

M. RUNDKVIST, M. GILL. *Benefits of using ICT in supporting elderly informal carers in the Municipality of Västerås. Gerontechnology 2010;9(2):323; doi:10.4017/gt.2010.09.02.170.00* **Purpose** In Sweden, the number of family caregivers is increasing over time. To be a family caregiver is often a life commitment where positive experiences are predominant. But many informal caregivers also experience feelings of loneliness, stress, anxiety, guilt and decreased social relations. ACTION (Assisting Carer using Telematics Interventions to meet Older person's Needs) is an ICT-service that arose from an EU-funded project that involved working together with elderly carers and their frail elderly relatives<sup>1</sup>. It was subsequently developed in Sweden as a unique support service for older carers. The ACTION-service consists of four components: information and education programs; ACTION center staffed by healthcare and social professionals; an ACTION-computer with videophone at home and training and support<sup>1</sup>. **Method** The municipality of Västerås has for three years used the ACTION-service in a project with elderly carers. Recruitment was done by professional carers who met with informal carers. Three different evaluations were conducted: two qualitative interview studies<sup>2-4</sup> and one quantitative web- questionnaire<sup>5</sup>. **Result & Discussion** Evaluation results show that the carers involved with ACTION in Västerås experienced enhanced quality of life. ACTION has had a positive impact on participating families' daily lives and contributed to new or increased social networking and therefore decreased loneliness and isolation. Life became more enjoyable; carers thought they had increased their knowledge and insight in several areas which gave them increased confidence, greater ability to plan ahead and to deal with everyday situations, a feeling of safety, inclusion in society, and a willingness to continue care for their spouse at home. This is also supported by other studies<sup>6</sup>. Widegren<sup>4</sup> identified nine categories of the participants' experiences: fellowship, source of energy, improved knowledge, availability, dependence on the service, anxiety over losing service, their own responsibilities, interaction and priority of time. The conclusions show that ACTION is a well-functioning support for relatives and that it plays a key role in promoting health among the family caregivers. Follow-up has elucidated strengths with ACTION as a support to relatives, but also areas that need to be developed further. ACTION has been an effective way of giving support to elderly carers, improving their often difficult situations and most probably postponing the transition to nursing homes. However, not everyone can use a computer and the conclusion has been made that other groups in need of care can benefit from using an ICT solution. Therefore, the Municipality is now extending the project to other target groups and using other tools.

## References

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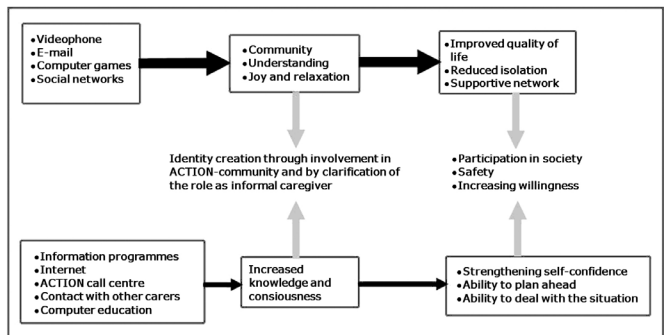


Figure 1. How different parts of the service has contributed to users experiences and results of those