

Total Conversation Cymru

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Summary

Total Conversation Cymru (TC Cymru) is the implementation of a service in Wales to allow Deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate with public services either remotely (eg from home or work) or in person (at a walk-in centre) in video, voice and text (or any combination), either directly face to face or through an on-demand online relay agent. With the help of European funding in the REACH112 project, up to June 2012, we have been able to run a full pilot service (the myFriend Network) and to demonstrate this to public service bodies. Total Conversation Cymru has provided a medium term open trial for Deaf people and for public services in Wales (until April 2013 under this grant and until July 2013 with contributions from the participating organisations) in order that they can more effectively interact and determine the advantages of this on-demand communication service.

Immediate outcomes are (a) to allow telecommunications between all public service staff and Deaf and hard of hearing people in Wales and (b) to provide the data to evaluate the cost savings, efficiency gains and service improvement, in a form whereby strategic units in public service bodies can determine the significance of this initiative.

Medium term goals are to increase awareness among Deaf and hard of hearing people of the ease of interaction and engagement with public services (when they have not been able to do this in the past) and similarly to persuade public service staff to engage.

Primary outcomes (to be measured by telecommunications traffic, ease of use, monitoring of time of day, purpose of calls) were to offer a means to deliver the public services' consumer charters for the first time to these marginalised groups. For Deaf and hard of hearing people, they can approach equality in access through the use of the myFriend Network in Wales.

All potential users can register and download the necessary software free at www.myfriendcentral.com. The software works on PC, Mac, Android smartphones, iPhone, iPad and there is even a web browser version. Deaf users have had support and training through Deaf Access Cymru and SignWales who have continued to manage the myFriend Network Wales (arranging relay agents, providing the feedback to Local Councils and so on) until the present (July 2013).

In order to provide this service most easily, we set up a testbed which any individual and any agency can use. The use of the test bed has been free. However, we have tried to engage with public services to determine whether a tailored value added service was needed. In addition we have worked to push costs down and to offer a no frills entry point which Local Councils might see as an effective way to begin. This new product is described in Appendix 2.

During the period of this project the testbed has allowed users

- To download and register the software free in order to make video, text and voice calls direct to Deaf and hard of hearing people, who also have myFriend

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- and each Deaf or hard of hearing person with myFriend to make calls through the relay service to any voice phone in the public bodies (also without charge)
- civic centres and customer support centres to provide a walk-in service for Deaf and hard of hearing people – although this was not taken up, despite the initial interest in this
- The aspiration was that emergency services and other time critical services would be able to receive calls from Deaf and hard of hearing people either directly (if equipped) or indirectly through the relay service. The sign language relay part of this service, remained elusive due to their being insufficient numbers of 999 trained relay agents and because BT raised issue with the text connection which was offered. Providing a realistic 999 service (24 hours) remains an aspiration.

The statistical data on the use of the service is provided in Table 1 and the progress against targets set in the original proposal are shown in Table 2. Headline figures show increasing use with over 17,000 calls attempted, over 1,500 successful relay calls occupying over 13,000 minutes. Cost of the service for the period of the project is manageable: if we use the number of attempted call minutes as the driver, then it is between 50p and 80p per minute; or with the relay service as the driver, between £2.60 and £3.50 per minute.

The provision of the test bed has provided an overall evaluation of the proposed service development as well as providing the feedback to the participating public services. We are now in a position to move this service on and to offer a very simple entry point for all organisations who wish to support Deaf people's access.

Initial Objectives of the TC Cymru project (December 2012)

Aims and Objectives

The myFriend Network is currently available to everyone in Wales. Total Conversation Cymru seeks to make this telecommunications service and the accompanying relay service a part of daily life for deaf and hearing.

Activity 1:

Provide the myFriend relay service to everyone in Wales until April 2013. This period will be used to further test the service and give feedback on its viability for Welsh public services. All stakeholders will be engaged in the process of developing, improving, and evaluating the service.

Activity 2:

Establish the management systems of myFriend relay service, establishing workflow, interpreter booking systems, and a management group involving all partners.

Activity 3:

Market the myFriend service to health and local authorities to promote their adoption of the service as a means of communication with their service users but buying into a contract arrangement and establishing a myFriend account.

