AIMhi for Youth
Treatment and User Guide

Version 2.0

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Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of the many young people, Aboriginal mental health workers and health professionals and other services who have engaged with the AIMhi Stay Strong team and contributed their expertise and experiences to the Stay Strong Program. In particular we acknowledge AIMhi First Nations[1] researchers and consultants, past and present, especially Patj Patj Janama Robert Mills, Carolyn Griffin, Valerie Thompson, John Cusack, Daniel Mulholland, Catherine Pumuralimawu Stassi, AMA Puruntatameri, Jahdai Vigona, Jaylene Friel, Tristam Watkins, Violet Buckskin, Coleen Strangways, and Chantal Ober.

In the spirit of respect, Menzies School of Health Research acknowledges the people and the Elders of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations who are the Traditional Owners of the land and seas of Australia.

Icon Legend

▶ Video

☑ Action

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[1] Please note that when we mention the terms 'First Nations' and 'Indigenous' we include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and acknowledge their rich traditions and heterogeneous cultures.

Contents

Background

The Aboriginal and Islander Mental health initiative (AIMhi) Stay Strong Program

The AIMhi for Youth (AIMhi-Y) app was developed as a resource within the **AIMhi Stay Strong Program** of research at **Menzies School of Health Research**. The **Stay Strong Program** has been collaborating and co-designing wellbeing resources within the community since 2003[1-4].

Our Aim:

- Promote understanding of social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB).
- Promote skills in problem solving and goal setting for lifestyle change.
- Provide brief, opportunistic, understandable, culturally safe resources.
- Promote access to mental health and SEWB support.
- Provide information, assessment, care planning and brief intervention tools.

Our Strategies:

- Co-design
- Strengths based, trauma informed approaches.
- Simplify concepts.
- Use metaphors, plain English, language, images.
- Maximise engagement, rapport and relationships.

Our People:

- A multidisciplinary cross-cultural research team
- Local and national partners and collaborations
- Research and services together

The Stay Strong Approach

> We have a yarn first about **family** and **strengths**, spending time developing trust and relationship rather than going straight to the problem.
>
> We use family and strengths as motivation for change. The discussion of strengths and stressors is holistic and covers physical, cultural, mental, and social aspects to life.

AIMhi-Y is based on the evidence-based Stay Strong approach[5, 6] which:

- Values and prioritises culture, family and language[2].
- Is a *holistic, strengths-based, and client-centred* approach to treatment and care planning.
- Incorporates elements of problem-solving therapy, motivational interviewing, and low-intensity cognitive behavioural therapy.

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[2] The AIMhi-Y app uses words from the Kungarakan, Arrernte and Tiwi languages of the Northern Territory and the Kaurna language of South Australia

Four Key Steps

| 1. People | 2. Strengths | 3. Worries | 4. Goals |
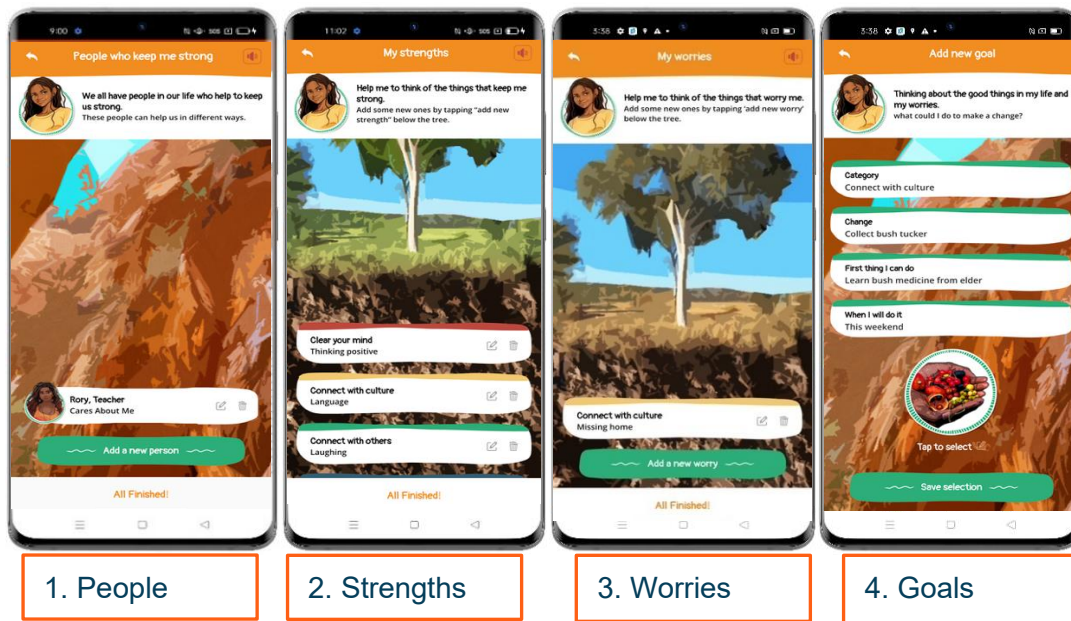
Development of the AIMhi-Y app

