

OCS Best Practice, Shared Learning

Hidden Disabilities Programme at Gatwick Airport - February 2017

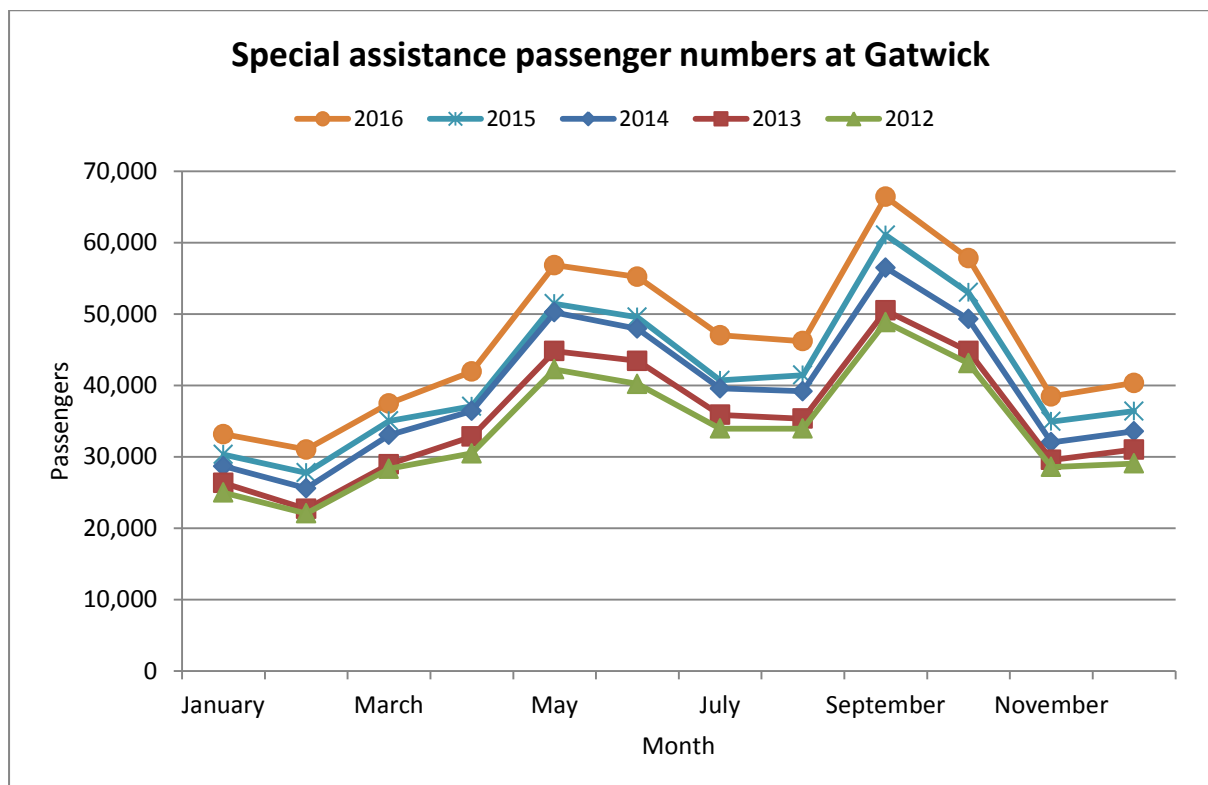
Project Overview

Navigating your way through a busy airport environment can be a challenging experience, but for passengers & their families with hidden disabilities like dementia & autism, it can often be a daunting task. Frontline staff at Gatwick are trained and experienced in providing assistance for passengers with reduced mobility. However, for passengers with hidden disabilities, it's not always immediately apparent that additional support may be required.

To address this challenge and enhance the assistance provided to these passengers with hidden disabilities, Gatwick Airport Limited and OCS Group UK (OCS) have teamed up to introduce a range of innovative, airport-wide measures aimed at establishing Gatwick as an internationally recognised accessible airport.

Context

OCS have been providing passengers with assistance at Gatwick since November 2010. Data from the last five years show that there has been an increase in the number of passengers requiring assistance at airports for non-mobility related disabilities, including hidden disabilities.



In 2015, OCS started working with both the National Autistic Society and Alzheimer's Society to deliver key initiatives which improve the airport experience for passengers with hidden disabilities such as autism and dementia.

