

KEY FINDINGS

OurHerd: Assessing the Outcomes and Pathways to Impact 2021



Acknowledgements

batyr and the OurHerd team would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We recognise the rich culture of storytelling for First Nations People and the power of this oral tradition. As an organisation founded on the power of storytelling, this is something that resonates with us at batyr. There is so much we can learn and can continue to learn from our First Peoples.

This research project was commissioned by batyr and independently conducted by Western Sydney University's Young & Resilient Research Centre team: Dr Benjamin Hanckel, Senior Research Fellow, Associate Professor Philippa Collin, Co-Director and Sarjana Ahmed, Research Assistant.

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A special thanks to the young people using OurHerd for participating in our study and for sharing their experiences with us.

Suggested Citation

Hanckel, B., Collin, P., Ahmed, S (2021) 'OurHerd: Assessing the outcomes and Pathways to Impact, Sydney: Western Sydney University.



Introduction

batyr is a 'for purpose' preventative mental health organisation, created and driven by young people, for young people. Our vision is for all young people to be engaged in positive conversations about mental health and empowered to reach out for support when needed.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, **25%** of 14 - 24-year-olds live with a diagnosed mental illness

(ABS, 2018)

Young Australians have been further affected by the social, economic and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions, leading to a significant increase in reported psychological distress (AIHW, 2021). Meanwhile, the social limitations imposed by the pandemic have amplified the use of digital technologies to facilitate connections, work, education and support.

At a time when mental health is an increasing priority for young people, there is an urgent need to provide accessible, engaging, evidence-based and youth-led mental health initiatives that support young people.

In 2019, batyr invested in building a digital intervention to support young people across Australia going through tough times: the OurHerd app.

OurHerd is a mental health storytelling app that empowers young people to use their collective voices to create change. The platform provides a safe and supportive space to share stories about tough times, resilience and hope. It is a community that builds confidence by listening to and learning from each other. OurHerd captures the data and insights from young people's lived experience stories to better inform policy, research and practice.

In March 2021, we officially launched the OurHerd research partnership with the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University (WSU), with The Honourable David Coleman (Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention). The partnership is a collaboration between experts in youth engagement and research to learn from young people. The project evaluated the potential of the OurHerd platform to support youth mental health and wellbeing. This report is a summary of the key findings.

Suggested Citation

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'OurHerd: Assessing the outcomes and
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Sydney University.



Nothing I've ever used is specifically to share mental health stories, which is why I really like it, I mean people share mental health stories on all different social media platforms, you can see it on other platforms like TikTok that sometimes delve into the world of mental health, and other apps.

But I think OurHerd is the first like safe space purely dedicated to speaking about mental health, which is why I really like it. It's just a really positive platform that focuses more on strength and resilience in mental health, rather than on the negatives associated with it.

So, I think it's a great app that really just helps people to communicate stories and you know see and make an impact in the community.

