

Learning Labs Case Study

Improving the AT Skills and Confidence of NMH Support Workers

In 2014, Access SUMMIT identified that a number of their Study Coaches lacked the skills and confidence in using a range of Assistive Technology (AT). In response to this, they put all of their 75 Study Coaches through a combined 1,125 working hours of AT training.

The goal was to make Study Coaches more proficient in the use of the AT their students receive and give them the skills and confidence to integrate AT into their specialist 1:1 support sessions.

Difficulties Encountered

- **Cost:** The program was a considerable investment of both time and money. As well as management costs and paying trainers for their expertise and Study Coaches for their time, all AT needed to be procured to support the practise and embedding of new skills.
- **Logistics:** The program was complex to organise. There were difficulties in arranging travel, booking rooms for the training sessions and IT problems in accessing computer facilities.
- **Longevity:** AT is regularly updated with new functionality. As training only covered the most recent version of AT, soon after there was an immediate knowledge gap.
- **Support:** Despite an initial increase in skills, the lack of on-going support made practicing these new skills difficult, resulting in a steady decline with each passing day.

Learning Labs: An Alternative Approach

In 2015, Access SUMMIT purchased 1 year licenses to Learning Labs for 22 Study Coaches to see if the difficulties encountered could be overcome whilst maintaining a measurable impact on AT skills and confidence levels within the group of Study Coaches.

Learning Labs would allow support workers to learn new, and refresh existing AT skills:

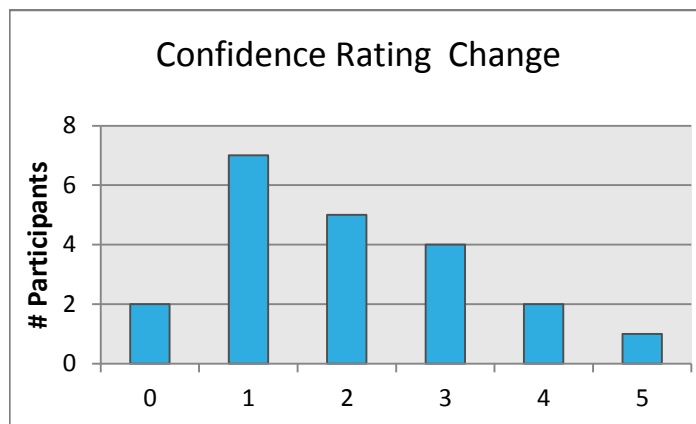
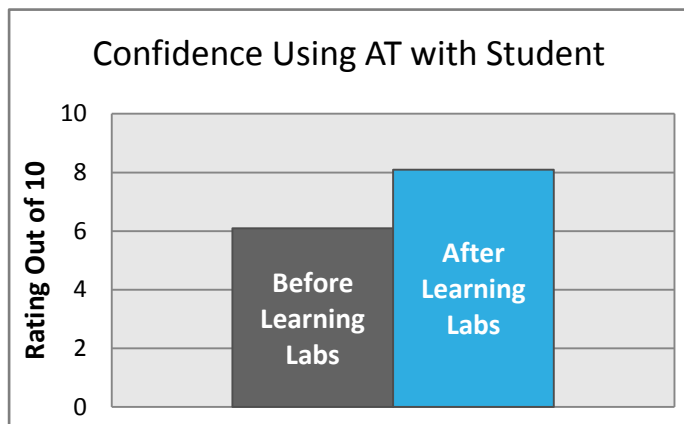
- At their own pace, so that they take as much or as little time as they need.
- In their preferred environment, without embarrassment or external pressures.
- As much as they need to, so they can repeat and practice skills as required.
- At any time of day or night, so that it fits around their existing workload.
- In a variety of different ways, to suit a range of learning methods.

Overcoming the Difficulties

- **Cost** - Learning Labs was far more cost effective with minimal management costs, no trainer costs, reduced costs for support workers and no requirement to procure additional AT.
- **Logistics** – Learning Labs accounts were much easier to set up and access. All that was required was an email address for each participant and access to the internet to use it.
- **Longevity** – New updates and versions of AT software were made available automatically, resulting in the most up-to-date resources, removing any knowledge gaps.
- **Support** – Instead of training being completed in a one-off session with no support afterwards, Learning Labs accounts were available for a full year. This allowed support workers to top-up their skills on demand and at their own pace.

Results - Quantitative

At the end of the pilot period, all participants were asked to leave feedback to ascertain whether the Learning Labs pilot had been successful. The results demonstrated a significant 33% increase in the confidence and skills of support workers and are summarised in the following charts.



Results - Qualitative

As well as the positive quantitative results, participants left a range of qualitative results. A sample of these appears below as well as in the appendix.

"Learning Labs are now an integral and essential part of my study coach resources and will be a useful tool to utilize/demonstrate with students re: the various AT software applications recommended by the assessors. It would be advantageous, therefore, and to further facilitate the full potential and purposefulness of the LL's indispensable content, to permit student's accessibility to the LL's once they have received their appropriate software. One of the many benefits of the LL's is that they can be used as a user guide, for both SC and student in order to further support the student to become an independent learner. Having a resource which is available to use/revisit when necessary helps me to feel more confident in my role as a study coach."

"I found the 'do' Labs really good because you are able to go back section by section if you didn't quite understand what you were doing and also being able to repeat each mini Lab. I believe Learning Labs has already increased my confidence because they are bite sized chunks that I am able to cope with and replay and I will definitely incorporate more of AT in my study skills sessions because of my increased confidence."

"I think having this fully up and running on Access SUMMIT computers plus personal laptops is incredibly useful as I don't use some of the software very often I generally forget how to do things."

Conclusion

The Learning Labs pilot was successful and achieved its objectives. Participants significantly improved their skills and confidence using AT and would be able to transfer this to support sessions with students.

This was achieved at a significantly reduced cost in both time and money for Access SUMMIT and therefore proved to be an excellent return on investment.

Enable your support workers to help your students even more.

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Appendix

"I'm dyscalculic, so really need the kinaesthetic approach to process and remember chronology: this has been really useful."

"Good that [tutorials] are so short and specific. Also good to have both old and new versions."

"I found all the content easy to understand and a useful reminder of how to use the software, particularly the programs I don't use regularly or don't use on a Mac platform. Even if you use a program regularly, having the option to see how it works on windows/mac is useful to support students."

"Excellent to have different versions of the packages covered, as they can vary widely. For example, I now use MindView 5 for Mac, but will turn to LL to help students with MV6 for Windows."

"I was impressed that Dragon and MindView can be used together to help students who find word processing challenging. I have been focusing on MindView - using it for time management is very effective and think it will be a great tool for all my students. I do intend to use this in my session in the next academic year."

"I find it very useful to be able to log on to a Learning Lab to go through something a student may have forgotten (and I may have forgotten). For example, using the index button on the DVR. It is great to be able to just get right to it there in the session so that a student can be reminded of how to do something. Because the videos are short and sweet, this is appealing to both student and coach as it doesn't take too much time to access something which may crop up in a session."

"Feel more confident in dealing with student questions that they have about technology."

"I have found it helpful to explain to students who are reluctant to use and become more familiar/confident with their software that we have the Learning Labs tool to use in order to make this process less daunting and time consuming. I hope we will reap the benefits when working together in the next year."