University of
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Virtual Reality, Immersive Experiences and AI Companions to Support Student Learning.

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Background

- There is limited opportunities for many students to engage with individuals with lived experience throught their degree. Yet, students expressed seeking more engagement and individuals want supports (graduates) that listen to their will and preference.

- Students can report high levels of anxiety and a lack of confidence before engaging in the field with WIL or entering the workforce. They would like safe to make mistakes learning opportunities.

- Engaging students with research papers, journal articles and other resources to prepare them for WIL can be challenging and historically not based on cocreation with those with lived experience. Case Studies can offer an option but traditional written case studies or even videos are not very effective as they offer no engagement or interaction.

Opportunity to Support Learning with AI

Case Studies

- Case studies are valuable in social work education because they bridge the gap between theory and practice, providing a hands-on approach to learning. They help students develop critical thinking, ethical judgment, and professional skills by analyzing real-life scenarios. This method encourages deeper learning, retention of knowledge, and the ability to apply concepts in complex, real-world situations
- Case studies align with the experiential learning model, prompting students to reflect on their own experiences and knowledge as they work through a problem.
- Case studies offer a concrete, in-depth look at a specific situation, making theoretical knowledge more tangible and relatable and promotes creativity and innovation
- BUT…… are they based on lived experiences and the unique person centred aspirations and needs of an individual. Or could they unintentionally encourage one size fits all practices

Opportunity to Support Learning with AI

Experiential Learning in Safe Environments

- Students can engage in realistic client interactions (e.g., with virtual individuals experiencing trauma, addiction, domestic violence, etc.) without risk to real individuals or themselves.
- AI allows students to repeatedly practice skills such as interviewing, active listening, or crisis intervention until they feel competent. Based on lived experience. Without annoy individuals!

Building Empathy and Perspective-Taking

- AI expert experiences codesigned and created with individuals with lived experience can facilitate students “stepping into the shoes” of individuals—e.g., experiencing homelessness, living with a disability, or navigating a public service system as an immigrant.
- Perspective-taking experiences can challenge stereotypes and reduce unconscious bias, which is crucial in human services work. Frankly, why shouldn’t have students engaging with them that have some foundation understanding based on lived experience not just theory.

Opportunity to Support Learning

Cultural Competency Training

- AI can provide students with culturally diverse interactions, assisting them learn to navigate cross-cultural communication and culturally responsive support.
- Global learning: Students can explore community contexts from different regions or countries without travel, broadening their understanding of social determinants and systemic inequality based on engagement and interactions with an individual living in that context..

Trauma-Informed Practice

- Carefully designed AI experiences can help students recognize trauma responses and practice trauma-sensitive interventions in a low-risk setting.

Opportunity to Support Learning

Skill Development

- AI role-plays with virtual humans can help students develop soft skills—like empathy, de-escalation, or motivational interviewing.
- Simulations can present complex scenarios requiring ethical judgments and prioritization of individual needs.
- In codesign with lived experience it can prepare students to be more effective in the real world. Could it provide individuals with a way of orientating new staff?

Reflection and Feedback

- AI experiences maybe recorded, and transcriptions discussed for critical reflection.

Opportunity to Support Learning

Accessibility and Flexibility

- Remote learning: AI Skilled Companions can support distance learning by giving remote students access to experiences or practice opportunities equitably.
- Providing equitable learning experiences: Ensures all students can encounter and learn from a range of key scenarios that might not arise in limited or even diverse field placements.

AI Companions/Experts

Again I must acknowledge fEEL Lab and a conference I attended for seeing these AI Experts. With a very small teaching grant (very small) we developed two initial avatars and we are working on a third.

- These AI companions are currently part of a course in disability and form the basis of a case study assessment. Student engage and interact then with the Avatar develop a plan based and actions based on the individuals aspirations.

- In the first year 1/3 of students chose the avatar over a written case study outline and all these students presented a more representative and clear plan. Some students had difficulties loading software so in 2026 we have a solution.