Activity 4:

Promote the myFriend service amongst hard to reach Deaf and hard of hearing people (those who do not frequent Deaf clubs or are not involved in the Deaf community). We aim to ensure that all Deaf and hard of hearing people are aware of and have access to the myFriend relay service either via PC, Apple computers, smartphones, iPads and other telecommunication devices.

Background

The research that led to this Total Conversation service began in 2009 with the REACH 112 pilot project in five countries in which voice, video and real time text were available simultaneously in telephony over the Internet. This pilot programme was designed to create a blueprint for Deaf and hard of hearing telecommunications and was aimed at providing access for Deaf, hard of hearing and others who have difficulty in the use of a voice phone to call others and especially emergency services. Using a standards-based solution, each country's system was interoperable in order to provide a joined up service across Europe.

Software was developed to run on all platforms allowing end users to call from computers, from netbooks, laptops, tablets, android smartphones and i-phones. A complete back office solution was developed for tracking calls. Reporting issues and providing billing records. User satisfaction with the service was high and they were clearly anxious to continue the service.

The scope of the service was considerable producing almost one million calls in a twelve month period, over 100,000 relay calls and also documented calls to emergency services. Various business models were presented which might make the services in each country viable as a standard provision. Apart from Sweden which already had the framework in place, none of the pilots have managed to implement a free-standing service. The significant advance in technology ran into an unfavourable economic climate.

In the UK, with collaboration among partners we were able to continue significant components of the service: person to person calling (in video, voice and text), video mail, 24 hour text relay access. This latter was given a boost as the existing service for “talk by text” closed down and users transferred to the myFriend Network. This continues to be a growing area of use by Deaf and hard of hearing people.

The TC Cymru project came into being after several meetings and discussions with public services and agencies in Wales. In almost all cases, the responses to demonstrations and to the pilots set up with Councils were very positive. However, it was clear in the autumn of 2012 that public service finance was already stretched to the limit and no investment in new initiatives was likely at this time. For this reason, central government support was requested and after negotiation a sign language relay service was added to the existing service (from mid January). This relay service was funded until April but continues until the date of writing (July 2013, through contributions of the partners).

As the service expanded so did the customer numbers. There has been a steady increase in numbers of users (see the report details below)

The pattern of service provision is set out below.

Progress in MyFriend Network and TC Cymru

MyFriend Network is described in Appendix 2. It is a complete telephony solution for end users who have difficulty with voice telephones. It allows communication at a distance in any or all, of video, voice and text. It is available 24/7 for person to person calling, for video mail and for text relay services connected through BT text relay. Sign language relay has been provided during the working week. The TC Cymru project is a focus of this development in Wales.

TC Cymru was managed by Deaf Access Cymru, based in Mold in North Wales. Their role was in overall financial management and promotion work in regard to the service.

SignWales based in Cardiff provided a base for the major part of the relay service and supported technically and logistically where needed. Sign Wales also had a role in workshops and discussion with a range of agencies.

Aupix based in Bristol, provided the necessary software and infrastructure to the whole project. They provided a helpline and support to users.

The Deaf Studies Trust provided a coordinator for the relay service itself, training and engaging the relay agents and monitoring their performance. They also contributed to the report by providing the traffic monitoring.

All end users in myFriend Network are provided with their own online account and can check their use and personal details. They use the online system to change any of their details and can use it to top up payments (needed for the telephone charges levied by BT). There are detailed terms and conditions provided online in text and in British Sign Language.

Operation of TC Cymru in this project time period

The North Wales Deaf Association (based in Llandudno) joined the myFriend Network and this allowed an expansion of the relay cover to North Wales. It also allowed contact with public services in the northern part of Wales.

Gloucestershire Deaf Association as an original partner in the REACH112 project provided sessions of relay service and contributed a great deal in the steering and promotion of the project.

myFriend Network initially a cooperation of organisations has now come together formally as a social enterprise (CIC) with the aim of promoting and developing the service of Total Conversation to end users.

As part of the goal to network and extend the service, Deaf Direct in Worcester took part from late March in providing relay sessions. This provided a test connection of the service to Deaf organisations in the UK who have an interest in going forward with the service as a whole.

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During the period of the project, Aupix, the infrastructure provider and partner in the project, came under severe financial pressure. Having effectively provided their input without charge for several months in the hope that public sector agencies would at some point match their enthusiasm for the myFriend Network service with actual financial backing. They had to release staff and reduce the scope of their operation, creating a period of uncertainty for everyone. They were eventually acquired by Purple Communications of the USA in order that the software and infrastructure developed in the UK could be applied in the USA. This ensures the future stability of the service.

