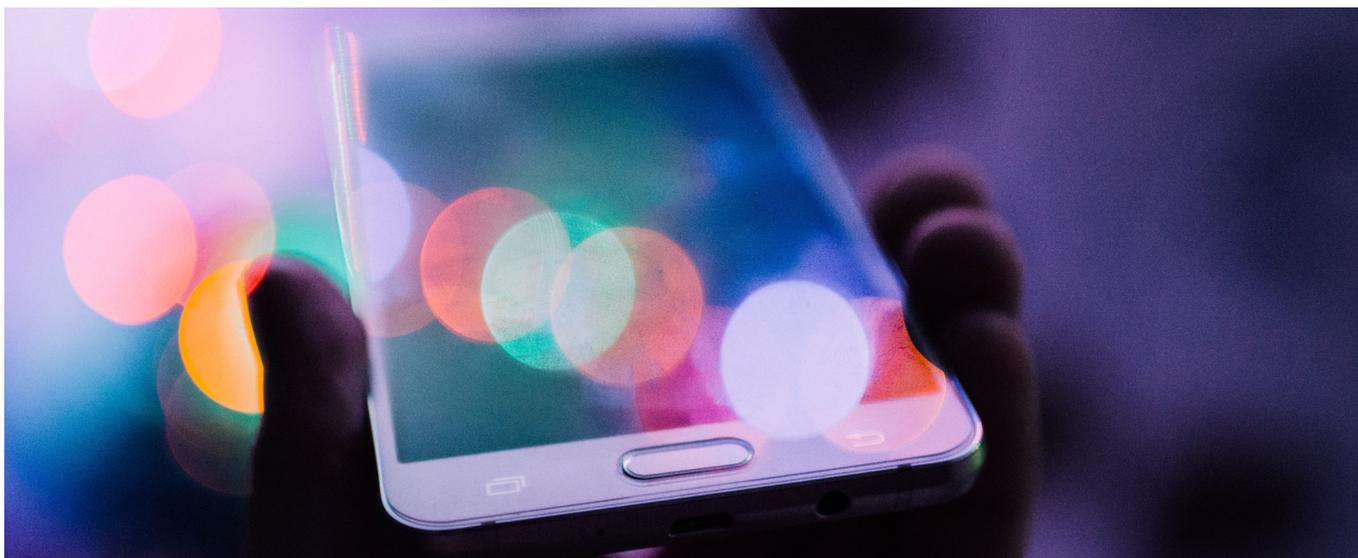
‘Yes as digital is part of their life now, it’s not a new thing, it’s where they go for information.’

‘I would really like if my daughter who is 15 would use online support.’

‘I think they might, but they might be a bit reluctant as they may feel their experiences aren’t bad enough to need support. I speak from experience of being a young person.’

‘I’d say yes, there is a lot of young people online. Not sure about children depending on the age they are. If they’re very young they may not know how to get online to do these things and might have to rely on an adult – which may be an issue if it’s the adult/parent who has alcohol or drug problems.’





Finally, we asked respondents to give suggestions on the best way to support families online. The key takeaways are:

- **Online chat available through most times of the day and the week**
- **Storytelling from people with lived experience**
- **Have lots of information for people to read whenever they need it**

'Make support available when people need it – day and night. Make sure that support is the right thing that will solve the problem there and then, instead of passing you on to someone else.'

'Good detailed info pages as well as clear contact details for those who need to speak to people without a run around.'

'For families to have the opportunity to speak to individuals who have either been in the same situation and can offer advice on where to seek further help or for professionals to be available to offer that help.'

'I'd quite like to see an online chat helpline. A forum is all well and good but if it's not active people will go elsewhere. I am a member of Facebook groups which are fairly active. I've been a mod [moderator] on a mental health Facebook support group which is very successful also.'

'Simple bite-sized information.'

'A dedicated web chat service with someone always available to talk – problems happen at any hour of the day.'

'Readily understandable easy to read bullet point information that can point to more detailed information if necessary.'

7d. Scottish Families online support services

The last section of questions in the survey focused on the Scottish Families online services which includes the service directory, forum and chat room.

We asked respondents first to choose only two options between the online support services. Many responses said that they only chose them because it was what they knew of, but personally would not use them.

The key takeaways are:

- The majority of people said they would not use a chat room or online forum
- People flagged security and safety concerns as the main barriers
- People were worried about their anonymity and did not want others to read about their lives
- Reading people's stories and information came up frequently as being what people wanted from online support

What online service would you personally use?