The AIMhi-Y app is:

- A colourful, interactive, guided and self-driven smartphone-based wellbeing app
- A wellbeing intervention for First Nations Young people 12-25 years
- *Co-designed* with > 110 young First Nations people in the NT through:
    - Workshops, online surveys, youth reference groups
    - Narrative literature review
    - Service providers, Elders and experts' perspectives[7, 8].
- A *preventative tool* in the early intervention or postvention space.
- Adaptable to different settings to complement treatment or fill service gaps.
- Inviting continuous feedback to allow ongoing improvement.

Evidence for feasibility of the AIMhi-Y app

The AIMhi-Y app was tested for feasibility in 2020 with 30 young people recruited from Darwin based schools, mental health and rehabilitation services.

The study found:

- Statistically and clinically significant improvements in symptoms of psychological distress (Kessler 10; K10) and depression (Patient Health Questionnaire; PHQ-2).
- Positive ratings for look and style, content, overall rating, check-ins, and involvement in the study (average over 4 out of 5).
- Average of 37 minutes spent in the app, with 6 app opens over 4 weeks.
- Feedback that the app was easy to use, culturally relevant, and useful.

Study limitations included:

- It was a simple pre post study without a control group.
- Participants were not blinded to treatment.
- We cannot attribute the improvements to the app alone.
- It was a relatively small sample from Darwin and most were school students.
- This limits the study's generalisability to other young people in other places.
- Participants volunteered which can lead to selection bias.

Update of the AIMhi-Y app

The app was updated 2022 – 2025 through codesign with young people, knowledge holders and Elders in South Australia, Central Australia, the Top End, and Tiwi Islands. Nine Youth reference groups, and 21 youth codesign groups engaged over 95 young people in cultural, wellbeing and codesign activities. The young people reported that they enjoyed the workshops and learnt something new. New content including 11 new videos, 7 new games, and 5 new character stories with local cultural input were codesigned through this process and added to the AIMhi-Y app in 2025.

What is the purpose of the app?

The app is designed as a wellbeing intervention for First Nations young people aged 12-25 years to:

- *Engage* young people with wellbeing concerns
- Promote understanding about wellbeing and mental health
- Develop skills in emotional regulation (staying in balance)
- Develop skills in problem solving and motivation to change
- Promote cultural connection
- Promote help seeking and access to treatment and crisis support

It can be used:

- As a brief intervention delivered by service providers
- To complement other treatments delivered by service providers
- In group or individual settings
- As an early intervention tool or between sessions
- As a user-driven tool to support individual wellbeing and help-seeking

