



Durham Smart County

Tackling Social Isolation in County Durham

About the Durham Smart County project

Following the Director of Public Health's report on the impact of social isolation in County Durham, Business Durham began the Durham Smart County Project - an initiative **aligning innovation with public health outcomes** and economic development.

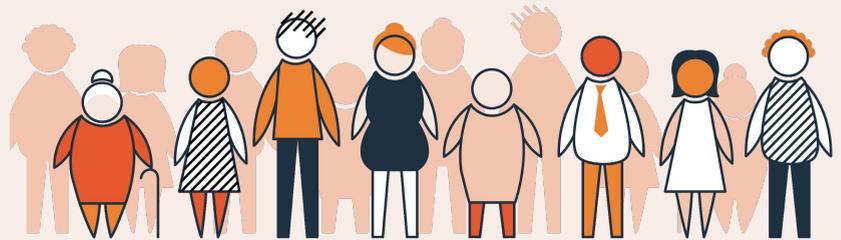
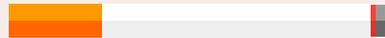
Sentimoto took part in this initiative through a project that would help prevent the **health consequences** of social isolation by increasing community engagement and prevent the **health causes** of social isolation by tackling physical inactivity.

The cost of social isolation

Both social isolation and its subjective counterpart loneliness have been shown to be detrimental to health, with one study showing it can have the **equivalent effect of smoking 15 cigarettes a day** in increasing the risk of premature death. Social isolation has also been tied to an increased risk of developing Alzheimer's and depression, as well as having a negative effect on sleep and blood pressure.

Nesta has estimated that the public sector cost for a single older adult was of **£12,000** over a 15 year period.

15 Social isolation has health effects equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day



31%

of 65+ in County Durham are lonely

22,000

people aged 18-64 are socially isolated

Social isolation in County Durham

The Director of Public Health identified County Durham as having a **heightened risk of social isolation** as a result of an ageing population (19% of residents aged 65+) and high deprivation rates (29% of residents living in poverty).

In the report produced in 2014, it was estimated that loneliness affected **19,000 people aged 65+** (20% of the age-group), and that social isolation affected **22,000 people aged 18-64** (7% of the age-group). The report emphasised the **role of communities and connectedness at the local level** as the key for any prevention programme.

The prevalence of social isolation and loneliness in County Durham

What was done in this project?

Sentimoto developed a smartphone application that would help users discover and engage with community activities in their local area while also displaying lifestyle metrics including physical and social activity, sleep patterns, and time spent out of the house.

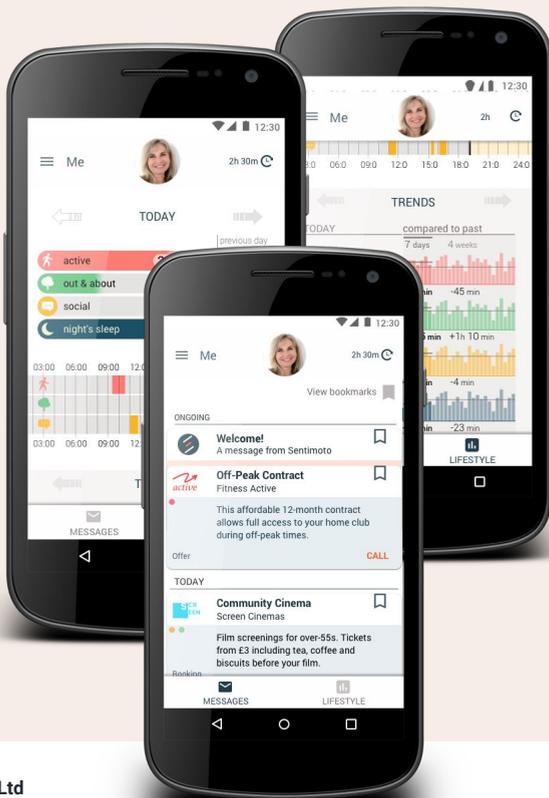
The project lasted 6 months, and was divided into three phases - a scoping stage in which the project partners and stakeholders were identified; a development phase in which the core capabilities of the Sentimoto solution were adapted to the requirements of the pilot; and a two-month feasibility study with 100 participants aged 50 and over. The project aimed to demonstrate a digital technology of this kind could tackle social withdrawal and social isolation by providing users with information on targeted activities in their local area.

The primary outcome for the study - established prior to the start - was to investigate whether participants took part in activities prompted by the application that they would have not otherwise taken part in, with secondary outcomes around the ease of use and relevance of the solution, as well as whether the solution actually increased the social connectedness of the users.

Project outcomes

From the end-of-study questionnaire, the application was found to have successfully met its target of helping users identify and engage with new activities. Of respondents, 77% stated the application had helped them find out about activities they did not know about, 46% said the app had encouraged them to join more organised social groups and activities, and 25% felt the application had made them become more socially connected. Only 8% of respondents found the application hard to use, and 83% of users would open the app weekly, more than half of whom would check the app daily. Of users who did less than 150 min of exercise a day, 60% stated the application had encouraged them to join physical exercise classes and do more physical activity.

The app...



How does this compare

This feasibility study has shown that a digital intervention of the kind developed can lead to real change. No users were referred onto the application, yet the gains in behaviour change - both in joining social activity groups and physical activity groups, are comparable to results found in Community Navigator services.

Nesta has estimated that an effective intervention is only able to change 5% of the population from lonely to non-lonely. The results obtained indicate that this set-up can help achieve and surpass such a rate.

Find out how technology can help deliver scalable prevention and social prescriptions:
email info@sentimoto.com