4 tips to help you be more creativew and flexible about tailoring digital mental health to suit your clients

On the Ground with Psychologist Dr Lyn O'Grady

Tania McMahon

Welcome to Digital Mental Health Musings, a podcast series from the e-mental health in practice initiative, providing health practitioners with the latest news and developments in digital mental health services and resources.

eMHPrac acknowledges the Turrbul and Yuggera people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we bring you this conversation. We acknowledge elders past and present, and honour their continuing connection to land, culture and community and that it's these connections that are intertwined in indigenous mental health and social and emotional well-being. We acknowledge the strength and resilience of all First Nations people and communities since colonisation of their unceded lands.

Hello and welcome to a brand new season of Digital Mental Health Musings. I'm your host Dr Tania McMahon, and I'm delighted to be back with you. If you're new here, a big welcome to the community. This is a podcast that explores the research, practitioners, and stories behind the latest evidence-based digital mental health resources developed here in Australia. Our aim is to really highlight and discuss the key issues surrounding digital mental health so that we can safely navigate the digital space with our clients and within our own practice.

We've been working on some exciting new content for you this year. We'll be delving into the fascinating research behind the psychology of adopting digital mental health. We'll look at what it means to trust a new technology, what builds trust and distrust, and we'll also speak to experts about the implementation and translational research helping clinicians bridge the gap between evidence and best practice. Will unpack some of the big issues that the widespread use of digital brings to the field of mental health. How does digital mental health challenge our professional identity? What kinds of attitudes and behaviours drive clinical change when it when it comes to technology? And we'll also look at why adapting to change can be inherently difficult, and how to overcome those barriers.

This season we're also bringing you a new segment called on the ground. In these episodes, we'll hear from clinicians who have started to integrate digital mental health into their practice and in our first episode, I'm delighted to be joined by psychologist Dr Lyn O'Grady.

Lyn spent decades working, researching, and presenting on better mental health for children, young people, and families. She's worked with parents in the community sector as a school psychologist and as a manager of the KidsMatter project for the Australian Psychological Society. More recently, Lyn has developed a particular interest in suicide

prevention. She has a master in Suicidology and conducts workshops and training in this area for mental health professionals. And she's also the author of a book for parents of teenagers who are suicidal, called Keeping Our Kids Alive: Parenting A suicidal young person.

So on to our first episode and to hear Lyn's insights and experiences. Enjoy. Welcome to the show, Lyn. It's an honour to have you join us today.

Lyn O'Grady
Thank you, Tanya. I'm really happy to be here. It's gonna be an interesting conversation I think.

Tania McMahon
Certainly. And Lyn, you you've worked across such an interesting range of settings in child and adolescent mental health. Can you start by just telling us a little bit about your journey through this field and and where you are now and the the type of practice you're involved in. The type of clients you typically work with.

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah, sure. Well, it goes back to the 90s actually, when I was working with parents in the community. So in the Community sector, I was working with parents and parenting groups and running, running groups and support groups and that kind of work. And then spent some time, and I was studying psychology at that time. So it was before I was registered as psychologist.

And then during the 2000s I moved into school, schoolwork. So, but doing some work initially with kids at risk who are not attending school and then moving into working with a number of schools in wellbeing sort of proactive kind of roles and then ended up in the more traditional school psychologist role for a few years as well.

And then from 2010 on and I spent a decade. So I've sort of had these decades that my my work has broken down into. So in 2010, I moved into more system work. So working with the Australian Psychological Society, so managing some projects, the KidsMatter project was what it was called at the time. And did that work and some other part of other projects that the APS were involved in and often Government, the Department of Commonwealth, Department of Health kind of projects.

So I did that work and then just before COVID hit, which was probably not the best timing, if you kind of knew it was coming, which we didn't really at the time I decided that I wanted to get a bit closer to the ground again. I felt like I was sort of moving away from the real kind of world. So I decided that I wanted to to do something a bit closer to the ground. So I moved into private practice. So that's where I've continued to be and worked through COVID, continuing to do quite a bit of face to face work with people with masks and all those kinds of things on and and working with children and adolescents as well as adults as well. So I have a bit of a mix now and continuing to do that work now and supervised psychology interns, do some consultation and do some training, and quite a bit of mix of

things in my week which I which I really enjoy. That variety is really good and and you know they fit together, but they're quite different. Different areas of work. So that's what I've been doing the four years.

Tania McMahon
Wow, you really have quite a wide breadth of experience across the sector with, you know, treatment, intervention, prevention and then working in that that kind of system space as well. That's really fascinating.