Ash*, Story Creator, 21

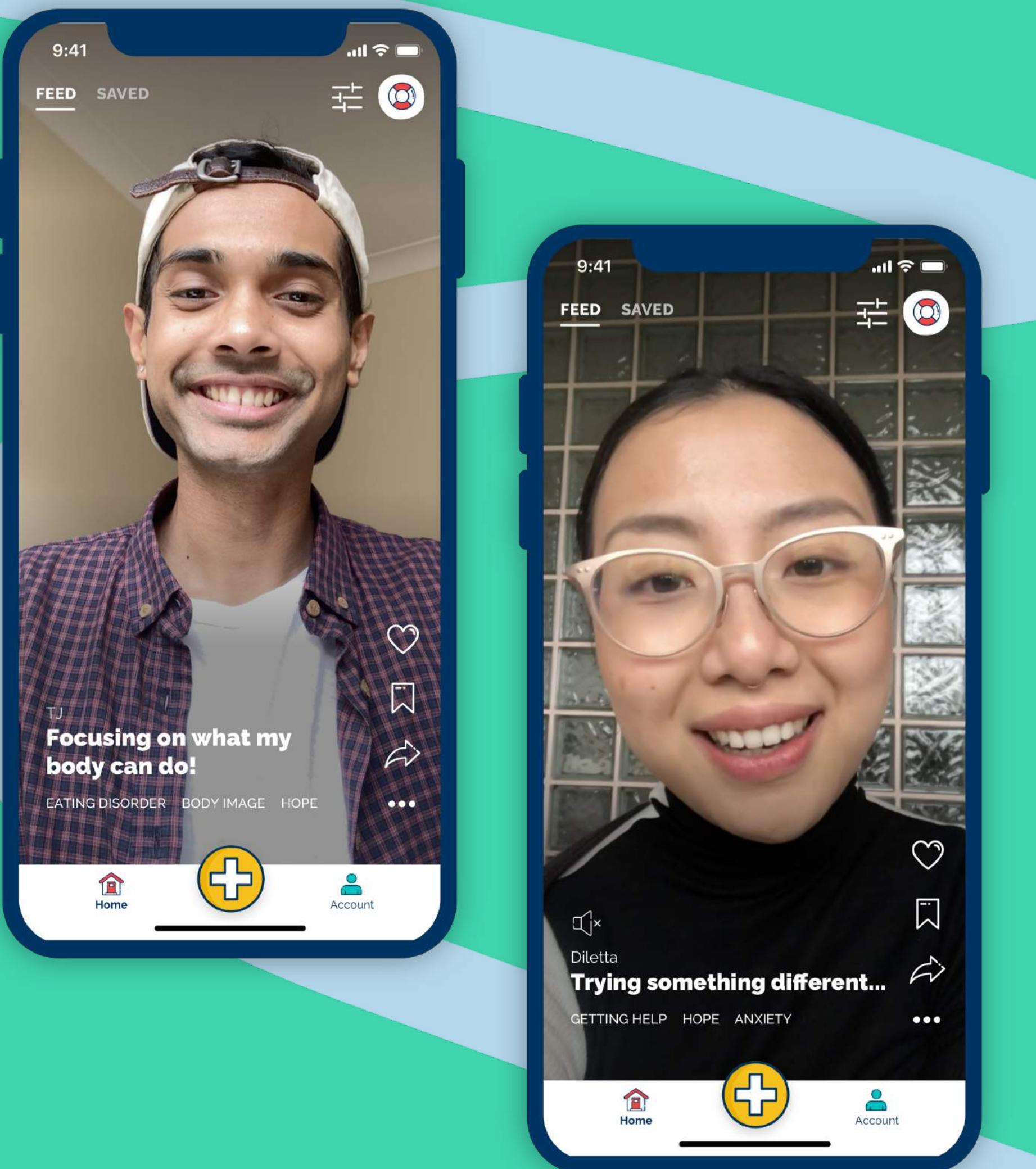
Research & Methodology

The objective of the preliminary evaluation was to understand the make-up of OurHerd's current user base, how early adopters were using the OurHerd minimum viable product (MVP), and the potential associated outcomes and impacts of the platform on young people's mental health and wellbeing. These findings would then inform recommendations for future improvements to the app and its ongoing evaluation.

The mixed methods research design* collated data from a range of sources between April - May 2021. Quantitative data included data from user surveys with validated metrics on self-stigma (ISMI), mental health literacy (MHLS), and barriers to help-seeking (BASH-B), all linked to the OurHerd user theories of change. User distress scores (DQ5) and app behaviour analytics were also used. The study comprised 479 users. A low response rate on the user surveys was a significant limitation of the results. Thus, the data provides an indication of the potential impact of the platform on these key outcomes.

