

Co-designing technological solutions to loneliness

with carers of people with dementia or Parkinson's



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What's the problem?

Loneliness disproportionately affects certain groups, including people with neurodegenerative disorders (PwND) or caring responsibilities¹⁻². Technology has the potential to address specific barriers these groups face in making social connections. However, existing technology-based interventions for loneliness have not involved these groups in their design and research shows a lack of awareness among these groups of the capabilities of technology^{4,5,6,7}.

This research adopts a co-design approach to developing technologies to address loneliness among PwND and carers. Work to date is with carers.

What's needed?

Context

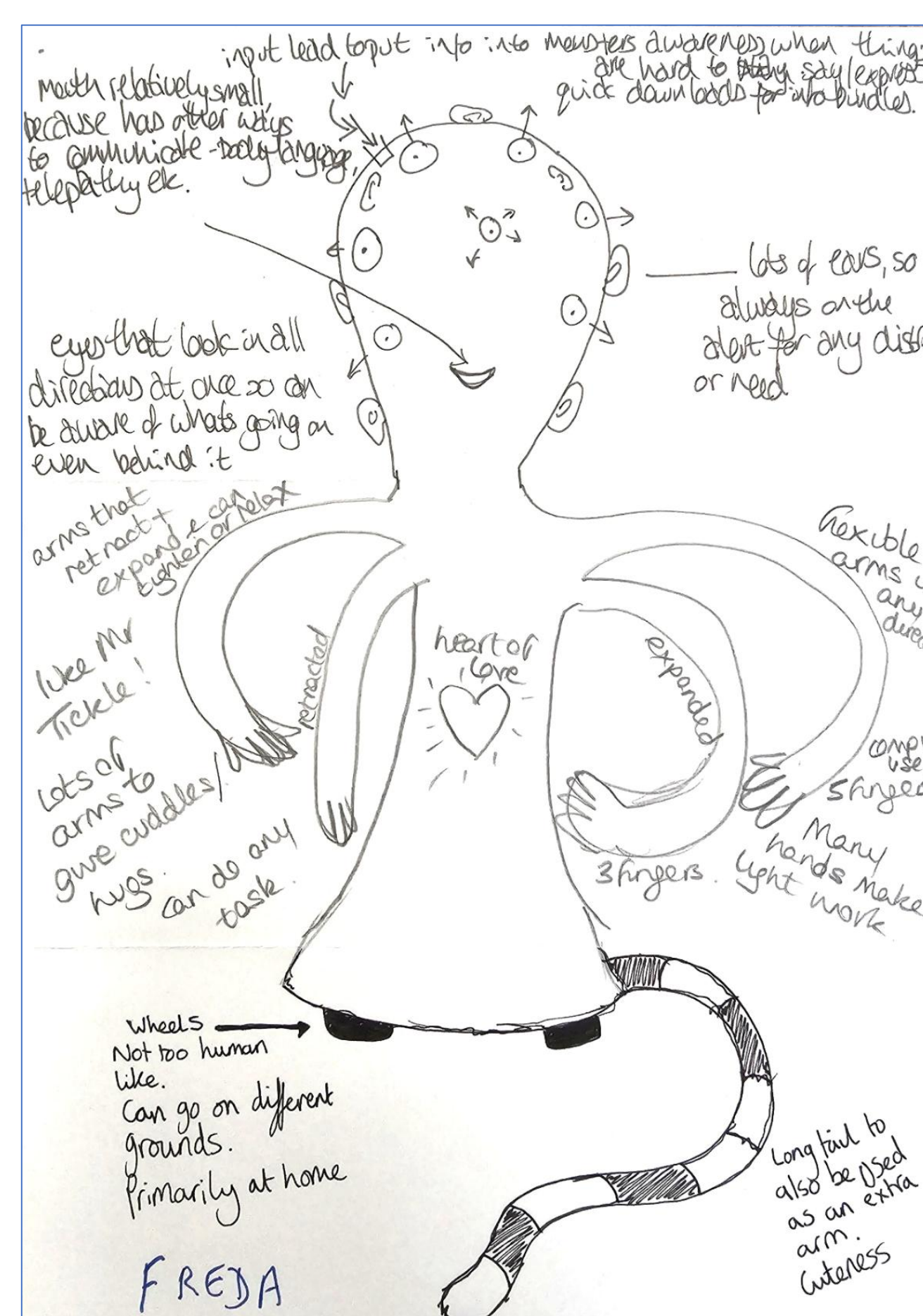
Carers felt uncomfortable with technology that was a 'substitute for human interaction' but were open to it being used to 'aid human-to-human interaction' and to assist with routine tasks/chores.

A common feeling for carers was others not understanding their situation – others may offer advice but what carers want is someone just to listen. And, at times, carers may feel unable to ask for help or express their feelings.

Caring responsibilities restrict carers' free time, limiting their ability to seek and engage in social interaction and making loneliness feel outside of their control.

Caring can be all-consuming making carers feel 'less part of the outside world'. While carer groups can provide specific support, carers also need non-caring related conversations and fun.

Carers often make upward social comparisons, feeling they are not coping as well as they 'should', heightening a sense of otherness.



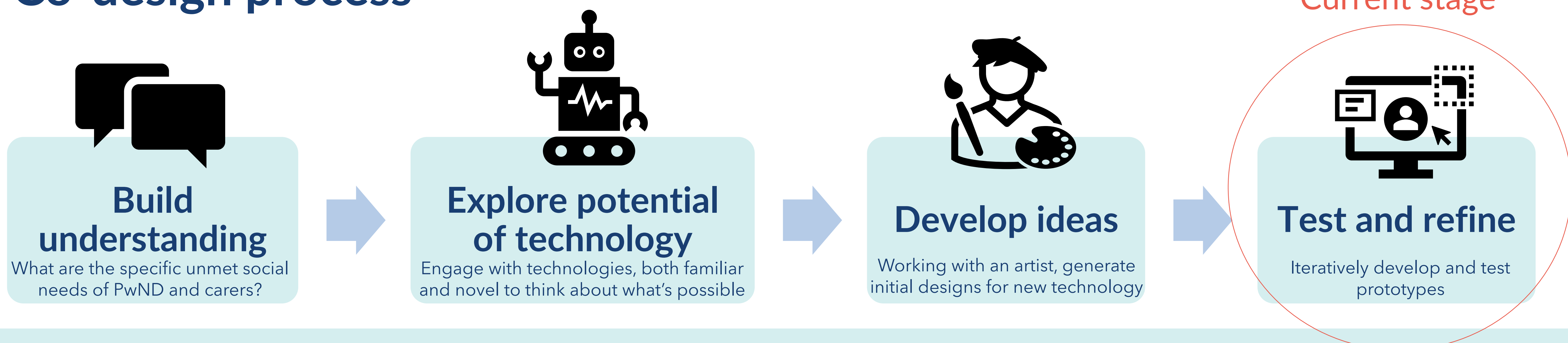
Connection companions

Carers' drawings of robots/creatures that are 'great at connecting with others' in a warm-up activity in the creative workshops

Requirements

- Facilitate being understood by others without having to explain your feelings/situation
- Prompt empathic listening in others
- Assistance with 'admin' of caring (booking appointments, repeat prescriptions, medication reminders etc.)
- Assistance with household chores
- Enable remote communication and sharing of experiences
- Facilitate new connections based on non-caring interests
- Provide opportunities for (fun) connections within available time
- Build confidence and self-esteem

Co-design process



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