

# RSA

## OLDER PEOPLE AND NEW MUMS CLUB TOGETHER TO COMBAT LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

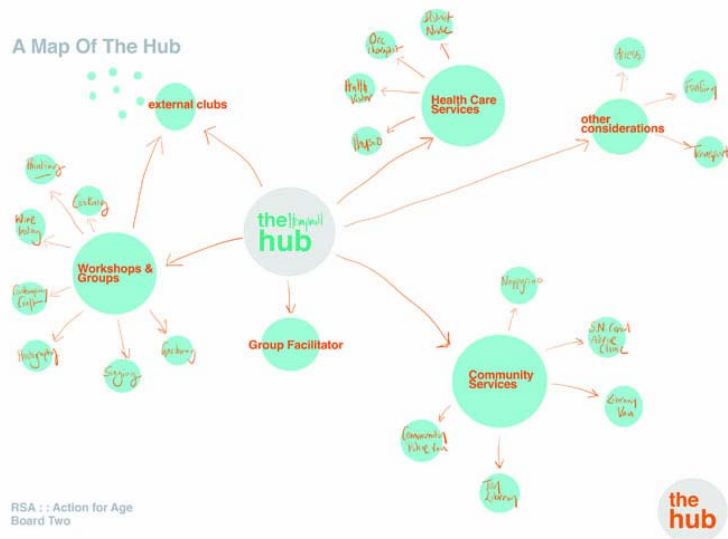
Friday May 8th

Designers combating isolation and loneliness amongst older people have scooped the RSA Design Directions award for their proposals.

Submitting their ideas in response to the RSA's 'Action for Age' brief, the designers examined some of the complex challenges presented by an ageing population and how better design might help.

**Katy Shields**, of Norwich University College of the Arts, response to the brief was a concept called 'The Hub', a community group for older people and new parents providing an environment that encourages and nurtures friendships across the generations through a range of activities. Her research drew on speaking with older people, service providers and new parents, and her own former experience as a community occupational therapist where she met many older people in their own homes.

She views this proposal as part of a longer-term solution to loneliness and isolation among older people by enlarging their social network to include younger members of the community in which they live. Katy plans to develop the project on the ground in her local area.



**Sabrina Koelbl** of Middlesex University submitted 'Knit Together', a project that makes computers, accessible to older people at no cost. It is firstly a re-cycling system whereby young people re-furbish used computers for older people and train their seniors in how to use them. Secondly, she developed a computer interface which is tailored to the specific needs of older people and uses an operating system that will function on a variety of older models of computer.

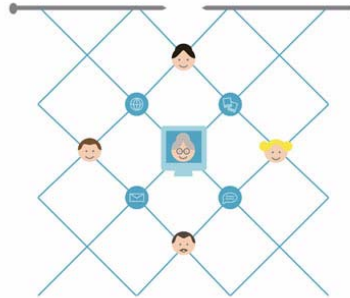
Making computers, and therefore the numerous ways of modern communication, accessible to elderly people, at no cost, to integrate them more into their social environment.

**Modern communication**  
The ways how people communicate with each other has changed a lot in the last decades. Talking in touch with people and especially with people you can't see often is now easier than ever. Social messenger and online communities are only a few examples of how this is a computer offers.

