

NHS INFORM TRAINING FOR LANGUAGE SUPPORT TEAM AT SAHELIYA

Assessment Report



'MIND THE GAP' PROJECT – DIGITAL PIONEERS PROGRESS FUND



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Date: 30th November 2024

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of NHS Inform training for language support team at Saheliya to support their clients (women and girls 12+) on managing their health online. With the increasing shift toward online health services, NHS Inform serves as an essential resource for accessing health information, booking appointments, and managing health conditions in Scotland. However, it was identified that language barriers, limited digital literacy, and lack of confidence or unfamiliarity in using online platforms can create obstacles for many women. The goal was to equip staff with the skills to support clients in navigating NHS Inform and to gather feedback for improving the platform's accessibility and usability for women with limited tech experience and literacy. This report explores what the training entails, challenges, and recommendations from perspective of Saheliya language support staff, clients (women) and trainer.

The NHS Inform training facilitated by Mhor Collective was part of a broader initiative 'Mind the Gap' project supported by the Digital Pioneers Progress Fund which aims to partner with community organisations to embed digital inclusion as a core part of service delivery, supporting people with the digital tools and skills to connect with the necessary services/ support that meet their health and care needs. Saheliya, with its long-standing commitment to supporting ethnic minority women, partnered with Mhor Collective to deliver this training to their staff, ensuring that the women they serve are empowered to make informed decisions about their health through digital tools. The primary goal of the 'Mind the Gap' project is to equip staff with essential digital skills to become Digital Champion.

The report examines the training content, key findings, challenges encountered by both staff and service users, and recommendations for improving the accessibility and usability of NHS Inform for Saheliya's clients.

Training Objectives

- Familiarize Saheliya staff with NHS Inform's core features.
- Recognize the unique needs and challenges of service users, particularly regarding language, literacy, and digital skills.
- Document staff and client experiences to inform recommendations for making NHS Inform more inclusive and user-friendly for Saheliya's clients.

Overview of NHS Inform Training

The training involved the following:

- Navigate the NHS Inform website and understand the key features
- Learn to search for health information and resources needed
- Language support and translation
- Finding local health services near you (eg. GPs, pharmacies, hospitals)
- NHS 24 online app

Materials Used

- Laptops and phones with internet access
- Projector and screen for demonstration
- Printed step-by-step guide to access NHS Inform website

Participants

- 5 language support staff
- 21 clients/service users so far

Key Findings and Challenges Identified

Through hands-on training and feedback from staff and service users, several usability challenges and barriers emerged:

- **Language and Translation Barriers**

Limited Language Options: Many languages spoken by Saheliya clients are not available on NHS Inform platform and Google Translate on some devices, limiting the accessibility of the information for non-English-speaking clients. Some of the languages spoken by the service users could be found on my laptop but it was not available on their phones. The service users mentioned they will be glad to see the translate button on the homepage. The most common languages among service users in Saheliya are Swahili, Kurdish Sorani, Tigrinya, Somali and Arabic. Other languages include French, Spanish, Creole, Afrikaans, Wolof, Farsi/Persian/Iranian, Pashto, Amharic, Urdu, Punjabi, Mandarin and Hausa.

Inaccuracies in Translation: When the platform's content is translated into available languages, some translation errors can lead to misunderstandings. This is particularly concerning for health information where accuracy is essential.

Reach Deck Audio Limitations: The Reach Deck audio feature, which assists with reading website content aloud, only supports English. Clients with literacy limitations in their native language have no audio support, leaving them dependent on staff, friends or family for interpretation.

- **Interface and Device Usability**

Inconsistent Experience Across Devices: The NHS Inform interface varies between devices. For example, certain features available on laptops do not appear on iOS or Android phones, which most clients rely on. These inconsistencies make navigation confusing and limit the platform's usability.

Complex Navigation and Technical Language: The platform contains multiple steps and uses complex medical or technical terms that are challenging for clients with low literacy. Many participants found the navigation overwhelming and were discouraged by the fear of making mistakes.

Connecting to GP Websites: When NHS Inform links to external sites (such as GP websites), clients often encounter additional complexities, as these linked sites have different interfaces and navigation styles that are also challenging to use.

- **Lack of Content for Specific Populations**

Missing Resources for Asylum Seekers: NHS Inform does not include a dedicated page for asylum seekers, who have restricted access to certain public services. This omission leads to confusion about which services they can legally access, adding stress and uncertainty for these clients.

