Digital Solutions Supporting Marginalised Communities

Utilization review of the ACORN Age-Friendly Smart technology device

Interim Report

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ACORN

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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"2020 was the year that Covid-19 and Zoom took over our lives" Eileen Doyle, CEO Cairdeas, Co Carlow

2020 was the year that forced us all to think differently, about how we deliver services to vulnerable older people or, indeed, how to support older people and other marginalised communities to stay connected to family, friends and the wider local community. Never before were people so disconnected from everyday life. Covid-19 restrictions, while very necessary to keep us alive, catapulted very vulnerable older people, particularly those in nursing homes and those being cared for in their own homes, into a world of silence as they could no longer see family or friends. During Level 5 Restrictions, those over 70 years could no longer venture out to shop for themselves and had to rely on family and neighbours to shop of their behalf. Service Providers who provide care services for vulnerable people found themselves struggling to keep in contact with their clients. Day care centres were forced to close their doors, leaving many day care clients with little or no interaction with people other than the postman.

The pandemic accelerated the need for service providers and service users to look to technology to find a solution that could work for everyone. From the outset, Service providers were looking for a digital solution that was intuitive to the needs of their clientele. The Acorn smart technology device was designed with the support and advice of older people and trialled by them at the developmental stage to ensure that the device was as intuitive and user friendly as possible.

The review of the 'Utilisation of the ACORN Smart Technology Device' was undertaken to ascertain the extent to which the product is being used and by whom and what learnings the ACORN Team can take on board for the future in order to better support the growing ACORN community.

There are currently 70+ ACORN based smart technology projects in the country. The map shows the reach of the device across the country and the 15 interviews undertaken as part of the review process highlight the variety of service providers and the breadth of activities being undertaken in an online capacity. The interviews revealed a number of interesting findings e.g. the diversity of projects around the country, the opportunities for sharing best practice on matters relating to funding & GDPR and the desire/need for project coordinators to be part of an Acorn Community Network.

The review demonstrates that digital solutions, such as the ACORN device, have a definite role to play in combating the exclusion of marginalised communities

- County Councils
- HSE Services
- Community Groups / NGOs
- Consumer User Network
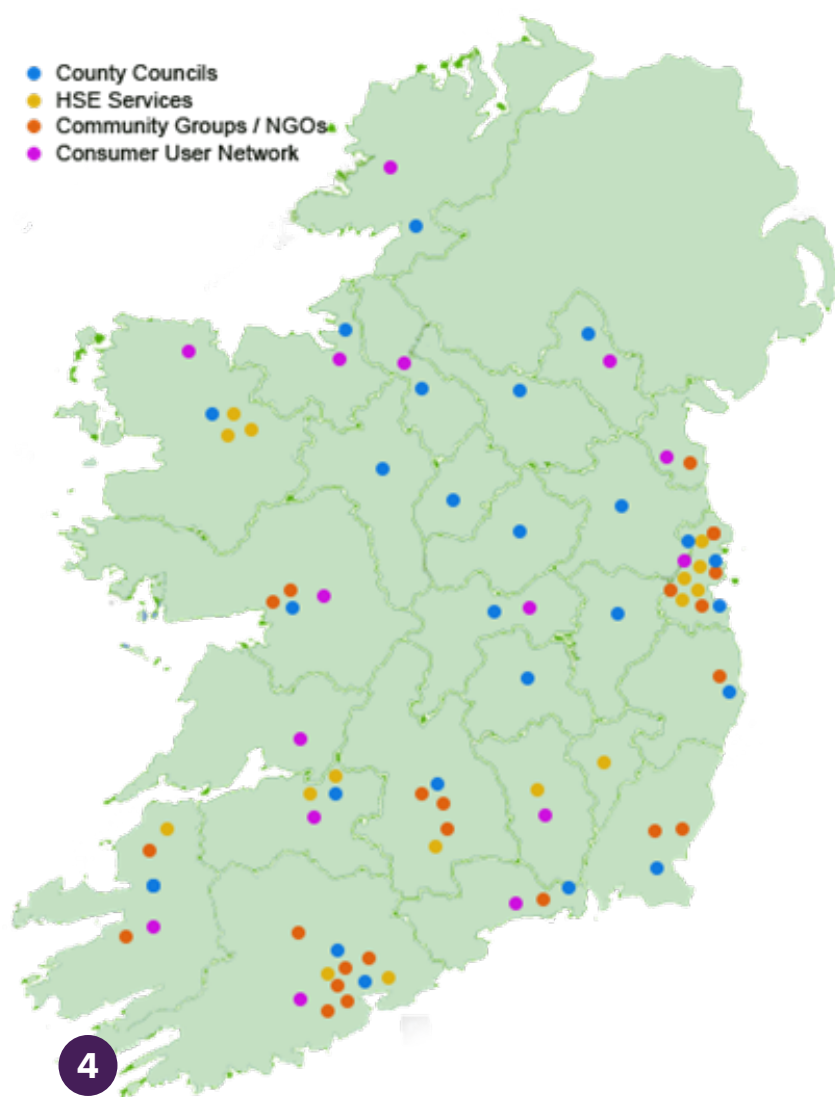
INTRODUCTION

While it may seem hard for us to imagine life today without access to our smart technology devices, it is, in fact, only 30 years ago that the internet first appeared in Ireland. Trinity College was the first organisation to connect to the emerging internet in 1991.

Against this backdrop of rapid technological changes, national Government established the information Society Commission in 1997 to act as an independent advisory body to Government on matters relating to the information society. A Second Information Commission was established in 2000. The Commissions published a number of very influential reports and carried out a number of general public surveys. The latter were carried out to ascertain the attitudes and expectations of the public to new technologies. In addition, the Commission published a report on 'eInclusion: Expanding the Information Society in Ireland'.