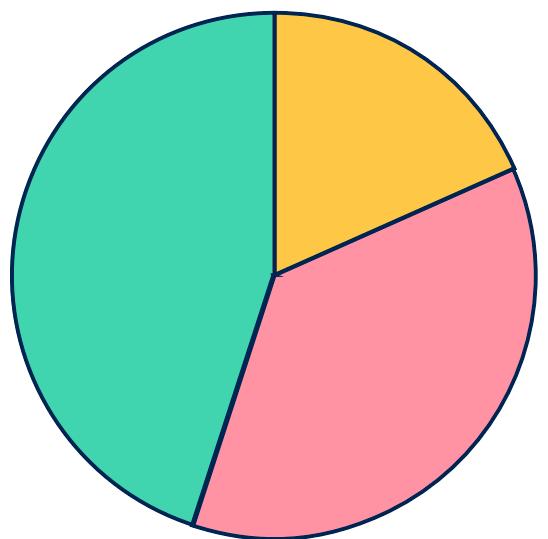
Qualitative data collection included 12 in-depth interviews with OurHerd users who had shared stories, begun the process of crafting their story and/or watched other users' stories on the platform. Six participants had training as Being Herd Speakers, and six had not had training so this cross section included both warm and cold leads to the app. The semi-structured interviews explored MVP users' experiences of OurHerd, how OurHerd fit into their lives, as well as how they talk about it with peers, friends and family. Interviews also examined the self-reported impact of OurHerd and asked young people about what could be enhanced or changed to better meet their needs and overall mental health and wellbeing.

*The study had ethics approval from Western Sydney University. Ethics approval number: H14317



Who do OurHerd users represent in the community?

