



Enhancing the lives of people with low vision or blindness through co-design

Client: Guide Dogs Victoria
Location: Melbourne, Australia
Industry: Not-for-profit

Challenge

- People who are blind, or have low vision faced difficulties connecting online with peers
- Information for visually impaired people was drawn from multiple sources impacting accessibility, accuracy and reliability

Solution

- DXC, GDV, and Swinburne University's Social Innovation Research Institute collaborated to build a peer support platform
- The project included co-design with people who are blind, or have low vision to inform platform design
- The new user-friendly portal collates events and information in one place, connecting users with the community and giving them a voice

Results

- A significantly improved service offering from GDV to its clients
- Improved peer and community connection, facilitating wider social networks
- Australian blind and low-vision community empowered with greater online information

Guide Dogs Victoria (GDV) is a not-for-profit organisation with approximately 165 employees and 510 volunteers, delivering over 1.3 million volunteer hours each year. Providing diverse services for people who are blind or have low vision, GDV offers guide dogs, children and adult mobility services, occupational therapy, assistive technology, support coordination and acquired brain injury mobility services.

Enhanced access to information and social opportunities

GDV has been delivering services to people who are blind or have low vision for over 60 years. Traditionally, the organisation is well known for its guide dogs, however this accounts for just 30% of services offered. GDV works with a broad range of people from newborn babies through to people in their nineties, providing services and support that help people with blindness or low vision to live independently and safely in the community.

The organisation has a goal to be the first choice for clients in everything it offers and has recently undertaken a period of significant change to ensure a sustainable future business model. As part of that, this project was driven by GDV's desire to remove barriers for people with low vision and blindness and their carers when accessing information and connecting to services, peers and communities - and to ensure their experience matches that of a sighted person.

The selection process

GDV was awarded a grant from the NDIA to collaborate with a technology partner to co-design an information and peer linkages platform for the Australian blind and low-vision community. Initially, several different options were assessed in the search for a partner. According to Abe Ropitini, Leader of the Project Management Office at GDV, "We needed to find a technology partner capable of working with us to facilitate quite a lengthy stakeholder consultation process to determine their needs. We chose DXC because it offered the most flexible option. The project team worked collaboratively with our stakeholders and staff spending time working out why it is that people who are blind or with low vision face difficulties getting access to information online."

Karen Hayes, CEO of GDV commented "When we selected DXC as our partner, we thought they were really at the forefront in terms of championing inclusive environments. It's very important for us to partner with an organisation that is committed to inclusivity."

DXC helps GDV progress its digital transformation goals

DXC Technology was engaged to build a peer-to-peer support platform that could provide GDV's clients with access to reliable, accurate and up-to-date information that would be relevant to them. Utilising DXC's Digital Transformation Centre (DTC), located at Swinburne University of Technology (SUT), enabled a highly participatory approach of co-designing the platform with individuals with low vision or blindness who actively contributed to the success of the project.

The DXC DTC was established at SUT in 2018 as a strategic partnership alliance. It provides a dedicated space at SUT's Hawthorn's campus that allows for collaborative research and innovation between industry and academia.

The strategic alliance between DXC and Swinburne enabled the GDV project to engage with SUT's Social Innovation Research Institute to complete an evaluation study of the

peer support platform and investigate how it could potentially increase social inclusion and digital participation within the community. The Social Innovation Research Institute's vision is to ensure that no one is left behind in the digital revolution, including vulnerable and marginalised people.

- To ensure a meaningful solution, the project's primary focus involved:
- Consulting people with low vision and blindness throughout the entire journey;
- Engaging with SUT's Social Innovation Research Institute, for research and evaluation of the platform for relevance and inclusiveness; and
- Delivering on the goals of Information, Linkages and Capacity building (ILC), as outlined by the National Disability Insurance Australia (NDIA). The ILC is an integral part of the NDIA and was introduced to assist people with a disability to live an ordinary life and increase their inclusion by creating opportunities for them to participate in the broader community.

