

We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging.

What would we use and how would we use it?

Can innovative digital technology promote wellbeing and therapeutic engagement with homeless young people?

Good morning

And I am Annemaree Callander, CEO of Brisbane Youth Service, and this is Rhianon Vichta, our Research and Evaluation Coordinator

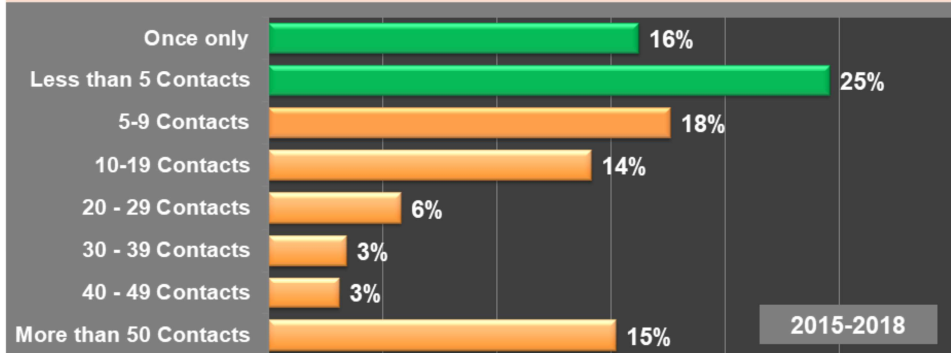
I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pay my respects to elders past and present.

Brisbane Youth Service has been exploring this question—how can we use digital technology – particularly customised apps – to both promote wellbeing and enhance engagement with vulnerable and homeless young people. In 2016, Rhianon was a grant recipient from the Optus Future Makers award for innovative technology solutions which benefit disadvantaged young people. And while we had some ideas of what we thought might be useful, from our perspectives as service providers, as responsible researchers and practitioners we avoided the temptation to just start building... and instead began with asking young people accessing our services what they thought and what they would use. Today we are going to share a little of what we learned.

THE “WHY” ...

Vulnerable young people benefit from sustained, consistent support relationships over time. However...

41% of young people come in to the service for support less than 5 times in a 3 year period.



So why are we interested in the role digital technology can play in young people’s engagement with homelessness services?

As most of you here will know, BYS is a specialist youth service supporting young people aged 12-25 years old who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Young people who access our services are most often experiencing a complex range of mental health issues, substance use, trauma, violence and other complex intersecting issues. Our data and practice research shows that homeless young people benefit from sustained consistent support relationships. The young people who access our services are, however, characteristically highly transient, crisis-driven and sporadic in their engagement. Over 40% of the young people we support have less than 5 contacts with us, often in a disjointed way – dropping out of contact for long periods and re-appearing when in crisis.

So what we are really interested in is how digital technology can assist us in sustaining more consistent engagement so that we can be more effective in achieving outcomes with homeless and at-risk young people.

We know....	We don't know....
Young people benefit from sustained contact with support	Innovative ways to strengthen and sustain support with highly transient, crisis driven, at risk young people
Most young people have smart phones and internet access	Will they use apps and websites to build their wellbeing and/or sustain connection with support?
Self-ownership of personal goals and wellbeing helps young people achieve positive outcomes	What does wellbeing mean to homeless young people? Will they use technology to engage with goals and wellbeing outside of support sessions?

We also know that most young people we support are active internet users...and we have learned that trying to sustain contact through phone calls is not very effective or reliable – transient young people often don't answer calls and change their phone numbers frequently – making it very hard to sustain engagement in the spaces between times when they are knocking on the door in crisis.

We needed to know if moving into the digital space would effectively meet young people where they are, and if this could benefit homeless young people by strengthening their connection with support, and ultimately promoting better wellbeing outcomes.

We were also, to be honest, interested in knowing if custom designed wellbeing tracking technology could give us better evaluation data about their wellbeing progress over time – but we wanted that to happen in the context of actual therapeutic benefit for young people. We believe that young people will benefit from greater ownership and awareness of their own wellbeing, so if technology can help it's a win for everyone.

Research Questions:

- What does wellbeing mean to the young people who come to us for help?
- How do they currently use digital technology like apps and websites?
- How might they use apps and websites to build their wellbeing and strengthen connection to support?

So our initial Research focussed on :

Firstly – construct validity – checking how well our concepts of wellbeing mapped to how homeless young people understand wellbeing in the contexts of their lives.

