Autumn 2024

Outside the box

Alumni magazine



Megan Lam

The power of tech in mental health

Anna Freud

Editorial

Welcome to the autumn edition of Outside the Box! Whether you are a technophile or a technophobe, there is no avoiding the fact that artificial intelligence (AI) and technology are infiltrating almost all aspects of our modern lives, including the field of mental health. This forms the central theme of this issue and we delve into how cutting-edge technologies are enhancing the mental health landscape. These advancements are not only breaking down barriers to access and reducing stigma but also providing new ways to diagnose, treat and support individuals on their mental health journeys.

Our feature story on page 12 spotlights amazing alum and entrepreneur Megan Lam, who has successfully launched a mental health app for the workplace. It superbly showcases how collaboration between technology and mental health can optimise employee wellbeing and enhance productivity.

On page six, Anna Freud manager Sally Marriott reviews Pod (originally called Patient Outcomes Data), an online outcomes data collection tool for mental health providers that can be used on any device with internet access. Developed by Anna Freud, Pod perfectly illustrates how technology can enable the collection and use of data to build better evidence bases for mental health provision.

Whilst excited about technological development, we are also conscious that privacy and security measures need to be prioritised to ensure safe, ethical and inclusive adoptability. Here at Anna Freud, Deputy Programme Director Mariana Pereira felt it was important to dispel some of the common misconceptions surrounding AI and to provide a basic understanding of how technology can be used positively in our work – but also to address some of its limitations. If you are avoiding the technology wave, turn to page 10 and Mariana might just put your mind at ease.

As an interesting contrast, alum Asma Syeda chose to review Tara Westover's autobiography *Educated* for the Book Corner section on page 20. Tara grew up in a strict Mormon household where even the most basic necessities were forbidden; technology certainly had no place. Asma explores why the key message of the book – knowledge is empowerment – resonated so deeply with her. The book is a real favourite of mine too.



Neelam Dongha
Alumni Magazine Editor

I hope you enjoy reading this magazine and if you would like to be featured in a future issue, or if you have any article feedback or suggestions, we would love to hear from you.

Please get in touch at alumni@annafreud.org.



Contents

3 Welcome
4 Alumni achievements
6 Anna Freud news
12 Alumni stories: Megan Lam
20 Book Corner
23 Training, events and offers

Welcome

We live in an increasingly technological age and advances are happening at an astonishing rate, reshaping numerous aspects of our lives. From how we communicate to how we work, learn, and even manage our wellbeing, technology has become an integral part of our daily existence.

Inevitably, these have seeped into the world of mental health and are changing the way we professionals work; innovative tools and platforms are revolutionising the delivery, accessibility and effectiveness of care.

We are incredibly proud to showcase the work of our alumni who are at the forefront of these innovations, sharing their contributions and insights into how technology is being harnessed to address mental health challenges. From developing AI-driven therapeutic tools to creating online communities that offer support and resources, our alumni are making significant impacts in the field.

However, we must also recognise there are ethical considerations and challenges that accompany these technological advancements. Ensuring privacy, maintaining human connection and addressing disparities in access are crucial components that must be thoughtfully managed as we continue to integrate technology into mental health care.

We hope that this issue not only informs and inspires you, but also ignites a sense of pride in the collective achievements of our alumni community. As we navigate the complexities of mental health in the digital age, it is heartening to see our alumni leading the way with innovation, compassion and a commitment to improving lives.

Staying connected to our alumni network is so important to us and we would love to hear from you. You can get in touch at alumni@annafreud.org or via any of our social media channels.

Warm wishes, Vanessa



Dr Vanessa Puetz

Dr Vanessa Puetz is Deputy Director of the UCL-Yale MRes in Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology (DNP), Co-Director of the new distance learning course – PG DiP in Child and Adolescent Psychology and Neuroscience in Practice, Senior Course Tutor in Postgraduate Studies and a UCL Associate Professor. Vanessa's contribution to education has been recognised through a number of teaching award nominations, as well as being honoured with the UCL Provost's Education Award 2019 and the UCL Education Award 2019. Vanessa was awarded these for her extraordinary commitment to students, who rated her amongst the best lecturers in the UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences.

