

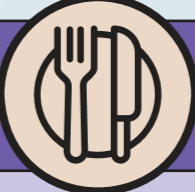


"A Piece of Cake"

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Abstract

The perfect recipe for providing peer support opportunities internationally for Adolescents and Young Adults (AYA's) relies on quality ingredients such as some imagination, flexibility, basic IT skills and the confidence and willingness to free-style occasionally!

Prep: 	Ingredients: 	To Serve/Yield: 	★★★★★
Planning time: approx. 4-5 hours Cook time: virtual peer support session approx. 2 hours Cooking Temperature: dependent upon seasons in both countries.	Packet of respect, 8 oz of varied accents, Spoonful of willingness to try something new, Scoop of synchronisation (time differences),	Pinch of Patience, Splash of silliness and humour, Cup of kindness, Bunch of strong wifi, Dusting of new found confidence to finish	(13 reviews) "Bake off was so much fun! It was great taking some time to make a cake and sharing it with everyone. I loved seeing everyone else's' designs."

Keywords

Peer support; Virtual; Adolescent and Young Adult; AYA's; Cancer; COVID-19; Pandemic; International; Lockdown; Quarantine.

Introduction/Background

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought the world to a standstill with people living in fear of the unknown, bringing about mass panic at the thought of becoming ill from something that could not be seen or controlled, relentless handwashing to the tune of 'Happy Birthday' and varying degrees of success with #QuarantineBaking. For those diagnosed with cancer, this not only added another layer of complexity to an already turbulent time, but also left adolescents and young adults (AYA's) with disabilities at a greater disadvantage to their peers⁽¹⁾.

- AYA's have identified that there is real benefit gained from relationships formed with cancer peers⁽²⁾, but that it is also often an unmet need in their psychosocial care⁽³⁾
- Teenage Cancer Trust fund Youth Support Coordinator (YSC) posts across the UK, to provide psychosocial support that is youth-focused⁽⁴⁾, and part of this role is to facilitate peer support opportunities.
- AYA's with a cancer diagnosis face many of the same challenges, regardless of where they live in the world, including lack of independence and confidence, facing their own mortality and physical changes.
- Peer support facilitated by YSC's that would ordinarily have been face to face was required to rapidly move online which at first was novel, but, 'virtual fatigue' soon set in, so it was necessary to find new ways to engage young people.
- With the normalisation of virtual working and the removal of geographical boundaries for connecting AYA's⁽⁵⁾, new opportunities for offering peer support on a national and also international scale were created.

Aims/Objectives

To gain feedback from AYA's that had attended collaborative Peer Support events between Canteen Australia and the West Midlands Teenage and Young Adult (TYA) Service, to establish if there are benefits to offering international peer support as part of AYA psychosocial support. These findings could then offer an insight into if providing opportunities for peer support with AYA's from different countries has merit to being continued and further developed.

Methodology

It was agreed that due to the differing remits of the services delivered by Canteen Australia (support services for AYA's aged 12-25 with a diagnosis themselves, or that of a family member supporting until no longer needing the service) and Teenage Cancer Trust (support services for AYA's aged 13-24 with a diagnosis themselves and up to 2 years post treatment), that collaborative events would be open to AYA's aged 16-25 with a cancer diagnosis who were on active treatment, or up to 2 years post treatment. The invitation to take part in these events was shared by text, email, social media pages and word of mouth by their respective organisations. A questionnaire was sent out via Microsoft Forms to everyone

that had attended a collaborative event offered by West Midlands TYA Service and Canteen Australia, between January 2021 and February 2023. The questionnaire captured feedback on feelings before and after attending the event, and invited people to share their feedback on sessions.