Then, while there is existing research about young people’s broader use of technology, we wanted to know about how the young people we work with currently use apps and websites – specifically in relation accessing support and building wellbeing.

And then of course, we needed to know how they would *like* to use digital technologies.... what would they want it to *do* and *be* if they were going to benefit from it and actually use it?

There was a huge amount of learning that came out of exploring these questions, and today we will touch only briefly the highlights and key takeaway learning about the role that technology can potentially play in this space.

Now I am going to hand over to Rhianon to tell you about how we went about the research and what we learned...

THE “HOW” ...

External Researchers

Dr Karleen Gwinner

Peter Melrose

Dr Amanda Moffat

With two Youth Consultants

3 Interactive Art-Based Workshops

- Story telling
- Critical playing with existing technologies
- Creating visions and sharing ideas

2 Focus Groups

Testing learning about wellbeing, engagement and digitech

Online Survey

- 372 valid responses
- Social media and KHL links
- Point in time snapshot of perspectives on wellbeing, digital technology and engagement with support

To find out what a broad cross section of young people thought we started by contracting external social researchers, Dr Karleen Gwinner and her team, so that we wouldn't be biasing the process with our own involvement.

We used a fairly straight-forward mixed methods research design of interactive workshops, focus groups and a more detailed online survey, and two service users were contracted as youth consultants to the project. In this way we were able to have input from over 400 young people, generating huge amounts of information and learning.



THE “WHO”...

**16-25 years old, identifies as female
Grade 10 education, unemployed
Homelessness, drug use & mental health
issues**

**Anglo-Australian, may be Indigenous or African migrant
Internet use on phone, apps on and offline
Goes online for information, social media & entertainment
Seeks support by phone/in person when in crisis.
Highly values trust relationship with support workers
Wellbeing is: happy, healthy and having material basics
Wellbeing “Makes life worth living”**

To describe the young people involved, rather than statistical demographics, I will share a couple of composite profiles of our typical research participants...

So Dana is 16-25 years old and was one of the majority who identified as female. She finished Grade 10, but can't find a job.

Dana has been in and out of homelessness, dealing with some drug and alcohol problems & ongoing mental health issues (depression and some anxiety symptoms) She may be one of the one in four young people who are Indigenous or the one in ten who are from migrant backgrounds, but she is probably anglo-australian.

She usually uses internet on her phone, depending on her data access.

When online she is most often looking for information, using social media & or sometimes just wanting entertainment.

When she needs general help she looks up stuff online, which she usually trusts, but when she is in crisis she will most often phone or go see a trusted service for help.

For Dana, Wellbeing is being happy, healthy and having material basics like a place to live, food, money. She says that Wellbeing “Makes life worth living”



Luke is 14 – 17 years old
Anglo-Australian
Also unemployed, he uses the internet daily
on a range of devices, mostly a smartphone
Likes gaming and entertainment, some social media
Will use information websites if interactive/ entertaining
Seeks helpful information online, but mostly with mates
Takes more risks online in information sharing and disclosure

Luke, on the other hand is younger, about 14 – 17 years old and probably Anglo-Australian. As is common, we had a lot less males participate, and they tended to be younger.

Luke uses the internet daily on a range of devices, but again mostly on his phone. He uses apps and websites mostly for gaming and entertainment, with some social media but a lot less than Dana

He will potentially seek information from websites, rather than apps which are mostly for fun, but the sites need to be interactive and entertaining if he is going to use them. If he looks for helpful information online it is most often when he is in the company of his mates, which may inhibit his deeper interrogation or engagement with the information. He also takes more risks online than young women, in terms of self-disclosure, and this is consistent with other research.

So what did our Danas and Lukes tell us?

The “WHAT” we learned....

Wellbeing is...

- Sometimes irrelevant to young people who are just surviving
- More about coping than thriving
- Sometimes contradictory eg Health/Safety vs Happiness

Positive·Coping·Doing·Safe·Okay·Life·Stable·cool
Healthy·emotional·**Physically**·
 comfortable·**Mentally**·positivity·**Spiritually**·
 grounded·Self·**Happy**·peace·Friends·connected·
 Socially·family·resilient·balanced·nourished·survive·fulfilled·care·
 Loved·content·**Health**·Basic·Needs·Met·
Feeling·body·Mind·cognitive·satisfaction·wholefully
 Support·Holistic·**Taking·Care**·vitality·outlook

Well... a lot... In terms of a shared understanding of wellbeing, we saw that young people accessing homelessness services may not agree with theoretical frameworks and worker perspectives on wellbeing... Without going into all of the detail today – what was important to technology design was that:

- Firstly – young people who are in survival mode often didn’t relate to a multi-dimensional idea of wellbeing, beyond basic health, and generally see it as more about coping day to day than about capacity to thrive.
- And... not altogether surprisingly, the different domains of well-being may at times be contradictory for young people – so for example - it was seen as important to be happy, as well as to be safe and healthy...but the ways that young people may achieve happiness, or avoid unhappiness, are not always consistent with health...or even safety. So gains in one area, like healthy lifestyle, may actually be associated with losses in other areas, like happiness and social connection.

