

‘All About Us’ from the FPA helps those with learning disabilities on sexual health & relationships



Introduction

Winner of the **Silver Award** in the ‘**Excellence in the Production of Learning Content – Not for Profit Sector**’, this case study describes how the **FPA** (Family Planning Association in Northern Ireland), developed ‘**All About Us**’ - an interactive educational resource designed to improve access to appropriate structured information on sexual health and wellbeing for people with learning disabilities through the use of a simple, effective interactive learning tool.

As a result of a 3 year research project with the School of Nursing at the University of Ulster, the FPA certainly did their homework. They found that the lack of accessible information on sexual health and relationships contributes to a major problem for people with learning disabilities. They do not have the same opportunities to form friendships and relationships as those who do not have a disability. Many lead lonely lives and this inevitably has an affect on their health and wellbeing and they continue to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in society. Throughout the three years of the research, people with learning disabilities, family carers, professionals and front line staff were highly critical of the dearth of resources on sexual health and relationships for people with learning disabilities. The production of the **All about us** CD-ROM was designed to address this identified lack of resources and has ultimately helped to empower people with learning disabilities and challenge their social exclusion.

Why e-learning?

There are 1.5 million people in the UK with learning disabilities. They find it hard to organise their thoughts, to remember things and often find communication and socialising difficult. Multimedia technology can radically improve their lives as long as it is designed so that people with learning disabilities can use it.

In general, the use of interactive, multimedia-based instruction for people with learning disabilities has long since been proven to be very effective. ¹

An innovative solution

People with learning disabilities were involved at all stages of the development of the resource and that involvement in the design has proved to be a key factor in ensuring high levels of use, acceptance and endorsement. For example two people with learning disabilities are featured at the beginning to introduce the CD Rom.



Their target audience was defined as:

- People with a range of different learning disabilities, especially limited cognitive understanding and therefore a limited attention span.
- Mix of male, female users.
- Mixed level of IT skills – but more likely to be low to medium.
- Sensory impairments – especially in hearing, so therefore they needed to limit the on-screen text.
- The project would be designed for people with learning disabilities to use on their own, but could also be used in conjunction with parents and/or care workers.

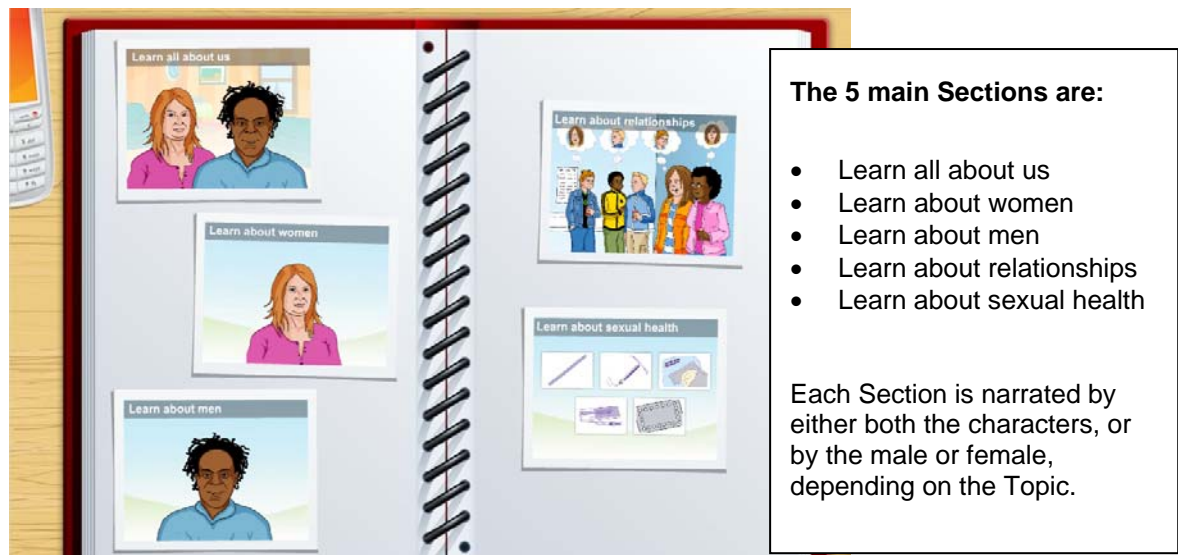
Whilst the project was designed in Northern Ireland, final distribution of the CD-ROM would be to all of Ireland and the UK regions.

