help@hand Evaluation

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORATION: LEARNINGS FROM OLDER ADULTS

Marin and San Mateo Counties explored myStrength, Uniper, and Wysa for use with older adults and community members through surveys and focus group data. While each County took a unique approach to understand the needs of the older adults in their communities, this learning brief is intended to bring together general learnings that Counties/Cities may find useful if they are interested in working with older adults as a target audience. Although findings from this brief may also generate insights into the technologies themselves, we caution that members from other target audiences may have different and unique perceptions of these technologies, and thus these findings should not be used to generalize to other target audiences.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR OLDER ADULT POPULATIONS

- The degree of an older adult's digital literacy will influence their ability to use the technologies. Counties/Cities should carefully consider the skill level of their older adult community when selecting a technology. For example, they could provide training programs to some County/City residents.

- Limited Vendor technical support as well as not having friends or family who can offer technical assistance may limit an older adult's ability to make use of the technology. On-going technical assistance may be needed to support older adult users and facilitate engagement -- not only during set up but also as they continue to use the technology.

- Different mental health literacy levels and different ways older adults think about mental health may also influence the use of a particular technology. For example, terms like "anxiety," "depression," etc. may resonate with some people, but others may not think about mental health in these clinical terms. Understanding how the County's/City's older adult community thinks about mental health can inform what technologies may be a fit as well as inform outreach efforts.

- Cultural sensitivity was consistently rated low in these technologies. This should be considered when thinking about selecting technologies for particular subgroups within the older adult population, such as Spanish-speaking older adults.

- Older adults perceived myStrength, Uniper, and Wysa as useful generally, but sometimes for different reasons. For instance, Uniper was viewed as helpful to address isolation generally but was perceived as being less helpful for providing content specific to mental health concerns, such as depression. On the other hand, myStrength was seen as useful due to its specific mental health content but less useful for addressing isolation because it did not allow users to connect with other people. Counties/Cities should consider the objectives of implementing a technology for older adults, as that will influence which tools to pilot to meet those objectives.

Learnings across Marin and San Mateo Counties

Marin and San Mateo Counties separately received feedback about myStrength from older adults and community members[1] using surveys and focus groups. While their approaches differed somewhat, the learnings reported here are taken from data obtained from standardized questions to glean insights across the two Counties. Seven older adults were from San Mateo, and twelve were from Marin. Marin held two focus groups for myStrength on June 26, 2020 and July 18, 2020, and San Mateo held one on September 24, 2020. Participants explored myStrength for 1 to 6 hours, were asked to complete a demographic survey, technology experience survey, and participate in a focus group. Please note not all participants completed all data collection components. Survey data and focus group notes were analyzed by the Help@Hand Evaluation Team.