Aim / Intended Outcomes

Our stated intention was:

- to improve the experience for passengers with both visible and hidden disabilities using Gatwick
- To improve training across a number of teams, especially in hidden disability awareness
- create a community engagement programme to understand the accessibility needs of local families

Description of Activity / Project (Methodology)

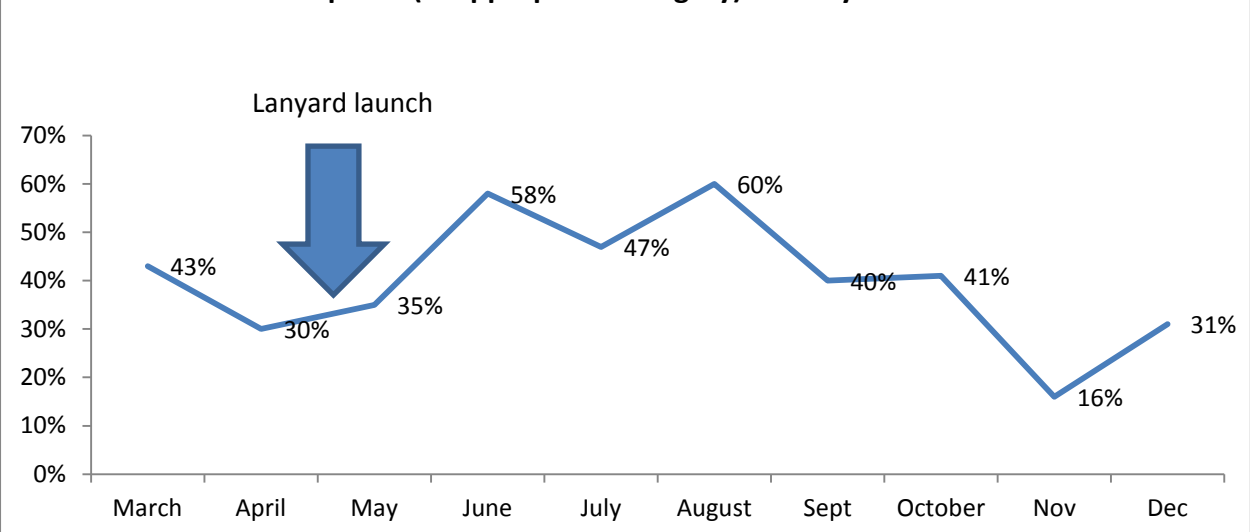
There were a number of elements included in the project:

- Dementia Champions were trained by the Alzheimer's Society in September 2015. These Champions were then able to deliver Dementia Friends training across a number of airport communities.
- The Assistance Team training has been enhanced to include specific hidden disability modules at both induction and refresher sessions
- An NVQ qualification in Dementia Care was introduced for the departure lounge teams
- A distinctive lanyard was introduced for passengers with hidden disabilities to wear when they travel from the Airport. The lanyard is a discreet sign to airport staff that a passenger has a hidden disability, even if they are not using the assistance service. Airport staff can then provide additional assistance if necessary or simply help by allowing a passenger more time at security.
- A bespoke training package was created by the National Autistic Society so Gatwick now has a team of 12 Autism Champions who are able to deliver accredited Autism Friends Training

Impact

So far, over 4000 lanyards/pin badges and lapel ribbons have been issued and we have seen an annual average 41% increase in assistance requests for passengers with learning/intellectual difficulties or cognitive disorders i.e. Dementia/autism

Growth in assistance requests (in appropriate category) vs last year



- Gatwick became the first UK Airport to be awarded an Autism Friends Award on 3rd November 2016
- OCS was also jointly awarded the Alzheimer's Society Dementia Innovation Award on 30th November 2016
- By working closely with charities, local user groups and their families to obtain feedback, the lanyard scheme has subsequently evolved to include a pin badge and lapel ribbon in the same distinctive design.
- OCS have also introduced quarterly community forums to engage with local parent, carer-support groups and local government departments to share information and further improve the airport experience

Feedback from our customers has helped us adapt service and training:

Mr Hay (October 2016) *"I would whole heartedly like to commend you on your initiative. Our emails were responded to both promptly and professionally. Your staff at the airport were very friendly and helpful."*

Ms Frind (October 2016) *"I think its quite hard to get every member of staff to constantly remember about the lanyards and pins, but I think at check in, and security, is the main place as its normally quiet busy and people tend to be in a rush and queuing doesn't help with the children, I would fully recommend this service to anyone using Gatwick, and will use again myself when flying to and from Gatwick, I think the service is a really good idea and helps, It gives parents extra peace of mind."*

Laura (September 2016) *"This initiative needs to continue and certainly at security where it can be very traumatic for parents and autistic children because of the noise. Also it would be good if there was a more visible quiet zone in which to calm autistic children and some sensory lighting which promotes calm for many disabled people."*

Mr Brazier (travel date unknown) “The only improvement that I can think of was that the lanyard was not recognised at Malaga airport on our return, but as this is a Gatwick innovative I guess that is to be expected.”

Recommendations

It's proved vital to seek feedback from passengers once they have used the service. The initial review of feedback gave us great insight into elements of the airport process which didn't seem to be working well. That feedback resulted in our approach to the National Autistic Society to design us bespoke training - this training was offered to a number of teams, including those who manage the perceived 'pinch-points' such as security and passport control. To ensure continuous improvement of these initiatives, we will continue to seek feedback.

In addition, our quarterly group sessions have proved invaluable to ensure Gatwick Airport and OCS understand the ever changing needs of the local community.

Following the successful launch of these initiatives at Gatwick, other airports at which OCS operate will be rolling out additional support for passengers with hidden disabilities.