



STOPPING THE SPIRAL

How ReachOut helps young people in distress stop their negative thought spiral, feel calmer and take action to improve their wellbeing



UNDERSTANDING REACHOUT'S IMPACT

The Check In study, a three month long study of ReachOut users, found that ReachOut had a number of important and positive impacts on young people. In particular, young people who used ReachOut reported a reduction in their negative emotions, with many describing feeling less stressed and down. Visiting ReachOut helped many young people feel a greater sense of calm, less worried and more encouraged to try something new to improve their wellbeing.

Stopping the downward spiral of distress is a notable outcome given that young people visiting ReachOut were found to have higher levels of mental health challenges than the general population of young people. This suggests that ReachOut can give pause to the negativity, allowing young people to consider actions that they could take to build on their wellbeing and resilience. This shows how ReachOut can address early intervention needs of young people struggling with their mental health, and how ReachOut supports many to manage tough times.

KEY FINDINGS

REACHOUT'S 2021 CHECK IN STUDY FOUND THAT:

1. ReachOut helped those in distress feel calmer, and reduced young people's negative feelings
2. ReachOut helped young people to help themselves





REACHOUT HELPS THOSE IN DISTRESS FEEL CALMER

ReachOut users consistently reported feeling less stressed and down after using ReachOut. Young people were asked to rate how stressed and down they felt both before and after visiting ReachOut. A statistically significant decrease was evident at several points across the 12-week study. At week 12, the average rating of feeling stressed or down before using ReachOut was 6.8/10. After visiting ReachOut, this decreased to 4.7.

Young people described feeling less alone in their experiences after visiting ReachOut, and feeling comfort in knowing that others are going through the same thing. This contributed to their reduced feelings of stress. Feelings of stress were also reduced through an increased understanding of ways young people can help themselves, that came from using ReachOut. This understanding provided some a sense of hope about their downward spiral of feelings.

“

Reading some of the articles related to topics such as building confidence and looking after mental wellbeing was kind of like an act of self care in a way. If I were to implement those things into my life more often it would almost be like protecting myself from getting super stressed really easily.

”

**Female, 19, VIC
Regional**

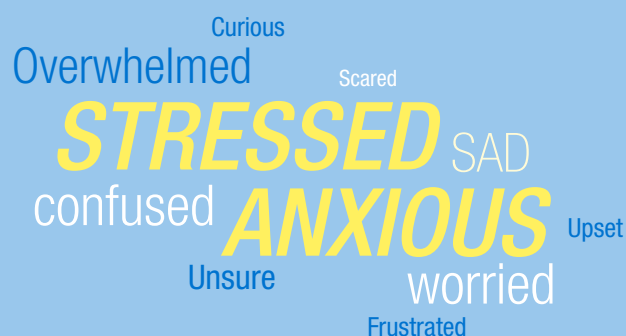




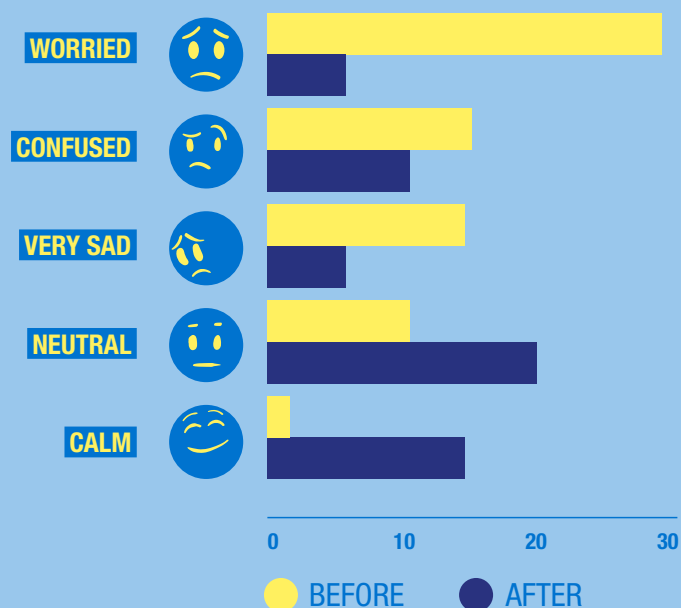
Visiting ReachOut also changed the state of feelings described by young people in a positive way. Before using ReachOut, young people described their feelings as 'stressed', 'anxious', 'overwhelmed', 'confused', and 'sad'. After visiting ReachOut, the most common words used to describe their feelings included, 'calmer', 'relieved', and 'unsure', suggesting a shift from negative to more neutral feelings. Although still present, the prevalence of those reporting they felt 'anxious' or 'stressed' decreased.

