Real Livewires

A Research Report on the Role of Chat Hosts in the Livewire Online Community for Young People Living with a Chronic Illness or Disability

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December 2013

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Acknowledgements

Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre

The Young and Well CRC is an Australia-based, international research centre that unites young people with researchers, practitioners, innovators and policy-makers from over 75 partner organisations. Together, we explore the role of technology in young people's lives, and how it can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of those aged 12 to 25. The Young and Well CRC is established under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program.

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Main Messages

Globally, many young people are keen participants in diverse forms of online communities. It is often assumed that young people prefer to engage in forums where adult moderation is either absent or minimal (i.e. moderation of posts after the fact). However, this study found that, under certain conditions, online moderated spaces are keenly embraced by young people who are vulnerable.

This study evaluated the efficacy of chat hosts active on livewire.org.au, a moderated online community dedicated to young people aged 10–21 living with a chronic illness or a disability. Among other things, the chat room in this online community allows young people to develop meaningful friendships with other young people going through similar life experiences; to socialise in ways that allow their illness or disability to be present but not focal; and to develop social skills necessary to be able to participate in other forms of social interactions, whether online or offline (Third and Richardson, 2010).

The chat hosts are key to the success of the Livewire online community. Livewire chat hosts challenge the traditional notion of a moderator. Far from a 'fly-on-the-wall' moderator that steps in to enforce the community's rules, Livewire chat hosts are integral to the flow of conversation and activity that occurs in the chat sessions. Alongside members, Livewire chat hosts instigate conversations, contribute personal views and experiences, and generally join in with the fun. Further, Livewire chat hosts ensure the community runs smoothly, and also seek out opportunities to support members to learn about themselves and others, to experiment with their identity, and to develop the skills necessary to socialise with their peers. In doing these things, they actively construct a safe and supportive online space for members.

Achieving the right balance in the chat room demands finely developed skills of the chat host. Chat hosts must actively engage young people, whilst always being mindful of creating conditions in which young people develop the skills necessary to socialise beyond the Livewire context. They aim to build members' resilience and skill them in social interactions so that they eventually migrate out of the Livewire community to engage in other online and offline social settings.

Chat hosts receive training in adolescent psychosocial wellbeing and development, as well as skills and strategies for building rapport and developing safe and supportive relationships online. Effective chat hosts draw upon these skills to construct an online identity with whom young people feel comfortable communicating, whether they are having a good day or a bad day. The skills chat hosts acquire in training, and develop on the job, enable them to be sensitive and adaptable to members' needs; to adapt their communication style to evolving situations; and to know when to play 'friend' and when to assert their authority.

Chat hosts model appropriate online behaviour and safety strategies for members in order to construct an environment that provides the security necessary for members to engage meaningfully. Chat hosts actively work to convert difficult situations that arise during chat sessions into learning opportunities for members. In this way, the emphasis is on building members' resilience.

Livewire chat hosts assume high levels of responsibility for the emotional wellbeing of the vulnerable young people with whom they engage. Challenging situations inevitably arise. The training online chat hosts receive at induction, along with organisational protocols around handling suicidal ideation and other serious mental health issues, is key to ensuring they are prepared to deal with a wide range of potentially challenging situations. However, on-the-job training and peer mentoring (in which chat hosts have opportunities to debrief with other chat hosts and share successful strategies) also play an important role in their ongoing professional development, further skilling chat hosts to deal flexibly with a wide range of situations that arise in the context of online moderated chat forums. Livewire chat hosts are encouraged to seek guidance from management and one another, and they note that their skills in handling difficult situations improve with time in the job.

As an organisation, Livewire has learned to be flexible in the face of the diverse needs of its members. The Livewire membership tends to comprise a mix of young people – some who engage every day, and others who return to the community only in a time of crisis. Chat hosts have been key to Livewire's capacity to respond to the evolving needs of a transient, vulnerable youth population. The well-developed skills and constancy of the chat hosts provides a consistent point of connection for Livewire members, whether they are logging on regularly or periodically.

The experience of Livewire shows that the provision of online programs is not merely a low cost alternative to face-to-face services. Rather, the provision of online services constitutes an alternative mode of service delivery that requires careful consideration and planning, along with the development of tailored resources (such as dedicated, well-trained staff) to ensure maximum impact on the mental health and wellbeing of vulnerable young people. Finally, to guarantee success, evaluation measures and funding mechanisms need to be tailored to the diverse and changing needs of vulnerable young people.

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Executive Summary

Despite the fact that young people are engaging on an unprecedented scale with a range of online chat forums – from well-known platforms such as Facebook and Tumblr, to moderated spaces like Bebo, Habbo and Livewire – relatively little is known about how and why young people participate in moderated online chat spaces. Emerging research conducted by Young and Well CRC suggests moderated chat forums provide an important space for marginalised or vulnerable young people to engage with others in similar situations, share creative content and experiences, and develop the social skills and digital literacy to engage in other online activities, including forms of social networking (Third and Richardson 2010). Anecdotal evidence indicates effective chat hosts are key drivers of vulnerable young people's ongoing participation in online moderated chat.

This study set out to better understand the role chat hosts play in chat spaces dedicated to vulnerable young people, as well as the kind of skills, expertise, training and ongoing professional development necessary to support chat hosts in their role. To do so, this study focused on a case study of the Livewire online moderated community. The research team conducted:

- Content analysis of conversation threads comprising over 30,000 individual chat entries to identify and classify the roles chat hosts play in the chat rooms, as well as the strategies chat hosts use to engage members, facilitate conversation between members, and moderate member interactions;

- Discursive analysis of an online discussion forum with 12 Livewire members who regularly engage in the chat rooms in order to understand how Livewire members experience the presence and role of the chat host is the Livewire chat rooms;

- Discursive analysis of informal, semi-structured interviews with six Livewire chat hosts to identify how the chat hosts perceived the roles they play in the chat rooms, the skills, attributes and training required of an effective chat host, and the strategies they use to navigate difficult situations;[1] and

- A review of chat host training modules and materials to understand the extent to which training prepares chat hosts for situations they may encounter in the chat room

This report presents the key findings of this analysis.

Livewire is a closed online community designed to support young people with a serious chronic illness and/or disability who experience isolation from their peers and community. The online community was established in 2008 by the Starlight Children's Foundation, and today comprises young people of a range of ages and cultural needs. The program is designed to increase members' wellbeing, social inclusion, and sense of community and connection through participation in a range of activities, including moderated online chat.

A previous evaluation of the Livewire initiative (Third & Richardson, 2010) found the Livewire online community strongly supported the personal and social wellbeing of its members, and that chat hosts were significant to the success of the Livewire community. Building on this initial study, and using methodologies deployed in other studies to explore the role and effect of moderators of online support groups (i.e. analysis of online transcripts and interviews with chat hosts and members), this study investigated in further detail the roles played by chat hosts within the Livewire community, focusing on how chat hosts interact with Livewire members and the impact these interactions have on members, the community, and the chat hosts. The study also sought to identify the attributes and training required for chat hosts working in this environment to be successful.

In this study, members consistently reported that Livewire chat hosts are highly valued and that they play a vital role in the success of the Livewire community. Livewire chat hosts operate differently to the traditional 'fly-on-the-wall' moderator found in many online communities for young people. Rather than remaining a silent observer that only intervenes when the community's rules are breached, Livewire chat hosts contribute alongside members to the flow of conversation and activity that occurs in the chat rooms. They initiate conversations, contribute personal views and experiences, and generally join in with the fun. Whilst Livewire chat hosts are responsible for the smooth functioning of the online community, they also actively support members to use their engagement in the chat rooms to learn about themselves and others, to experiment with their identity, and to develop the necessary social skills to interact with their peers in a positive manner. In doing these things, they aim to build a safe and supportive online space in which members can explore their experiences of living with chronic illness or disability, but also the experience of being an adolescent more generally.

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[1] A full description of the methodology deployed in this study can be found in the section entitled 'Approach' below.

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Achieving the right balance in the chat room demands finely developed skills of the chat host. Chat hosts must actively engage young people, whilst always being mindful of creating conditions in which young people develop the skills necessary to socialise beyond the Livewire context. They ultimately aim to build members' resilience and skill them in social interactions so that they eventually migrate out of the Livewire community to engage in other online and offline social forums.

Chat hosts receive training in adolescent psychosocial wellbeing and development, as well as skills and strategies for building rapport and developing safe and supportive relationships online. Effective chat hosts draw upon these skills to construct an online identity with whom young people feel comfortable communicating, whether they are having a good day or a bad day. The skills chat hosts acquire through training and develop on the job enable them to be sensitive and adaptable to members' needs; to adapt their communication style to evolving situations; and to know when to play 'friend' and when to assert their authority.

Chat hosts model appropriate online behavior and safety strategies for members in order to construct an environment that provides the security necessary for members to engage meaningfully. Chat hosts actively work to convert difficult situations that arise during chat sessions into learning opportunities for members. In this way, the emphasis is on building members' resilience.

In their work with vulnerable young people, Livewire chat hosts assume high levels of responsibility for the emotional wellbeing of the members with whom they engage. Challenging situations inevitably arise. The training online chat hosts receive at induction, along with organisational protocols around handling suicidal ideation and other serious mental health issues, is key to ensuring they are prepared to deal with a wide range of potentially challenging situations. However, on-the-job training and peer mentoring (in which chat hosts have opportunities to debrief with other chat hosts and share successful strategies) also play an important role in their ongoing professional development, further skilling chat hosts to deal flexibly with a wide range of situations that arise in the context of online moderated chat forums. Livewire chat hosts are encouraged to seek guidance from management and one another, and they note that their skills in handling difficult situations improve with time in the job.

The Livewire membership tends to comprise a mix of young people, some of whom engage every day and some of whom return to the community only in a time of crisis. Our analysis showed that hosts have been key to Livewire's capacity to respond to the evolving needs of a transient, vulnerable youth population. The well-developed skills and constancy of the chat hosts provide a consistent point of connection for Livewire members, whether they are logging on regularly or periodically. Chat hosts provide structure, stability and security for the Livewire community by performing a range of social, organisational and intellectual roles. They promote the development of digital literacy amongst participants; encourage and support individuals to participate; provide a sense of structure and purpose for the group; and assist group cohesion by providing information and guidance.

The analysis of the online focus group discussion with Livewire members, the online chat transcripts and the interviews with chat hosts revealed that effective chat hosts had engaging personalities (i.e. charismatic, fun, empathic); a keen interest in youth cultures and well-developed popular cultural literacies; and a capacity to skilfully adapt communication styles and content to respond to the diversity of the Livewire membership. Chat hosts used a range of techniques to engage, build rapport with and, where necessary, moderate the interactions of, members.

Chat hosts reported a high degree of satisfaction with their work as online community moderators. Further, they related that their role had fostered their own personal and professional growth (i.e. an enhanced perspective on life). Chat hosts also highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development in enabling them to better understand and relate to members' health concerns, including issues relating to members' mental health and wellbeing.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of knowledge about vulnerable young people's engagement with technology and its relationship to their wellbeing by identifying and reflecting upon the key dimensions of a chat host's role in a moderated online community. In doing so, this study provides a basis from which to further develop and consolidate best-practice for the facilitation of online communities for vulnerable young people.

What is livewire.org.au?

LIVEWIRE.ORG.AU: CONNECT, SUPPORT, EMPOWER

Livewire.org.au is an online community connecting young people aged 10–21 living with a serious illness, chronic condition or disability and their siblings to help increase their social inclusion and enhance their sense of connection and community.

Livewire facilitates connection, empathy and understanding between people who are experiencing similar situations by offering a customised, safe and secure online community in which members can connect using social networking tools and engaging with/sharing digital content. The features of the Livewire platform include:

- Online chat
- Blogging
- Member profiles
- Competitions

- Music
- Articles
- Community Groups

Livewire aims to lift spirits, enhance self-esteem, and build resilience.

At the time of this study, Livewire hosted live chat sessions for two age groups: members aged 11–15 and 16–21. Members undergo a strict sign-up and identity checking procedure upon joining the community. Further, members participate in Livewire on the condition that, if they are under the age of 18, they do not disclose any personal information that would enable another member to contact them outside of the Livewire space without the consent of a parent. These measures mean that Livewire members are guaranteed a high level of safety.

Member interactions and content are moderated by professional chat hosts, volunteer and paid, trained in adolescent health and wellbeing. All paid chat hosts are employed on casual contracts and work part-time in their role. The presence of, and ongoing moderation by, chat hosts in the Livewire community differentiate it from other social networking services for young people such as Bebo, Facebook and MySpace.

In 2011, and during the course of this study, Livewire piloted a merger of its online chat function with Starbright World (USA and Canada). This partnership gave Livewire members the opportunity to chat with American and Canadian members in a chat room that is accessible and moderated 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In addition, the Livewire community enables other organisations to set up their own Livewire group, offering a safe platform for organisations to connect with young people that utilise their services, providing them with event updates, resource information and support relevant to their condition. Examples include Asthma Australia, Disability Sport and Recreation, and Epilepsy Action.

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Introduction

Despite the fact that young people are engaging on an unprecedented scale with a range of online chat forums – from well-known platforms such as Facebook and Tumblr, to moderated spaces like Bebo, Habbo and Livewire – relatively little is known about how and why young people participate in moderated online chat spaces. Emerging research conducted by Young and Well CRC suggests moderated chat forums provide an important space for marginalised or vulnerable young people to engage with others in similar situations, share creative content and experiences, and develop the social skills and digital literacy to engage in other online activities, including forms of social networking (Third and Richardson 2010). Anecdotal evidence indicates effective chat hosts are key drivers of vulnerable young people's ongoing participation in online, moderated chat.

This report builds upon the insights of an evaluation of the Livewire online community undertaken in 2009, which highlighted both the importance and uniqueness of the chat host role in 'constructing and sustaining a strong community of support for young people with a serious/chronic illness and/or disability' (Third & Richardson, 2010: 41). The original report identified that there was a limited evidence base addressing the potential of chat hosting and moderation for community building among vulnerable young people. The report recommended that Starlight pursue further opportunities to explore, publish and promote the Livewire model of chat hosting and moderation to build a stronger evidence base.

As a result, the current study examined in further detail the roles of Livewire chat hosts in providing and facilitating a supportive and safe environment for online chat between Livewire members. Specifically, the evaluation sought to identify and discuss the ways Livewire chat hosts carry out their duties and interact with members of the Livewire community; the impact these interactions have on the community; and the perceived chat host attributes and capabilities required to successfully perform these roles.

Five components underpin this research evaluation:

- A literature search of recent and relevant research;
- Analysis of Livewire chat transcripts;
- Interviews with chat hosts;
- Online discussion with Livewire members about the chat sessions; and
- A review of Livewire's chat host training modules and materials.

The research methods underpinning this study are detailed in the 'Approach' section below.

This report outlines the key findings generated by these research components. The findings are intended to inform the further development and support of Starlight's chat hosts. It is expected that this report will also prove valuable to organisations that run moderated online communities for vulnerable young people, as it provides insights into the unique role chat hosts can play in supporting the young people who engage in these spaces, as well as the training and resource implications for developing successful online communities and programs.

Key Findings of the Literature Review

The literature review conducted for this study focused exclusively on literature that examines the role chat hosts or online facilitators play in online discussion forums. It was based on the Matrix Method (Garrard, 2011) and used a combination of search strategies: (1) a previous set of documents from an earlier literature search were reviewed, with a set of search terms developed; (2) various combinations of the search terms (moderator/moderation, facilitator/facilitation, online, web-based, e-communities, forum, chat, support, community, health, disease, youth, adolescent/ce) were used to search for relevant scholarly articles in journal databases; (3) articles were selected from these searches, scanned for relevance and then retained or rejected; and (4) in a variation of the 'snowball method' of data collection, relevant references were derived from the reference lists and/or bibliographies of relevant articles. The complete results of this review are presented as a review matrix in Appendix 1.

The literature review found that existing scholarship provides limited discussion of the role of facilitators in online spaces specifically dedicated to seriously ill and young people living with a disability. There is, however, an emerging literature on the role of chat hosts across a range of online communities for young people that provides useful insights for understanding the specific place of a chat host within a moderated discussion forum for vulnerable young people. The following summarises the key findings of both the specific and broader literatures on chat hosts.

ROLES OF FACILITATORS OF ONLINE SPACES

Within the existing literature on chat hosting, there is a general consensus about the roles played by facilitators[2] of online spaces across a diversity of online communities targeted at different ages and with a range of purposes. Most reviews of online facilitation draw upon the schemata developed in Winograd's (2003) analysis, which suggests facilitators' roles fall into three categories: organisational, social, and intellectual.