Additional App Screenshots

| Activities to Calm and Focus | Help Page | Export Function |
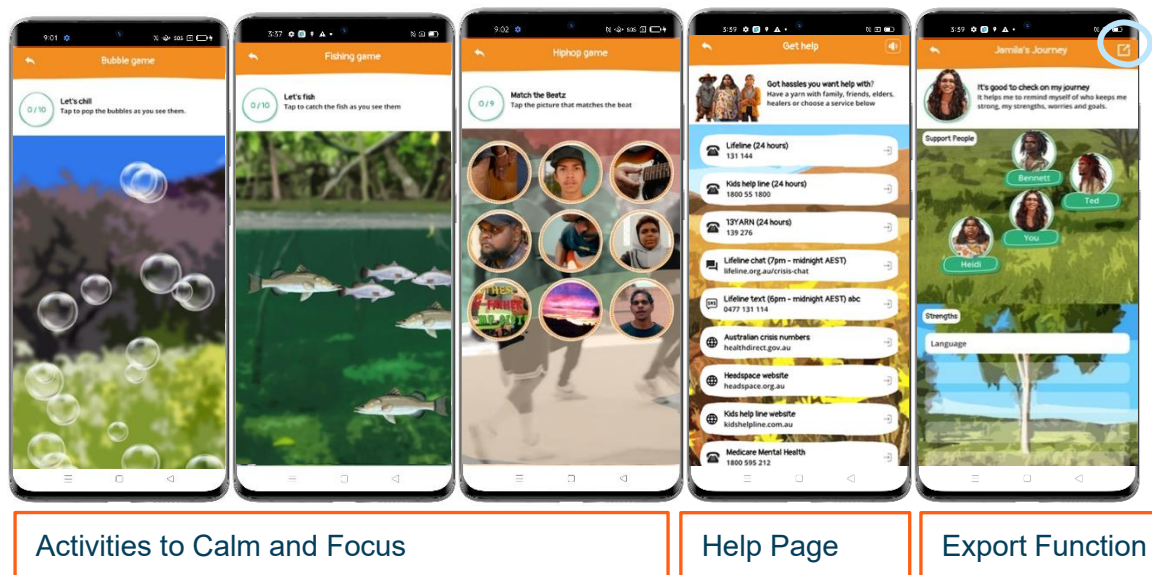
Downloading the App
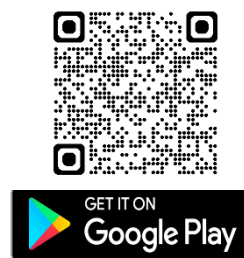
Note:

- The app is available on the App store and Google Play.
- An internet connection is only required to download and set up the user profile (see below); after that, the app can be used offline.
- Service providers should enter their own organisation as the 'service helping them to use the app', not Menzies.
- **Parental Controls** can block app download. In this case, parents must approve the app before it can be downloaded.
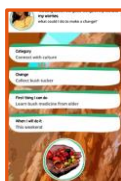
Key App Features

Offline Use
(After Download)
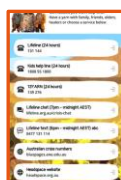

Wellbeing Check-Ins
(K5 and PHQ-2)

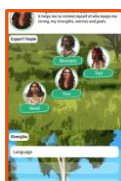**CBT and Motivational Interviewing Elements**

Mindfulness-based Game-like Activities
(Relax and Focus)
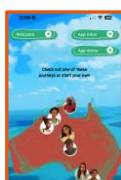

Gamification
(Levels and Rewards)

Safety Features
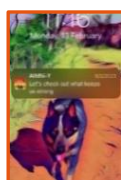(Interactive Help Page)

Export Function
(Share to Trusted Person)

App Rating and Feedback
(Helps Improvements)

Videos and Audio
(Explain and Support)

Notifications
(Prompt Engagement)

Metaphor of a Bush Trip
(Images and Words)

Cultural Connection
(Elders, Language, Country)

Setting Up Your Profile

In addition to some personal information (e.g. name, gender, year of birth, Indigenous status, postcode), there are three important profile questions below:

Which service is helping you to use the app?

- Important to identify *your organisation* correctly so we can provide feedback to organisations (note: do not put Menzies in here, we are after *your* support organisation).

- We ask that you be specific and consistent (i.e. check the drop-down menu first to see if your organisation is listed there).

- Input formal organisational title first and program second (if necessary), using all common abbreviations (e.g. "NT PHN, Youth early psychosis program"; "headspace Darwin").

Are you a young person or servive provider?

- Important to enter this correctly so we can sort and analyse the data correctly in our evaluation.

Do you agree to the collection of anonymous information in the app?

- Service providers introducing the app to a young person should understand and have a conversation about what data is collected and how it is used.

- Use the info icon next to 'collect info' to guide the discussion (also see Privacy and Confidentiality below).

Privacy and Confidentiality

The Privacy policy for the AIMhi-Y app is available here and from the About Us section in the app.

We recommend that users have a **pin on their device** to prevent unauthorised access to the information they put into the app.

Early consultations with young people suggested a mandatory password might be a barrier however an optional password has been suggested for a future update.

Important points on data collection

- In order to use the app, users need to **create a profile** that includes Name, gender, year of birth, Indigenous status, postcode, service/organisation, whether they are a young person or service provider and optional photo

- **Users can choose** whether to allow their data to be collected in the app's database by answering yes to the collect info question.

- **Only anonymous data is collected** in the database. Name and photo are not collected.