Feedback and Insights from Saheliya Staff and Service Users

During the workshop, service users shared their experiences and expressed a desire for ongoing support and adjustments to NHS Inform that would make it more accessible. Key insights include:

- **The Need for Continuous Digital Skills Training**

Service users expressed a strong interest in digital skills training. Many were accessing online health resources for the first time and noted that they would benefit from regular, hands-on training sessions focused on finding health information and navigating essential services.

- **Importance of Accessible and Visible Language Translation**

Many women requested that language translation options be more visible on the NHS Inform homepage and easier to find. While some were able to use the

translation feature after instruction, they noted that it wasn't intuitive and that they would need assistance locating it in the future.

- **Multimedia and Step-by-Step Guidance**

Service users suggested that the platform could include step-by-step instructions and short videos on how to use its features. They also expressed a preference for multimedia elements like audio guidance, video, and images to help with navigation, as many are more familiar with platforms like WhatsApp that use multimedia extensively.

- **Interest in Health Information, Despite Usability Barriers**

Although most participants found NHS Inform challenging to use, they were eager to access the health information it provides. Over 90% had never heard of NHS Inform before the workshop but expressed willingness to use it because of the relevant health content available.

Participants requested handouts with visual steps for accessing different features on the website, which they could refer to at home. This would provide them with a useful reference and reinforce the skills learned during training.

- **Dependence on Support and Digital Champions**

Most participants indicated that they would need ongoing support, especially when using new features or accessing information for the first time. They suggested that having dedicated Digital Champions or caseworkers available would help them navigate the website independently over time.

Recommendations for Designing an Inclusive Health Platform

Based on feedback from Saheliya staff and service users, the following recommendations would make NHS Inform or a similar platform more accessible for women from minority backgrounds:

- **Simplify and Focus on Core Health Features**

Limit the platform's interface to include only four or five core features that are most relevant to users' health needs, such as finding local services, checking symptoms, booking appointments, and accessing urgent care resources.

- **Integrate Multimedia Elements for Enhanced Accessibility**

Include multimedia elements such as audio (voice note) guidance, videos, and minimal text for critical information. Features should be similar to WhatsApp, with familiar icons and visual cues that reduce reliance on literacy skills.

- **Improve Language Accessibility**

Make language translation options more visible on the homepage, and ensure translations cover a broader range of languages relevant to the user base.

Ensure that translations are accurate by working with native speakers to verify and refine content in key languages.

- **Provide Ongoing Digital Skills Training and Support**

Develop regular digital skills workshops, including one-on-one sessions for service users with minimal digital experience.

Offer printed guides with visual steps for using the NHS Inform website and other essential online health tools, which can serve as a reference at home.

- **Engage Users in Platform Design and Testing**

Involve social workers, caseworkers, and service users directly in the design and testing process to ensure that features meet the needs of diverse populations with varying literacy levels and tech experience.

Insights and Reflection

Training the Saheliya staff on NHS Inform highlighted a range of barriers specific to our clients, revealing the need for health platforms to be more inclusive. While the platform offers valuable resources, the complexity and language limitations make it inaccessible to the very communities who need it most. The staff at Saheliya provided valuable feedback, emphasizing the importance of simplifying content, improving language options, providing ongoing digital literacy training, and aligning the interface with familiar multimedia tools. These adjustments would make NHS Inform more practical and empowering for minority ethnic women with limited digital and language literacy.

By incorporating these recommendations, NHS Inform, or similar platforms could significantly enhance their accessibility, inclusivity, ensuring they serve a broader, more diverse user base effectively. The Digital Pioneers Progress Fund has played a crucial role in supporting this initiative, highlighting the importance of continued investment in digital inclusion for underserved communities.

About the Organisations

Mhor Collective

Mhor Collective is a facilitator of digital inclusion programs aimed at empowering communities with the skills to use digital technology effectively. With a focus on social justice, Mhor Collective works with a range of organizations to deliver training and support in digital literacy, ensuring that underserved populations can access and benefit from the digital world.

Saheliya

Saheliya is a community-based organization that provides culturally sensitive services to women from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly those who have experienced mental health challenges, domestic abuse, or other forms of marginalization. Through its programs, Saheliya aims to empower women to improve their wellbeing, build self-confidence, and access the support they need in a safe and supportive environment. For this project, we focused only on the Glasgow office.

Contact Information

For questions or comments relating to the survey, please contact us through:

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