Age: Users were between 15 - 29 years of age

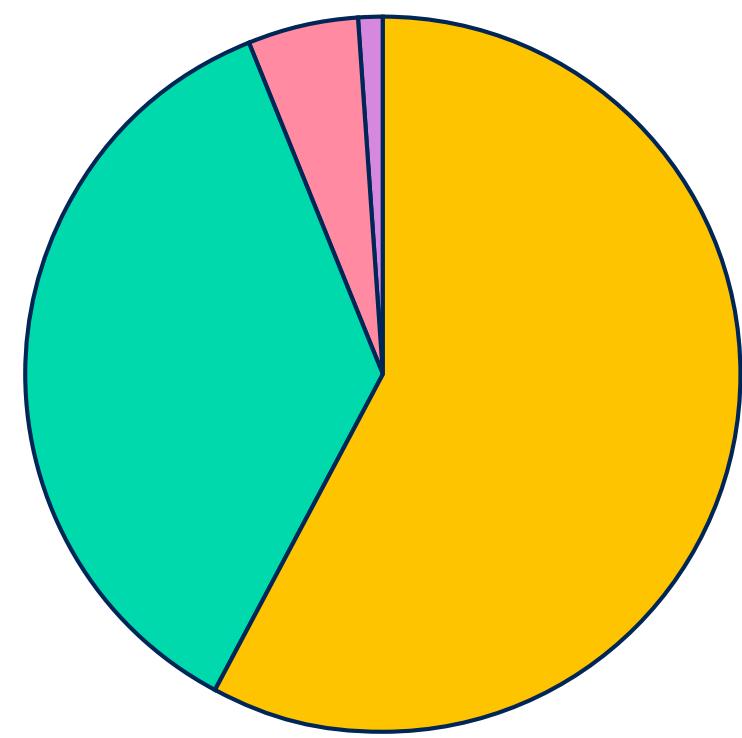


18.5% 19 years

36.3% 20 - 24 years

45.2% ≥25 years

Gender



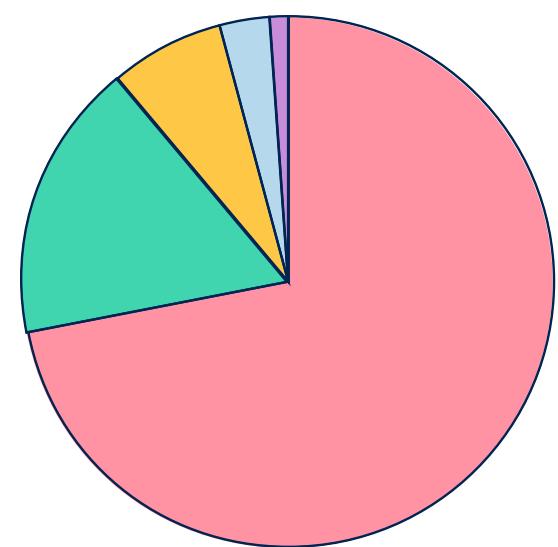
58% Male

36% Female

5% Trans or Non-binary, Genderfluid or Non-conforming

1% Undisclosed

Location: Most users lived on the eastern side of Australia*



72% New South Wales

17% Victoria

7% Queensland

3% South Australia

1% ACT, WA and Tasmania

Additionally - 25% from regional and rural

*these results are in-line with the regions that batyr primarily operates in

Key Findings:

- 1  OurHerd is a one-of-a-kind safe digital space where young people don't feel alone
- 2  Young people want to take control of their own mental health by seeking information and supporting others
- 3  OurHerd is expected to be beneficial for mental health literacy, help-seeking, and internalised stigma
- 4  The informal learning that comes from viewing stories is a critical offering of OurHerd
- 5  The OurHerd community feels self-empowered and empowered to help others

OurHerd is a one-of-a-kind safe digital space where young people don't feel alone



The research highlighted that participating on **OurHerd gave young people a sense of connectedness and made them feel like they were not alone**. The platform also helped validate their experiences. These feelings are likely to have been particularly present due to COVID-19 and restrictions, which created additional mental health challenges for young people during 2020-21. Young people also said they felt a sense of familiarity with Story Creators on OurHerd, which made the stories feel more relatable.

[S]ometimes it's pretty easy to feel like [...] alone, and then I suppose when you're reading other things about other people going through something similar [...] at a similar age it feels like it's more related to me personally than just listening to what feels like more of a stranger... I don't know, with other platforms being from overseas or people that aren't in quite in the same circumstances

Gem, Story Consumer, 25

OurHerd is perceived as a trusted space for sharing and consuming peer stories of navigating mental health. For some users, distinguishing OurHerd from other social media platforms and digital spaces contributed to the sense it was a 'safe space' that fostered diversity and inclusion. The story moderation on OurHerd was highlighted as an important and distinct feature:

[O]ther forms of content are available on social media that's a little bit less controlled or less informed, it can be really aggressive and triggering so yeah in looking at OurHerd, it's a bit of a subtle difference, but knowing batyr's work [...] they've invested into ensuring that.

Dipa, Story Creator, 27

Whilst mental health stories might be found on other social media platforms, **OurHerd's unique positioning of mental health stories focused on 'strength and resilience' enables people to safely share stories with others who can relate**.

OurHerd aims to build users' empathy and understanding of diverse experiences. The interviews indicated that across stories on diverse topics, young people report feeling connected to others via shared mental health difficulties. By reflecting on their own mental health journey and learning from other young people's stories, users were able to better understand and empathise with others who shared stories and were going through similar experiences.

Young people want to take control of their own mental health by seeking information and supporting others



The OurHerd community shared that **one of the most important and motivating aspects of the app was the potential to have a positive impact on others**. They view the platform as a space to contribute to broader advocacy for mental health; to be heard, share stories, support the journeys of their peers and help reduce mental health stigma. Dipa (Story Creator, 27) says that she **“just focus[es] on the fact that a particular story will have an impact on someone else going through maybe something similar”**, which she gets value from doing.

Story Creators shared differing ideas on promoting OurHerd and their stories on traditional social media channels, such as Instagram and Tiktok. Nathan (26, Story Creator), for instance, indicated he was happy to share his OurHerd story through his social media channels, and saw it as a way to extend the reach of his advocacy. For others, the uniquely youth-focused nature of OurHerd, removed from other social spaces involving family and friends, was also important:

I don't think I have any of my kind of, say, close friends or family on [OurHerd] which might have been why I was more willing to post my story. Knowing that it was going to help other people, not within my close circle ... if my friends and family were on there [OurHerd], maybe I'd be less willing to share some of the parts of my story that they might not know about.

