Learning Point:
Online Referral Tracking Systems

August 2014

About this learning point

This learning point is part of a series of publications by the *Improving Outcomes in Money Advice* project, a project funded by the Improvement Service and the Money Advice Service. The research phase of the project provided an overview of the current landscape of money advice across Scotland and to develop improvement opportunities and support the sharing of good practice in money advice and financial inclusion. This learning point explains the use of online referral tracking systems including potential benefits and barriers that need to be overcome.

Context

The research report *Money advice across Scotland's Local Authorities* highlighted a lack of robust referral systems to ensure people seeking money advice are offered a holistic approach to their problems and their needs are adequately met. While a client might access a service for money advice they often require additional support in areas such as income maximisation, welfare rights, housing, employability, health and education. Some Local Authority advice services have robust referral systems and partnership links in place but other services are less joined-up with partner organisations. Likewise, national online and telephone providers often lack knowledge of which services are available to their client at local level and how the person could be best referred on to these. Many services will currently signpost their clients to other sources of help; however this approach does not enable the adviser and agency to see whether the client accessed further help.

Online referral tracking systems

Potential benefits

Online referral tracking systems are web-based systems which can be accessed by all organisations signed up to the referral network. The systems often include service directories with information on the type of advice and support each organisation is able to offer. Such an approach includes a range of benefits for both clients and service providers:

- An adviser can make an instant online referral on the client's behalf without having to contact the other organisation first
- The outcome of the referral(s) can be tracked by the referring agency, making sure the client has received further support, or the referral can be acknowledged by the receiving agency who has agreed to make contact with the client.
- Casework systems and client information can be integrated into the referral process; this makes it easier for the client who has to provide their personal details only once; it also reduces time an adviser has to spend taking case notes
- Better performance and monitoring information creates on the number of referrals between partners
- Managing demand more effectively; if a service is working to capacity they have the option to send incoming referrals back to the referrer who can then choose another organisation
- Improved partnership working and knowledge of other services that exist within a local authority area
- Improved visibility of services and access for clients
- Possibility to reduce waiting times and administrative procedures and an overall simplified customer journey

Data protection and client confidentiality

In order to implement and operate an online referral tracking system, a number of barriers need to be addressed. Making sure that client data is kept safe and confidential is a key issue for any referral. Using a web-based system, adequate security systems need to be in place. In addition, a data sharing protocol should be put in place to which all referral agencies sign up to. When a client is referred to another agency the referrer has to get client permission to pass on any data and log this into the system.

Culture change

Changing staff behaviour is important to increase the number of referrals going through the system. Advisers need to be on board with the approach and willing to refer clients on without feeling too protectionist about their client. Including the use of the online referral tracking

system in contract agreements with agencies funded by the local authority can help prioritise this change.

Implementation of systems and processes

The process of implementing an online referrral tracking system should include adequate training for staff that will be using the system. It is also important to make sure their workload does not increase significantly after they have become used to workign with the system.

Resources

In order to establish and continue to run an online referral tracking system, a dedicated full time member of staff to coordinate and support agencies using the system is often seen as highly beneficial. Resources also need to be invested in developing or buying a system as well as managing relevant updates and software.

Examples of online referral tracking systems in Scotland

Co-ordinated Advice and Tracking System (CATS) – Dundee City Council and partners

This online referral tracking system currently involves 16 statutory and voluntary advice agencies. The CATS is both web-based as well as a system which can be installed. Features include a service directory which can also be used as a training tool for new advisers to learn about partner organisations across the Council. The directory can also be searched on a public website. Agencies that reject a referral have to provide feedback and the client will be then referred on to another agency. Agencies making inappropriate referrals receive feedback to prevent this in the future. The system is free to use for Dundee advice agencies. All Citizens Advice Bureaux use the system as part of their agreement with the Council. The use of the system covers a lot of areas for compliance within the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers in terms of performance monitoring. A CATS user group was established to give feedback and make improvements to the system. New changes to the system will include improved reporting functionality, simplicity and a GIS function. The system is also used to integrate Welfare Reform action plans for clients as part of piloting Universal Credit. It is also planned that CATS will be used as part of the forthcoming Local Support Services Pilot in Dundee City and the DWP will be signed up. This will enable referrals from DWP staff directly to advice services. The system currently does not have a dedicated resource to coordinate services and support agencies. The CATS was originally introduced and agencies were supported with training on the first stages of development and implementation of the system. This was achieved through the dedicated funding for this work through the financial inclusion funds available from central government.

Key benefit

- The referral system covers many of the performance and monitoring aspects of the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers