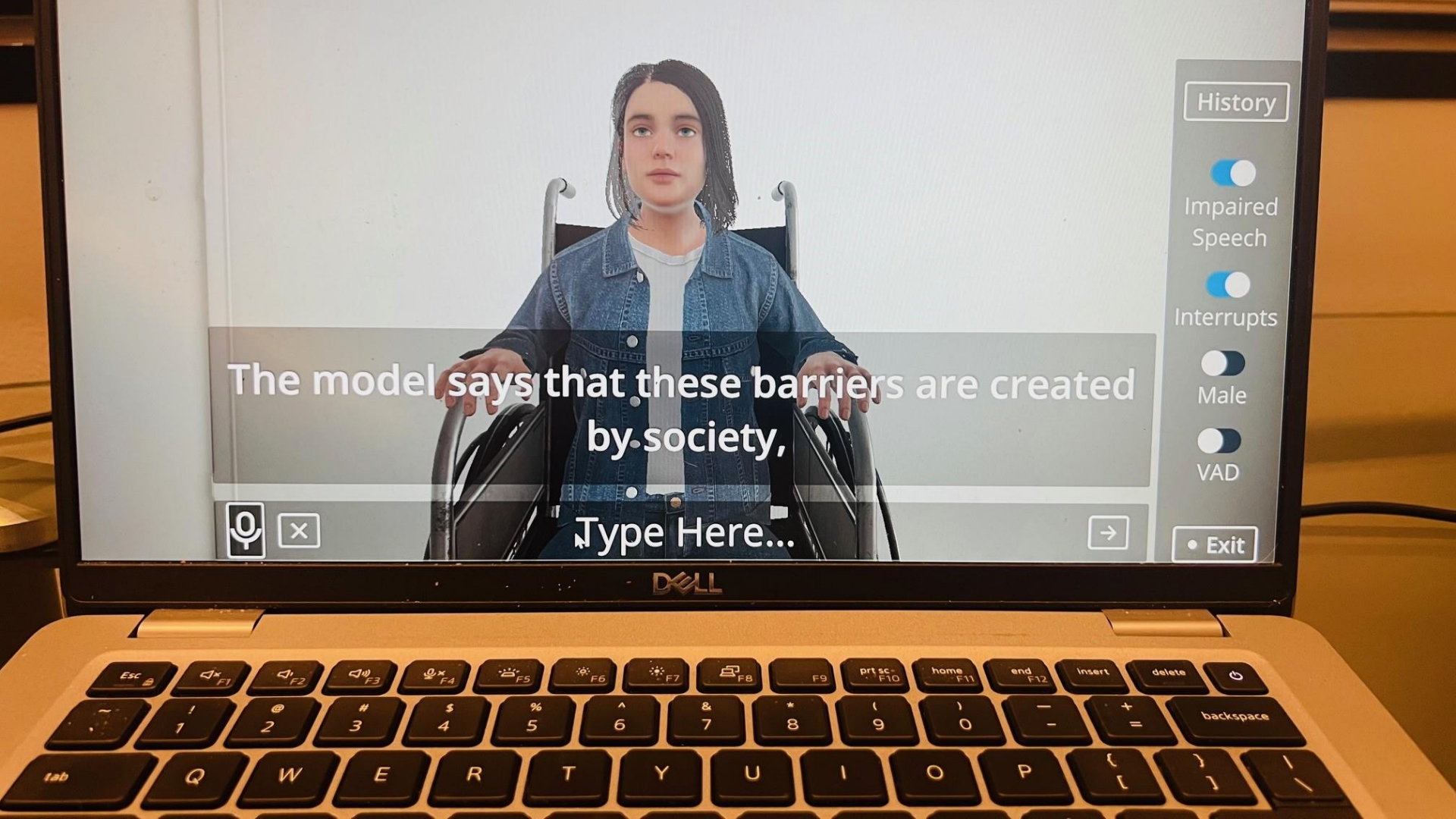
AI Companions/Experts

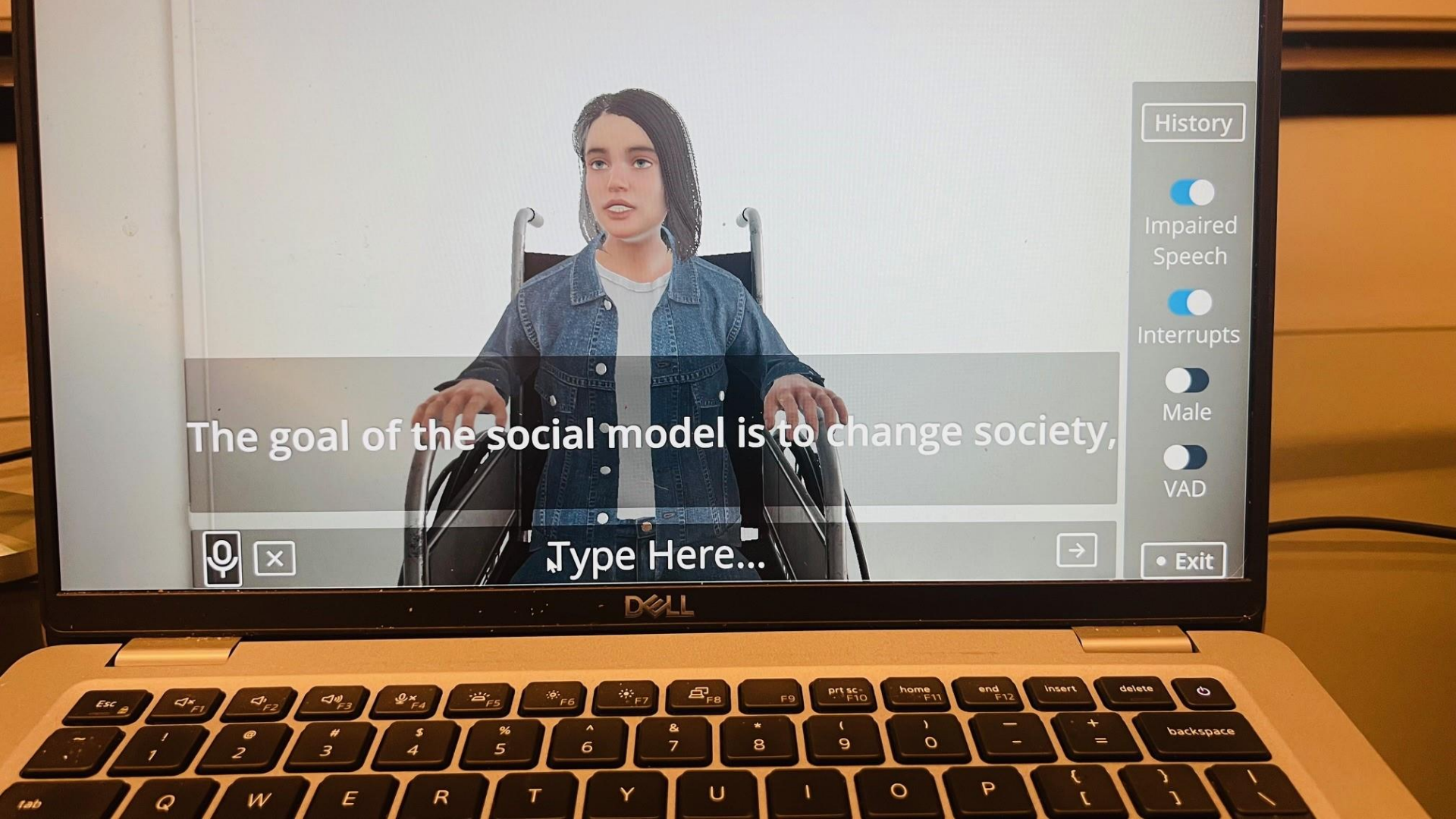
Claire is a woman living with Cerebral Palsy and Michael with younger onsent frontotemporal lobe dementia. Both are based on the valued constributions of individuals that are in my network. Therefore, are not completely representative of all individuals living with these impairments. We will try and attract resources for further codesign with individuals living with this experience to refine the content.

- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_IF39Cp3nfopJwRGgiiybKFhLxCuizrU/view?usp=sharing

Please feel free to email me for access the SOP that gives instructions on how to download and then use the AI Skilled Companions. Happy to share we only ask for feedback so we can improve.

- We are open to collaborations if anyone is interested.


History
Impaired Speech
Interrupts
Male
VAD
Exit
The model says that these barriers are created by society,
Type Here...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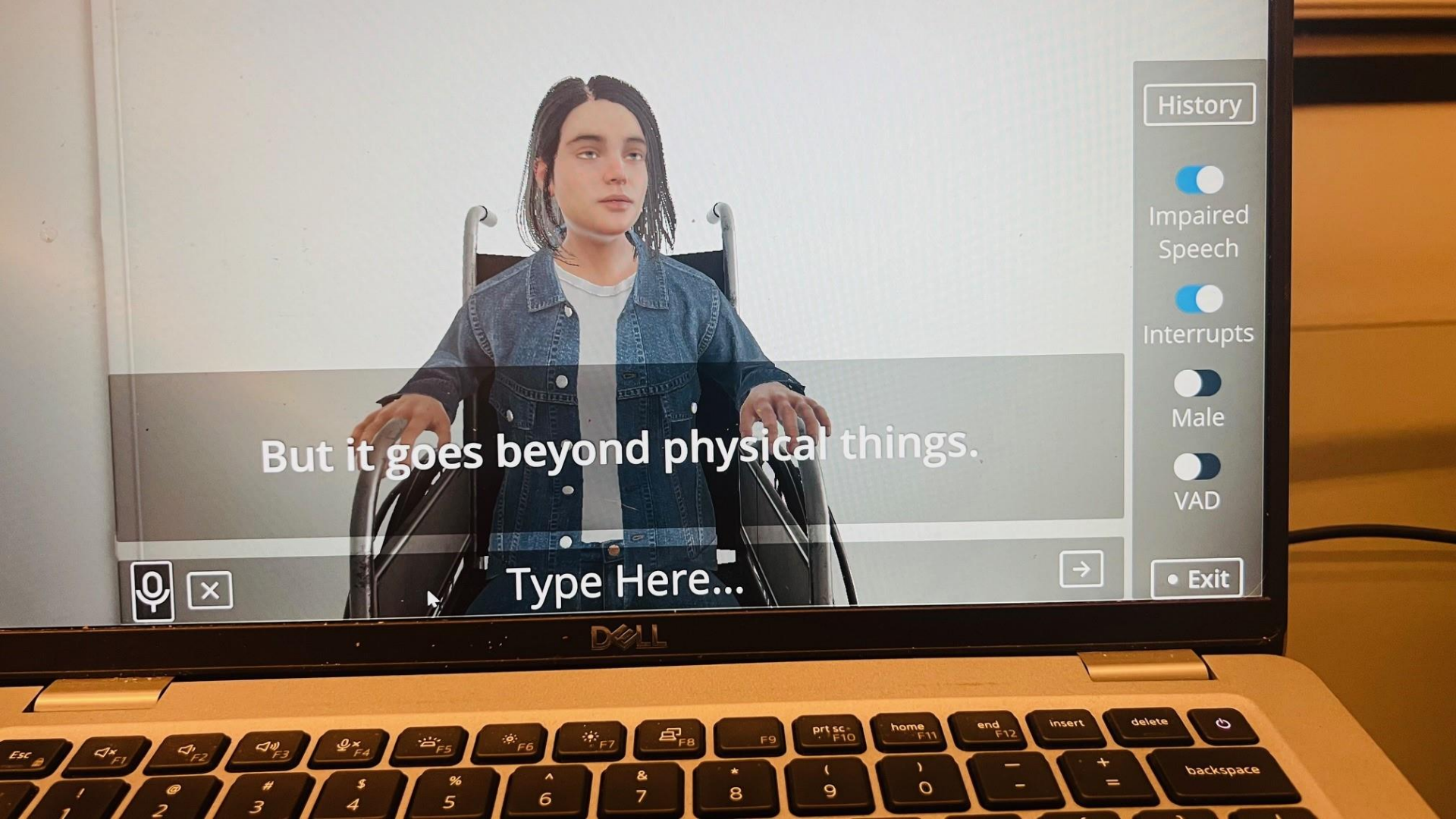
The goal of the social model is to change society,
Type Here...


