

Stacey Coleman¹ Rebecca Crabtree¹, Ceri Phelps¹, Carol Hughes¹, Andrew Baker², Helen French³, Mas Minou¹, Paul B. Hutchings¹

¹ School of Psychology & Counselling, University of Wales Trinity St David, Swansea (email ceri.phelps@sm.uwtsd.ac.uk)

² School of Applied Computing, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea

³ Counselling Services Manager, Tenovus the Cancer Charity

Background

Young people are often reluctant to make use of traditional face-to-face counselling but have reported positive experiences of engaging with online counselling (Hanley 2012; King, Bambling, Reid & Thomas 2006). The aim of this project was to develop a virtual reality counselling world (C:EVOLVE World) for young people affected by cancer, informed by young people. Phase I involved the development of an avatar-based online counselling world, informed by a Young Persons' Panel recruited from students at our University (n=4) and from a local school (n= 8). Phase II of this study is currently underway and is exploring the acceptability and effectiveness of this intervention amongst young people aged 13-25, who either have a personal diagnosis of cancer or who are caring for someone with cancer.

The Young Persons' Panel (YPP)

The YPP met monthly to test the interface and design options of the online intervention, and pilot materials to be used for Phase II recruitment. A closed Facebook page was used by the YPP to aid engagement with the project.

YPP's contribution

- ✦ Brainstorming to identify important elements of a virtual reality counselling world
- ✦ Voting on preferences for avatar design
- ✦ The creation of 'frequently asked questions' page for technical help/guidance
- ✦ Testing out the C:EVOLVE world as it developed; providing oral and written feedback on usability and acceptability of the intervention
- ✦ Identifying emotions and emoticons for use within the counselling world

Phase II Pilot Study

Phase II represents a five month pilot feasibility study where participants can engage in up to six weeks of online counselling via the C:EVOLVE world.

The following recruitment activities took place over the course of the recruitment phase:

- ✦ Internal and external university press releases
- ✦ Tenovus mail out
- ✦ Dissemination of information to local schools
- ✦ The use of Twitter and Facebook to promote the project

The project team also set up a C:EVOLVE blog - <http://cevolve.wordpress.com/>

Only one participant has taken part in the project so far and has received one session of online counselling. This has been paused due to bereavement.

Benefits for the Young People

The young people found engaging in the project a positive and rewarding experience, and referred to a number of benefits of being involved with this research including:

"It's helped me understand the ethics of counselling and using social media"

"I liked the chance I was given to express my opinions and make a difference"

"Being part of this project gave me more confidence and enabled me to express my opinions in a team"

"I've learnt the importance of dealing with issues surrounding cancer sensitivity"



#LetTheKeyboardDoTheTalking



Changing the face of counselling
#CThisEvolv

Discussion

Overall, the YPP had a significant influence on the final design of the avatar-based world, and contributed greatly to the development of recruitment materials for Phase II.

There is a need to explore barriers faced in relation to recruitment, such as:

- ✦ Parental suspicion
- ✦ Lack of engagement from referrers
- ✦ Young people's reluctance
- ✦ Lack of personal contact between researchers and young people

There is, however, still huge potential for exploring potential role of online counselling within this context.