Deaf Studies Trust in Bristol was able to add expertise to the project by managing the relay service, by providing support to the relay agents and offering training where needed. They also acted as intermediaries in regard to technical issues in the network, linking with Aupix.

The period of uncertainty concerning the infrastructure provision and the goal of strengthening the network of relay service, meant that TC Cymru had to focus more than had been expected, on the consolidation and resilience of the service as a whole. This made it difficult to be certain which proposition and product was to be offered to public bodies. The period was also marked by a noticeable withdrawal from innovation by the public services with whom we had been in contact and this made it more difficult to engage with them, even though the users were making calls into the public services. By the end of the period we had developed a simple proposition for public services which involved them in the least amount of change and which could be mounted easily. We are now in the process of promoting this more widely.

Management of the service

The Total Conversation service is ubiquitous as users can connect from anywhere at any time. They are able to call throughout the UK. With the addition of NWDA we have operated the relay service from five different locations:

- Cardiff (SignWales) – the larger proportion of the relay service
- Llandudno (NWDA)
- Gloucester (GDA)
- Bristol (DST)
- Worcester (Deaf Direct)

This multi-centre approach has been very important as it shares the load in the case of the limited resource of interpreters and it also offers a model of networked service rather than a wholly centralised one.

A strict code of practice is operated. This sets out the quality of the service (eg that all interpreters must be registered qualified sign language interpreters) and working conditions.

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There is also a protocol used to standardise the presentation of the service covering the code of conduct for relay agents.

Relay agents are usually contracted directly by the coordinator although special arrangements apply for GDA who managed their agents locally. The agents are able to take bookings online and these are displayed on an online timetable at www.myfriendcentral.com. Users can check on the online calendar whether an interpreter is available and if unavailable can decide if they wish to work only in text.

All claims from relay agents are matched with the timetable and can be checked against the relay log in and the numbers and times of calls.

In case of difficulty with the call (due to problems in software, hardware or network, the relay agents can submit reports online and immediately – these reports offer a means of tracking and dealing with problems since the report captures the data record as well as the subjective comments of the agent.

Sign Language Interpreters as relay agents

Interpreters working in the service are contracted individuals working on a casual contract with the organising body in this case (DAC and from May SignWales). Although the number of agents has grown, the opportunity for expansion has always been relative to the finances of the network.

Since January 2013 there have been 21 interpreters most of them already trained from the REACH 112 project who contributed as regular interpreters throughout, until July 2013. There have been 8 new relay agents who received training from the coordinator. With new features added to the software all interpreters have received additional training and written material has been provided as well.

The relay agents who took part have delivered the service from

Cardiff: 8

Llandudno: 3

Gloucester: 4

Bristol: 3

Worcester: 3

Deaf Direct relay agents were not paid by the project (as a quid pro quo arrangement was in place in regard to users whom they had signed up). We considered this to be a model to be monitored and evaluated as a means of integrating relay services.

The eight new interpreters who were trained for the network were 1 in Cardiff; 1 in Gloucester; 3 in North Wales and 3 from Deaf Direct.

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The increase in interpreter numbers is only as good as the availability of each of them to take part. That is, all of the interpreters have onsite bookings in their normal interpreting role and typically have sessions booked outside of TC Cymru up to six months in advance. However, the larger pool of interpreters trained did give us an advantage in filling all sessions in the TC Cymru timetable.

Updates to the system

Software is freely available through the Apple App Store, the Google Play Service and by direct download from the myFriend website.

Throughout the period of the project there were significant improvements to the service in terms of the end user software and particularly the improvements to the i-pad and i-phone versions. There were developments in the relay software. Equipment had to be updated and replaced in order that the most efficient interactions could be produced. The back office software also was improved and there was improved accessibility for the managers in regard to tracking user activity and developing the billing system.

Aupix were able to respond quickly to perceived problems and to provide online support and to make changes to the software.

Users

There has been an increase in the user base over the time period of the project. Since January 2013 there have been 256 new registered users to the service.

Aupix have released an app for hard of hearing users which is text and voice only. This has also added a significant number of users although these are not coming through the myFriend network but are rather registering direct with Aupix; we believe there are several hundred new registrations.

