

App finds design solutions to everyday problems for people with disabilities

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Judges for the 'ifonly' design app competition. From left to right: Professor Nigel Harris, Director of Designability; Richard Oldale, Industrial Design Expert; Martin Fortune, Research and Academic Liaison Officer, WSUN; Lisa Austin, Research Manager, University of Bath; Chris Ramsden, EIDD - Design for All Europe; Professor Chris Eccleston, Director of Pain Research.

The success of an innovative design app competition, organised through our Centre for Pain Research, is cited in a recent Parliamentary Report on advances into assistive technology that could help the elderly and people living with disabilities.

Countering the [rise](#) in [chronic conditions](#), coupled with the push towards greater independent living for these groups, researchers from our Department for Health and Bath Research & Development launched the 'ifOnly' crowdsourcing app to encourage these populations to share the everyday problems they face.

Through the app, users recorded, uploaded and posted videos to demonstrate a variety of challenges experienced; from opening cans to making a cup of tea. Under the premise of 'if only I could...' the competition set out to bring together a user community with new designers each challenged to come up with innovative solutions.

Over the course of the project, over 100 'ifOnly' videos were uploaded charting a variety of challenges and attracting in total over 22,000 views via YouTube. In tandem, a community of interest grew via an ifOnly webpage displaying films and providing a forum for potential design collaborators.

Lisa Austin, Research Hub Manager in our Department for Health explained: "Through this project we are interested in combining smartphone technology with expert knowledge of what people need when trying to live independently with disabilities.

"The 'ifOnly' app provided a route to engage with people to gain insight into the everyday problems and difficulties that they face and to inspire product designers to provide innovative and relevant solutions.

"Through the competition organised at Bath, we challenged designers to find solutions to real-world challenges for people living with [disabilities](#). The 'ifOnly' model has the potential to really improve provision and access to products that could help this community and it is significant that this has been recognised in the recent Parliamentary Report."

As part of the competition, designs were considered by a panel of stakeholders including representatives from the NHS, social care, creative industries and the third sector as well as members of the public.

Rosie Cole, from the BANES Carers Centre, commented: "In your everyday lives you think, 'if only they could do this, if only they could do

that'. I think that the fact that you have this absolutely critical phrase for your young designers has been absolutely paramount to what you are doing."

The overall winner of the [competition](#), announced in May, was student Simon Lyons of Loughborough University whose design found a simple cutting tool to help elderly people open packets, jars and bottles without the risk of injury.

Provided by University of Bath

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