

Tech to Connect

Tackling isolation
through innovation

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Department for
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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.

Runner Up of the Tech To Connect Challenge (£75,000 prize)

Mirthy



Location

Greater London, with reach across the country

Our idea

Mirthy is using technology to transform the UK's 35,000 retirement developments and care homes into activity hubs for older adults, using existing spare resources such as communal lounges, to efficiently and effectively tackle social isolation. Our aim is to transform under-utilised spaces into 'community hubs' for activities like talks, where older adults can make

new social connections and strengthen existing ones. Our online platform allows retirement developments to book speakers, typically older adults themselves, to provide talks in their communal spaces, whilst encouraging residents and members of the local community to attend and mix for social interaction.

Who do we want to reach?

Mirthy's intended beneficiaries are older adults aged 65+, who number approximately 12.2 million across the UK,* split between those that live in retirement developments and care homes, and those that are in the community in their own homes. With recent internet use for 65-74 year-olds up from 52 per cent in 2011 to 83 per cent in 2019 (ONS), there appears increased demand for connectivity and connection in older populations. We will initially work with retirement homes to offer them an online platform through which they can easily organise and book older adult speakers to deliver interesting talks on a variety of subjects for their residents and older adults in the local community.

*As per ONS mid-year 2018 data.

The story so far

In January 2020 we signed a contract with McCarthy & Stone, who are the UK's leading private retirement housing provider for a paid pilot. During the Tech To Connect Challenge, we iterated quickly and cheaply using the lean startup methodology to test various operating approaches to find a model that is viable, scalable, sustainable and meets the needs of users and beneficiaries, delivering a greater impact in comparison to alternative models.

What's next?

In light of the current lockdown among our target audiences due to Covid-19, Mirthy is launching online Mirthy Talks, which are delivered by our network of speakers using webinar technology to reach millions of older adults who may be socially isolated in their own homes. We also plan to continue our expansion plans to onboard more retirement living groups as well as work with McCarthy & Stone to roll out the platform to more of their homes, targeting 100 of their developments. We're also looking to scale across community clubs region by region

and nationally where a national overarching body is present. Finally, we'll be exploring other activity types that could use a similar platform and model e.g. Arts & Craft and fitness classes to engage beneficiaries with other interest types.

"Mirthy's advantage is that the human and physical resources exist and with their spare capacity, it's simply a matter of enabling and connecting them. Creating human and physical assets requires excessive time, funding and resources, whereas leveraging existing resources is fast and efficient - this approach will have a net contribution to combating social isolation on a national scale."



58 Victoria Embankment, London EC4Y 0DS

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