Main queries from users

We consider that a fundamental issue is in regard to the concept of remote communication and the traditionally reduced level of communication with hearing people, which Deaf people have experienced. This means that members of the Deaf community do not immediately see their contact with public service bodies as a priority. Offering this possibility to talk to public services, free and on demand does not open a floodgate of use. In fact, Deaf community members will often maintain that they do not have anyone to call and may even have difficulty in relating telephone interaction to subsequent actions and service development. This is more of an issue for older people and those not in work. This type of problem is seldom raised in workshops and is never recorded on our helpline, but remains an obstacle to widespread adoption by the Deaf community. Nevertheless, where support was provided on a one to one basis, progress was made.

The main issues raised by active users have been predictable service matters.

How to use it

In anticipation of the questions about the use of the system, a great deal of instructional text and BSL video was provided online. New users were able to use instructional material with screen shots in text and sign language. It was clear also that there was a much greater need than had been envisaged, for workshops and refresher workshops. Although the workshops scheduled in the proposal were provided, we recognise that for the future we would need to plan more and would specifically engage field officers to work with the community. Working with a community who have had very limited telecoms experience and indeed, minimal IT training, proved an unexpectedly difficult challenge in Wales.

Login information lost

A common problem was loss of, or incorrectly recorded, passwords. This was compounded because many users inadvertently created multiple accounts when they failed at their first attempt, and not realising that they could retrieve their original login information online. Also many of the infrequent users simply forgot their login details and so then set up a new account. It is perhaps important to recognise that these are in fact common problems for many internet and telephony service providers: many users are poor at storing their user information and passwords and are then unable to re-instate a service, when for whatever reason it is disrupted.

This project highlighted that what is already a general problem among internet and telephony customers, is exacerbated in the case of a relatively new service for the Deaf community and it will take time for people to adapt. Many Deaf people are not confident with computers/Internet and not aware that general service providers now create passwords for security reasons and also provide help and information online and through email. Deaf users unaware of and unfamiliar with this, lose, misplace or ignore passwords and are unable to manage those services which then require voice conversations to re-instate.

A great improvement was the release of mobile apps both on Android and i-phone as these are more commonly used by the Deaf community. These were more intuitive to use.

Availability of the relay service

Although other parts of the Total Conversation service were available at all times, the relay service was typically staffed between 9 and 5pm during the working week. As the service gained in popularity, some queuing inevitably built up and although each user should be told visually which position they have in the queue, in one update of the server, this message was lost and users were told that there was no service. This problem was resolved when users drew attention to it.

Managing personal accounts – top-up

Connection to text relay requires the use of a voice telephone line (this is a requirement of the BT system). This connection triggers a cost of a voice call. In order to use the TC Cymru/myFriend Network relay services (which is in itself free), users have to be connected

through a “voice” call and thereby incur the costs. Users transferring from the Action on Hearing loss talk-by-text service had no difficulty with this and were able to top up their accounts. Deaf users experienced many more difficulties both with the online topping up and with the concept that the text on Total Conversation was triggering a voice call. More explanation is required through workshops.

This unnecessarily problematic method of connection which BT require, would appear to be a business strategy and is not a requirement of the current technology – which in fact, we have offered to BT several times, for free. The likelihood is that in the near future, myFriend network will offer its own text relay service.

Other issues

It was announced that the service would need to become a paid service from May 1st but this has been delayed due to the contractual developments at Aupix and with the difficulties of finding either users who would pay or public services who would accept the cost. This is discussed in more detail below. As a result, we continued to provide a free service until the end of July 2013 by subsidy from partners.

End users have still a long way to go until they embrace this new technology. Those who used the service regularly value it. Their positive experiences will gradually build the momentum on use. It is important to remember that most of the effective dissemination of information is still done by “word of mouth” and the community still needs time to adapt to this new technology.

Social media

One of the best methods in information sharing is the use of social media. Most people in the Deaf community who are computer literate use Facebook/Twitter/Youtube and so on. Wherever possible we provided information on Facebook and on YouTube.

myFriend Network Website

Many changes had to be made to the website (www.myfriendcentral.com) as it changed from a European pilot to the TC Cymru/myFriend Network project. New information pertaining to the new service with new partners and updates were added. The Deaf Studies Trust managed this and provided the updates,.