As early as 2003, it was becoming clear that while information technologies were making rapid inroads in all areas of economic and social life, and those who had access to these technologies were reaping the benefits, other more marginalised and disadvantaged groups were getting left behind. The Dublin Employment Pact, in partnership with the Dublin Regional Authority, Dublin City Development Board, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Development Board, Fingal County Development Board and South Dublin County Development Board commissioned a study entitled 'Digital Divide': Analysis of the Uptake of Information Technology in the Dublin Region to look at the nature and extent of the digital divide in Dublin and of the key elements of an effective strategy to tackle it.

Over the next three decades, national Government programmes demonstrated a commitment to advancement of information technology developments in Ireland. Successive Programmes For Government rolled out a series of capital and revenue funding schemes in order to try to ensure that Ireland kept pace with international trends and that its people had access to digital technologies. In this regard, programme funding schemes were made available to statutory and community organisations and groups to deliver ICT education and training at local level to marginalised people. In the new Programme for Government 2020 – 'Our Shared Future', national Government indicates a reinforced commitment to an Age Friendly Ireland, supporting vulnerable people, with specific attention being paid to delivering more care in the community, eHealth and ICT, increased capacity of the health service and further support for Healthcare workers.

THE CHALLENGE

- Over the last 10 years, technological innovations have seen a huge upsurge. During this period we have seen a huge drive by organisations to deliver services to the public in an online capacity. Many services particularly financial, health, retail and those involving social interaction are now carried out online. This works well for those who are digitally connected, but for more marginalised communities e.g. disadvantaged young people, the long term unemployed, people struggling with addiction issues and older people, these challenges can seem daunting. Furthermore, the impact of the current pandemic has been far greater on these communities, leaving them more socially isolated and even more disconnected from society than ever.

- While there is a definite commitment to addressing these issues, translating it into actuality is still a challenge which can only be tackled by using technology specifically designed for those

OVERVIEW OF SMART TECHNOLOGY DEVICE

The ACORN smart technology device was specifically developed as a way of addressing the digital divide by providing marginalised groups with a user friendly tool to stay connected in this rapidly changing world. Designing the ACORN smart technology device with the support of older people is what makes the ACORN device unique. It was designed on the premise that "If you design for the young, you exclude the old but if you design for the old, you include everyone"(Glenn Millar, Director of Education& Research, Canadian Urban Development Institute).

In the early development stages, the ACORN smart technology device was trialled and tested by 150older people from four counties - Meath, Fingal, Limerick and Louth. Participants on the trials received training on all aspects of the device. Feedback from participants was used to enhance the look and feel of the device before going out to the market for purchase.

In the 18 months since the product came to market, the numbers using the device continue to grow. It is now being used by a wide variety of statutory and community groups as well as the individuals that have chosen to purchase the device. At this point, it is considered appropriate to carry out a review of the 'Utilisation of the ACORN smart technology device'. This report is based on a series of interviews with Statutory and State-funded project co-ordinators. It tries to capture how some service providers, when faced with Covid-19, were forced to think of creative ways to deliver their services to some of the most vulnerable people in society.

The report looks at some of these initiatives to ascertain the extent of use and by whom. The interviews reveal the variety of impressive initiatives to which the device is being put nationwide and demonstrates that the ACORN device can and is being used by marginalised communities with a great deal of success.

A review of the 'Utilisation of the ACORN Smart technology device was undertaken to ascertain the extent to which the product is being used and by whom and what learnings the ACORN Team can take on board for the future in order to better support the growing ACORN community.

15 projects(from the 70+ organisations who have purchased ACORNs) were selected for interview, based on factors of geographic spread, balance of Statutory, State-funded and Voluntary groups and the diversity of initiatives. (The list of participant projects is included in Appendix 1).

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, it was decided that the review would be conducted through a process of over-the-phone interviews. All project participants were asked a series of 11 questions. (The interview questions are set out in Appendix 2).

The review revealed a number of interesting findings:

1.   The broad geographic spread of ACORN projects around the country
2.   The diversity of ACORN clientele
3.   The impressive range of initiatives
4.   The variety of funding schemes used to purchase devices
5.   Future opportunities

Geographic Spread

Covid-19 forced many service providers and service users to embrace technology, if they wanted to stay connected with their clients or, in the case of ordinary people, to stay connected with family and friends in their communities. Projects selected for interview represented a cross section of counties around the country comprising Dublin, Cork, Kerry, Galway, Carlow, Tipperary and Kilkenny. The map shows the full extent of the reach of the device around the country. The interviews undertaken as part of the review are a snapshot of this reach.

