

## Project Background:

Multiple aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that people were unable to physically participate in the events and activities that previously connected them socially\*, leading to new digital catalysts in which traditional face-to-face services moved online.

Whilst the revolution of digital inclusivity has been found to help people at risk of isolation remain socially connected with others, virtual-only inter-household contact has also been negatively associated with mental well-being in older adults\*\*, perhaps even exacerbating loneliness.

### The project explored:

- What kinds of virtual experience create the most positive impacts on health and wellbeing, Particularly within groups at the highest risk of isolation?
- Can virtual technology be used in a way that will support a safe restoration of physical access and mobility?

## Project Aims:

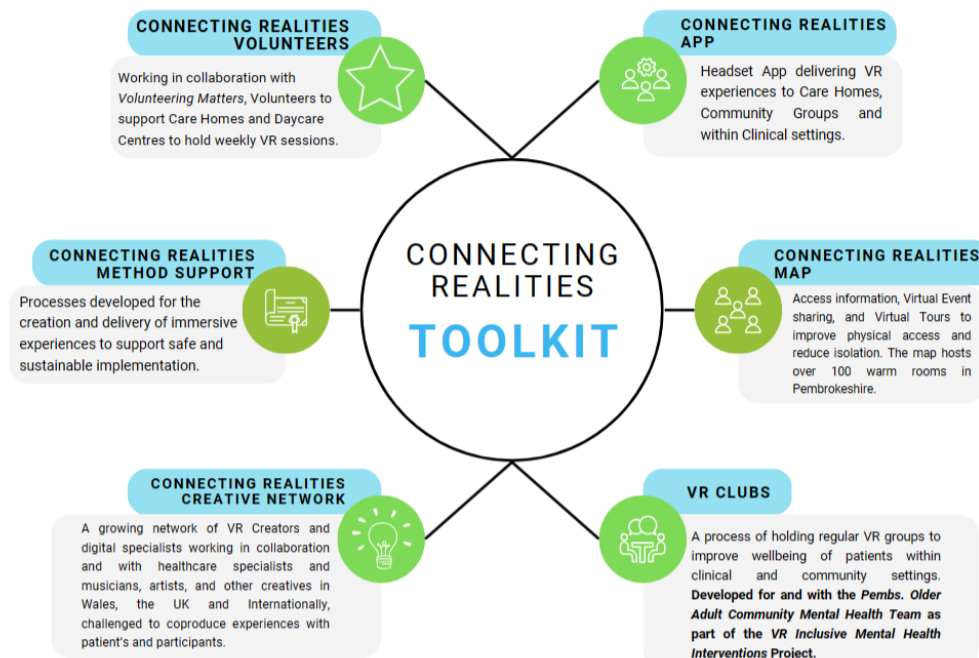
To develop digital solutions that provide meaningful wellbeing benefits and improved outcomes and quality of life for people at risk of isolation. The project hopes to create a new blueprint for integrating VR as a valuable community resource.

## Project Approach:

- A Steering Group was established and a variety of potential routes to development were explored.
- The areas with most clearly registered demand and potential were developed further and tested small scale. Service users were involved in the co-production of experiences.
- The Toolkit was created. Systems were put in place. The project was rolled out on a larger scale using a method that supports constant research and development.

\*Age UK  
 \*\* COVID-19, Inter-household Contact and Mental Well-Being Among Older Adults in the US and the UK', Frontiers in Sociology, July 2021

**Project Outcome(s):** The creation of a **Connecting Realities Toolkit** to empower the creation and sustained delivery of digital and immersive solutions.



## Project Impact:

- 50 + VR Sessions supported over 200 VR Experiences:
- The project is working with 4 x Care Homes and 3 x Daycare Centres.
- 3 x team members are employed part-time to support and create VR sessions.
- 2 x Support events occur weekly, each event reaching approx. 10 individuals at risk of isolation.
- 6 x Virtual Reality Tours and 10 x Access information profiles are developed, with more in development.
- Project developed with the Pembrokeshire Hwb maps and shares over 100 warm rooms in Pembrokeshire.
- A Creative Network linking VR innovation with Healthcare is in development.
- 100% of Care Homes supported to hold a VR session requested more sessions.
- Feedback forms suggested that 78% of care home participants, many who are living with advanced dementia, showed an improvement in mood after a Virtual Reality Experience, with 0% reduction in mood observed.
- 100% of health and social care professionals involved in the delivery of VR sessions found them a positive experience for their service -users.

## Key Conclusions:

Of the routes explored, the following areas registered the highest demand and opportunity for continued development.

- To create and support the delivery of VR and XR material as a virtual wellbeing experience when physical access is not possible.
- Providing digital information to support people at risk of isolation to successfully access physical locations and experiences.
- Establish innovative new material by bringing together creative, computer, and healthcare specialists.

## Next Steps:

- Continue rolling out the Toolbox resources to an increased audience of care homes, community groups and organisations, and clinical departments within Pembrokeshire.
- Further develop the creative network to participate in the development of new XR solutions.
- Explore the use of emerging technology such as AI in the development and assessment of toolkit elements.
- Continue working with the OA CMHT to develop the VR Inclusive Mental Health interventions project.