In online chat forums for young people, chat hosts promote digital literacy, encourage and support individuals to participate, provide a sense of structure and purpose for the group, and provide information and guidance for members.

Organisational roles include those tasks carried out by facilitators in developing a well-functioning online space in which young people engage and find value. These roles emphasise the promotion of digital literacy, namely supporting participants to understand and develop the social and technical skills to use online tools to interact. The role does not generally address technical, programming, design or information architecture, which remains the responsibility of designers and software engineers, who typically work behind the scenes.

Existing studies highlight the importance of the social roles played by the facilitators. Facilitators are invariably described as crucial to the success of online group discussions, both in the sense of (a) their role in encouraging and supporting individual participants to contribute in ways that are meaningful, positive and respectful; and (b) the sense of structure and purpose that they provide to the group by, for example, keeping chat participants on topic and weaving different conversation threads together. Existing research has found the facilitator's social role is key to promoting and developing online relationships and group cohesion. Facilitators achieve this by providing encouragement and acknowledgement, expressing gratitude, validating participants' views, and guiding them about appropriate online communication and behaviours.

Facilitators also perform intellectual roles that consist of providing knowledge and guidance, and organising it in ways that ensure it can be shared effectively by group members. Whereas social and organisational roles operate primarily to structure chat forums, intellectual roles are content-focused. A facilitator's intellectual role can include the screening of members' contributions. Current studies show a facilitator's intellectual role is particularly important in contexts where participants are sharing medical advice. However, this role may also extend to other matters that participants face, such as doing homework and coping with returning to school while in recovery or remission.

SELECTION, PREPARATION, TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR FACILITATORS OF ONLINE SPACES

While existing scholarship frequently affirms the value of online facilitators, it falls short of making recommendations about appropriate methods for selecting, training and supporting facilitators. For example, while Cantrell et al (2010) recommend facilitators have expertise in offline facilitation and experience in online group activities, they do not discuss what such expertise involves. Overall, there is very limited empirical evidence about the training and selection processes that organisations are currently deploying to select facilitators. Similarly, little work has been done to identify the career pathways that lead qualified individuals to take on a facilitator role. However, discussions of the roles of facilitators often provide a list of criteria for facilitators' success that might be used as a template for preparation and training.

VALUE OF ONLINE SPACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, INCLUDING THOSE WHO ARE ISOLATED AND/OR LIVE WITH SERIOUS HEALTH CONDITIONS

The literature supports the view that online spaces support young people to access information; develop relationships; seek advice; overcome isolation; and have fun. Some research also indicates that online spaces are particularly supportive of vulnerable cohorts. For example, Bonetti, Campbell, and Gilmore (2010) argue online communities provide spaces for otherwise socially withdrawn young people to develop relationships, and Leung (2007) highlights the active use of the Internet by young people seeking support and mood management. On the other hand, Baker and White (2011) report that a number of young people do not use social networking

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[2] The term facilitator is used in this section as it is commonly used in the literature reviewed. It represents a rough equivalent of the term 'chat host' used in the Livewire community. There are, however, variations in the roles and functions of the facilitators discussed in the literature and therefore no direct correlation is possible.

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sites due to concerns about privacy because they feel uncomfortable with online disclosure, perhaps due to shyness or a general lack of confidence in initiating social relationships.

Summary of Existing Literature

- The role of facilitators in online spaces is an emerging field of research.
- Facilitators' roles typically address three areas: organisational, social and intellectual.
- The social role of the facilitator is considered the most important.
- There is limited research about how facilitators are best selected, trained and supported.
- Online facilitated discussion may be more helpful to people who are socially isolated or withdrawn.

Approach

DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

In order to gain a holistic view of the role and impact of chat hosts in the Livewire moderated online community, the research team collected and analysed three sets of data, including:

- Online chat transcripts in which Livewire members interacted with each other and a chat host;
- Informal semi-structured telephone interviews with Livewire chat hosts;
- An online focus group discussion with Livewire members; and
- Review of chat host training modules and materials.

These data sets, along with the methods that were used to analyse them, are described in the table below:

Data Set	Purpose	Analysis
Phase 1: Online chat transcripts Complete chat entries for both the younger and the older groups of Livewire members were analysed. Due to the volume of data, the research team analysed every second day of chat for two periods just prior to the merger of the Livewire and Starbright World online communities: 2–14 Jun 2011, 29 Aug–10 Sep 2011	The analysis of the online chat transcripts was used to: - Identify the patterns of interaction that emerged in online chat in a moderated forum; - Identify the various roles chat hosts play in online chat; - Identify the strategies chat hosts use to facilitate conversation and members' engagement; - Identify how information and knowledge is shared in the chat room; and - Develop a list of key topics and discussion threads between Livewire members, and between members and the chat hosts.	Conversation threads comprising over 30,000 individual chat entries were reviewed, coded and analysed using textual and content analysis. A coding template adapted from a previous study (Ginossar, 2008) was used to categorise 'higher-level' interactions between members and the chat hosts (See Appendix 4).
Phase 2: Interviews with Livewire chat hosts Informal, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with six employed Livewire chat hosts. Interviews were approximately one hour in length (average of 63 minutes) and were recorded for analysis by the research team.	To understand chat hosts' perspectives on: - Roles assumed by a chat host; - The process of constructing a chat host 'identity;' - Chat host characteristics and attributes; - Perceived impacts of chat hosts both in the online community and beyond; - Skills required to be a successful chat host; - Responses to difficult situations/trauma in the Livewire community; - Psychological impact of hosting on the chat host; - Chat host's professional experience; and - Training required.	The telephone interviews were analysed via a systematic review of transcripts and field notes. Textual analysis and content analysis were used to identify key issues, themes, and patterns of interaction relating to the chat host's perceived role in the online chat forums. Appendix 7 contains topics and examples of personal information disclosed by chat hosts to Livewire members. Appendix 8 contains a summary of key chat host characteristics and traits identified in the analysis

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A list of questions used to guide discussion with chat hosts can be found in Appendix 4.

Phase 3: Online focus group discussion with Livewire members Livewire members were invited to participate in a single hour-long online focus group discussion in order to inform the research team about their experiences of chat hosts in the online chat forums. Twelve Livewire members participated. The session was recorded using Silverback software. Two members who were unable to attend the discussion took up the invitation to email responses to the research team's set of questions, to the Livewire program manager after the online discussion had taken place.	To document and analyse how hosts are perceived by the members of the Livewire community. In particular, to gain Livewire members' perspectives on: ▪ Chat host characteristics and attributes; ▪ Perceived impact of chat hosts; and ▪ Skills required to be a successful chat host.	The online focus group discussion was analysed via systematic review of transcripts and field notes. Textual and content analysis was used to identify key issues, themes, and patterns of interaction relating to the chat host's role in the online chat forums.
Phase 4: Review of chat host training modules and materials Review of Livewire's chat host training program including the program structure and the content of individual modules	To understand the extent to which this training might prepare chat hosts for the situations they potentially encounter in the chat rooms. To identify areas for improving the training of chat hosts.	This review was used to inform the analysis of the chat host interviews but also provided a context for the other phases of analysis.

PARTICIPANTS AND RECRUITMENT

Participants in this study were Livewire members and professional paid chat hosts[3] who had participated in online conversations over the period of the study. Chat hosts participated in informal semi-structured interviews with a member of the research team and the views of Livewire members were elicited using a format with which they were familiar and comfortable, namely an online discussion with researchers from the research team held via the Livewire chat forum.

Livewire Members

During the period of this study, Livewire hosted a chat space for two age groups: a space for younger members aged 10–15, and a space for older members aged 16–21. A total of 73 Livewire members (n=39 younger group; n=34 older group) participated in the chat room message threads that were analysed for this study. Twelve of the same members also participated in the online discussion.

Members participating in the online discussion were recruited through a notice placed on the Livewire website. Members who were unable to participate in the online focus group were offered the opportunity to provide feedback about their chat host experiences via an email submission. Two members took up this invitation.

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[3] Volunteer chat hosts were not interviewed for this evaluation. Volunteer chat hosts are online approximately two hours a week, and their primary role is to fill in when paid chat hosts are on meal breaks or are designing or uploading content for the Livewire community.

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The average age of member participants was 16 years (ie: 14 for the younger group and 18 for the older group), and they had been members of the Livewire community for between one and 30 months, with a mean period of 15.3 months for the younger members and 17.6 months for the older community members. Female participants were over-represented in both the younger and older cohorts, with just over three quarters of participants (77%) being female. The largest number of participants in both younger (54%) and older (44%) cohorts resided in New South Wales, followed by Victoria (15%) and Queensland (15–17%). The primary health condition of the participants varied considerably with the most frequently reported conditions being Autism/Asperger's Syndrome (n=9), Cerebral Palsy (n=7) and intellectual disability (n=7). A detailed breakdown of member participant demographics can be found in Appendix 6.

Chat Hosts

The online chat transcripts analysed for this study included message threads in which 21 chat hosts (n=10 employed; n=11 volunteers) participated. These included:

- *Chat hosts in paid employment:* All 10 employed chat hosts participated in the message threads analysed in this study. Seven of the chat hosts were female, with three male. They resided in New South Wales (five), Queensland (three), Victoria (one) and South Australia (one). Only one of the chat hosts was from outside of a capital city, residing in the city of Newcastle. Their ages ranged from 23–31 (average age 25). They had been employed for between 11–31 months as chat hosts (average 21 months). Paid Livewire chat hosts work part-time on casual contracts. In addition to their role at Livewire, they work and study in fields such as: the health sciences (i.e. psychology and occupational therapy), education (secondary teaching), and the Arts (i.e. performance and media).
- *Volunteer chat hosts:* Of the volunteer chat hosts who participated in the message threads for this study, all were female and all resided in New South Wales. Their ages ranged from 22 to 44 (average 29 years). They had volunteered for at least three months and up to 34 months (average 14), spending between four and 10 hours (average eight) per month hosting chats in the Livewire community.
- Employed Livewire chat hosts (N=10) were sent emails outlining the purpose of the research and inviting them to participate in informal semi-structured telephone interviews. Follow-up emails to the chat hosts were sent two weeks after the original email. Six chat hosts accepted the invitation to participate.

VOLUNTEER CHAT HOSTS

Volunteer chat hosts are recruited via Starlight's regular volunteer recruitment processes and trained in the same way as paid chat hosts. On average, volunteers work two hours per week in the chat room, and are there primarily to ensure things run smoothly when the paid chat host has to step out to take a meal break or spend time developing and uploading content to the Livewire website. As such, volunteer chat hosts tend to be less active in the chat rooms than their paid counterparts. The average daily number of chat entries from the chat hosts varied from 2 to 286 for volunteer chat hosts, and between 192 and 550 per employed chat host.

HOW LIVEWIRE RECRUITS AND TRAINS CHAT HOSTS

Livewire chat hosts (paid and volunteer) are recruited and trained according to a rigorous selection process to ensure they meet the high standards required of the role. This process is elaborated upon below.

Recruitment

Chat host positions are advertised via online recruitment platforms. The interview process is two-tiered. Starlight's Human Resources team vet applications, conduct initial interviews and compile a shortlist of candidates for interview. Candidates are then interviewed by a selection panel comprising a Human Resources representative and the Managers of the Livewire program. A standardised list of questions has been developed for the interview process that explores the candidates' reasons for applying for the position; their prior experience; and capacity for working with young people online. In the interview process, candidates are asked to respond to a series of scenarios designed to ascertain their capacity to manage and respond effectively to a range of potential situations that might arise in the chat sessions. In addition to their skill levels, the process is designed to identify candidates who show qualities of honesty, empathy, and self-motivation, and who have the capacity to show support and are 'teen and team focused'. All chat hosts are required to provide their current Working With Children Check and complete Federal Police checks before commencing work with Starlight.

Training

Aside from skilling chat hosts in instigating and managing positive interactions in the chat sessions, chat host training also aims to prepare chat hosts to handle a wide range of challenging situations including suicidal

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ideation, death of a member, working with members with a range of cognitive abilities, and addressing issues that may arise which are specific to a disability (i.e. autism, or a medical or mental health condition such as depression).

Upon induction, and prior to starting work in the chat sessions, newly appointed Livewire chat hosts undertake a two-day training program at Starlight's Sydney office. All training is conducted by Livewire program managers, all of whom have significant experience and expertise working with online service delivery platforms for vulnerable young people. Where appropriate, industry representatives with expertise relevant to Livewire's work with young people are asked to deliver guest presentations during training sessions.

This introductory training includes six modules structured around the following topics:

- Adolescent development.
- Adolescent mental health and wellbeing.
- Loss, grief and change.
- Engaging with adolescents.
- Detecting and dealing with suspicious online behaviour.
- Moderating Livewire.

In developing the chat host's training program (including the training manual and related resources) Livewire drew upon a range of theoretical frameworks, concepts and models underpinning adolescent biological, psychosocial and cognitive development (i.e. Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory, Piaget's stages of cognitive growth); the role of illness and disability in shaping adolescent's realities (i.e. the Disability-Stress-Coping Model); loss and bereavement (i.e. Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief); and strength-based models for supporting adolescent wellbeing (i.e. Positive Youth Development and positive psychology theories). In addition, literature identifying the perspectives and concerns of adolescents utilising health-based psychosocial interventions along with the program staff responsible for delivering the interventions, were reviewed to ensure their views were reflected in the development of the training program. The training program and the corresponding manual were also reviewed by a psychologist experienced in adolescent health. The training modules are regularly updated to reflect emerging evidence-based findings of interest to livewire.org.au.
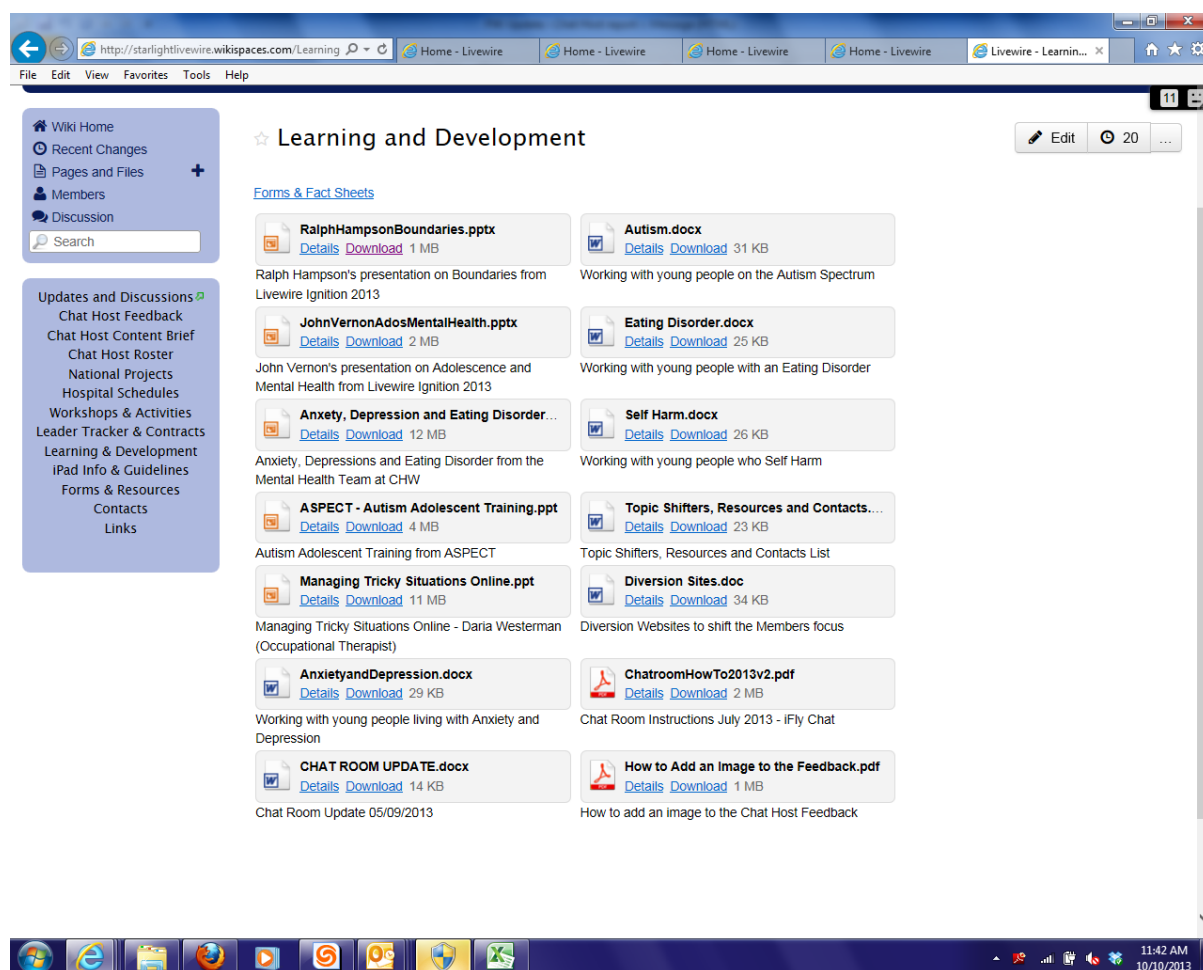
In addition to skilling chat hosts, these modules are designed to acculturate new chat hosts to the Livewire work environment. The training sessions are an opportunity for Livewire staff to communicate the organisation's values, familiarise chat hosts with Livewire's policies and procedures, and provide them with strategies for dealing with challenging situations in a way that aligns with the organisation's overarching goal of supporting vulnerable young people. During training, Livewire chat hosts are given opportunities to explore how they will manage the boundaries between being a 'professional' and being a 'friend' to Livewire members. Strict protocols guide chat hosts' communication with members (i.e. correspondence of a personal nature including letters and emails are not allowed); their personal disclosures (i.e. discussing non-appropriate or non-relevant personal details of lifestyle or self, the sharing of personal information about other staff or members); physical contact (i.e. meeting a member offline); gift giving; and adopting a welfare role that is the responsibility of a counsellor. Given the safety imperative that underpins the Livewire community, online safety is also a key focus of chat host training, with significant time dedicated to strategies for the promotion of safe and supportive online behavior (i.e. techniques for detecting and responding to inappropriate or suspicious online behaviour and materials such has online bullying, sharing tips on self-harm, or anorexia; strategies to manage potential risks to members such has preventing members from sharing personal details without parental and management consent; and approaches for empowering members to report issues of concern to them) Please see Appendix 3 for sample Livewire protocols. At the training, chat hosts are provided with a take home manual. An overview of the contents of the manual can be found below.