Alumni Achievements

Career Evenings

It was wonderful to welcome back alumni to talk to current students at our recent career evenings.

Our Clinical Panel Event held in March gathered Masters' students and staff at Anna Freud, all eager to learn from seasoned experts in the clinical field. The event featured an impressive lineup of alumni who shared their insights and professional journeys, making it a cornerstone of our career evenings. Panelists included:

- Dr Holly Dwyer Hall, a Child Psychotherapist
- Dr Abi Enlander, a Clinical Psychologist
- Dr Rose Mortimer, a current DClinPsy student with a DPhil from Oxford
- Mariana Escallon from the NHS
- Pritpal Chandan, involved in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy Training
- Kate Yan, a Doctoral Candidate in child and adolescent psychotherapy.

The evening was structured to maximise learning and engagement. It began with introductions by the panelists about their roles and experiences, followed by a dialogue session where student representatives posed questions from all students. The event concluded with an informal interaction session over refreshments, providing a unique opportunity for personal engagement with the panelists. This event not only enlightened but also inspired students by illustrating the diverse career paths in psychotherapy and clinical psychology.

The research panel event took place in early May. Panelists included:

- Professor Julian Edbrooke-Childs, Co-Director of the UCL/Anna Freud Evidence-Based Practice Unit
- Dr Eva Sprecher, Research Fellow at UCL
- Dr Rose Mortimer
- Dr Guilherme Fiorini, Research Officer at Anna Freud
- Max Moser, current PhD student at UCL.

This session mirrored the structure of the previous event, with a focus on experts and alumni sharing their knowledge and experiences in the field of psychological research. Students had the opportunity to engage directly with these experts, gaining invaluable insights into the world of academic and applied research.

We will be hosting more career evenings in the next academic year, so if you would like to share your career experience with Anna Freud students, please get in touch by emailing alumni@annafreud.org. We welcome career experiences from our alumni abroad as well as anyone who may not have followed the traditional routes into clinical work or research.

Elizabeth is awarded her PHD

As a follow-up to our last issue where we featured alum Elizabeth Li, we are delighted to report that she passed her viva with no corrections in January and was awarded a PhD in Developmental Psychopathology and Psychotherapy by UCL. Her thesis was on Epistemic Trust and Mistrust in Psychology, Psychopathology, and Psychotherapy. Elizabeth received two grants: a Secondary Data Analysis Grant (as a Co-Principal Investigator) from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and a Grant for Systematic Review (Principal Investigator: Professor Nick Midgley) from the What Works Centre for Children & Families.



"A huge thank you to my supervisors, Professor Patrick Luyten, Professor Nick Midgley, and Dr Chloe Campbell. I could not have wished for a better supervisory team. Their generous input, guidance, support and encouragement were instrumental in my ability to develop an understanding of this field. As a PhD student, I was merely conveying ideas from them and other great psychologists such as Peter Fonagy CBE, Bruce Wampold, Erik Erikson, and Donald Winnicott. Yet, what I have learned from my supervisors transcends knowledge and skills; it continues to inspire me to reflect on our many conversations and the relationships we have built.

Starting this PhD journey in September 2019 at the age of 25, I can't think of a better way to have spent the second half of my 20s. While the pursuit of a PhD title is significant, my advice to potential candidates is to ensure their motivation stems from a genuine passion for research rather than the allure of the title itself. The process can be tough if your heart is not fully in it."

Elizabeth Li

Anna Freud news

Professor Peter Fonagy CBE retires

Many of you will be aware that in September our long-serving CEO, Professor Peter Fonagy, retired from Anna Freud. Professor Fonagy has had a profound influence on Anna Freud and we will be marking this properly in our next edition.

