

Tabled by Inspire Foundation  
1/3/10

Inquiry into Suicide in Australia



SENATE INQUIRY INTO SUICIDE 2009-10 – COMMITTEE HEARING BRIEF

MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND PREVENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF  
INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The Inspire Foundation works with young people through ICT because that's where we know they are. Both in Australia and internationally, young people aged 15 to 24 access the internet more than any other age group and have been dubbed the 'early adopters' of new technologies (ABS 2007). We also know that after friends and family, the internet is the third most popular place to a young person to turn to for advice and support (Mission Australia 2009).

Unlike many traditional health promotion settings, the internet is not restricted by geographical, temporal, or physical constraints, and offers the advantages of anonymity, 24-hour access, and immediate, transactional-feedback.

Many also highlight the influential role of the Internet in cultivating social networks and strengthening existing social ties (Boasse et al. 2005 and Kraut et al. 2002). Wyn et al. (2005) suggests that the Internet is continuously increasing the possibilities of who we connect with, and how we 'belong' both online and offline.

Furthermore, the advent of 'Web 2.0' has blurred the boundaries of consumer and producer, enabling individuals to create and publish content themselves through applications such as wikis, blogs, social tagging and networking websites, and pod/vod-casting. Through participatory content generation, Web 2.0 fosters increased collaboration, ownership, and empowerment (Wyn et al. 2005).

**Utilising ICT as a tool and setting opens up opportunities to develop and implement population health strategies in new ways.** A key aspect of the internet's appeal is that it allows the delivery of health interventions in a variety of interactive formats, including collaborative and dynamic audio-visual content, enabling individuals to tailor information and delivery style to suit individual needs and learning preferences.

Thus, ICT based approaches enable us to effect change in individuals' health behaviour as well as the broader environment, in a manner that is similar to grassroots methods and strategies, but **on a larger scale than previously considered possible.**

SENATE INQUIRY INTO SUICIDE 2009-10 – COMMITTEE HEARING BRIEF 2  
REACHOUT

REACHOUT.COM



Reach Out - **reachout.com** - is a web-based initiative that offers information, support and resources to help young people improve their understanding of mental health issues, develop resilience, and increase their coping skills and help-seeking behaviour.

Anonymous and available 24 hours a day, Reach Out serves young people, in particular those who are geographically or socially isolated, who may not be comfortable seeking professional help, or who are unsure about where to find the help they need in their community.

The service aims to break down the stigma attached to seeking help, and connect young people so they can share their stories and provide support to each other in a safe and positive environment.

Reach Out is directly informed by a comprehensive youth participation program involving a Youth Advisory Board, Youth Ambassadors, Youth Leaders and Interns who play a central role in the design, development and marketing of the service.

Content is written in partnership with expert organisations, such as Family Planning Australia and our Clinical Advisory Group.

**In 2009 Inspire's Reachout.com maintained critical service delivery by reaching at least 370,000 young Australians at an estimated cost of \$11.50 per young person.<sup>1</sup>**

In 2008, a user profiling survey of 904 young people and 102 professionals found:

<sup>1</sup> Inspire Foundation (2009) Inspire Foundation Annual Report.

<http://inspire.realviewtechnologies.com/?xml=Inspire-Annual-Report&lid=32521#folio=009>



- 24% visit Reach Out at least once a week; the average frequency is once a month
- 83% of repeat visitors spend more than 10 minutes on Reach Out each visit
- The main reason young people visit Reach Out is because they are going through a tough time and the main type of information they are looking for is about mental health issues
- Young people report that Reach Out helps them learn more about mental health issues (82%), understand other people's experiences of mental health issues (77%) and learn where to get help with mental health issues (74%)
- Reach Out contributes to increased help seeking: 88% of repeat users had spoken to someone about their tough time; 59% of repeat visitors talked to a professional after visiting Reach Out
- Reach Out is a site young people trust (85%), think is straight up and honest (85%) and makes them feel like they are not alone (72%)
- 81% would tell a friend about Reach Out.