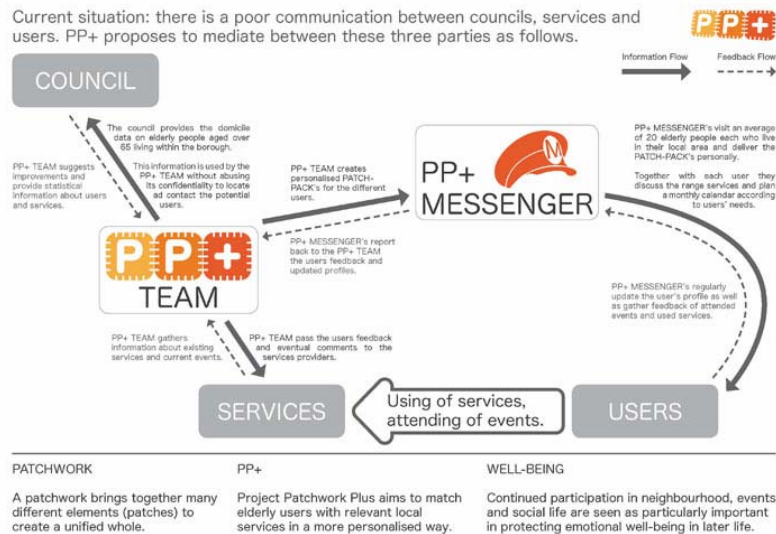
**Difficulties for elderly people**  
Elderly people who are depending on easy ways of communication mostly don't have the access to a computer, for several reasons. One problem is that they are afraid of modern technology. They don't know how to use it because they haven't grown up with it. And by now, computer interfaces has got too complicated for beginners. They would always need a helping hand that takes away their fears. Another reason is that elderly persons are often not able to afford a new computer. They wouldn't go and buy a computer by themselves.

**Old computers**  
There are thousands of unused computers in the world, that no one ever thinks about. A reason is, that a computer is very quickly out-of-date. But old people wouldn't need the newest technology. They would be satisfied with an old computer that someone will let them.

For my project I worked out a computer interface tailored to the specific needs of elderly people. I also developed a way to bring the computers to them.



**Vincenzo di Maria/Ayda Anlagan/Pu Tai** (Graduates of Central St Martins) undertook their field research in Hackney and their proposal, Project Patchwork Plus, is a localised system to improve the communication of existing services to older people by delivering and gathering personalised information. The PP+ team works in collaboration with the local council and service providers, monitoring and mediating information about potential older users and the list of services, events and activities on offer. An information pack, Patch-Pack, contains information about services in the borough for the current month, differentiated according to users' profiles. The packs are delivered by PP+ Messengers, older community member volunteers who play a key part in the overall system.



**Commenting on the winners, RSA Head of Design, Emily Campbell said:**

“The finalists developed a deep understanding of the character and value of networks; and how individuals, actions, objects and places might signify those networks to alleviate social isolation. The RSA is proud to reward Koelbl, Shields, di Maria, Anlagan and Tai, these outstanding students who are really helping to blaze the trail of service design.”

**Notes to Editors**

1. For more information contact **Luke Robinson, RSA Head of Media on 020 7451 6893** or [luke.robinson@rsa.org.uk](mailto:luke.robinson@rsa.org.uk)
2. A full list of the Design Direction award winners can be found at [www.rsadesigndirections.org](http://www.rsadesigndirections.org)

3. **The RSA developed this project with support from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. GlaxoSmithKline is also a sponsor.**
4. Design Directions is the RSA's annual design awards in which students are challenged to address intractable social problems through innovative new design.
5. Design Directions is the UK's leading competition for 'socially responsible' design. The RSA established its first awards scheme for students in 1924 and today this unique scheme identifies, supports and rewards the most promising and creative students.
6. Worth over £60,000 in prize monies, comprising cash and work placements, the awards provide financial and practical assistance to student designers starting out in their careers.
7. This year Design Directions received 800+ entrants. There were 30 winners. There was a choice of 11 briefs to which students could respond, proposing solutions to ways in which design could make useful and meaningful interventions in a variety of situations.
8. The RSA is grateful to the following organisations who supported Design Directions in 2008/09: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation; Garfield Weston Foundation; Kalyx; GlaxoSmithKline; Royal Mail; Home Office; Design Council; Forum for the Future; The Worshipful Company of Tin Plate Workers; Engine Service Design; CIM Charitable Trust; Aircraft Medical; Design against crime research centre; Springetts; Waitrose; NCR; Wolff Olins