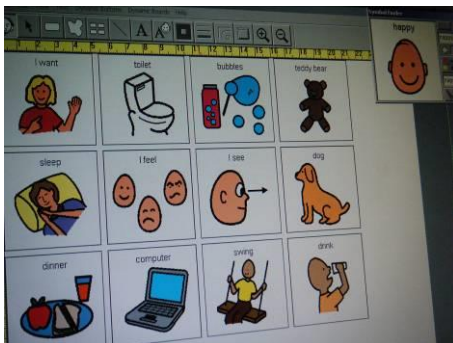
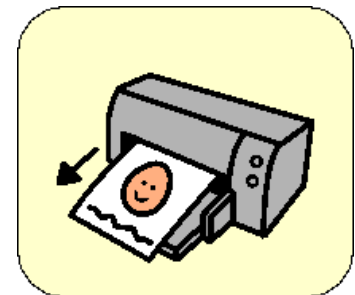
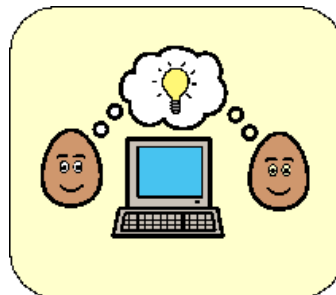


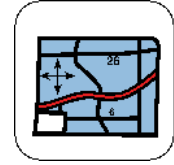
Across the Board: Boardmaker in Leeds Library and Information Service

Implementation report



www.leeds.gov.uk/boardmaker

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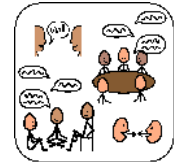


Introduction:

This report explains how and why Leeds Library and Information Service installed Boardmaker software in 25 libraries across Leeds. The aim of the report is to help other library authorities who may be thinking of introducing a similar service.

After an initial summary of the project, each section of the report has two parts:

- **The Leeds model.** Providing a detailed explanation of how each stage of the project was developed and delivered and the decisions made in Leeds.
- **Factors to consider.** Highlighting some of the issues that may have implications for other library authorities.



Across the Board project summary:

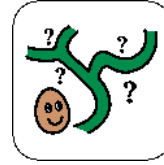
In 2008, the mother of a young boy with autism went into her local library in Leeds to ask if the library service could buy Boardmaker symbol software to support her son's communication needs. Boardmaker contains thousands of Picture Communication Symbols that can be printed, laminated and used to support communication. The parent who made the original request has a son who has autism and is non-verbal. He uses symbols at school and brings the symbols home on his communication board. Because this parent didn't have access to Boardmaker to create more symbols she was finding it hard to support her child's development.

Leeds libraries have:

- Provided autism awareness training to library staff
- Installed Boardmaker software in 25 libraries across Leeds
- Trained Librarians to use the software so that they can train families
- Introduced an ongoing programme of monthly advice sessions for parents of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), delivered in partnership with a team of specialist autism teachers.

Parents of children with ASD are now coming into Leeds libraries to:

- Learn how to use Boardmaker software to print their own symbols
- Meet autism professionals for advice about their child's behaviour and communication needs
- Share their problems and solutions with other parents in a mutually supportive group.



Understand the current position:

The Leeds model

Leeds Library and Information Service was largely unaware of Boardmaker before a parent brought it to our attention with a request at her local library. We spoke to the parent to explore her request and learn more about the software. Once we understood the reason behind the request, we wanted to know if Boardmaker was already available and being used elsewhere in the city.

In Leeds, Boardmaker is used by teachers, speech and language therapists and other professionals to create symbols to use with children and families. Boardmaker is used in a range of educational and care settings for children with Special Educational Needs or children with disabilities that affect their verbal communication. In some cases, professionals in Leeds had been using Boardmaker for many years. However, in all of these cases Boardmaker was installed on PCs or laptops used by professionals – parents could not access the software.

We investigated the implications, assessed the viability and examined the impact that this potential new service would have. We consulted members of the community that would be affected and held meetings with professionals who had expertise in the field.

Decision

- To buy and install Boardmaker software in Leeds Libraries.

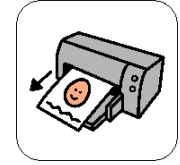
Issues that needed more investigation before a decision could be made

- How many copies of Boardmaker should we buy?
- Identify the number and location of libraries that should get the software.
- What would be the likely training implications for library staff?
- Agree the best ways to promote Boardmaker's availability in libraries.
- How best to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the new service.



