

Invention, Adoption and Diffusion: Older People as Pioneers

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COBALT (Challenging Obstacles and Barriers to Assistive Living Technologies) is a multidisciplinary research project that is developing new ways of working with older adults, service providers and commissioners to encourage adoption and diffusion of Assisted Living Technologies (ALT's). COBALT's research goals are to work with end-users in all three groups to draw out their experiences and perceptions and feed these back to the ALT industry. The end-users are at the heart of the process and we have developed a range of approaches to working with them, including our 'Pioneer Group' programme.



Figure 1: St Andrews Pioneer Group introductory session

The 'Pioneer Groups' involved older participants in two research sites (St Andrews and Sheffield) taking part in a ten week programme of practical activities addressing a different part of the technology adoption and diffusion

process each week (Wang, et al., 2010). This included design, creating business models and identifying technology champions. The St Andrews 'Pioneer Group' 'invented' a novel ALT based on needs they identified. This took the form of specialised floor lighting to light their way to the bathroom in the night; thus preventing falls and injuries.



Figure 2: St Andrews 'Pioneer Group' design session

This 'product' was mocked-up and became the foundation upon which the other sessions were built. The Sheffield group re-designed an ALT created in another research project NANA (Novel Assessment of Nutrition in Ageing) (Astell, et al., 2010). NANA uses sensitively-designed touchscreen technology to identify individuals at risk of under-nourishment and improve targeting of interventions. This group also followed a ten session plan, with a focus on the process of getting NANA to market.



Figure 3: Sheffield 'Pioneer Group' Technology Champions session

The participants 'pioneered' these new techniques and helped steer the groups, making them central to the research process. COBALT has thus gained new insights into the behaviour of older adults around technologies which can help them to live more active, independent lives.

References

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