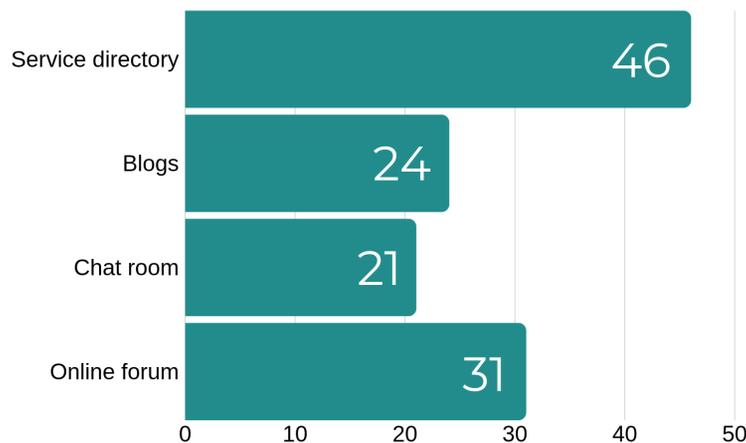


Figure 6 Survey responses to the question: what online service would you personally use?

'Don't know if I would use these unless one-to-one as I don't want everyone knowing my business.'

'Never sure about security on forums and chat rooms.'

'I prefer to read real life stories.'

'Impersonal and safety issues for me.'

'Chat rooms scare me. I'm unsure why.'

'For me, it's what I would feel more comfortable with. I wouldn't want to post something that could be commented on by strangers that could be negative or unwelcome responses.'

'I would use Facebook but that wasn't in the question.'

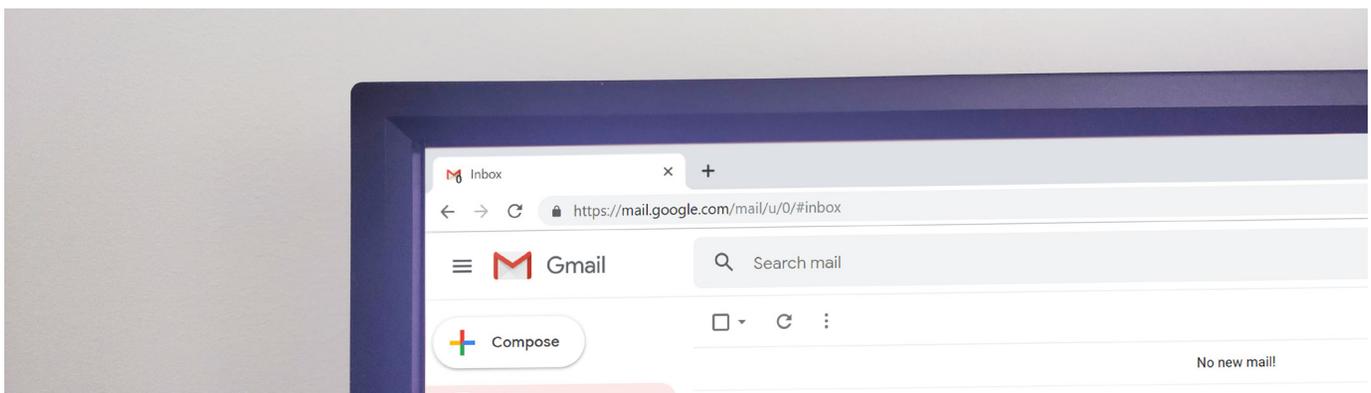
'Wouldn't be interested in a forum and blogs.'

'I would not be happy using a chat room or forum as I do not wish to discuss issues in an open forum.'

'I don't like the idea of forums or a chat room.'

'I live rurally and it's not as anonymous in the smaller area to chat about any issues that might be affecting me and my family. Yes services/organisations are confidential, but it can still be embarrassing for them to know what's going on in private.'

'I would never use a chat room or forum. They're too out in the open for people to see into your business. I know some people won't mind that but I do. I think writing and expressing yourself through blogs is a great idea. I also think the service directory is great because then I can find support myself and can then go along or make the call to a service – it gives a sense of pride and 'I did it myself'.'



Conclusion

- The digital survey highlighted the major benefits of online support and how people will feel more comfortable and more connected.
- The general opinion was that online support would be very beneficial for people living remotely.
- Respondents were clear that online support would need to have a lot of easy to understand information, and that it had to be a 'real' person that was speaking to you, not something automated.
- Major barriers were also highlighted, mostly concerned with safety and anonymity. Other barriers highlighted include costs, skills and location.
- Most respondents are in favour of online support but do have concerns.