- **Only the research team can access** the anonymous data which is password protected.

- The **data is used to evaluate** the app **and improve** user experience and may be used in research publications.

- Some data are collected regardless of whether users answer yes or no to this question to evaluate and improve the app. This includes: organisation name, young person or service provider, number of app opens, time spent in app, app ratings and feedback.

- The app uses a service called DigitalOcean, in their Sydney, Australia data center to store the data. All data in transit is encrypted via HTTPS (TLS 1.2+).

Risks and Benefits

We recommend users are fully informed about the potential risks and benefits of the app.

Key points

- This is a new wellbeing app developed by young First Nations people in the NTand SA, with Elders, researchers, service providers and mental health experts

- It is strengths based with wellbeing tips and links to further help as well as some games and videos

- A small scale trial with 30 young people in Darwin showed some benefits such as improvements in symptoms of distress and depression.

- The app collects some anonymous data to evaluate and improve the app - but you can say no to the collection of detailed information if you want.

- The information that is collected will never be linked to you.

- Sometimes talking about wellbeing can be upsetting. there are links to more support in the app or you can connect with [your service].

- It is recomended that you use the app 10-15 minutes per week for the most benefit, but it is up to you how often you use it.

Seeking Parent or Guardian Consent

Consider your organisations protocols and whether you need parental consent to use the app with young people. Some things to consider in making this decision are:

- the age and maturity of the young person (generally over 14)
- the preferences of the young person
- the level of parental involvement in care
- level of parental controls on phone

TIPS

Parents often appreciate phone contact.

You can revisit the key points on Risks and Benefits above with them.

Highlight that it's new treatment and a 'complement' to other treatments.

It allows treatment to continue outside of the room/at home.

Highlight the preventative aspect and its meeting young people where they are at (i.e. in the digital space).

Mention the success of the pilot study & involvement of young people & experts.

Acknowledge that now might not be the right time.

Respect their choice.

Questions they may ask:

- Why my child?
- Will I know if they are upset/at risk?
    - Outline your protocol for informing parents of distress.
- How can I help / support app use?
    - Look at the tips for parents to support Info Sheet
- How often do they have to use it?
    - They can use it as much or as little as they like.

Issues that may arise:

- Some may hesitate as its 'new' or linked with 'research'.
- Some might be concerned it might overwhelm or get in the way of other treatments.
- Some might not want to encourage more time on phones.

Introducing the App

What you might do

- **Put aside time in a session with a young person**
  - You might choose time one on one or in a group

- **Point out key features:**
  - Games (bubbles fish animals), support people, videos with tips, adding photos, other young peoples stories

- **Talk about the why they might use it:**
  - this app … 'helps young people with their wellbeing', 'helps young people to stay strong through tough times' 'can help when you're stressing or bored'

- **Give a personal vouch:**
  - 'I have checked it out and I think it could help', 'I know other young people who it has helped', 'others like using it'

- **Talk about the time commitment:**
  - 'you can use it whenever you like', '10 minutes a few times a week can help'

- **Have some visual prompts:**
  - screenshots or show them on your phone (see here)

- **Keep it light and casual:**
  'Hey, check this out', 'Oi, look here'

- **Show your personality**
  - Be genuine

- **Adjust to age**
  - Younger people might prefer games, where as school leavers might prefer goals, 'help you to feel good

What you might say

- *'Oi [Name] check this out. Its a new app here – on this phone, that some young people like you have found helps them to understand, manage and keep track of their wellbeing. It lets you set up a profile, and then there are three quests… Ramone is from the Top End and Emily is from Central Australia. Once you do one of theirs, it unlocks your own. There's also some games and videos with tips for how to stay strong and well. What do you say? You want to try it?*

Video: Watch this example of a young person introducing the app

Youth App - Ethan & Jay - YouTube

Following Up and Checking In

We recommend you follow up with the young person every one to two weeks. Following up strengthens the therapy and impact. Prompt them to connect to the internet (WiFi or data) and open the app (this allows data to be uploaded to our database for evaluation purposes).

What you might do

- Ask how they have been going and look at it together

- Prompt them to complete a check-in - K5 and PHQ-2.

- Revist their quest or prompt them to complete the 4 steps -
  People, Strengths, Worries, Goals.

- Prompt them to give feedback in the About Us section (i.e. 'Tell us what you think') and/or give feedback yourself.

- Ask them to share/export their summary for your records and so that you can talk about their journey together.

