

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR INCLUSION: 2024-2025



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ABOUT THE SOCIETY

WHO WE ARE

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) which operates under the Ministry of Community Empowerment in the UAE, is dedicated to bettering the lives of people living with multiple sclerosis (MS) and their communities through education, advocacy and advancing global efforts to finding a cure for MS.





A WORD FROM OUR VICE CHAIR

Education is the foundation on which every society is built. When social impact becomes a core value pursued from the start rather than an afterthought, that is when real change takes root. When the next generation of this nation is grounded in empathy and inclusivity from the outset, the UAE will continue to demonstrate its global leadership in innovation and its unwavering commitment to an inclusive society - one that works with People of Determination (PoD), not merely for them.

As a first-of-its-kind initiative in the UAE, the Universal Design for Inclusion Program (UDIP) reflects NMSS' enduring commitment to empowering youth to become changemakers and champions of inclusion. This program marks a pivotal step in nurturing a generation of innovators who view accessibility from inception as a cornerstone of purposeful design and social progress. By merging education with practical design challenges, the program transforms awareness into action, equipping students with the empathy, creativity, and insight to design solutions that truly make a difference.

We are deeply grateful to our academic partners, faculty, and experts whose early commitment and collaboration brought this vision to life. Their dedication has ensured that accessibility is not an add-on, but a principle embedded in learning from the very start. I further extend my heartfelt appreciation to the PoD who shared their voices and experiences, and to the students whose passion and determination reflect a powerful commitment to shaping a more inclusive tomorrow for the UAE.

Together, we are shaping a future where inclusion and opportunity are not distant aspirations, but daily realities.

H.E. Dr. Fatima Al Kaabi

Vice Chair, Board of Trustees
National Multiple Sclerosis Society



ABOUT THE PROGRAM



The Youth Awareness Program is an educational, interactive initiative under the NMSS MS Educate portfolio. It aims to raise awareness about MS among university youth and provide support to community members affected by the condition.

NMSS works with universities to spread awareness through their community events, while also developing targeted educational courses.



DRIVING INCLUSIVE DESIGN & INNOVATION



PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

Falling under NMSS' Youth Awareness Program, the Universal Design for Inclusion Program (UDIP) engages university students through educational and interactive initiatives aimed at deepening understanding of MS and promoting inclusive thinking. The program equips youth with the knowledge and skills to create universally accessible and culturally relevant designs, that address real-world needs.

500+

Students

The program aims to raise awareness among university youth about Cognitive, Mobility and Communication challenges people of determination face in their day-to-day lives.

15+

Immersive Workshops

45+

Faculty Members, Experts
& Inclusive Innovators

First-of-its-kind initiative at this scale in the UAE, the program underscores NMSS's ongoing commitment to building a more inclusive society through youth engagement and education.

**PROGRAM DESIGN
& GOALS**

Design for Inclusion:
Tackle stigma and promote universal design thinking.

Inspire the Next Generation:
Empower youth to create designs that improve lives.

Sharpen Design Skills:
Build creativity and problem-solving through real challenges.

Lead the Way:
Champion culturally relevant, inclusive design for PoD across the UAE.

Integrating accessibility-focused learning into university curricula. Students designed assistive technologies to empower PoD across three focus areas:

COGNITIVE

Assistive technologies that support individuals with cognitive disabilities, such as those with learning difficulties, attention deficits, or memory impairments.

Technologies might include tools for organization, memory aids, or those that facilitate learning and comprehension.



MOBILITY

Assistive technologies designed to enhance the mobility and independence of individuals with physical disabilities.

Technologies might encompass mobility aids, adaptive equipment, or solutions that enable greater access to environments and activities.



COMMUNICATION

Addresses the needs of individuals with communication challenges, including those with speech, hearing, or language impairments.

Technologies might range from augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices to tools that facilitate hearing or speech comprehension.



HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERS ACROSS THE UAE

06

Leading Universities

As part of the UDIP, NMSS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with six leading universities across the UAE.

