

An inspirational test bed enables textile developers to understand the multi-disciplinary opportunities and challenges of creating Smart Textile Product Service Systems.

THE CAREGIVERS' VOICE

Martijn ten Bhömer, Bianca Pastoors, Corrie Aarts, Malou Verheijen
Interviewed by Christine De Lille

To provide the caregivers' perspective on being involved in design for well-being, Christine De Lille spoke to care professionals at De Wever, an institution which specialises in care for elderly with dementia.

Together with De Wever and other CRISP STS partners, Martijn ten Bhömer developed two Smart-Textile Services in the context of elderly care. This form of bottom-up collaboration with different partners is second nature for designers, but for care professionals it is still quite novel to work with designers.

As Bianca Pastoors, a physiotherapist at De Wever, points out, "People who work in care are currently quite passive. Their attitude seems to be: 'Come to me when it's finished.' I became involved in the project because I wanted to do something that was not directly related to my discipline; technology is not really my expertise. I noticed that designers don't really understand dementia. They have a lot of ideas of which I thought from the beginning: this won't work. That's why I think it is so important that people in care - physiotherapists, nurses, managers, and volunteers - are involved in projects like these, where research plays an important role. As we co-develop the product, we can be involved in the design process and put the focus on what we need."



MARTIJN TEN BHÖMER — 1985
m.t.bhomer@tue.nl

- PhD Candidate, Eindhoven University of Technology, Industrial Design, Designing Quality in Interaction group
- Member CRISP project Smart Textile Services



BIANCA PASTOORS — 1975
b.pastoors@deweever.nl

- Physiotherapist at De Wever
- Member CRISP project Smart Textile Services



CORRIE AARTS — 1958
c.aarts@deweever.nl

- Projectmanager DOT at De Wever
- Member CRISP project Smart Textile Services



MALOU VERHEIJEN — 1987
m.verheijen@deweever.nl

- Geriatric physiotherapist at De Wever
- Member CRISP project Smart Textile Services

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"For me," says Martijn, "care for the elderly suffering from dementia was something far removed from my experience as a designer. You always have certain assumptions in mind, which often turn out to be different in reality. That is why I wanted to connect to the context, to experience the context as much as possible. With this approach, you become aware of a different world, quite unlike the academic world. I joined people from De Wever in their daily practice, in different departments, participated in activities with their clients, and tried to implement the prototypes during the design process as much as possible in the real PSS context. I wanted to make sure that it was a shared project for which all of us felt ownership, which means you have to trust the expertise that already exists within De Wever. You develop the PSS step-by-step, together with the people who will actually use and implement it."

"One thing that became apparent while planning," Bianca notes, "is the difference in perspective. In care, most things are arranged

rather ad hoc. I thought the projects would be finished relatively quickly, but after a meeting with Martijn I realised, oh right, this is research. He would prepare these meetings with a list of topics and questions, which turned out to be really helpful, as they forced us to stop for a moment and reflect. He would ask us what everybody had been up to, so we would discuss it before next steps were taken. This helped to reduce the complexity and forced us to go back to the basics for a moment."

Corrie Aarts is a project manager at De Wever, "In projects I have been involved in, it is often the case that you start something and, along the way, notice that it does not work. So you have to continually adapt your goal. You learn this by doing many projects. You sometimes have to adapt, but that is also the strength of the project. That is one thing I learned from this project, this approach of switching fast, learning from other disciplines, and thinking out of the box. I remember that I joined the project and I really had to get used to the way

of working: what had I gotten myself into? Together with Malou, another physiotherapist at De Wever, I visited some of the CRISP STS events, for example, the Careful Designs symposium at Waag Society and the review sessions to get a better idea of the bigger picture, to better understand the academic world. I have now met other people, for instance, members of the G-MOTIV project, who helped us initiate a new project about humour and dementia. People often don't realise what is happening and now we have a way in. That is a valuable connection for us."

Bianca—"We now know how we should approach things, how to plan a design and research process, for instance updating academic and ethical committees and asking the family members of our clients for permission. What changed for me as CRISP progressed is that I am more aware of recent developments. I am more aware of things outside my area. It doesn't only have to do with my discipline."