In September, we welcomed Professor Eamon McCrory as our new CEO. Professor McCrory has been part of Anna Freud for many years and is the current Co-Director of both the Education and Training and Clinical Divisions. We look forward to properly introducing Professor McCrory in our next edition.

The power of Pod

Sally Marriott has been a Pod Manager at Anna Freud for over three years. For six years before that, she was a Regional Officer in the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC). Sally's work has always focused on supporting services in efficiently collecting routine outcome data. When used effectively, this data has the power to improve services for individuals and whole cohorts. In line with the theme of this issue, Pod exemplifies perfectly how technology can make for better data collection that in turn betters mental health provision. In this article, Sally explains how Pod works, how its use has grown and how recent developments have enhanced its future useability.

What is Pod?

Pod is a web-based system developed by Anna Freud, that enables the efficient collection of outcome and feedback data across numerous mental health settings and services. Pod was originally developed for the collection of data during research projects such as the Social Brain Study at UCL. However, it has proved highly effective as a tool to support mainstream clinical services such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and large-scale training programme evaluation such as the Knowledge and Understanding Framework (KUF).

History of Pod

Pod started out as a research tool over a decade ago to help measure and monitor a specific piece of research between UCL and Anna Freud. It was built for collecting two questionnaires, the Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ9) and Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment 7 (GAD7); both are routine outcome measures. It was originally called Patient Outcomes Data and this became the acronym POD. Over the years, the title behind the acronym has lost some of its meaning to users who only ever refer to it as 'Pod'. Therefore, in consultation with Pod customers and our in-house in-house marketing team, the decision has been made to drop the title as an acronym; going forward the product is simply 'Pod'.

Through word of mouth alone, the use of Pod has grown and now over 40 services and projects are using Pod every day. There are now over 130 measurement tools built into the system. This is such a great achievement for a product that started out with one project and two tools!

How does Pod support practice, research and evaluation?

In clinical practice, Pod provides practitioners with a platform to score outcome and feedback questionnaires in real time. This facilitates the sharing and interpretation of the scores with service users during the clinical session. Service users can complete questionnaires outside of sessions and on their own devices using Pod's client interface. This timeliness increases efficiency, and scores can be accessed and discussed during sessions. Pod is compatible with all devices including mobile phones, tablets and laptops.

Each new service user added to the system has a unique Pod ID allocated to them; this allows data to be captured and stored against their individual record, showing progress and changes in scores over time. This is particularly important for any large-scale analysis, as it may be used in research or training evaluation, so that important questions around efficacy and rigor can be answered.

Other completers can also be linked to this account (for example, parents, carers and siblings) so that they can also complete questionnaires as part of the support being offered. These additional completers can also be given access to their own client interface, allowing them to complete the questionnaires remotely.

PodV7 is available for use with any age range of clients as it contains an assemblage of measures suitable for use in work with clients from age five and above. Self-report measures can be used by children as young as eight years within session. However, access for them to complete the measures outside of session, through the client interface, is only recommended for young people aged 12 years and above.



Sally Marriott

Pod for EMHP and CWP Trainees

Since 2017, Pod has been used by Child Wellbeing Practitioner trainees studying at either UCL or King's College London. Since 2019, it has also been used by Education Mental Health Practitioner (EMHP) trainees. During their training year, students are taught to use outcome and feedback questionnaires during their placement in service, as part of their case work. The measurement tools they are encouraged to use include standardised questionnaires such as the RCADS (Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale), SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire), and Goal Based Outcomes. Using Pod helps to set the standard for collecting and using the data from these questionnaires in the most meaningful way. It helps to monitor the cases they are working on and reflect on their developing practice. At the end of the training year, students can use the data they have collected to present as evidence for their learning and practice, and complete their qualification.

How does Pod fit with Anna Freud ambitions?

Anna Freud has a mission to close the gap in wellbeing and mental health by advancing, translating, delivering and sharing the best practice with everyone who impacts the lives of children and families. Pod supports this mission by providing a digital solution for gathering evidence – one of Anna Freud's six strategic goals.