Factors to consider

- Are Boardmaker symbols already being used in your local authority? The fact that Boardmaker symbols were well established amongst families and professionals in Leeds helped us tap in to that existing user community.
- Colleagues in Education or the NHS should be able to tell you how they use symbols with families and what software they use to create them.
- You can use this mapping exercise to assess the level of interest amongst other professionals in your proposal to make Boardmaker available in libraries.



Partnerships:

The Leeds model

Having made the decision to buy Boardmaker, we wanted to get a clearer picture of how many families might benefit and whether there were particular areas of the city where Boardmaker would be best used. We hoped this would inform our decisions on buying and installing the software.

To try and answer some of these questions we arranged meetings with staff from:

- **STARS (Specialists Training in Autism and Raising Standards).** STARS are a team of autism specialists who offer advice and training to mainstream settings. They work in early years settings, primary schools and secondary schools.
- **Leeds NHS Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Service.** The service provides a named Speech and Language Therapist to all educational settings.

The STARS team have a specific focus on children with ASD and the SLT team work with children who have a range of disabilities that affect their communication. They were able to tell us how many families they work with using Boardmaker and the rate at which their caseloads are increasing. They also helped us decide where to install Boardmaker by identifying areas of the city with the highest levels of need.

As discussions progressed we explored some of the other ways that we could improve outcomes for families by working together. We also discussed the issues that we knew the library service still had to investigate and address. It quickly became clear that each of our organisations would benefit from a longer-lasting partnership that would add value to the project. We realised that such a partnership would lead to an improved service to families.

Decision

- To buy 40 copies of Boardmaker and install it in ten libraries.
- To buy laminating equipment for each of the ten libraries and offer free laminating to anyone printing Boardmaker symbols.

Issues that needed more investigation before a decision could be made

- How should we develop the project by working in partnership?



Factors to consider

- Did your mapping exercise highlight existing networks that you could tap into?
- Does your local authority have specialist services for people with autism or other specific conditions that affect communication?
- The partnerships that we formed in Leeds at this stage of the project are still in place almost three years later, and look set to continue well into the future. How actively involved would potential partners be in helping you to develop and deliver your services?



Staff training:

The Leeds model

Librarians in Leeds Libraries deliver thousands of computer learning sessions for the public every year. We arranged Boardmaker training for our Librarians so that they could deliver training to parents and professionals as part of our programme of sessions. This training was delivered by representatives from Dynavox Mayer-Johnson (the company behind Boardmaker). However, as well as attaining the necessary technical skills we also wanted staff in Leeds Libraries to learn more about autism, about the needs of the families who would be using Boardmaker, and about visual communication.

To address those training needs our partners delivered a session for our Librarians. This was based on the training they deliver to parents whose children are newly diagnosed with ASD. The training looked at the impact of autism, showed our staff some of the main features of visual support, discussed why people use symbols and examined some of the benefits. The training was delivered by a Specialist Autism Teacher and a Speech and Language Therapist, it was very informal and our staff could ask lots of questions. This gave our Librarians much more confidence and a better understanding of the reasons why people would be coming into libraries to use Boardmaker.

A shorter version of these training sessions was delivered to other staff in the libraries that would be getting Boardmaker. Those staff wouldn't be sitting with parents to show them how to use the software, but we still wanted them to have an awareness of the issues.

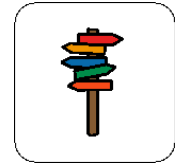
Decision

- To develop the project by working with our partners to offer monthly autism advice sessions at Leeds Central Library.



Factors to consider

- Do you have local experts who could deliver staff training on how to use Boardmaker and the principles of visual communication?
- Do you have staff within your organisation who will be more heavily involved in delivering your project and may benefit from in-depth training?
- Once trained, will library staff have the capacity to offer Boardmaker sessions to parents and other professionals? If not, can you put other systems in place to support people who want to learn how to use Boardmaker?



Expanding the project:

The Leeds model

Our most important development was to introduce monthly autism advice sessions at Leeds Central Library. Parents told us they wanted somewhere to get together, meet other parents, share experiences and get professional help and advice. But they wanted it to be informal. They didn't want to commit to joining a 'support group' and feel under pressure to attend if they didn't want to. They just wanted to know there was somewhere like that available if they needed it.

Now, sessions are held every month during term time. Sessions run on a drop-in basis and they are very informal. Parents can just have a drink and a biscuit and look at the books, leaflets and other information provided by the library service and Leeds ABC parent support group; they can talk to the STARS team to get professional help and advice about their personal situation; they can meet and chat to other parents who also have children with autism; or they can talk to library staff to learn how to use Boardmaker and get help creating symbols. Sessions have been running since July 2008. Some parents come to every session, some come only when they need help. At most sessions there are one or two parents who are there for the first time, having been referred by a professional from an education or health setting. Parents can come whether or not their children have an official diagnosis, a statement of Special Educational Needs, and whether or not they live in Leeds.