8. Our one-to-one website user tests

We had a qualitative approach to the website user tests. We asked four people with different levels of digital skills to do a set of tasks on our website www.sfad.org.uk and to give us feedback on each task. We also asked for feedback on the look of the website and its content.

8a. The website and its content

All of the testers said that the images on the website were not the best and could do with an update. They also all agreed that the chat room and online forum were too difficult to find and felt clunky when used.

There was a few points raised about language, including the use of 'professionals' on the website. Some of the testers felt the language wasn't suitable and was difficult to understand. Users highlighted that there was some jargon and acronyms used far too frequently that was off-putting. There was also issues around some of the content like the 'self-help modules' and 'NHS tools'. Most testers found them to be unnecessary with many of them not working.

Positives included that the helpline information was clear as soon as you land on the homepage and the website itself was visually appealing and clear on what the charity does.

'You should include testimonials/stories on the main page.'

'The chat room page with the big red box saying no entry is very off-putting so I'd just click away and not bother.'

'You are 10 years too late for an online forum, most people would not use them now that Facebook groups exist.'

'The mobile optimisation is a bit off, things aren't scaled great but it's good that the webchat is available through mobile.'

'The website isn't easy to navigate. Things aren't called what you would assume like 'professionals' people are coming to your site for specific reasons and don't have time to search through everything.'

'Bereavement and helpline is clear but nothing else of what you do is.'

'Self help and NHS tools – it's great to support yourself but you're not going to sit and read all of that information on your site. Is the first thing someone is going to think in a crisis is 'I need to eat healthier?' no.'

'The online forum, chat room, email, webchat and phone number shows that there are too many options for people to get in touch with you which is why some are greatly used while others aren't.'

'The homepage has too much on it and it's repeating everything that you can find in the tabs at the top. Use the homepage only to advertise other parts of the site that you want people to click to.'

8b. Scenario-based questions

The second part of the website test was scenario-based questions. Testers were given seven scenarios and were to navigate their way around the website and then give us their feedback.

<p>1. Find information on the Scottish Families online forum</p> <p><i>The online forum is under the tab Communities and can also be found on the home page in its own banner</i></p>	<p>Every tester said they did not understand why the online forum was under the tab 'Communities' and said they would not have immediately connected them.</p> <p>All testers said that the online forum should come under 'Support Sevices' because its main aim is to support people.</p> <p>When asked, all testers said they would not use the online forum. One tester in particular said the topics on the forum are not good enough for people and people shouldn't have to click on numerous things to try to find information.</p> <p>Two of the testers also mentioned that they believe forums are outdated and that no one uses them anymore, instead people would choose Facebook groups or to use online webchat rather than post on a forum.</p>
<p>2. Search for the nearest support group to where you live</p> <p><i>The question intended for users to go to the service directory where they can search for support groups and services over Scotland</i></p>	<p>Most of the testers found the service directory on the home page but were clear in saying that 'service directory' sounded too formal and business-like. One tester did not understand service directory and instead clicked on the 'family support groups' tab in the support services section which talks about Scottish Families own groups.</p> <p><i>'I clicked on the tab family support groups because that is what I was looking for, 'the nearest support group'. Service directory doesn't make sense to me.'</i></p> <p>All of the testers commented on the service directory and how it looked 'too cluttered' and 'overwhelming to use'.</p> <p><i>'The map is good but I don't like that at first it shows all of the world and then a massive clutter of different icons on the map.'</i></p> <p>All of the testers also commented on the 'backwards' nature of the service directory and how at first there is 200 listings already presented and then people are required to filter out the listings to what they actually need.</p> <p><i>'The service directory is so cluttered and already has search criteria without entering anything. It's too difficult to filter results – tabs are too overwhelming and cluttered.'</i></p>

3. Find the Scottish Families chat room

The chat room falls under the tab Communities and can also be found on the home page

All of the testers again said they could not understand the connection between 'Communities' and a chat room. They all said that it should appear under the tab 'Support Services'.

All of the testers said that the immediate red error box saying 'sorry you do not have chat room priviledges' put them off and that they would not bother registering.

'You have a massive barrier in the way with the big red error box – why would anyone bother with that? You'd just go email or call. People's time is precious.'

'As soon as I need to register up for something I can't be bothered.'

One tester also picked up on the registration element of the website which is there for people to sign-up to use the online forum and chat room:

'The registration to your site makes no sense – it makes it sound like your services are no longer free bcause of that.'

