

Tech to Connect

Tackling isolation
through innovation

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The **Tech to Connect Challenge** ran from April 2019 to March 2020 and aimed to help civil society develop their early stage ideas for tech to enable more or better interactions between people. Technology can be alienating or divisive for those that are isolated, but it doesn't need to be that way. Tech to Connect was all about supporting civil society to translate their knowledge into good ideas for new ways to connect people.

The challenge prize helped ten finalists develop their ideas into working prototypes and plan for their implementation. The £1 million prize was split into £500,000 of business support with the other £500,000 being awarded as financial support – £25,000 grants for each finalist, plus a winning prize of £100,000 and two runner-up prizes of £75,000.

Finalist of the Tech To Connect Challenge

Happy Place by Suffolk Libraries



Location

Suffolk

Our idea

A digital platform designed for libraries that will reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing. It will do this by identifying individual and collective needs for emotional and practical support, transforming the relationship between demand for and supply of services in communities. Our service harnesses technology to deliver a tangible, real-world intervention that draws from a huge pool of readily available activities, events and experiences. Technology acts as the facilitator of change, referring users to interventions proven to address the root causes of social isolation and loneliness.

Who do we want to reach?

Initially, the main group of intended beneficiaries are those at risk of experiencing loneliness or isolation in Suffolk. Happy Place is an intervention that could address both challenges by connecting people to activities, events and experiences in their local area. It could also give the user the opportunity to connect to individuals and/or groups of people in similar circumstances, or perhaps with shared interests by making personalised suggestions. Research commissioned by Suffolk Libraries has studied the link between attending activities and improvements in wellbeing.

The story so far

We started doing user research and testing in December 2019 and embraced a human-centered design approach to tailoring our solution to our beneficiaries. After a period of user research, we were able to identify four demographic groups that would benefit from our project and different types of interventions. It is clear that the library service hosting brings the

additional benefit of being able to incorporate recommendations of wider content such as books, information resources, film and music – all available for free. Some feedback also outlined the need to have activities outside of the library. As a result, new partnerships were created with the Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Mind and Wellbeing Suffolk, to be able to explore opportunities to also showcase activities, events and experiences outside of a library setting.

What's next?

We will be spending the next few months creating a minimum viable product (MVP). This will require further development time and mapping of the library and wider community offer when it comes to events and activities. The next development phase will see the creation of the diagnostic tool based on the manual process used during testing. The MVP will incorporate functionality driven by user feedback

and a prototype of the diagnostic tool. It will be freely available to library users at a test site. We are really looking forward to using the agile approach as it makes developing the MVP financially viable.

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