



‘Enduring focus, lasting impact’:

An Evaluation of Customer and Volunteer
Feedback

Executive Summary

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1. Overview

Easylink Community Services is a not-for-profit community organisation on the Northern Beaches that provides affordable and accessible transport for people who are 'transport disadvantaged'. Easylink provides a range of services including individual transport, medical and hospital shuttles, social outings and public transport travel training to over 2,000 active customers.

The full report 'Enduring focus, lasting impact' presents an analysis and evaluation of data obtained from surveys of Easylink's customers and volunteers. This research project was heavily influenced by previous surveys conducted by Easylink, which are carried out regularly in order to gain valuable feedback. However, this project is the first time that customer and volunteer surveys were administered simultaneously, which provided a good opportunity for comparison and contrast.

The purpose of this research project was to establish the profile of Easylink's customers and volunteers, to gauge their attitudes towards Easylink and to determine whether Easylink has an impact on their social well-being. The research was funded by Easylink and conducted by a fourth year social work student from The University of Sydney.

This project had a particular focus on the social impact of Easylink, influenced by the emerging research evidencing the positive effect that community transport has on the well-being of its users and broader society. Survey respondents were asked to self-assess the effect that Easylink has on their social well-being in order measure the impact Easylink has on people beyond their practical transport needs.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted from April-June of 2017. Mail-out surveys were sent out to 500 Easylink customers, who were randomly selected from the 785 customers who had used the service in the preceding 3 months. The customer survey gained a response rate of 48%.

The volunteer survey was created online using Survey Monkey and distributed to 74 volunteers via e-mail, with other options available for those without access to the internet. The volunteer survey had a response rate of 49%.

The questions in the volunteer and customer surveys were identical where possible to allow for comparison. Both surveys contained a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions.

Participants were provided with a cover letter attached to their survey which explained the purpose of the research and an assurance of confidentiality. All participants had the right to refuse participation in the survey.

3. Key Findings

The following is a summary of some of the key findings from the customer and volunteer surveys. For a complete analysis of all the data obtained from the surveys, please see the final report.

Customer Survey

Customer Profile:

- 82% of respondents were female and 18% were male.
 - This gender gap is more exaggerated than in the entire Easylink customer base, which is 69% female and 31% male.
- 87% of respondents were over 75 years of age, with 50% of all respondents 85 years of age and older.
- 27% of respondents were born outside of Australia and 5% primarily speak a language other than English at home.
- 14% of the surveys were completed by an advocate acting on behalf of the customer.

Use of Easylink Services:

- The majority of respondents used individual transport (50%) and/or social outings (40%).
- The survey showed a marked increase in respondents who used Easylink's social outings program, from 22% in 2014 to 40% in 2017.
- 96% of survey respondents reported using modes of transport other than Easylink, mainly citing 'family/friends', 'public transport' and 'taxis'.
- The majority of respondents (64%) had been using Easylink services for 1-5 years.

Customer Satisfaction:

- 97% of respondents reported satisfaction with Easylink and 90% said they were 'very likely' to recommend Easylink to others.
- 91% of respondents reported that Easylink office and booking staff are 'always' courteous and helpful.
 - This statistic increased from 88% in the 2014 customer survey.
- The vast majority of respondents (95%) reported that they did not have any trouble contacting the office.
 - This is a major improvement from 2014, where only 75% of respondents said they never had trouble contacting the office.

- 97% of respondents said that drivers were 'always' courteous and helpful, an increase from 95% in the 2014 survey.
- 94% of respondents said that drivers were 'always' or 'often' on time.
- 58% of respondents did not know or were unsure of how to submit a complaint.

Volunteer Survey

Volunteer Profile:

- 56% of respondents were male and 44% were female, which is a good representation of the Easylink volunteer population.
- The majority of respondents (55%) were 65-74 years of age, with 25% aged 55-64.
- 64% of respondents were born in Australia and 36% were born overseas. The most common countries of birth outside of Australia were the UK and Ireland.

