Describe your company and your organization.

[ReachOut](#) is the most accessed online mental health service for young people and their parents in Australia.

Our trusted self-help information, peer-support program and referral tools save lives by helping young people be well and stay well. The information we offer parents makes it easier for them to help their teenagers, too. ReachOut has been championing wider access to mental health support since our online service was launched more than 20 years ago. Everything we create is based on the latest evidence and is collaboratively designed with experts and young people or their parents. This is why our service is trusted, relevant and very easy to use. Accessed by more than 2 million people in Australia each year, ReachOut is a free service that is available anytime and almost anywhere.

Goals

[ReachOut](#) offers three programs: for young people, parents and schools. A range of products sit within each program, one of which is [ReachOut's Online Community](#) (previously known as ReachOut Forums) for young people.

The Online Community is a peer to peer support community where young people can read about the experience of others or share their own experiences in a safe, inclusive and supportive environment that is free, anonymous and available 24/7.

Over time, the Community had grown to over 12,000 registered members. However, analysis of behavioural data - visits and pageviews versus member registrations and posts/replies - showed that there was a range of differentiated engagement segments, with many young people gaining therapeutic benefits from reading (without having a registered account). The risk profile of young people using the platform and the

number of incidents has also increased over time. While we have adopted new approaches to peer support (e.g. hosting 'ask me almost anything' sessions) and enhanced the supporting moderation technology and workflows (e.g. upgrading the machine learned assistive moderation tool), we had not had an opportunity to undertake a comprehensive upgrade of the Online Community since it was launched.

Technology, design and user experiences and expectations online have shifted significantly in that time. As ReachOut developed and refined organisational strategic direction, we saw the need to continue to improve our online Community so as to continue to meet the needs of young people based on user research and evaluation, ReachOut's strengths based approach and a strong focus on user safety.

The primary goal of this project was to update the Online Community to meet the needs of young people using the service, and improve their mental health outcomes. These goals are guided by ReachOut's user experience goals and program logics, which outline what needs to happen to improve mental health outcomes, two of which are to: increase young people's positive sense of self and increase their sense of wellbeing by increasing a sense of hope, meaning and purpose and increasing a sense of belonging and social connectedness.

Why did you choose to invest in Khoros?

Internal research and external (independent) evaluation reinforced the positive impact the Online Community can have on a wide range of young people. While there are obvious benefits for members who actively participate in the forum, preliminary data also showed that benefits are also gained by passive users (those who may only read posts without actively contributing). The evaluation also highlighted significant opportunities to increase the number of people accessing the Online Community and to improve the overall user experience and safety. The existing ReachOut Online Community was a largely out of the box Khoros Community, and we continued the partnership to address these insights.

Strategy and tactics

Key insights from behavioural data, user research and internal and external (independent) evaluations informed our overall strategy to consolidate the service and

product positioning of ReachOut's Online Community as a safe, inclusive, empowering space where young people feel both individually valued and part of a supportive community, which can meet them where they are.

These insights were translated to product, user experience and technical solutions for each user segment, from users without registered accounts to highly engaged members.

The Khoros Community was enhanced by:

- Improving navigation and control over relevant content (through the new onboarding flow, filters, and the ability to follow spaces)
- Developing spaces that respond to a spectrum of topics, issues and experiences. Spaces acknowledge that all young people's experiences are valid and worthy of support. They also help create a community that is safe and inclusive, encourage young people to find others with similar lived experiences, and build confidence to engage
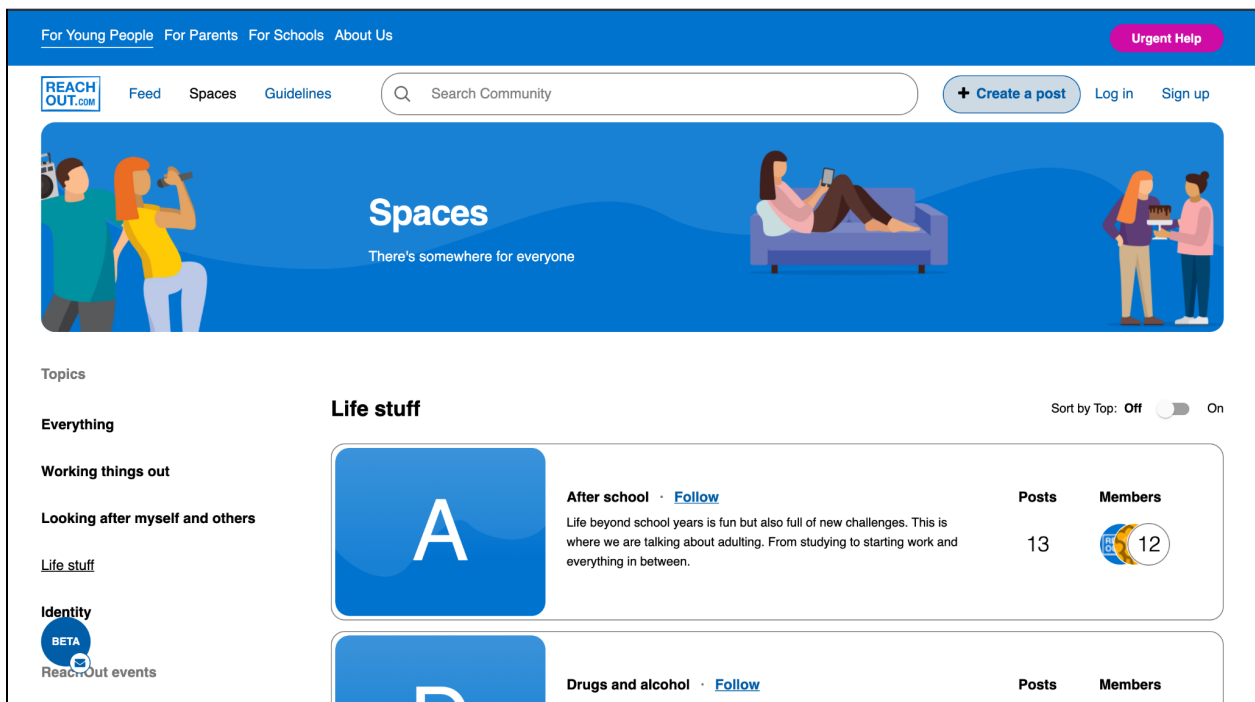
- Creating a new login flow and check-in tool as a way to validate young people when they re-visit so that they feel motivated to re-engage, and build

connections with others

Daily check-in ✕

It's good to see you here. How are you feeling today?

🙂
Things are good

😟
**It's bad, but I'm okay**

😫
It's a lot to handle

Feed

Sort by: <u>Top</u> **New** **My**

Self-care during lockdown

📌 FEATURED

Hey guys!

I just wanted to make a quick post to see how people are practising self-care during