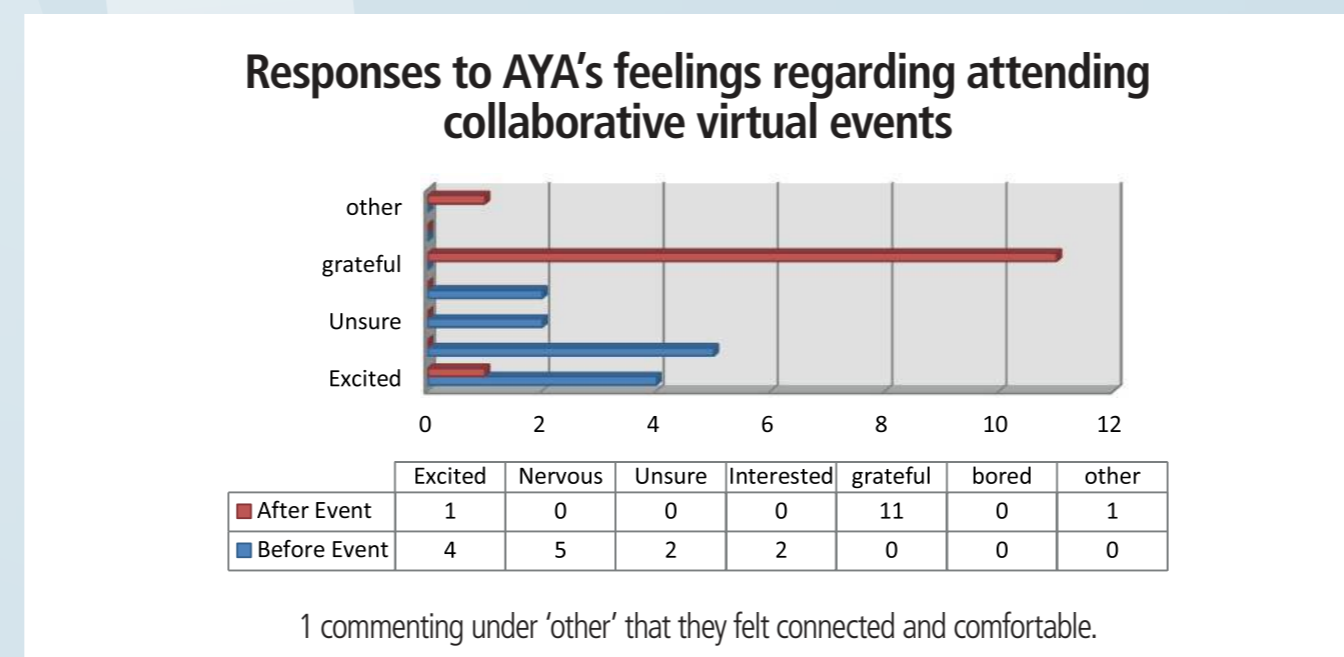
Results

The questionnaire was sent out to 33 AYA's (13 from the UK and 20 from Australia) and 13 were completed, with 6 returned from Australia, and 7 from the UK. Some of the respondents had attended more than one collaborative event.

Figure 1: Cake based representation of activities attended by questionnaire respondents



Figure 2: Responses to AYA's feelings regarding attending collaborative virtual events



"It was a little scary at first meeting new people but as the event went on i got more and more comfortable. It was quite funny at times because we compared stereotypes from our countries. It was also good to have similar experiences to other people from over seas."

Discussion

Every recipe needs some tweaking as lessons are learned with each attempt, and even when it has been finalised, there is still room for creative flair. This is reflective of providing peer support opportunities to AYA's - there is research available about the pros and cons of peer support⁽⁶⁾ and the use of online support communities to facilitate this, however there is little information on the identifying any benefits of international virtual peer support. It may be that the pandemic normalising the use of online platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams has opened up new

opportunities to facilitate this⁽⁶⁾, where it had previously not been considered as an option.

- Well evaluated themed sessions, such as the "Cake Off" shown beneficial to attendees, where the focal point has not been discussing health or treatment, but to offer fun and diversionary activities and an opportunity to meet others knowing that they have also experienced a cancer diagnosis and may be learning to cope with their 'new normal'.
- There could be a negative impact of AYA's meeting together, as those off active treatment may want to move away from interactions with cancer peers as they return to some sense of normality⁽⁷⁾. The evaluation did not capture whether respondents were on active treatment or had finished treatment at the time of attending.
- The questionnaire was completed retrospectively, with some recalling an activity that they participated in 2 years ago, so the results may not be truly reflective of their experiences, although verbal feedback given by those involved in events at the time is consistent with the findings. Future considerations to be given to formalising an evaluation following each event.
- A further limitation is the low response rate, which on reflection, would hopefully increase by circulating a questionnaire following each event to capture more accurate feedback.
- Consideration must also be given to potential barriers for engagement in international peer support opportunities such as access to resources and Wi-Fi connectivity.

Conclusion

Virtual peer support for the AYA cancer community is not something new, but preliminary research has shown that international peer support has not been factored into many working practices. Having cancer itself can be isolating, let alone in a pandemic, so being given the opportunity to meet young people from another country has offered a new perspective to traditional peer support. It is hoped that the work discussed in this poster is a starting point for future developments for more collaborative work with AYA organisations.

~Acknowledgement to the Adolescents and Young Adults that took part in these events, and make my job so varied. Also thank you to the staff team at Canteen Australia for working with us to provide these amazing opportunities, and to Teenage Cancer Trust for funding them~

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