

Digital Talking Mats: a tool to enhance communication.

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1. Overview

This presentation will explain the background to Talking Mats and the journey from a low-tech method to a digital tool. The tool is now being used widely with people of all ages and abilities across the world.

Talking Mats is a product of the social enterprise Talking Mats Ltd.

2. Background

We are a team of Speech and Language Therapists who have developed a communication tool based on our extensive clinical and research experience [1-4]. Talking Mats was originally developed as a low-tech resource and was found to improve both the quality and quantity of a person's communication. It provides a 'thinking tool' to enable people to explore issues and help them to structure and verbalise their thoughts. In 2013 the process began of working with Arum Systems, an IT Consultancy, to develop a digital version.

Digital Talking Mats was a Winner in the People Driven Digital Health Awards which were held in Leeds in July 2015.

3. Methods

The challenge was taking the existing physical Talking Mats tool and building a digital application suitable for multiple platforms, while maintaining the core ethos of the tool. A significant amount of academic research went into creating the physical product and those principles had to be present in a digital version. The applications had to be extremely intuitive to use and enable better conversations for people with communication difficulties. The aim was to create 3 digital versions; a browser based version for laptop users and a tablet version for iPad users and Android users. Each application would connect to a cloud server, allowing users to log in from any device, and the tablet versions would allow offline working through syncing with the cloud when a connection was available.

4. Results

Following a process of integrating feedback from our customers, Phase 2 of the Digital Talking Mats is now complete. The new features include:

- Easy access to a wide range of symbol sets relating to health and well-being, structured in thematic groups. The design means you cannot lose or mix the symbols up.
- An intuitive design which automatically prompts the user through the framework
- An ability to import relevant photos or images from camera role or web to personalise the mats or create sub-mats.
- A secure log on to protect confidentiality.
- Storage of previous mats on the internal Digital Talking Mats filing system allows reflection and progress evaluation.
- Facility to email completed mat, additional comments and action plan directly to relevant team members.

5. Discussion

The digital Talking has the potential to support people to self-manage a range of issues in their lives irrespective of their age, ability or background. New research is being carried out to examine this in a variety of settings.

6. Conclusion

This presentation will explain how Talking Mats works and will include a demonstration of the Digital Talking Mats in action with a video of a man who has aphasia after a stroke using it.

7. References

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3. Bornman, Juan, and Joan Murphy. "Using the ICF in goal setting: Clinical application using Talking Mats®." *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology* 1.3 (2006): 145-154.
4. Murphy, Joan, and Lois Cameron. "The effectiveness of Talking Mats® with people with intellectual disability." *British Journal of Learning Disabilities* 36.4 (2008): 232-241.

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speech and language, AAC, Alternative and Augmentative Communication, symbols, literacy skills

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Figure 1 : A young user operating Digital Talking Mats