11

Campuses

This landmark agreement formalized NMSS' collaboration with higher education institutions, integrating accessibility-focused learning into university curricula and empowering students to develop innovative solutions that enhance inclusivity.

Delivered across 11 campuses in six emirates, UDIP is one of NMSS's flagship initiatives, implemented in partnership with:





EDUCATING THROUGH IMMERSION

The program provided more than 500 students with hands-on opportunities to explore inclusive design principles through NMSS-led awareness sessions, expert-led workshops, and interactive discussions with inclusive innovators and, importantly, the end-users themselves-PoD.

PROGRAM DELIVERY

A series of workshops incorporated design challenges that allowed students to learn problem-solving strategies and tools for universal design for people with MS and other abilities and disabilities.

Over 15 immersive sessions were delivered, including in-person empathy workshops, virtual subject-matter workshops, and industry expert feedback sessions. More than 45 faculty members, experts, and inclusive innovators participated, alongside people with MS and other chronic conditions, enabling students to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by PoD and empowering them to develop practical solutions that advance accessibility and inclusion.



DESIGNING FOR IMPACT

Around 90 students collaborated in teams to develop and present 30 final prototypes to a panel of experts. Each project was evaluated for feasibility, functionality, and potential for real-world implementation, ensuring that solutions were practical and impactful. The prototypes ranged from assistive technologies for cognitive, mobility, and communication challenges to innovative designs addressing broader accessibility needs.

Outstanding projects were recognized through an expert jury award, highlighting the students' creativity, problem-solving skills, and commitment to inclusive design. This process empowered students to apply their learning in a hands-on setting, transforming knowledge into tangible solutions that can make a real difference for PoD in the UAE.



2024/25 COHORT WINNERS

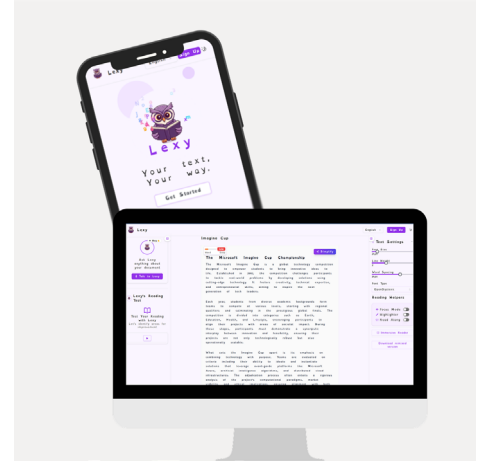
COGNITIVE THEME

WINNER

Lexy

AI-powered tool developed by students at the Higher Colleges of Technology Sharjah that simplifies complex text and tracks clarity in real time.

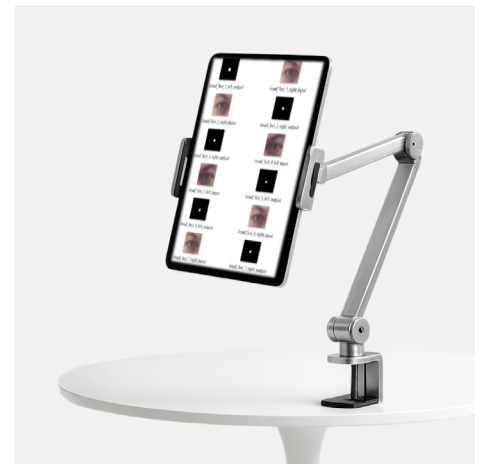
With Arabic language support, the tool offers valuable assistance to people living with conditions that affect memory and concentration.



RUNNER-UP

Neurocognitive Decline Assessment

An affordable and accessible tool, developed by students at Khalifa University, that uses regular cameras to measure pupil response and help detect early signs of cognitive decline.