- Monitor for distress and have a check-in conversation (see below Managing Risks).

- 'How have you been going using that app... Lets look together...'
- 'Have you done a checkin lately?'
- 'Would you like to share (i.e. export) your journey with me?'

TIPS

Reflect on the Metaphors.

The grow strong tree and the idea of a journey are important metaphors that you can bring out and reflect on during your follow up.

Grow Strong Tree

Mental health is like a tree which needs good nourishment. If the roots are dry and aren't fed properly, the tree might get weak. We need to keep all our branches going strong by making choices that add strength to the different areas of our life. Do more of what keeps you strong and less of what takes your strength away.

Journey Through Life

We start our journey on solid footing (family and culture). We are guided by our history, our culture, our community, our Elders. We plan our journey according to the landscape. We follow the well-trodden foot track (pombah-kitjit) (accept guidance from others). Now we know our bearings, it's time to start our journey. We look for landmarks, hills, trees, rivers, creeks, or rock formations to guide our way. The landscape changes. We observe where the sun is going, which side of the tree, look at the tree bark colour. Sometimes we can't see our way for the trees. We share the journey and the pathways become clear (support from others). We come across open plains, grasslands or floodplains. The world opens up and we see the possibilities. We carve a canoe to cross the floodplain (overcome difficulties and see rewards). Finally, we look to the horizon (future). We admire the changes in landscape. A corrobboree or ceremony is happening (celebration). The ceremony goes on for some time, it ends, we rest and then journey on, planning on where we go next.

Reflect on our Supportive People.

One of the important ways in which we can stay strong and have balance in our lives is to have strong people around us who help to keep us feeling okay during the tough times. When times get tough, it's important to remember who are the supportive people in your life and what role they play. You always have that reminder here now in the app.

Managing Risks

The safety of users is very important. There are several things the app and we can do to be aware of distress and help to manage it.

App Safety Features

- Help page is triggered if:
  - Check-ins (K5 or PHQ-2) indicate moderate to high level of distress
  - Suicide or self harm is selected as a worry

What You Might Notice

- Check-in results reveals distress
- Self harm is selected as an option in the worries section
- Young person talks about or expresses thoughts of suicide or self harm
- Young person's behaviour changes, for example they become withdrawn or absent

What You Might Do

- Have a check-in conversation:
  - *It sounds like things are tough at the moment, can you tell me a little about what is going on?*
- Check out their safety in more detail through specific questions
- Encourage them to reach out to a trusted person or service during tough times
- Follow your own organisational procedures if concerns are raised. These might include:
  - referral to antother service
 - notifying parents, school counsellor, manager

Action: Check with your organisation what your distress management protocol is.

Navigating the App

The first thing a user will do is create a profile. They will then be asked to complete a wellbeing 'check-in'. The check-in can also be accessed from the home page. A summary of all check-ins is shown first, then the 5-item Kessler psychological distress scale and the 2-item Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2).
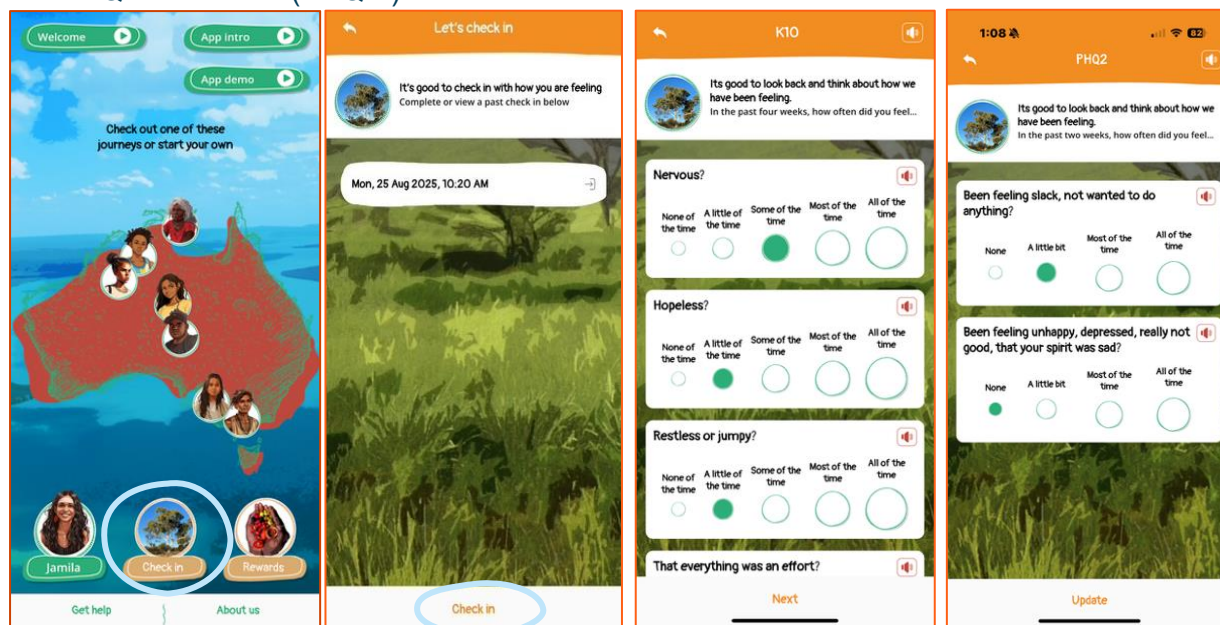