The data collected in Pod can be used to support individual care. Additionally, when analysed at an aggregated level, it can:

- advance the understanding of mental health and wellbeing
- identify risk and protective factors
- evaluate what works for who, why and in which contexts.

The evidence produced facilitates data-led conversations, further helping Anna Freud to connect – another of its strategic goals – with professionals and communities of practice.

The user experience



Freyja Rigler

Alum Freyja Rigler provides her perspective on using Pod, both as a student and a staff member at Anna Freud.

"I am a Wellbeing Practitioner within the Brent WEST team, part of Anna Freud's School Division. In 2021, I completed the Child Wellbeing Practitioner course at Anna Freud whilst working as a Trainee CWP within an NHS service.

Throughout my course at Anna Freud, I was able to use Pod to record and collect my Routine Outcome Measures. I found Pod easy to use and that certain features enhanced the young person's experience of completing the questionnaires, for example, being able to display results to them in a clear and meaningful way such as bar graphs or gauges. Since returning to Anna Freud as a Wellbeing Practitioner, I have been able to start using Pod again which I am pleased about. Pod allows me and the rest of the team to keep track of our outcome measures all in one place, the results of which we can analyse and use within our termly reports."

The development and future of Pod

In this article, we have established how Pod is critical in providing good, person-centred care and enabling the right conversation across the sector as a whole. However, up until relatively recently, Pod had a very small team to cope with growing demand and a product that did not have the capacity to grow at scale or accommodate changing customer requirements. Consequently, Anna Freud decided to invest. This is now showing fruit as the new version of Pod has risen to meet these demands and is ready to be rolled out at scale.

The table below highights some of the key features of the new version of Pod.

The Change	Benefit to Service Users	Benefit to Staff
Overall improved user interface taking a 'Mobile First' aesthetic, designed through a User Experience process, aligning fully with the new Anna Freud branding.	More engaging and easier to use interface means greater likelihood of users completing the measures fully and seeing a tangible benefit to using them as part of their support pathway.	Improved engagement from staff in the use of measures, enabling them to prioritise service users' needs throughout any support provided.
Improved service user interaction by: allowing service users to manage their own logins and receive notifications directly from Pod; sending alerts when a measure is due for completion.	Empowering the service users to take charge of their care journey and making sure they are aware of their right to use measures for their benefit. With service users able to complete the measures flexibly and remotely, affords more time in session to discuss the results and plan support accordingly (as opposed to using precious time in session to complete the measures).	Dramatically reduce practitioner burden of having to contact service users themselves and ask them to complete a measure. Will result in measures being completed in a timelier manner and facilitate better discussions in session about the results.
Interoperability enabled through the Application Processing Interface (API), meaning that services can now push and pull data between Pod and their electronic patient record system (EPRS).	Service users will experience a smoother service as all their data is linked and reduces likelihood of having to repeat their story multiple times.	Reduces administrative tasks including dual set up and entry of service users and better management of the measure completion process.