So what we saw was that technology design needed to not fall into the trap of trying to direct or stipulate what we believe is good for young people who are just surviving life’s challenges... Because where the different aspects of wellbeing were not immediately compatible, young people made it quite clear that they wanted to feel, and be, in control and determine their own priorities. In other words – they don’t want us to hand them digital wellbeing tool that tell them what they should be doing, or expects them to fit into our frameworks of what wellbeing means to us – they need to be able to decide how they go about making life changes.

Wellbeing is...

A state of being

"You don't need things. You are born with some sort of wellbeing it just takes other people to help you grow ur wellbeing."

A right

"...to have a home, bed, family, friends, money, education, food and phone."



Self determined

"...to be positive and take care of my mind."

An attitude

"To have wellbeing I need to make sure I take daily risks and I identify my strengths and disadvantages."

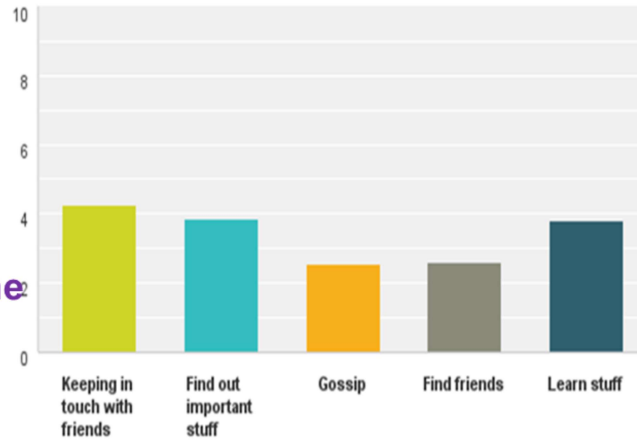
For young people who who are likely to have experienced high levels of being disenfranchised, unfairly disadvantaged and being vulnerable to harm from experiences that are often outside of their control – a critical element of wellbeing was seen as having ones rights respected – wellbeing was seen as an inherent right as well as something that they were responsible for actualising in their lives – and while they also needed help to be able to achieve it and it was critical that the help was grounded in experiences of Fairness, self determination and agency.

How do young people use technology?

52% use a smartphone to access the internet

74% use apps online and offline

77% use social media daily

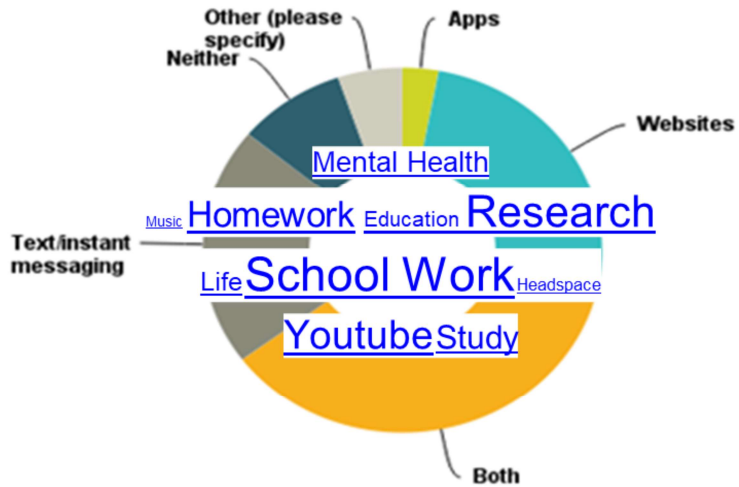


So – moving on to how young people currently engaged with technology in relation to their own wellbeing. Most were using a smartphone to access the internet, and many were largely dependent on wifi as the more affordable option than mobile data. Interestingly, 23% of respondents said they would never use a public hotspot to access the internet.