And what for you in your work, would you say was the catalyst or the turning point in terms of adopting digital mental health tools and products and that kind of thing, services into your workflow? Was there a particular product or service that peaked your interest to start with or, you know, where clients perhaps coming to you with tools they'd already been accessing? When, when did you start looking into digital mental health as something of of interest?

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah, I think when I was working at the APS and part of different conversations at that government level. I remember a lot of talk about digital mental health and that being an option for people. So recognising the the wide range of needs that people, children, young people and adults have around accessing support and the lack of ability, I guess, to to get the support that they need all the time or quickly.

So there was a lot of talk at that time around the digital mental health space and and the work the Black Dog was was sort of leading as well and research that they were doing to to really talk about quality and really understanding what was there because there's lots and lots of lots of variety of it. But and then some concerns around well, you know, where's the evidence based for this?

So I was involved with some of those conversations at that kind of level, so I was very aware of it and very conscious of it. And then starting to use some of them myself, I, I suppose. So, starting to download some of them for my myself, the Calm app and Insight Timer and just different relaxation type things, meditation type things for myself, my own.

So I started to do that. So then of course, when I got into private practice work, children would come in and be looking for technology and they'd be looking for iPads and things. And I'd say I don't have iPads and no, I don't want you touching my computer. We've got a farm set and we've got some blocks. We've got some paper. And so I was sort of going back to the old school and I really noticed lots of change in that decade that I've been away from doing that work. That technology was a big part of children's life and and adolescence and kind of really conscious of that, but then not wanting to go down a path that I got kids in and just playing games on the computer. I didn't wanna do that. I wanted it to be purposeful and I wanted to to be connected to the work that we're doing.

So that was kind of a a sort of a a challenge to then work out well, you know, what, how do I make this work? How do I then use what's got a good evidence base behind it? And that's

why the eMHPrac is a really useful as a resource so that I can feel confident with that. So that was sort of one of the things I started to look at. And then printing out the guide, giving it to people as options was one of the things I started to do straight away. And then testing how that went, and I guess that's, you know what we can talk about in terms of some of those learnings. And then think about well, how do I operate it into my work? And is it, is it actually helpful? Is it distracting?

So trying to manage all of that was was kind of where I went. And often they'd heard of things like Smiling Mind. So Smiling Mind was often used in schools. So Smiling Mind was probably the main one that they would be able to talk about. If I talked about relaxation that they sometimes say ohh is that like Smiling Mind? So that was probably the main one, I think, that that they would bring and again it's got some variety around that. Some, some kids are very familiar with it and others have never used it at all. Knew about it, but not much.

Tania McMahon
Yeah. So that's really, that's really interesting. Sounds, sounds like quite a, not a quick journey. Not a overnight, like I've heard about these things, and tomorrow I'm gonna go use them, great. You know, sound like a real evolution where you were hearing about the need to start with.

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah.

Tania McMahon
That there's obviously a huge problem out there. There's people not getting access to to care and there's these options becoming more and more available as something, something else to access. So it sounds like that that was kind of the groundwork for you that, you know, there's, there's these options out there to solve a very real problem.

Lyn O'Grady
Yes.

Tania McMahon
And then you had this kind of kind of married together with then the, the needs of the the individuals you were seeing. You know, these young kids and adolescents coming in who are already digital natives, who are already look, you know, really comfortable with technology and well versed in it, coming in, look, wanting that because that's what they're comfortable with. They don't wanna worksheet.

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

Tania McMahon
You know, or workbook or whatever. The stuff that we were trained on. And then so it sounds like you had you know, those two things kind of coming together and then that

really, it it sounds like motivated you to then actively look for, well, what could I be, hat could I be offering them? And it sounds like already there were, there were ones they were familiar with that they were mentioning. Smiling Minds a a big one. Some of those really well known ones. But it sounds like you're also treading into that space yourself looking for apps that worked for you.

Lyn O'Grady
Yes, yeah, yeah.

Tania McMahon
You know, and that's what a lot of us have been doing. You know, an app that helps with, you know, whether it's mood tracking or whatever. We're starting to look for that ourselves. So having that that personal experience of I guess success or it working or being helpful all coming together to a point where it's then it sounds like you're really then looking for ways to integrate it really effectively into your work.

And that's where, you know, mentioned looking for, you know, part of the work we do, offering you know a directory of resources and things like that. To really go well, how do I go from just offering, here's one app that I've heard of, to making a really tailored choice.

That's a really interesting journey and I'm really interested to know, you know, in in your work, what kinds of products have you ended up, you know, using and how do you use them? Can you talk us through any specific cases for examples?