WORDS YOUNG PEOPLE USED TO DESCRIBE THEIR FEELINGS:

Before visiting ReachOut:



After visiting ReachOut:



Young people in the study were also asked to use emojis to describe their feelings. The most common emojis selected to represent how young people felt before visiting ReachOut included 'sad', 'confused', and 'worried'. After using ReachOut we saw a decrease in the number of people selecting these emojis and an increase in the frequency of emojis such as 'neutral' and 'calm'.

REACHOUT HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES

91.1% of young people who used ReachOut reported getting ideas about things that they could do to feel better when feeling stressed or down. Young people often described specific articles they had read as being useful in providing tips which helped them to manage stressful circumstances in their lives. When asked to describe the new strategies they had learnt, the top three strategies included:

1. **Mindfulness techniques** such as meditation, yoga, breathing exercises and sensory grounding strategies
2. **The practice of adopting a positive mindset** through putting their thoughts into perspective, reframing and positive self talk.
3. **Talking to trusted friends and family members** was a strategy that some took on board after learning to see themselves and their problems as help-worthy.

“

Reachout told me to talk to a trusted adult about how you are feeling. I got up the courage to talk to my eldest brother about my parents upcoming divorce and that was really comforting and although confronting I now feel like a weight is off my shoulder and it makes me more confident that I can go and talk to others now. Another strategy was to make a list of the things that you are grateful for. Although at first it sounded cheesy I thought of things to be grateful for in my head and it lifted my mood.”

Female, 16,
VIC Metro



91.2% of ReachOut users reported putting strategies they learned into action, either by using them in the week before they were surveyed or interviewed, or planning to do so. Trying out something they had read or heard on ReachOut helped many to feel better.

“

I have used the section ‘How to prioritise and get stuff done’ to help me think through everything that I have to do and the order in which I should do it. I found that the grid here was extremely useful in getting myself to think through the time and effort components of the things I have to do. I also read the section on ‘How to overcome your shyness’ in preparation for meeting new people at upcoming social events. While I wouldn’t say that I’m a particularly ‘shy’ person, I still found it useful in providing ways to make myself feel more comfortable when meeting new people.

”

Male, 17,
SA Metro



ABOUT THE CHECK IN STUDY

From May 2019 to November 2020, ReachOut ran a cohort study of its users, the Check In study. The study aimed to gain insights into ReachOut users aged 16-21 years old to explore how they use ReachOut and track their mental health and wellbeing. Participants of the study were asked to complete weekly surveys over 12 weeks. To gain a natural and realistic understanding on how young people use ReachOut, young people were asked to use ReachOut when they need it, and as often as they like during the 12 weeks.

215 ReachOut users participated in the study, with 114 completing week 12 surveys.

WHAT DO REACHOUT USERS LOOK LIKE?

According to the sample of Check In participants, ReachOut users are a relatively distressed group of young people. There was a high prevalence of suicidal ideation among the young people who took part in the study. Approximately half of young people met the criteria for probable mental illness, and displayed elevated scores on depression and anxiety scales. Wellbeing scores were also below the norm, indicating poorer wellbeing.

Of the 215 16-21 year old ReachOut users who participated in the Check In study:

- 80.5% were female
- Almost 50.8% identified as LGBTQ+ or unsure/questioning
- 11.5% were born outside of Australia, and 63.2% had both parents born overseas
- 73% lived in a major city, 18.1% lived in inner regional, 8.4% lived in outer regional and 0.5% lived in very remote areas
- 2.2% identified as Aboriginal
- Most were students (70%) followed by paid workers (8.4%).