But it goes beyond physical things.
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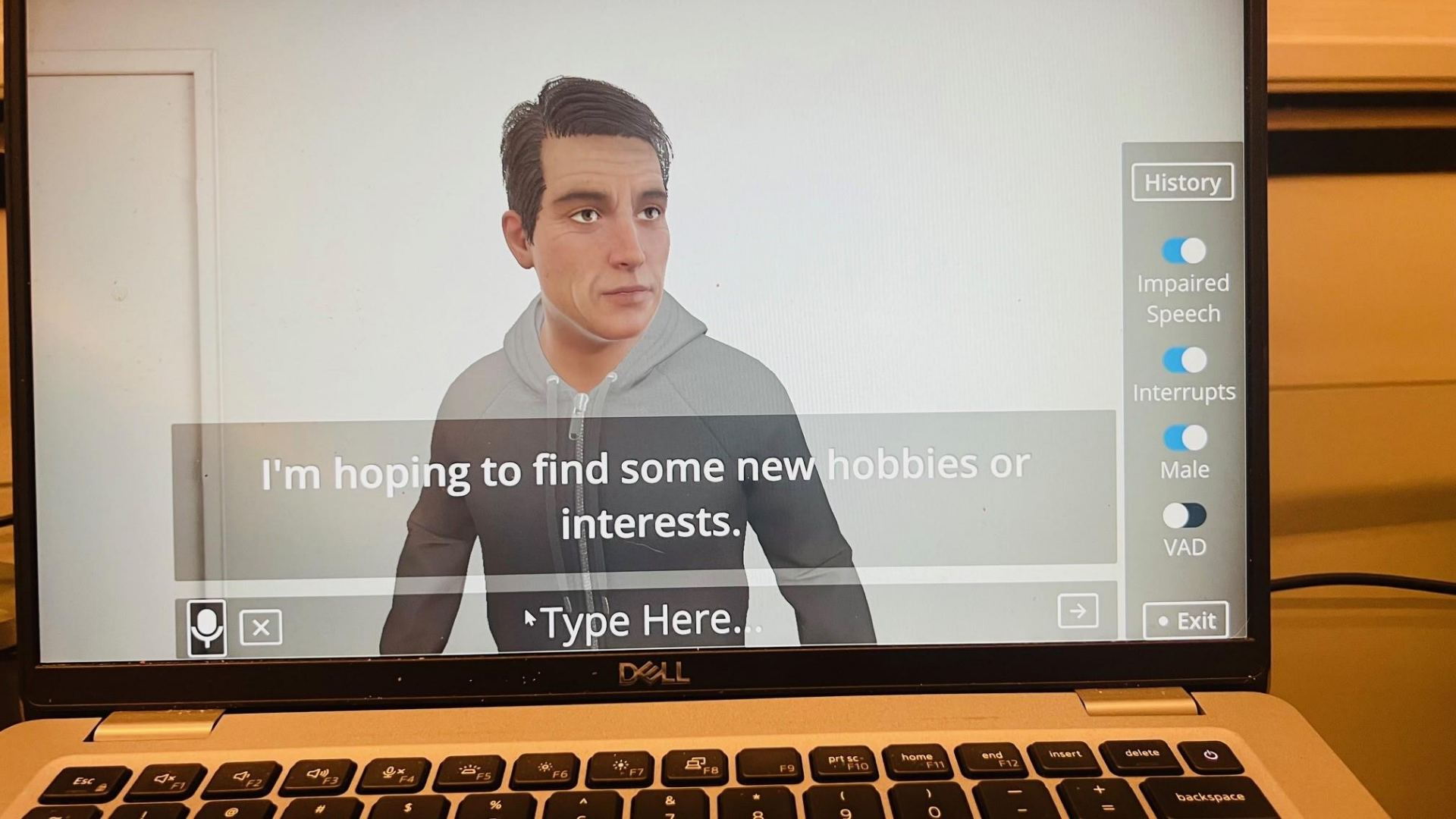
I'm hoping to find some new hobbies or interests.