Prior to commencing work in the chat rooms, new chat hosts participate in two 'ghost shifts' in which they join a live chat session and learn how experienced chat hosts monitor the chat room and interact with members. Chat hosts can ask and respond to questions privately during this time.

'Up skilling,' or refresher courses, occur once a year. Chat hosts meet for two to three days per annum to review the program modules and strategies, learn new strategies where appropriate, and address any issues that may have arisen.

A Wiki platform for chat hosts provides them with access to additional and/or updated modules and program information, as well as links to online resources including contact numbers for a variety of mental health services (i.e. Kids Helpline, The Butterfly Foundation and so on). This resource is one that chat hosts can refer to when they are experiencing challenges relating to members' medical conditions. A sample screen grab showing the kinds of further learning and development resources that are available to chat hosts can be found below.

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Figure 1: Screen Grab of the Livewire Chat Host Wiki Featuring Learning and Development Resources

After every session, chat hosts are required to fill in a journal debrief form on the Wiki in which they respond to a set of questions about the chat hosts' experience of the online session. Chat hosts are routinely encouraged to seek guidance from program managers and their team members. Journals are reviewed daily by the program management team and, when chat hosts raise questions, these are responded to. This process assists with minimising the risks associated with working online with vulnerable young people.

Chat hosts, along with Livewire program managers, meet once a month as a group to debrief, share experiences, and provide support to each other. If a chat host encounters a difficult situation and requires additional support to address it, Livewire managers can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week for assistance. This level of assistance ensures there is appropriate practical support for chat hosts staffing this round-the-clock service.

The training and ongoing support chat hosts receive aims to prepare them for a challenging and constantly transforming role. In particular, it aims to produce professionals with the capacity to engage with young people appropriately; who can identify and respond to a wide variety of circumstances; and who know the boundaries and limits of their role well. However, there is a clear acknowledgment from Livewire management that no amount of training can prepare chat hosts for every possible situation that might arise in the chat room. For this reason, Livewire has embraced a peer learning model that enables chat hosts to further hone the skills learned in their initial training via effective collegial support processes and time in the job.

Table 1: Excerpt from the Livewire Chat Host Training Manual

Module	Intended learning outcomes
Adolescent development	- Become familiar with adolescent development. - Understand adolescent issues and needs. - Learn strategies to enhance interaction. - Develop appropriate skills and knowledge to work efficiently with adolescents. - Understand the issues that may arise around sexuality. - Feel comfortable to respond appropriately and effectively.

	• An understanding of the effect a member's disability may have on their behaviour within the community (i.e. members with Autism Spectrum Disorder conceptualising the meaning of personal boundaries).
Adolescent mental health and wellbeing	• Understand conditions that can impact adolescents. • Become familiar with warning signs of abuse/self-harm. • Understand the way to proceed should these warning signs occur. • Understand the issues that may arise around sexuality and risk taking behaviour. • Feel supported/confident to handle situations that arise.
Dealing with loss, grief and change	• Understanding the impact of grief and the emotional issues. • Identify strategies for managing. • Explore the qualities of resilience. • Understanding the value of debriefing and highlighting ways to improve debriefing sessions.
Engaging with adolescents: Managing professional boundaries	• Protecting yourself and personal boundaries in an online environment (if they can't see you, why is it important?) • Recognising the importance of identifying and working within personal boundaries. • Establishing appropriate and professional behaviour to facilitate safe and effective relationships. • Identifying warning signs of unhealthy boundaries. • Recognising organisation perspectives and responsibilities. • Identifying strategies for maintaining professional boundaries online without inhibiting members' ability to share.
Detecting and dealing with suspicious online behaviour	• A complete understanding of safe online behaviour for young people and the ability to communicate that message in a fun and effective way. • What is suspicious behaviour and procedures to follow to report behaviour of concern.
Moderating Livewire	• A complete understanding of how to navigate the site and how to edit and delete user generated content in the community. • A complete understanding of what is appropriate to edit and delete as well as an understanding of when to moderate behaviour. • A complete understanding of the sensitive nature of the information they will encounter.

Livewire chat in action

Participants in Livewire chat sessions are young people aged 10-21 with chronic illness or disability who live in Australia. Participants are divided into two age groups, with separate, dedicated, and closed chat spaces for 10–15 year olds and 16–21 year olds. This is designed to enable young people to engage with others of a similar age and at a correlate developmental stage.

A minimum of one paid chat host oversees chat at any given time. Often the paid chat host is supported by a volunteer chat host, who engages in and monitors the conversation and 'holds the fort' when a chat host needs to develop site content or take a bathroom or meal break. Chat hosts not only participate in the chat sessions but also contribute to the development of content for the Livewire website.

The number of participants in any given chat session varies. However, there may be as few as two or three participants (including the chat host) and up to 20 participants contributing in a chat session. Participants are free to engage in the chat sessions for as long as they wish. Some drop in quickly to say hello and others might engage in chat for two to three hours at a time (often leaving the chat space and returning later). Participants come and go as they please, according to their other commitments (i.e. homework and extra-curricular activities), energy levels, and the routines of family life (i.e. having dinner). Evidence from a previous evaluation of Livewire showed that members often participate in Livewire chat whilst also engaging in other forms of social media and/or online activities (Third and Richardson, 2010). This means that the membership base participating in a chat session can be dynamic and changing from one moment to the next. Part of the chat host's role is to ensure that there is continuity in the chat sessions as people come and go. Indeed, there is a committed core community that

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engages regularly and members report looking forward to meeting up with their Livewire friends during chat sessions (Third and Richardson, 2010).

For the most part, chat inside the Livewire chat room is positive and upbeat and consists of conversations about a wide range of everyday topics (i.e. family, pets, employment, school, activities, interests) or topics of relevance to members' wellbeing (i.e. identity formation, friendships, health). Chat is generally allowed to unfold according to the interests of the members. Chat hosts only instigate new conversation threads when the conversation slows significantly or stalls altogether. If members do raise difficult issues, the chat host's brief is to acknowledge these difficulties (using reflective listening strategies) and, if possible, find opportunities to mobilise peer support (i.e. through sharing of experiences etc). If serious issues that require additional professional support or intervention arise in the chat space (such as suicidal ideation), chat hosts' handling of the situation is guided by a strict policy that outlines, among other things, pathways of referral. Please see Appendix 3 for Livewire's protocols on handling discussions of eating disorders, self-harm, anxiety and depression.

In addition to participating in the main conversation underway in their age group's chat space, Livewire participants can also communicate privately with other Livewire members and chat hosts using the 'whisper' function. This involves using a sidebar on the right hand side of the screen to instant message individuals. These conversations remain unseen by the larger group. This enables members to converse in a more intimate way with others, and provides a safe and secure space to let the chat host know if they are having a bad day or to talk through something that is concerning them which they do not wish to share with other members, require clarification on, or support on how to communicate effectively with another member.

The pace of the conversation in a chat session varies considerably. If there are lots of members active in the space, or if members are excited about engaging in an activity that is taking place (i.e. responding to chat host's questions or challenges), the chat can move very fast. By contrast, there are also times when the conversation slows down. Chat hosts carefully manage the pace of the conversation to keep everyone engaged as fully as possible. This entails being attentive and responsive to the particular needs of individual members (i.e. for some members, it is difficult to type quickly enough to keep up with a fast paced conversation, which requires chat hosts to either slow the main conversation down or to use the whisper function to keep them engaged).

As we detail in this report, the role of the chat host is – at times – a challenging one and requires specific communication skills and interpersonal capacities. All up, Livewire employs 10 chat hosts on a casual part-time basis (three males and seven females). They come from a variety of professional backgrounds. All are trained via Livewire's chat host training program outlined in this report. This training is crucial to chat hosts' capacity to operate well in the role. Chat hosts must make frequent, swift, and well-informed judgements 'on-the-hop' in order to ensure chat sessions function smoothly and foster a safe and positive space of engagement for members. In an average chat session, this requires a deep understanding and ability to activate the community's rules and standards in ways that reflect the organisation's values, are developmentally appropriate, and respond to both the needs of individuals and the broader Livewire community.

Interestingly, the average age of Livewire chat hosts is 25 years. Whilst it is not a deliberate strategy of Livewire to employ young people as chat hosts, chat hosts tend to be young because the role entails casual part-time employment (chat hosts often balance their Livewire role with study and/or other part-time work commitments), and a strong interest in enhancing the lives of young people. Whilst they are often young, Livewire chat hosts bring maturity and considerable life experience to the role.

Importantly, it is not a requisite for employment with Livewire that chat hosts have personal experience of living with chronic illness or disability.[4] This is consistent with the fact that Livewire staff conceptualise the service not as one focused on the experience of illness and disability but on the experience of being an adolescent more broadly. Given this focus, experience working with young people is a key criterion for the selection of chat hosts for the Livewire service. As such, chat hosts usually come to the role with extensive experience in other settings where they have been required to work closely with young people.

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[4] Mental health literature emphasises the importance of young people with a mental illness being able to connect with others who have personal experience of a mental health issue (Webb et al, 2008). Livewire does not require chat hosts to have had personal experience of living with a chronic illness or disability. This is because Livewire is fundamentally concerned with supporting members to develop a sense of identity in which their illness or disability is present but not focal. In other words, Livewire aims to promote the idea that members are young people first.

Key findings

The key findings of this research are:

- Chat hosts are integral to the Livewire community, providing structure, stability and security for members during chat sessions;
- Chat hosts perform a range of social and functional roles (including techniques for managing member behaviour) that are integral to the 'smooth running' of the community;
- Chat hosts' charisma and personal appeal, along with their knowledge of popular culture, are key to building rapport with, and among Livewire members;
- Chat hosts are required to skilfully adapt their communication, content and style to accommodate members' age, gender, and culture;
- Chat hosts can gain a range of personal benefits from their work; and
- Specific forms of ongoing training and professional development can further enhance a chat host's efficacy and provide them with necessary expertise and support

Each of these findings is discussed in detail below.

LIVEWIRE CHAT HOSTS ARE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE LIVEWIRE ONLINE COMMUNITY

Feedback from Livewire members overwhelmingly indicated that chat hosts are highly valued by, and key to the success of, the Livewire online community. This is because they are active participants in the life of the community. Far from the stereotype of a faceless, 'fly-on-the-wall' moderator that steps in to enforce the community's rules, Livewire chat hosts are integral to the flow of conversation and activity that occurs in the chat sessions. Alongside members, Livewire chat hosts instigate conversations, contribute personal views and experiences, and generally join in with the fun. Further, Livewire chat hosts ensure the community runs smoothly, and also seek out opportunities to support members to learn about themselves and others, to experiment with their identity, and to develop the skills necessary to socialise with their peers. In doing these things, they actively construct a safe and supportive online space for members.

Within the Livewire online community, chat hosts play the full range of organisational, intellectual and social roles identified by Winograd (2003) as key roles and functions of online facilitators. Confirming a further finding of Winograd (2003), the research team's analysis revealed both chat hosts and Livewire members consider the chat hosts' social role as the most important function they perform. As we outline in further detail below, individual chat hosts skilfully encourage social interaction, build rapport, and promote the self-esteem of Livewire members to create an inclusive and supportive space for members. They ensure the overall tone of the chat forum stays positive and respectful, whilst allowing a safe space for members to raise and discuss difficulties they are experiencing. They provide structure and purpose to conversation threads by weaving together different topics and/or member insights. And they navigate a delicate balance between building broader group cohesion and supporting individuals to express their views and participate in conversation.

This is not to say the community always operates perfectly. Indeed, difficult situations sometimes arise, and chat hosts must be vigilant and quick to respond. As already outlined, Livewire chat hosts receive training on how to deal with these situations. They also develop further skills and strategies for managing difficult conversations over time working in the role. Importantly though, in their responses to such situations, chat hosts demonstrated the ability to turn these moments into opportunities for members to learn more about themselves and engage in meaningful and socially appropriate ways with others. Livewire chat hosts model appropriate online behaviours and strategies for ensuring that members can engage safely in the Livewire space. As one chat host reported:

> I really believe we teach them positive and healthy ways of interacting with each other. I think we provide a consistent model for appropriate behaviour – good leadership skills which can be modelled.

These roles are fundamental to nurturing group cohesion and the members' emotional support of one another. Indeed, feedback from the hosts and evidence from the online chat transcripts suggests that chat hosts' interventions are integral to sustaining high levels of participation, and minimising inappropriate behaviour that either inadvertently or deliberately upsets other members. This was particularly evident in chat hosts' engagement with younger members. Chat hosts gently encouraged younger members to adopt the community's behavioural norms and develop the necessary social skills to communicate effectively with others online. For members who appeared less socially confident, the analysis of the transcripts highlighted that chat hosts facilitate peer support between members, particularly when managing sensitive topics of discussion such as those related to members' health. This is important because, for a variety of reasons associated with their disability or illness

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and the impact this has on their development as social individuals, many Livewire members have limited opportunities for engaging socially with their peers. As such this online community can provide a critical space for them to experiment and learn to socialise (Third and Richardson, 2010). As one chat host explained it:

> At times it seems like we are their social life. Their life outside of Livewire does not seem as dynamic. Even though they do a lot of the normal things, like going out drinking with friends, it seems that their worlds are a bit monoculture, they do the same things with the same people and then they enter into Livewire or Starbright World and you have such a mix of people from different backgrounds – an alternative sounding board.

Importantly, Livewire chat hosts aim to empower members. Sometimes this means that they recede into the background and let members drive the conversation:

> I also think that over the past two years that I have been there kids have got much better at facilitating it themselves. And that is what I love seeing – just being in a room and kind of sit back and watch them talk is so nice. It is kind of empowering – empowering for them. And that is because I have seen them go from being really polite and not saying anything – to chatting to the chat host and then going to just chat amongst themselves, which is what the point of Livewire is.

Livewire members have previously reported that one of the things they value most about the Livewire community is that it is one space – and sometimes the only space – in their everyday lives where they can attain some sense of normalcy. For many members, this is because the Livewire chat space enables them to integrate their embodiment with their identity. Or to put it another way, their bodies, and therefore their condition, can be present but not focal (Third and Richardson, 2010). This study found that chat hosts are key to creating this sense of ease and normalcy for Livewire members. They treat members as 'normal' young people, allowing them space to relax and enjoy themselves, encounter new possibilities, and help them imagine bright futures for themselves:

> We treat them all as potentially normal kids – which is reflected in how we speak to them. For example, 'When you move out of home... When you get a job.' We speak as if they will be doing these things. It challenges them to think of their lives differently – to ask challenging questions of themselves and how they live their lives. Also kids ask each other these questions. They get to think of the possibilities in their lives.