Updated links to the new Facebook page and to other social links such as partner websites were added and more videos were added to written articles to provide signed information to BSL users.

As many videos were added as possible to make sure that sign language users could benefit fully from the latest developments to the service.

The decision was made to create a new Facebook page, allowing all partners to be administrators and to update information independently. This new Facebook page became a powerful tool in letting users know about technical issues or new developments to the

service. Liaising with partners was a significant asset in promoting good customer service as partners needed to be able to work in a coordinated way with the service and with their own registered.

Partner Websites

In addition to the Facebook page, all partners' websites were added to the main website with links to their organisations in order to give customers the necessary information and opportunity to contact the best person for them.

A dedicated page was allocated on each partner's website promoting the MyFriend Network. The main website referred back to the partners' sites with links to their own website.

Support

Providing IT support from a distance poses certain issues (especially when users are not able to read text). Most people expect problems to be solved through voice telephony. We had to use text messaging and in some cases, there had to be remote access to the user's equipment by the engineers at Aupix. The vast majority of problems are easily solved but the means of contact with Deaf people remains an issue. That is, Deaf people need the relay service in order to make the voice contact with the service provider; if they cannot access the relay service, then they are blocked from solving the problem.

We need to recognise that this underlines the importance of working closely with local agencies (ie Deaf charities), because any problems experienced by Gloucestershire users were usually resolved by them coming into the office and benefiting from the one-to-one support that could be provided.

Supporting the relay agents

In the event of problems with calls, relay agents submitted fault reports online and with a trace of the call itself. This enabled both the engineers and the relay coordinator to take a closer look at the technical parameters of the call.

Other technical issues could be solved by telephone contact with the relay coordinator; where there were more complicated matters, this could be passed on to the engineers at Aupix.

Support to Deaf users

The two main methods of communication with the service for users were the support email address (support@myfriendcentral.com) and the support video mail number (55117788). Most reporting was done via the email address. This appears to be the easiest way for users to contact the service. One factor could be that users do not realise the possibility to send a videomail and are still unsure of how to use videomail. The few videos that have been

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recorded in the videomail inbox appear for the most to be mistakes as no signed, text or spoken communication is sent. Some users might call only to see what it looks like in the event that they might need to use it.

Use of the Service in the period of the project operation

Traffic

The new service has been in operation since January 17th 2013. There have been almost 600 hours of sign language relay service provided.

Details of the traffic are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: myFriend Network Traffic

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Total 2013
Number of calls attempted	2,499	3,366	3,171	2,517	2,034	1,893	2,067	17,547
Number of successful calls (>10 seconds)	1,112	1,382	1,567	1,835	1,424	1,314	1,392	10,026
Number of relay calls with 3	201	400	563	441	520	569	712	6,958
Number of text relay calls	373	330	423	609	507	467	485	3,194
Video mail messages left	209	295	209	288	149	156	198	1,504
Total Duration in minutes of all calls (indication of overall network traffic)	7,167	8,280	10,786	9,113	9,559	11,103	10,622	66,533
Total duration of person to person calls (minutes)	3,174	3,313	2,755	2,444	2,861	4,003	2,947	21,499
Total duration of relay calls (minutes)	521	926	2,307	1,651	2,182	2,964	3,261	13,681
Number of Relay sessions (there are variations each month as a result of holidays)	11	23	35	19	30	34	36	188
Number of relay calls with 3 transaction was completed	37	155	225	140	246	322	353	1,508

The data generated in Total Conversation calls is extremely complex and has taken time to provide the detail we need in order to report accurately.

We see considerable progress in the use of the service (despite the issues described above). The general trend in use is upwards although on a monthly basis we see fluctuation. April was a more difficult month since video relay sessions were fewer due to the holidays and many users switched to using text relay which continued to operate 24 hours each day. The ratio of “successful” calls compared to attempted calls is unsurprising and comparable to data we have from other countries – notably France and Sweden. Users may receive no reply, particularly if a person has switched off the device with the myFriend software. This

is clearly more of a problem with web applications than with standalone devices. It would be better if users were equipped with always-on devices. While this might include mobile/smartphone applications, it is still the case that as the user moves around the connection to the 3G signal and thereby the phone registration may be lost. These are network issues over which we have no control at this time.