Participant demographics. Eighteen participants took the demographic survey (one declined). **Gender:** Thirteen participants identified as women, and five as men. **Age:** Two participants were between 55-59 years old, one was between 60-64 years old, five were between 65-74 years old, six were between 75-84 years old, and one was between 85-89 years (three declined to answer). **Race:** Ten identified as White; three as Asian; one as Latinx/Hispanic; one as Black/African-American; and one as American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, and White. (Two declined to answer.) **Language:** Seventeen participants' preferred language was English. For one participant, Spanish was their preferred language. **Education:** Six participants reported having bachelor's degrees, ten had graduate or professional degrees, and two reported some college. **Household Annual Income:** Eight participants had income under $50,000, two between $50,000 and $74,999, and five $75,000 or over. (Three declined to answer.) **Mental Health:** Eleven participants indicated that they had experienced mental health concerns, one reported current mental health concerns, and five reported not having experienced mental health concerns. (One declined to answer.)
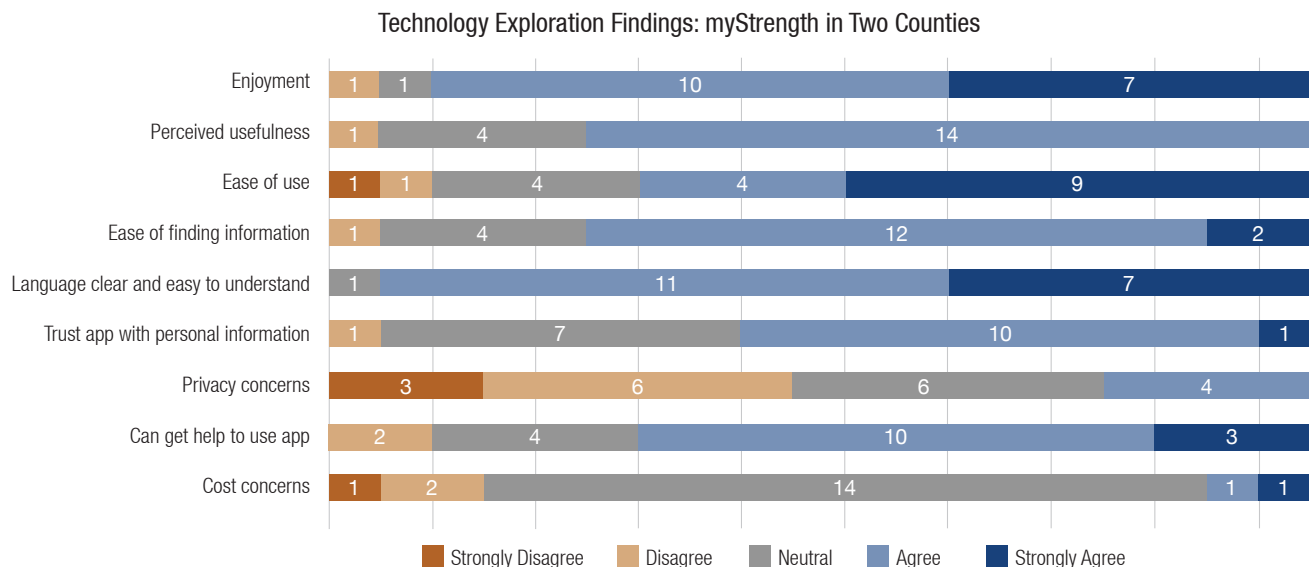
Summary of Findings

Table 1. Summary of Findings for myStrength in Marin and San Mateo Counties (n=19)

Pros	Cons
• A variety of topics and content specific to mental health and wellness were viewed positively • Information was perceived as easy to understand • Some activities, such as sleep tracking, seem particularly useful and may help users stay engaged	• Did not allow participants to connect with other people and did not integrate with mental health services • Exploration within the app may be discouraged, as some exercises could not be explored without completing or deleting progress made in other activities • Information in the app may be repetitive and redundant for some users, not leading to new knowledge • While participants themselves generally rated myStrength as easy to use, they felt that some people with less technology experience may find it more complicated

On two separate surveys, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement, on a scale from Strongly Disagree(1) to Strongly Agree(5), for a number of statements related to their perceptions of myStrength (see Figure 1). Figure 1 shows that participants generally rated the technology positively, but had some privacy concerns. Across the two Counties' older adult participants, most rated myStrength as enjoyable (n=17), useful (n=14), and easy to use (n=13). Most participants also reported that information was easy to find (n=14) and the language myStrength used was clear and easy to understand (n=18). In terms of trust and privacy, eleven participants agreed that they trust myStrength with their personal information; however, only nine disagreed that their personal information on myStrength could invade their privacy if used, and four participants reported this as a concern. Most participants (n=13) felt they could get help using myStrength if they had difficulties, and few participants (n=2) had cost concerns. It is important to note that while less common, some participants reported myStrength as not enjoyable (n=1), not useful (n=1), and not easy to use (n=2), as well as not easy to find information (n=1). Further, two participants reported that they would not have access to help to use myStrength.

Figure 1. Survey results from standardized questions for Marin's and San Mateo's myStrength Exploration[2]

Technology Exploration Findings: myStrength in Two Counties

Legend: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

[1]A few participants did not identify as older adults and were brought in as community members in order to understand the perspective of Spanish-speaking individuals.

[2]These results are provided for myStrength as it was the only application explored in both Counties; Figure 1 shows combined data from both Counties.