The results of chat hosts' efforts are palpable: Livewire members count relationships with chat hosts alongside their friendships with peers in the community as among the most significant and meaningful social connections they have, both inside the Livewire space and in everyday life more broadly (Third and Richardson, 2010). The analysis undertaken for this study thus suggests that chat hosts can be very effective when they are fully integrated into the interactions of a moderated community that supports vulnerable young people.

CHAT HOSTS ACTIVELY CONSTRUCT A PERSONA WITH WHOM MEMBERS WANT TO ENGAGE

In order to engage effectively with Livewire members, chat hosts carefully cultivate an online persona that is fun, upbeat and friendly. They also work to project a personality that is approachable, empathic and supportive. Chat hosts' capacity to combine being approachable and fun is a key factor in ensuring members visit the space regularly and participate enthusiastically. Livewire members noted that they particularly appreciate the chat hosts' sense of humour; the ways they express their idiosyncrasies; their level of personal engagement; and the understanding they show members. They reported having great respect for the chat hosts.

Interviews with chat hosts and the online discussion forum with participants highlighted key attributes of successful chat hosts in an online environment for young people living with serious illness or disability. These included:

- The capacity to interact in a way that Livewire members report is very engaging;
- A deep understanding of the norms of youth culture, including a strong knowledge of popular cultural references and a fluency in the conversational language favoured by members;
- The capacity to manage online social interactions to facilitate group rapport through techniques including humour and encouragement;
- The courage to manage difficult online members who do not participate along agreed guidelines, along with the wisdom to know when and how to intervene;
- The professionalism and relevant expertise required to offer appropriate guidance when needed; and

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- The willingness to be open, honest and sharing with the group of which they are a part whilst maintaining their professionalism and the community's standards as set out in Livewire's guidelines and policies (see sample protocols in Appendix 3).

Chat hosts' identities are fluid and dynamic – they must work hard to project an appropriate personality. In interviews, chat hosts demonstrated an awareness of the performative dimensions of their role. That is, they recognised that their job demanded that they perform a particular kind of persona that not only appeals to their target audience but enables them to play an inspirational leadership role for members. For chat hosts, the 'performance' of their role is about setting a positive tone in the chat space that allows members' conditions to be 'present but not focal' (Third and Richardson, 2010). They see their role as nurturing members to foster a sense of identity as a 'young person,' as opposed to a 'young person with a chronic illness or disability.' In doing so, they encourage members to think beyond any limits their illness or disability might impose and to think of themselves as 'normal adolescents.' These efforts most often took expression in comments that their role required them to be 'fun' or 'upbeat' and engage in conversations that were targeted at a specific audience:

> Well you've got to be fun. You've got to know what they are interested in at the time and talk about it.

One chat host acknowledged that sometimes, when she herself was having a bad week, it could be difficult to perform her role to the usual standard. On these occasions, she might ask a fellow chat host to take on her shift rather than risk not being able to fulfil members' expectations of her:

> I'm not always a very up person and… yeah I have days – like everyone does – when I am not really into things – and it is all just about getting through the day… There are going to be days when I am in there and I am not going to be the best that I can be for these kids… Sometimes… I have had a really bad week and… I will say can anyone [ie: another chat host] pick [my shift] up and they will. Which is excellent – knowing your limits is good.

In this kind of way, chat hosts' capacity to recognise that their role entailed projecting a carefully crafted persona was necessary to maintaining their professionalism.

Interestingly, whilst chat hosts were aware of the performative dimensions of their role – that is, that they were 'playing to an audience' – in the Livewire community, they nonetheless felt they engaged authentically with Livewire members. One chat host noted that, although members don't know much about her personal life because she doesn't disclose personal information in the Livewire space, she has developed meaningful relationships with Livewire members and always responds to members in an emotionally genuine manner:

> I have always tried to be really true – to a certain extent – like obviously I'm not going to divulge all my personal information. I've always tried to be true and honest – like I have tried to be real as well… I don't try to sugar coat everything… I think the way I kind of have tried to be a chat host – I think that has impacted the community – just because they just know that you are a real person – you are not just going to glorify everything – you are going to be real.

AGE MATTERS

Age has an important bearing on the communication styles and discursive norms preferred by chat hosts and Livewire members. The younger group place greater importance on asserting their individual identity and are more likely to challenge authority figures. The older group are more inclined to discuss matters like their work and education, to talk about their lives as challenging, and to discuss their increasing independence from authority figures.

Generally speaking, the existing literature on chat hosts does not directly address 'what it takes' or 'what it means' to be a skilful and effective online social facilitator of online communities for vulnerable young people. This gap in the literature is particularly pronounced when it comes to discussions of online communities designed to support young people with a serious illness or disability. Studies of adult online support groups have found that the identity or leadership style of the facilitator influences online community members' outcomes (Hsuing, 2007; Lieberman and Golant, 2002).

Notably, online communities in which facilitators provided a structure and format that encouraged participants to express and discuss their emotions enabled participants to integrate the more challenging aspects of illness into their understanding and experience of their illness. Such support allows participants to interpret their illness in personally meaningful terms, enabling them to adapt emotionally and show resilience. This in turn results in lower depression scores, fewer physical problems, higher wellbeing, and better social functioning of online community members (Lieberman, 2008: 2454).

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AGE MATTERS

The younger group are more likely to use 'whispers' (where two members engage in a private conversation thread) – perhaps reflecting a higher degree of concern that some discussions remain private, especially those in which strong emotions are expressed and intense relationships emerge. Livewire supports young people to engage in developmentally appropriate ways by providing age-specific chat groups (10–14 years and 15–21 years). Livewire chat hosts are trained in adolescent development and tailor their communication strategies accordingly. They also have protocols in place to ensure that members in need of specific kinds of support can have private conversations and, if necessary, have appropriate pathways into care and that other members are not exposed to developmentally inappropriate concepts and content.

While it was not within the scope of this study to clinically measure the impact of the chat hosts on the Livewire members' wellbeing, analysis of the transcripts and the online discussion highlighted many examples where chat hosts empathically and positively responded to members' inquiries and concerns, and the members' responses to the chat hosts strongly suggested that Livewire members benefitted from the exchanges. In saying this, it is vital to understand that Livewire chat is not focused only – or even primarily – on providing members with a space to work through their experiences of living with a chronic illness or disability, even though the subject of members' conditions and how they manage them inevitably arises within the chat space.

Nonetheless, the intimate modes of sharing that online moderators facilitate in the chat rooms raise the issue of potential rumination and contagion, particularly around eating disorder behaviours, self-harm and suicidal ideation (Dunlop, More and Romer, 2011; Richardson, Surmitis and Hyldahl, 2012; Ransom, La Guardia, Woody & Boyd, 2010), as well as the risk that members are exposed to developmentally inappropriate concepts and information. Livewire minimises the possibility of rumination and contagion via a strict protocol that determines how chat hosts handle situations in which this is a possibility.

Further, Livewire splits members' participation in chat into age groups and skills chat hosts in how to manage age-appropriate communication around sensitive content in order to ensure that chat remains developmentally suitable.

CHAT HOSTS ADAPT THEIR COMMUNICATION STYLE AND CONTENT TO ACCOMMODATE THE NEEDS OF MEMBERS

Livewire chat hosts are required to converse about a wide range of topics. During online chat sessions, discussions tend to revolve around participants:

- Interests (i.e. music, media consumption habits, pets, sports, favourite foods);
- Emotional wellbeing and support (i.e. how they are feeling, mood, loss/grief/bereavement, displays of empathy for others);
- Family and social networks;
- Personal identity (i.e. presenting an alternative persona to the outside world);
- Personal demographics (i.e. age, gender); and
- Experiences with school, work or post secondary education.

In some cases, members talked about their experiences with their particular illnesses, and the range of personal issues and challenges this brings. In addition, members discussed topics specific to the Livewire community, such as updates on Livewire members, birthday celebrations, clarification of information shared by members, and matters relating to the functionality of the Livewire community.

The chat hosts' ability to intuitively and successfully engage and maintain online conversations within the Livewire community was enhanced by their familiarity with relevant popular cultural texts and trends. A number of the chat hosts talked about how they stay in touch with youth culture by following up references online or via other mainstream media such as television or magazines.

Youth cultures typically develop and grow around particular popular cultural interests and passions, and popular music in particular is an interest with the power to unite young people (Moore, 2010; Savage, 2008). Online chat transcripts and the feedback from chat hosts indicated that discussing popular culture within the Livewire community provided opportunities for chat hosts to develop rapport with Livewire members, including those members whose preferences differed from the majority. Chat hosts do not need to be experts in all of the topics that they discuss. Rather, they need to have a broad awareness of current trends in popular culture and to know just enough detail to seed a conversation:

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> [You need to be familiar with] a broad range of pop culture... to know just enough to start off a conversation – like have you seen the latest Harry Potter movie? And then we all start.

Chat hosts sometimes find themselves in conversations that expose the limitations of their popular cultural literacy. Chat hosts emphasised that it is important to be able to acknowledge when they had reached the limits of their knowledge. As one chat host illustrated, these situations are often used as a way to engage members further as it gives them an opportunity to assume the role of 'expert' and share their knowledge and expertise with the chat host and others:

> You have to have a willingness to admit that I have no idea what that band is, or if it is a band or a person, or if it is a flavour of bubblegum – I have no idea what you are talking about can you guys explain it to me? And they are like 'Oh geeze, well...'

These moments are also often a source of humour. Chat hosts can make fun of themselves and members join in with gentle teasing.

The pace of the conversation in the chat forums varies greatly but it often moves quite fast. At these times, the screen can scroll quickly as new comments are added at the bottom of the screen and older comments disappear from the top of the screen. The speed is particularly fast when there are lots of members online at the same time and they are excitedly commenting on a conversation or participating in a game. The speed of the conversation demands that chat hosts cultivate their capacity to think and act quickly when situations that require their intervention arise:

> You have to be able to think quickly on your feet if something is going wrong or if you need to think of something else to entertain them.

When the conversation is moving fast, chat hosts need to remain attentive to the needs of members who are not able to respond as quickly as others due to physical, cognitive (i.e. Asperger's) or technological limitations. In these instances, chat hosts deploy a variety of strategies. Sometimes they will pull these members into the conversation by directing simple questions that require quick answers at them:

> Some of the kids may feel a bit left out, not as adept at managing the online communication – and a chat host can become involved and ensure that they are part of the conversation by asking simple questions that only need quick responses.

Chat hosts sometimes alleviate the pressure of quick response by initiating a separate 'whisper' conversation (a private conversation thread between two people that is monitored by the chat host) with a member who is having trouble keeping up with the main conversation. This allows those for whom the fast pace poses a challenge to take their time to respond whilst feeling included and remaining engaged with the chat session. At other times, the chat host will step in and slow the whole conversation down a bit using strategies such as turn-taking:

> If things are a getting a little crazy, I bring a bit more structure to the conversation like turn-taking. It can be about silly stuff like 'what is your favourite food?' It grounds members and pulls members into the centre where the conversation is. It is also great for the kids who might be struggling a bit keeping up or responding – it gives them a chance to say something because often the responses needed are short.

In moments when conversations slow down significantly, chat hosts draw upon their own interests and knowledge to instigate conversations and maintain members' engagement:

> Some of the hosts play games, some are movie watchers, some of them are music fans – whatever is something to connect and get the conversation rolling.

Chat hosts are generally highly attuned to members' emotional states and, when necessary, work hard to respond in a supportive manner. If a member indicates they are feeling down or distressed, chat hosts often invite them to talk about what is going on. However, chat hosts balance the need for members to talk through difficulties with other strategies that are designed to lift members' spirits and distract them from their problems. One strategy that appears to be particularly effective with younger members entails imaginative play. Taking a lead from members, chat hosts will take them on some kind of make believe adventure together. For example:

> One of the kids was saying that they couldn't go anywhere and they were stuck in the hospital and it was summer holidays and we said 'Alright.' So we set up we are going to fly to America – 'So who is going to be the pilot?' And we did this whole imaginary virtual holiday where we ended up crash-landing into a pile of jelly and we had a virtual birthday party. It is just amazing when they all get involved in the one

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> thing – especially the make-believe ones – it is more members than us that starts it and then suddenly the whole room is involved and everyone is in a great mood and it is just ridiculously silly and everyone just gets to escape from their lives for a bit and, um, I think that is the best thing about the site.

As the chat host identifies, this strategy is very effective in involving and engaging the whole group. The chat host facilitates such adventures by taking cues from members and helping them weave together a narrative. Members and chat hosts report that these moments are highly enjoyable.

CHAT HOSTS WORK HARD TO BUILD RAPPORT WITH AND AMONG LIVEWIRE MEMBERS

As already noted, chat hosts play a crucial role in keeping the online community functional, vibrant, positive, valuable and rewarding for members. Examples abound of supportive interchanges between the chat hosts and members, highlighting the important role chat hosts play in building rapport amongst the members. This rapport is vital to ensuring the online safety and emotional security of members of the Livewire community, and essential to members' capacity to participate meaningfully.

In addition to being conversant in a range of topics and having a strong engagement with, or a willingness to learn about, popular cultural forms that young people like, Livewire chat hosts used a range of techniques for engaging with, and building rapport among, the Livewire community. These included:

- Using youth-centred language in their interactions (i.e. language which is clear, positive, and utilises current trends in internet discourse);
- Deploying well-developed reflective listening skills;
- Encouraging members to discuss their interests and experiences;
- Asking questions to facilitate discussion and shape discussion threads;
- Posing fun challenges or instigating games with the membership; and
- Engaging in humour.

For the chat hosts, the most significant of these techniques was non-judgmental reflective listening – where the chat hosts' focus exclusively on the content and feelings of members' communication, clarifying and empathically acknowledging the thoughts and feelings shared by members. Two different chat hosts described this in almost identical terms:

> I think you have to be a really good listener and not try too hard to solve their problems for them… [You have] to listen and be there for them to talk to. And offer – not advice – but help them find how they should deal with things in their life.

> Chat hosts can provide an ear for them to like kind of blurt out stuff – without us… passing any kind of judgment… Or… what I do the most, you know is kind of put it back onto them. What is it that they think they should do [to solve their problem].

Here, chat hosts emphasise the importance of not judging or giving advice, but instead guiding members through a decision-making process in a way that validates individual members and their experiences and best positions them to take positive action. Chat hosts talked about how it was important to help members come to a place of acceptance about their situation in order to assist them to find ways of better dealing with it. This meant avoiding the temptation to assure members that everything would be alright:

> I think the first thing I try to do is emphasise that it must be really hard to go through what you have been going through – sort of just agree with them to start with. So I don't try to say, I never say 'it is going to be okay' – just sort of agree with them and talk through it and compliment them on the way they are handling it and are doing it.

Chat hosts emphasised that this process takes time, patience, empathy and careful management. In building rapport, they take a keen interest in and encourage conversation about Livewire members' lives and interests, including jobs, school assignments and especially popular culture, such as favourite music acts and TV shows. Chat hosts ask lots of questions to keep discussion moving, signal their interest and validate member contributions.

Members often reciprocate by asking a lot of questions of chat hosts. Chat hosts' personal disclosures are an important mechanism for building rapport amongst the community. Personal disclosure here refers to the exchange of personal views and experiences as appropriate to the context of the conversation underway with members. As we detail below, these disclosures relate primarily to everyday activities and likes and dislikes. [NB:

Strict protocols guide the ways chat hosts deal with (potential) personal disclosures pertaining to serious health and/or emotional issues such as suicidal ideation, self-harm, sexual violence, bullying and so on – see Finding 6 below]. Livewire's rules pertaining to participation in chat sessions prevent members and chat hosts exchanging information – such as their full name, street address or suburb, email address, Facebook account, and so on – that would enable another member to identify and contact them outside the Livewire online community (see Appendix 2 for the Livewire rules). This is an important element of Livewire's capacity to guarantee the safe participation of its members.

When it comes to chat hosts' personal disclosures, these reflect and reinforce the community's rules. In line with the reflective listening principles that underpin their work, chat hosts use personal disclosures to create points of connection with members, express empathy, and build a sense of community. Chat hosts are guided by a principle of minimal disclosure; namely that they disclose just enough about themselves in order to create a sense of empathy and support between themselves and members. This principle helps to ensure that chat hosts never dominate the conversation but, rather, encourage the fullest possible participation and engagement by members. As a result, members feel like they get to know chat hosts as they do other members of the community, and this aids in building trust:

> So you have to share enough – to say I am sharing too so you can trust me, and so you have to be part of it because if you are completely separate it is just they are not going to come to you if they need something – kids sort of are not going to give that information to the very generic person on the end of the computer.