If a person identifies that they are experiencing distress when completing the K5 and PHQ-2, the interactive Help page will display. The Help page is also available on the home page.
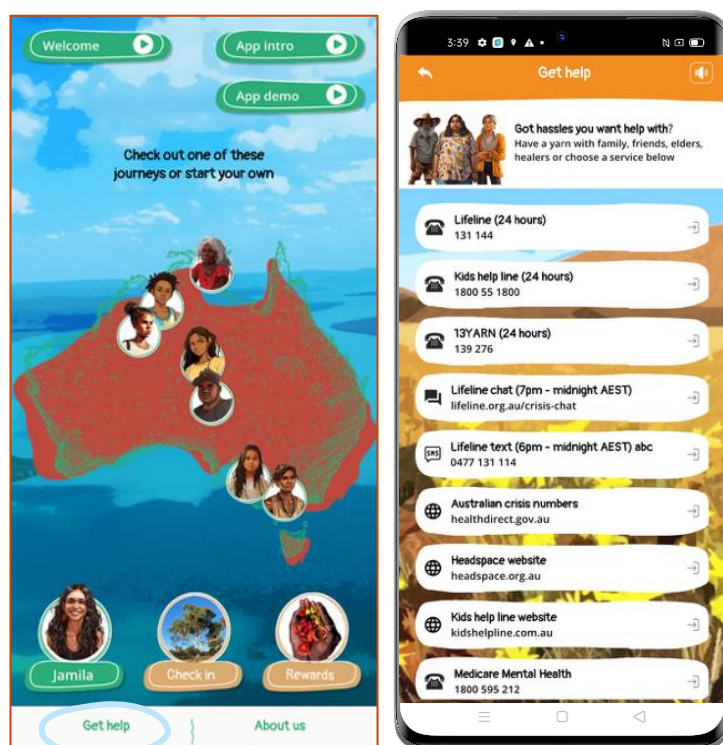
A Character Quest can be completed before the user's Own Quest. Ramone and Nikkita are from the Top End, Emily and Sean are from Central Australia, Izayah and Tarli are from South Australia and Pwangajimawu is a Tiwi elder. The character quest's offer users a chance to see and learn about the wellbeing journey of a peer, understand and get to know how the app works, and to learn some skills.