The intermittent nature of data access means that they will be most likely to use something that is also available offline, with 74% using apps in on- and off-line modes. And what do they do online? They are primarily seeking connection with friends and support people, with 77% reporting daily social media use.

How do young people use technology?

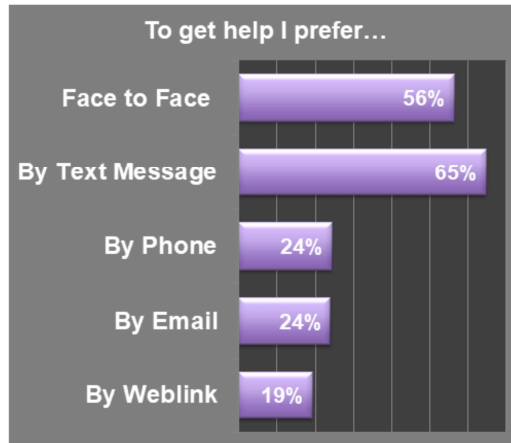
When I use the internet it is for...



As well as social media and some study, young people we spoke with also said that they do go to the internet for assistance with mental health and other life problems. 39% use apps for this and 62% have referred to websites. Young people told us that they preferred to use apps to find quick responses, but would expect to be referred to websites for further more detailed information.

How do young people use technology?

30% in a crisis
37% to help
someone else
52% to get help to
deal with stuff
80% when I need to
know something



And while the majority would indeed turn to technology for help... it really is important for us keep in mind that the preferred way to reach out to someone when they wanted help dealing with stuff was still face-to-face or texting with a real person that they know and trust.

What do young people want from digitech?

Connection with real people that they know and trust...

“Access to trusted support”

“Interactive relevant advice”

“Fun distractions”

“Real time information”

“Not the same old generic tips”

“Goal Setting and Achievements”

“Youth friendly but not childish”

And this leads us to the results on how young people would want to use digitech to engage with support or for their own wellbeing...

- . It was really clear that digital support services need to be centred around and positioned within personal interactions.
Young people’s vision of an ideal app or site was focussed on engaging with real people - services, workers and peers – people they know or know of and trust in the real world.
- . They said they would like information to be interactive and to focussed on specifically relevant advice, rather than generic tips or fact sheets.
- . They said games or challenges would be good to distract them from the harshness of life’s problems
- . And they liked the idea of an app or site being able to provide real time updates about when and where to access resources like when the orange washing machine van was going to be near.
- . Young people told us that apps and sites *could help* with goal setting and monitoring achievements, that they may use it recording changes in their states of life and moods over time, and if it was connected to a real person then they may see it as a life line to feeling supported in times of crisis.
- And they wanted the design to be youth-focussed, of course, but they emphasised that it needed to not be too simple or childish.

Control Over Connections....

63% want the ability to engage with support between sessions.

86% say it is important to speak to the same support person each time.

"Yeah but... they don't know how you have been feeling about it...and then the next worker will be like - oh do you have any coping methods?..."



Young people told us they do want more engagement with support services between occasions of support. They said that they often forget what has happened between the times when they see their worker, and so it would be useful to have an app or site that they can use to check in along the way. But - and this is a big BUT - they want and need to be in control of how, when and what they share, AND 86% insisted that is important to connect to the same support person each time.

Young people may, at times, independently interact with a digital wellbeing tool - because it may feel therapeutic in its own right...and they want to make sure that they can limit information sharing and decide when they will share it with people who know their story.

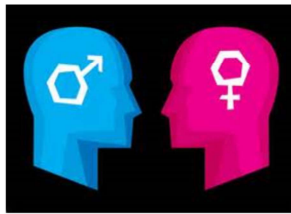
We heard from young people, very clearly, that digital technology in this context can't be used to replace or substitute for a personal relationship with a support worker - but it *can* enhance that relationship - if they are able hold onto a sense of autonomy in the process.

So it was really clear that we cannot just built a funky wellbeing tips and charting app that sends data back to us - expect it to be useful or used.

Gender Differences

Gender differences in the way that young people engage with technology pose development challenges

- Higher use for gaming and entertainment
- Higher online risk taking
- Information seeking with mates
- Lower engagement in health and wellbeing generally



- More independently seeking online help for mental health issues, health and wellbeing.
- More social connection and entertainment
- More problem-solving and creative

There some gender differences that we should mention...

Without falling into binary gendered divisions, and noting that a significant number of young people we consulted identified as gender non-conforming, there are some gendered patterns of differences in ways of engaging with technology that need to be taken into account.