Lara, Story Creator, 21

The intended outcomes for OurHerd are for young people to be able to better advocate for themselves and gain a sense of purpose and impact from sharing their stories. In-depth interviews indicated that the majority of OurHerd users considered themselves to be mental health advocates and that the platform has helped them and/or supported them to speak up for mental health in other settings, including on traditional social media platforms. OurHerd was not necessarily the main channel but added another avenue for young people to engage in activism and advocacy work in mental health particularly as it impacts on women, CALD community, LGBT+ people, and rural young people.

OurHerd is expected to be beneficial for mental health literacy, help-seeking, and internalised stigma



Key outcomes linked to the OurHerd user theories of change include increases in mental health literacy, decreases in stigma and increases in help-seeking. The validated measures data showed that the longer the period of time between account creation and taking the survey for Story Creators, the higher the mental health literacy (MHLS) scores were (p value <0.05); and, the lower the barriers to help-seeking (BASH-B) scores were (p value <0.05). For all Story Creators and Consumers, higher MHLS scores correlated with lower BASH-B scores (p value <0.01).

Although the survey completion rates were low, the numbers are indicative of the potential outcomes of use as the app is launched to more young people and further impact evaluation is conducted. The results suggest that OurHerd may have a positive impact on increased mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviours.

Mental health literacy appeared to be fairly even across those who created a story and those who watched stories, with Story Consumers rating slightly higher. In comparing knowledge, 70% of Story Creators were able to identify over five mental health conditions, whilst 74% of Story consumers were able to do the same. One user described the impact of OurHerd on educating them on mental ill-health:

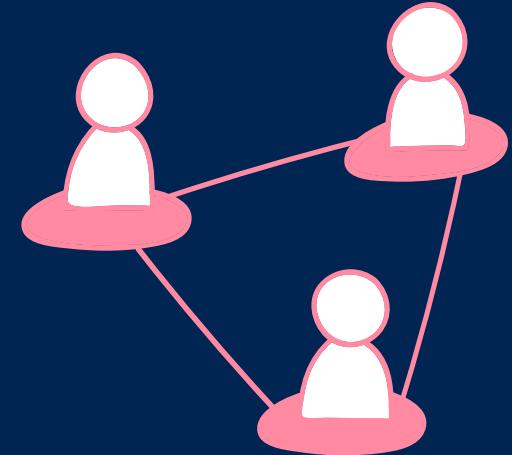
Other people's stories have also helped me understand more about different mental illnesses that I haven't experienced before, which is really helpful for my awareness and also for the "taboo" that I might be carrying simply due to the fact that I don't know enough about them.

Story Creators who spent a shorter period of time on OurHerd had higher internalised stigma scores, suggesting that **time spent on the platform could influence internalised stigma**. **Interviews indicated that a space like OurHerd, where mental health is normalised across a group of peers, will likely have a positive effect on reducing internalised stigma**. One respondent said that a significant change for them from being on the app was: **“Being kinder to myself knowing that tough times are normal”**.

Among young people who had created stories, mental health literacy was lower when they reported higher psychological distress (DQ5) at baseline and follow-up. Mental health literacy scores were also lower when Story Creators reported higher internalised stigma (ISMI). For both Story Creators and Story Consumers, mental health literacy (MHLS) scores and barriers to help seeking (BASH-B) scores were strongly and negatively correlated: that is, as barriers to help-seeking went up, mental health literacy scores went down, and vice versa.

