

Online Communities peer chats

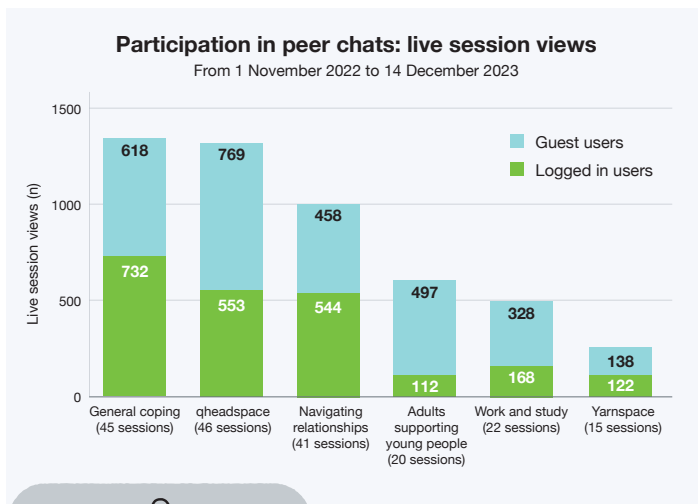
Creating safe digital spaces: how headspace Online Communities peer chats support priority groups

The program

As part of the suite of headspace online service offerings (headspace.org.au), headspace Online Communities aims to provide low-barrier, anonymous, safe, scalable, and sustainable support to young people across Australia. Online Communities peer chats are designed for young people and led by young people, allowing service users to engage with real time group peer support and conversation. Peer moderators are trained and supported by qualified mental health practitioners. The program is specifically designed to support priority groups through specialised chat types such as 'qheadspace', a supportive space for LGBTQIA+, gender diverse or gender questioning young people, and 'Yarnspace', a culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to connect. Other chat types include 'general coping', 'work and study', and 'navigating relationships'. Online Communities also has a group chat designed for 'adults supporting young people' which is led by peer workers with lived experience in this area.

Program reach

Session engagement in peer chats was greatest for general coping and qheadspace



Peer chat engagement
From 1 November 2022 to 14 December 2023

- +4.5K** live session views
- +35K** transcript views
- 189** peer chat sessions
- +425K** total clicks on the page for live sessions

33 young people on average attended qheadspace each week

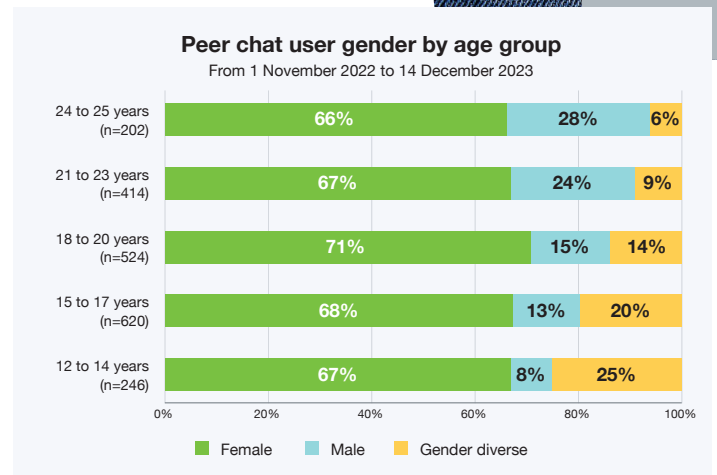
7-8 peer moderators and staff were involved in each session

Demographics of young people using peer chats

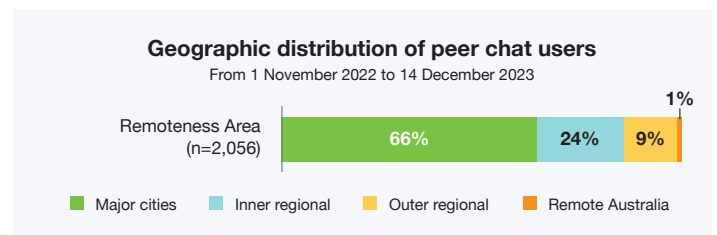
6% of young people identified as First Nations (n=128)