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah. So I think the Sleep Ninja is a a more recent one for Black Dog, which I've used, which is specific obviously to sleep. And sleep is a pretty big issue across across the board I think, and something we're recognising is pretty important. And you can't really think about mental health without thinking about sleep. So I've I've had some success with that, with I'm thinking about one teenage boy in particular that I would only ever see on zoom and and he was quite keen to to kind of do what I suggested. So he was always the one who would take away, you know, sort of expectations from the session of what he would do and if it was, talk to mum about something or go away and try something or deal with something differently, he would, he would always do that and report back. So he was, he was fairly serious about what we were doing. And so he was quite a good person to use the Sleep Ninja with. So it it was something that he did, he did use, he did find it interesting. He didn't solve all of his sleep problems. He would still have some difficulties with with sleep and and being a a teenager doing, you know, sort of trying to manage his his time and turning off his his devices and things at night time sometimes got in the way of that or, you know, just sometimes some worries. that he would have would get in the way but, but at least it gave him something quite concrete that he could use and refer to and take responsibility for.

So he kind of, it was almost like he knew from that and the conversations we'd had over a period of time around sleep hygiene and what he could do to kind of help himself and and gave him something extra. So I think that was something that added, added some weigh

to what I was talking about. And also in a session you're trying to cover so many things quite often in that 50 minute session that to give, give that sort of idea to go away and look at that to consolidate some of that, or to get a bit more information, or to look at it in a different way. Because you don't quite know what people do take away from the conversations that you're having. So, so that was that was a pretty successful one. Partly his, his approach to the sessions and what he was, how he just approached what adults told him to do that made it

Tania McMahon
So, you could tell from the outset that he was going to be really on board with, with, the suggestion? For our listeners who aren't as familiar with with Sleep Ninja, can you briefly just describe what it what it does?

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah. So it has some CBT approach to. So it's through Black Dog Institute. So again that idea that it's well researched, it was quite new, but it had been researched before it had been released. So that's that's that kind of evidence based part that I always have in the back of my mind. Or probably closer to the front. Really I'm always thinking about that. And, and so it has CBT so it has that kind of awareness raising and and then it has these explanations around how things work. And then a way of sort of strategies and approaches to to manage sleep better and then to to track it a little bit as well in terms of how your sleep's going. So it's it's a very structured kind of approach to it with with that psychoeducation aspect to it as well.

So, and I had looked at it myself as well. So I had, had a bit of a look at it and I'm just sort of aware of what what was there so that I felt confident I could explain what it was as well. And confident that the timing was right because he tried a few things with sleep. We talked about it a fair bit and then here's this app that I just found out. So I was able to be a bit enthusiastic about it and thinking that it's probably, you know, really good, good time now to try it. That we'd sort of, you know, I didn't start with it because I kind of worry that if you could just give a an app to start with too soon that might be a bit dismissive. That we've got some work we could do first. So I felt the timing was quite good. That he was, he tried a few things, or we've sort of been working on it so we needed something to boost that. So he needed something extra, and I I felt is what I'm saying. It's kind of not getting us, not creating the change. So added to what I could do and gave him something to go away and look at between sessions as well.

Tania McMahon
Yeah, isn't that interesting because we're, we're often focusing on so many different aspects of a problem and we're working with someone. And if you you don't have all the time in the world, sometimes it can feel like, well, we've mentioned this and I've, I've tried raising it and and there's only so much traction we're getting in the session. And this sounds like a great example of where a tool has has really come in and, like you said, added weight to what you've talked about. Backed, you know, backed up the the kind of approach that you're, you know, you would be taking and yeah, then allow them to go away and kind of do it in their own time. And yeah, it sounds like it really work, you know, works really well with this client.

Lyn O'Grady

Yeah. Yeah. So that was, that was a good one. And the other one that I've used quite a bit is Bite Back, which is again for Black Dog. And that has kind of activity. So it's around mood, it's around, it has different sort of topics. And there's one activity that I've used around friendships and it's like a little quiz that you can sort of use.

So I've uses that in session with people as a way of sort of getting them sort of familiar with what it is. So just sat, sat at my laptop and work through that activity and giving them a bit of a feel for what, what's there, and then sort of showing them the other thing. And I've had mixed success with that. So I I was sort of thinking that getting in, doing it in the session so they're familiar with it and then sending them the link so they've got it handy or writing it down for them might then engage them a little bit more. And I think for some people it did, they would use that and and part of coping. So often night time again is a difficult time. And so having something maybe to to try to do before bed to how to focus on was something even though we say don't, you know turn off your devices. But for some young people it was sort of something they're ruminating and, and getting stressed and maybe having, you know, thoughts about self harm or suicide with some of the clients I was working with the time. So this was sort of an idea around maybe you could do a bit of that as part of that bed time routine as a way of getting your brain into some of this more positive, helpful stuff that might be engaging.

