

Operation Harrier – GPS monitoring clips

The provision of GPS monitoring clips to those living with Alzheimer's and dementia to prevent missing person episodes and protect vulnerable people from coming to harm.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Essex Police
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Health services Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2019
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults
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Aim

The aims are to:

- prevent vulnerable people living with alzheimer's and dementia from going missing and to enable them to remain safe in their own home
- protect vulnerable people from coming to harm
- to provide families with confidence around keeping their family member safe

Intended outcome

The intended outcome are to:

- increase the safety of vulnerable people
- reduce the number of 999 calls to report an individual missing
- increase relations between the members of the public, partner agencies and the police

Description

The project involves issuing GPS monitoring clips (which can be clipped on to keys, bags, or lanyards) to people living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

It was identified that the tagging system used in integrated offender management (IOM) could potentially be adapted and used to provide a mechanism for monitoring the whereabouts of vulnerable people with a tendency to go missing and come to harm. The force uses Buddi Clip who provides the clips used in this intervention and the ankle tags for use in offender management. 39 out of 43 forces use Buddi as their provider for the tags, so the links with the organisation are established.

Consultation took place with the missing persons department to identify people who had had two missing episodes in the last year which had required police attendance. Liaising with the Buddi

coordinator, the potential for trialling the use of clips to monitor the whereabouts of individuals living independently with Alzheimer's disease or dementia was explored.

Due to the degenerative nature of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, recipients of the clip only tend to be in the scheme for six to eight months.

Candidates are identified by missing person liaison officers, and a best interest assessment is undertaken with social care and family as to their suitability for the scheme. This relates to establishing capacity to provide consent to joining the intervention. The following questions are used to establish the required element of capacity to engage with the intervention.

- Regarding Social Care. Have they or are they involved with the person?
- Living arrangements - alone, with partner, with family?
- Do they care for themselves, washing, cooking, dressing, housework, shopping?
- Do they manage their own money such as a bank account?
- Do they have mobile or tablet which they use and understand?
- What is their daily routine?
- Are there carers in, how many times a day?
- Do they drive?
- Do they have access to a vehicle?
- Do they have a pet that they care for such as dog walk?
- Do they visit a pub or social club?
- Are they friendly with the neighbours and meet them socially?
- Do they make regular trips alone e.g. to get a newspaper, betting shop?
- Based on your interaction with the individual, do you believe they have understood what you have said about the scheme?

Following discussion with the user/family and police, safe and unsafe zones are established using geo fencing. The zones are tailored to suit the user's lifestyle and can be activated for different days of the week and hours in the day if applicable. Examples of zones include train stations, major roads, water sources, and parks. Should the individual undertake unsafe activity or enter/leave a certain zone, a notification is sent to the family/carers who is able to use the GPS tracking to locate the individual and ensure their safety, thereby preventing a missing person report being raised with the police.

A missing person liaison officer or intelligence co-ordinator provide family, carers, and friends with an input on how the platform works and how it is used to monitor the individual. Clips can be re-assigned if they are no longer required.

Evaluation

An evaluation was conducted from April 2019 to April 2023 and was led by Essex Police. The evaluation looked at 53 individuals living with dementia or Alzheimer's.

This examined the number of alerts and notifications that provided intervention options for friends, family, and carers. These are incidents that could have resulted in a missing person episode. A broad cost basis was then assessed based on previous academic research on the cost of an average medium risk missing person episode to calculate a range of potential cost savings because of this project.

Overall impact

The project has proven successful at reducing the risk of harm to vulnerable people by empowering relatives and carers to support the wearer without the need for police intervention.

The partner of one of the recipients reported the clip as being “wonderful” and felt that it was extremely useful, noting that this had been a “lifeline.”

The cost is funded from the force budget for other types of tags. A clip cost approximately £30 per month, compared with the £350 monthly cost for an offender tag.

The project has averted up to 704 potential missing person investigations at a total project cost of £16,632. If each of these occasions had resulted in a missing person investigation, a conservative estimate suggests it would have cost Essex Police at least £70,400, up to £1,700,7232.

Learning

One of the biggest challenges was to overcome the concerns that social care had around privacy. This was overcome with conversations to say that the police would only have access to collected data if the Buddi controllers failed to contact any of the appointed family or friends when an alert is generated.

It can be challenging to ensure the vulnerable person takes the clip with them. The clip has the potential to be attached to clothing, a bag or lanyard or keys. It is therefore important to establish through conversations what the most effective approach is for individuals. For example, one person joining the scheme never left home without his dog, so the agreed approach was to attach the clip to the dog's lead.

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Tags

Vulnerable people