All of the testers said they would never use the chat room nor would they use a chat room for anything else. They suggested social media as being the better use for groups and discussions, and for support being what we have already, the phone number, email and webchat.

4. Find an example of Scottish Families' community work

Any Community work falls under the 'Communities' tab

All of the testers said they could not understand 'Community' and said people would have to understand that line of work to be able to know what it is about.

All testers also said that the content wasn't useful, nor did any of it make sense to an 'everyday person'.

'Nothing on the site explains clearly any community work. It's very confusing and makes no sense. I don't understand what 'community' is.'

5. You are a parent worried about your child's drug use – what do you do?

All of our helpline and support information should be the clearest and most prominent on our website

All of the testers commented on how great it was that the helpline information was the first thing you see and how that made it very simple, easy and quick to get in touch with us.

'Helpline number is very clear and is the first thing I see.'

6. You are a son who has recently been bereaved – your father who has passed had an alcohol problem – what happens?

All of the testers said any information on bereavement was prominent and clear on the page. Some of the testers also commented on the content on the pages:

'I like the guides that are available for people to read.'

'I watched the little bereavement video. It's really nice and gentle.'

7. You are working with a family member and want to refer them to Scottish Families support services – what happens?

The referral portal to our services is currently under the 'Professionals' tab

All of the testers had issues trying to find the referral link on the page. We had to tell each of them in the end that it was under the 'Professionals' tab. They all commented on that it was too hidden and that 'Professionals' did not make sense and it was off-putting.

'The referral portal is quite a niche thing so I guess it's okay being under Professionals but it is still really difficult to get to.'

'The word professionals creates a barrier – what if it's a volunteer running their own support group who doesn't call themselves professionals?'

Each tester said that the referral link should be under 'Support Services' because that is where people would go. Some of the testers also said it should be a lot more prominent on the home page.

'I went to support services because it was my main instinct. Even after clicking the professionals tab I'm still confused at the word 'refer' I wouldn't know if that is right.'

Conclusion

- All of the testers said they would never use a chat room or online forum.
- It was highlighted that the language on the website could be difficult at times, mostly concerning 'communities' and 'professionals'.
- All of the testers mentioned it was difficult to find simple information at times such as 'service directory' not being clear enough to know what it actually is.
- All of the testers commented on the service directory as being flawed, cluttered and in need of a redesign.

9. Supporting group facilitators with social media

The final activity for Digital Families was a social media training session for support group facilitators. The training was there to show group facilitators how useful social media was for connecting with their audience and for creating an online community.

Eight people attended the training on the 25th February 2019 and came from a range of services and groups including: Families Outside, Step Together Family Support, My Support Day and VOCAL.

The training specifically looked at social media channels and how they can be used to create an online community. Each channel was broken down into what it offered for online support and what group facilitators could do to use this effectively.

All of the attendees also said that this course should become a core training session in Scottish Families' training programme.

'I've been given the knowledge and tools to put my learning into practice.'

'I will use my learning to promote the support groups to the target audience.'

'It covered everything I needed to know to help me with My Support Day support group, thank you.'



Part three: Conclusion



10. Conclusion

Digital Families was very successful in highlighting the major benefits of an online support service. Most of the respondents in our activities spoke highly of online support.

The major key takeaways in favour of online support are:

- It will make people feel 'more comfortable'
- People will feel connected to others even if they live remotely
- Information is easy to find and readily available for whenever a person needs it
- It can be the first line of contact for someone with anonymity
- May be the only support available to people living remotely
- Would reduce travel costs, etc. if people had to make their way to the closest city for support
- Young people would definitely use an online support service

There were however some major barriers that were highlighted about online support that have a huge role in our next steps with designing our website and online services.

The major key takeaways for the barriers of online support are:

- Websites constantly need to be updated because most problems come from:
 - o Poor website navigation
 - o Lack of content
 - o Out of date information
 - o Issues with web design
 - o Not being able to see contact information clearly
- It may make things more impersonal as there is a big advantage with face-to-face contact and support group settings where you are able to connect with people better
- There are many personal barriers of going online:
 - o Costs of internet, devices, etc.
 - o Internet access especially if you live in rural areas – connection speeds may be very slow or there may be no access at all
 - o Many people do not have the level of digital skills to be able to use the internet with confidence