There was considerable increase month on month in the use of relay services and this suggests that the advances are being built upon. The demand was increasing throughout the time period of operation.

In terms of cost, we can see that if we take the Total Conversation service¹ as a whole, the per minute cost (of all attempted calls) is around 50p per minute. If we consider only the relay service as the driver, then the cost for connection to the relay is between £2.60 and £3.50 per minute. Depending on the base used for the calculation, we can see that the cost of providing this service overall, need not be prohibitive. Nevertheless, this does require a critical mass of users and of course, is dependent on the charges being met by individuals, government bodies or by public/commercial services.

In Table 2, we set out in summary the activities against the specific targets proposed for TC Cymru.

Table 2: Activities of TC Cymru (planned for the project time period, in italic; delivered/ explained in bold)

Planned actions, outputs and milestones	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
1. Creation and publicising of the All-Wales myFriend Relay service	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>		
Actions completed				
Details have been provided to all partners and websites have been updated with the information. myFriendcentral website is the focal point providing updates on the relay service.	yes	yes	yes	yes
A range of materials/leaflets have been prepared and are used by partners.				
Powerpoint presentations have been constructed and video examples of use of myFriend have been made available online.				
Materials are being continuously updated and the website is kept active.				

¹ Budget for this pilot phase was around £35,000 and this is used in the calculations. However, there were additional costs met by the partners throughout and especially over the last three months.

<p>2. Workshops for Deaf and hard of hearing users</p> <p>Actions</p> <p>A workshop was held in Colwyn Bay for Deaf people from Conwy, Anglesey and Gwynedd and Wrexham. Workshops were also held in Cardiff, Mold and Pembrokeshire.</p>		3	2	
		1	2	2
<p>3. Use of the service by Deaf and hard of hearing users (see also Table 1)</p> <p>Actions</p> <p>The numbers of <u>active</u> users (ie in relation to registered users) has been increasing. This continues to increase although a large proportion of these are text users.</p>	80	90	100	-
	105	291	344	-
<p>4. Use of Service by 10 local Councils</p> <p>Actions</p> <p>We have been monitoring calls to public services. This proves to be somewhat difficult as we cannot often tell which numbers are council officers. Until the range of numbers is provided by councils, we cannot be sure. Where the calls are to published contact numbers we are able to report. Details of the call destinations as far as we can determine them are shown in Figure 1.</p>	3	6	10	
	9	9	6	10
<p>5. Training and engagement of 15 sign language relay agents</p> <p>Actions</p> <p>21 relay agents are now contracted. Of these 8 have been newly trained.</p>	10	15	15	15
		16	16	21
<p>6. Interpreter sessions provided (each 4 hours)</p> <p>Actions</p> <p>Relay sessions continued to be offered until July 2013 (See Table 1)</p>	10	30	40	
	11	23	35	19

<p>6. Use of service by/for 20 public service bodies Actions See data in point 4 above; also Figure 1.</p>	<p>5 9</p>	<p>10 18</p>	<p>20 24</p>	<p>34</p>
<p>7. Reporting on incoming and outgoing calls in forms requested by public agencies – monthly statement Actions We continue to refine the likely cost structure for the use of myFriend in future, with a view to harmonization of costs and charges across the UK. Billing records are being produced for the next phase of the development. The data analysis has proved more complex than envisaged and new software has had to be developed. We are only now ready to offer this extent of tracking. We have not yet offered this detail to public services. (See appendix on Greenphone)</p>	<p>x</p>	<p>x</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>8. Report and transition arrangement to sustainable public service funding Actions This requires considerable discussion by partners and has gone through a number of versions. This has proved a very difficult time for public service engagement. The new proposal is now being made available to local authorities. (See Greenphone appendix)</p>				<p>x</p>