Each Character Quest has up to 9 levels that can be completed. A user's Own Quest has 10 levels. Character quests can familiarise the user before doing their own quest.
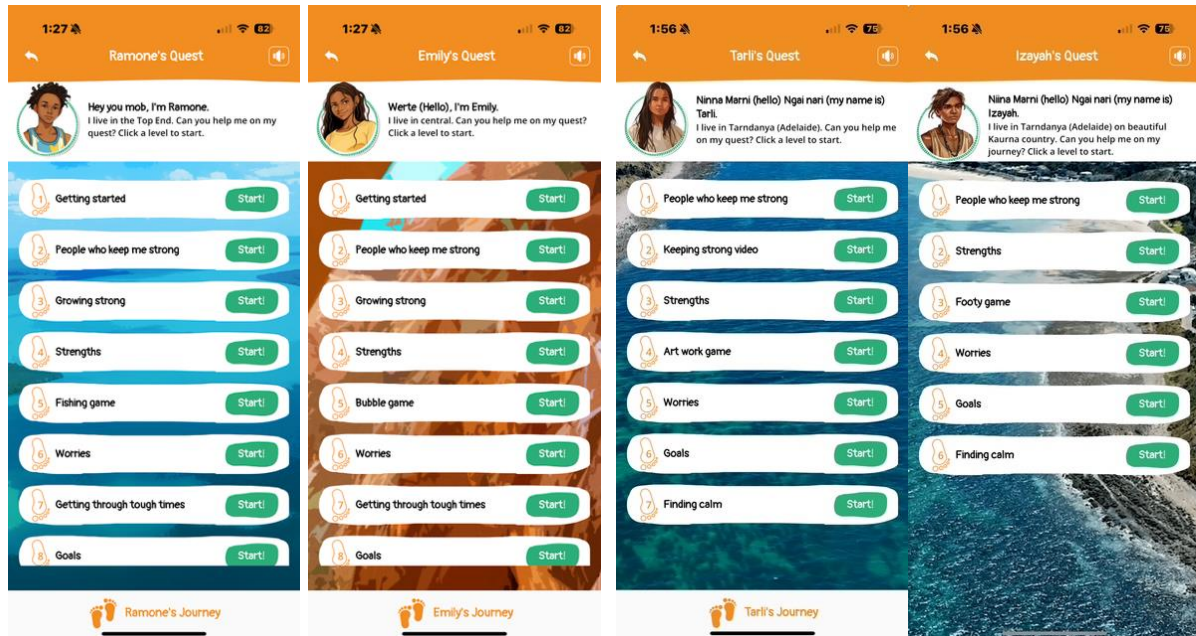