So that that was kind of helpful for a period of time for some people, but then others I would say, did you check it out? You know, did you remember to have a look and they hadn't necessarily done that. So even though we've done it in the session, which I felt was setting them up to get familiar with it and have something to take away, but it didn't always mean that they would go away and do it. So I I guess thats this individual choice and individual, you know, kind of priorities that that people have. But that, that seemed like that was a useful way. At least I thought I was doing, was doing it in a solid way. I wasn't just suggesting a website, I was kind of getting them to have a bit of a look at it and try it out first and use it in some way to to get a feel of it. So that had mixed, mixed results really.

Tania McMahon

Yeah. So you gave it a good, you gave it a good crack really. So you, you you really viewed your role as I'm gonna try and socialise them to this tool and not just say, oh, there's this really good website, you should check it out. Here's the link. Actually build in a point to it. Like we're gonna, you know, there's some really helpful, you know this kind of activity on there and this will help you know your rationale.

Lyn O'Grady

Yes, yes.

Tania McMahon

And it sounds like, much like we experience in just our face to face interventions, things don't always land. Yeah, things don't always work. And you know that's that's yeah, yeah.

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Lyn O'Grady
Yes, that's right.

Tania McMahon
Yeah.

Lyn O'Grady
You know, and I may have needed to be a bit more prescriptive with some of them. Maybe I needed to say go away and try this activity. Like if I sort of think back to some of them that may have still been too, too broad, you know? We've done this activity now you go away and look at it more broadly. Maybe if I'd said, let's choose one that you can do at home, that might have been a better way and and it made it a little bit clearer. So be more scaffolding around it, maybe? Because I'm thinking it's good to look around all the different activities that had, but maybe they needed something needed a bit more support than that.

So I think it's, it's ongoing, it's kind of reflection that I that I continue to do, I think in my work. And even yesterday I was getting a bit stuck with an 11 year old girl and we were sort of not feeling like we're making much headway. She likes to play games, card games and things in session, but she doesn't wanna talk very much at all. And my questions just kind of annoy her. And so I was sort of saying, you know, do we want to continue and brought the dad in. What are we going to do? How do we, how do we move forward? And I've done some outcome measurements with her and compared to previously and and some things are increasing, some concerns are increasing rather than decreasing. So I was feeling stuck and I said I don't feel like, I I don't feel like the sessions are that helpful but I don't feel like we can kind of close with these increasing outcome measures. So I felt like, you know, we need to kind of I need to still keep something happening here, but it wasn't serious enough to refer off, to escalate to somewhere. So I ended up kind of coming up with the idea that we needed a bit more structure to our sessions and because anxiety was coming up as really high, that perhaps together we could do The Brave Program together.

So The Brave Program is an online program that often I would suggest people do it with parents and do it at home, but I ended up saying what if we make our sessions more structured even for the most part of it? We can have a game still, but that we actually work our way through this, this program and we make our sessions fortnightly to try and build in that structure. And then I give you some homework in between times and we come back, we we keep working our way through it and then share that with the parents.

So that was kind of, it was when I was getting stuck. This was just yesterday and I was getting stuck going what do I do? Yeah, you know, I can't, I couldn't kind of close, but I couldn't keep doing what I was doing. And so then I I just, you know, The Brave Program came to mind when the anxieties reaching out. So she's obviously got this internalising anxiety that's going on and, and kind of not wanting to talk about it, or not knowing how to talk about it. And not making. Like with her, my questions weren't landing and just annoying her really. So I'm hoping that this Brave Program will give us a connecting point with a bit of a focus and structure that will maybe help us work through and help her understand what's going on for herself in a way that she wasn't connecting with me for. So.

Tania McMahon

Yes. Isn't that interesting? It's given you another option hasn't it?

Lyn O'Grady

Yeah, yeah.

Tania McMahon

And, and for anyone who's not familiar with Brave, it's it's a full course of treatment essentially. There's quite a few services out there that offer full, full course of treatment. The kind of CBT based treatment you would get in, in face to face care. And they can be stand alone. So someone could go away and do, do it completely on their own or with with the guidance of a of a parent.

But it's great that you know it's given you a different. You know, in in a situation where many of us might consider discharging, referring on, because you're kind of getting stuck, you've run out of options. It's given you something else to try that actually might suit suit her, or at least change things up. You know, at least, you know, get some movement happening.

