

Startup Fizika Group devising software to reduce dementia risk

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Martha Harris, founder of Fizika Group, is creating a digital platform to foster brain fitness in those at risk of developing Alzheimer's or other dementias. Her Lancaster-based start-up is receiving technical, design and market research assistance at Harrisburg-based technology accelerator Catamaran. - (Photo / Amy Spangler)

A Lancaster woman who has spent years working to improve brain health in children is using what she has learned to help reduce the rate of cognitive decline in people who are aging.

Martha Harris, founder and CEO of Lancaster-based **Fizika Group LLC**, is building a product called FizikaFlex with the help of technology accelerator **Catamaran**, which was founded last year in Harrisburg to help startups gain traction.

FizikaFlex is a digital platform that aims to lower the cost of dementia care by reducing risk factors for cognitive decline. One way might be to create a digital scrapbook to enhance memory retention for people at risk of developing dementia, Harris said.

At Catamaran, Harris is fleshing out a viable product that will be piloted in senior living communities throughout Lancaster County. Harris said she is still working out the details of the software.

For the pilot, FizikaFlex plans to recruit people with a prior health diagnosis including hearing loss, stroke or cardiac problems, all of which can affect cognitive abilities.

“Because of that diagnosis, they’re more focused on doing what they can to improve their brain health,” Harris said.

FizikaFlex will monitor the seniors over a three-month period and then evaluate which features they like best and what improvements they’ve made in physical health and socialization.

The goal of the pilot is to prove that with the help of FizikaFlex, people will be more active, record their steps and other physical activities, eat better and make sure they get enough sleep and hydration. Shortcomings in any of these areas can contribute to cognitive decline.

The complexity of building secure, digital technology solutions is a long road for any entrepreneur.

But Catamaran’s director, Lauren McAteer said health care is a prime target for disruption by new entrants and believes that if it works, FizikaFlex can help people.

The number of Americans living with Alzheimer’s disease is soaring. An estimated 5.5 million Americans of all ages have Alzheimer’s disease, according to the Alzheimer’s Association.

Fizika is one of three firms selected to receive technical assistance, market research and design help from Catamaran, which was created by **AndCulture**, a Harrisburg-based technology design firm. The other two are Daddio and **Popped Culture**.

Their work will culminate in an event slated for April 17 at Harrisburg University, during which all three firms will present their products to an audience of invited guests, collaborators and prospective investors.

“It’s been exciting to see how Martha entered the accelerator program with an existing business and an idea for a transformational pivot, but truly an open mind for what’s next,” McAteer said.

Since founding her company in 2009, Harris has been developing programs that improve brain health for people of all ages. One program designed by Fizika helps educators integrate physical activity into the academic curriculum.

FizikaFlex is just one of the ways in which Fizika Group is reinventing itself.

In January, Harris founded a new company, B Fizika, a social enterprise, to accommodate her partnership with Catamaran.

B Fizika is a holding company for the assets developed by Fizika Group, including an online graduate-level course offered through **Harrisburg University**, and FizikaFlex.

The future for Fizika is as a digital health solutions provider, Harris said, but she also hopes to develop services that accompany the use of technology.

“In my entrepreneur experience, both in the public sector and in the private sector, I’ve learned that technology alone doesn’t solve the problem. It’s how you use it. It’s how you equip people with the knowledge to use it, and it’s how they’re able to share their use of it to build support for its application,” Harris said.

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