i-matter
...our social innovation platform

**What we did...**
- We launched an online social innovation & ideas platform called i-matter & made it accessible to our 5000+ staff at work & home.
- We encouraged staff to get involved in “the bigger picture” by setting challenges relating to innovation & organisational issues.
- We regularly advertised new challenges & ideas via the most popular form of internal communication e.g. our eBulletin.
- We took i-matter “on tour” to our Community Hospitals to promote grass roots innovation to frontline staff.
- After 16 months, 40% of our staff have registered on i-matter.
- We have received over 600 ideas which have generated a further 2100 comments.
- We have devised a pathway, ‘ideas into action’ which gives ideas the best chance of survival. This includes a feedback loop to make sure staff are kept informed of idea progress.
- Based on user feedback, we worked with Crowdicity to further develop the platform to improve accessibility & performance.
- We launched a kick starter fund which attracted 24 applications & resulted in us backing 6 innovative projects with funding (max £1k) & project management support.

**What we learned...**
- There is no shortage of good ideas! NHS staff have brilliant ideas & are committed & enthusiastic to see them through to implementation. Capitalise on this & watch them grow!
- Staff really want to be actively involved in finding solutions & improving the services we provide.
- Feeling valued- not just in our work role, but for our skills & potential is fundamental to feeling a sense of wellbeing & engagement at work.
- An innovation platform doesn’t just run itself. It needs to be appropriately resourced & supported by senior management. Permission to “get involved” needs to be continually reinforced by management.
- If you invite ideas, you must do something with them! Even if you are not going to take the idea forward, you must feedback your decisions & rationale or people will stop engaging.
- Rewards matter, but a genuine “thank you” or small token of recognition is highly valued.
- The NHS must explore & exploit the potential of crowdsourcing, inviting patients, public and stakeholders to get involved in co-producing solutions for a sustainable future.

**We matter, you matter, i-matter!**
i-matter is Dorset HealthCare’s online ideas and innovation platform. Based on the concept of crowdsourcing, it gives all our staff a social space to put forward their good ideas, and to collaborate over and support others’ ideas. The aim is to promote the generation and adoption of new ideas (or copying of existing ideas) to bring about improvements in the safety, quality, efficiency and productivity of the services we provide. i-matter can be accessed by all Dorset HealthCare staff via our intranet, either from a networked Trust computer or from home on a smartphone, tablet or computer through the intranet portal.

**HOW do i-matter?**
i-matter is based on challenges. These are questions or problems that we put out to staff to obtain their feedback and ideas and to promote the sharing of best practice. Challenges can be time limited or can be left open e.g. our, “Got an idea? Post it here!” challenge is open for any idea, any time, and is not limited to a particular topic. Examples of previous challenge themes include improving staff retention and recruitment, increasing uptake of staff flu jabs, reducing unnecessary use of email, ideas for integrated, locality working and strategies to reduce appointment non-attendance.

Challenges work best when they have a sponsor: a named person with ultimate responsibility for working with the Innovation Team to ensure the success of the challenge by encouraging widespread participation, and providing timely feedback and recognition for ideas.

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At the close of a challenge, a summary report of ideas is generated by the Innovation Team and sent to the sponsor who coordinates a response and action plan. Where ideas are submitted to our open innovation challenge, “Got an idea? Post it here!” the Innovation Team categorise it accordingly e.g. into a sustainability, quality, clinical service, HR and will produce a monthly report of all new ideas that will be sent to the relevant team or service. We encourage people to respond to ideas directly on i-matter to ensure the idea generator (the “ideator”) is acknowledged for their idea, kept informed of decision making and involved in any possible development. I-matter challenge feedback is regularly published for staff to see on our intranet homepage and also via i-matter blogs, the Trust’s weekly eBulletin, other organisational publications and on Twitter.

The role of the Innovation Team
The Innovation Team (Jodi @JodiMBrown and Kate @KateHardy79) are here to support staff with the generation, development, testing, implementation, evaluation and diffusion of their ideas. We know that staff frequently have good ideas about how things can be made better, faster or safer but there is often disconnect between having the idea, and feeling able and empowered to put it into action. The best innovations usually come from those who are doing the job because a need or a problem is converted into a solution or idea. Wherever possible, we work alongside individuals and teams in a coaching-type relationship in order to optimise transfer of skills, learning and development. A big part of our role is signposting and encouraging people to join forces with others, particularly where similar initiatives are already happening inside or outside the Trust (because copying is good!). We also offer a range of improvement tools and services to staff including creative thinking workshops, grant and award application support, social media coaching and optimisation, business case development and change management methodology (based on the NHS Change Model).

i-matter blogs
Blogs are a great way of sharing regular snippets of information, photos, reports about the experiences and lessons learned from a project. Blogs can be written by individuals or teams and can be shared within the Trust e.g. with a link to the blog on email signatures. Sharing success and difficulties (we don’t call them failures!) is essential learning for others who might also want to test out an idea.

What’s next for i-matter?
We’ve had a good amount of time to reflect on our experience with i-matter and crowdsourcing and we know what we now need to focus on. This includes finding meaningful ways of demonstrating Return on Investment (ROI) for i-matter: we know that those who use it really like it, but we need to get smarter at proving its worth. It’s not good enough to say, “It works!” or, “We like it!” We need proof. This includes getting better at promoting successful ideas and demonstrating value in the implementation of ideas. Work needs to be done to extend i-matter’s reach since many staff simply cannot access it due to limitations in technology: finding ways of engaging all staff in innovation is vital, not just those who are “connected”. Finally, we need to work hard at Organisational Development initiatives to challenge risk-aversion and build on a “can do” culture. Innovation flourishes in an environment where personal agency, self-efficacy and creativity are openly and actively encouraged.

We are still learning about what does/doesn’t work, how best to engage busy and overstretched staff and how to influence key decision making processes. There is no simple formula to successful grass roots innovation, but an awful lot of trial and error. That’s why we’re keen to share our experience with anyone who is interested in our work! We’d love to connect with other Trusts or organisations that use similar methods, or those that want to learn about our journey to share best practice, or collaborate over potential future joint projects.

“i think [i-matter] is a wonderful tool. i find it liberating to be able to contribute in a meaningful way to important issues outside my sphere of work and refreshing to hear from unknown people in other parts of the Trust.”

Medical Secretary, Dorset HealthCare

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