UNIPER

Learnings from Marin County

In total, twelve people[3] participated in surveys and focus groups to provide stakeholder feedback for Uniper. Participants took a demographic survey, used Uniper for 1 to 8 hours over one week, completed a survey individually, and then participated in a virtual focus group. Focus groups for Uniper were held on June 26, 2020 and July 18, 2020. Data were analyzed by the Help@Hand Evaluation Team.

Participant demographics. Eleven participants took the demographic survey (one declined). **Gender:** Six participants identified as women, and five as men. **Age:** Six participants were between 65-84 years old, one was between 60-64 years old, and one was between 85-89 years (three declined to answer). **Race:** Six participants identified as White, one as Latinx/Hispanic, one as Black/African-American, and one as Southeast Asian (two declined to answer). **Language:** Ten participants' preferred language was English. Two participants spoke Spanish, and for one, Spanish was their preferred language. **Education:** Eight participants had graduate or professional degrees, two had bachelor's degrees, and one had some college experience. **Household Annual Income:** Seven participants had income under $50,000, and two had $75,000 or over (two declined to answer). **Mental Health:** Six participants indicated that they had experienced mental health concerns while four had not experienced mental health concerns (one declined to answer). **Digital Literacy:** The majority of participants (n=10) were confident using technology.

Table 2. Summary of Findings for Uniper in Marin County (n=12)

Pros	Cons
• Perceived as useful for human interaction, which can help in addressing feelings of isolation • Rated as enjoyable and easy to use • A variety of content available and opportunity to add content relevant to counties viewed positively • Interesting activities and videos available • Technical support available to provide ongoing support to users	• Lacks mental health-specific content, such as issues like depression and anxiety • More personal information is shared via video possibly making privacy more of a concern • Support needed to get started with the app, as some faced technical issues even with Uniper's assistance • Content needs to be updated more regularly • Difficult to fit timing of live activities into some people's schedules • Unclear how emergencies would be handled • Rated low on cultural sensitivity, particularly for Spanish speakers • Web version not as well put together as the TV version

WYSA

Learnings from San Mateo County

In total, seven older adults participated in surveys, and six older adults participated in a focus group to provide stakeholder feedback for Wysa. Participants took a demographic survey, used the technology between 1 to 6 hours, completed a survey individually, and then participated in a focus group, which occurred on September 24, 2020. Focus group notes were shared with the Help@Hand Evaluation Team, and survey data were analyzed by the Help@Hand Evaluation Team.

Participant demographics. Gender: All seven participants who took the demographic survey identified as female or women. **Age:** Two participants were between 55-59 years old, three were between 65-74 years old, and two were between 75-84 years. **Race:** Four participants identified as White, two as Asian, and one as American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, and White. **Language:** All participants reported their preferred language as English. **Education:** Four participants reported having a bachelor's degree, two had a graduate or professional degree, and one had some college experience. **Household Annual Income:** Three participants reported their annual household income as over $100,000, two between $50,000 and $74,999, and one less than $30,000 (one declined to answer). **Mental Health:** Five reported having experienced mental health concerns, one reported current mental health concerns, and one reported not having experienced mental health concerns.

Table 3. Summary of Findings for Wysa in San Mateo County (n=7)

Pros	Cons
• Enjoyed by participants, due to its effective use of imagery, which had a calming effect • Useful in daily life because it possesses exercises that address problems experienced on a daily basis and focus on wellness • Allowed for access to a therapist and the ability to easily contact emergency services • Language was perceived to be relatively simple, which may appeal to more people, and did not require understanding of mental health terminology • Allowed for tracking of progress, including exercises that record the number of minutes engaged with the technology, as well as a therapist who maintains notes from chatting with users	• Technical issues experienced, including technology freezing and denying users access to certain features • Not very customizable according to need and eventually both the technology's and the therapist's responses became repetitive • Perceived not to be very culturally sensitive and lacked the incorporation of one's culture to dictate the manner in which the technology or therapist responded to participants • Information was seen as less trustworthy and, while easier to understand, lacking substance for some

[3] A few participants did not identify as older adults and were brought in as community members in order to understand the perspective of Spanish-speaking individuals.