● County Councils
● HSE Services
● Community Groups / NGOs
● Consumer Users
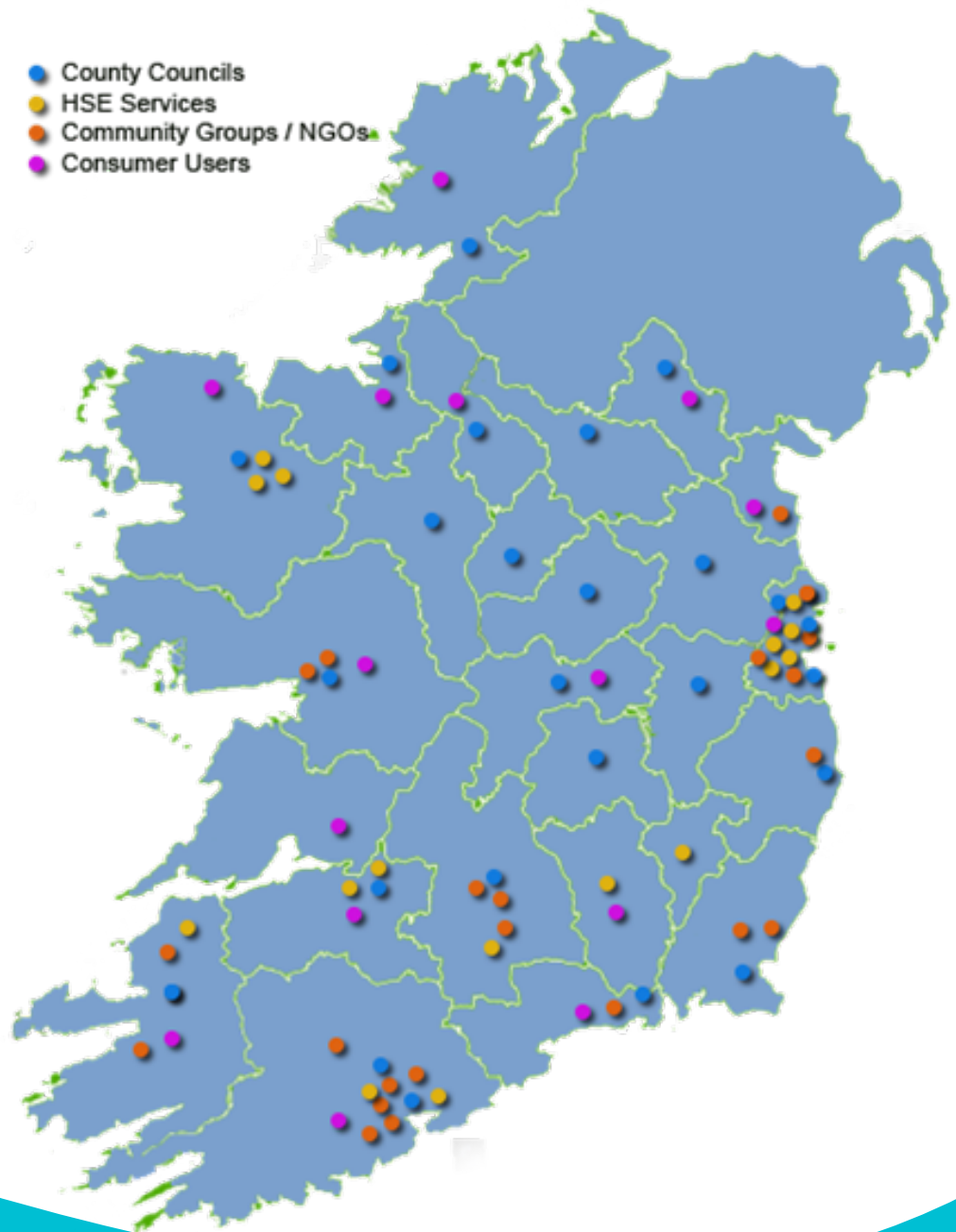
Conclusions

A digital solution means that by its very nature, people can be anywhere and still be connected either to each other or to family and friends. In addition, they can access information or participate in classes or the services they require to enhance their lives. Project co-ordinators can feel very isolated and would benefit from sharing both their learnings and their concerns with similar projects. Capturing evidence of where these projects are, and providing a mechanism/platform or forum for shared learning would assist the groups to overcome many issues they are faced with.

Diversity of Clientele

All project co-ordinators were asked where they had heard about the ACORN smart technology device and why they had chosen to purchase this device and for whom.

- Three invested in the device following desktop research
- Three were introduced to the device through the local Education and Training Board
- Two organisations heard about the device through Age Friendly Ireland presentations
- Four heard about the device through peer organisations who had already used the device successfully

All participants indicated that they needed a device that was user friendly, simple to use and suited the needs of their clientele e.g. older people who have never used technology before, people with cognitive impairment issues (e.g. Alzheimer's, stroke victims, intellectual disabilities) and people who struggle with addiction issues etc.

Feedback from participants was hugely positive regarding the user friendliness of the device and the wrap-around support service provided by the ACORN Team. Most, if not all, project co-ordinators indicated that these were the main reason that they had chosen the device for their clientele.

Conclusions

It is clear from the diversity of project clientele that the ACORN device, while initially developed for older people with older people, is as relevant in other marginalised group settings. All of the project co-ordinators indicated that they had purchased the product because of the user-friendly aspects of the device - the large font size making it easier not only for older people but for people with literacy issues, visual impairment, cognitive impairment etc. Furthermore, all emphasised the ACORN Team personal support service was key in their decision to purchase the device.

"The device is suitable for people with literacy difficulties. It comes with mobile data and also contains all the necessary accessories in the box"

"Our participants enjoy using it because it is so straightforward to use"- **Karen Hayes, Cork NCE**

"We chose the ACORN because of the wrap- around service provided by the ACORN Team" - **Vernice Murray, Galway Partnership**

"Our organisation aims to help combat isolation and overcome loneliness. We needed a device that was easy for older people to use so that they could stay connected with family and friends. The ACORN device helps us to achieve this objective"
 Louise Edmonds, Age Friendly Fingal

"The personal approach of the ACORN Team is one of their biggest assets" - **Paul O Donnell, Churchfield CT, Cork**

The review highlighted an inspiring array of creative initiatives that have been undertaken by Local Authorities, NGOs and local community voluntary groups across the country. What was particularly notable was the fact that the ACORN smart technology device was being used successfully by a wide range of marginalised groups, and not just the older people for whom the device was initially developed, thereby upholding the Age Friendly premise that if you design for older people you design for everyone. There follows case studies of a selection of some of these inspiring initiatives.