For example we found that male identified young people were more oriented towards interactive gaming and entertainment than social engagement, they took more risks online and males did less independent information seeking. They were more likely to access support if they were with their mates while doing it. This is consistent with other research. Those who identify as female tend to be much more socially active and will engage in more depth with online information, as well as doing more help-seeking and pro-active problem seeking online in general.

While this makes it tricky to design a gender inclusive product – we do put a caveat on this because the proportion of males who participated was very low – only 10% of the sample - as is very common in this kind of research. The fact that young males are so reluctant to participate means we still need to work proactively to better understand young men’s particular relationships with technology in this context and to ensure strong male engagement in the design of these kinds of technologies to promote its use across the genders.

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

- ✓ Quick, fun, personal, social, interactive
- ✓ Direct connection to be heard by peers and someone I trust
- ✓ Inclusive and respectful of diversity
- ✓ Goal/progress accountability
- ✓ Tracking like a diary
- ✓ Sharing stuff with workers about how you are going, in the moment (*"often I forget by the time I see them"*)
- ✓ Control over sharing (who, when, what)

So Overall:

-key enablers identified by young people were that digitech should be Simple, fun, personal, social, interactive, and provide a direct connection to be heard by people they trust. Young people said digital service delivery needed to be actively inclusive of diversity including different genders, sexualities, levels of ability and ages. It needed to be safe and non-judgemental, non-stigmatising, and to be transparent about the professionals involved. It also should be flexible and be easy to quickly connect to just what they need.

Young people also told us, that if they were going to use an app or site for their wellbeing then there should some level of accountability built in - knowing that they had made a commitment to using it would be part of their therapeutic process with their support worker.

And they definitely need to feel that they have control over it.

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

- ✗ Cost – access and ad-ons (must be free)
- ✗ Stigma and judgement
“I’ve been to so many places where I have felt judged”
- ✗ Too much text or Long navigation pathways
- ✗ Lack of trust in the agency/people behind it
- ✗ Being lectured at (overly narrative)
- ✗ Being monitored (comments moderated and controlled)
- ✗ Not locally/context relevant

Cost and stigma were two of the most significant barriers, and it was important to not only be treated fairly, but to feel valued as worthy of resource investment – it should be something that had time and money put into making it work well and look good.

Other barriers were consistent with past research and logical - that it needed to not be too wordy or involve long complex click pathways – or they would feel lectured-at or get bored trying to find relevant stuff.

It needed to be connected to a real person, but – importantly - not be overly-monitored or moderated – they needed to feel free to express themselves without big brother intervening.

So young people have given us a design challenge – to create something simple yet to be able to accommodate flexibility, creativity, inclusivity and personalisation, giving each young person the sense that it is tailored just for them.

Luckily they did have some suggestions about what might work well...

What would we use? Emoji Creation...



Using emojis 🙌
for expressions
To workers
With Soundtrack

Workers can
ask a question
.....

Send another
emoji - homeless
- assault - drugs -
happy - Social.

Strategies - tips and
tricks to keep
yourself safe!

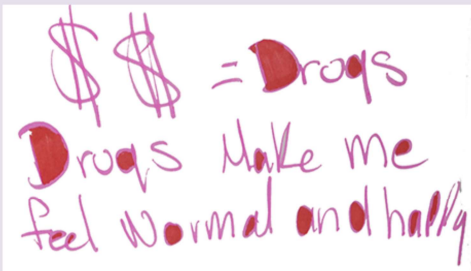
What young people really responded to was being able to communicate in a very personalised, creative and visual way. They particularly loved the process of being able to build their own personalised emoji that expressed how they were doing or feeling or identifying in that moment... and being able to choose to send this, through an online communication tool. Emoji are obviously very familiar icons, for young and old these days, and what is meaningful to note is that our young people didn't want to be limited to choosing from a pre-determined set of standardised emotional states... The common happy-sad faces didn't allow young people to creatively express their own identity and individuality. Creating their own emoji images was seen as an affirming identity development experience. So not only was it a way that they could uniquely share states of being at different times, but the act of creating them was considered a therapeutic process in and of itself.

Young people emphasised that their sense of agency was key in this process, sometimes they may engage with the technology purely for themselves, and sometimes they might choose to use it to connect with a trusted worker. They would like to know that their own workers (not some random person on shift) could, within realistic timeframes, respond with a check-in and maybe some contextual advice/support.