Solution

DXC committed to the project without knowing exactly what the technology requirements were. DXC involved both GDV staff and clients during the entire journey, from user research and design, through to building and testing the platform. The project team, which included several consultants with 'lived experience' of blindness or low vision, spent a great deal of time with GDV staff guiding them through a human-centred design process. SUT was involved early on to consider how the team could research and understand the platform's potential impact, as well as during the actual platform design process.

Challenges were tackled as they emerged using innovative techniques and tools such as interactive workshops that were modified and adapted to be accessible for the participants involved. People were engaged in open and collaborative spaces which helped bring fresh perspective to the project; and all feedback was collated and considered in the eventual peer support portal design. The platform was also piloted with a small cohort of potential users to provide feedback and insights on enhancements.

This collaborative/co-design approach meant the project team gained deeper insights into the challenges faced by people with low vision or blindness during the solution design and build process which ensured the final solution provided meaningful experiences for everyone.

Alex Sarac, a lived experience consultant who worked on the project said, "DXC really cared about making this an accessible platform - for people that might be struggling with the same things I'm struggling with. It was a really considerate environment, and a very holistic approach to working together. The team made me feel like my input was heard by relaying everything back and recognising any frustrations. They demonstrated their understanding by providing me with an example or adapting some aspect, so it became more appropriate."

Results

GDV puts its clients at the centre of everything it does and acknowledges that digital transformation can be life changing and extremely empowering for clients. The platform created with DXC offers an information base within the GDV community, and beyond, for people to understand the services available to them, what's going on in the community, training opportunities and so on. It allows GDV to regularly introduce new information to the community and keep people updated.

Karen Hayes commented, “If we’re making a decision on a new strategy or initiative, the first question we ask is what difference is this going to make for our clients? If it’s not going to make a positive impact, we must question why we’re doing it. This project is a game changer in terms of providing accessible and inclusive environments across our whole community.”

The strong emphasis on co-designing directly with people with low vision or blindness produced an ideal result and is key for GDV to further expand service offerings and maintain relevance for clients in a rapidly evolving digital world. Karen continued, “We chose DXC as a partner because we feel they are at the forefront in terms of championing inclusive environments. It’s very important for us that we’re partnering with an organisation where that’s a genuine focus for them.”

Benefits already delivered for GDV clients include:

- Being more connected with their community and having easy access to the information they need to make decisions and choices;
- Having greater access to social and peer networks;
- Being able to develop the necessary skills and confidence to participate and contribute to the community and protect their rights;
- Being able to use and benefit from the same mainstream services as everyone else;
- Participating in and benefiting from community activities; and
- Making active contributions to leading, shaping and influencing their community.

What the future sees

Information and learnings are being shared in a way that wasn’t possible before working on the peer-to-peer platform with DXC. The success of this project with DXC is being applied across new projects, and GDV has been able to branch out with other digital transformation initiatives and technological innovations. For example, beacon navigational technology has been installed across different environments, such as CityLink train stations around the Melbourne city loop to improve accessibility and ensure that people who are blind or have low vision can navigate their way regardless of what might be going on in the community. GDV is also considering other possible projects so the environment becomes even more inclusive for everyone.

The challenge for GDV in such a fast moving technological environment, is to ensure the platform meets its clients’ needs for many years to come. SUT will soon release a report evaluating the peer platform and process undertaken to increase social inclusion and digital participation. The assessment will provide insights into the portal’s impact in the community and highlight areas for potential development.

About DXC Technology

DXC Technology, the world’s leading independent, end-to-end IT services company, manages and modernizes mission-critical systems, integrating them with new digital solutions to produce better business outcomes. The company’s global reach and talent, innovation platforms, technology independence and extensive partner network enable more than 6,000 private- and public-sector clients in 70 countries to thrive on change. For more information, visit www.dxc.technology.