Tackling Loneliness Through Play

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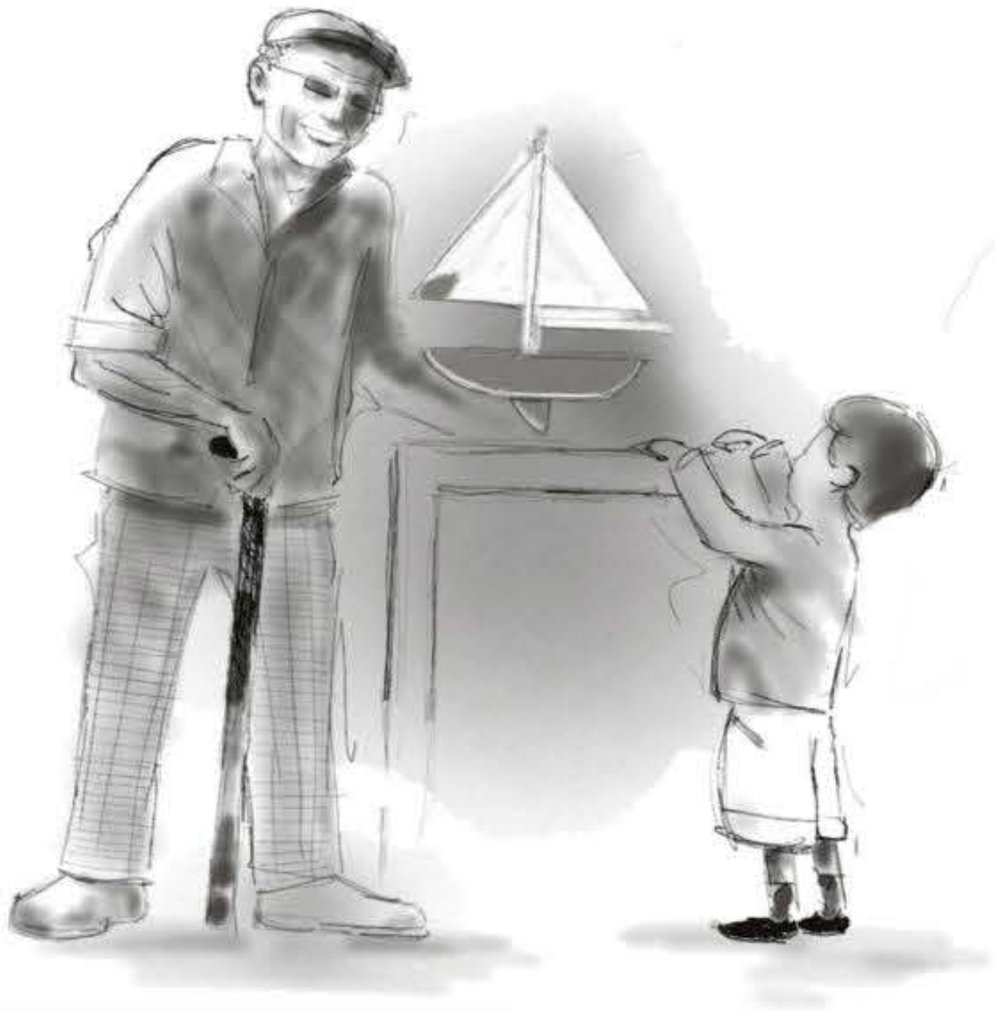


"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."

- George Bernard Shaw

Today, the act of play is bound to the elderly in their younger years, tying humanity to a lonely future in old age as two fifths of all older people say that the TV is their main source of company, and that half a million older people can go a minimum of 5 or 6 days a week without speaking or seeing someone else, this loneliness then promotes Alzheimer's, depression and other illnesses. It is globally recognised that the way we view ageing needs to change due to the growing older population and the possible negative consequences of it. As a result of this, The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2021-2030 the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing.

