

EVA PARK

2016 Nominet Trust 100 Winner

2016 Nominet Trust 100 Winner

2016

VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH APHASIA

Project URL: <http://smcse.city.ac.uk/eva/>

Project Twitter: [@city_university](https://twitter.com/city_university)

Organisations Involved EVA Park <http://smcse.city.ac.uk/eva/>
City University London

- Health
- Social Exclusion
- Audiovisual

Since John Smejka suffered a stroke, his ability to communicate has been so damaged, he was unable to order a meal at a restaurant. Like one third of people who survive a stroke, John was left with aphasia – a language impairment that affects a person's ability to express and understand written and spoken language, which can leave them socially isolated.

According to speech and language therapist Dr Celia Woolf, 400,000 people have acquired aphasia in the UK. Woolf is part of a project at City University London that aims to help them recover their communication skills, through a virtual environment called EVA Park.

A multi-user online world, EVA Park has virtual locations like a town square, a park, or a shop. Each user has a personalised avatar that is free to roam (and even fly) within the interactive space and practise functional and social conversations, from ordering a drink in a virtual bar, to having a meeting in a virtual conference room. Each session is run by a speech therapist who engages in conversation with the user through another avatar.

After a three year research project, a prototype was tested with 20 participants over a five-week period, where each participant spent on average 40 hours a week in EVA Park. The participants found EVA Park to be a fun and creative place, and the use of playful virtual avatars instead of face-to-face communication led to less embarrassment, and more freedom to practise.

When John completed the study, his wife said: "That was the first day since his stroke that he ordered his own dinner in the restaurant...for the kids to have their dad ordering his dinner, that's normal." City University London will now

employ a software developer to create a version that can be released for general use.

Image courtesy of EVA Park

Last updated: 13th of September, 2016