

Cartier

WOMEN'S INITIATIVE AWARDS



2017 FINALIST FOR EUROPE

LISE PAPE

United Kingdom

Walk with Path

WWW.WALKWITHPATH.COM

Assistive technology for people with mobility problems

In the UK, falls currently account for more than £2.3 billion of National Health Service (NHS) spending each year, making fall prevention an urgent public health priority. One in every three people aged 65+ falls at least once a year, with potentially devastating consequences, including social isolation, reduced quality and life and less independence. For 35-year-old Lise Pape, who has seen her father suffering from Parkinson's for more than 15 years, issues around mobility and the risk of falling are deeply personal. Driven by a desire to help her father, and with access to researchers at Imperial College London where she was completing a double Masters in Innovation



Design Engineering, Lise started studying the issues of day-to-day life for people with Parkinson's disease and Multiple Sclerosis.

The result was two products, Path Feel and Path Finder, which focus on improving people's balance and mobility, significantly impacting on physical health, self-esteem and social life. Funding from the Dyson Foundation, Nesta and the Helen Hamlyn Trust soon followed, giving rise to Walk With Path, a company dedicated to developing wearable products that reduce the risk of falling for vulnerable individuals.

WALKING TALL

The psychological impact of ageing or living with a neurological disease is not always addressed in healthcare products. Research shows that users want discrete products which allow them to feel that they can walk and function normally. Walk With Path's products have a direct therapeutic effect on users. The Path Feel shoe insole provides vibrational feedback to the soles of the feet of people at risk of falls, including those who can't feel the floor properly because of peripheral neuropathy. A wide range of people suffer from sensory deficit in the feet, including those with diabetes, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, patients who have undergone chemotherapy, as well as the elderly in general. There are more than two million people in the UK who suffer from neuropathy and 28 million+ throughout Europe. Existing products, like walking aids and canes, can carry a stigma and impact the user's self-esteem. Path Feel's invisible solution offers the feeling of independence and positively impacts confidence.

“ There's starting to be a lot more support for women. More and more infrastructures now exist to make entrepreneurship work in terms of work/life balance ”

Path Finder is an assistive aid able to facilitate gait and reduce the risk of falls. The shoe attachment consists of a laser that generates a green line in front of the opposing foot. While taking a step, a switch is turned on to activate the laser line to help with gait and provide guidance. The delivery of the cue is automatic, intermittent and tuned to the step pattern of the user. Path Finder is still at prototype stage but the company receives daily emails from Parkinson's patients worldwide asking when they can buy the product.

PAVING THE WAY

While Walk With Path has yet to start selling commercially, there is already a strong interest in its products in the UK and further afield in the US, including from the Michael J Fox Foundation and the Meyrow Foundation. The company has also forged connections with key membership organisations in the UK and has attracted widespread media interest. Sales will initially be done online, with a focus on Europe, however media attention has attracted interest from patients across the globe who will be able to buy the products via the website.

The company has plans to expand into other market segments, including elite sports or defence medical rehabilitation where its technologies can be applied to prevent injury and improve training methods. What started as one woman's pursuit to make everyday life easier for her father has grown to become a business on the cusp of making a huge impact, with the potential to help tens of thousands of people around the world live a more independent life, feel more confident, empowered and socially included.

“ I think there's a huge potential for technology in general to disrupt healthcare. The ability for technology to benefit users without having side effects is a huge advantage ”