The ACORN smart technology device has been used by project co-ordinators in the following settings:
- Enabling Community Day Care clients to continue to participate on the day care service, as is evidenced in the projects in Kerry and Fingal
- Supporting older people in hospitals and nursing homes to stay connected with other residents and family and friends in their local community, as is demonstrated by the Friends of Clonakilty Community Hospital and the Skerries Age Friendly Town Staying Connected Initiative
- Utilisation of the ACORN for online physio sessions
- Enabling older people to stay connected with each other and to take up classes provided in their local communities, as is evidenced by Galway Partnership
- Enabling Community Employment participants to continue on the path to employment. Participants are using the device to access courses that facilitate upskilling and retraining. Projects such as the Family Resource Centre in Inchicore, Dublin 8 and Churchfield CT in Cork are evidence that the device is working successfully for them
- Supporting organisations to continue to provide social interaction to vulnerable people in the community, as is shown by the Family Call Service in Cork and The Good to Chat project in Dublin 15
- Supporting Active Learning as is shown by projects e.g. Galway's Art & Wellbeing programme and Fingal's Active Age for All Programme in Donabate

The following are case studies from the over-the-phone interviews undertaken as part of the review process. It forms a snapshot of how the device is being used around the country.

St Michael's Estate Family Resource
Inchicore,Dublin 8 ,

"We discovered that men embrace technology quicker than women, particularly younger-older women. When Covid-19 came we felt that if we didn't do something to support this group they would get left behind." - **Sinead Clancy, Community Development Worker**

The Family Resource Centre aims to engage with the hard-to-reach and people living on the edge of society. Covid-19 increased the need for the Family Resource Centre to find a solution to support the needs of younger/older women who lacked digital awareness and who were in danger of becoming more socially isolated due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. They became aware of the ACORN device from a peer group within the network of NGOs working with marginalised groups. They are currently using the ACORN device to up-skill younger/older women to stay connected in this ever changing world. These are women who are either struggling with addiction issues or have family members with addiction issues. The group selected the device because it best suited the needs of their clients, some of whom may have literacy issues. They felt the device was particularly user-friendly and liked the larger font size.

Cork Northside Community Enterprise

"We needed to find a new solution thatwould enable us to reach out to our clients and a solution that would enable them to continue on the path to re-employment"- Karen Hayes CE Supervisor Cork NCE

Cork NCE aims to get people back into employment. Pre-Covid, participants attended training courses but lockdown restrictions forced the group to find new ways to reach out to their clientele. NCE is using the ACORN device to deliver its re-education and re-employment programme to Community Employment participants and people with addiction issues. Participants use the device to complete level 3 and 4 QQI qualifications that will support them to get back to work.

Baile Mhuire Community Care, Tralee, Co Kerry

Baile Mhuire Community Care is an NGO semi-funded by the HSE. Because of Covid-19 restrictions, the Centre was unable to allow Community Care clients to attend the Day Care Centre.

The ACORN device is being used to facilitate day care users to access the Community Care Services. Participants include people with cognitive impairment issues and stroke victims. As well as virtual Zoom sessions for people with cognitive impairment issues, the Day Care Centre runs a Better Bones fitness programme for older people, using the device.

"Our carers support our clients, particularly those who have cognitive impairment issues, to access technology, that way they can still join our group gatherings on Zoom or listen to music if they want to" - Catherine Murphy, Occupational Therapist, Baile Mhuire CC

Cairdeas, Tullow, Co Carlow

"Our carers support our clients, particularly those who have cognitive impairment issues, to access technology, that way they can still join our group gatherings on Zoom or listen to music if they want to" - Catherine Murphy, Occupational Therapist, Baile Mhuire CC

Cairdeas is a service dealing with people with intellectual disabilities. Overcoming social isolation, particularly during Covid-19 restrictions, was a key factor for them. The organisation is using the ACORN device both to keep clients connected to each other and to the service and also to enable them to deliver a horticulture course. Clients found the device easy to use and using it has enabled them to listen to music, take part in horticulture courses and use Zoom to attend a puppet show

"Pre-Covid, people didn't quite understand the need for digital connectedness. Covid has highlighted the absolute necessity to ensure that older people have digital technology that they find easy to use, which enables them to stay connected to family members and within their communities." - **Louise Edmonds, Fingal Age Friendly Co-ordinator**

"Seeing people able to do it and changing their lives is wonderful. It's lovely to see people grow" **Patrice Reilly North Dublin Integrated Care Programme Manager**

Fingal County Council Age Friendly initiative – The Council, through its Age Friendly Programme Coordinator, supports community initiatives that help combat isolation and overcome loneliness amongst older people. The following are some examples of initiatives, using the ACORN device, to support older people to stay actively involved:

- Skerries, Age Friendly Town Skerries: Staying Connected Initiative
  The Skerries Age Friendly Town voluntary group fund-raised to purchase devices to support Skerries older people residing in local nursing homes and the Community Day Care participants in Lusk and Skerries to stay connected to family and friends, with the aid of the device. They purchased ACORNs because they felt the device best suited the people they were trying to reach. Collaborating with the North Dublin Integrated Care Programme ensured access to vulnerable older people in nursing in North County Dublin
- Donabate 'Active Age for All' secured funding from FCC and are using the device to assist people to take part in classes
- Blanchardstown/Castleknock 'The Good to Chat Group' initiative. The project aims to reach the most isolated people across Dublin 15.

Friends of Clonakilty Community Hospital

"We were keen to support the Healthy Ageing Programme of Adding Years to Life and Life to Years" - Jim Daly, Volunteer with Friends of CCH

The Friends of Clonakilty Hospital are using the ACORN device to enable residents in the Hospital to connect to other residents and to family and friends in the community, thus enhancing their lives. The device was selected because it was user-friendly. The group aims to connect residents and families. The project is new but if successful, the Friends of Clonakilty CCH are committed to ensuring that all residents have access to technology, if they want it.