- Enabling young people to "check in" and gauge their distress level (low, medium, high) in order to provide recommendations on how they can best leverage their time in the Online Community to improve their wellbeing
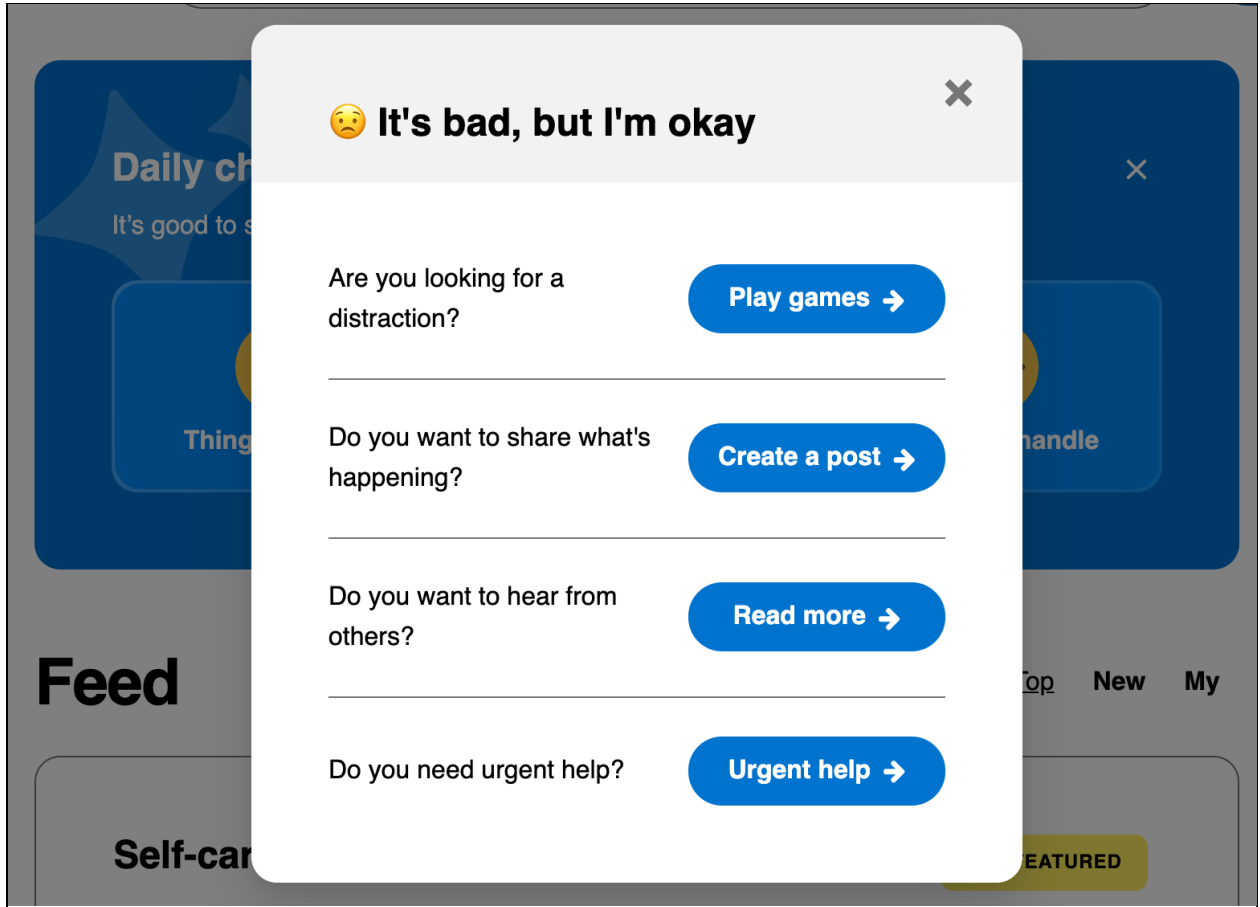
- Providing an expanded set of emotional reactions (emoji reactions) to support young people to feel recognised for their contribution so that they continue to participate and benefit from a positive community
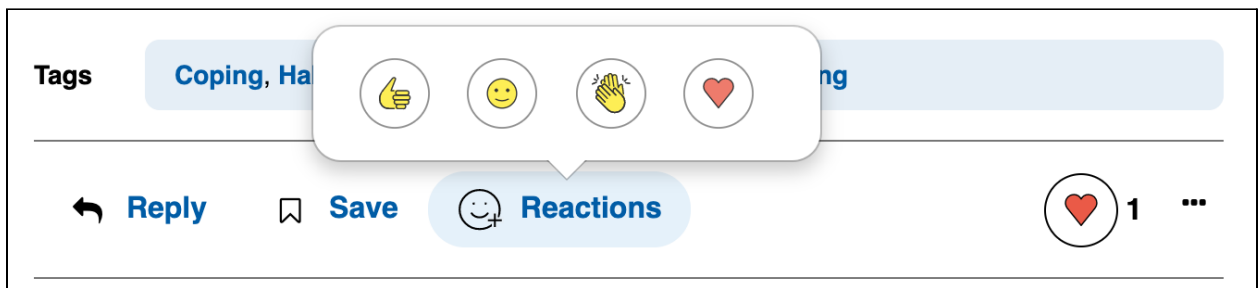
- Incorporating new safety features to support Community Moderators who are critical in ensuring individuals and the community feel safe.