Progress on a user's quest can be viewed from the Journey page. This allows users to view a summary of what they have put into the 4 steps – people, strengths, worries and goals. It also allows them to export or share a PDF (pictorial) or text summary of their quest with someone else by pressing the icon in the top right corner of the journey page. Service providers might encourage young people to share their journey next time they see them. Sharing the journey can give you more talking points, greater understanding, and an opportunity to follow progress more closely, including wellbeing measures (i.e. check-ins).
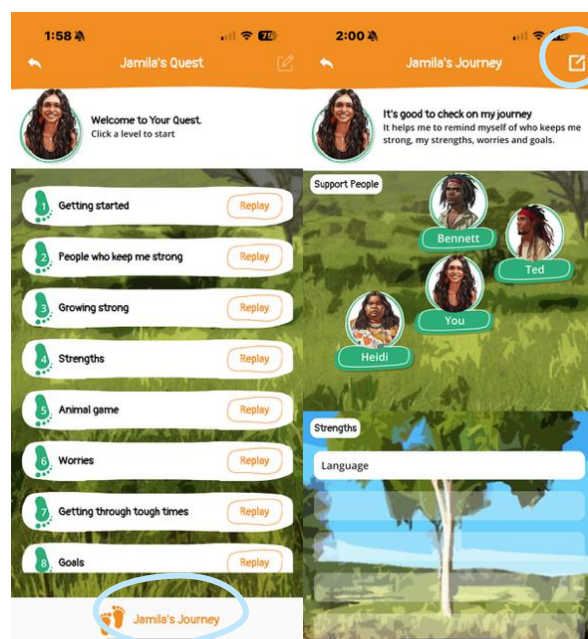
The About us section has some useful information. It explains the intended use of the app, acknowledges the app's contributors and allows users (young people and service providers) to access the privacy policy, and provide feedback on the app to help us improve it.
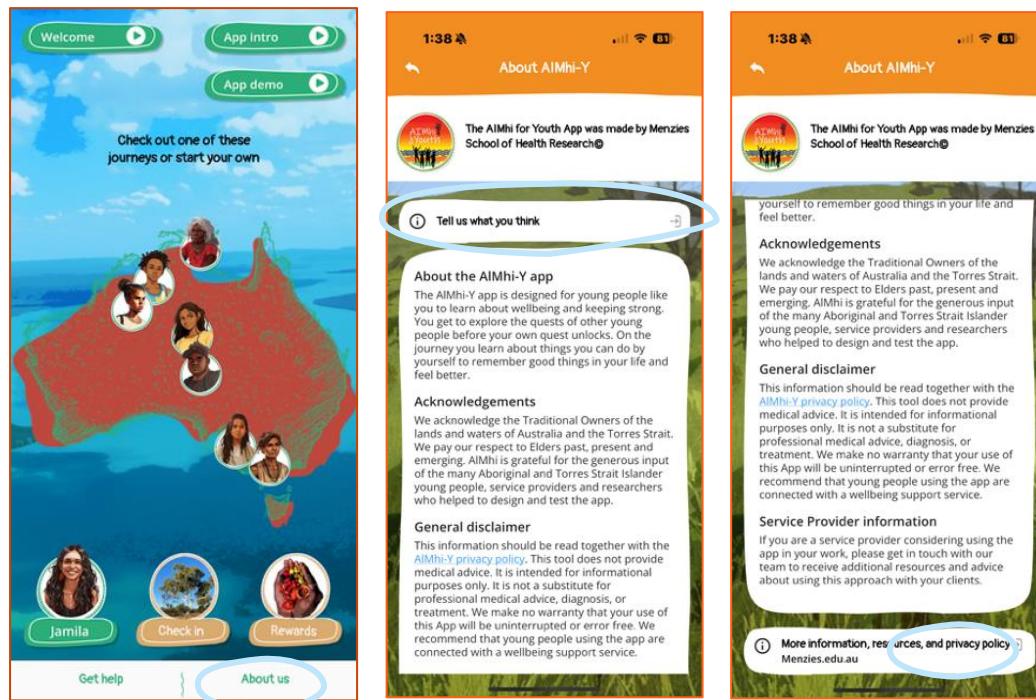
The app is like a game, and the Rewards page allows users to check the rewards they gain by completing levels. These elements aim to support motivation and bring a light-hearted touch to the often serious business of yarning about mental health.
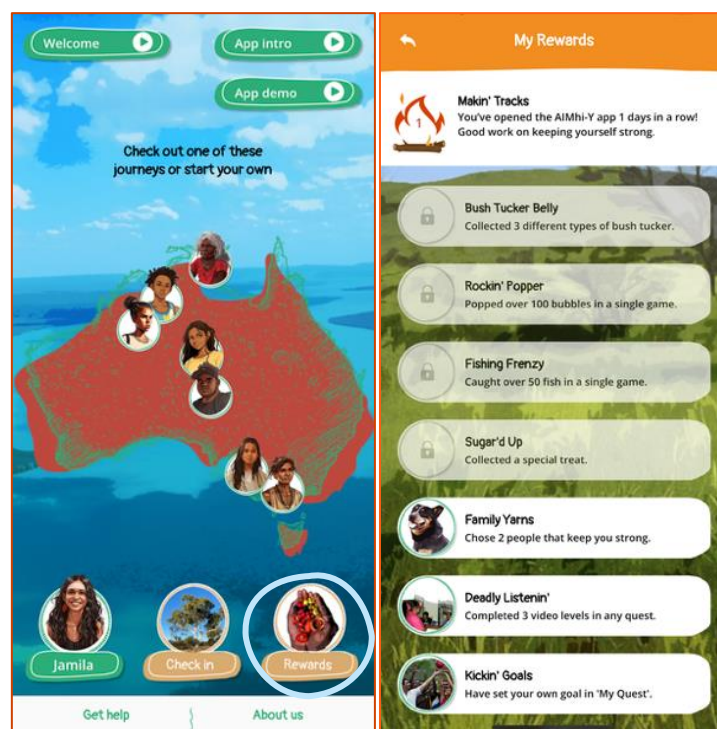
Create profile is the first thing to do.

A **'Check-in'** is prompted the first time the app is used and every 4 weeks thereafter.

The **interactive help page** is triggered if distress is detected, or self-harm selected, and can be accessed anytime.

Ramone or Emily's quest must be completed before the **user quest** is unlocked.

The Journey page displays progress

A summary of the user's care plan can be shared via the Journey page

We encourage feedback from all users (young people and service providers) on the app to be provided through the *'Tell us what you think'* section of the *'About us'* section.

Support Resources Available

Tips card for Service Providers

Tips card for young people

Phone Card Screenshots

Tree poster

Videos

Website

Contact Us

We encourage you to provide feedback to us about the app, clinical issues, technical issues or any other feedback good or not so good so that we can continue to evaluate and improve the app.

You can do this through the About Us section by pressing 'Tell us what you think' or by contacting us on the below email.

The AIMhi Stay Strong team.

Mail to:

Menzies School of Health Research
PO Box 41096
Casuarina NT 0811

E-mail: Info.aimhi@menzies.edu.au

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