Volunteer Role at Easylink:

- The majority of respondents were individual transport drivers (36%) and bus assistants (36%), followed by bus drivers (22%).
 - Other volunteer roles also included receptionist/office assistant, board director, gardener and maintenance.
- 42% responded that they volunteer with Easylink for 6-10 hours per fortnight (on average).
 - The remaining respondents were equally distributed across 1-5 hours, 11-15 hours and more than 15 hours.
- 95% of respondents stated that they were 'clear on their role and responsibilities'.
- 90% or more of all respondents answered positively to questions regarding the application process, the role description, the induction session and the driver orientation.

Volunteer Satisfaction:

- 100% of respondents reported satisfaction in their role with Easylink.
- 100% of respondents agreed that Easylink values the contribution of its volunteers.
- The majority of respondents (86%) were satisfied with the level of communication from management/office staff.
- 80% of volunteers reported satisfaction with the amount of feedback they receive in their role.
- 94% reported satisfaction with the range and frequency of volunteer meetings and training sessions.
- There was also 94% satisfaction with the amount of work volunteers were asked to do and 97% satisfaction with the conditions and safety of the working environment.

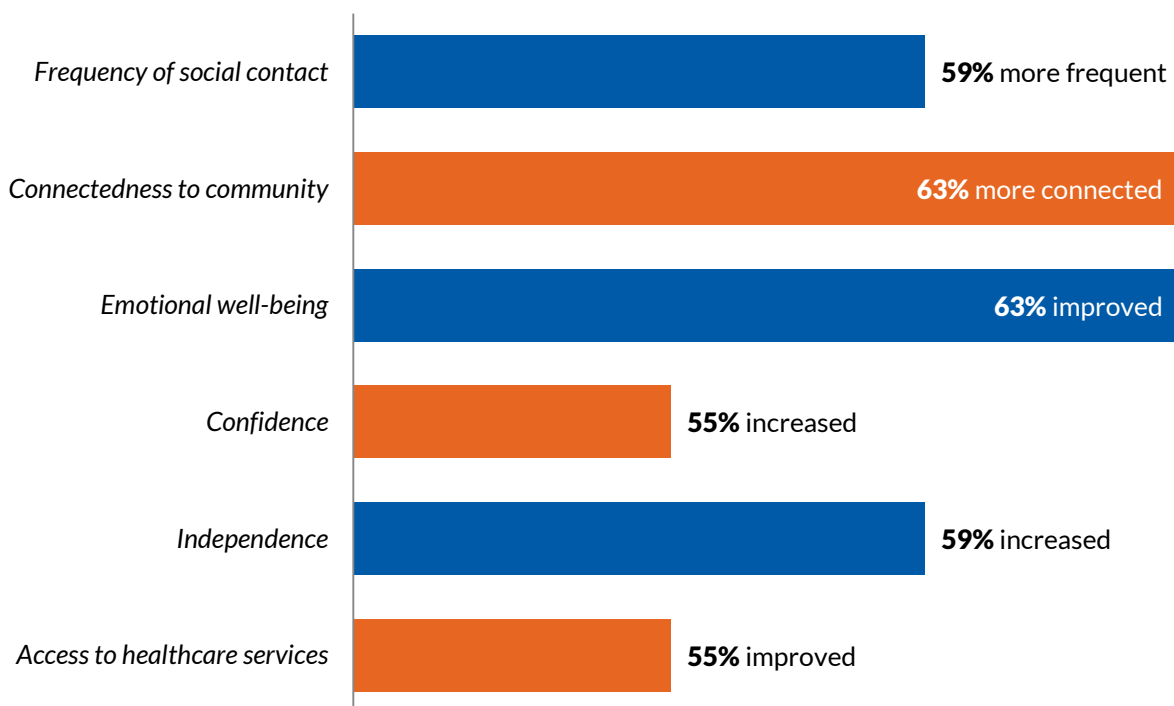
4. Social Impact of Easylink

There is a wealth of research demonstrating that social isolation and loneliness can have negative impacts on one's physical and mental health. Conversely, efforts to achieve social inclusion can positively influence one's physical and mental health. A 2016 report published by ECT Charity in the UK estimated that the cost of social isolation and loneliness on the UK economy was between \$2.2-4.8 billion. They also calculated that the economic savings from the predicted reduction in size of the socially isolated and lonely population due to community transport would be between \$0.7-1.8 billion.