Lyn O'Grady

Yeah. Yeah, because I think we're both starting to get frustrated. But she didn't want to. She also. I said if you don't want to come back that's fine, you know, I can talk to Dad about that, but then she wasn't saying no. And that was the other thing. It's like she sees that there's a need, but I'm just not hitting the mark. I'm just not meeting where she's at and something. We just need to do something different. So, well, yeah. So this will give us a structure and we've got sort of laid out for fortnightly sessions is a structured thing and we can review it after. See how that goes after that. So I, I feel like I've got something to be a bit more direction with her, but hopefully engaging and interesting and and kind of picks up on where she's at, what she needs. But yeah, I would have otherwise, it would have been, I wouldn't have wanted to discharge, but I wouldn't have wanted to continue doing what I was doing there because I'd like to actually have a focus when the need is obvious. But to have a focus on it and not just play games and try to invite conversation just wasn't really.

Tania McMahon

Yes. Not just trying the, you know, doing the same, you know, the same things over and over again.

And if, the other interesting thing about that is, it's not a. It seems that you're using the tools in different different ways and at different stages along the journey. It's not as though okay, I, I use digital tools, I introduce them all in the first session because that's what I do and I sign people up. You're really using your, your clinical expertise and your judgment to to figure out how and when these tools will be the most effective. When seems to be the right time to to introduce them into the the therapy journey, if at all.

Lyn O'Grady

Yeah, that's right. And there might be times when it's not appropriate. And I think about younger children where parents are not that receptive towards it or I. And I certainly have children coming in, you know, wanting to use technology. But I also would have some children I work with whose parents are not keen on technology and wouldn't really be open to that. So then it's a decision around what is the conversation with parents to say this could be useful and could be something that's a benefit for you to look at. But then if the parents are not really open to it then there's a point that that's probably not going to work.

So again, it's the engagement level with as we all work with children where the parents at and what support do you get from parents. So introduced it as an idea. But I did have a a new client that I haven't started working with yet and there was a bit of a waiting period that I've set up a a session in in a few weeks and they were quite keen around anxiety. Quite keen to do something. So I did suggest The Brave Program for them to have a look at as as parents to see what they thought about that in this period of time, the couple of weeks before I see actually meet with the child, and to have a look at that to get a bit of a feel for it. And they were quite keen because they're quite keen to do something and to work on it then I.

Tania McMahon

To get started, yeah.

Lyn O'Grady

Yeah. So I'll, I'll see how that goes. That'll be another, was another kind of thing where I felt there's. And you know, but it was just a phone call to to make a time but both parents came online and very, very keen to to get going. So that felt like that was a a good time to make that suggestion as an option and they're both very keen to do that.

So, so it's really. I guess it's like all our work. We're tuning into where people are at. I've always. Yeah, I, I, I know what I'm confident with. I'm continuing to learn. I've been. Black Dog has some webinars and brief kind of webinars about this kind of thing that I I often try and join or or read their research updates. Get their newsletter and get their research updates about new apps and things that are coming out or where it's up to. And so trusting the sources is really important, and and knowing what the programs are or what the apps, what's involved in them, I think is is part of it.

So I just build that into my, my. It's not even formal professional development, it's just a. Yeah, it's just organic, really that I'm interested in. I find it coming to me and I go, oh, that, that could be useful. So it's always there stored up in mind and bring it out when it's, when it feels useful to do it as another resource. Just as I might have in the past a book or handouts or something. It's, it's. I kind of see it in that way, that sometimes there might be a book that I suggest or there might be some handouts or you know, sort of information that I would suggest. I kind of see it in that same way. That it's just part of how I work with people.

Tania McMahon

Yeah, and yeah, Black Dog do have a great kind of library or repository of of support information. They've got the Health Professional Resource and Education Hub, which has has a lot of access to general mental, you know, mental health stuff, but also, yeah, how to integrate digital into practice.

And you raised something really interesting before they want to go back to about the the different rules that families have. You raised a really interesting point about some parents perhaps being hesitant or reluctant to introduce technology into the treatment space. And obviously you know, different families will have different rules around screens. It's huge, yeah, you know, issue and topic at the moment. And also different capacities for overseeing how their kids use digital tools at at home. How do you factor those kinds of discussions into how you prescribe? Like do you have to do you educate the entire family? Like how, how do you kind of have that conversation?

Lyn O'Grady

Yeah. Look, I think if there was something like The Brave Program that's really useful that then I would probably work with the parent a bit more about that and try to explain to them how it works and what what's involved with it. But I, I guess if they're not sort of engaged and interested, then they're, they're probably less likely to do that. So I wouldn't wanna then just rely on that. I'd want to then go back to my normal ways of working.