St Dympna's Hospital Carlow

Staff in St Dympna's work with people who have intellectual difficulties and mental health issues. Carers/support workers are supporting clients to use the device. The ACORN smart technology device is working well in Kelvin Court, one of the locations. Covid-19 has restricted staff from doing more with the device, but it is hoped that now that all clients have received their vaccines, staff will have more time to learn all aspects of the device before using it with clientele. Clients who have access to the device are using it to make WhatsApp calls to family members.It is also being used by clients to access YouTube and, in general, to maintain contact with the workplace.

" Covid-19 restrictions meant that people found themselves very isolated. We wanted a solution to enable our clientele to be able to stay connected to our service and to their families" **- Margaret McEvoy, Senior Occupational Therapist**

Galway City Partnership

Galway City Partnership
Comhpháirtíocht Chathair na Gaillimhe
a tide for change
an taoide ag casadh

"Covid was the catalyst for us, a lot of our members are older people and they had just begun cocooning. They had never used technology so we needed a device that wasn't complicated"

"We chose the ACORN device for our project because of the wrap- around service provided by the ACORN Team. The project works because of the support we received from them"

"Getting devices would not have been an issue, but getting data would have been a headache. It was great that the ACORN Team provide you with the data and the device comes with all the accessories"- Vernice Murray, Project Officer, Galway Partnership

Galway Partnership works with disadvantaged communities in Galway. Covid-19 lockdown restrictions accelerated the Partnership's need to find a solution to enable them to stay connected to their members and enable older members themselves to stay connected to each other. Many of their members don't have family and others have family but they don't live in Galway. The Partnership needed an easy technical solution that would help overcome possible social isolation and loneliness. Through its Art and Wellbeing Programme, the Partnership is successfully using the ACORN device to promote active learning and are about to kick off the third programme of this initiative.

Dublin City Council
ACORN Digital Initiative

Dublin City Council
Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath

The ACORN digital project in Dublin city was undertaken to enable older-older people to stay connected during Covid-1- lockdown restrictions. 10 people were identified from the Harolds Cross and Phibsboro areas of Dublin along with 10 sponsors who provide mentoring to participants on how to use the ACORN device. Feedback on the success of the initiative is provided by sponsors on a regular basis.

"The ACORN device is a great product and really good value for money, the ACORN team need to say this up front and centre" Robert Chester, Administrative Officer, Dublin City Council

Participants are delighted with the device, using it to access information, read the regional newspapers, get Mass and generally explore the world wide web. All have found it really user friendly. The support service provided by the ACORN team is definitely a key asset

Cork City Council
ACORN Digital Initiative

Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí
Cork City Council

"We want people to see the ACORN smart tablet as another tool they can use, just like the pen" - **David O'Brien, Senior Executive Officer, Cork City Council**

This ACORN Digital project is at a very early stage, so it is hard to talk about the impact the device is having locally yet. However, following a short interview with David O'Brien who chairs the group, it is clear that key stakeholders have been identified for the project and that the co-ordinated approach to securing funding has proved successful for the group. ETB Cork was very proactive in the area and actively supported digital projects to secure funding under the MAED Funding Scheme. There's a lot to be learnt from this approach.It will be interesting to see how they get on

"Our clients love to read the regional newspapers, but when Covid-19 struck and they were forced to cocoon, they were afraid to go to the shops to get the paper. We decided to encourage them to use the Acorn device to access the newspapers online"

Mary Hussey Rockmount Care Centre Kilgarvan Co Kerry

Rockmount Care Centre

Rockmount Care Centre is a community-based facility that provides nursing care services to those living in the catchment area. Pre- Covid, the centre not only provided nursing care services to those with dementia but was also a social hub where people came together to socially interact.

People came to participate in the recreation and outreach programme, availing of arts & crafts, traditional music and a three course meal. Many older people in the catchment area live in very isolated settings so Rockmount is very important to them.

Pre –Covid, They hadn't looked at technology as it was more important to get people out of their homes and into a social setting to prevent social isolation. Once Covid-19 struck, They needed to find a way to stay in touch with their clientele and to enable them to stay in touch with family and friends and the world at large. They secured funding for the devices from Kerry County Council and the RTE Comic Relief Fund. The Acorn device meant that their clientele could read the local newspapers and for some it was a lifeline to their community, especially as they live in such rural settings and the postman may be the only person they see and talk to on any given day.

SouthEast Community Healthcare

Living Well
A programme for adults with long-term health conditions
Your toolkit for better health

" Seeing the delight on peoples faces when they meet each other on Zoom, is magic" - Kate O'Connor, Self Management Support Co-ordinator, SouthEast Community Healthcare, Kilkenny

"Prior to Covid we would never have dreamed we would have gone online "

As Self Management Support Co-ordinator for chronic conditions, her job is to support people to manage long term health conditions. 65% of people over 65 are living with 2 or more conditions e.g. diabetes or pulmonary and cardiac issues etc. It is, therefore, really important to support those clients to manage their conditions. Pre-Covid, people met face to face with service providers in hospitals and community centres and day care settings. Covid-19 changed all that.

They are dealing with some of the most vulnerable people who are struggling to cope with their conditions. Even before Covid-19, the service found it hard to reach some of the clientele. When looking for a technical solution, it had to be a device that was easy to use and that would work for everyone. They got advice from the Kilkenny Age Friendly Older People's Council who recommended the Acorn device.

Providing their service in an online capacity raised a number of challenges particularly the lack of devices, connectivity, knowledge and desire. The Acorn device was the user friendly device that they needed for their clientele. They upskilled their leaders and loaned the Acorns to some of theirolder clientele and to some of those who have intellectual disabilities.

According to the Co-ordinator "people who have managed to get online are absolutely delighted to see others on Zoom".