15% of young people identified as gender diverse (n=315)

Gender diverse peer chat users tend to be younger in age



34% of young people were from regional areas (n=704)



The evaluation approach

The evaluation aimed to explore the experience and satisfaction of peer chat participants with the service; the degree to which the program had an impact on peer moderator confidence and capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people; and the extent to which the program is making progress towards its intended outcomes for young people, including those from priority groups ¹.

Data were collected for the evaluation between November 2022 and December 2023 and involved the use of mixed methods. The evaluation drew on quantitative and qualitative data from a range of sources, including: program monitoring data, a peer chat participant survey (n=90) and a peer moderator survey (n=8).

The findings may amplify the voices and viewpoints of gender diverse and regional young people as they had greater representation in the survey sample compared to program data.

¹ Online Communities Peer Chat Evaluation Report, April 2024

Evaluation findings

Online Communities peer chats provide young people with culturally safe opportunities for meaningful connection

"The most helpful thing I believe is the yarn circle actually being culturally good and helps you be with your culture"- First Nations young person, Peer chat participant survey 2023

Gender diverse young people benefit from being part of an online community where they feel listened to and understood

The best aspect of peer chats is... "Listening to other people talk about their experience and feeling heard when talking about mine." - Gender diverse young person, Peer chat participant survey 2023

"Queer young people felt empowered to share their stories with people around them, and feel safe to explore and learn different ways to experience and understand their identities" - Peer moderator survey 2023

7.2
mean rating for helpfulness of sharing experiences on a 10-point scale (n=64)

7.8
mean rating for helpfulness of listening to others' experiences on a 10-point scale (n=64)

Online Communities peer chats facilitate a positive mental health support experience for peer chat participants by creating a safe environment of support

92%

of survey respondents felt safe to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings (n=58)

100%

of peer moderators felt they helped to create a safe space to share (n=8)



Young people from regional areas reported a greater likelihood of participating in future peer chat sessions on a scale from 0 to 10 (Median=10.0, n=28) compared with those living in major cities (Median=8.0, n=28).

Young people from regional areas particularly benefit from an increased sense of belonging and community

"The chats that come from young people for young people, they are much more helpful and bring the community together...you feel like you can relate with other young people and are not the only one going through this" - Inner regional young person, Peer chat participant survey 2023

84%

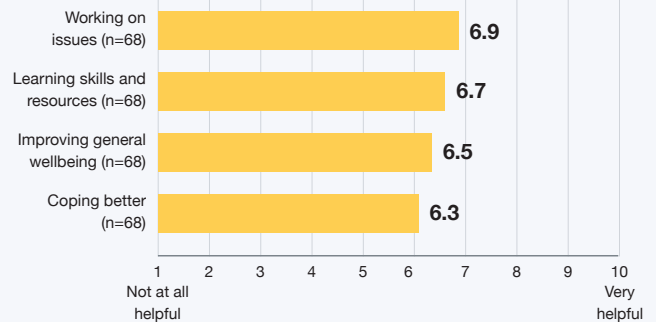
of survey respondents felt less alone and more part of a community (n=53)

90%

of survey respondents were satisfied with peer chats (n=55)

Peer chat participants indicated an increased capacity to manage their own mental health and wellbeing due to their engagement with Online Communities

Helpfulness of peer chats on mental health and wellbeing outcomes



Conclusion

headspace Online Communities provides an important open access service to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people and families.

Peer-led chats play a critical role in:

- the creation of a safe and inclusive space for young people
- bringing a supportive community together
- increasing connection and reducing social isolation
- contributing to the improved mental health and wellbeing of young people

The program increases equity in access and reach for priority groups such as gender diverse and LGBTIQ+ young people, First Nations young people, as well as young people from regional areas.