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Theme - Designing for Basic Human Needs

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THEME

DESIGNING FOR BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Text by Steve Jarvis

Design, and designers, exist in a complex new age and work within a vastly increased range of actors and design considerations. Beyond the creation of a standalone product or service, successful design is now also gauged on how effectively connections amongst people, products, and services are realised. Consequently, the 2020 series of Signed is dedicated to understanding why people's need must always be the starting point for any designed solutions.

The concept of Human-centred Design has been central to helping us understand the potential of Design to make positive impacts within societies. In Signed #22, we concentrated on the principles, processes and strategies used by Social Design organisations to stimulate social change. In Signed #23 we focused on Wellness Design services, introducing practical examples of projects that give hope, dignity, and social connection to individuals and communities. In this final installment, Signed #24, we extend these themes and highlight a selection of products that demonstrate the capacity of Human-centred Design to help overcome pressing physical and social divides.

Our first story, Life Café, shows how carefully designed communication spaces can reduce people's resistance to talking about important subjects and difficult transition periods in their lives. The second story, Open Style Lab, provides a compelling example of participatory design enabling people living with a disability feel more included in mainstream society. The third story, Eatwell Assistive Tableware, demonstrates how needs-appropriate design can restore dignity and pleasure, to the rudimentary act of taking a meal. Our fourth story, Empathy Toy, highlights the importance of play as a way to build and refine the foundational skill of empathy and foster harmonious interaction under challenging circumstances.

Finally, by way of conclusion to the three issues, is a discussion with Professor Kees Dorst, which explores the significance of the previous twelve stories using the lens of values-based design. His argument, that only by identifying and responding to our deepest human values will we be able to address the most pressing challenges in our society, is both compelling, and a fitting conclusion to this three-part exploration of Human-centred Design.