

Redesign of a Toolkit Aimed to Increase the Independence of Young Autistic Adults

People on the autism spectrum often struggle with their independence and rely on healthcare professionals and their closed ones in their day-to-day life. In order to empower people young autistic adults (YAAs), many assistive technologies have been developed, but they have shown to not be significantly efficient. Design Your Life (DYL) is a project aimed on creating a co-design method that can be used to empower YAAs. Designed method is introduced in a form of a toolkit. Toolkit is a product that guides the users: young autistic adult and a co-design partner of their choosing, through the product design process. Toolkit presents the users with six design stages: empathise, define, ideate, prototype, test and evaluate. Every stage has an arrangement of exercises that will help the user go through the design process. As a result, YAAs can create highly personalized products by themselves, without any guidance from a professional designer. In 2020 three toolkits were developed as and tested. This graduation project took advantage of the feedback that was gained during those graduations assignments, and combined the exercises from the developed toolkits to create a new iteration of it. It then was tested with a 32-year-old man with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and his partner. The toolkit was provided to them in a form of a Power Point presentation since the sessions were taking place online due to COVID-19 pandemic. The feedback provided by the participants is used to establish what parts of the toolkit are the hardest ones for the participants to execute without supervision of a designer, and what guidance is necessary for the users with little to no experience in product design to use the toolkit independently from a professional designer. The co-design sessions showed that the main issues are:

- The lack of guidance in the prototyping phase,
- Overwhelmingly heavy workload in the prototyping phase,
- Lack of reflection exercises,
- Lack of playfulness in the toolkit design,
- Users forgetting where they stopped during the previous co-design session / a lack of result overview.

These issues were taken into account and the toolkit was redesigned to fit the needs of the users: the prototyping phase was divided into 2 steps, the design of the toolkit was adapted to be more boardgame-like, reflection exercises were added to every step, the language used in the toolkit was corrected to be less professional, and a space for creating an overview of the user's design process was added. The final design is a physical product (fig, 1) that provides the user with a playing board that has pockets for cards and additional free space for user's notes, 6 decks of cards with exercises (one per design step), an instruction, a notepad, 2 pens and Blu Tack. The users write down their answers on post it notes, and

connect the answer together with the card to the overview words in order to create map out the design process.

