

Few elderly people relish the prospect of moving to a retirement home, despite the wide range of care and support services now available. One of the main issues is perhaps the ease with which the elderly can take advantage of the services made available to them; a wide range of support services - and remote services in particular - have a high entry barrier for the users they are designed for.

Case Study
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Designing Independence

User-driven development of care services

“Designing effective connections needs the involvement of those being connected”

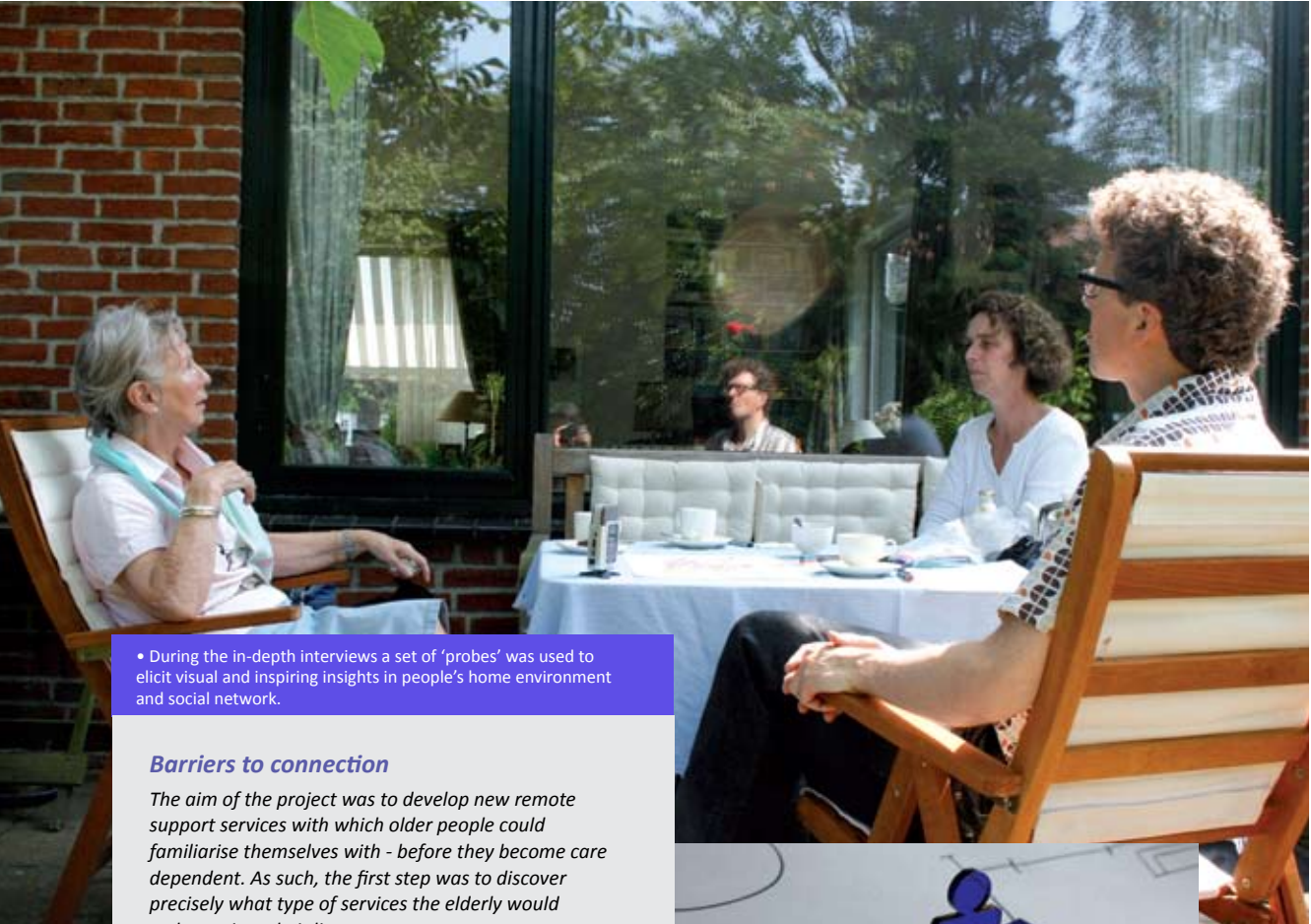


- After an extensive round of home visits and interviews, the insights from the exploratory study are synthesised on cards and used as input for a series of co-creation workshops with the client team and representatives from the target group.

