

## 'Synergy' Co-Production Group:

### Creating a Virtual Reality Solution for People Living with Dementia in Suffolk

# Frequently Asked Questions

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### What is Virtual Reality?

Virtual Reality is the name given to computer generated experiences which have a very high degree of realism.

This means that when in Virtual Reality, people really feel as though they are interacting with real objects and environments when they are actually watching a computer-generated film simulation.

There are a number of ways in which people can experience Virtual Reality films, this can be through a mobile phone or a VR headset.

## What is the purpose of the project?

Suffolk County Council is keen to use any new technology which could provide significant benefits for its citizens.

In November 2022, Suffolk County Council awarded a contract to [Spark Emerging Technologies Ltd](#) as part of a ground-breaking attempt to make Virtual Reality experiences accessible to people living with dementia across all of Suffolk's care settings.

Spark will design a purpose-built platform to use with people living with dementia which will consist of linking the VR display (whether a mobile phone or a VR headset) to a tablet that will enable a carer to see what the person with dementia is seeing and, importantly, to pause or stop the experience if the person is becoming distressed or tired.

Spark will be creating 10 custom films for the new platform and there will also be a major competition launched to gather a diverse range of films for people living with dementia to watch.

## Why have I been chosen?

Suffolk County Council want People Living with Dementia, as well as their families and care providers, to be involved in designing the new supported-VR solution from start to finish.

A special co-production group has been set up called 'Synergy' which will be consulted at every stage throughout the design and delivery of the new VR solution and the VR films which will be available on the platform.

You may have heard about the opportunity to join our 'Synergy' co-production group from your health or social care provider / professional or have been recommended as someone that may be interested in taking part.

## Do I have to take part?

No, membership of the Synergy Co-production group is entirely voluntary and you can opt out without having to provide any reason at any point.

If you would like to discuss your participation in the group, please feel free to reach out to the Project Lead, Mark Tattum-Smith whose contact details are at the end of this document.

## What are the eligibility criteria?

There are two tiers of membership within the Synergy Co-Production Group. The first tier is made up of experts by experience who are people living with dementia and their family carers.

The second tier are care professionals who may be paid carers, care managers as well as Health and Social Care professionals.

### The Eligibility for the First Tier is:

#### Essential

**Adult or carer of an adult with a formal diagnosis of dementia.**

Resident in Suffolk.

**No pacemaker or ICD.**

No current experience of hallucinations, visual disturbance or psychosis.

**No known susceptibility to travel / motion sickness or vertigo.**

No open wounds on face or head.

**No cervical (neck / upper spine) conditions (arthritis or significant degeneration) that make head and neck turning painful.**

No experience of seizures or epilepsy.

**No severe visual or auditory loss that cannot be rectified by glasses or hearing aids.**

#### Desireable

**Effective communication skill to provide verbal feedback and response.**

Mental ability to engage in small workshops and individual sessions.

**Open and positive view of trying new things including technology.**

Preferably with ability to consent to take part in this project.

**Access to the internet.**

## **What will happen if I decide I would like to take part?**

If you would like to take part, you will need to apply to join the Group by going to our website; [www.suffolk.gov.uk/vr-project](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/vr-project) where there is a short form.

You may need some help from a friend, family member or health and social care professional. If you do not have someone who can assist you with the application, please contact the Project Lead whose details are at the end of the form.

Once your application form has been received, you will then be invited for a short informal interview.

This will provide you with an opportunity to ask further questions and enable the leader to make sure that you meet the above criteria.

After the interview you will be informed whether you have been accepted onto the Group.

## **Can I bring a family member / carer or friend with me?**

Yes, we want you to feel comfortable and relaxed during the workshops and if this will help you participate in the session then we would be more than happy for you to bring a family carer with you.

If you would like to bring a carer with you we would also really like to formally include them as a member of the Group going forwards so they can also contribute their own thoughts and impressions. This can be discussed at the interview.

## **What will it mean to be a member of the Group?**

As a member of the group you will be invited to small workshops which will convene at different points in the project called 'sprints'.