This project aims to end the epidemic of loneliness by bridging the ages with intergenerational play. A product made from locally sourced, sustainable materials, will entertain young and old alike in community outdoor spaces; offering young people role models and improving the lives of older people in society. To achieve this the project objectives were to make senior years more joyful, to reduce loneliness in older people through play, and to encourage outdoor activity

After meeting a trustee from Glasgow's 'The Children's Wood', I worked in collaboration with the outdoor space to create a bespoke solution to loneliness amongst their elderly community by designing an outdoor kinetic sculpture to promote intergenerational play.

So much of the inspiration for the solution I've devised comes from my visit to the Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre. So many of the designs there were so provocative and engaging, I wanted to incorporate that emotive experience into my design. The trustee from The Children's Wood also wanted to include a water feature into the design because of natural availability of rainwater in their area, drawing inspiration from the local environment.

Combining these ideas, I took the mechanical contraption elements from Sharmanka and created an interactive kinetic sculpture which encourages children and adults to work together to turn the device.

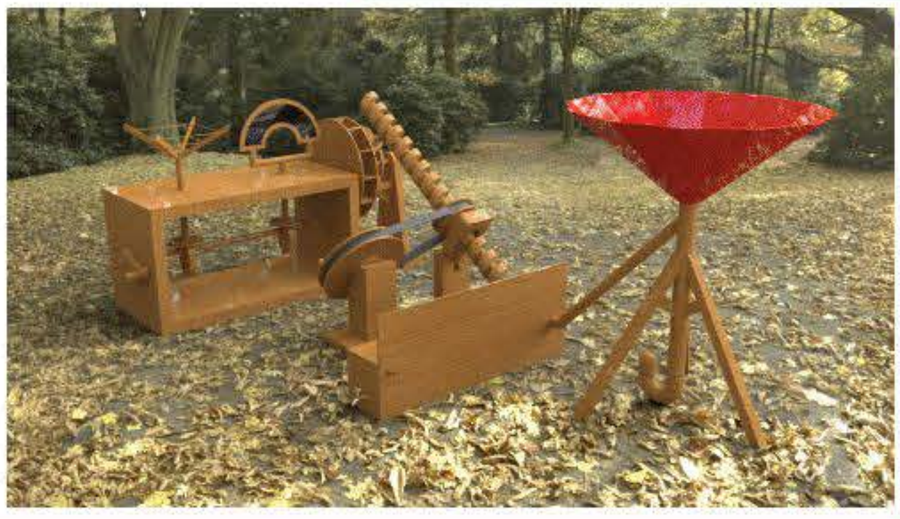
Firstly, water is captured in an upside-down umbrella and stored in a water tank that is shaped like a park bench. The park bench water tank also acts as a chat seat, this is a bench in outdoor social spaces which allows users to signal that they would be happy to speak with someone they have not met yet.

An Archimedes screw is fitted to the underside of the bench at an angle. When the screw is turned, using a pulley mechanism, the screw scoops up a small amount of water and turns it up screw until it falls over the side of the screw's end. The pulled is rotated by hand when a user grips a handle which is connected to the pulley system.

Once the water topples over the side, it lands on top of a water-wheel and spins. This spinning motion is then connected to a shaft with two oval shaped cams. The cams rotate, when one rises the other falls, and as they spin they knock the underside of a wooden boat, causing the boat to rock as though it were out at sea. This links to Glasgow's shipbuilding past.

Connected to the fixture holding the waterwheel is another handle, that handle can be independently turned from the water system, and it will spin a decorative clothesline that can be used in storytelling activities and a stained glass rainbow which will spread colour across the surrounding area. This further embodies nature by introducing the wind, the rain and the sunshine into the design.

All of these aspects are a part of the design to make the installation as celebratory of the local area, to encourage socialising and to make the feature as engaging as possible whilst encouraging collaboration due to the two-handle mechanism. Additionally, the kinetic sculpture has an educational value due to it its water, gear, and pulley system which would encourage curiosity and imagination in adults and children alike. There is also the opportunity that retired volunteers could update, repair and maintain the installation, which would increase their feeling of worth, input and wellbeing. Children could also become involved in the care of the sculpture. Consequently, the project objectives were achieved which were to make senior years more joyful, reduce loneliness in older people through play, and to encourage outdoor activity.



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