New Roots – Integrated support for refugee men

Evaluation summary prepared for beyondblue

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Background
The New Roots project aims to assist newly settled Australians to rebuild their mental capital to more fully participate in their community and society. The name of the project originates with the concept of establishing new roots when starting out in a new country, the idea that when a tree is transplanted from one place to another it takes time for it to grow new roots and become strong again. Eventually with enough sun, nutrients and water the tree can grow strong again and have flowers and fruit.

The New Roots project was developed by Settlement Services International (SSI) in partnership with beyondblue with donations from the Movember Foundation, and aims to improve the health and wellbeing of males 18 - 45 who have recently settled in Australia through a humanitarian visa from the Arabic, Farsi-Dari and Tamil speaking communities.

The New Roots project includes three components:

- **New Roots Application** – information, tips and tools that help with starting a new life in Australia including healthy eating, sleep and exercise; making connections with others; and work, study and volunteering. Available on both iOS and android mobile phones.

- **Online New Roots Toolkit and training for case managers** - information to improve the skills, confidence and knowledge of settlement case managers in identifying and responding to the social and emotional wellbeing of recently arrived men. The training also builds the capacity of case managers to support clients in using the App.

- **Community workshops for community leaders** - supported the implementation of the project through broader community engagement with the New Roots App.

The New Roots project was launched in December 2015 and Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) conducted an evaluation between November 2015 and October 2016. An evaluation plan and program logic were developed in collaboration with beyondblue and SSI to provide a strong foundation for embedding evaluation in the implementation of the New Roots project and establishing an evidence base in relation to the effectiveness of the New Roots project.

A mixed method evaluation approach was used. Monitoring data included project documentation, with data on community leader workshop sessions, participation in community launches, client numbers/SSI case managers and analytics from the New Roots App and online New Roots Toolkit. Evaluation data included in-depth interviews with clients, case managers, team leaders, community leaders and self-complete surveys with community leaders and case managers.
Key Evaluation Findings

New Roots – a successful project
The evaluation suggests that both the New Roots App and Toolkit have been well received and have had high levels of usage. The success of the New Roots project indicates potential to contribute to the social and emotional wellbeing of the target population in the future.

“I think the best thing about this App is that I have something in my pocket that I can refer to any time I feel down or I need some sort of help or guidance.” Client

The New Roots App is well used
The New Roots App (the App) was well used, acceptability of the App is high and functionality was noted as very good. In a typical week, 96 users accessed the App and there were approximately 146 sessions. The project has a strong reach in the context of the target market with 2,806 downloads of the New Roots App - 293 in Arabic, 280 in Farsi, 151 in Tamil and 2,082 in English.

The monitoring data indicates that user engagement is growing with both time of session and average number of screens increasing in recent months. Combined with the high levels of repeat usage, this is a positive sign that there is a core group of engaged users of the App.

Clients increase knowledge and change behaviours
SSI clients had a positive response to the New Roots App with increases in awareness and knowledge of health and wellbeing and positive changes in client behaviour. Some clients had implemented strategies to improve health and wellbeing after using the App, including strategies to reduce distress and increase participation in social and community activities.

“It provides really simple tips but they are so important and they work. Just paying attention to my emotion and learning about my own feelings has given me insight that made me feel better.” Client
Clients value the provision of the New Roots App in community languages

The App is available in English, Arabic, Farsi/Dari and Tamil and users can move easily between languages. The provision of in-language information, including videos, and the ability to switch between languages was highly valued by clients.

“The best feature in the whole App for me are the videos. I think I learn better by watching something than reading. I loved the fact that you could switch from English to Arabic and the videos would change into Arabic too.” Client

Self-assessment tool is valued

About half the clients interviewed had used the self-assessment tool and reported that it was easy to use and helpful. The self-assessment tool provided these clients with increased awareness and an opportunity to check-in on their own wellbeing, focusing on potential issues or problems, such as sleeplessness.

“Using the self-assessment tool makes me aware of nervousness, restlessness and sleeplessness. I also liked the question about feeling “worthless”, because it dawned on me that by helping my friend who was grieving I got a sense of worth and that I was not worthless”. Client

Improving the New Roots App

SSI clients suggested increasing user engagement by including more visual material and enhancing connections with others through more real-life stories and videos.

New Roots Toolkit and training was well received

Case managers and team leaders indicated an increase in self-reported knowledge, confidence and capacity against all key topic areas covered in the New Roots Toolkit. Participants found the workshops helpful with the biggest increases in knowledge in relation to the value of the App, the difference between mental wellbeing and mental illness and strategies for case manager health and wellbeing.
New Roots Toolkit well used
The registrations of the online New Roots Toolkit have built to 104 (out of the 181 SSI frontline staff in SSI humanitarian programs) since the launch. This indicates that over one half (104/181 = 58%) of all SSI case managers have accessed these materials.

Incorporating New Roots App into casework
While most case managers support the New Roots project, the App has not necessarily been integrated in their day to day casework practice. The interim evaluation (July 2016), recommended a hands-on workshop focussing on the App and this approach resulted in a greater willingness by case managers to engage clients in using the App as part of their casework. There is scope to continue to develop this information channel moving forward.

“I think it’s really great, we are really busy, our job is demanding, if a client uses the App to find information about education, law, migration, employment, everything is updated, it saves us time." Case manager

Supported by community leaders
Community leaders were very positive about community use of the App, they engaged with the workshop and gained new knowledge, leaving with increased confidence about having conversations with community members about mental wellbeing. Community leaders noted that the App was likely to be more popular with younger people due to their familiarity with new technologies.

“…young people are very comfortable with using their smartphones which means this project is very suitable for them, but older people who are not familiar with the technology, I don’t think they show an interest or follow it up.” Community leader

Some community leaders face challenges in relation to understandings of, and preparedness to discuss mental health, particularly in contexts where there may be evidence of social stigma. To some extent, this provides a barrier for community leaders in promoting the use of the App and broader understandings of mental health and wellbeing.
Acknowledgements

The Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) wishes to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners of Australia and custodians of the oldest continuous culture in the world, and pay respects to Elders past and present.

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**Settlement Services International** (SSI) is a leading not-for-profit organisation providing a range of services in the areas of humanitarian settlement, housing, support for people seeking asylum, multicultural foster care, disability support and employment services in NSW. SSI’s mission is to be a leader in the settlement services sector through the provision of support services that achieve independence for refugees and migrants, underpinned by the lived experience of refugees and migrants.

**beyondblue’s** aim is for everyone in Australia to achieve their best possible mental health, equipping people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to protect their own mental health, identify when they become unwell and take steps to support those around them. Information and support is provided for people at every stage of life, whatever their need and the beyondblue support service is available 24/7 for people to talk through whatever’s worrying them.

The **Movember Foundation** is a global men’s health charity whose vision is to have an everlasting impact on the face of men’s health. The Foundation raises funds that deliver innovative, breakthrough programs that allow men to live happier, healthier and longer lives. Millions have joined the men’s health movement since 2003, raising $650 million, funding over 1,000 projects focussing on prostate cancer, testicular cancer, poor mental health and physical inactivity.

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