

Introducing Alfie—the prototype robot helping elderly people stay independent for longer

March 18 2016, by Elizabeth Allen



A robot being developed to help elderly people stay independent and active for longer has been named by residents of three local care homes where it is going to be tested.

As part of the ENRICHME project – pioneering robotics research funded by an EU Horizon 2020 grant – [residents](#) from LACE Housing Association's housing with extra care in Lincolnshire in the UK have called the first prototype [robot](#) Alfie.

ENRICHME (ENabling Robot and assisted living environment for Independent Care and Health Monitoring of the Elderly) is an

international collaboration involving the University of Lincoln in the UK. The research will develop and test the ability of robots to support our ageing populations and see service robots integrated with 'smart home' technology in order to provide round-the-clock feedback to elderly users, carers and health professionals. Tasks the robots will be designed to help with include giving reminders to take medication, locating lost objects around the home and enabling video chat with family and friends.

The first ENRICHME development robot, programmed by artificial intelligence and robotics experts from the University of Lincoln's School of Computer Science, was introduced to the residents in December 2015. During a special launch event, the researchers showcased the robot, explained the project and conducted some initial tests in the home environment to aid early development processes.

Residents from the LACE housing with extra care schemes in Lincoln, Grantham and Bourne were then invited to vote for their favourite name for the robot. 'Alfie' was selected as the winner from a shortlist of five names put together by the ENRICHME team.

Dr Nicola Bellotto, Reader in Computer Science at the University of Lincoln and Principal Investigator for the ENRICHME project, said: "We are delighted that the residents have named our first prototype robot, with 'Alfie' proving to be a popular choice. The name is a diminutive of Alfred, which means 'sage' or 'wise', and it also refers to the famous Lincolnshire poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, so it has wonderful connotations locally. The robot has received an extremely positive reception from the residents so far and we are pleased that they are keen to be involved at each stage of the project.

"The system we are developing builds on recent advances in mobile service robotics and ambient assisted living to help people improve

health and wellbeing. It will be of particular benefit to those people who have mild cognitive impairments, for example older people who are still physically healthy but may have early symptoms of dementia."

Hazel Ashmore, Project Lead Officer for LACE Housing, said: "Initial reactions from our residents have been very positive, with many looking forward to potentially participating in the final testing phase in 2017."

Provided by University of Lincoln

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