Workshops will be set up at a Suffolk County Council office near to where you live. Any out-of-pocket expenses, such as travel costs can be reimbursed.

The workshops will be wheelchair accessible and refreshments will be provided at each sessions.

At the workshops you will have the opportunity to feedback on different design options relating to the app which will be vital to ensure that this will work for other people with dementia in Suffolk.

You will also have the opportunity of trialling early versions of the VR solution and specially created VR content to make sure that it is accessible and appropriate.

At the end of each workshop, the Group leaders will circulate a summary of feedback from the workshop to all members.

The Group Leaders may follow up individually with you and / or your family carer by telephone or a video call.



## **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no real disadvantages or risks in taking part in the group workshops, but risk assessments will be carried out to minimize any discomfort or difficulty for people with dementia taking part and best practice guidance will be followed.

With regards to experiencing virtual reality through the Group, for people who meet the above essential criteria, the physical risks in using virtual reality are extremely small indeed.

In terms of the risk of viral cross infection, research has demonstrated that wiping the VR headsets with 70% alcohol wipes will effectively kill all bacteria and viruses including Covid-19<sup>1</sup>.

We will be working with healthcare professionals to develop Covid-safe cleansing protocols for the VR equipment used in the project and will also use previously developed research protocols used during the pandemic<sup>2</sup>.

The other main side effects that some people experience when using VR is 'cybersickness' which is the term given to computer-induced nausea and dizziness.

We will be following best practice guidance to really minimize the risk of cybersickness for all members of the group and will carefully monitor any participants who experience these side effects in conjunction with our healthcare leads<sup>3</sup>.



## **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

We hope that taking part in this project will be a really exciting and rewarding opportunity for all the group members.

This is a great opportunity to make a real difference to how this new technology could be designed to benefit people living with dementia across Suffolk.

From clinical research, the benefits of virtual reality for people living with dementia are now recognized to be very extensive indeed particularly with regards to enhancing wellbeing, but also including cognition, communication and rehabilitation<sup>4</sup>.

As an additional thank you for taking part, all First-Tier members of the group will receive a small gift voucher.

## **Will my participation in this project be kept confidential?**

All data and information from participants in our Synergy working groups will be stored securely and will be non-identifiable.

## **What will happen as a result of this project?**

All of the feedback and input from the Synergy co-production group will be fed into the design of the VR solution. It is hoped that the new platform will launch in the Summer of 2023 after a period of trialing and testing with different Suffolk care providers.

## Can I contact anyone for more information?

More information can be found on our project website

[www.suffolk.gov.uk/vr-project](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/vr-project)

If you have any specific questions or would like to talk to someone, please contact:

**Name:** Mark Tattum-Smith (Project Lead)

**Email:** [synergy@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:synergy@suffolk.gov.uk)

**Tel:** 01502 674562

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> cf. Creel, B., "Bacterial Load in Virtual Reality Headsets" (2020). Honors Theses. 1384.

(Accessed via: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon\\_thesis/1384](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/1384))

<sup>2</sup> Moore, N., Dempsey, K., Hockey, P., Jain, S., Poronnik, P., Shaban, R.Z. and Ahmadpour, N. (2021) 'Innovation During a Pandemic: Developing a Guideline for Infection Prevention and Control to Support Education Through Virtual Reality'

(Accessed via: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fdgth.2021.628452/full>)

<sup>3</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2020) 'The safety of domestic virtual reality systems A literature review' BEIS Research Paper Number 2020/038 RPN 4527.

(Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safety-of-domestic-virtual-reality-systems>)

<sup>4</sup> cf. for recent literature review of impact on wellbeing; Appel, L., Ali, S., Narag, T., Mozeson, K., Pasat, Z., Orchanian-Cheff, A. and Campos, J. (2021) 'Virtual reality to promote wellbeing in persons with dementia: A scoping review'. Journal of Rehabilitation and Assistive Technologies Engineering (Vol. 8: 1-16).

(Accessed via: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/20556683211053952>)