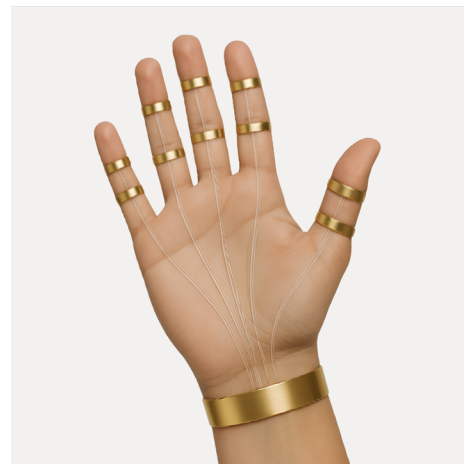


MOBILITY THEME

WINNER

VersaGrip

Developed by students at the Dubai Institute of Design and Innovation (DIDI), the AI-powered assistive grip device draws inspiration from Emirati jewelry, blending cultural identity with functionality and reducing stigma around assistive technology.



RUNNER-UP

Stand Ease

A standing wheelchair concept, developed by students at the Dubai Institute of Design and Innovation, that can be self-built with local materials, offering a customizable and more cost-effective option.



COMMUNICATION THEME

WINNER

Ni'mah Smart Bracelet

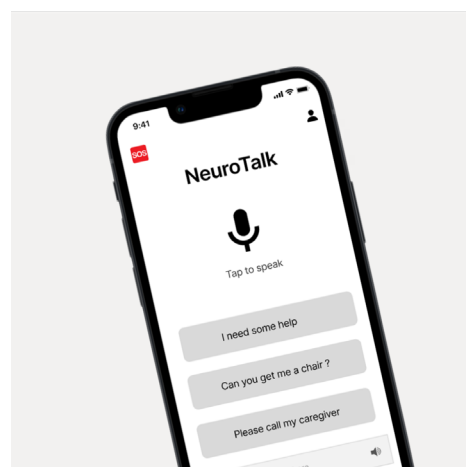
A discreet smart bracelet developed by students at the University of Sharjah. The bracelet translates emergency sounds into light and vibration alerts, helping individuals with hearing impairments respond quickly in critical situations.



RUNNER-UP

NeuroTalk Inclusive

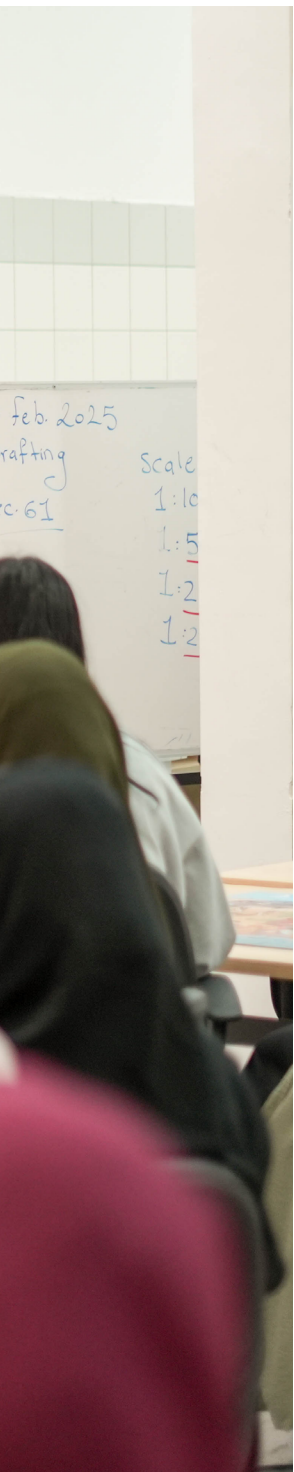
An AI-powered voice-assisted mobile app, developed by students at the Dubai Institute of Design and Innovation, that transforms short or unclear speech into full sentences, helping people communicate more smoothly and confidently in daily interactions.





ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We extend our sincere appreciation to our academic partners, dedicated faculty, industry experts, and designers whose commitment and collaboration made this program possible. At the heart of this program were People of Determination, whose voices and lived experiences shaped student learning and helped translate empathy into inclusive, real-world design solutions. Their contributions were central to this journey, shaping both the process and its purpose.



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