While it is valuable to have evidence showing the economic benefits achieved by community transport reducing social isolation and loneliness, it is also useful to assess whether the users of community transport observe these impacts in their own lives. Survey questions were constructed that required the respondents to self-assess the impact of Easylink on their well-being.

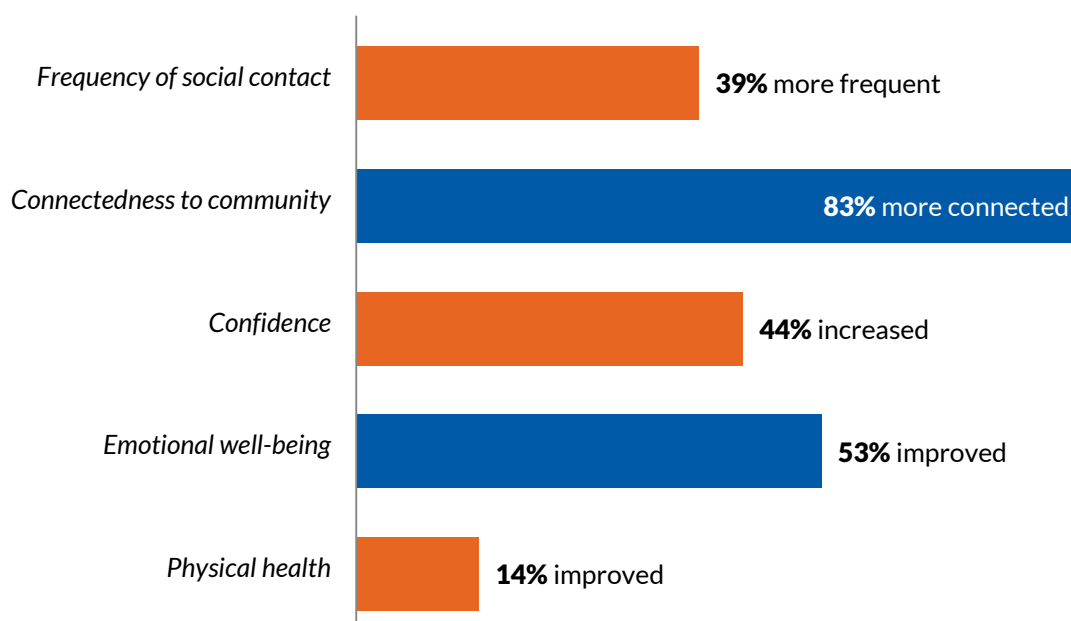
More than two thirds of all customer respondents reported that they felt more connected to their community and had improved emotional well-being as a result of using Easylink. More than half also stated that their independence and confidence had increased, they had more frequent social contact and that they had improved access to healthcare services.

Social Impact for Customers



Volunteer survey respondents also reported significant positive impacts on their well-being. More than four in five volunteers reported feeling more connected to their community due to their involvement with Easylink and more than half reported improved emotional well-being. A significant proportion also reported more frequent social contact and increased confidence.

Social Impact for Volunteers



Reference: ECT Charity, *Why Community Transport Matters*, 2016, http://ectcharity.co.uk/ECT_Final_version4.pdf, accessed 21 June 2017.

5. Conclusion

Easylink would like to thank everyone who participated in the surveys. It was evident from the data and comments gathered that Easylink provides a vital service to the community, particularly those most vulnerable and at risk of social isolation and loneliness. The fact that a number of people reported that they would rarely leave the house if not for Easylink emphasises the necessity of community transport in ensuring that transport disadvantaged people stay engaged and active. Furthermore, the large volunteer base at Easylink provides extremely vital and capable support, without which the organisation would not be able to function. The information collected from this research project will be used to help Easylink meet its customers' and volunteers' needs, as well as inform future research.