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Tenovus Innovation Grant Expression of Interest Form

SEND COMPLETED FORM BY 4PM JUNE 26TH 2012 TO: Email: innovation@tenovus.org.uk; Post: Tenovus, Gleider House, Ty Glas Road, Llanishen, Cardiff CF14 5BD

Lead Applicant Name(s): Dr Ceri Phelps

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Project Title: *This can be a temporary title for now and may be changed if invited for full application.*

Facing the reality of on-line counselling: a pilot study to explore the acceptability and therapeutic value of a virtual reality counselling world for the provision of counselling for young people affected by cancer.

Brief description of the purpose of the project: The aim of the project is to gain pilot data on the acceptability and therapeutic value of a *"virtual counselling world"* for younger individuals affected by cancer. This virtual counselling world (developed by the School of Applied Computing at SMU in collaboration with the School of Psychology & Counselling) will enable young people to design their own personal avatar and that of the counsellor (in a format similar to X-box 360 3D animated avatars (e.g. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatar_(Xbox_Live) and to engage in a therapeutic session (through text, images or speech) via these avatars. The final design of the virtual counselling world will be heavily influenced by the ongoing input/feedback provided by a "project steering group" of young people aged between 12 and 25.

Proposal summary and what is expected to be achieved by this project? The *virtual counselling world* will offer an innovative online counselling service. For this pilot study, the on-line counselling intervention will consist of a minimum of one on-line "instant" exchange session of up to one hour a week over a 6 week period (to map across the standard counselling provision within Tenovus), with additional non-instant exchanges also possible. Those taking part will be asked to complete an on-line questionnaire prior to their first online communication with the counsellor and at the end of the pilot study (after six weeks or after the last email counselling exchange if sooner e.g., if the participant decides to withdraw or to take up face-to-face counselling if available). The questionnaire will capture data on demographic variables, key psychological outcomes and satisfaction with counselling. Data will also be collected from the counsellor delivering the on-line counselling through a reflective diary focusing upon the perceived impact on the therapeutic alliance. The project is expected to achieve the following specific outcomes:

1. The development of a virtual reality avatar-based counselling world for young people affected by cancer
2. Quantitative data on the acceptability, likely usage, and therapeutic value of this virtual counselling world for young people affected by cancer
3. Qualitative data evaluating the impact of the virtual counselling world on the therapeutic alliance from the counsellor's perspective
4. Recommendations regarding the potential pitfalls and challenges in relation to the delivery of such on-line interventions

What are the expected benefits to people affected by cancer and how do you see it making a positive impact on their lives? Large numbers of people are now choosing to access internet counselling online which has grown significantly in the last decade (Barak, Hen, Boniel-Nissim and Shapira 2008, Chester and Glass 2006). Adolescents in particular may be drawn to this method of therapy as they have grown up with computers and may conduct their relationships through them, with research suggesting effective therapeutic relationships can be

formed with young people online (King, Bambling, Reid & Thomas 2006, Hanley 2012) and that it is a service which is valued and used by young people http://www.xenzone.com/benefits_of_kooth.html. Whilst most forms on on-line counselling still involve simple email exchanges (Chester and Glass, 2006), the use of avatars as a mechanism through which to achieve psychological benefit is starting to be explored in other settings (e.g., http://www.psypost.org/2012/06/avatars-may-help-children-with-social-anxiety-overcome-fears-12169) and engagement with avatars is recognised as being familiar to most young people who are used to engaging with virtual reality computer games. It is therefore hoped that this *virtual counselling world* will provide an accessible, effective way of helping younger individuals affected by cancer cope with the many challenges that they face.

How the work is going to be carried out: *Please include any planned collaborations and partnerships and how these will benefit the project. If you believe there is further assistance required that could support or add value to the project please specify.* The proposed project offers an exciting collaboration between the Centre for Psychology & Counselling at SMU (co-applicants are Dr Paul Hutchings, experimental social psychologist and Carol Hughes, Practising Counsellor), the School of Applied Computing, SMU, who have significant expertise in computer games development involving avatars (co-applicant Andrew Baker will oversee the technical aspects of the development of the virtual counselling world) and the Tenovus Counselling Service (Helen French is a named collaborator on this bid). The strong collaborative links and easy availability of the student population for feedback and piloting of the virtual counselling world adds further strength to the project team. For the duration of the project the counselling will be delivered through an appropriately trained counsellor within the Centre for Psychology & Counselling (either a member of staff or Master's in Counselling Practice student) as part of their annual requirement for practice hours with no additional cost to Tenovus. Volunteers aged between 12-25 years will be sought through advertisements placed on the Tenovus website and other collaborating organisations e.g. Cancer Genetics Service for Wales. Given the age group involved in the project NHS ethical approval will be sought for this project (this can be obtained within the first three months of the project alongside the initial development of the virtual counselling world) as well as following the BACP ethical framework and other relevant guidance e.g., the *Ethical Framework for the Use of Technology in Mental Health*.

Public/patient involvement plans: *How are you involving patients and/or the public and why? If you would require assistance with this activity please specify.* A crucial element of this project is to engage young people with the development of the *virtual counselling world*; this will primarily be achieved by setting up two volunteer panels: 1) 6-8 school children aged 12-18 from existing links with a school in our area and 2) 6-8 SMU students between 18-25 (both Psychology & Counselling students and Applied Computing students). We would be keen to also involve young people affected by cancer (either personally or involved in the care of a family member affected by cancer) through existing links with Tenovus and the Cancer Genetics Service for Wales, or SMU students expressing an interest from their own experiences with cancer.

Costs and brief justification:

Development costs for virtual counselling world: This is a maximum costing based upon the development of a 3D avatar virtual counselling world and will also include web-site creation and design; we will also seek alternative costings to keep costs down. **2 X .5 FTE Games Development Research Assistants for 6 months:** development, piloting and refinement of virtual counselling world. This six month phase of development includes ongoing piloting/feedback involving the Young People's Project Steering Group prior to "going live" for the evaluation period.	**£20,250 max**
0.4 FTE Project Research Assistant for 12 months (2 days a week): The project RA, based within the Centre for Psychology & Counselling, will assist with the co-ordination the project and gaining ethical approval and will have specific responsibility for the Young People's Project Steering Groups, preparing recruitment materials and measures, downloading and analysing data from the on-line questionnaires and contributing to other analyses (overseen by Dr Ceri Phelps & Dr Paul Hutchings).	**£8,100**
Survey gizmo licence for on-line questionnaires	**£500.00**
Total Costings	**£28,850**

Is there any help or support Tenovus could provide to help you develop your proposal? *If yes, please provide a brief summary. We may contact you to discuss further.* We would be happy to discuss ideas with Tenovus regarding preferences for the content and delivery of the *virtual counselling world* given the suggested costings above.