Personal disclosures used to build rapport with Livewire members relate to a wide range of topics[5] including:

- State of residence
- Musical tastes
- Movies and television
- Food
- Gaming
- Dreams
- Personal Traits
- Pets
- Recreational activities
- Holidays
- Health
- Family
- Emotional states
- University experiences

However, chat hosts' personal disclosures most frequently focus on media, music and food preferences. Chat hosts share their tastes in music, games and television with the members:

> It wasn't bad, better than X3 but that's not hard lol. The foo fighters… gomez… big day out… angus and julia stone.

They talk about recent concerts they had been to and what they enjoyed about them:

> I loved the theme last night and the fountains were cool.

And they discuss their favourites using inclusive and age-appropriate language:

> Oh really… I loved that show jag; I did see that chooka guy though…Lol – he was pretty good.

They also use personal disclosure to establish common desires or experiences:

> I'm the same, I ge[t] the craving to watch a specific movie or show.

OBS (ONLY BOY SYNDROME) GENDER IN THE LIVEWIRE COMMUNITY

The transcripts showed variations between the male and female hosts' styles of communication, including their levels of self-disclosure and the tendency for female hosts to defer to male hosts when it comes to 'classically masculine' topics such as sports and cars. On the part of the Livewire members, the under-representation of males led to in-house jokes about 'OBS' (only boy syndrome) where there was only one male (member or host) in the discussion thread. Responses by under-represented males to conversations that were being (in their terms) dominated by female-centric discussions included attempts to interject male perspectives into the thread. For example, one male member posted AC/DC song lyrics into an extended thread discussing Kylie Minogue. These kinds of interactions are enjoyable for members and give them the opportunity to play with gender identities. The gendering of expertise implicit here also highlights the need for Livewire to be mindful that there is a gender balance in their staffing of the chat rooms.

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[5] Personal information provided by the chat hosts is listed under a series of topic categories in Appendix 7.

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And chat hosts used personal disclosures to demonstrate empathy and understanding of Livewire members' experiences:

> i see… my dad and brother used to gang up on me… but it doesnt happen anymore… and if it does i know to ignore them and just leave the situation.

Online chat transcripts indicated that chat hosts skilfully negotiate the issue of personal disclosures. Operating according to the principle of minimal disclosure noted above, chat hosts reveal information appropriate to the immediate context of the conversation and, in doing so, they model the community's standards for members.

CHAT HOSTS BALANCE BEING A FRIEND WITH BEING A LEADER

Chat hosts balance the need to take leadership at certain moments with the need to listen reflectively, allow members to express themselves, and be a friendly presence in the chat room. Part of the training chat hosts receive is precisely around how to manage these tensions between the personal and professional dimensions of their role (see the excerpt from the training manual in Table 1). This is further supported by ongoing peer mentoring.

Whilst members frequently count chat hosts among the friendships they form online, chat hosts maintain clear boundaries between their professional roles and their connections with the young people in the space. As one chat host expressed it:

> I think all the kids are aware that we are moderators. They… respect us in a way that they know that we are overseeing what's going on and if anything negative happens that we are there to sort of rectify the problem. But they also see us as friends as well.

Indeed, the fact that members understand the dual role of the chat hosts is evidenced by the fact that, sometimes, when a chat host reminds a member of the community rules (see Appendix 2) or takes other action to curb inappropriate exchanges, the member may initially get angry with the chat host, only to return to the space later and engage in a friendly manner with the chat host and community members, indicating the member understands the chat host's actions as a necessary part of their leadership role that need not disrupt the positive relationship they have with the chat host or other members.

The chat hosts' ability to combine their position as an 'expert' and 'leader' with personal, intuitive engagement with Livewire participants supported the process of building rapport in the community. Livewire members responded positively to chat hosts who were engaging, empathic, and personable, while being reliable, professional and showing leadership. 'Getting the balance right' between being a dependable, mature professional, and an open, engaging, charismatic personality was a core goal of the chat hosts interviewed:

> I think you have to be really open to their world. Obviously you have to be really compassionate as well – to their situation because they come in so often with so many different kinds of problems and issues so you really have to be compassionate and open and really willing and kind of listen and take the right steps – but you also need to be kind of firm at times to kind of, you know, stop different situations or direct it [an]other way or to [remind] people [about the rules] as well.

On the one hand, chat hosts understood their role as one of being an 'adult' confidante, in a way that differed from the role played by other adults (such as parents, teachers, or hospital staff) in the lives of the Livewire members. Chat hosts' position outside members' familial and formal medical care networks meant that members could confide in them without fear of repercussions. Chat hosts were very clear about the fact that they were not there to solve members' problems for them. Rather, they understood their primary role as one of listening carefully and giving members a space to explore ways to deal with the challenges they were facing. As one chat host reported:

> It is not a counselling role but it is an adult presence that they can talk to about anything without a lot of judgement – where they can vent about their family and their home life and their frustration without upsetting the balance at home.

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What does it take to be a successful online chat host?

Our analysis shows that successful online chat hosts have the following characteristics:

Passion*

High degree of enthusiasm, energy and commitment, responsive to the needs of the program and its participants, flexible and creative.

Charisma*

Inspire, enthuse and build esteem, project confidence and authenticity, focused, strong communication skills, holds the interest of members, unique personality.

Integrity*

Honest and credible/genuine 'what you see is what you get', follow through on commitments, transparent and open, solution orientated, trustworthiness, available.

Respectful*

Non-judgmental, support members' sense of worth, inclusive, non-patronising, listen with positive regard for members' strengths and ability, patient, tolerant, responsive.

Empathic*

Understanding of and identification with participants' thoughts, emotions and experiences.

Strong sense of self*

Insightful / capacity to put things into perspective, competent, not easily deterred or upset by participants' challenging or negative behaviour, resilient, calm.

Fun/joyful*

Warm, non-threatening, joyful, strong sense of fun, capacity to positively influence the mood of participants, willingness to be silly, positive, entertaining, humorous.

Creative*

Independent, self-assured, intuitive and divergent thinking (flexible and original ideas, the ability to think of many ideas rapidly), hold specialist skills, i.e. journalist.

Professional*

Congenial, displaying expertise, maintain a professional distance, good boundaries.

Mentoring

Big sister / big brother / super friend / buddy, provide a mature presence in the room, tactful, subtle, engaged, responsive, display common sense, committed.

Leadership

Ensures safety of members, diplomatic, credible, no alliances, creates a cohesive environment, motivates, takes charge, actions things quickly, thinks quickly on feet, responsive to dynamics of the group.

Knowledgeable

Maturity / life experience; subjects of interest, advice, skills to accommodate different cognitive and developmental needs.

* Characteristics and attributes of Livewire in in-hospital facilitators identified in previous research.[6]

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[6] The characteristics of successful chat hosts generated by this study correlate strongly with those identified by a previous study that documented the attributes of Livewire in-hospital facilitators (staff overseeing the Starlight Children's Foundation's Western Australian-based in-hospital arts program for adolescents). This suggests that facilitators who exhibit these characteristics are best suited to supporting young people living with chronic illness or disability.

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As this chat host acknowledges, chat hosts are not counsellors. Nonetheless, the role embeds a number of classic counselling strategies including establishing rapport, use of appropriate and effective questions (i.e. open-ended questions), active listening, showing attention and interest, paraphrasing and reflecting, acknowledging the uniqueness of members' experiences, limiting their own self-disclosure, and engaging empathy (Nelson-Jones, 2008). In taking leadership, chat hosts were careful to allow members the space to go through a process of coming to terms with the issues they were facing in order to foster members' skills in navigating everyday situations autonomously:

> It is sort of like facilitating in a drama room you know. Like you have got all these different feelings, all these different emotions... it is like you are going into a process drama. You have to try and lead it in the right direction but, you know, let them experience what they need to experience.

Chat hosts noted that the process of making judgments about how to best guide members to tackle difficult issues is 'intuitive' and a matter of 'feeling your way'; a skill they have acquired in their training (the Livewire training program as well as any prior training) and their experience working with young people. Chat hosts also noted that having a deep understanding of the organisation's values, as well as being able to refer to Livewire protocols for dealing with challenging situations (See Appendix 3), helped guide them to 'feel their way' through supporting a young person to navigate issues they are confronting.

Whilst they saw their role as one of adult confidante, chat hosts also emphasised that their role requires a kind of performance of the norms of friendship. This included being able to joke with members in a light-hearted manner in order to connect with members. This frequently involved acts of self-deprecating humour:

> I think you need to be silly as well. I think you need to be able to make fun of yourself because half the time that is what the kids love.

Chat hosts thus carefully and skilfully negotiate the tensions between being simultaneously a mature and reliable leader and a familiar and funny 'friend'. They recognised they play various roles in the chat spaces, and appeared to be comfortable and adept in doing so:

> You have to be a friend but you also have to be able to remove yourself a bit. You can't get too close to situations, you have to be able to step back.

In addition to the training they receive, the chat hosts' success in negotiating the boundaries of their roles with members is testament to their high levels of motivation for their job and their affection for the members. One chat host stated:

> I feel so lucky that I am that close I am able to be that person and be there with them and be those people who can be their friend, you know, offer them some kind of rapport.

Maintaining clear expectations with members about the boundaries between chat hosts' various roles is an ongoing process. Chat hosts send members frequent and subtle reminders about the dual roles they play in the chat forums. Chat hosts reported that training provided by Starlight in techniques for maintaining personal boundaries (for example, the module on 'Engaging with Adolescents: Managing professional boundaries' – see Table 1) enhanced their capacity to simultaneously perform as a friend to members and a reliable and effective leader.

CHAT HOSTS HAVE DEVELOPED STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH A RANGE OF CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Occasionally, online chat forums wander into 'difficult territory'. This might entail one or more members behaving inappropriately towards others:

> They have typical teenaged issues. Sometimes they pick fights with each other so it's important that someone is there to monitor that behaviour.

And sometimes the situations that arise are more complex and involve the community finding ways to deal with traumatic content, such as the death of a member or a member expressing suicidal thoughts. At these times, a chat host's role is particularly crucial, and a chat host must draw on their entire toolkit of resources and training to handle a situation effectively.

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Livewire has clear protocols that guide how chat hosts deal with difficult situations that have potentially life threatening or serious repercussions – such as a member expressing suicidal thoughts. These protocols provide sample text chat hosts can use to respond in these situations. They also specify pathways of care (See Appendix 3 for sample protocols dealing with self-harm, eating disorders, anxiety and depression). When other kinds of difficulties arise in discussion threads, chat hosts use a combination of informal tactics and formal censures. Informal tactics include 'soft' interventions like changing the topic, giving members private warnings via a 'whisper', or ignoring a post. In some circumstances, chat hosts take disciplinary action, which can culminate in members being barred from the forum for a period of time. Chat hosts emphasised in interviews that they only use disciplinary actions as a 'last resort.'

The chat hosts' preferred choice of action for managing inappropriate exchanges or commentary within the online community is the 'whisper'. For example, one chat host explained how, when an older member began to overstep boundaries in a conversation about alcohol consumption with younger members, she used a 'whisper' to intervene:

> I just whispered to the kid, 'you know it's cool that you are talking about that but we have to be careful there are a lot of younger kids in the room. Why don't we change the subject?' And the kids are always, 'Oh yeah, cool, that's fine. Sorry about that.'

Chat hosts have a very strong sense of duty of care towards members, and they will step in and assume responsibility for protecting members if a conversation is becoming a bit intense or intrusive. When they do so, chat hosts avoid a disciplinary tone and, instead, appeal to members' sense of community and encourage them to look after one another. For example, one chat host intervened in a 'whispered' conversation between two members when one started asking about the other's illness:

> Hey XXXX, maybe go easy on XXXX? I know you are just trying to be friendly, but it might be a bit intense for her… :) otherwise you are helping with a great chat.

Chat hosts actively cultivate strong community values about appropriate ways to communicate with others, and set standards about the kind of content it is appropriate to exchange. They do this by setting an example via their own interactions, reminding members about community rules when necessary, and talking to members privately about issues that cannot be expressed to the wider group (because they are developmentally inappropriate and/or because the member's issue requires privacy in order to be handled sensitively). Chat hosts are guided by a set of protocols and standards that guide topics which can discussed in the chat rooms and the manner in which the information can shared (i.e. topics revealing illegal behaviour are discouraged, active listening encouraged) (See Appendix 3).

Occasionally a member will contribute to the chat in a way that signals they need professional support. This is potentially confronting or distressing for other members. One chat host recounted that this can be very challenging to manage:

> There was one member we had that was going through a lot of mental health issues – having a pretty hard time, and quite often would bring up some full on things in chat – talking about overdosing and getting really drunk and having to be taken to hospital. I found that quite a bit challenging.

Again, the whisper is a useful strategy when these situations arise:

> If the conversation becomes inappropriate and I think that member really needs to talk about it I will just take that conversation into a whisper or into private room between me and that person and I might say to them "Oh I think this is worrying some members a little bit – why don't we have chat about it?" And keep a positive conversation going in the main room at the same time talking to the other member about whatever they are going through.

Chat hosts generally felt they were well equipped to identify when members required additional emotional and/or professional support, although a couple noted that they would like further training (see section on 'Training' below). They were particularly attuned to the issue of mental health and suicidal ideation:

> There have been times when kids talk about suicide for example and we can pick up on that and help them. It's important that someone picks up on mental health issues.

It is crucial that Livewire members have a space to work through and emotionally adapt to their circumstances so that the difficulties they experience don't manifest as long term mental health issues. However, given the comorbidity of mental illness and chronic illness and/or disability is common, it is also vital that chat hosts pick up

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on the signs of mental illness and support the relevant members. Chat hosts reported that, in the overwhelming majority of instances, clear protocols and pathways to care enabled them to point members to relevant resources and support structures, such as helplines. They also felt they were well supported in their role by other members of the organisation, such as the program manager, who would follow up on members' wellbeing outside the space of the chat room when necessary:

> We have been given really great strategies on how to deal with different kinds of things – like if someone is talking about suicide or something like that we know we can speak to them and say – 'Okay have you spoken to your parents? Have you rung these hotlines?' You know, and obviously if it continues then we can call [the program manager] and she will call their parents straight away – it's really good – it is really kind of fool-proof, in terms of there is a set way of doing it and is really nice that [chat hosts] have that support as well.

The specialist skills and valued experience of the chat hosts become more important in situations of high stress for the community, such as when a member's health deteriorates or when there is a death. At these times, even though chat hosts must come to terms with their own experiences of grief (see below – Finding 7), they are nonetheless are a valuable source of support and guidance for members, facilitating communal forms of grieving that appear to help members come to terms with the loss of a friend:

> One girl who had a really strong presence in the chat room died and we had to break the news to the kids… We had a memorial session in the chat room to do something positive for the kids. We wrote lyrics to her favourite piece of piano music and posted it to the site. It was really important to do that. And she loved bright colours so we all agreed to wear really bright things even though we couldn't see each other.

The example above illustrates the powerful forms of co-presence or 'being with' (Zhao and Elesh, 2008) that are sometimes facilitated amongst this community of people, who have never met face-to-face. Sometimes members need to take time out from the community in order to deal with a death:

> Most of the kids were okay. But there were a couple that disappeared for a while until they got themselves together because it affected them. But, you know, they came back. They just needed a week away from talking about it especially when a whole lot of people were getting told the first time and they didn't want to be going through that again.

Reflecting the strength of the ties that form in this online community, the process of coming to terms with a members' death takes a long time. When the death of a member comes up in conversation, chat hosts try to keep the tone of the discussion positive and focus on helping members to remember their friend in ways that emphasise resilience:

> She was one of the regulars in there and so it still comes up and we talk about her in a really positive way – you know, what a fighter she was and all that sort of thing.

Nonetheless, when a community member dies, it can cause other members to confront some difficult questions, particularly around their own mortality:

> I think it made some people question their mortality – the kids – I think it is always in the back of their minds, especially if they sort of haven't been given long or if there is no cure or whatever.

At such times, the chat hosts' guidance is crucial to members. However, they don't bear the burden of managing these big issues on their own. Chat hosts reported that Livewire provides an excellent level of support at these times, which includes bringing in external counsellors to work with chat hosts either collectively or individually. Where appropriate, chat hosts use chat sessions to talk with members about such issues. If required, Starlight will refer a member to other services (i.e. Lifeline, Kids Helpline) or contact a member's parents to work with them to get the support that is needed for their child.