Key challenge

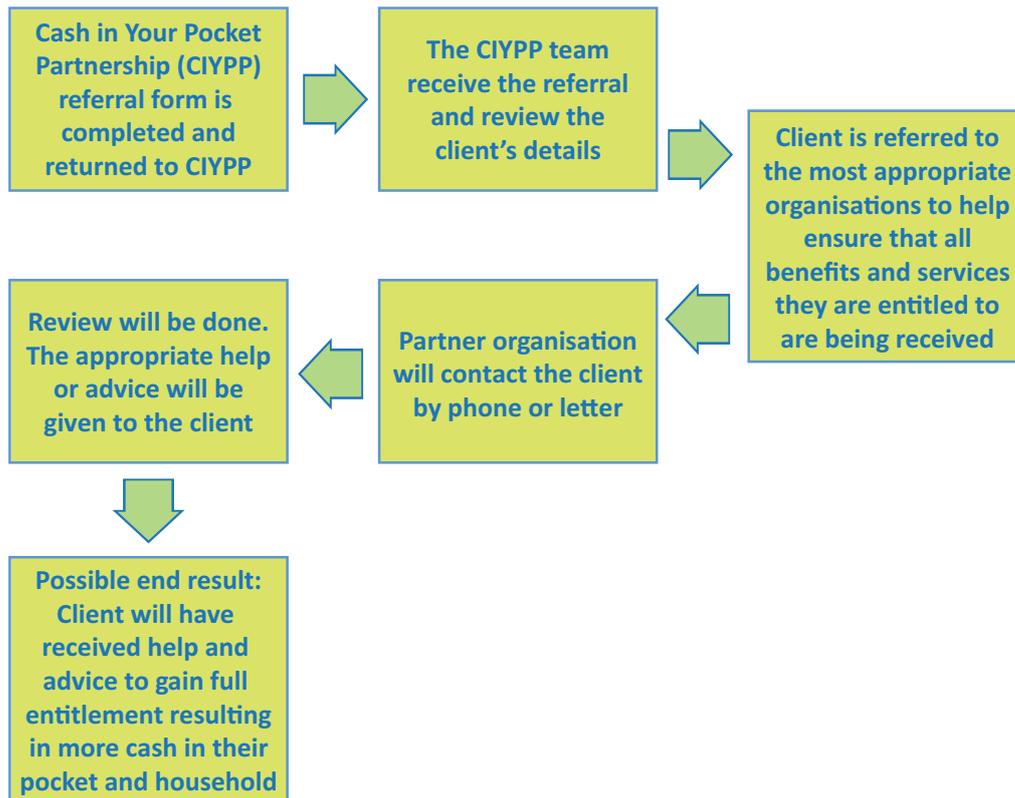- No dedicated resource for coordination and support

Contact

Website: www.dundeeadvice.org/DundeeAdvice2.aspx

Cash in Your Pocket Partnership (CIYPP) – Grampian region

The Cash in Your Pocket Partnership includes both an online referral system and a financial

inclusion network. The partnership manages different groups and networks and offers training sessions to organisations around financial inclusion. The system makes around 3000 referrals annually and can be used for self-referral via a leaflet, online or by an agency using the system. Agencies and projects regularly change and CIYPP updates this information on the system. CIYPP is an independent provider and officers working with the partnership are referring clients on to the most appropriate organisation. Most clients accessing the system via self-referral are at crisis point and some need additional support filling in the forms.

Cash in Your Pocket Partnership (CIYPP) referral form is completed and returned to CIYPP → **The CIYPP team receive the referral and review the client's details** → **Client is referred to the most appropriate organisations to help ensure that all benefits and services they are entitled to are being received**

Review will be done. The appropriate help or advice will be given to the client ← **Partner organisation will contact the client by phone or letter** ←

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Possible end result: Client will have received help and advice to gain full entitlement resulting in more cash in their pocket and household

Key benefit

- CIYPP coordinates both the referral system and a financial inclusion network and is seen by clients as an independent agency

Key challenge

- Increasing demand in referrals due to Welfare Reform changes means increased complexities of circumstances, system needs to adapt to this

Contact

Website: www.ciyp.co.uk

For more information, the Scottish Government published a case study on this model in 2010. Read it at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/pir/learningnetworks/cr/casestudies/cashinyourpocket

Fife Online Referral Tracking system (FORT) – Fife Council and partners

The FORT system is being used by around 130 advice agencies including Fife Council and 3rd sector agencies across Fife. The FORT model is currently the biggest online referral tracking system in Scotland with round 13,350 workers currently registered on the system and over 40,000 referrals in the last 7 years. The FORT system can be used for reporting, auditing, process management and sharing of information. From October 2014 NHS Fife will start using the system, which will further increase the number of users. Currently the system does not include self-referrals by clients but this feature will be added by the end of 2014. The system is owned by Fife Council (for use within the boundaries of Fife) and managed by Fife Rights Forum. Advice Infrastructure, a private company, is contracted to support the roll-out of the system and offer training. Advice Infrastructure also holds the rights to roll-out the system across the country. The FORT system is also linked to a range of different CRMS (Client Relationship Management System) with around 55,000 client records. By the end of 2014 most user agencies will be on a CRMS which makes sharing of client records possible (via nesting and over-lapping of different systems. Information sharing can also be restricted to certain CRMS or agencies). The system operates under a 'gold standard data sharing agreement' with Fife Council which makes sharing of client information possible if the client has given consent. The FORT system also includes a GIS tool that can be used e.g. for mapping levels of demand across different areas. The reporting functions of the FORT system can also be used to analyse seasonality of demand and client contacts and the system measures the time between a referral and client contact. The FORT system also includes an integrated money advice module.

Key benefit

• Improved partnership working across a range of organisations in Fife and links to health sector will further strengthen 'holistic' referrals.

Key challenge

• Issues with double entry of information as many agencies use other casework systems in addition to the CRMS on FORT; also problems with knowledge gaps when staff who are trained using the system are leaving employment positions (high turnover in voluntary sectors).

Contact

Websites: www.adviceinfrastructure.com or www.fortsupport.co.uk

Key learning points

- There is a need to strengthen referrals between different advice agencies and partners.

- Online referral tracking systems have the potential to facilitate referrals between agencies and allow for tracking of referrals and sharing of client information while at the same time improving the client journey.

Key recommendations for implementing an online referral tracking system:

- Plan for resources needed to implement the system and offer a level of ongoing support and longer term stability.

- Dedicated lead to coordinate agencies and provide support.

- Suitable web-based system and IT support including security systems.

- Establish which partner organisations should be included in the referral system.

- Include and consult existing partnership agencies in the implementation process.

- Ensure procedures are in place including clear guidelines for staff using the system.

- Making sure staff from all agencies are adequately trained in using the system.

- Ensure all agencies sign up to a data sharing protocol.

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