Editorial

Sarah Parsons and John Woolham

New name, new team, but some familiar challenges

This is our first issue as the new editorial team for the journal and we are both delighted, as well as fairly daunted, to be taking over the reins from Chris Abbott. Chris was the founding Editor of the journal and has steered it brilliantly over the past decade. It was Chris' enthusiasm for understanding more about how technologies were being developed and used in everyday life that proved to be a catalyst, and the focus of the journal has stayed true to this original vision. It is absolutely right, therefore, that we include an editorial afterword from Chris as he steps down to pursue his other interests in retirement. In his afterword, he reflects on his time as Editor and highlights some of the key factors and principles that underpin and influence the journal. Specifically, Chris discusses how the focus has been, and will continue to be, on how technology can be enabling and facilitating in so many important domains and contexts of everyday life: from learning in schools, to lifelong learning in leisure and employment, through to learning (or re-learning) skills for daily life and enabling autonomy and independence. He reminds us it is the "use not the device that determines outcomes" and this focus remains one to which we as the new editorial team are very committed.

Nevertheless, as Chris also highlights, mainstream digital technologies – smartphones and tablets especially – have transformed the field of assistive technology bringing access to important and valuable applications within the reach of many. Indeed, while the devices may not determine outcomes directly, they have enabled access in ways that were unimaginable even a decade ago when the journal began. Thus, the device – perhaps more now than ever – can strongly influence outcomes through enabling affordability, usability and accessibility in non-stigmatising ways. The potential power of such an enabling environment is difficult to overstate but of course it is the job of research to ensure that hyperbole and hope are appropriately grounded by evidence from the field. Thus while we may have changed the name to the *Journal of Enabling Technologies* to better reflect this dynamic, more mainstream enabling context, our commitment to publish high quality, practice-relevant research is unchanged. We will continue to bring you well designed, ethically conducted and informed research that has users and practitioners at the heart of technology development and application.

This issue exemplifies our approach by foregrounding the views and experiences of caregivers and professionals in decision making about the use of enabling technologies. For example, Alberto Brunete González, Micheline Selmes and Jacques Selmes place care givers at the centre of their brief exploration of how smart homes could be developed for people in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. The authors sought care givers' views about the potential usefulness and acceptability of ICT-based solutions for smart homes, with a majority of proposed applications being judged as "very interesting". Applications for personal safety, including fall detectors and safe mobility, as well as for leisure and recreation featured strongly on the list, which is a good reminder that wider well-being should not become marginalised in contexts where medical and safety needs may understandably predominate.

Chris' reflections on his time as an Editor also highlight the importance and relevance of participatory research approaches to our field since if we continue to strive to involve users and stakeholders in our research in stronger ways then there is increased likelihood that technology will be able to better meet their needs. The question "Who is involved in technology research, and how?" is discussed in the short paper by Sarah Parsons, Nicola Yuill, Mark Brosnan and Judith Good, which is the fifth report from the "Digital Bubbles" seminar series that took place in the UK from 2014 to 2016. In this paper, the authors focus on what inter-disciplinarity means in the field of autism technology research. They highlight that this term should be broadened to consider not just the academic teams who collaborate in research, but also the extent to which users and stakeholders

are involved, as well as the diversity of those users and their very different skills and experiences. Very much in line with Chris Abbott's afterword, user views and practitioners' expertise are positioned as central to moving the field forward in important ways.

Finally, Paul Herring, Karen Kear, Kieron Sheehy, and Roger Jones' paper is an important illustration of the need to ensure that the enabling technologies field continues to investigate and advocate for the views and preferences of those who would otherwise continue to be marginalised; namely, those who may struggle to express themselves verbally or in typical ways. Herring and colleagues report an investigation into the responses of non-verbal children with autism to a virtual Picture Exchange Communication Systems tutor. The tutor came in two different versions: one with a synthetic voice and one with a human voice. Interested readers should read the paper for the outcome but suffice to say the results are interesting, possibly counterintuitive and once again speak to the need for publishing research that investigates such technology tools in trustworthy and context-appropriate ways.

Our concluding comments are a thank you and an invitation. Thank you to Chris Abbott for his guidance, kindness and time as we take on this new role, and for his inspiring leadership in the field. Thank you also to all our readers, authors, reviewers and Editorial Board members for your continued interest and invaluable efforts. As we move into a new phase for the journal we would like to invite all of you to enjoy the content of this issue and to ask you to recommit and redouble your support for the journal by sending us your ideas, examples, comments and research reports. The journal can only flourish with your help and we very much welcome your contributions.