

THE GLASGOW
SCHOOL OF ART



21st Century TeleWEAR Project



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accolades
2011
finalist



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Background

Supporting people to age well through staying independent, active, well, safe and informed is the focus of early intervention and prevention work being led by the Moray Community Health and Social Care Partnership (MCHSCP).

Low level services which help people to better manage their own health and wellbeing and support them to continue to live independently, enable under-pressure resources to be targeted towards those in greatest need.

Telecare products and services are playing an increasingly important role in supporting the choice of citizens to live at home safely for as long as possible.

Yet these residents, who are often elderly, are too often only recognised as being users of the service, not as consumers of products who may wish to exercise choice in how their individual needs are met.

The 21st Century TeleWEAR Project was run in partnership with Glasgow School of Art and provided local residents who have the Moray Lifeline Service with a chance to share their experiences of wearing – or not wearing – their community alarm pendant with fellow current users and those who may be future users. Together they were encouraged to visualise tomorrow's world.

This group – who ranged in age from those in their 60s to several in their 80s – served to inspire and challenge a group of enthusiastic young product design engineering students from the Glasgow School of Art to come up with a range of innovative products which could better meet not only their needs as clients assessed as requiring Telecare, but also their aspirations as consumers.

Moray was the first local authority in Scotland to involve its Telecare service users in a collaboration which challenged the manufacture/supply sector to consider current methodologies for engaging with consumers.

All the participants were encouraged to work together to visualise tomorrow's world.



The project

Technology may be developing at a rapid pace, but the functionality, usability and aesthetic design of the 'button and box' community alarm has remained largely unchanged since first coming on the market in the 1950s.

The project was sparked by the variety of suggestions put forward by some of Moray's community alarm users as to how the pendant alarm trigger, which most currently wear hung on a cord around their neck, could be improved.

A postal survey of all community alarm users (1,324) was undertaken by the Moray Community Health and Social Care Partnership in 2009 to review how beneficial the service was and whether users might benefit from additional Telecare equipment. The survey, which elicited a 62% response rate, also tried to gauge users' compliance by questioning their reasons for wearing or not wearing their personal alarm, and invited them to say what they would change about their pendant button and why.

The service as a whole was viewed very positively by the respondents particularly as it gave them and their families a feeling of reassurance, although an issue with compliance was identified. Responses revealed:

- Almost one-third of clients admitted to wearing their alarm pendant only some of the time. The main reasons given were that it got in the way and had the potential to be set off by accident; or simply that they forgot to put it on.
- Fewer than one in 10 wear it at all times, thus rendering them at risk in the event of an emergency.
- More than one in 10 had found themselves without their alarm pendant in a situation where it was needed.

“The ideas presented showed that all teams had a sound understanding of the requirements of a pendant.”

– supplier/manufacturer representative

Many people considered the design to be adequate, viewing the device as a functional 'safety net' and took an 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' view of the alarm which had been 'prescribed' for their 'own good' by a professional. At that time there was no charge for the Moray Lifeline Service.

It is anticipated that in the coming years, a more consumer focused generation of older people will have different attitudes, expectations and aspirations, particularly as 'paying customers' and will be more likely to be early adopters of technology.

Therefore it was considered the suggestions received on potential improvements for the pendant merited further investigation.



Could people expect to be able to choose from a range of alarm pendants rather than receive a standard one designed to dangle from a neck cord?

Would it need to be easy to operate or should it be multi-functional?

Would a redesigned pendant instil greater confidence that a false

alarm was less likely to be triggered and in turn help boost compliance so that more people would be able to call for help in an emergency?

The project aimed to test the potential value of bringing together service users, possible future service users, manufacturers/suppliers and design students in a co-productive process to innovate the current community alarm pendant. Innovation funding was secured from the Scottish Government to support the project.

Getting started

How do you prevent an alarm pendant being left beside the bed or put away 'safely' in a drawer? By inviting older people who have been given an alarm and told it will 'do you good' to challenge the status quo and share their wisdom with designers and the manufacturers/suppliers who talk to practitioners but not to their end users.

The 21st Century TeleWEAR Project set out to achieve its objectives by bringing together key stakeholders to innovate the design of the current Telecare alarm pendant in two collaborative design workshops, a final



prototype exhibition and a follow-up evaluative focus group with the service users who participated.

This was an opportunity to raise awareness of current Telecare products and consider how they could be improved by drawing on the insight of those who rely on them.

The students were challenged to think more about how someone assessed as requiring a community alarm lives their life, to consider why the current design processes are not working to support users and how they could be done differently. They were tasked to produce design prototypes for presentation to potential purchasers which would balance the aspirations of customers and the commercial restrictions faced by manufacturers/suppliers who also have to consider viability.

“I think our conversations inspired them (the students).”

-service user

The project provided a test bed to highlight engagement between manufacturers/suppliers and service users as good practice in design processes and will hopefully have helped instil an ethos of continuous improvement in the design of not only this but all products to ensure that the ever changing needs of future generations are met.

It also provided an opportunity for the exploration of the potential benefits of interdisciplinary and intergenerational collaboration.

The participants

Current Telecare service users who responded to the 2009 survey expressing a desire for design change were contacted and invited to take part in a project, and a press release was issued to the local media inviting wider participation.

All were welcome to bring along a friend, carer or family member to ensure there was representation of potential service users, and practitioners from social work were also invited and asked to consider themselves in the future role.