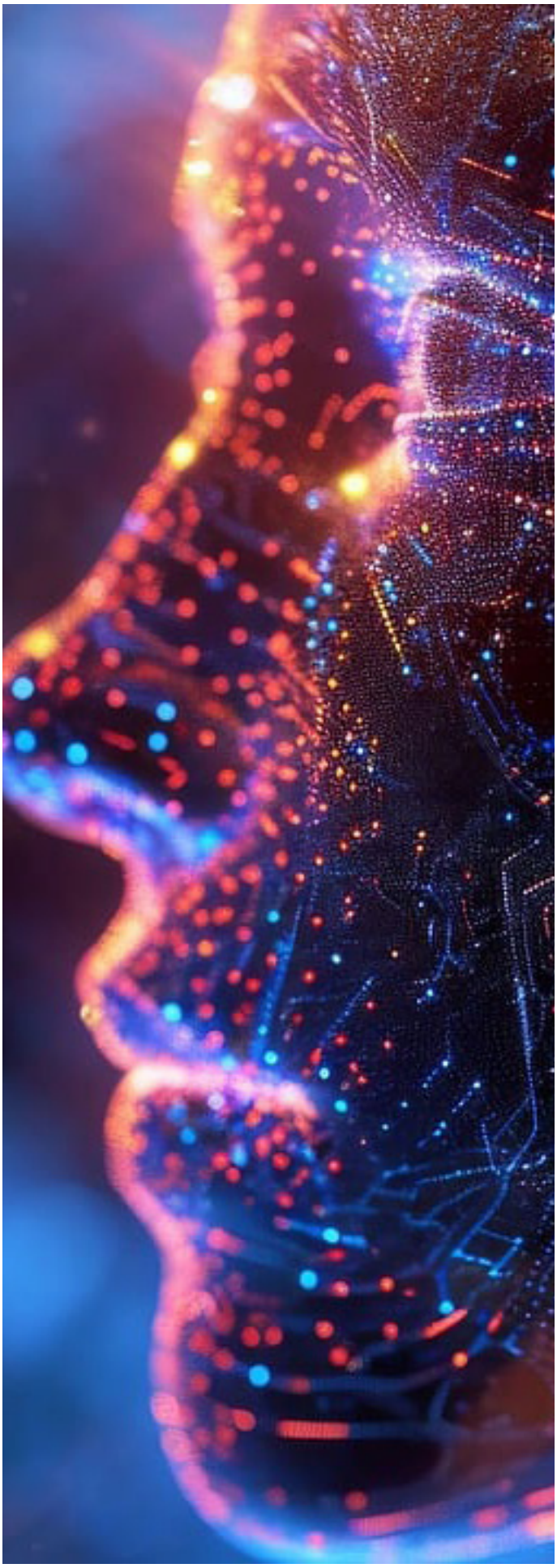
Further information

We are excited to show you how PodV7.0 looks and feels. Here is a short demonstration of the system, from a practitioner's perspective:

Pod Practitioner Demonstration Video.

The next year is going to be busy for Pod as the team continue to migrate all the services currently using the system over to this new version, while beginning to actively seek out new business. The features and functionality of Pod will continue to develop and we look forward to sharing these in future issues of this publication.

If you would like to find out more and think that Pod could help in your own work, please get in touch by emailing pod@annafreud.org.



AI training at Anna Freud

In addition to her roles as Deputy Programme Director, Module Lead and Research Tutor for the MSc in Early Child Development and Clinical Applications, Dr Mariana Pereira also runs modules on the MRes in Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology. These roles reflect Mariana's own academic journey, from an initial degree in Clinical and Health Psychology to undertaking a PhD in Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience.

However, Mariana professes her passion has always been teaching – even from a young age when she used to teach Classical Ballet to children – which led her to teaching at the UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health and at Anna Freud. In recognition of her impactful evidence-based and gamified approach to teaching and learning, Mariana was awarded a Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy.

In this article, Mariana talks about the relevance of AI and her motivation for running a training initiative for staff and students at Anna Freud.

"The concept of training on AI for students and staff at Anna Freud was borne a while ago, when the so-called 'dangers' of AI in education were being widely discussed. Many educators talking about it online or in the news seemed to adopt a 'panic mode' stance, with universities all around the world treating AI as a forbidden fruit. I found this reaction very interesting, since it painted the picture of AI as the holder of incredible power; one that could potentially entice students to use it even more! I feel a more open-minded and sensible approach to AI was adopted by UCL, which was really inspiring for me.

After exploring and experimenting with the use of AI tools, I assessed how these platforms can positively impact education and identifed the main limitations.

Through my analysis I came to three main conclusions:

- Due to the negative publicity around AI, public perceptions have been distorted. In fact, there are many AI-based platforms that can significantly support students with their studies and improve their accessibility to education.
- I feel that staff could benefit from using these platforms too, through time-saving advantages of automation and so on.
- Once I started to critically analyse AI, its limitations became very apparent. Equipped with greater insight into where it can be useful, balanced against its drawbacks provides a clearer picture of how we can best utilise AI. It makes it less intimidating, effectively giving power back to the person behind the screen.

