

# National Health Service uses audiobooks to increase wellness and continuing education access for 5,000 employees

**What began as a quick solution to an accessibility challenge during the onset of remote work has become a consistent staple to professional development and wellness resources for one of England’s largest mental health trusts.**

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT), part of the National Health Service, employs more than 5,000 staff and provides mental health and learning disability services across two counties in England. Their specialist library is responsible for providing services and resources to health care staff and students. But in summer of 2020, Library Manager Robert Kelly said they found themselves unable to provide users with the typical access to resources they relied on.

“The library was closed during the COVID lockdown and our users were unable to access the collection of hard copy CDs,” said Kelly. “We were looking for a digital solution to this problem of access.”

With staff now working remotely and based in more than 50 locations, something that could deliver resources quickly and be accessed from any location was essential. That’s when NSFT implemented an OverDrive Professional digital library made up of audiobooks accessible to every employee on the devices they were using every day.

“We were impressed by the OverDrive platform and its ease of use,” said Kelly. “We were also aware that the two public library services covering Norfolk and Suffolk were both using OverDrive, which would have benefits for us.

An OverDrive Professional digital library is accessible to employees through the Libby library reading app and many users were already using the Libby app through their public library, making it even simpler to add the NSFT library to their app.

NSFT Librarian Andrea Core shared that implementing the digital library during lockdown was good timing as people were more open to exploring new systems and tools to make remote work more effective. And since the pandemic, the preference for digital has seemed to stick.

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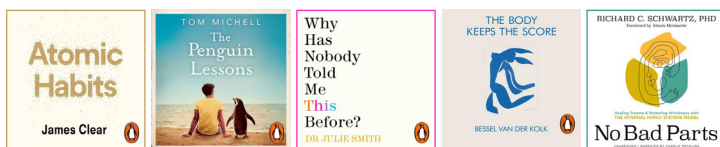
“Launching audiobooks in the middle of the pandemic was the best thing we could have done,” said Core. “We saw ebook usage go up as well during that time. I definitely think there’s been a shift to digital.”

## THE ACCESSIBILITY AND VALUE OF AUDIOBOOKS

The NSFT library team opted for an all-audiobooks digital library with OverDrive, in part due to the flexibility they offer employees. Core shared that given the rising popularity of audio formats like podcasts, she thinks there’s often a preference for the accessibility audiobooks can offer. The ability for employees to multitask as they listen is a major benefit for their busy employees, according to employees themselves.

“I think it is a fantastic resource,” one NSFT employee shared. “Audiobooks are great for me because I can listen while driving or getting other things done. It feels like I’m able to do continuing professional development without adding to the workload.”

The NSFT library has seen continued checkout growth each year since launching their library of audiobooks. Among OverDrive Professional libraries, **audiobooks have also seen a 35% year-over-year circulation growth**, indicating a preference for this format particularly for busy professionals.



“Audiobooks feel very current in how people are approaching their learning or entertainment, and how important ease of use is,” said Core. “I think if something’s not easy to use, people go somewhere else quite quickly.”

Other employees have shared that audiobooks as a format make it easier for them to focus or retain information than with traditional books, which allows them to develop knowledge in a way that feels much more accessible to them.

## WHAT EMPLOYEES ARE READING

When it comes to the kinds of titles Kelly and his team add to the digital library, they tend to focus on key academic areas important to the organization and employee’s roles – mental health and learning disabilities – as well as topics their employees have expressed additional interest in.

Kelly shared topics like management, leadership and personal life stories about mental health work particularly well in audiobook format. In addition, employees are interested in psychology, mindfulness self-improvement, and stress relief.

TOP 10 SUBJECTS FOR NSFT	
1. Nonfiction	6. Psychiatry
2. Psychology	7. Self Help
3. Self-Improvement	8. Business
4. Medical	9. Health & Fitness
5. New Age	10. Biography & Autobiography

As an organization, NSFT has a wellbeing initiative, and the library plays an integral part in providing resources to support this initiative. It’s a major reason why NSFT wanted to implement an OverDrive Professional digital library.

While much of the library’s titles can be useful in continuing education for employees, Kelly and Core believe the library reaches a wider audience within the organization because it can be used not just for academic purposes.

“It’s one of the products or services that we offer that seems like a ‘feel good’ product rather than a chore to read a book because you need to in order to keep up with your professional role,” said Core. “It’s nice to have titles in our collection that people do use in that way, but it’s also nice to have things for looking after yourself and wellbeing.”

*“I am so grateful that you have made such a wide range of audiobooks available to staff. It really helps to make us feel valued and as though our learning and personal development are important.”*

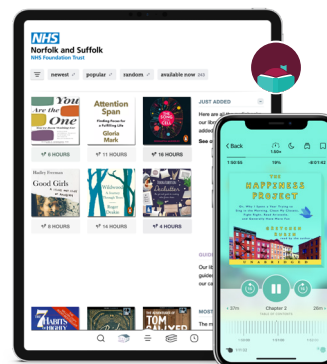
## THE DIGITAL LIBRARY TODAY

Three years after implementing their OverDrive digital library, NSFT’s librarians continue to add new audiobooks for staff and students, encouraging new users to download Libby – no matter where they’re located.

NSFT was the first NHS Foundation Trust to implement an OverDrive digital library in 2020, but since then, other NHS foundation trust locations throughout England have followed suit with rolling out their own.

Access to these resources is no longer an issue and feedback from employees remains positive.

“I am so grateful that you have made such a wide range of audiobooks available to staff,” said one NSFT employee. “It really helps to make us feel valued and as though our learning and personal development are important.”



**Libby.**  
The library reading app