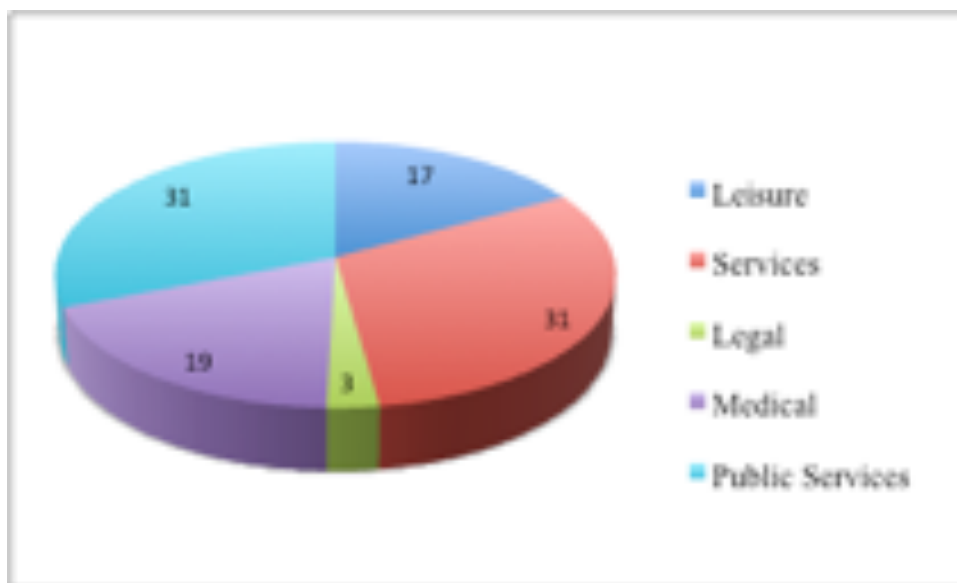
<p>9. Proposed KPIs Actions Inevitably, public service bodies are looking for the highest level of key performance indicator possible with minimal queueing times and 24 hour on-demand service. We are not in position to offer this unless there is an overall initiative from all public bodies, when the generally high cost (nearly £1m per annum for a 24 hour service) could be met. We will need to offer the service stepwise according to what public services can afford and will commit to. Unless there is a sustained central input on this, it will continue to meet the kpi levels which would be desired by all public services.</p>				x
<p>10. Other There has been considerable further development of software and infrastructure during this period – see appendix 1. This increases usability, provided Apple compatibility and has updated the Android versions of myFriend.</p>	x	x		

Types of relay calls made

We have no means of monitoring the internal content of the calls of users – this is enshrined in the terms and conditions to which users agree. However, by considering the destination telephone numbers we can in *some* cases determine the end point of the call. Of 557 relayed calls made, we can identify destinations in 20% of cases. Figure 1 shows the distribution of call destinations for the period to April 2013.

Figure 1: Relay call destination by type (%)

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Most calls (62%) were service calls where either a commercial company or public services was contacted. Half of these were to publicly funded services such as councils or associated bodies. Fewer legal calls and fewer health related calls were made than in past analyses.

Monitoring, Targets

Project team meetings have been taking place each week to monitor the project to ensure targets are being achieved.

A new Code of Practice has been drawn up and a new Protocol for answering calls has been put in place. These can be provided separately for reference. These documents are now to be used for national service development in the UK and TC Cymru will be a major contributor to this.

Support to Users

Although not specifically mentioned in the original proposal, there has been a need for a great deal of support to individual users. This has occupied on average nearly one day equivalent per week of time at Deaf Access Cymru, SignWales and North Wales Deaf Association. This has also triggered technical support from the supplier Aupix, whose responsiveness has been complemented. Home support to users is very draining on scarce resource and partners are trying to find a different cost model in order to be able to sustain this level of user support.

We continue to collect reports from the relay agents concerning the use of the system. Problems occur in the user connection but we have also had problems in the unevenness of broadband services to the relay centres.

Software updates

Total Conversation Cymru

The user feedback and requirements of the myFriend Network have led to updates and developments of the software, which have been carried out and issued to users. Details supplied in the February report.

There has been further work carried out by SignWales in developing systems for billing which are necessary for the exploitation and sustainability. There has also been progress in introducing text-only users and there has been a need to migrate them into the system from their previous supplier Action on Hearing Loss.

Conclusion

The underlying goal of TC Cymru was to create a new option for Deaf people and to bring this to the attention of the public services for whom there is a duty of care for those Deaf people. Almost all of the time in the project (which was in fact, of exceptionally short duration to create a social change) was spent in supporting users, developing the products, enhancing the relay service and managing the expectations of the Deaf users against the reality of the economic circumstances for the public services.

By the end of the period we had developed a new concept and new framework but were very close to losing our infrastructure and technology provider. The fact that we have come through this is almost miraculous but the uncertainty meant that we could not guarantee to public services that we would be able to sustain the service. This led to a hesitation in regard to the planned engagement with the public bodies even though by that stage we had developed the full range of Total Conversation products and indeed the soft entry point of “green-phone” for the organisations.