One of the biggest changes in modern society is the increasing role technology plays in connecting people.

The continued rise of social networks is perhaps the best example available of how innovative new services can quickly become a fixture of everyday life, and how quite radical routines can soon come to feel indispensable.

How can such services be extended to reach the people who need them the most however? STBY were recently commissioned by a consortium of public sector organisations in The Netherlands to explore this issue, in the context of facilitating elderly people's engagement with the development of services aimed at allowing them to live independently - even whilst their mobility is decreasing. Services that would allow such people to connect with friends and helpful organisations from the comfort of their own home were the focus, and as such their development was focused around both a primary target group of potential users, as well as a secondary group made up of friends, family and neighbours.



- During the in-depth interviews a set of 'probes' was used to elicit visual and inspiring insights in people's home environment and social network.

Barriers to connection

The aim of the project was to develop new remote support services with which older people could familiarise themselves with - before they become care dependent. As such, the first step was to discover precisely what type of services the elderly would welcome into their lives.

A consortium of public sector organisations in The Netherlands were involved with the project; ZuidZorg, PuntExtra, Gemeente Geldrop Mierlo, and Ananz. They are all interested in developing remote services with the potential to offer people both flexibility, and independence.

Exploring New Service Concepts

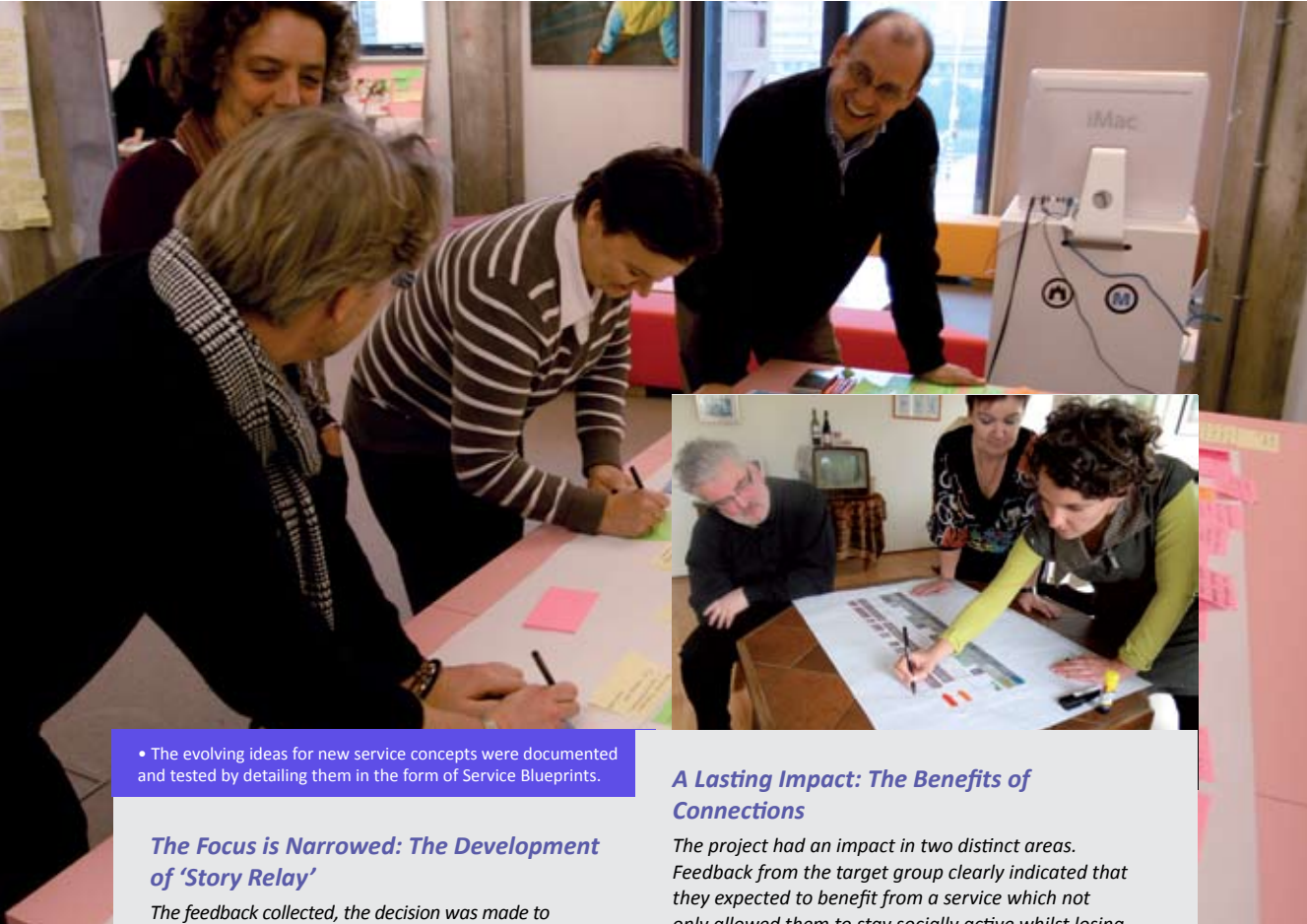
The project began with an in-depth needs analysis of the target group. This entailed a series of semi-structured interviews with a sample of older people, which were conducted within their own homes. Questions centred around daily routines and social environments, and these were complimented with a series of photographs of key areas and objects in each home; people were asked to show the interviewers areas and items that were important to them, with these being recorded and analysed in order to create an extended profile of each participant.