“The project was very much worthwhile and, I felt, a great way of brainstorming ideas using service users, developers and suppliers input.” –
supplier/manufacture
representative

Level 4 Postgraduate MEng in Product Design Engineering students from the Glasgow School of Art were recruited to participate via discussions with the Head of Department.



The whole year was involved and the project contributed to their coursework for the autumn term 2010.

The three leading manufacturers of Telecare products (Tunstall, Tynetec and Chubb) were contacted and invited to participate in an observational/advisory capacity.

The Scottish Telecare Leads in the other 31 Partnerships across Scotland were contacted and invited to complete an online survey considering perceptions about innovation in Telecare products.

The overwhelming majority (10 out of 11 respondents) indicated that in their experience, manufacturers/suppliers did not engage directly with service users in the design of products. One commented that it could be that they do not know how to do this and so rely on indirect engagement through service providers.

The workshops and exhibition

The venue for the two workshops was Horizon Scotland in Forres, an award winning business incubation centre which supports research and development, innovation, entrepreneurship and creative thinking in Moray. The modern building has excellent environmental credentials, including sheep's wool insulation and a grass roof, and all the participants felt the venue was very conducive to the creative process.

The students made the long trip north by coach to meet fellow participants. The first workshop was an opportunity to get to know one another and learn more about the scope of the project before splitting into mixed groups where everyone was challenged to think about what could improve the alarm pendant. By the time the second workshop was held six weeks later, the students had developed these initial ideas into rough prototypes.

“It’s not often that we’re treated as having something useful to say.” –

service user

Following further comments from the service users, the students spent three weeks refining their prototypes before staging an open exhibition in Forres Town Hall to which the workshop participants and public were invited. The event attracted coverage in three local newspapers and on one radio station.

The workshops and exhibition was followed up with a focus group with the service user participants to elicit more feedback not only relating to the process, but to the personal impact their involvement in the project has had.



Outcomes and Impact

The brief of the project was for participants to take an innovative approach to imaging the alarm pendant of the future and co-produce a redesign of the alarm pendant. The designers were then able to produce prototypes, the quality of which was testament to the effectiveness of co-production.

The project formed the focus of the students' term coursework and opportunities are being identified to present the findings and prototypes to industry. They had the benefit of input from the end users who presented their aspirations and of input from suppliers who cautioned the need to balance aspiration with technical and cost constraints.

“It’s been really exciting, especially to get the service users’ input. This has been a big part of our degree.”

- student

The value of involving end-users in early design stages was reinforced to suppliers who gained a greater appreciation that the wearability, the look, comfort and functionality of a product are all of key importance to a customer. They have taken the learning from the project back to their sector.



“The best way for our company to develop new products is to listen primarily to our service users. They use the equipment and therefore can give feedback on current devices (both good and bad points). The added bonus was seeing these ideas being developed by people outside of the business. Hopefully shows that it is not rocket science.”

– supplier/manufacturer representative



Those with the community alarm were delighted to see how their input was reflected in the finished versions. They welcomed the process which gave them a chance to chat and share experiences with others in a similar situation and to impart their knowledge to a younger generation which wanted to learn from them.

“We’re not often credited with still having some intelligence, are we?” – service user

An unintended consequence of the project was that it became apparent that there was a lack of accurate communication about the functionality of the current pendant, such as it being waterproof so can be worn in the shower. Information provided to service users has been revised as a result of this.

“It’s certainly made me aware of everything. As I say, I wear this more now than I used to.”

– service user

The positive experience of being involved has led all the service users who participated to agree to join a Telehealthcare Involvement Group currently being established in Moray. The project participants now form the core of this group, the average age being over 80. They will give a strong voice to users in the future development and direction of the service, helping to take forward the Moray Telehealthcare Strategy.

Conclusions

Demand for Telecare will continue to grow in the years ahead. Its role in supporting people will become increasingly important as the elderly population grows and more people live with multiple long term conditions which affect their independence. As we work together to shift the balance of care, a shift is also needed in the market paradigm to better encourage design and innovation in Telecare products.

The project innovatively challenged whether current market relationships are the right ones.

Involvement in such a partnership venture was a first not only for the service users but for one industry representative who has worked in the field for more than three decades. He had previously commented: “At present the design of the simple body pendant and its current functional scope seems to meet the market needs.”

That was very much the approach taken when NHS glasses were introduced in the 1930s. They had a function and minimum thought was given to how they looked – their remit was to be ‘adequate’ rather than ‘styled’, even though the thick, heavy frames were known to humiliate wearers.

As the number of people prescribed glasses rose so did design standards and in the 1970s the importance of styling was acknowledged, albeit at a cost. Today people requiring glasses – and even those with no vision problems – are courted by designers, manufacturers and suppliers, and met with a variety range of fashionable products on which they can choose to spend their money.

There is a real opportunity for Telecare manufacturers/suppliers to emulate that success by considering design as well as technology as a matter of course.

One Scottish local authority Telecare Lead explained: “There are some hints that suppliers are starting to think about the look and design of their products more but I do not think the penny has dropped that the demand for a better designed product is growing in momentum and that the end users’ expectations of the look and feel of Telecare products is changing fast.”

This project encouraged service users to think of themselves as consumers with collective ‘buying’ power and challenged designers and the Telecare industry to listen and respond.



“Interest in what appears to have been a pioneering exercise. I’ve been in the industry for over 30 years and this is the first time such as request for involvement has been made!”

– manufacturer



“You could see how keen they (the students) were and how hard they must have worked after they left here to get all that done and produce the pictures to let us see what was going on.”

– service user





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