45 Connects

45 connects is the brainchild of Sean Byrne a lecturer in Gerontology at Dublin City University. "During the coronavirus, I could see how my mam, Mary, was responding to the cancellation of her twice weekly 45 card nights. She was gutted. 45 really structures her week since my Dad died. She really missed the comradery and the social outlet that it brought". An avid online poker player, Sean wanted to create something similar for people like his mother who may not have the opportunity to meet physically with others but who love playing 45 (albeit for glory and the joy of being on top of the leaderboard – not for money). "I don't really see it as a business idea" explains Sean – "I see it as more of a labour of love". He feels confident, given the demographics of the users that he can keep an app going through the input of experts from the university aswell as from volunteers outside of the university. "Already I have gotten some great commitments from a lecturer who specialises in the creation of gaming apps. He is a real techie. He can get all of the technical stuff sorted. Anything that I ask him to do, he can more or less get it done. We have people in the university who are computing experts, who can create excellent visuals, audio and develop something that works. In terms of the back end of the application, I think I am sorted".

DCU seeks to be an "age friendly" University – see https://www.dcu.ie/agefriendly. Sean hopes that this creation might be the first of many similar types of technology developed by the university which can build connections among older people through the use of innovative technologies (which the university has the time, technology and expertise to develop). "They all have smartphones nowadays – but they really only use stuff like WhatsApp family groups – with good user centred design, we can create technology that they will engage with and we will see technology solutions that can make a real difference to older people's lives helping them to connect when, perhaps physical contact becomes more difficult– I see this as like a pilot for something bigger. Its more than social networking. It is about building connections through activities that break the ice – be that games, music, storytelling – whatever." Because this project aligns with the community engagement aims of the university, backing in the form of expertise, time and money is likely to be forthcoming. "We can get grant after grant after grant with a project like this. The grant money gives us human, financial, and time resources to give this our best shot".

"Whilst I can figure out the rules of 45 and get an app working (with the help of colleagues) I think that our team has a few gaps that needs input from likely users" explains Sean. "I want it to be more than just an app that helps people to play 45. I want it to have that "magic" which makes these women and men come back time after time to their local parish hall or pub or GAA clubhouse. I want it to be a valuable experience that connects people and fulfils those deep-rooted needs that we often might struggle to articulate. Love, belonging, self esteem, self actualisation, competence, autonomy are some of the things I reckon are fulfilled by regular 45 nights (and the competition that ensues)."

Having spoken to Mary and some of her friends (he found them through Mary's whatsapp group) Sean has identified the following as being important. He is thinking of an app/website provisionally called "45 Connects". When individuals register they will become part of the All Ireland 45 Connects club. The club will have live 45 sessions on Monday and Thursday nights from 7pm till 10pm.

Sean has suggested that the following are key requirements

1: 45 needs to be able to be played online without any fuss or bother. Sean thinks this is key. Having tried to help his Mam use technology for the past 20 years, he has realised that anything complicated is the death knell of his idea. This is why he is worried about just working with tech people.

2: Live games at set times – playing 45 for a 2.5-hour duration. This is key. This brings structure to the week and makes the pursuit sustainable in terms of staffing and resources.

3: A league system based on performance during weekly competitions (as well as other ways of winning e.g. nightly winners)– Friendly competition seems to be key and this is what the solution will need to help deliver.

4: It will be important for players to communicate with each other before, during and after a game.

5: Should not be like a casino – a "local" feel, a place to chat freely and be themselves and make friends

6: Accessibility (a lot of the players are old (Retirees is the target market) and have various accessibility issues). We don't want to exclude anyone from this platform.

7: Must work across devices and platforms

8: It must capture whatever it is that keeps people coming back to play again and again in parish halls up and down the country

You are friend of Sean's and he knows you are interested in User Experience design. He has told you all about the project and wants you involved. He sees you as playing a critical role in creating something that is usable and engaging.