The monthly advice sessions also act as an easy referral option for our Librarians when delivering Boardmaker sessions. If parents have questions about their child's behaviour or specific needs, library staff can refer parents to the monthly sessions for professional help and support. This reinforces the Librarians' role as an information provider showing people how to use Boardmaker, and not someone who can offer advice or guidance on autism or communication. The referral is to another part of the library service so our staff can signpost people with confidence.

Decision

- To deliver with partners a rolling programme of monthly autism advice sessions at Leeds Central Library. Dates agreed 12 months in advance.



Factors to consider

- Would the partners you have worked with so far be interested in helping you expand your project to offer advice sessions in a library setting?
- Sessions could focus on issues other than autism, depending on the expertise of your partners and the needs of parents in your area.
- Are there any other ways in which you could expand and develop your project? Listening to partners and parents is important here. In Leeds, we bought collections of Makaton resources in response to requests. We are also running monthly advice sessions for people with memory problems.



Funding:

The Leeds model

When we received the request for Boardmaker software, Leeds Library and Information Service was working on a project funded by UK Online centres. The aim of that project was to demonstrate the social impact of computers and ICT. We used some of that funding to buy our first copies of Boardmaker. We also purchased laminating equipment for each library where the software was being installed. This initial spend was just over £3,500.

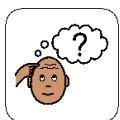
In 2009, the Across the Board project won the Libraries Change Lives award. We received £5,000 prize money and that was invested in the project. To date, our total spending on the project has been:

Boardmaker software in 25 libraries and two mobile libraries	£4,500
Laminating equipment for each library with the software	£1,500
A collection of books about Autism recommended by our partners	£300
Collections of Makaton resources recommended by our partners	£900
Print 7,500 copies of Boardmaker booklet to advertise the service	£1,330
Total	£8,530

All of the spending on the project thus far has been from external sources. If we had not had this external funding we may not have been able to buy as many copies of Boardmaker, or pay for other resources to support the project. But our mapping and consultation exercises convinced us of the merits of making Boardmaker freely available to parents in our libraries. The only question was the scale of the initial financial commitment. Subsequent spending decisions have been based on evidence of usage and impact.

Decision

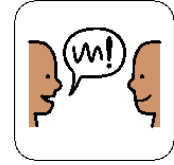
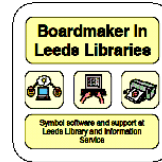
- To increase the number of libraries where Boardmaker was installed from 10 to 25 as more funding became available. Boardmaker is not installed on every PC in those libraries:
 - Central Library = installed on 10 PCs
 - 16 libraries = installed on 3 PCs per library
 - 8 libraries = installed on 2 PCs per library



Factors to consider

The main factor will be the amount of money you can spend on the project. Your mapping exercise and partnerships will help to inform decisions such as:

- What is the anticipated level of demand?
- Can you target provision in libraries where demand will be higher?
- Where are other agencies based who may refer parents to you?



Promoting the service:

The Leeds model

In May 2010 we spent some of the prize money from our Libraries Change Lives award on printing a booklet to explain and advertise Boardmaker in Leeds Libraries. Up to that point, all of our paper-based publicity had been in the form of posters printed in-house. The booklet looks more professional than the posters and we use this at outreach events. We printed enough copies that we could give some to our partners to distribute through their networks. The booklet and posters were designed by library staff using symbols from Boardmaker to increase their accessibility and illustrate some of the ways Boardmaker could be used. All of this publicity is available for download on the Leeds City Council website at:

www.leeds.gov.uk/boardmaker

Information about our project has appeared in various local magazines and newsletters aimed at families who have children with Special Educational Needs, as well as publications aimed at a more general audience. These include: Leeds ABC Newsletter, A Brighter Future, Every Child Matters Update, Leeds Now, Your guide to NHS service in Leeds, Yorkshire Evening Post.

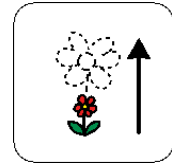
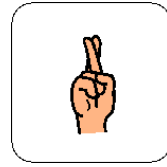
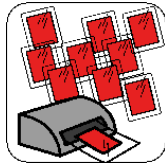
By far the most effective form of promotion throughout the project has been word of mouth. Parents and partners have told friends, colleagues and clients about the whole range of services that Leeds Libraries now offer to families with children with ASD. Boardmaker in libraries and the monthly advice sessions are being publicised by the SLT service, the STARS team, Leeds ABC group, schools and children's centres. Parents are telling other parents about the support they can get from Leeds Libraries.