These relationships between mental health literacy and indicators - like psychological distress, barriers to help-seeking and stigma - are worth considering in further evaluations, as well as OurHerd content development and app enhancements. And these correlations give us a strong indication that the app is meeting its intended outcomes. **OurHerd is designed to educate young people with information about mental health, and with that we expect to see stigma and distress decrease, and help-seeking increase in association with use of the app. The education that OurHerd offers via lived experience stories enables its community of users to better access and understand self-care strategies and more confidently provide support to others.**

The informal learning that comes from viewing stories is a critical offering of OurHerd



OurHerd story content, which includes shared knowledge about self-care strategies, accessible services and diversity of experiences supporting users' learning about mental health, contributes to their self-care and can be incorporated into their lives:

[I]t's really amazing to hear these stories, but then it also helped me probably more so... [seeing] how other people find ways to get through challenging times.

Lara, Story Creator, 21

Story Creators share content that includes strategies and tips to help others, whilst using experience tags and titles to ensure Story Consumers have control to filter out stories that may be triggering. Stories are shared with similar others who they believe will benefit from the intervention.

Gem, for instance, discussed how **learning about another young person's self-care strategies during a COVID-19 related lockdown helped her establish productive routines:**

Especially during lockdown I really enjoyed reading other people's experiences, like seeing how people shared tips [for coping]. I was four days a week working from home and I found each day sort of a little bit harder to, you know, stick to a routine and I remember other people sharing that they were going through the same thing... This lady [on one video] would like order a new tea each week and it helped her. I say lady - she was like my age. It helped her get out of bed each day, making different cups of tea. And so, I tried different things like that, like but, for me, I like coffee, so I got like a heap of new capsules and I had a new one each morning, so I felt like I could go and work at my computer again.

Gem, Story Consumer, 25

Discussion with **users indicated that they found the story structure of positive endings beneficial and attributed OurHerd engagement to increased self-care strategies and accessing support:**

[F]or young people especially because of how you're prompted in [OurHerd] you can see that, although people experience mental health there's a positive side and there's a positive outcome...through storytelling and through breaking down the stigma attached to seeking help...Every story is unique, and every story is important to share so that people can support each other and break down the stigma that's associated with seek helping.

Ash, Story Creator, 21

These user insights reveal promising alignments to OurHerd's theories of change and help to validate the purpose of the app. It is particularly encouraging to see evidence of the early intended outcomes; for young people to feel more equipped to take positive actions for themselves, better understand diverse experiences and provide appropriate support for others.

The OurHerd community feels self-empowered and empowered to help others



The qualitative data suggested that **feeling more empowered and validated in their mental health journey was a significant change that affected all users on OurHerd**. Story creators said that the sense of empowerment that comes from storytelling comes from being able to share your story, having an outlet to do so with peers, and potentially positively impacting others. Feeling heard was a strong theme associated with OurHerd use, as one young person indicated:

You don't always get to express what you're feeling and is personal, and I think that the OurHerd app also gives another platform to share and storytelling as well.

Ash, Story Creator, 21

Whilst it was not always easy or the best time for young people to create and publish stories, interviewees said that even starting the process on OurHerd was empowering. Hannah, who drafted a story but has not yet posted, explains the process for her, and why it was important to be able to know she could share:

I found it quite difficult [to tell my story], but I think - I want to say empowering as well, because I could, I know I could share that sort of thing.

Hannah, Story Drafter and Consumer, 19

Like other interviewees, Nathan felt OurHerd was an important part of a broader intervention into mental health in Australia. Specifically, as part of his peer advocacy work to elevate his story, he noted that OurHerd helped him feel more visible: **"It can be quite powerful to share a story,"**

OurHerd's community believe listening, watching and viewing other people's stories is empowering; they were inspired by how other young people overcame a challenging situation, and felt less isolated or alone by seeing relatable experiences:

[I feel] empowered to know that I'm not the only one who has experienced... challenges to their study goals, their career goals. It was a bit empowering to know that there were others that were just like me and then, in addition to that point, it was empowering to know that for those young people who had similar experiences that they were able to manage them.

Arif, Story Creator 25

What does OurHerd mean to Young People?





Thank you!

POWERED BY