These profiles were presented and discussed in a multi-disciplinary workshop, a co-creative setting in which information could be clustered and emerging insights identified. Once established, these insights were the input for the exploration of several new service concepts; three such concepts were initially developed, with each incorporating a description of the user it was intended for, a summary of the problems it was designed to solve, and a practical set of guidelines for how it could be delivered.



In every stage of the project STBY worked in close collaboration with the design partner Waag Society.

A key aim of the project was that the development of new service concepts should be primarily user-driven. This was the thinking behind a follow-up workshop in which the first concepts were presented to a group of users including a number of older people, their carers, and representatives from a number of elderly care organisations. This group joined the client team for an initial exploration of the materials gathered and concepts developed, before being interviewed individually to determine if, when, and how they would use each new service.



- The evolving ideas for new service concepts were documented and tested by detailing them in the form of Service Blueprints.

The Focus is Narrowed: The Development of 'Story Relay'

The feedback collected, the decision was made to further develop one of the service concepts into a full prototype. 'Verhalen Estafette' (roughly translatable as 'Story Relay') was the concept that most closely matched the original aim of the project; built around the personal stories and memories of local people, the service offered users the ability to share and react to stories from the comfort of their own homes. This process would be facilitated by a whole range of lectures, radio programmes, online videos and social networking tools. If a community is made up of collective memories, then Story Relay would ensure these memories could still be shared - and the community continue to thrive - even whilst it's members lose their mobility. The format may change, but the connections remain.

A series of 'Experience Prototypes' for the service were developed, based on a service blueprint which mapped out the exchanges between the various stakeholders involved. These prototypes could then be presented to the target group in another round of individual home interviews. This iterative process of user involvement kept the service in the hands of those who would use it throughout the entire development process. It wasn't just that they felt their voices were being heard, they were able to experience a sense of ownership due to having had such an influence on its gestation. The key benefit here was access - there are few entry barriers to a product you have designed yourself.

A Lasting Impact: The Benefits of Connections

The project had an impact in two distinct areas. Feedback from the target group clearly indicated that they expected to benefit from a service which not only allowed them to stay socially active whilst losing personal mobility, but which would also gradually familiarise them with the remote services they may eventually rely upon for domestic care.

The organisations involved in the client consortium meanwhile could fundamentally reposition the role they play in people's lives. No longer are they there to simply 'solve people's problems.' They could now focus on facilitating people to solve their own problems whilst they are still able, thus addressing a target group who do not yet consider themselves in need of care services. If the success of the project in relation to the target group then was down to the iterative process of user involvement, the benefits brought to the care organisations came from the equally close involvement of the client team.

The project was ultimately then a story of connections. The Story Relay concept facilitated continued connections between existing communities, whilst also introducing connections to the care organisations upon which they may one day depend. Both groups meanwhile benefited greatly through their connection to the service's development process, with their constant iterative involvement ensuring it both met their needs and assuaged their fears.

When designing connections therefore, a lasting impact can only come from from effective involvement.