So the emoji building process was more just a visual measure of mood, it was an interactive dialogue which was closely aligned with identity development and individualised self-expression. In many ways this process summed up a lot of the recommendations of the research around youthful engagement in the digital space.

Key learning...

Youth perspectives on wellbeing may not match our priorities



“We all need our own kind and definitions of wellbeing to survive”

So some of the key take away points about youthful use of digital technology in a homelessness service delivery context:

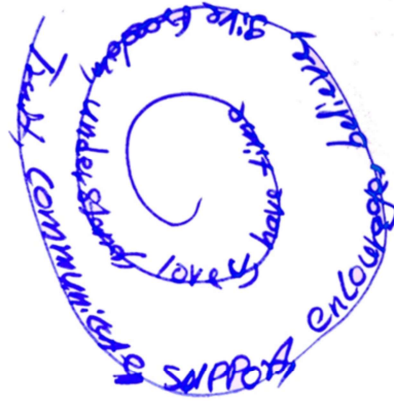
- Firstly – don’t try to fit homeless and at risk young people into theoretical, pre-determined or standardised concepts of what wellbeing “should” mean in their lives... or into service provider expectations about what is good for them...

Particularly when young people are in a survival mode, tech design needs to be flexible enough to accommodate young people’s individual and evolving ideas of self and what helps them to “be well” in a given moment.

This represents a real challenge not just for measuring wellbeing, but for holding true to client-centered practice – When the tool is in young people’s phones, they have the power – if we impose our agendas they can simply hit delete and the connection is lost.

Key learning...

Technology should be embedded in a trusted therapeutic relationship



One of the most important learnings was that Embedding technology in real trusted relationships is the key to engagement. The research results emphasised young people’s interest in using tools that would build continuity and extend their support relationships into every day life. They thought that using online platforms to “check in” was as a potential bridge to the encouragement, understanding and care that they experience in good support relationships.

Key learning...

Young people want to be in control of how they use technology, and when, and what they share.

(but they still want help when they need it)

“Access to helpful ways to improve my life, for me to be in control...”

- . There was clear evidence that young people do exercise agency and choice in the way that they digitally interact, and our tech design needs to embrace that. Digital tools should reinforce experiences of self-determination.
- . Of course self-determination doesn't mean self-help. Young people still very much want support and connection to people they trust to help them when they need it. They need, however, a sense of control and equal participation in an ongoing dialogue. Information exchange needs to be opt-in, not automated or worker-directed.

What do we need to know...

Respect
Rights
Self-determination
Creativity & Individuality
Flexibility & inclusiveness
Simple, fun but professional



It's a tricky balancing act and not easy, but here is good potential for digital engagement as long as we keep in mind that:

- . We need to meet vulnerable and highly disadvantaged young people in their experiences of the world, even when this is challenging for us as health professionals.
- . Respect is critical, as is young people leading their engagement. When tech tools are in their hands, agency needs to come with it.
- . Focus on individual identity and creative self-expression is key - not passive rating scales or pre-set measures, generic tips or tasks.
- . We need to be really aware of being flexible and inclusive of diversity;
- . And while design needs to be easy and fun, we also need to invest resources and treat young people with professionalism, striking a balance that is youth-friendly but not childishly simplified.

In the end...

**Don't squish
young people
into our
boxes...
creatively
connect with
them in their
world**



So in the end, in this context, we are unlikely to be talking about something that can be cheaply developed and distributed on a wide, generic or public scale.

Standardised information-based apps and sites can be really useful in other areas of health promotion and to point people towards where they can get help in the real world... but for young people who are users of crisis services like BYS, even if in sporadic and transient ways, we need to think differently.

Here the real potential of online tools appears to lie in how it can extend individual expression and therapeutic communication into daily life.

Technology, used innovatively, can enable and strengthen creative therapeutic dialogue. It is not about tips sheets or measurement scales. Nor is it about people being boxed into goals that are “good for them”. It is about being able to exercise self-determination and self-responsibility, within a relational framework of support, acceptance and trust.

This is what young people told us they want... And this is what young people told us that they will use.

Read more:

<http://brisyouth.org/publications/>

Contact us:

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So there was so much more learning from this research than we could cover today, but if you would like to read the whole report we have made it available on our website.

As we moving on to prototyping and further development we are working with Infoxchange and soon with the Random Hacks of Kindness project, and we welcome contact from anyone who is interested in finding out more or sharing their own engagement with digital technology and the wellbeing of homeless, vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

Thank you!