Age Friendly Tipperary

TIPPERARY
Age Friendly

"We have an 87 year old woman who had no contact with her two daughters in England due to the pandemic, getting her using what's App on the ACORN now means that she is in contact with them every day, It's like a new life has opened up to her". Breada Ryan, Age Friendly Digital Champion"

"We have people now who are digitally engaged who were not engaged with us before"

" We are building up knowledge of what people want on the device, so that we can add the content they want.This helps to make it more relevant to them" - Fiona Crotty, Age Friendly Co-ordinator

The Tipperary Age Friendly County Programme Co-ordinator supported community groups to access funding from a variety of funding schemes. The Age Friendly Co-ordinator targeted high areas of older population in the county and contacted groups who support older people to assist them in their funding applications. Applications made to funding schemes pre-Covid were not successful, but lockdown restrictions encouraged funding bodies to release monies, making it easier for groups to access funding to purchase smart tablets.

The initial programme in Tipperary included 8 pilot sites. The targeted groups each have a project champion who supports the older person in getting confident and competent in using the device. ACORN project participation templates were drawn up and signed before devices were distributed. The Age Friendly Co-ordinator checks in with champions on a six-weekly basis and gets updates on progress on each pilot site. The Gardaí in Nenagh have been quick to embrace the project with Garda Maureen Finnerty offering to download the companion app providing vulnerable people with additional support and links to the community garda in the local area.

They have plans for a further 8 pilot sites to be activated in the near future. The project is having a huge impact in communities.

Churchfield Community Trust Cork

"Covid-19 was the driver. We were looking for IT resources to enable us to keep our members engaged. The ACORN device provided us with that resource"

"Relevance is key, some of our members struggle to see the relevance of technology to their daily lives but when Covid-19 restrictions meant children had to be home schooled, the smart technology device proved to be the answer" - Paul O Donnell, Development Worker, Churchfield Community Trust

Churchfield Community Trust is an organisation working with young men on the edge of society. The organisation provides upskilling and re-training programmes to support young men to return to employment. Churchfield CT is using the ACORN device to ensure continuity of service for its members and to provide their clients with the tools to access the courses they need to get to support them to get back to work. From the outset of this project, it was decided that responsibility for on-boarding of all participants would be given to one of the particpants on the project. This approach has proven to be very successful,

Conclusions

These case studies offer a snapshot of the impressive array of digital initiatives around the country. They demonstrate that marginalised communities can benefit from digital solutions. They also show that the ACORN device has the capacity to enhance the lives not just of older people for whom and with whom it was originally developed, but can be used successfully by service providers who work with people with intellectual disabilities, cognitive impairment issues. In addition, the device is providing a solution for Community Employment service providers working with people who have addiction issues and who are in danger of being left out of the work force or, indeed, left excluded from society as a whole.

Apart from using funding resources from within their own organisations, Project Co-ordinators used a range of funding schemes to secure finance to purchase ACORN Smart Technology devices. The following is a list of some of the funding schemes used;

- National Government Drugs Task Force Funding Scheme; HSE Lottery Funding Scheme and Sláinte Care Funding
- Local Government funding schemes including, LCDC, Local Age Friendly Ireland and local Creative Ireland funds, where available
- Comic Relief Covid-19 Fund
- Education and Training Board – Mitigation Against Educational Disadvantage Fund
- Local fundraising

Three of the Fifteen Project Co-ordinators had difficulties securing funding for digital projects pre-Covid. Twelve of the projects had no problem securing funding for digital initiatives. All of these project applications were made after Covid-19. It is safe to say that Covid-19 accelerated the need for digital solutions to ensure that service providers working with marginalised groups could continue to deliver their services and so that clients of these services were not left socially isolated as a result of the pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

A co-ordinated approach to funding applications is the most successful approach. Groups that receive support with funding applications are far more likely to be successful in their applications for funding.

As part of the interview process, project co-ordinators were asked how they were monitoring/evaluating the success of the digital initiatives and whether they would like to avail of this type of service from the ACORN Team, at a cost. They were also asked whether they would like to be part of an all-island ACORN network and If they would like to receive updates on developments.

Monitoring of the projects varies and depends on the size of the project, the level of resources the organisation has and the timing of the project.

Smaller projects, e.g. St Dympna's and Cairdeas, both in Carlow, rely on feedback from carers who are directly involved in supporting clients to access the device. Community Employment project participants are accessing training courses which are accredited. Success of the project is evidenced by the participant getting a certificate of achievement.

Projects like Skerries Age Friendly 'Staying Connected' initiative and Friends of Clonakilty Community Hospital rely on feedback from staff within the nursing home or day care setting. In the current Covid-19 climate, providing updates on progress has proved difficult, as staff have been overwhelmed in coping with the impact of Covid. In some cases staff have been redeployed to cover absences caused by the pandemic.

Larger projects such as Tipperary Age Friendly, Galway Partnership and Cork City Council's Digital Initiative have identified key digital champions who are mentoring participants in the use of the device and who report back on progress. A measure of the success of these initiatives is based on the record of attendance at sessions which can be quantified.

CONCLUSIONS

Project co-ordinators are interested in exploring opportunities relating to monitoring services, but raised concerns regarding GDPR and cost of such a service.

A number of concerns were raised by project co-ordinators about the ongoing cost of data and how that would be paid for. A couple of projects have devised a deposit scheme to cover these costs and information of this nature would be worth sharing with others.

All are interested in participating in an all-island network and/or receiving information on updates and developments. All want to learn from the experience of other projects around the country, particularly those of similar size and type.

RESPONSE FROM THE ACORN TEAM

The Acorn Team was invited to respond to feedback from project coordinators from around the country. The following is a list of topics raised during the interview process that the team has considered and propose to initiate next steps to further ensure successful project execution.