Chat hosts emphasised that remaining attuned to and managing difficult situations effectively required them to listen attentively, be alert to the signs that situations might escalate, and to respond quickly. They underlined that managing difficult behaviour requires compassion, empathy and patience. As such, rather than judging difficult behaviour, chat hosts seek first to identify why the behaviour is happening so that they can contextualise and best address it:

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> You have to be compassionate about why she (member) was actually doing it. I was really really confused [by her behaviour] but I thought there must be some kind of reason why she was doing it.

This culture of approaching inappropriate behaviour with compassion extends to the members. Chat hosts and members both noted that members generally feel free to report to chat hosts when they are feeling upset by or concerned about someone else's behaviour. This is because reporting is coded as a caring gesture within the community:

> There is not the perception of 'dibber-dobber' – there is no stigma about how you feel. If a member comes to me and says something about how someone else has been behaving inappropriately or that they don't like what someone has said to them or to someone else, or they are concerned for a member, the group sees that member as someone who is caring. It is a much more cohesive group than you would find in real life.

Overall, chat hosts use tricky situations to model appropriate ways of interacting for members. In doing so, they open up opportunities for members to learn how to handle difficult issues and to act with compassion and care for others. These are vital skills for members to develop, not only so they can be more resilient but also so that others can benefit from interactions with them. By all reports, members greatly value the safety and emotional security chat hosts foster.

CHAT HOSTS GAIN A RANGE OF PERSONAL BENEFITS FROM THEIR WORK

In interviews, chat hosts were very frank about the fact that working with young people with a chronic illness or disability can be very challenging work – both personally and professionally. A number of chat hosts reported feeling upset or distressed at times, particularly when a Livewire member's health deteriorates or there is a death of a community member. However, analysis of the data suggests that chat hosts tend to be very resilient and had developed strategies for maintaining their own wellbeing. Many took real comfort from the fact that they were making meaningful contributions to members' everyday lives:

> I wouldn't even try to imagine what some of these kids go through – I get upset about it quite often actually when I sort of look back and think about some of the kids we talk to and what they are going through. But I think it is invaluable to them to have someone neutral who is not judging them that they can talk to about anything.

> I have moments [where I get very upset by the things the members are going through] but I think I compartmentalise it a little bit… I try to concentrate on the positive impact I am having on them rather than feeling sad. I concentrate on how I am going to change their lives by being a positive person in the room. I try not to get down about it. I think I succeed at that.

Other chat hosts had developed very pragmatic strategies for managing their distress and, in particular, dealing with grief:

> I make sure I do a lot of exercise – yeah – just work it off – particularly before a shift I get outside and go for a run.

However, it appears that the biggest boost to chat hosts' resilience comes from participating in the chat sessions:

> It makes me feel so good when the kids are excited to see me when I come into the room. And when you haven't been in for a week or so and they are asking where you were – [and saying] that they have missed you over that week – moments like that make you feel like you mean something to them – that you are making a difference in their lives.

During the course of the interviews, the research team asked chat hosts to what extent their role with Livewire had impacted them personally. Whilst chat hosts acknowledged the work was challenging, they struggled to identify experiences in which their hosting duties had impacted negatively on their lives. Rather, chat hosts spoke in glowing terms about how hosting had enhanced their everyday lives and their wellbeing, and contributed to their personal growth.

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Several of the chat hosts noted an immediate improvement in their mood upon participating in the chat room. Others commented on the longer-term benefits of being in the role and witnessing, and contributing to, the lives of members. They majority noted that chat hosting helped them put their own lives in perspective. For example:

> It makes you more grateful for the little things in life. Like today, I might have had a bit of a shitty day, but it doesn't compare to some of the things that other people are going through.

> They take you out of yourself and they take you out of what is going on. If you are talking to a kid who is in hospital who is excited because she is talking to her best friend on the phone, or something like that, it just makes everything else pale in comparison.

They highlighted that they have a greater appreciation of their own health, and the importance of their families and friends. And they spoke of feeling deeply inspired by the way Livewire members live their lives:

> Hearing and seeing the stuff they go through – I'm inspired by each and every member that comes into the room. I'm inspired by the way in which they conduct their life, because I know if I was in the same position I probably wouldn't handle it as well as they have.

It is worth noting here that chat hosts are employed on part-time casual contracts with Livewire. This means that they are often juggling multiple jobs or combining part-time work with study, which can be challenging for them. However, as one participant noted, the demands and stresses they face quickly fade once they are in the chat room and talking with members:

> When I first started I would come home from work from my other job and I would think 'Oh my god why am I doing this to myself? I've got an hour between coming home from one job and starting the next but within five minutes of being in the room you are just uplifted and you just don't think about it because you engage with the kids so much and you just forget about the rest of your crappy day.

Chat hosts reported that their work brings a high level of enjoyment and job satisfaction. One participant summed it up succinctly when she said simply:

> It is the most satisfying job in the world.

CHAT HOSTS BELIEVE THEY WOULD BENEFIT FROM FURTHER TRAINING

Chat hosts spoke in very positive terms about the training they receive at induction, and the mechanisms of support in place for fostering their ongoing professional development. Nonetheless – and this is perhaps a marker of chat hosts' general enthusiasm for their roles – when asked if they would like further training and/or professional development, chat hosts expressed a desire for further knowledge about and techniques for responding to members' health-related concerns. Chat hosts are often privy to conversations in which, for example, members express anxiety about undertaking particular forms of surgery or frustration with the medical system. Chat hosts feel they would be better equipped to respond in such circumstances if they had more knowledge about specific illnesses and associated medical procedures and treatments.

> I think maybe [we should have] more training on specific conditions that the children have. We talk a lot to them about the medical processes they are going through because they like to chat about their surgeries and when they are going into hospital and so I have actually learnt quite a lot about the medical system and the different surgeries they have for the different conditions. But I would like a bit more training about the illnesses and the processes in the hospital so I have a bit more understanding.

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Case Study

NAVIGATING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

During the course of this study, Livewire and Starbright World (an online community for adolescents with serious ilnnesses aged 13-20 years run by the Starlight Children's Foundation in the United States) merged chat facilities, games, and the tool 'find a friend' to create a shared chat community. The chat hosts noted that the merger initially posed some difficulties for them as they adapted to the integrated online environment, but they reported that they were able to settle quickly into their roles as chat hosts overseeing an online community with international members. The internationalisation of the chat hosts' role required some changes to the way in which the chat hosts communicated with members. This included an avoidance of subjects where a lawful requirement of an activity, such as the legal consumption of alcohol (i.e. 18 years of age in Australia, 21 years of age in the US) varied between the countries. On the other hand, the merger also provided opportunities for chat hosts and members to learn more about each other's cultures, which included how illness is constructed and managed within their respective countries. The findings of this study suggest that chat hosts are able to work cross-culturally and learn and adapt to different cultural environments.

In interviews, the chat hosts noted there were tendencies for the Australian and North American/Canadian groups to initially prefer to converse with their own national groups:

> Yeah, at first I noticed that there would be two separate conversations going in the room. One with the Americans and one with the Australians and I was constantly trying to link it together by asking Americans questions about Australians and sort of trying to get both countries interacting. It seems to have settled down.

> I think initially at least, well, I was over excited – 'oh wow what time is it over there and what are you doing for Halloween?' It has been a big learning curve [...]. They tend to still keep into their little group a little bit, because it is safer for them to just talk to the people they know. So sometimes there would be two separate conversations going but, um, when we are really enthusiastic about learning about these new people I think it helps the others and they have found other kids with their condition but their treatment is different or their hospital system is different. So they are learning about each other a lot more.

But the experience has generally turned out to be a positive opportunity to learn about a different culture:

> They are still getting excited about finding out about each other's lives – how the States are different from Australia. I think they have, especially the Australians, been really surprised finding out about the US's health system. Like, for example, in Australia if you have a chronic illness and it flares up and you can't control the symptoms, then you go to emergency. In the States that need not be the case. Like in Starbright World there was this girl who was saying that her family wouldn't do that – that there had been a big feud with their insurance providers and so her parents don't take her to emergency. What it means is that there is a lack of consistent care available to many of the kids in Starbright World.

Differences in time zones mean that the Australians are more likely to be awake when the North Americans are asleep and vice versa. This has the effect of making it more difficult for members to talk across national communities and can create a temptation for members to be online late at night when they would otherwise be sleeping, which can have detrimental knock-on effects for a young person's mental health and wellbeing. As the recent Young and Well CRC National Survey reveals, this is a particular issue for those young people who, for one reason or another, are living with high levels of distress (Burns et al, 2013). The potential for this issue to arise has been addressed through the recent decision to separate the Livewire and Starbright chat facilities once more.

One participant suggested that having a better knowledge of medical conditions and their treatments would enhance chat hosts' capacity to empathise with members:

> It would be good to know more so that when a kid is talking about how frustrating it was with that doctor that day, and how scared they are about a particular surgery and about the processes with that hospital, [a chat host's response is] more at their level instead of somebody who is completely healthy trying to guide them through that process and who doesn't actually know what it is like.

Chat hosts noted two areas of knowledge in particular that would enhance their ability to support members. Firstly, chat hosts requested education about eating disorders and training that would enable them to better manage members' exchange of potentially harmful health information:

> I think it is always good to learn more about the different kinds of illnesses or the way that different kids have responded. You know I have struggled in the last year when the kids have been talking about things – lots and lots about anorexia and things that I didn't know how to deal with, that kind of thing.

Secondly, chat hosts noted the prevalence of mental health issues amongst the Livewire membership:

> Any adolescent with a chronic illness will at some point experience mental illness – and they will feel helpless. The level of anxiety disorders in the room is out of control. Whether it is due to personality, or attachment styles, or circumstances that lead them to experiencing trauma, anxiety is evident.

Whilst there are specific protocols in place to guide chat hosts to respond effectively when mental health issues arise in the chat space, chat hosts stated that further mental health training would enhance their capacity to respond compassionately and thereby assist them in achieving better outcomes for members.

These requests for additional formal training notwithstanding, it appears the training Livewire provides prepares chat hosts well for the range of experiences they will encounter in the chat forums. As noted earlier in this report, the training chat hosts undertake before commencing in the chat rooms includes adolescent development; mental health and wellbeing; working with loss, grief and change; management of professional boundaries; the promotion of safe and supportive online behavior; and Livewire program polices. On-the-job training is also provided through participation in 'ghost shifts' where new chat hosts have the opportunity to pair up and learn from experienced hosts. Livewire also provides follow-up training and has a support structure in place for chat hosts, which includes ready access to guidance from the Program Manager (who has a reputation for responding promptly and effectively when chat hosts require extra support), and a private chat host space and process for regular debriefing with other chat hosts via the Livewire website. These mechanisms provide chat hosts with opportunities to share their (positive and negative) experiences, and to peer mentor one another. One chat host explained that these mechanisms for sharing experiences were particularly useful early on:

> I was reading every single thing that got sent out back then – learning as much as I could – being as prepared as I could... And when I asked for feedback some really supportive wonderful chat hosts would post me back and say that they did the same thing or 'do it this way' or whatever.

However, chat hosts also acknowledged that life experience was an important factor impacting their capacity to make a judgment call and respond effectively to members:

> A lot of common sense comes into it. It's definitely a job for more mature people with a bit of life experience.

It also appears that experience gained on-the-job significantly develops a chat host's abilities. Several chat hosts noted that they have grown into their roles over time:

> Emotionally I was really exhausted when I first started because I was learning so much about everybody because it is that initial stage of trying to figure out who is who and what is going on and remembering things [...] and you are adding to your knowledge. And at first I would finish the shift and my brain would be buzzing and it would take a few hours before I could even sleep. But now [...] it is just positive now [...] it was just harder at first. I think, after two years, you have more ownership over your role. You definitely feel more comfortable in the role.

Conclusion

This study sought to better understand the role of chat hosts in an online community for adolescents and young adults with a serious medical condition or disability. This study identified how chat hosts work to project a persona with whom members want to engage; the range of strategies chat hosts deploy to generate and guide online discussions; the challenges they face and the strategies they use to deal with them; and the benefits chat hosts experience in working in a space with chronically ill and disabled young people.

This report found that Livewire chat hosts are highly capable professionals who ensure members' engagements with the online community are fun, safe, and supportive. They expertly balance the tensions between supporting individuals and fostering community cohesion; between supporting members to engage and developing their independence; exercising leadership and being a 'friend' to members; and providing a space in which members feel free to express what they are experiencing whilst maintaining an overall tone that is positive, vibrant and enjoyable for members. In doing so, chat hosts make a very meaningful contribution to the lives of the young people who make up the Livewire community. Whilst they are by no means the only ingredient of the community's success, they are crucial to ensuring that Livewire members remain highly engaged and benefit from being involved.

Recruitment and training is key to ensuring Livewire chat hosts perform to a high standard. The training Livewire provides to chat hosts upon their induction is well-targeted to developing their skills in managing group interactions effectively, identifying and responding to challenging situations, and building members' resilience. Clear protocols and a chat host Wiki ensure Livewire chat hosts have access to targeted resources that enable them to support Livewire members in challenging times and refer them to relevant support services where necessary. Ongoing professional development, peer mentoring and on-the-job experience also play a significant role in developing chat hosts' skills further. Whilst Livewire chat hosts have developed highly effective skills for supporting members to engage in meaningful and enjoyable ways, chat hosts highlighted their need for specialised training to best deal with some of the medical needs of the Livewire membership. Such training would enhance the excellent work they are already doing in the space.

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Appendix 1

LITERATURE REVIEW MATRIX: SUMMARY OF SELECTED RELEVANT COMPARABLE RESEARCH ARTICLES

Author, title, journal	Subject of study	Roles/functions of facilitator	Preparing/Training facilitator	Value of online spaces	Methods of reviewing/evaluating	Notes
Williams, S & Cothrell 2000, 'Four smart ways to run online communities,' *Sloan management review.*	An early study reporting on experiments and developments using four cases studies of online communities considered successful. Includes Kaiser Permanente Online, an online sites providing health information to members.	Clearly distinguishes between roles of experts (physicians who discuss health issues, but due to legal ramifications are unable to provide medical advice) and 'peer moderators' who build communities of support. Provides a set of guidelines for moderation which emphasise the need to prioritise members' needs, refrain from censorship while offering advice and clarifying, and 'keeping the conversation' going.	Claims that prior training and experience in health education and face-to-face group work prepares facilitators for their online roles.	The online groups are seen as a way of 'improving customer satisfaction' and 'drawing them into a virtual community' while presenting the company's 'human side' and 'improving patient outcomes.'	Claims to use customer feedback processes to adapt online spaces to their needs. There is little discussion of methods in this short case study.	
Winograd, D 2003, 'The roles, function and skills of moderators of online educational computer conferences for distance education,' *Distance education: What works well.*	Discusses the role of moderators in asynchronous online educational spaces.	Defines three roles: 1. organisational – ensuring the space works and that participants understand how it works; 2. social – developing and facilitating online relationships so that the space is supportive and beneficial; and 3. intellectual – providing information and promoting the sharing	Notes the importance of 'trained and prepared moderators,' but does not make explicit the type or amount or training or preparation. Implicitly, providing examples of the roles and functions of moderators is suggested as a means of preparation.	Argues the moderator is 'crucial' for the 'success' of an online space, and that online spaces may be poorly constructed and managed, leading to poor online experiences. Value is dependent upon quality of moderation.	Meta-analysis of published research into the roles of moderators, including surveys of moderators and case study analyses.	