The solution had to provide a self-study learning tool that can be supported by a teacher, parent or carer to introduce key issues of sexual health and wellbeing, while ensuring that people with learning disabilities have access to accurate information on sexual health, sexuality and relationships. Ideally it should also complement and support the delivery of relationships and sex education in the home, school, Further Education Colleges, Day Centres, residential and supported living accommodation and by advocacy groups.

¹ (Source: Study conducted by: Mr Andy Minnion and the project Apple team led from the Rix Centre, University of East London, 2004)

The designers worked with practitioners in the field of learning disability to help shape the FPA's ideas for the User Interface Design. It was deemed essential to use graphic illustrations when addressing sex and sexuality issues with people with learning disabilities to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. It was also seen as essential to use familiar concepts and images as the audience often struggle with adapting to new environments. The resource was divided into short topics that could be taken over and over again to address the fact that the audience both like and need repetition.

The resulting CD-Rom combines the innovative use of language, imagery, other media (animation and sound) and interaction that transfers learning effectively and efficiently. Based on a User Interface Design Metaphor of a photo/scrap book, the users are introduced to each section of the CD using two specially designed animated characters – Mark & Sarah, as shown below:



Animated characters rather than video were chosen to make the CD less threatening and real-life like. They were also chosen as they could specially design the facial features of each character using the software package "Poser". This allowed them to pilot each character with a selected learning disability target audience to choose the best character to present the different sections of the CD-ROM. The programme also provides certificates to recognise achievement and progress and levels of user acceptance are increasing all the time.

Results & Feedback

To date, the FPA have received very positive feedback on the CD as shown in the example comments below from key stakeholders, learning or communication specialists and from learners, carers and teachers:

<i>"All About Us has become an invaluable</i>	<i>"Informing people with learning</i>
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<p><i>educational tool which empowers people with learning disabilities, their parents, support workers and professionals working with them to discover the facts about sex and relationships”.</i></p>	<p><i>disabilities about their sexuality has few risks. Indeed we expose them to greater dangers by keeping them in the dark. All About Us is a ground-breaking teaching resource designed specifically to cover the topics and issues that people need to know about”.</i></p>
<p><i>“Rooted in research and embodying the latest educational techniques, it sets a new standard in making information accessible to people with learning disabilities.“</i></p>	<p><i>“The National Autistic Society welcomes high quality, accessible resources to help people with autism. There is a great need for more resources and this DVD offers excellent and sensitive support on a difficult subject.”</i></p>
<p><i>“I have reviewed this resource and recommend it to RCN members as a very helpful tool.”</i></p>	<p><i>“All the different parts of our bodies we learned from it and when we had to get dressed and we had to be in a private place and when we're at the cinema watching a movie it's a public place. And I looked at it so much. It was so good having a laugh with my friends and all. I really enjoyed it. It was good, one of the best I've ever had.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It was fantastic. With our young people we have to reinforce these subjects over and over and over again and the CD-ROM never bored them. They could use it over and over again.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Very, very useful, excellent, brilliant teaching tool.”</i></p>
<p><i>1:“The section on relationships was very basic and made it easily understood.”</i></p> <p><i>2: “I feel confident that I would be able to use this CD-ROM with my son who is 21 and it is a very visual piece of software and I think that he would get a lot from it.”</i></p> <p><i>3:” OK. I would highly recommend the DVD/CD-ROM it's a very informative, factual and gets straight to the point that young people can understand.”</i></p>	

Compelling evidence from parents, carers and the learners themselves is clearly showing that this programme is really making a difference to learners awareness and confidence, and the FPA is to be complimented for applying sound and thorough research into the development of this programme.

- **Top tips**

- Use available research to help you understand your audience style and preferences and design appropriate programmes. If no research is available, do your own!
- Continually seek feedback from all stakeholders and make changes as and where appropriate.
- Recognise that no audience is unreachable with e-learning.