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New app gamifies mental health and well-being strategies

Doctor of Psychology student, David Bakker, is developing a smartphone app, MoodMission, which uses an intuitive and engaging interface to help users learn better ways of coping with low moods and anxious feelings.

Mental health and well-being apps are being used ever widely with users of all ages and mental health needs. Australian app Smiling Mind has received international acclaim for bringing mindfulness meditation to almost 1 million users' phones. It is now being used widely in schools and organisations around Australia.

The project is now seeking financial support through crowdfunding site Pozible. Funds raised will go towards coding the software with help from Spark Digital, which is the same app development firm behind Smiling Mind.

David, and supervisor Associate Professor Nikki Rickard, have been working on MoodMission for the past 18 months. David and Nikki are part of a team that has developed another mental health app, MoodPrism, which is due for release on the app store in the coming months.

MoodMission is based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which is the most effective, evidence-based treatment for anxiety and depression problems. Clinical psychologists who use CBT often help their clients find ways of breaking vicious cycles that maintain unhelpful thoughts, feelings, or behaviours. MoodMission works in a similar way by recommending useful, brief, easily achieved coping strategies to users to help them deal with negative thoughts, feelings, or behaviours.

MoodMission uses principles of gamification to award users for completing missions, motivating them towards overcoming low moods or anxious feelings. In this way, MoodMission will bring the same design principles that have found success in apps for fitness and physical health to mental health.

MoodMission will be designed to be used by anyone, whether they have a clinically significant anxiety or mood disorder, or just want to find ways of coping with day-to-day feelings of anxiousness or low moods. The app will be experimentally validated via randomised controlled trialling to ensure that it is effective. No other mental health and well-being apps currently available on the app store have been validated by randomised controlled trialling.

The app will be free to download when released, scheduled for next year, if crowdfunding is successful.

For more information about the project visit:

www.pozible.com/moodmission

www.moodmissionapp.com