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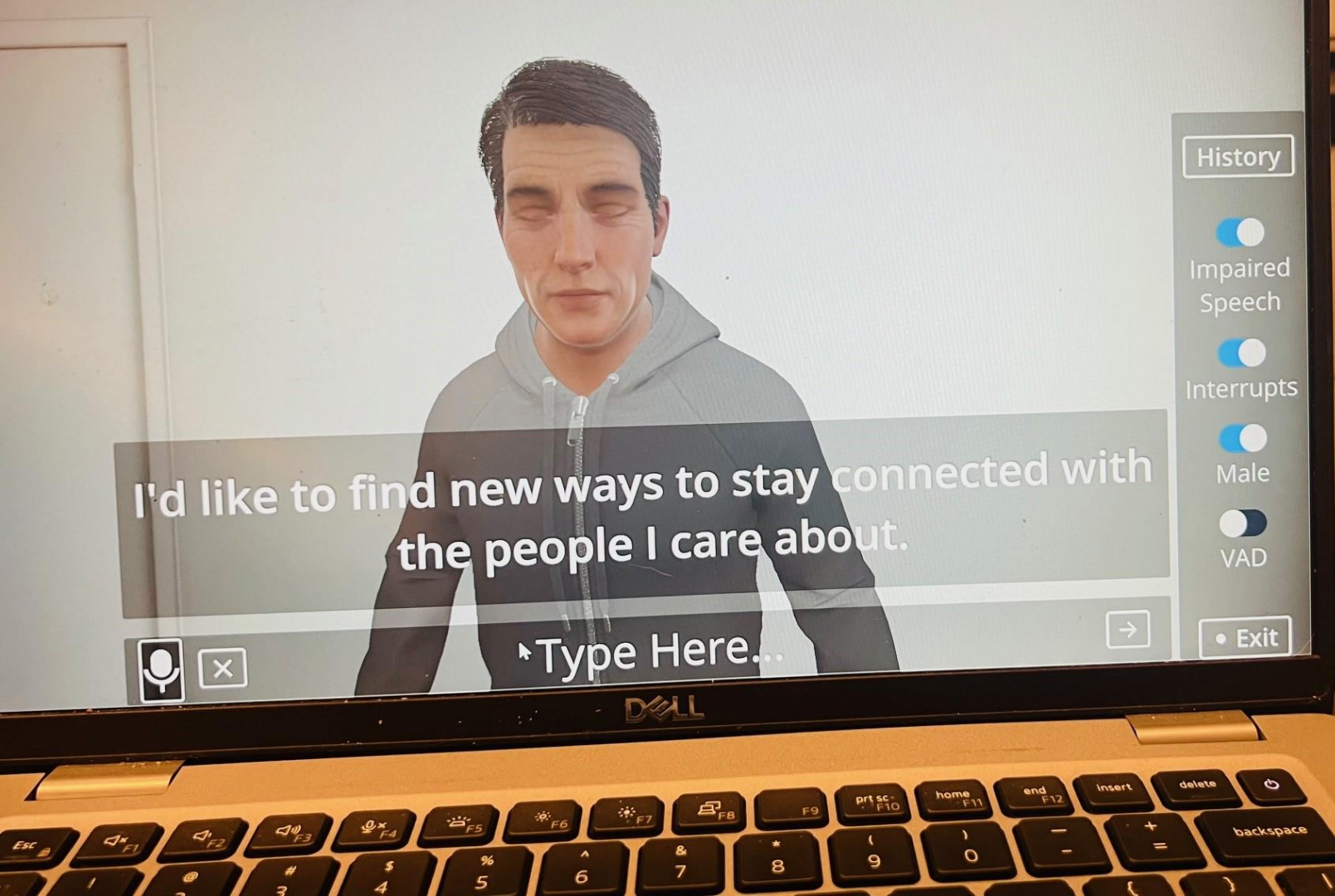
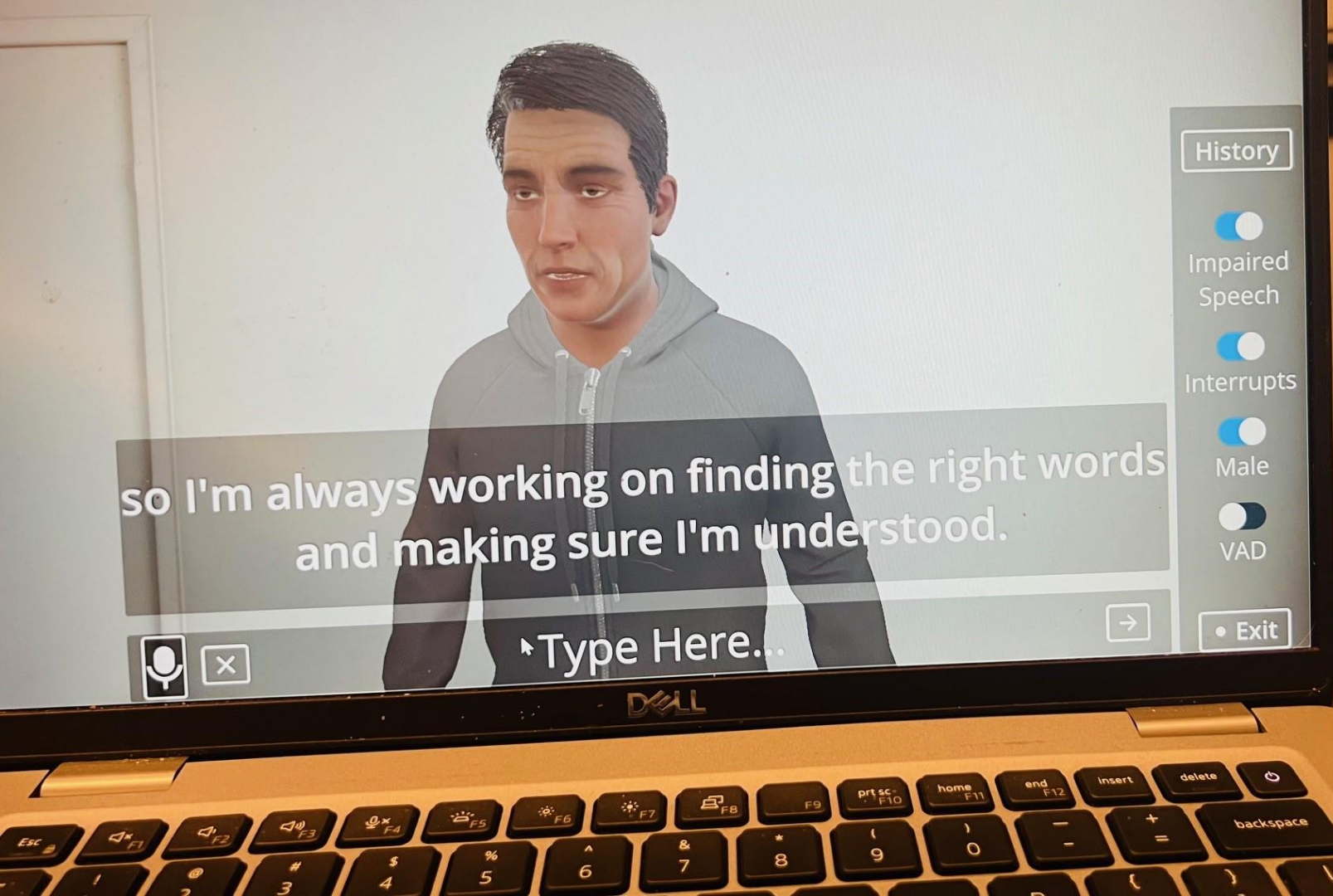

I'd like to find new ways to stay connected with the people I care about.
Type Here...
History
Impaired Speech
Interrupts
Male
VAD
Exit


so I'm always working on finding the right words
and making sure I'm understood.
Type Here...
History
Impaired Speech
Interrupts
Male
VAD
Exit