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		of information among the group. 'Weaves' discussion lines so that they are coherent and relevant.				
Leung, L 2007, 'Stressful life events, motives for internet use, and social support among digital kids,' *Cyberpsychology & behaviour.r*	Explores the motives for Internet use during times of stress among children (8–18 years) in Hong Kong. Finds the main reasons for Internet use are mood management (seeking entertainment or information) and social compensation (seeking recognition and developing relationships).	No discussion of the role of the facilitator / moderator.	No discussion of the role of the facilitator / moderator.	Suggests that Internet use is an important source of social support and assists in mood management, and that young people actively use the Internet to seek out supportive online spaces, such as blogs and chat rooms.	Based on survey of probability sample of 717 children and adolescents in Hong Kong, based upon adapted versions of previously administered or standardised surveys.	
Hsiung, RC 2007, 'A suicide in an online mental health support group: Reactions of the group members, administrative responses, and recommendations,' *Cyberpsychology & behaviour.*	Examines responses to a suicide in a large, public online mental health support group and reports on the actions of the moderator in managing the response. Author of the report is the moderator in question.	Describes moderators role as 'maintains the supportive milieu.' Notes specific actions in response to member suicide, including cautious consideration of how to report and discuss the suicide, and the eventual initiation of a mourning discussion thread and development of a memorial page.	Not explicitly discussed, but implies the moderator had received training in providing support to mental health groups that addressed suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, and that the project was subject to administrative oversight.	Reports positive engagement online by members after news of a members suicide; warns against generalising based upon this experience but suggests the online space benefits from moderation as well as from strong rapport in the group.	Narrative descriptive report of single case study.	See also Baum, et al (1997) which discusses a suicide in an unmoderated online support group.
Kusumi, T, Ogura, K & A Miura 2008, 'The development of a positive community using virtual space for cancer patients,' *Second international symposium on universal communication.*	Investigates the results of an avatar-based, facilitator-supported online support group for adult (39–69 years old) cancer patients aimed at improving mental health. Suggests online expression of positive emotions increased and negative emotions decreased as time	No discussion of the role of the facilitator / moderator.	No discussion of the preparation of the facilitator / moderator.	Posits the value of online spaces and particularly the advantages of visual means of communication through avatars as providing valuable emotional signals that were missing from text-only-based online communication	Content analysis of online group support sessions, identifying and quantifying expressions of positive and negative emotions.	

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	spent in the group increased.			practices.	
Silva, L, Goel, L & Mousavidin 2008, 'Exploring the dynamics of blog communities: The case of Metafilter,' *Information systems journal.*	Examines a particular community blog, MetaFilter. Findings suggest that cohesion in a community blog is brought about by practices including: (a) explicit ground rules regarding membership, (b) presence of moderators, (c) availability of profile information, (d) 'net etiquette.'	Is less explicit about the role of a facilitator but recommends the establishment of moderators to promote and monitor practices that lead to cohesion. Notes the roles played by 'old timers' in promoting learning and leading community practice.	Discusses experience gained in situ by community members as being of value and as establishing reputation. Does not directly discuss moderators' training or preparation.	Focuses on online communities of practices as places to share information of interest. Reports the value of the information and discussion varies: 'good' posts based upon tacitly shared knowledge about the types of contributions that are valued. Notes the difficulties in making this knowledge explicit.	Uses interpretive analysis of stratified sample of blog archives to identify patterns and mechanisms that related to research interests; includes revision based on participant feedback.	
Lieberman, MA 2008, 'Effects of disease and leader type on moderators in online support groups,' *Computers in human behaviour.*	Examines the effect of (1) illness type and (2) leadership type (peer-led versus professional-led) in online support groups.	Discusses the effects of leadership on positive and negative emotional expression and cognitive mechanisms, such as assimilation and accommodation processes.	Compares the identity and background of the moderator (i.e. professional versus peer) rather than their preparation and training.	Highlights that the effectiveness of online support groups varies, and cautiously suggests that disease types and leadership types may affect this.	Uses computer-based textual analysis to identify emotional state and cognitive mechanisms. Uses multivariate analysis with variables - leadership type and disease - to demonstrate correlations.	Highlights the significance of the type of leader / moderator and the relevance of the characteristics of the online group.
Owen, JE, O'Carroll Bantum, E & Golant, M 2009, *Pyscho-oncology.*	Identifies and discusses differences between the roles of moderators in online versus face-to-face support groups for cancer survivors at The Wellness Community.	Identifies three elements: group processes (such as openness, equality, pacing, and commitment to the group), structural elements of the groups (availability of the discussion board or the transcript, the lack of contact or non-verbal clues, and technical and literacy challenges), and facilitator role (facilitation processes, role certainty, and ethical and professional concerns).	Recommends cross-training of online and face-to-face facilitators, based upon their shared experiences as well as their distinct tasks, challenges and communicative strategies.	Notes enthusiasm for online support groups among the facilitators as well as their limits and raises the need for further examination and perhaps regulation of their use. Suggests online group suffer in comparison with face-to-face groups in areas such as lack of regular member commitment and insufficient group size for discussion.	First, qualitatively reviews transcripts of online facilitator's support group sessions, noting facilitator-reported benefits and deficits of the online support groups. Then surveys facilitators based on the relative strengths and challenged noted in the initial review.	
Cantrell, K et al 2010), 'The role of e-	The role of e-mentors in a purpose-built, closed	Emphasises the building and developing of relationships	Asserts the value for e-mentors of:	Argues the value of the virtual world is	Case study of online discussions and activities of	Uses the term 'e-mentor' to denote the

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mentorship in a virtual world for youth transplant patients, '*Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing.*	online virtual world, 'Camp Zora,' designed for paediatric post-transplant patients.	as prerequisite stages, then outlines four roles: 1. facilitating relationships. 2. encouraging activity. 3. promoting coping. 4. fostering technological development of the online world.	1. expertise in running group interventions 2. experience in online participation 3. experience using online communication tools. Does not make clear what counts as expertise or what amounts to sufficient or appropriate experience.	dependent upon a skilled and dedicated e-mentor; suggests online world is dependent upon 'out-of-world' contact (with participants, parents, teachers and hospital staff) for the purposes of scheduling, reminding and maintaining social relationships.	Camp Zora, noting time spent online, directions of conversations, initiation of discussions and activities, and 'out-of-world' contact.	relationship between older and more knowledgeable leader and younger participants. Roles and functions similar to those of a moderator or facilitator in other studies - ie works with groups in addition to one-to-one support.
O'Grady, I et al 2010, 'Promoting and participating in online health forums: A guide to facilitation and evaluation for health professionals,' *Journal of communication in healthcare.*	The role of facilitators in asynchronous online support groups, in particular, methods of evaluating this role and its outcomes.	Emphasises the promotion and maintenance of participation through encouragement and moderation of online posts.	Underlines the importance of skilful facilitation and notes that different online communities require different forms of facilitator (professional expert or lay person, for example). Discusses some useful facilitation techniques such as acknowledgement, appreciation, validation.	Notes proliferation of and challenges of online communication, is neutral on its value noting the diversity of circumstances in which it occurs and the need therefore for evaluation of its processes and impacts.	Discusses a range of methods available and suggests a mixed methodological approach including measuring metrics (time spent online, number of posts), content analysis of posts and interviews with participants. Provides few details on this.	
Bonetti, L. Campbell, MA & Gilmore, L 2010, 'The relationship of loneliness and social anxiety with children's and adolescents' online communication,' *Cyberpsychology, behaviour and social networking.*	Investigates differences in usage of online communication patterns between children and adolescents with and without self-reported loneliness and social anxiety. Finds children and adolescents who self-reported being lonely communicated online significantly more frequently about personal and intimate topics than did those who did not self-report being lonely.	No discussion of the role of the facilitator / moderator.	No discussion of the preparation of the facilitator / moderator.	Suggests children and adolescents with increased loneliness and social anxiety use online communication significantly more frequently to compensate for their weaker social skills to meet new people. Results suggest that Internet usage allows them to fulfil critical needs of social interactions, self-disclosure, and identity exploration.	Uses shortened versions of standardised surveys using scales of loneliness and anxiety.	See also Boyd, D (2007, 2008).

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Stewart, M et al 2011, 'An online support intervention: Perceptions of adolescents with physical disabilities,' *Journal of adolescence.*	Report on a six month online support 'intervention' for a group of 22 adolescents and 5 'mentors' with spina bifida or cerebral palsy.	No discussion of the role of the facilitator / 'mentor.'	No discussion of the preparation of the facilitator / 'mentor'. Notes that the mentors have the same conditions as the group members.	Concludes that the online intervention positively addressed concerns such as loneliness, lack of social acceptance and confidence.	Combination of qualitative survey of standardised psycho-social measures with semi-structured interviews examining the perceived impacts of the intervention.	Detailed quantitative reporting of member's perceptions of the value of the intervention, provides a template for comparable future evaluations.

See also Nicholas, et al (2009) for a similar report, one which notes the absence of and need for skilled group support by a trained moderator. |
| **Baker, R.K & White, KM 2011, 'In their own words: Why teenagers don't use social network sites,'** *Cyberpsychology, behaviour and social networking.* | Surveys Australian teenagers (Years 9 and 10) who prefer not to use social network sites. The primary reasons nominated were: lack of motivation, poor use of time, preference for other forms of communication preference for engaging in other activities, cybersafety concerns, and a dislike of self-presentation online. | No discussion of the role of the facilitator / moderator. | No discussion of the role of the facilitator / moderator. | Not discussed | Based on survey of students who nominated that they did not use SNS. Survey asked a single open-ended question inviting participants to nominate their reasons. | |

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Appendix 2: Livewire Rules

The Livewire Rules

1. Please – no swearing, and keep the content clean (NO BAD WORDS, PLEASE! You know what they are!)

2. Avoid using ALL CAPS JUST LIKE THIS, ALL THE TIME. This means that you're shouting, like we just did in 'NO BAD WORDS, PLEASE!'

3. Do not give out your personal information; like your full name, telephone number, home address, email, gaming details etc.

4. Do not share your YouTube/Facebook/MySpace/Yahoo! Messenger/email or any other social networking identity publicly in the chat room, groups, blogs or comments. Do not actively discuss, promote or refer members to other social networking sites.

5. Do not share your Livewire username and password or let other people use your account. Keep your password private!

6. Respect others in the chat room, and everywhere else on Livewire. Please treat others how you would like to be treated.

7. If there is another Livewirian making the experience not-so-fun for you, please send an instant message (you'll see how in chat) to the chat host and he or she will help you out.

8. If you would like to share a website link in chat, please get permission first, by instant messaging the link to the chat host on duty.

9. And most importantly, relax, enjoy, and have a good time getting to know other teens on Livewire!

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Appendix 3: Livewire.org.au protocols for handling self-harm, eating disorders, anxiety and depression and ensuring pathways to care

Livewire.org.au: Working with young people who self-harm

Context

Very occasionally young people talk about self-harming while on livewire.org.au. This could either be in the chat room or on another feature such as blogs. They may talk about it as something they currently do, or as something they have done in the past.

Most prevalent issues in Livewire.org.au

- Talking about the gory details/giving updates on latest cutting or harming episodes.
- Talking about self-harming in the past, with too much detail.
- Talking about thoughts of suicide.
- Chat hosts sometimes feel unsure if members are actually self-harming or trying to get attention.

Guidelines/policies/procedures

- All mentions of suicide and self-harm should be taken seriously. If it seems that a member is in immediate danger please notify Gabi, Kylie or Vanessa straight away.
- If in main chat room, ask them to go into Instant Messaging for any further discussion.
- Gauge the level of seriousness. Ask questions such as - Is someone there? Do they know you're having trouble? Have you had this feeling before? Are you telling me this because you want to do it again?
- Ask them if they want you to call someone. If older than 18, encourage them to call doctor/friend/parent or lifeline etc (see Appendix 1).
- If the situation is gauged to be immediately threatening and they are alone, call the office (or Gabs, Vanessa or Kylie on weekends) to contact parents, while you stay in chat with them.
- If the situation is not immediately threatening – talk them through it by using distraction, such as the sites listed on the Wiki.
- In both blogs and the chat room make sure the details are not specific or romanticised. E.g., no methods of self-harm, no gory details, no talking about results in a positive light, such as "I cut my vein and as the blood slid lusciously down my arm, I felt free". No comments or recommendations of self-harm as being a great way of dealing with things.
- Have your own boundaries as a Chat Host – you do not need to participate in any conversation that is uncomfortable for you and you need to make sure that the conversation is not uncomfortable to other members. Feel free to say that Livewire is not the place to have this discussion and use distraction techniques, such as those listed in Appendix 2.

Appendix 1: Help, Contacts and Resources

- The Butterfly Foundation: 1800 334673 or www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au
- Lifeline: 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelp.com.au
- Pain retreat website for those with anxiety: http://www.painretreat.net
- Operation Real website for those with eating disorders: http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/rm-home
- MoodGym website for depression: http://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome/new/splash
- Livewire Rules article: https://www.livewire.org.au/articles/article/livewire-rules

Appendix 2: Topic Shifters and Distraction Techniques

NURS

- N = name the emotion
- U = understanding
- R = respect (deal with their issues with respect)
- S = support

E.G. 'I can see that you're angry; it's understandable that you're upset because of X; and it's okay to be angry. How can I help?'

- 'I'm noticing that you have been talking about – weight loss, dieting, having a low mood etc. – I am worried about the impact that this is having on you, are you getting any support/help with this?'
- 'I'm glad that you are able to express what has been happening for you. I know of some places where you can get more specific information and support with this.' (Provide a list of resources and contact numbers.)
- 'It sounds like you are going through a really hard time at the moment. Whilst we're always here to listen and chat, we think that there are also other places where you can get more specific help with this.' (Provide a list of resources and contact numbers.)

Livewire.org.au: Working with young people with eating disorders

Context

Young people with eating disorders alone are eligible to access livewire.org.au, but not chat and private messaging, Most issues arising as a result of a young person having an eating disorder come from those who also have access to chat and private messages, that is, those who have another health condition that qualifies them for access to the shared features, but who happen to have an eating disorder as well.

Most prevalent issues in Livewire.org.au

- Body image discussions – unusual talk about food, talking about weight, dress sizes, BMIs and comparison of these things.
- Talking about health but taking it too far. Negative body talk that leads to depression.
- Sharing information with other members – sharing tips, tricks and tactics; focussing on eating disorders, to the exclusion of everything else; oversharing their personal eating disorder experience; and other members jumping on the eating disorder bandwagon (thinking it's cool).
- Where is the line for allowing eating disorder/food talk?

Guidelines

- Keep it general – no specific talk about numbers/weight/BMIs. They can talk about exercise, but not unhealthy/excessive amounts of exercise.
- Don't allow conversation around comparisons of weight, BMIs, food eaten etc. Talk about 'dieting' should be discouraged.
- It is fine to talk about food in the chat room and on livewire.org.au. Discourage talk about food being 'bad' or 'good.' All food is fine, it's just that some foods are 'sometimes' foods and others are 'all the time foods.' If the member continues to exhibit unhealthy attitudes towards food, refer them to The Butterfly Foundation http://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au/ who also have a support line (1800 ED HOPE / 1800 33 4673).
- Encourage the members to realise everyone is different. People's food needs are dependent on a number of factors like exercise, lifestyle, and health/illness. E.g. those with cystic fibrosis need a high calorie diet.
- Members with eating disorders who are not following the rules must follow the same 'three strikes' plan as everyone else (apart from those on the autism spectrum or with intellectual disorders). That is, three short term bans from the site and then their access to chat and private messaging is taken away, but they still have access to blogs, games, articles etc.
- The time to ban them for the short term is when they are endangering the health of other members, when interactions aren't positive and if they won't stop the behaviour when asked.
- If the situation is not serious and you need to change the subject/focus try these ways of diverting the conversation:

'I'm noticing that you have been talking about – weight loss, dieting, having a low mood etc. – I am worried about the impact that this is having on you, are you getting any support/help with this?'

'I'm glad that you are able to express what has been happening for you. I know of some places where you can get more specific information and support with this.' (Provide a list of resources and contact numbers)

'It sounds like you are going through a really hard time at the moment. Whilst we're always here to listen and chat, we think that there are also other places where you can get more specific help with this.' (Provide a list of resources and contact numbers).

Appendix 1: Help, Contacts and Resources

- The Butterfly Foundation: 1800 334673 or www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au
- Lifeline: 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelp.com.au
- Pain retreat website for those with anxiety: http://www.painretreat.net
- Operation Real website for those with eating disorders:
  http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/rm-home
- MoodGym website for depression: http://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome/new/splash
- Livewire Rules article: https://www.livewire.org.au/articles/article/livewire-rules

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Livewire.org.au-Working with young people living with Anxiety and Depression

Context

Young people living with serious illness, disability or disease often suffer some form of anxiety or depression as a secondary effect of what they are going through. Their mental illness can cause some behavioural challenges that require chat hosts to work with them to make sure they share information appropriately on livewire.org.au.

Most prevalent issues on livewire.org.au

- Contagious anxiety.
- Discussion and/or comparison of medications.
- Super negative self-talk.
- Stuck in a rut – talking continuously on a certain subject and not being able to stop (to the exclusion of everyone else).
- Negative conversations that bring whole chat room down and members don't know how to respond.
- Having a panic attack in the chat room and describing it to everyone, making everyone else panic.
- Chat Hosts unable to ascertain at what point they act and what is attention getting.