And I guess a lot of the apps for children do need, or programs for children do need adult support. So it's a bit different to adolescents. So I feel like with adolescents I've got a bit more leeway that they've got their phones or they've got their own access that they can make their own decisions and less need for parents to agree or be part of that, whereas with children you really need the parents on board. So I, I guess I gauge where they're at and if they're interested and motivated, then I'll talk to them about it. If they're really not, that's not gonna hit the mark for them or then I'll let that go and go back to my my normal kind of ways of working, I suppose. But, but flagging it I think is important so they can see.

And I guess there's a bigger conversation around where technology fits and the pros and cons of technology, and that you know, it's not all bad. That it, that it can be part of, part of life now that we need to kind of embrace and work with kids around so here's one avenue of of where it has shown been shown to be be positive.

But really, apart from The Brave Program and, and Smiling Mind, there's probably not a lot that are tailored just to younger children as well. And that, that makes them. I mean, I'm sure there are apps there but not ones that I'd be recommending for children. So I guess there's, there's not as many, so it probably isn't such a priority for me, as it is, as our adolescents in particular or adults as well. So yeah. So I think it's.

Tania McMahon

Definitely. It's an interesting conversation to to be able to have with parents too, because you know, I like to think of it a lot as like the the conversation around food. You know, not not all, you know, there's plenty of food out there that's nutritious and helpful. Then there's

junk food which we wanna limit and some people view screens and screen

Lyn O'Grady
Yes

Tania McMahon
Time for for kids and adolescents as you know, a a sea of of all bad. And that, you know there is some not great stuff on there that they have to be mindful of but I think it's a great way to have the discussionthat there is some really helpful stuff that screens can do for us and technology can do for us, and this is one of them. And you know if if it's used in this, you know prescribed way definitely. Yeah.

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah. The benefits are there, yeah.

Tania McMahon
Yeah. The other question I had around, you know, issues with technology is obviously, you know, as many of us have probably experienced when we've used something new for the first, you know, few times you get teething problems cropping up, usually the most inconvenient of of times. Have you had things go wrong? And if you have, do you have any advice around how we can turn that experience around?

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah. Look, I've had apps sometimes where I've had enthusiasm, but then the app hasn't necessarily done what we expected it to do. So whether it's been not working or whether it was quite new and didn't didn't sort of live up to what I had hoped for.

So there was one in particular that, I perhaps won't say the name of it, but it was a new one and it sort of was about mood and tracking mood. So I expected that it was going to have a, you know, kind of a record of that. So I was sort of suggesting that this young person could go away and and track the mood every day, and then we could come back and talk about it. And it didn't actually do that tracking. So it was a pretty disappointing experience that she was very keen and she didn't do it but then when she came back to me, she, she said, well, I thought I could show you, but it's not actually not actually showing that. So I still don't know if it was malfunctioning of it or whether it was a feature that I expected was there, but wasn't actually, wasn't actually there.

So yeah, so that's one I still need to kind of investigate that and see where that went wrong, but it it really was very deflating. And she'd put in the effort and then went to show me and then it it wasn't having that feature available for us on that day. So that that was a bit of a, a bit of a disappointment, I suppose.

And I, I know that there's all the work that's gone into apps and looking at what makes them engaging and what makes people you know, look at them, Part of the quality control stuff, but also you want people to be able to keep using them and be engaged and to be motivated to use them. So I guess that experience then was pretty deflating, which might

then have impacted on her continuing to use it. Even though she said it was kind of useful at the time, she said it was okay, but because she didn't have that record at the end, it it made it less relevant and less and less useful for us because I then had to back track to things that she remember which was, yeah, not really the point of the app then. Could have just used paper like we might have done in the past.

So, so that kind of made me a bit reluctant then to to kind of use that app again until I get to kind of check it out to see how that was working so that I'm sure about what I'm suggesting it can do. But I think for that young person, it was probably a really unhelpful experience. That she, she sort of was motivated and then didn't get the outcome that she was hoping for as well. That we were both.

Tania McMahon
And it does, it does, it does feel, then, like the take away is to really dive in and have a look at the apps and things yourself and go through. Because I've, I've had similar experiences where I have recommended apps and things that I've, you know, had vouched for by other colleagues or I've, you know, read. I've done, you know, maybe a quick a quick dive in to have a look and gone yep, that looks good

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah, yeah.

Tania McMahon
And then recommended them and then had someone come back and say, ohh that you know that bit there wasn't there or which. You know, that like, some some kind of question. And, and then once you've gone and had an actual deep dive, realizing like, oh, this, this doesn't actually do that or it only goes so far.