#### Highlights of the results from professionals:

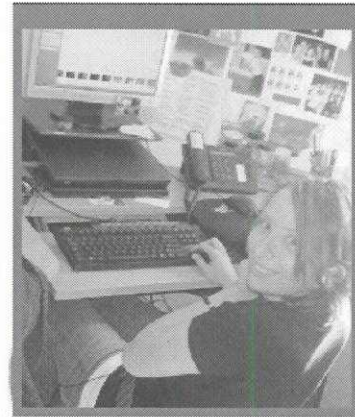
- Professionals are highly likely to recommend Reach Out to young people and colleagues
- 92% rate the Reach Out website as very good or excellent
- 84% of participants were repeat visitors to Reach Out; 49% have been using Reach Out for over a year
- Professionals are using Reach Out more regularly with 51% using it fortnightly (up from 41% from last year's survey)
- 62% stay between six and fifteen minutes per visit and a third of professionals are spending over 20 minutes.

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#### THE REACH OUT EXPERIENCE

When a young person visits Reach Out they experience an online environment that provides engaging and evidence-based resources to help them get through difficult times.

- Factsheets, stories and interviews enable young people to better understand their experience and to reach out for the help they need.
- Community forums provide a safe and moderated network, made up of Reach Out staff and other young people. The forums provide opportunities for young people to connect with and share their story with peers, give or receive support and positive reinforcement, and develop strategies for managing adversity and seeking help.
- Digital storytelling enables young people to tell their own stories about getting through tough times, weaving together video, photos, art, music, narration, print, and sound effects using simple multimedia publishing tools. And podcasts, 15-minute audio clips covering topics such as depression and seeking help, starting university or managing alcohol, can be saved to an MP3 player and played on demand.
- **Reach Out Central** is an interactive game that helps young people learn and improve life skills such as problem-solving, coping, communication and positive thinking, and helps them to identify the link between their choices, interactions with people and their mood.



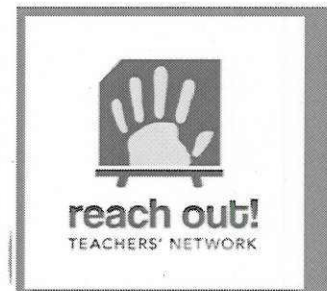
## REACH OUT TEACHERS NETWORK

The **Reach Out Teachers' Network** connects secondary school teachers with Reach Out, Inspire's web-based mental health service for young people.

In every classroom in Australia, one in five students will have a recognised mental health difficulty and only one in three of these students will seek professional help. There is a real urgency to reinforce to school students that resources are available to help overcome mental health problems.

While a teacher's role cannot be to fix these problems, topics associated with mental health are often highlighted in the school curriculum and issues often surface in schools. The Teachers' Network provides an introduction to the **Reach Out** service and practical ideas and tools to enable teachers to address mental health issues with confidence in the classroom and school environment.

Through the Network Inspire aims to share its learnings from young people about how they cope with tough times, technology trends and their relationship to mental health.



## REACH OUT PRO



Recognising the significant role technology plays in the lives of young people today **Reach Out Pro** - [www.reachoutpro.com.au](http://www.reachoutpro.com.au) - provides health care professionals with information and insights on how young people use technologies and online resources like **ReachOut.com\*** to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Tools on Reach Out Pro can be used to enhance the effectiveness of psychosocial support and mental health care provided to young



What does Reach Out Pro offer?

The website is broken down into two sections:

**Resources:** Providing access to a broad range of resources for use with young people experiencing mental health difficulties, including fact sheets, digital stories and other online mediums - many are linked back to the **Reach Out website**.

**Using technology:** Offering practical ideas and advice for using different technologies in clinical practice through clinician reviews, interviews and step by step guidance. This section features a glossary of technological terms and seeks to 'bridge the digital divide' by explaining what young people are doing online and what health care professionals need to know.

For more information about Inspire's ReachOut programs go to [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)