

Alice's story



A ONE-BUTTON SOLUTION TO HELP TACKLE LONELINESS

It gives me contact with my friends and family, it keeps me company.

Alice is in her early 80s and lives in London. She is a very sociable lady, with friends, interests and close ties to her community, but she misses her family who live in Ireland.

Alice has no experience of using computers or smartphones and the lack of 'real time' communication has, at times, made her feel lonely.

Through a project between her local church and Norwegian start-up firm, No Isolation, she was invited to test a piece of communication technology designed for older people who find new technologies intimidating and difficult to use.

KOMP is like a television. It has a simple user interface with only one large graspable button, a built-in camera, loudspeakers and a microphone. Using Wi-Fi, it can receive photos, text messages and video calls. Content is shown on a continuous loop and once set up, requires no logins or passwords.

"It's a marvellous machine and a really lovely thing to have in my home," says Alice. "It gives me contact with my friends and family, it keeps me company."

When Alice can't attend family events, she is video-called live.

"At my brother's recent wedding anniversary, I felt like I was there. I can see everyone and hear what they are saying. I don't feel like I'm missing out."

Relatives and friends can connect with Alice on her KOMP using an app. This makes the technology accessible to all generations of Alice's family, increasing their usage. Once connected, they see the photos and messages she has been sent.

She says: "They don't miss a trick! They love to see what I am up to and it gives us lots to talk about when they see the funny messages my friends have sent me."

1.1M PEOPLE IN THE UK AGED 75 AND OVER ONLY HAVE CONTACT WITH FAMILY AND RELATIVES ONCE A MONTH OR LESS, ACCORDING TO EUROSTAT.

Alice is in control of who she invites to see her content, how long content stays on her KOMP and she can choose whether she wants to join a video call.

In just five months, the KOMP has transformed how she communicates with loved ones, and it is alleviating feelings of loneliness. Alice would like to see it used more by older people, perhaps including people living with dementia and those who have difficulty leaving the house.

"Nights can feel very long when you're alone. Having a KOMP has made a big difference to my life and I would recommend it to anybody who feels isolated or lonely."

A HELPING HAND WHENEVER IT'S NEEDED

Sam's story

Sam, from Dewsbury, experiences mental health issues. A range of situations - coupled with previous traumatic events - cause her to feel anxious and things became so extreme she lost her voice and had to take long periods of time off work.

Commuting to her job in Leeds, Sam found her days getting increasingly difficult. Busy trains, often running late, would cause anxiety attacks and she would often "sit and sweat it out".

Sam would arrive at work feeling shaky and tearful and face the conflicting noises of an office, adding to her anxiety.

She could no longer work and was referred by her community mental health nurse to the not for profit Community Links Engagement and Recovery (CLEAR) service.

CLEAR gave her Brain in Hand, a mobile phone based tool providing immediate and personalised support. In a planning session they helped her to identify all the situations that can trigger anxiety, developed coping strategies and entered these into the software.

If Sam is on a busy train and feels her anxieties heightening, she takes out her phone and is reminded to take some deep breaths and to play a word game to distract herself from the situation, relax and continue her journey.

Brain in Hand has a traffic light system. If Sam is struggling, she can press a button to issue a 'red' alert to the team at CLEAR, which triggers them to call her. If they receive three consecutive 'amber' alerts, they'll also check in with Sam.

Phone calls can make Sam feel anxious, so this works well. "Having to pick up the phone and tell someone I'm not OK can be very scary. Just pressing a button and receiving a call from somebody asking if I'm OK makes a huge difference."

Sam uses the system to regularly check in on herself and reduces 'red alert' moments.

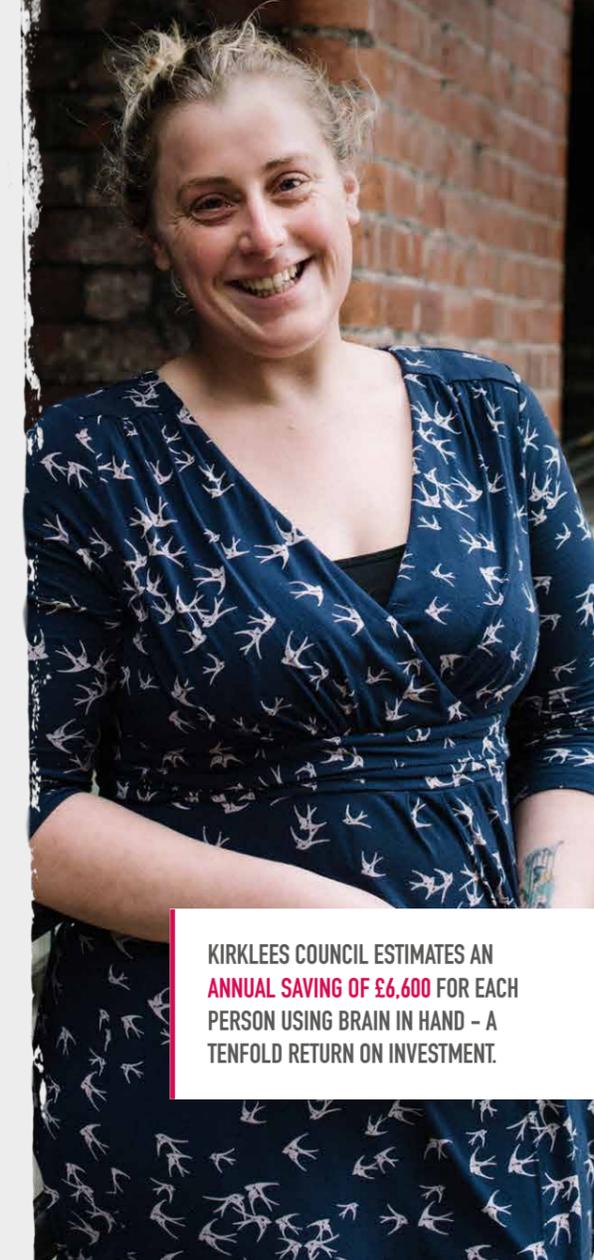
"I have reminders set for every three hours to ask myself how I'm doing. If I'm feeling a bit 'amber' I know I need to take a moment, have a bit of Sam time, and do something nice to stop it escalating."

Not only has she returned to work, Sam has started volunteering at her son's school and gets valuable 'Sam time' every Friday at a craft group.

Since being discharged from CLEAR, Brain in Hand has helped the process to feel gradual rather than abrupt.

"It came at the right time for me, I wanted to go back to work. Having this app has given me the helping hand I needed to become more independent and transition out of my support from CLEAR. It gave me confidence."

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KIRKLEES COUNCIL ESTIMATES AN ANNUAL SAVING OF £6,600 FOR EACH PERSON USING BRAIN IN HAND - A TENFOLD RETURN ON INVESTMENT.