How does Khoros help you deliver results beyond what a team your size normally can do?

The existing ReachOut Online Community was a largely out of the box Khoros Community with custom styling and some custom HTML content. The positive impact of the service on improved mental health outcomes for young people was clear from internal and external (independent) evaluations, and direct feedback had also been positive. However over time it became apparent that there were areas for Community improvement including updating the look and feel and addressing a disconnect between how young people expect to interact with a modern Community and what the [now] previous version of the Community provided.

To actualise ReachOut's vision of what the Online Community could be, Khoros helped us to overcome several challenges:

- A small development team meant we needed to be economical with how we approached development - Khoros' developer documentation, Professional Services team and extensible platform allowed us to achieve this goal
- The existing version of the community was already established and in daily use, therefore causing minimal disruptions for users. The version control provided by the platform facilitated this need. Version control also allowed us to quickly release hotfixes to rectify production issues
- The demographics of the community meant duty of care was a necessary part of every feature we developed - the battle-tested functionality provided by Khoros out-of-the-box, such as moderation and access controls, allowed us to proceed without starting these aspects of the rebuild from scratch.

Results

We launched a redesigned and redeveloped version 2.0 of the Online Community on 5 May 2021.

While formal evaluation of the new Online Community experience will not be conducted while the Community is in beta, we have a limited amount of quantitative indicators from early behavioural data, and a reasonable amount of qualitative beta user feedback since the relaunch.

In less than a month:

- Mobile usage has increased, and we are now seeing ~ 60% of total sessions on

mobile devices, a 7.45% percentage point increase on the previous period
- Conversions from the [Feed](#) pageviews to using recommendations provided by the daily check in is 12.82%

This is promising. The daily check-in (which enables young people to check in with themselves and provides recommendations on how to best use their time on the Community) is being used by young people in low, moderate and high levels of distress to follow pathways to the following areas in our Community (ordered by proportion of total usage):

- Games
- Create a post
- Spaces
- Urgent help
- Weekly wellbeing
- Hanging out

This early data suggests that even for young people with self-reported moderate to high levels of distress, they are leveraging the suggested recommendations being presented in the platform as forms of positive distraction and/or as a way to connect with other young people in the Community. For example, a young person who selects "It's bad, but I'm okay" or "It's a lot to handle" is most likely to then select 'Play games' or 'Create a post' as the top recommended pathways when in moderate or high distress. This provision of safe and considered automation was previously handled by the moderation team, and any suggestions provided were manual.

Community member feedback since the rollout of Community version 2.0 has also been positive:

"Fantastic change from the old version!

Definitely feels much more accessible and I feel more "at home" as it's more similar to most social networks I use.

Love being able to save posts and most importantly react. I'm definitely more of a 'lurker' on social networks and it's so much more likely for me to react to something than to write a reply."

Overall, the ability and flexibility that Khoros gave us to enable the continued improvement of our existing Community has allowed us to achieve organisational strategic objectives. Due to the nature of our work being solely concentrated on assisting young people with complex mental needs to seek guidance and support, the ways in which we choose how to do this is of critical importance. Through Khoros, we have been able to pivot, adapt and cater to the evolving needs of our members.

Acknowledgements:

ReachOut worked with our wonderful partners, [Nightjar](#), an experience design company, for the initial design prototypes and validation with young people.