More widely, these networks have disseminated information about the project outside the city. Parents from Wakefield, Harrogate, Selby, Batley, Dewsbury and elsewhere have come to the monthly advice sessions or booked onto a session to learn how to use Boardmaker. These parents have usually been referred by support groups or professionals in their local area.



Factors to consider

- If you do not have funding to pay for professionally produced publicity, how can you maximise the impact of the publicity that you produce in-house?
- Make your publicity accessible to the widest audience by incorporating Boardmaker symbols. This will also help to make your publicity more easily identifiable.
- Can you encourage your partners and users to act as advocates for your project by publicising it through their networks?



Future of the project:

The Leeds model

Across the Board has relied on external funding thus far. Without that funding we may have delivered the project on a much smaller scale. But whatever the initial outlay, running costs are virtually nil. We do offer free laminating facilities to anyone who prints Boardmaker symbols in our libraries. The occasional replacement laminator and a regular supply of laminating pouches is the only ongoing cost associated with the project. Other than staffing costs, no money from the library budget has been spent on the Across the Board project. This means that once funding has been found to buy the software (and optional laminating equipment to go with it) the project has been easily sustainable.

The monthly autism advice sessions are now into their third year and are still extremely well attended. Boardmaker software and Boardmaker learning sessions are among our most frequently requested services. When we started the Across the Board project we hoped it would be successful but we had no idea it would become so popular and highly valued. This success helps to ensure that the project will be sustained even if external funding becomes harder to find.

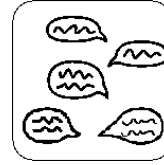
Our main focus for much of the project has been supporting families who have children with autism. We developed this focus because the parent who made the original request has a son with autism. Consequently, some of the professionals that we spoke to in the early stages of the project were autism specialists. But other groups and individuals may also benefit from using symbols and visual communication. During the life of the project we have worked with parents of children who have Down's syndrome, children with other special educational needs, young adults with learning difficulties and, most recently, older people.

Some of the NHS staff who worked with us on the project spoke to their colleagues about the autism advice sessions and the benefits of Boardmaker. Those colleagues, from the council's Adult Social Care department and Occupational Therapists from the Memory Service, have worked with us to expand the project to a new client group. We now offer advice sessions at Leeds Central Library for people with memory problems. More details at www.leeds.gov.uk/memory



Factors to consider

- How can you diversify your project to increase its long-term sustainability?
- Are there other partners you can work with or other user groups that you can target?
- Can your original partners help by recommending new external contacts?



Measuring the impact:

The Leeds model

Our original funding for Across the Board came from a UK Online funded project that was concerned with demonstrating the social impact of computers and ICT. As a result, we knew from the start that we would have to evidence outcomes as well as measuring outputs.

Some systems for gathering quantitative data were already in place. We can extract data from Netloan (our library PC bookings system) to show how often Boardmaker is used. We also ask people to complete an evaluation form after every learning session and we record attendance at the monthly advice sessions. This helps us to show how often the different services are used, such as:

- Librarians have delivered Boardmaker learning sessions to over 500 people including parents and carers, teachers and school support staff, Children's Centre staff, social workers, clinical psychologists and speech and language therapists.
- In the 12 months from January to December 2015, Boardmaker in Leeds Libraries was used 408 times for 126 hours.
- On the library PCs where it is installed, Boardmaker is often the third most popular application after Internet Explorer and Microsoft Word.

To collect more qualitative information, we recorded our conversations with parents and partners. The resulting case studies really showed the value of the project and the difference it was making to the lives of everyone involved. The case studies helped us meet the original aims of the UK Online funded project to demonstrate the social impact of computers and ICT. But they also helped us to apply for awards, to sell the project to staff, to promote the project to other partners and user groups.

Sample quotes from the case studies include:

- "Without the symbols, he just doesn't even make the effort to speak... For me and him, in our little world, pictures are fantastic."
- "The symbols give Christopher some control and they give him a voice. He can say what he wants to happen. In terms of his confidence, he's much happier now. I'm building up the number of symbols that I've got at home by coming to the library."
- "I honestly don't know what I would have done without this service, I really don't. It just felt like, in this world where you have to fight for everything, somebody cared."



Factors to consider

- How will you evidence the success of your project? Do you already have some systems in place or do you need to introduce new ones?
- Effectively demonstrating success could help you with funding applications, marketing and promotion, attracting new partners and new users.