UCP Holds First International Design-Athon

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United Cerebral Palsy (UCP [1])'s Life Labs [2], a technology and grassroots-focused initiative dedicated to identifying, developing, and supporting ideas that will make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities, hosted the two-day 2013 Enabled by Design-athon event.

Held in partnership with UK-based Enabled by Design [3] and Futuregov [4], the Design-athon is an international innovation event with a focus on disabilities. Hackers, designers and inventors from around the country came together at the Design-athon [5] to hear from experts, discuss the issues surrounding the need for more accessible, attractive and easier to use products for people with disabilities, and to build functional, scalable prototypes. The incredible prototypes built over the two days demonstrate just how quickly products can be designed, personalized and built to better fit with people's lives and their needs.

More than 100 individuals from a variety of fields participated, including: NASA, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the World Bank, Google, the George Washington University, the University of Maryland, the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), Marymount University, the Corcoran College of Art + Design, the University of Michigan, Syracuse University and the Cerebral Palsy Alliance.

Together, the participants listened to guest speakers, took part in an immersive usability workshop— where they completed a range of empathy activities involving the use of crutches, visual impairment simulation glasses and gloves of varying thicknesses to simulate altered dexterity, to help gain a better understanding of what kinds of products would make a difference for people with disabilities—and worked in teams to create their own prototypes. A panel of judges, including representatives from Google, Enabled by Design, FutureGov and Adobe, awarded the top prize to "Sous Chef," [6] a mobile kitchen island with variable height, and the people's choice award to "Springboard," [7] a device that combines a cutting board with any knife to help stabilize the food preparation process.

Participants in this exciting event include teams from:

- NASA
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
- World Bank
- Google
- University of Maryland
- University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC)
- Marymount University
- Corcoran College of Art + Design

- University of Michigan
- Syracuse University
- Cerebral Palsy Alliance

“United Cerebral Palsy is thrilled to have hosted this year’s exciting and hugely successful Design-athon. Many of the prototypes built today have the potential to be fully developed, brought to market—and to change the lives of people with disabilities. In just its first year in the United States, the Design-athon has proved that it is not only a great opportunity for discussion and collaboration, but is truly an inspiration for innovation among some of our country’s top science and technology experts,” said Stephen Bennett, President and CEO of UCP. “The 2013 Design-athon is just one of the initiatives that our Life Labs team is working on, and we look forward to more incredible events, partnerships and progress in the future that help to advance UCP’s mission of enabling a life without limits for people with disabilities.”

“Enabled by Design is proud to have bought the format of the Enabled by Design-athon to the US— and of all the participants, speakers and sponsors who have helped to make it happen. This event, now in its second year, embodies what Enabled by Design is about: creating a movement for accessibility for the masses, the belief that good design can help people with disabilities live more independently and building a diverse community of people with an active interest in accessibility,” said Denise Stephens, Founder of Enabled by Design. “It’s fantastic to see so many talented and imaginative designers coming together in support of accessible design, and we look forward to working with United Cerebral Palsy in continuing to build and expand the Design-athon in years to come.”

“At FutureGov, we are passionate about innovation in public services, social problem solving and utilizing technology to facility change. Driven by our openness to new opportunities and willingness to work with others, we are excited to partner with Enabled by Design and UCP’s Life Labs for the 2013 Enabled by Design-athon. This event is a great example of the kind of work that we seek to do on a daily basis, bringing smart, creative people together to address issues in creative ways that produce immediate results,” said Dominic Campbell, Founder and Director of Futuregov. “We applaud all of the participants for a job well done, and urge everyone involved to continue innovating, designing and pushing for change.”

To learn more about the Enabled by Design-athon, please visit www.enabledbydesignathon.org [8].

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[1] http://ucp.org/
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