Guidelines

- All mentions of anxiety and depression should be taken seriously, even if it is suspected that it may not be real.
- If in the main chat room and a member brings up topics that are going to upset or worry the other members, ask them to go into Instant Messages to discuss any further.
- If having an anxiety attack, gauge the level of seriousness. Ask questions such as: Is someone there? If so, do they know you're having trouble? Have you had this feeling before?
- For members exhibiting obvious signs of depression, recommend sites such as Mood Gym.
- Ask them if they want you to call someone? If older than 18, encourage them to call doctor/friend/parent themselves.
- If gauged to be immediately life threatening, and they are alone, call the office (or Gabs, Vanessa or Kylie on weekends) to contact parents, while you stay in chat with them.
- If not immediately life threatening – talk them through it by using distraction techniques and topic shifters, which have been uploaded to the Wiki (see Appendix 1) or suggest they go and write a blog about how they are feeling or play a game etc.
- If they write blog – we need to ensure the content is general and not specific about methods of handling the depression or anxiety that could be unhealthy (e.g. mentioning

ways/tools they would use to harm themselves), or suggestions of things not healthy to other members.

▪ Have your own boundaries as a Chat Host – you do not need to participate in any conversation that is uncomfortable for you, and you need to make sure that the conversation is not uncomfortable for other members. Feel free to say that Livewire is not the place to have this discussion and give alternative resources that can help them. (See Appendix 2)

▪ Medication talk – it's okay for members to talk about being on medication and discuss side effects and their experiences. Try to stop any talk of comparison before it starts but if they do start **recommending** or **comparing** medications, Chat Hosts need to step in with a statement such as:

▪ *'We do not want to stop you talking about your experiences and how you are feeling, but when you are comparing your medications and suggesting what others should try - you could be causing more harm than good to the other member.'*

▪ *'You may have the same diagnosis as they do, but the doctor will take in so many different factors when deciding what meds someone should go on. There are also many different side effects of drugs that will affect each individual differently; depending on what other medication the person is on and what other illnesses they have. Other members can be negatively influenced by this kind of comparison and advice-giving as they may find it difficult to maintain positivity in their medical plan, if they don't trust what their doctor has put them on.'*

▪ The aim is to stop unhealthy talk of medications – such as not following doctor's recommendations, comparing amount of drugs (like a competition), comparing types of drugs.

Appendix 1: Topic Shifters and Distraction Techniques

NURS

▪ N = name the emotion
▪ U = understanding
▪ R = respect (deal with their issues with respect)
▪ S = support

E.G. 'I can see that you're angry; it's understandable that you're upset because of X; and it's okay to be angry. How can I help?'

▪ 'I'm noticing that you have been talking about – weight loss, dieting, having a low mood etc. – I am worried about the impact that this is having on you, are you getting any support/help with this?'
• 'I'm glad that you are able to express what has been happening for you. I know of some places where you can get more specific information and support with this.' (Provide a list of resources and contact numbers).
• 'It sounds like you are going through a really hard time at the moment. Whilst we're always here to listen and chat, we think that there are also other places where you can get more specific help with this.' (Provide a list of resources and contact numbers).

Appendix 2: Help, Contacts and Resources

• The Butterfly Foundation: 1800 334673 or www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au
• Lifeline: 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au
• Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelp.com.au

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- Pain retreat website for those with anxiety: http://www.painretreat.net
- Operation Real website for those with eating disorders: http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/rm-home
- MoodGym website for depression: http://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome/new/splash
- Livewire Rules article: https://www.livewire.org.au/articles/article/livewire-rules

Appendix 4

ONLINE CHAT TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS: CODING SCHEME OF HIGH LEVEL INTERACTIONS OF CHAT HOSTS

Category	Description	Example
Welcome / Goodbye	Greetings / introductions/ farewells.	Hey XXXX; great to meet ya:); nighty night
Information seeking	Questions to members.	so where r u from?
Information reply	Provision of information in response to questions asked by members to the chat host.	oh yeh... i saw the powderfinger combined with silverchair concert
Information sharing	Provision of information in the context of current subject of conversation but not in reply to a question.	oh really...i loved the show jag
Unsolicited information	Provision of information as an announcement, not as a reply.	oh wow...so many people already:)
Emotional Support	Provision of emotional support, i.e. empathy, encouragement, well wishes, etc.	I'll think of you tomorrow XXXX... you'll go great guns aww... sorry that you are sick XXXX
Advice	Provision of advice.	XXXX don't hang around the wrong crowd
Humour / banter	Seeking/responding to information in a humorous manner,	Yeh... your pretty funny XXXX
Confirmatory statements	Statements that support the status quo	Oh cool
Other	Content that is not captured in the categories above.	Thank you Apologies Requests etc.

To develop the above coding template, two members of the research team independently reviewed 300 extracts from the transcribed data using the 10 categories on review. There was 100% consistency between the coders.

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Appendix 5

CHAT HOST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1	Introduction	**Brief description of the aims of the project:** ▪ Introductions. ▪ Interviewer to provide an overview of the project (including chat host right to anonymity?) ▪ Interviewee to ask chat host if they had any particular questions re: interview or the research project. ▪ Permission sought to audio-tape the interview.
2	History	**Formulate a brief history of the chat host:** (1) Length of employment in the role of a chat host? (2) How did chat host come to hear about the position? (3) What attracted the chat host to the role? (4) Number of shifts worked per week? (5) Whether chat host is engaged in additional employment – if so, what type of employment? (6) History re: working with adolescents?
3	Definition of a chat host including perceived role	**Define the role of a chat host:** (1) What is a Livewire chat host? (2) What is the previewed role of a chat host in the Livewire community? (3) Does the role change depending on which chat community is being moderated i.e. younger, older, siblings? (4) Have there been changes to the chat host role since integrating with US and Canada? [ie: Starbright]
4	Perceived impact of chat host on Livewire members and the community	**Explore impact of chat host on the Livewire members and the community:** (1) In what way(s) does the presence of a chat host influence the dynamics of the community? (2) In what way(s) do the dynamics and activities of the community change when a chat host is not present? (3) What are some of the perceived beliefs chat hosts have regarding the positive influence of the chat ost on the Livewire community/ individual members – explore further – chat host to provide examples. (4) Explore any potential negative impact presence of a chat host may have on the community - provide examples. (5) [Prior to integration with Starbright] - Do perceived impacts change depending on which Livewire community (younger, older, sibling] the chat host is moderating? (6) Has perceived impact(s) changed following move to integrated site [Sarbright]? (7) Could the Livewire/Starbright community function successfully without the presence of chat hosts? In what way?

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5	Skills required to engage members and to maintain successful functioning of the community	**Chat host skills and techniques employed:**
		(1) What types of skills are required to successfully engage Livewire members in the community?
		(2) What techniques has the chat host employed to:
		   • bring the group together?
		   • tactfully deal with questionable behaviour of members?
		   • manage inappropriate behaviour?
		(3) Example of the most difficult situation experienced by the chat host – how did the chat host respond?
		(4) Example of a chat host's most favourite moment in the chat room. What made the moment so memorable?

6	Response to trauma experienced in the Livewire community	• How does the chat host respond to distressing information shared by a member (privately and to the group)? • How does the chat host attend to the community's response to a member passing away? [NB some chat hosts may not have experienced this situation]
7	Impact of chat host role on self	• Explore positive/negative psychological impact on self through participating in the role of a Livewire chat host.
8	Training provided to chat hosts	• Review type of training provided to the chat host • Chat host to provide suggestions for future training – explore why these suggestions were made.
9	Attributes required for the chat host role	• Explore types of attributes required to be a successful chat host

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Appendix 6

LIVEWIRE MEMBER PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

N=73		Younger	Older	TOTAL
Number of participants		39	34	73
Sex	Male	9 (23)	8 (23)	17 (23)
	Female	30 (77)	26 (77)	56 (77)
Age	Mean	13.87	18.20	16.08
	Median	14	19	16
	Range	11-16	17-22	11-22
Residence	NSW	21 (54)	15 (44)	36 (49)
	Vic	6 (15)	5 (15)	11 (15)
	Qld	6 (15)	6 (17)	12 (16)
	WA	2 (5)	4 (12)	6 (8)
	SA	1 (3)	1 (3)	2 (3)
	ACT	3 (8)	3 (9)	6 (8)
Length of registration (months)	Mean	15.3	17.6	16.4
	Median	17.0	17.5	17.0
	Range	1-30	1-30	1-30
Primary medical condition (self-reported)[7]	Autism/Asperger's Syndrome	7	2	9
	Cerebral palsy	4	3	7
	Intellectual disability	1	6	7
	Asthma	2	3	5
	ABI	3	2	5
	Spina bifida	2	2	4
	Cystic fibrosis	3		3
	Muscular Dystrophy	2	1	3
	Organ failure/Transplant	1	2	3
	Cancer	1	1	2
	Diabetes	2		2
	Epilepsy		2	2
	Sickle cell		1	1
	Haemophilia		1	1
	Myalgic Encephalomyelitis		1	1
	Deafness	1		1
	Wolf Parkinson White	1		1
	Pulmonary hypertension		1	1
	Bronchiectasis		1	1
	Crohn's disease		1	1
	Scoliosis	1		1
	Slipped upper femoral epiphysis	1		1
	Juvenile arthritis		1	1
	Cleft pallet and lip	1		1
	Arthrogryposis	1		1
	Congenital heart disease		1	1
	Apert Syndrome		1	1
	Physical disability	1		1
	Other	5		5

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[7] Members frequently only disclose one medical condition to Livewire administration when they subscribe (i.e:.Livewire is often not formally notified when members have multiple diagnoses). This list thus differs slightly from Livewire's official records.

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Appendix 7

TOPICS AND EXAMPLES OF PERSONAL INFORMATION DISCLOSED BY CHAT HOSTS TO LIVEWIRE MEMBERS

Topic	Representative Quotes
Residence	
Location (ie: state/city)	i live in sydney..buti grew up in newie:)
Satisfaction with residential location	nah....newies pretty cool...yeh the central coast is lovely too...where on the central coast?
Music	
Concerts attended	the foo fighters......gomez.....big day out....angus and julia stone
Aspects of concert enjoyed	i loved the theme last night! and the fountains were cool
Bands enjoyed	i love powderfinger
Favourite music artists	Kylie is the best
TV/Movies	
Enjoyed	oh really...i loved that show jag; I did see that chooka guy though...Lol – he was pretty good
Expectations	I wasn't expecting much from it but the cast was amazing and fit into the other films so well.
Reviews	I wasn't bad, better then X3 but thats not hard lol
Acknowledgement of having seen same program	Im the same, times I ge the craving to watch a specific movie or show I only saw the first couple when I was your age lol. It was the ones where the witch was on the moon
For relaxation	Just chilling and watching some movies
Personal connection to character	I think a friend of mine knows one of the actors that played the Yellow ranger
Food	
Favourite food item	i want a nerd rope; they are my favourite...alongside gobbstoppers i love those! i put ham and chesse in them and melt them
Preferences	I love the original ones...not the ones with the chewy centre
Lunch/Dinner – choices/decisions	hey speaking of food.....i need my lunch/afternoon tea; i might have chicken for lunch...not sure just yet tho
Historical context of relationship with food within chat room	Beware i'm having Maltesers – you know with that means – chocolate
Pets	
Name	my dog was named tiger
Desire for	i really want a rabbit
Reason for not being able to have desired pet	I wanna get a puppy but you cant really have one in the unit
Humorous insight into connection between desire for pet and similarities with having a pet	– nah we're renting so we're not allowed☹ - Though my housemate sheds as much hair as a dog would anyway ;)
Death	icryed so much when my god died when i was in year 5 that i walked around my yard kicking trees
Humorous stories relating to pets	you know one time i saw a person waling his guniea pig -NO JOKE
Activities between pets and owners	our dog peed on my brothers jumper the other week. A fact he didnt realise till AFTER he laf the house
Activities host would like to do with a pet	one time i'm going to get a fish -and take it for a walk -in put the bowl on something with wheels - and pull it alaong
Activities	
Current	nothing much.....ive got avatar on in the background...and i'm reading blogs
Enjoyed	That's awesome! I love meditation!; i love hugging;
Outside of chat room	yeah good we have a recording session tomorrow but there are also a heap of other things too so we will see I volunteer at a community radio station and they have a lot of shows with people from different countries and at the christmas party every year they cook up some of their dishes from home and it is a
Day off	have to do some cleaning but I think a bit of movie watching in the afternoon
Gaming/ software – degree of knowledge/skills	sims are fun XXXX, im not good at playing it though dont give them enough attention!
Engaged/enjoyed during adolescence	hahai use to do that when i had my learners - go and reverse my car up and down my parents driveway - and sit in it and listen to music
Mutual understanding about activities	Me too – I totally get you on that.
Shopping	
Items intended for purchase	im so spending mine on the new cod black op maps when they are put up
sales	i love EB games sales

Activities not skilled at	i am not very good at make-up
Holidays	
Description of activities	I'm just gonna shop, and see shows and eat, and shop, and shop, and shop...
Attributed health problem from holiday	Fantastic XXXX! Though my head's still spinning a bit from the yacht...they call it "land-sickness"
Opportunity	yep, sometimes life shows you that you just have to snap these things up...long story, but life has shown me that, so HOORAY
Frequency of holidays	well, I know it's ridiculous, but I'm going on another holiday
Location	I got back from the Whitsundays on Monday spearfishing on a yacht for a week, ;)
Length of holiday	going for 2 weeks
Reason for going on holiday	yeah, I have a friend who has been on the road for 3 years and he has a week off in New York and asked me to come, so I was like, hey, why not
Anticipated financial status from going on holiday	I'm pretty much going broke, so that shouldn't be a problem
Health	
Problems	Yeah that's exactly the same as mine XXXX! I've got a bit of a head cold
Treatments	I don't think I have ever been on treatment
Reaction/response to treatment	I don't think I've ever been on morphine
Assurance – ease member's anxiety	I think it happens to a lot of people... you'll be fine! :D [Wisdom teeth];
Family	
Activities engaged in as a child	
Behaviour as a child compared to later in life	i was a good baby -i just made up for it as i got older
Dynamics	i used to do that with my brother when we bought music i see.....my dad and brother used to gang up on me...but it doesnt happen anymore....and if it does i know toignore them and just leave the situation
Personal views re: relationships	
Gift giving	Well, me personally, I would wait till a one year anniversary for that kind of present...it's a pretty big investment. ☺
Advice	I would cut ties personally
Dreams	Do you know I had a dream that I had to start getting dialysis and you and I met in the dialysis room... Along with another member I can't remember. Funny thing is, I have no idea what you look like. - I think in my dream it was just your screen name talking to me.
Response to general inquiries RE: chat hosts wellbeing	Yeah good – and you?
Feelings attributed to hearing member's news	that makes me so sad
Enjoyment experienced in chatting with members	i like you to know that i really like chatting to you lol cause I love chatting to you guys so much ;)
Being self in the chat room	And I can be my weird sleepy self with you guys
Personal traits	oh, hilarious. I'm very gullible. Watch that. Lol
Gender	Well I'm not a girl but I am assuming you are saying hi to me too!
Age	I think i was born when the song came out
Perceived personal strength	im tough
When next in the chat room	We'll I'm on next Saturday so let me know how it went!; ihavent been on a lot lately but i will be back on more soon; maybe next month ill be on abitmre
Reason for disappearance from chat room	sorry guys, just on the phone :)
University	
Celebration – last day	No way, I think it's so exciting! The last day of my uni course was the happiest day of my life so far! Lol
New course	Thats great! Congrats! I read your car review and definately the right course for you
Traffic	surprisingly ididnt get stuck in trafffici went out for a little while then went home

Appendix 8

KEY CHAT HOST CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAITS IDENTIFIED IN THE ANALYSIS

Consistently available	Realist
Moderate / keep things above board	Patient / tolerant
Big sister / big brother / super friend / buddy	Transparent
Older person / adult presence	Credible
Ensure safety	No alliances
Listen	Leader / leaderships skills
Advisor	Work towards creating a cohesive environment
Honest	Entertainer
Respective (includes not patronising members' experiences)	Motivator
Provide perspective	Don't back away from issues
Mentor	Knowledgeable (RE: subjects of interest to members)
Non judgemental	Engaged
Compassionate	Genuine
Willingness to be silly	Fun
Calm	Professional ie: maintain a professional distance
Creative	Take charge and action things quickly
Make fun of yourself	Journalist skills
Positive	Good sense of humour
Responsive	Unique personality / interesting to the members
Skills to accommodate different cognitive and developmental levels	Cool
Provide a mature presence in the room	Think quickly on your feet
Maturity / life experience	Display common-sense
Trustworthy	Mature / life experience
Diplomatic / tactful / subtle	
Empathic	
Capacity to put things into perspective	
Self-deprecating (humorous)	
Resilient	

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