GDPR Support

- The Acorn Team will convene a small advisory group to discuss issues/concerns relating to GDPR

Mobile Data

- The Acorn team will continue to provide access to competitive Mobile Data support

Feedback and Forums

- They will provide a space on ACORN website where members can post issues of concern and where the ACORN team can answer FAQ's of members
- They will convene a meeting of ACORN members to share learnings, either in a virtual capacity or in reality, after Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.
- The ACORN team will provide a shared learning space on the ACORN device, where project members can share learnings and discuss concerns with each other

Feature Updates and Improvements

- The Acorn Team will put greater focus on highlighting the user-friendly and support features of the device

Funding Models

- The Acorn Team will collate a list of funding schemes and upload onto a shared space on the ACORN device
- They will collate templates of successful funding applications and uploaded onto a shared space for use by ACORN network members

Knowledge Share

- The Acorn Team will capture evidence of digital initiatives on video to showcase/share with others
- They will develop a collection of digital initiatives, collating best practice templates. Upload on a shared space for use by ACORN network members. There's a lot to be learned from the approaches taken in both Cork City Council and Age Friendly Tipperary

"Leave no one behind" is the central premise of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. It represents the commitment of all UN members to eradicate poverty in all forms, end discrimination and exclusion and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals.

Digital solutions, such as the ACORN device, have a definite role to play in combating the exclusion of marginalised communities as is clearly shown by the impressive array of digital initiatives undertaken by Statutory, State-funded and community voluntary groups outlined in this review. Even at this early stage, there are huge learnings to be gained from the coordinated approaches taken by Cork City Council and Tipperary County Council. While the Cork Acorn project is still in the early stages of roll out what is commendable is the collaborative approach that was adopted by Cork City Education and Training Board in leading and coordinating the funding application process.

Tipperary County Council's Age Friendly Programme has an inspirational project from which others could learn. The far-sighted approach taken by the Age Friendly County Programme Manager in bringing together key stakeholders in the county including the Garda Síochána, the Tipperary Education and Training Board and Community & Voluntary organisations proved extremely successful. In addition, their identifying of Acorn Champions to support older people to gain confidence and competence ensures the success and longevity of this Acorn project.

What clearly emerged from the interviews were the broad benefits for both project co-ordinators and users, utilising the same device, thereby allowing for opportunities of peer-to-peer experience sharing and networking. In the past, some digitisation initiatives have suffered due to participants using an array of different devices, making it difficult both for tutors and participants. Moreover, if marginalised communities are to avail of the same economic and social benefits as their more advantaged counterparts, the kind of wrap-around personal support service offered by providers such as the ACORN team is essential to overcome the digital divide.

List of Review Participants

1. Cork City Council - David O' Brien, Senior Executive Officer
2. Fingal County Council – Louise Edmonds, Regional Age Friendly Coordinator
3. Tipperary County Council – Fiona Crotty, Tipperary Age Friendly Coordinator
4. Galway Partnership – Vernice Murray, Project Officer
5. St Dympna's Hospital – Margaret McEvoy, Senior Occupational Therapist
6. Cairde, Clonakilty Community Hospital – Jim Daly Volunteer
7. Churchfield Community Trust, Cork – Paul O'Donnell
8. Cairdeas, Tullow, Co Carlow – Eileen Doyle, CEO
9. Baile Mhuire Community Care, Kerry – Catherine Murphy, Occupational Therapist
10. Cork Northside Community Enterprise, Karen Hayes, CE Supervisor
11. Inchicore Family Resource Centre – Sinead Clancy, Community Development Worker
12. Skerries Age Friendly Town Staying Connected Initiative– Mary Conway, Volunteer
13. Dublin City Council- Robert Chester, Administrative Officer
14. South East Community Healthcare.
15. Kate O'Connor -Self Management Support Coordinator for Chronic Conditions,
16. Rockmount Care Centre , Mary Hussey Nurse Manager,

Review of ACORN Utilization- Interview Questions

Following the successful rollout country-wide of ACORN devices, the ACORN Team has now decided to carry out a review of the utilization of the ACORN device. The outcomes of the review will provide the Team with ideas/opportunities on how to expand the use of the device in the future and how the team can better serve the customer. We would really appreciate your contribution in this matter.

Name of Organisation:

1. How did you become aware of the ACORN device?
• Describe where /from whom did you hear about the device

2. Outline what prompted you or your organisation to purchase ACORN devices?
• Describe your ACORN project
• Do you have partners involved with you? Who are your partners if any?

3. What aims of your organisation does the device help achieve?
• Better communication with older people
• Overcome social isolation
• Help older people deal with digital world

4. How was the funding, used to purchase the devices sourced?
• Did you apply for funding from your own organisation?
• Did you make a joint application with other organisations
• Did you meet any barriers when trying to secure funding?

5. Is the extent of the use of the device being monitored by your organisation?
• Does the organisation have a policy regarding the devices funded by the organisation not being properly utilized.

6. How are you evaluating the success of your initiative?
• Have you built in a metrics to measure success of your project

7. Would you like to avail of a monitoring/evaluation service from the ACORN team if it was available at a cost?

8. Does your organisation provide training to users?

9. What creative/innovative initiatives, if any, have you used the device for?

10. Would you like to be part of an all island ACORN Network?

11. Would you like to receive a newsletter about ACORN developments and initiatives?

ACORN

Stay Connected

- Use wifi and /or our built-in low cost mobile data sim to access the internet.
- Simple secure phone/video calling with friends and family.*
- Easy Messaging and Email

Stay Informed

- Easy to use Internet Browser
- Local and National News
- Special Interests and Community Events

Be Independent

- Easy to use Calendar
- Easy access Apps and Websites

Access Help and Support

- Help Videos and Tutorials on all features on Acorn
- Talk to our dedicated Irish Based Support Team for help with your ACORN.