I felt these findings would be helpful to share with Anna Freud staff and students, to help them navigate these platforms. Together with the Education and Training division, we put together a series of events for staff and students about AI in education. Our underlying aims were to provide some baseline knowledge and to highlight the potential limitations, risks, and benefits of using AI.

Training was initially intended for Anna Freud Programme Directors, but then widened to include other education and training staff as they too expressed interest! A session on AI was also made accessible to all postgraduate students, exploring platforms that could be useful for them whilst highlighting the main risks they need to be aware of.

Interestingly, I felt the training was most impactful for Anna Freud staff. The sessions achieved what they set out to do, with staff reporting they felt less anxious about using AI. Consensus was that AI was no longer the 'unknown' it was before, which offered a newfound sense of empowerment and control, whereby they could use it in their work.

Going forward, I think more training is needed to keep staff updated on the ever-changing guidelines in the use of technology. Having other initiatives which collectively explore experiences of using AI and how to navigate it within our work is crucial. The next step will be to tailor training for staff from different areas of work and to identify challenges and advantages specific to each field.

Further enhanced training for students is also needed. In future initiatives, we hope to engage students and show them that talking about AI is not taboo. It is important and helpful to bring AI to the table, and have an informed, curious, and non-judgemental approach to its use. We look forward to sharing news about future initiatives very soon!"

Thank you to Mariana for providing these training sessions to explain the basics of AI and dispel some of the myths around this topic. We look forward to learning more about how we can utilise AI safely and effectively in our work.

Alumni stories

Megan Lam: the sky is no limit

We are incredibly proud of our Anna Freud alumni and what they go on to achieve after graduating from the charity. Some have made a real difference to treatment, care and service provision in the world of mental health. One of our groundbreaking alumni is Megan Lam, who is creating waves of interest in the field of technology in the Asia Pacific (APAC) region. We are excited to share her journey with you.

Following from her own experience of tragic loss during her childhood, Megan was drawn to creating a business that would support people with their mental health. After completing her MRes in Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology through the UCL-Anna Freud partnership, she proceeded to do exactly that. In 2018 Megan set up and became CEO of a company called Neurum Health in her home, Hong Kong.

Megan's innovative business perfectly exemplifies the way that technology can impact and benefit the field of mental health.

Dynamic, savvy and trail-blazing are all words that describe Megan – and with a list of accolades and awards to her name, her work has not gone unrecognised. More recently, Megan was selected as one of 33 new fellows to join the prestigious Cartier Women's Initiative 2023 and was shortlisted for the 2024 Aurora Tech Award, which celebrates women in STEM.

In this feature, Megan remembers her time at Anna Freud, explains the driving forces that led her to the field of mental health and gives us a detailed insight into the business concepts that underpin Neurum Health. Before that, we take a brief look at the Neurum platform, the company's main product offering.



Megan Lam

The Neurum app: an artificial intelligence (AI)-backed mental wellbeing tool

Megan teamed up with co-founder Caleb Chiu, a software engineer and AI expert, to develop technology that helps users understand and proactively manage their own behavioural health. Caleb is currently the Chief Technology Officer for Neurum Health. The cornerstone of the business is the Neurum app, an app which uses AI technology to create personalised programmes to improve mental and physical wellbeing – such as in relation to sleep and exercise.

The company developed the technology from scratch with input from research partners that include Hong Kong University's Business School, Lingnan University and the University of Cambridge.

The Neurum app is currently available to companies (serving largely the APAC region) to invest in and provide to their employees. The app is a cost-effective investment for companies if it leads to less absenteeism and a happier, more productive workforce. Since the Neurum app can be downloaded onto phones, it makes mental health support directly and immediately accessible, whilst being private. Megan cites this ease of accessibility as one of the core reasons she started Neurum.

