



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Swanswell showcases progress on new virtual therapy project

10 November 2011, national – Swanswell’s unveiled the latest progress of its research in to how computer game technology could be used in the treatment of substance misuse.

The national charity – which helps people overcome drug, alcohol and other problem behaviour – was invited to the Interactive Technologies and Games: Education, Health and Disability conference at Nottingham Trent University to showcase its work.

Swanswell’s currently working with the University of Reading as part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) to explore the use of virtual reality-based games to help in the development of coping skills and to reduce the craving for illicit drugs and alcohol.

Using the outcomes of various studies and its own research with people affected by alcohol and drug misuse, the team’s developing interactive software that can be used in existing services to provide even more innovative ways of delivering treatment.

The idea involves a client using a virtual reality headset to access a number of computer-generated scenes that allow them to make decisions. Each decision they make will lead to more events as the scene unfolds.

People using the technology can then ‘move’ between the scenes, which include a domestic scene with drug and alcohol-related cues, a street scene featuring phone boxes, discarded drink cans and drug paraphernalia and a bar scene.

They also have the opportunity to interact with characters and onscreen prompts, where the individual's responses can alter the game later on.

Liam North, KTP Associate at Swanswell, is leading work on the project and said: *'There's lots of promising evidence out there for the use of computer game-based therapy, so we're really excited about where this project is going.'*

'We've involved clients from the start because ultimately it will be those accessing treatment who will be using this software, so it has to be realistic.'

'Using their own experiences and feedback, we've developed a number of typical situations they may find themselves in. The game helps them identify the best way to deal with those situations, providing them with the skills they can then use in real life.'

'We believe that virtual therapies such as this can play a big part in the treatment and recovery of people affected by substance misuse in the future.'

Dr Faustina Hwang, one of the Academic Supervisors for this project, added: *'This is an exciting partnership for the whole team, enabling the development and application of the University's expertise in this exciting area.'*

'Our research so far suggests that there is real potential for this work to change the way drug and alcohol support services are delivered, in a way that will significantly benefit clients.'

To find out more about Swanswell and the services it provides, visit www.swanswell.org.

[ENDS]

Notes for editors

For more information or supporting photographs, contact Stuart Goodwin:

Swanswell
Suite 5, Hilton House
Corporation Street
Rugby
Warwickshire
CV21 2DN

Tel: 01788 559 422

Email: stuart.goodwin@swanswell.org

About Swanswell

Swanswell is a national charity that helps people overcome drug, alcohol and other problem behaviour. We believe that everyone deserves the chance to change and to be happy. We help them to remove the things that stand in their way, whether physical, emotional or practical. So, as their lives improve, they can feel well, do well, and stay well. Swanswell has a reputation for innovation and is a leading developer of new services which help people to change their behaviour for the better.

Swanswell has a number of offices across the country including Rugby, Coventry, Leamington, Birmingham, Nuneaton, Barnsley, Sandwell, Leicestershire and Rutland. Visit Swanswell at: www.swanswell.org.

Join the conversation, follow Swanswell on twitter at www.twitter.com/Swanswell.

About the University of Reading

The University of Reading is a member of the 1994 Group of 19 leading research-intensive universities. The Group was established in 1994 to promote excellence in university research and teaching. Each member undertakes diverse and high-quality research, while ensuring excellent levels of teaching and student experience. www.1994group.ac.uk

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships

This Partnership received financial support from the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships programme (KTP). KTP aims to help businesses to improve their competitiveness and productivity through the better use of knowledge, technology and skills that reside within the UK Knowledge Base. KTP is funded by the Technology Strategy Board along with the other government funding organisations.

Screenshots attached

Virtual-1.jpg: A screenshot of a typical bar scene within the game