Feel Secure

- Emergency Alert
- Community News

Thank You

Churchfield Community Trust CLG

HSE

South Dublin County Partnership
Páirtíocht Chontae Átha Cliath Theas

Living Well
A programme for adults with long-term health conditions
Your toolkit for better health

HUNTSTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE

FINGAL AGE FRIENDLY COUNTY PROGRAMME

Galway City Partnership
Comhpháirtíocht Chathair na Gaillimhe
a tide for change

Dublin City Council
Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath

cáirdeas

NORTH WALL CDP
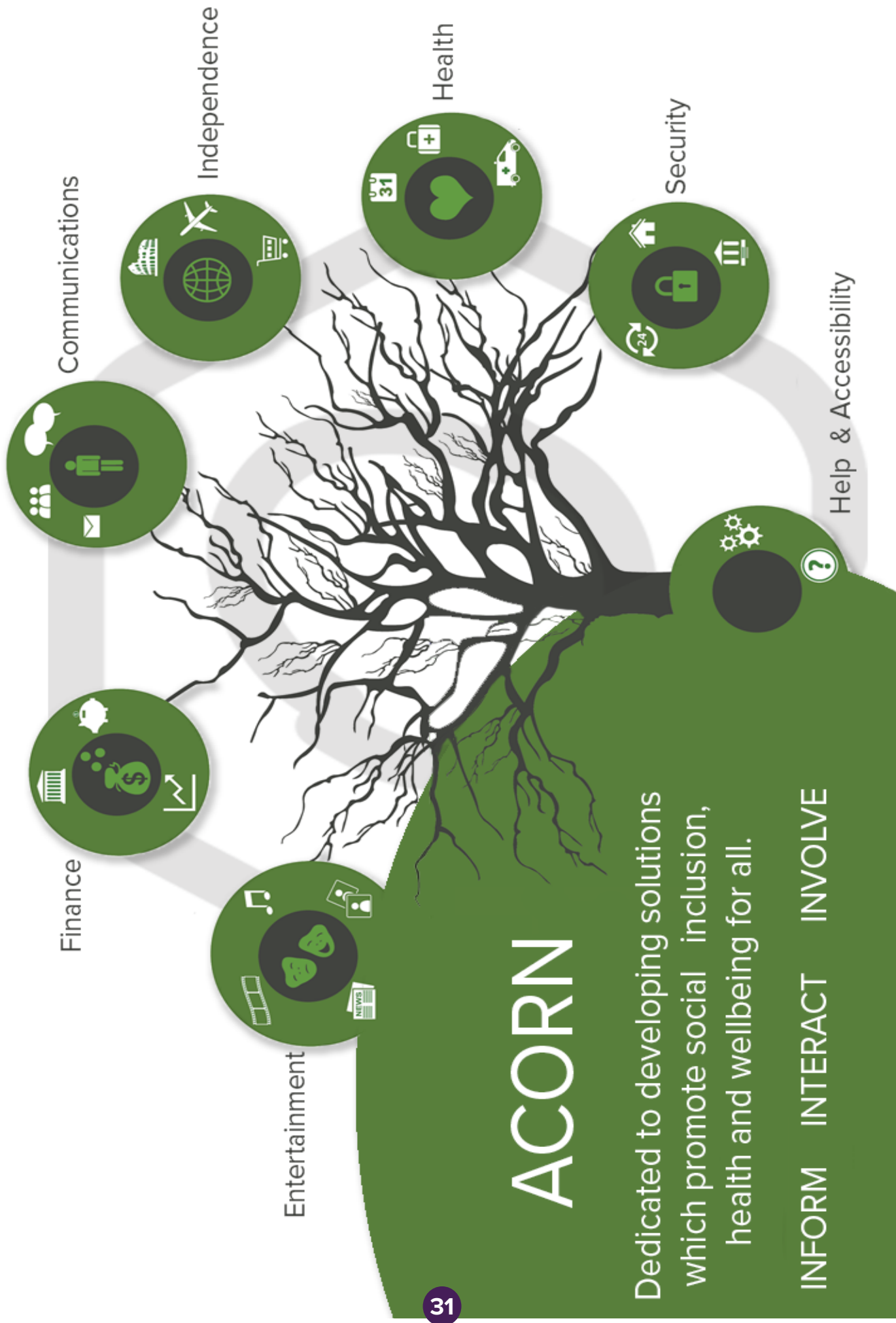Empowering & Developing Communities Since 1985

CAIRDE
CLONAKILTY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Memory Technology Resource Room

Rockmount Care Centre

TIPPERARY Age Friendly

NCE

Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí
Cork City Council

Baile Mhuire Day Care Centre

South Dublin Libraries
Leabharlanna Átha Cliath Theas
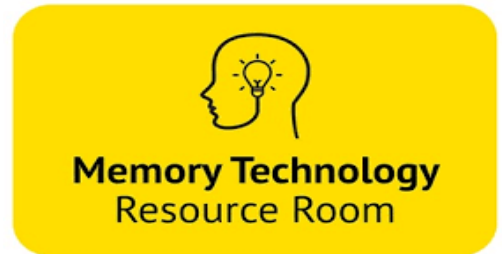
THE Alzheimer SOCIETY OF IRELAND

KILDARE AGE FRIENDLY COUNTY PROGRAMME

Independence

Health

Security

Communications

Finance

Entertainment

Help & Accessibility

ACORN

Dedicated to developing solutions which promote social inclusion, health and wellbeing for all.

INFORM   INTERACT   INVOLVE

31

ACORN

ACORN'S MISSION

We are dedicated to developing solutions which promote social inclusion, health and well being for all.

We are committed to using practical research and intuitive design led by the insight and experience of those who are not yet comfortable with mainstream technologies.

Our aim is Digital Citizenship for all through care, consideration and design experience

Cliffrun Media Ltd.