

ClientTalk revolutionising social work

Maria Wolters

A new system is revolutionising the work of Edinburgh Council's Social Work department. The ClientTalk system, developed by a team of leading European scientists, listens in on conversations between social workers and their clients and produces custom summaries of what was said on the touch of a button. Social workers are full of praise for the system, which drastically cuts down on the time they have to spend writing up case notes. Louise McCall is a Leith-based social worker who conducts home studies of couples who want to adopt a child. She says: "Before ClientTalk, putting together my final report based on hours of interviews with the couple was an enormous amount of work. Now, ClientTalk gives me a concise summary of what each couple said about relevant topics such as infertility or family background. I then edit this summary and add in my own assessments, and I'm done in half the time I needed before." Jack and Nadine Jones, a couple from Granton who have recently adopted two-year-old Nicky, said: "We were really impressed with the accuracy of our report. Before the process, we were afraid that everything we said could be twisted and turned against us. That wasn't the case at all - we truly feel we've been heard."

ClientTalk has also revolutionised the assessment of care needs. After listening to the assessment conversation, ClientTalk not only automatically produces a document that summarises the measures that have been agreed on – it also generates all the necessary orders. Social worker Peter Smith is enthusiastic about ClientTalk. "It does almost all the administration – which leaves me free to spend extra time with the people I'm assessing and get to the bottom of what they really need." Richard Gibbon, 69, was impressed with the system's efficiency. "I remember that when my parents were assessed way back in the 1980's, it took ages for Social Services to get its act together. Now, the social worker comes into your house, you have a nice long chat over a cup of tea, the next day you get a list of what will be done in your email, and two weeks later, the technician shows up and installs your kit. When something goes wrong or doesn't work as it should, I just phone my social worker, and three hour later, I get an email that summarises what needs fixing and tells me what they will do to fix the problem."

Modern smart homes enable more people than ever before to be cared for at home, but adjusting the technology to the needs of the people who live in a home has proved tough in the past. Before ClientTalk summaries, social workers used to have to spend hours in the office fine-tuning the different devices. Now, all the basic policies for controlling the smart technology are derived automatically from the home care intake interview. Social workers follow a fixed interview structure which allows the system to automatically create a tailor-made profile.