

Inventors win Blackwood Design Awards – supporting independent living

Innovators commended for designs which support people to live independently.

The Blackwood Design Awards, a Dragons' Den style competition to recognise innovations and inventions that improve the lives of older and disabled people, has announced this year's three winners.

The successful shortlisted inventors joined together to showcase their entries before the winners were announced at the V&A Dundee, Scotland's design museum, the same location where they pitched to a panel of eight of the sector's leading experts five weeks prior.

Koalaa Soft Prosthetics, from London, was recognised as the winner of Best New Aid, Equipment or Accessible Technology for its comfortable and affordable prosthetics devices.

Nick Fitzpatrick from Edinburgh picked up Best New Concept for his kettle redesign to help users independently and safely operate at home.

Charlie Wilson and the University of Strathclyde won Best Collaboration for the restructure of an electric plug to work on a push mechanism for removal instead of pull.

Fanchea Kelly, Blackwood's Chief Executive, said: "The inventions created by all the shortlisted entrants are inspiring and it was tough for the judges to decide on the

winners. Nate from Koalaa, Nick and Charlie are worthy winners, and it was great to host an event that gave all the entrants the opportunity to share their experiences in this showcase in the V&A.

“These inventions make a huge difference in helping people to live more independently and that’s what we aim to promote and encourage with the Blackwood Design Awards.

“The shortlist this year showcased truly phenomenal work and clever thinking and we thank all those who got involved for committing their time to such important endeavors.”

Sponsors of the design awards include Hyper Luminal Games and Social Telecoms whose generosity have provided overall awards sponsorship and £2000 prize money for the two new-to-market inventions so that they can develop their designs further.

Scotland based, Global Intellectual Property experts, Murgitroyd, are also supporting the winners and shortlisted candidates with advice and support on how to protect the rights of their inventions and the V&A Dundee have been proud hosts and supporter of BDA 2022 too.



L-R Nick Fitzpatrick, Blackwood Chief Executive Fanchea Kelly and Charlie Wilson

Koalaa's prosthetic device is a sleeve fitted with different tool attachments depending on the type of activity the user would like to do – with three options currently offered.

A virtuaclinic matches users with devices online and grants access to an online community for idea sharing and peer-to-peer support at a fraction of the cost, anywhere in the world.

Nate Macabuag, founder of Koalaa (Soft Prosthetics), said: “We are chuffed to win this award. It is so important to have awards like the BDA and to recognise the value of design for assisted technology.

“Such awards encourage current and future designers and engineers to think beyond the next shiny computer or car and put their minds to creating products that can be useful for others. Koalaa continues to be inspired by the privilege to be useful and to work with users who guide our ideas.”



Nick Fitzpatrick

Driven by his grandmother's struggles, Nick Fitzpatrick, founder of Inclu, reinvented the design of a kettle to balance

the functional needs of target users with a beautiful aesthetic, ensuring people can safely and independently use the appliance.

The dual horizontal handles give users a flexible and easy carrying experience, with a lid designed to allow users to fill the kettle without needing to open the lid, and a raised stand that boils the water while eliminating the need to lift and pour after boiling. Instead the user presses a single button to dispense the water into an object underneath.

Nick said: "Creating beautiful products for the home that are inclusive and accessible for people of all abilities is my goal.

"My kettle reinvention aims to solve the functional problems posed by mainstream kettles without becoming a stigmatising product. It does this by rethinking how a kettle should be used – modern technology like an induction coil housed in the stand of the kettle.

"The dual-handles and raised stand have the biggest impact on the user experience as they allow people with reduced strength and dexterity to lift the kettle more easily and it removes the need to tilt and pour water entirely.

"It's great to know that other people see the value in the work I'm doing, and I'm really excited about the opportunities this award will open up for me in the future."

Charlie's design, in partnership with Strathclyde University, aims to make the removal of electrical plugs easier by offering a push option rather than only pull – as well as giving different grip options.

This has been designed alongside people with arthritis on the basis that many of them find current electrical plug designs uncomfortable. They often resort to asking for help which impacts their independence or these challenges lead to unsafe

practices such as pulling plugs out by the cable.

He said: “My project focused on redesigning electrical plugs for people with arthritis. Some amazing people with arthritis shared feedback and personal experiences which fed into the final design – which focuses on being able to push the plug to remove it removing the need for grip strength.

“I feel very proud to have won this award and it’s given me confidence that there is the need for a product like this alongside genuine interest in creating more inclusive designs in general. It was also so great to see all the other people working to increase independence and comfort of those of us with disabilities.

“I’m partially sighted and believe in inclusive design, the principle of designing for the widest range of people possible.”

The panel of industry experts included: John Logan (Blackwood tenant and previous panel member), Gemma Lumsdaine (Wheelchair Rugby Coach for Dundee Dragons), Ryan MacDonald (Military Matters Manager at Housing Options Scotland and previous panel member), Jo Mawdsley (Head of Learning V&A Dundee), Julie McDowell (Blackwood’s Board Chair), Christina Miller (Communications Manager at Euan’s Guide), Emma Muldoon (UK travel and disabled blogger) and Gordon Stark (Chief Executive Officer at Murgitroyd).

Blackwood is an independent living specialist that has earned a reputation as an industry leader which uses cutting-edge technology to help its customers to live independently. Its Blackwood House design guide is the gold standard for accessible housing to support independent living in Scotland.

<https://www.blackwoodgroup.org.uk>



Charlie Alec Wilson