TC Cymru is now at the point where the services can be rolled out to both public and private services but is held back by lack of overall financial backing.

We will now from early September seek to promote the full service to the extent we can (with limited resources), targeting all agencies in Wales. We will need to identify a sponsor for the campaign.

We have re-structured the myFriend Network to separate the user facing component from the text service and from the sign language relay service. This offers a much better way forward given the continuing strong partnership with the technology provider, Aupix.

It is clear that this is not an advantageous moment in time to engage with public services in new initiatives. When access services (to Deaf people) are not being provided, it is hard to argue that this new approach will ultimately lead to major cost savings. Local Authorities are still asking for extended trial periods and ideally want these free. Even showing the data on uptake and setting out the types of activities of users, is not proving persuasive that even £99 investment is to be undertaken. New initiatives on equality and access will be needed in order to take this work forward.

We continue to be optimistic on this development and have not encountered any negatives from commissioning bodies on the value and urgency of the service to allow Deaf people to be included. However, it remains an enormous task when each public service has to create an internal business case for the service. We have come to the conclusion that it would be far more efficient to have central funding for a meaningful trial period of say 24 months, in order that public services can measure the benefits and Deaf people can be provided with support and training.

Total Conversation Cymru

User satisfaction is high, relay agents are enthusiastic and most technical problems have been overcome. We will continue to work with public bodies and commercial organisations to ensure that the service can be maintained and developed.

Appendix 1: Software updates

- ▼ PC myFriend
 - ▼ Version 2.3.10971
 - Rebuilt for Welsh Project
 - User interface moved contacts to top menu bar
 - Fixed occasional registration problems after a call
- ▼ Android myFriend
 - ▼ Version 2.2.10962
 - Rebuilt for Welsh Project
 - Added cloud based contact editing, saving and synching
 - Support for TCP SIP (fixes a number of ISP router issues)
 - Fixes a number of infrequent software crashes
- ▼ Web Plugin
 - ▼ Version 1.8
 - Certified Mac plugin means it will install with Gatekeeper enabled on Mac OS 10.8 (Mountain Lion)
 - Improved audio device handling on Mac OS X
 - TCP SIP support on Windows and Mac OS X
 - Created OneClick interpreter page for myFriend Central
- ▼ Apple iOS TCPhone
 - ▼ Version 1.1.10982
 - Improved in-fall Real Time Text notifications
 - In-call audio and video options
 - Bug fixes
 - Text only calling

Appendix 2



Green Phone Service

Five steps to access

- Simply put the green-phone icon on the top page of your website; with text eg “Deaf users click here”.
- The link takes the Deaf person to a webphone page on myFriendcentral where Deaf person clicks “*make call*”
- Automatically connects to relay agent
- Agent sees the number, connects to your organisation telephone number
- Agent speaks to your staff and signs and/or types to the Deaf person

This access page is designed with your logo and advert/information if you want (see overleaf for an example). So we need some details from you on a simple template.

This is very simple - you do not need to add any software or change your IT arrangements or learn passwords or use different equipment. Your operators just receive ordinary voice calls through the relay interpreter.

You will have a small set up charge of £99, which is renewable annually. We are currently setting this charge as in introductory offer for the first 50 agencies. It will then move to a more sustainable £250 per annum.

When a customer/user is connected to your organisation the charge is £2.50 per minute for connected calls through sign language relay – but obviously no charge if there are no calls. Relay calls are short on average, usually less than 5 minutes. Details of all calls received or made through the service are provided on a monthly basis. You can set aside a maximum limit for calls. If traffic greatly increases we will inform you.

Calls which are connected through text relay are charged at only 15p per minute because of Government subsidy.

Green phone meets your Equality Duty in regard to telephone access. It is also a very easy way to gain new customers, support existing customers and for your organisation to show they are supporting Deaf and hard of hearing people's access.

For more information see www.myfriendcentral.com or contact jim.kyle@bris.ac.uk or chris@deafstudiestrust.org or jane@deafassociation.co.uk

What the Deaf user sees.....

On your website



When he clicks on green phone



Connected to relay – talking to you



Green-Phone Service is part of the myFriend Network, CIC – see www.myfriendcentral.com