So it really, it. To have that absolute confidence in an app or a, or a tool or a service that you're going through and and and checking it out yourself. It sounds like that's what you kind of went, went back and did.

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah, I think it's really important. Yeah, that's right. Well, I still need to look at it and check and check what I yeah, go back back through it. Because I guess when you, you're looking at the apps you you get to a certain point and then you're not necessarily using it the whole way through as well when you're just doing find out about and you getting what information you can clean. So it's probably easier to make assumptions about what it would actually provide, but it may not.

So I think, yeah, I still need to check that one out and find out a little bit more about that. But it could have been a glitch. I mean, we talk about technology where there can be glitches and things can go wrong and that's why we get updated all the time because glitches happen and, or they add new features over time as well. So it may have been quite early because I, I knew it was an early one. So it may have been that it hadn't been completely finalised or that they were still completing some of those features so.

Tania McMahon

And that's quite a common, a common thing to happen, too is that in this space, it's it's a really rapidly evolving space, and we're noticing tools and products that are, you know, were available yesterday and the then the platforms no longer supported, you know, a few months later because of funding or think things like that. And so even some of our, our go to recommendations might have been updated since we last recommended them or might be, you know, under construction as they they update the platform whatever. So yeah, it's quite a a common occurrence for those glitches to to happen and things not to work the way that we necessarily expect.

Has using digital tools, you know, on the, on the flip side introduced any surprising benefits that you you hadn't anticipated? Or other, or other challenges that surprised you?

Lyn O'Grady

Yeah, well, yeah. Well, I think, yeah, just the the level of interest that people have is probably quite a surprising thing. Like for some people that are really, how they really take it on and it really is a useful thing for them I think is, is kind of something that I wouldn't have necessarily thought just how beneficial it could be for some people.

But then the, you know, the flip side of that is when I've kind of thought that it would be useful and then people don't engage with it and that that challenge. But that, you know, it's very similar to other work that we do and that you know, where things land or what works for some people doesn't work for others.

But I think about, you know, my own use of, you know Insight Timer or or Calm for my own stuff, just how how engaging it can be and how useful it can be. And how, you know, how they're sort of evolving and becoming more sophisticated. And, and you know the uses of the different mechanisms within them that, you know, for sleep or for meditation during the day or different times of the day. So the, the, you know the contents is is really very valuable and I think growing all the time. So the opportunities that are there and the the sort of ways that you can use them is really useful even personally I think.

So there's that personal use and and trying to , to, to kind of get benefits for for myself as well and then being able to pass that on, on to people. But I yeah, I think there there's certainly opportunities that perhaps are untapped as well that we could be maybe you know continuing to use them and keep keep engaging with them and finding out more about them and then using them more and more to get more of those benefits that perhaps you know we aren't really up to date with yet or, or building into the way that we work. There is, you know, more opportunity, I think to do that.

Tania McMahon

Yes, yes. So those kind of untapped benefits. And I think you raised a really good point there that despite there being you know a a wealth of evidence out there, a lot of clinicians still doubt. Is this really going to help, you know? I could, I could go through this you know myself or we just do it the way that I've done it and you know, is this really going to add extra? And it can be really surprising sometimes just what's, what capabilities are unlocked

with transferring some of these, you know, skills and activities and things into this digital format. That it's a really great way to deliver a lot of the the stuff that we do. And yeah, sometimes it just takes having a go to, to learn that and go ohh wow this, this work works really, really well.

And, and it's not just, say, the treatment programs or apps and things, it's also using digital online spaces as a source of, say, peer connection for people as well. I think a lot of people are drawn online because it's the world is there. The online world is there and there's some really amazing, safe kind of digital spaces for people to connect with with others going through similar things. And yeah, I think when we start to hear those experiences from from our clients and like you said, when we have them ourselves as clinicians, you know in our own lives and, and realize how how well it can work. It is a really big motivator for wanting to then use that on the regular. Yeah, in in our work.

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah, yeah. I think ReachOut, like ReachOut the parent forums, the parent ReachOut part of that program, I think is a really useful one for parents. So parents who are struggling with, you know, day-to-day concerns with with kids. I think that that's a different type of kind of way of connecting and and again, it's a forum style online forum. headspace have some similar things as well, and for young people to to engage as well. So I think yeah, that being with others and I think Kids Helpline have a whole lot as well, I found out about recently.

So I think there's a lot of again, more and more out there than what we we realise. And it's not necessarily the more passive app we're gathering information or going through it, but that connection with others as well. I think I think is perhaps untapped in terms of that online networking and trusting that for. I guess Beyond Blue forums and the other, the other kind of avenue for that as well that are there. That, we could be probably promoting those as well as as kind of between sessions support that people can access from peers and and other people going through the similar things.

