

VIRTUAL REALITY APP OFFERS UNIQUE GLIMPSE INTO LIFE WITH DEMENTIA

- *A third of UK knows a close friend or family member with dementia*
- *App developed by Alzheimer's Research UK and VISYON offers extraordinary insight into life as a dementia sufferer*
- *Exclusive previews taking place at St Pancras International from 2-4 June 2016*

An innovative Google Android virtual reality app – *A Walk Through Dementia* – will launch with an exclusive three-day preview at **St Pancras International** between 2-4 June 2016.

The free smartphone app, which will go on public release on the Google Play Store from Thursday 2 June, was developed by **Alzheimer's Research UK** and virtual reality specialists **VISYON**. Voiced by Dame Harriet Walter, and with an introduction from broadcaster Jon Snow, *A Walk Through Dementia* is designed to challenge misperceptions around the condition and encourage the public to think beyond 'memory loss' as a key symptom.

A third of people in the country have a close friend or family member with dementia, making it one of the most wide scale illnesses to threaten the UK population. Using Google Cardboard headsets, the pioneering technology combines computer generated environments and 360 degree video sequences to illustrate in powerful detail how even everyday tasks such as making a cup of tea can become a challenge for a sufferer.

Unfolding over three scenarios, users are tasked with buying ingredients, taking them home and making a cup of tea for their family. A supermarket environment reveals difficulties at the checkout, counting money, reading the shopping list, busy environments and finding items. A second street sequence illustrates problems people with dementia may face with navigation, visual-spatial problems and disorientation. Finally, back at home, making tea for visiting family presents challenges around memorising instructions, visual symptoms and coordination problems. It is hoped that by launching in St Pancras' busy Grand Arcade, the charity will help as many people as possible to recognise these tell tells signs of dementia.

The app features a compelling voiceover from Olivier Award-winning actress Dame Harriet Walter and an introduction from broadcaster Jon Snow, both of whom lost their mothers to Alzheimer's disease – the most common form of dementia.

Developed with the help of people living with dementia, and with support from Prof Sebastian Crutch at UCL's Dementia Research Centre, *A Walk Through Dementia* is an innovative, free and unique perspective on a condition that affects 850,000 people in the UK.

Hilary Evans, Chief Executive of Alzheimer's Research UK, the UK's leading dementia research charity, said:

"Dementia is commonly misunderstood, so *A Walk Through Dementia* is designed to offer the public a clearer picture of the challenges that people living with condition face in everyday life. The app also gives a poignant insight into the emotional impact of symptoms, an element that people with dementia told us was important to achieve. Although each person with dementia experiences the condition differently, and it would be hard to recreate the full range of complex symptoms, harnessing new technology like virtual reality helps us engage people with the impact of dementia on a new level."

Trina Armstrong, who is living with Posterior Cortical Atrophy, a form of Alzheimer's disease, and advised on the project, said:

"Anyone living with dementia will experience it uniquely, but I hope *A Walk Through Dementia* will provide people with an idea of what the world is like for me. Everyday things like popping to the supermarket or making a cup of tea are things I used to take for granted, but dementia presents a real barrier to my everyday life in ways that people often don't realise. It's been empowering for me to feed

some of my symptoms and experiences into the app and see them re-created. I hope it will encourage the public to think differently about dementia and the people living with the condition they might meet.”

Pere Perez, CEO at VISYON, said:

“We were pleased to develop *A Walk Through Dementia*, which showcases how emerging technologies such as virtual reality can help charities communicate in new and engaging ways. Immersive content formats encourages us to re-think how we tell stories and allows us to place users at the centre of the experience, rather than just watching from the sidelines. With a condition as misunderstood as dementia, the power of this technology to inform and connect with people could really change attitudes.”

Wendy Spinks, Commercial Director at HS1 Ltd (owners of St Pancras International), said: “With 1 million people through our doors each week, St Pancras International has the unique ability to demonstrate the debilitating effects of dementia to a mass audience of visitors, making it the perfect platform to showcase this technological innovation. We are proud to partner with Alzheimer’s Research UK this year and hope by hosting the launch of *A Walk Through Dementia* we can help raise awareness and understanding of this serious disease that affects the lives of so many.”

A Walk Through Dementia is available from the Google Play Store from 2 June and is designed for use on Android phones. For more on the project, including films and to purchase one of Alzheimer’s Research UK’s cardboard headsets, visit www.walkthroughdementia.org

The app will be launched at from 2-4 June in St Pancras International Station and showcased at the Cheltenham Science Festival from 7-12 June.

ENDS

Notes to editors

About Alzheimer’s Research UK:

- Alzheimer’s Research UK is the UK’s leading charity specialising in finding preventions, treatments and a cure for dementia.
- We rely on donations to fund our vital dementia research. To help us defeat dementia, donate today by visiting www.alzheimersresearchuk.org or calling 0300 111 5555.
- We are currently supporting dementia research projects worth over £33 million in leading Universities across the UK.

About VISYON:

VISYON is an award winning innovation services company providing immersive experiences through emerging technologies and content generation.

VISYON's Social Innovation initiatives are based on helping different parts of society through using highly innovative technology applications. In the last three years we have dedicated over 20% of our resources to work on these initiatives, covering education, science, healthcare, and climate change. We don't charge for this type of work, we put technology and our know-how at the service of society to help improving the lives of those who most need it.

www.visyon360.com

About St Pancras International Station:

Designed by William Barlow, St Pancras International originally opened in 1868 and for its time was an engineering marvel - it was the largest enclosed space in the world and provided the grandest entrance into London. The station has become a destination in its own right, boasting more shops than any other railway station, its own fresh produce market, the longest Champagne Bar in Europe and a Gastro Pub. This year will see St Pancras International's retail offering develop with a number of significant new store openings including products in technology, fashion and food & beverage.

St Pancras International launched the StP London app in January 2015, providing users with exclusive retail offers, travel updates and historical information as well as details on in-station events. The app can be downloaded via iTunes or the Google Play Store.

In November 2007, St Pancras International station was reopened following a multimillion pound redevelopment as the new terminus for the Eurostar link with Paris and Brussels.

For media enquiries please call +44 (0)20 7260 2700 or email stpancras@bluerubicon.com.