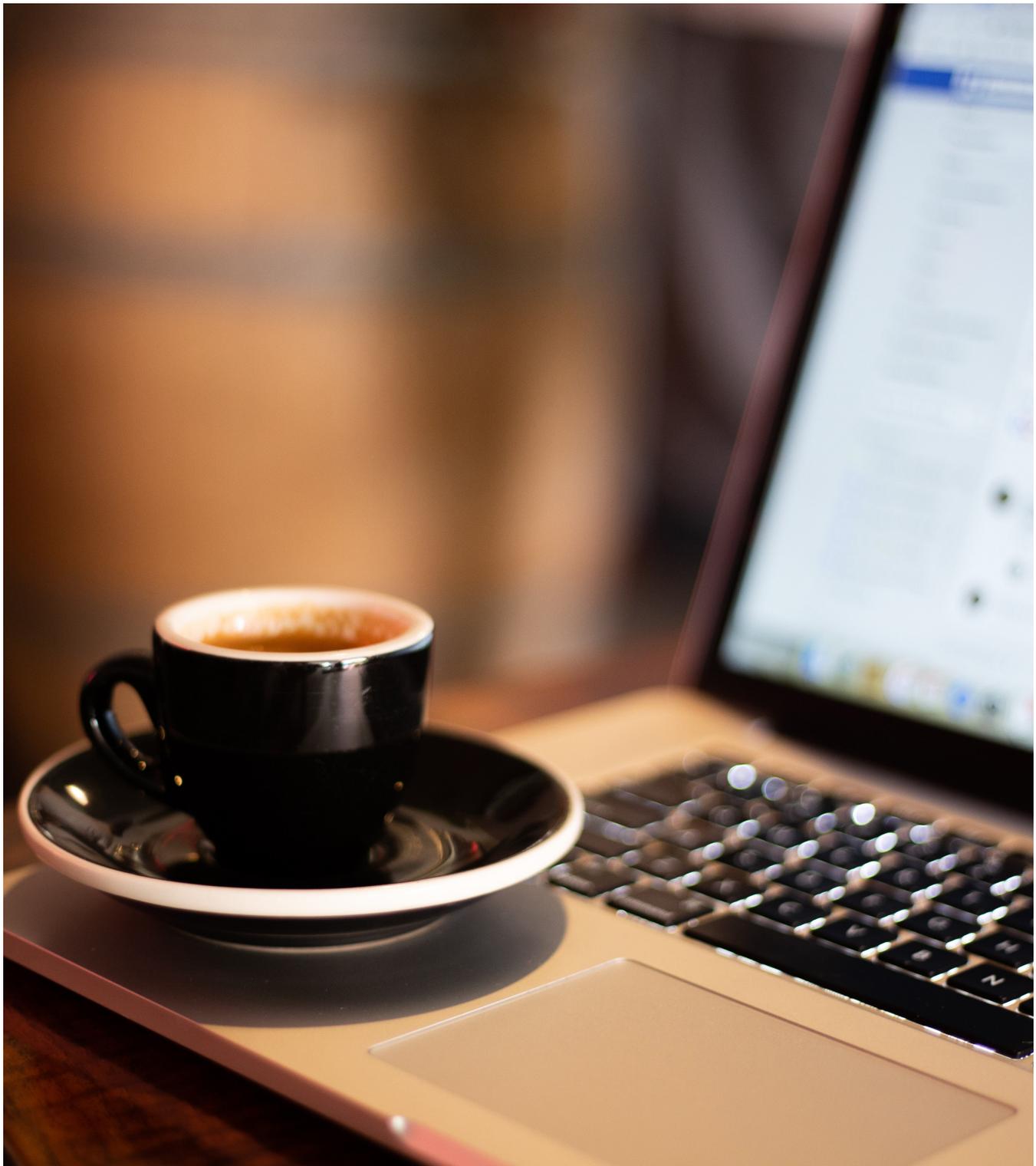
We have taken on board all of the feedback from Digital Families and the major points listed above to make changes to our website and online support services.

Changes going forward will include:

- Updated content including more information on alcohol, drugs, bereavement, looking after yourself, and formatting all information in PDFs into website pages

- A redesign of the service directory to be easier to navigate
- A better navigation path for support services, community and training/professionals
- New branding imagery
- Closing the forum and chat room to make way for more personal support options e.g. NHS Attend Anywhere¹ platform.

¹ Attend Anywhere is a web-based platform that helps health care providers offer video call access to their services as part of their 'business as usual', day-to-day operations. Scottish Families were granted by the Scottish Centre for Telehealth & Telecare to use the Attend Anywhere platform for their support services.







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