



Case study

Insight-led
communications
and engagement
strategy for North
Northants Family Hubs.

Synopsis

North Northants Family Hubs required a communications and engagement strategy and delivery plan to underpin their rollout of the service. The brief was to help them to understand the communities and people they wanted to reach and create a strategy which enabled them to do that in a sustainable and measurable way.

The brief was extended to include development of their brand identity. A key area of focus was equipping the client to reach under-served communities and those not already aware of or accessing support.

Background

North Northamptonshire was one of 75 local authority areas named by the Department for Education as eligible to receive a share of a £301.75 million Family Hubs and Start for Life programme funding package for the period 2022-2025.

This funding was part of the Government's vision to create more equitable access to support and information for families and children. Family hubs aim to provide local people with better access to services from before birth, through a child's early years, right up until they reach the age of 19, or 25 for those with SEND.

In North Northamptonshire the programme is led by North Northamptonshire Council with partners across health, care, charity and the community sector.

Physical locations are in the process of being opened as 'hubs', centred around existing services. In addition to the physical hubs, the new model introduces other ways to access services, including additional online and self-service routes. This will require a shift in behaviour for those accessing services so that people can realise the full benefits of the offer available to them and, potentially, access support or information more quickly, or while waiting for more intensive intervention.

Covid-19 has also led to increasing need for mental health support. The existing perinatal mental health support offer locally does not cover specialisms in mild-moderate perinatal mental health and child-parent relationship difficulties.

It was recognised that people were not always aware of the support available or how they could access the support they needed for their family early enough.

The need

Family Hubs North Northants recognised that for the support they offer – a combination of face-to-face services and an online offer – to be successful, communication and engagement with communities was a priority.

They required a communications and engagement strategy which recognised and understood the needs of the people they were trying to engage with and set out a strategic plan for reaching those people in a way that supported the local and national objectives of the programme. They had also identified a need to make better use of their diverse workforce in reaching people and understanding their needs.

We were commissioned to deliver a communications and engagement strategy and delivery plan built on insight to meet the needs of people who used, or could use, family hub services.



The solution



North Northants Family Hubs is made up of multiple partners, with organisations from the health, charity and third sectors, as well as local authorities and community organisations. Each of these has its own brand and identity. As such, we quickly realised the importance of making sure North Northants Family Hubs has a strong brand identity of its own to help build recognition and understanding. The client agreed to a project extension to allow us to enhance and build on the existing logo to develop a visual identity.

Together with key messages developed, tested and refined with service users and professionals working across family hubs services, a new identity was born.

To be effective, it was vital the communications strategy and delivery plan reflected the needs and views of service users. We therefore carried out a discovery phase, engaging with people who use services, those who could use services and those who work within them.

The aim of the discovery was: to understand people's preferences for receiving information – both the format and the channel; to test messaging, language and use of imagery; and to understand the current awareness of services and knowledge of support available.

Through audience segmentation we defined specific groups of people to target using a combination of engagement techniques, including surveys, focus groups and individual conversations.

1. Gained understanding of programme priorities and ambitions through meetings with project team, reviewing existing documents and data



3. Engaged with target audiences through focus groups and surveys



5. Developed strategic communications approach to address themes and achieve objectives



7. Developed three-year delivery plan aligned to programme milestones



2. Identified and prioritised audiences to engage with



4. Filtered and synchronised data, soundbites and insight to identify themes



6. Prioritised communications tactics, channels and activity

Findings from the discovery phase were then synthesised, resulting in four areas for improvement. These became the objectives within the strategy, with recommended activity aligned to each objective.

A detailed delivery plan was developed as a working tool to guide the client in implementing the recommended communications and engagement activity over the following three years.



Challenges



While focus groups were advertised widely across networks in North Northamptonshire, the process to recruit was difficult; particularly when targeting under-served communities and those who are eligible, but do not use children and family services. We found many of those who wanted to participate were already very well-versed in family services and we were keen to hear from those who knew less about support available.

A survey was promoted through paid-for and organic social media advertising to target core audiences, including parents, carers and families of children of all ages. We also offered incentive payments to non-staff participants of the focus groups. This proved more successful in reaching target groups and obtaining useful data.

Impact



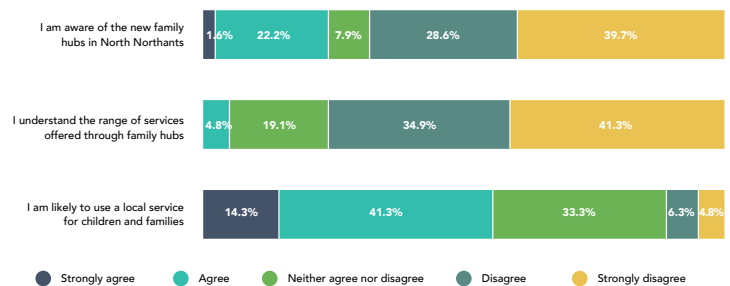
The communications engagement strategy is intended to remain a live document which continues to evolve with the communities it is there to support and engage with. As such, this project followed the Design Council's double diamond methodology which allows for continued listening and evaluation throughout the life of the strategy.

As family hubs mature and develop, insight gathering should continue. This may bring to light information which requires change. As with any project using this methodology, it is right that the communications strategy is not 'finished', but rather used as an approach to continue testing and evolving the way audiences are engaged and communicated with.

This methodology is reflected in the evaluation mechanisms used. This allows for activity and outcomes to be continuously monitored to evaluate the success of this communications and engagement strategy.

A baseline was established during the insight phase of the programme and targets set accordingly.

How much do you agree with the following statements?



Ongoing evaluation is expected to show an increase amongst target audiences in:

- their **awareness** of North Northants Family Hubs
- their understanding of the **range of services** offered through family hubs
- how likely they are to use a **local service** for children and families

This is being monitored through a series of pulse surveys which capture a snapshot of sentiment at a given time. The pulse surveys will be distributed to all target audience groups, including service users and professionals, at regular intervals on an ongoing basis. The scores will be collated and tracked over time to show changes in the effectiveness of communications and engagement activities.

Next steps, sustainability and scaling

The communications and engagement strategy, evaluation methodology and detailed, three-year delivery plan was passed to the client who will embed the work locally. The delivery plan included granular actions to ensure the communications activity reaches those target audiences. The evaluation tools will be used to continue to map and monitor change and progress and allows the client to flex and adapt the approach as required.

If you have similar challenges in your area and would be interested in exploring how our insight-led approach could help, please contact Caroline Maddams, Interim Head of Design and Change: caroline@ethicalhealthcare.org.uk