Tania McMahon
Yes. And I think that's the thing is because the space is really is evolving so rapidly it, I mean it's hard to keep on top of it. But it does mean that our ideas about it need to kind of catch up, because I think a lot of people do think ohh well digital, it's probably just like a mood tracking up you know? Like, because that's where we started when digital started started emerging, those, you know, those simple functions and that's. I mean it's great, you know some of those, those apps that do those simple things, but now it's really it's really increased in sophistication some of the things that these platforms and tools and things can do. So it's really worthwhile, you know having a look and seeing what's new and what can it do? And then, you know, obviously finding a way to to integrate into into our work cause the yeah, the digital world really can unlock a lot of benefits for the people we work with.

And as we we draw to to a close could you, have any any tips or advice, you know from your experiences? Tips or advice to clinicians who are brand new to to digital mental

health? Obviously you know you've you've had quite a a long journey to where you are now, but any clinicians who might be at the start of that journey. Any advice for them?

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah, I think that testing out and getting to know, and being comfortable is really important. And then you can authentically say this is a useful app or program that I'm familiar with. I think that makes it very real and and it's gonna come across in a way that people can trust you more, and you can trust what you're saying, too.

So I think finding out about it, trying them out , looking at what's available is, is really important, and and seeing it as a a valuable part of of kind of where we're where we're heading really. And I know there's there's, you know real government push to try and make things accessible to people and give people choices and opportunities to engage in, in mental health support in, in various ways. So I think it it fits with with that to complement what we might be doing or closing with the client. To leave them with some things to to keep continue the work themselves.

I think that's that's really important, but I think to yeah, just to also recognise that as one part of our work and we don't have to feel that it's gonna be right for everyone. So trusting that judgment that clinical judgment that we talked about around when, when's it useful that you know we can help people make good decisions around what's, what's useful and explain to them the sorts of things if they're going to be looking for. The apps. What they can look out for as well. So that quality control aspect or you know, is it being developed by you know, just as you're looking at any information, really. Who's the developer of it.

And the cost is also a factor I think as well because sometimes there are apps that that can be quite costly and even the Calm app and Insight Timer which. Insight Timer has got a lot of free resources but some of the really good stuff is actually you gotta pay. So you know that that's a trap. So I'm always conscious of that. If I'm sort of recommending apps.

So, I think again, it's finding out, using them and then not necessarily having to know everything about them but having a good sense of what's out there and and what's what's safe and and been shown to be effective. So that, just doing that as you would any other work that you do in terms of making recommendations. So I think to feel confident that, and the eMHPrac resources help us to feel confident. So you don't have to do all of that ground work. You can actually use resources to to give you that guide that you can pass on to people and then guide them to where, where might be most useful for them at at this point in time. But set it up that there are resources there that they can, they can keep trying as well.

Tania McMahon
Yeah. Yeah. So it's it's uh, it sounds like the main advice there being really authentic in your recommendations. Not just, you know, flippantly or I heard about this like, you know, having a look, not being really confident knowing what it's about and how it works. Having that confidence to, to recommend really, genuinely and authentically. And, and then using that clinical judgment like we do in any other, any any other context or when recommending any other kind of intervention.

And that's what we have the the, yeah, the National Digital Mental Health Standards that, you know, were were released to help us with that. That accreditation to those standards for Australian digital mental health services will be that tick of approval that that they've, you know, they've got the evidence behind them. They've been designed with, you know, people with lived experience, that kind of thing. And yeah, you know, then, familiarizing oneself with the just the, you know, directories or the the the indexes of, well, what's out there that's that's low cost or free, that's got that evidence because obviously it will take some time for for lots of services to meet the standards. And it's and that's, you know, obviously the the work we do here at eMHPrac, but Head to Health is another another great hub of information. And for those working with First Nations clients WellMob is a a great website that that navigates people to First Nations resources. So yeah, really, really great tips.

Well, thank you so much for joining us today Lyn. It's been an absolute pleasure chatting, chatting to you and hearing your your insights and your experiences.

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah. Thanks, Tanya. It's been interesting and ongoing work for me. So we can talk again and see what happens down the track because it it is just something to continue to learn about. I think I'd be interested in. So, thank you.

Tania McMahon
Yes. Yeah, lots of the the learning will be ongoing in the space. That's for certain. Thank you very much.

Lyn O'Grady
Yeah. You're welcome.

Tania McMahon
Thank you for joining us.

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