The advantage of AI technology is the personalisation aspect. As the app keeps data strictly confidential, users can merge information from their personal fitness trackers and devices to give the Neurum app a rounded view of their lifestyle. This data is used alongside the wellbeing data users input into the app to offer each user tailored recommendations for their wellbeing.'

There are over a thousand recommendations on the app, from keeping a gratitude journal to doing breathing exercises, and the app advises users to seek professional support where necessary.

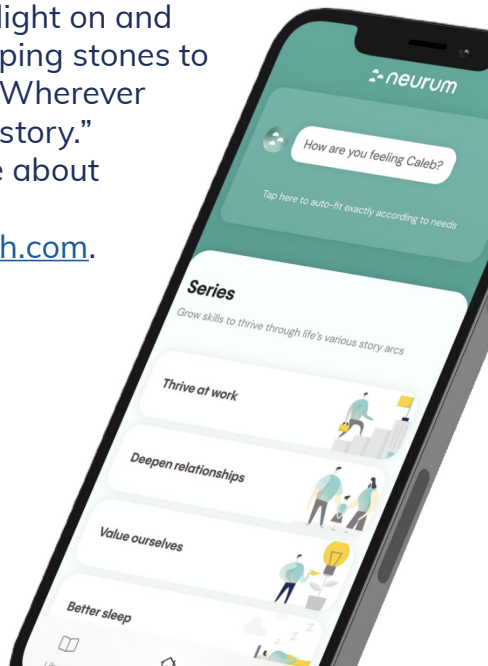
The data generated by the Neurum app is aggregated, anonymised and non-identifiable which ensures user confidentiality but allows employers to observe overall themes and gain a clearer understanding of their employees' behavioural health needs.

This means that employers can specifically tailor their offerings based on need. For example, if the data shows staff are worrying about finances, the company can provide relevant events and engagements to help directly address and alleviate this stress factor.

The data from companies using the Neurum app is very positive, and the app is continually gaining new clients. Global insurance company AXA is a customer that vouches for the benefits of its partnership with Neurum Health – you can read AXA's case study on Neurum Health's website.

Perhaps the biggest endorsement for the Neurum app is that Megan – who openly acknowledges that she has had her own mental health battles – is a committed user.

A point of interest is the company name: Neurum was chosen because 'Neuro' relates to the mind and 'umbra' means shadow in Latin. The company byline reads: "Our promise is to shed light on and pave the right stepping stones to care fitted for you. Wherever you are in your life story." You can learn more about Neurum Health at www.neurumhealth.com.



Interview with Megan Lam

When and what did you study at Anna Freud?

I was enrolled in the MRes Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology programme between 2015-2017 under the tutelage of Dr Vanessa Puetz.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in mental health?

I have had first-hand experience of the toll mental health challenges can take on people. I tragically lost my maternal grandmother and an aunt to suicide when I was very young. I also watched my mother struggle with her own mental health. I felt helpless and confused as to what to do during these experiences.

In terms of a profession, I was set to attend law school but changed my mind at the last minute. I attended a clearing fair to explore my options and ended up taking the last place at Durham University to study applied psychology at undergraduate level. During my studies, I was particularly interested in online interventions as I felt this route meant you could reach more people, more often, more quickly. Given my own traumatic childhood losses, my view was that the traditional model often does too little, too late, without considering cultural relevancy.

What did you gain from your experience as an Anna Freud postgraduate student?

What caught my interest was that the programme was unique in having a taught element and a hands-on research element. At the same time, the course allowed for each student to have the intellectual freedom to explore their area of interest, whilst providing support and access to experts in each of their respective domains. Hence it provided the breadth and the support for depth.

Is there anything you learnt at Anna Freud that impacts your work now?

Multiple perspectives are more than simply a collection of modules; more of a mindset that I learned. This approach is encouraged in our teams today – to think about a wide range of principles and embrace complexity.

Any particular or special memories from your time as an Anna Freud student?

Plenty! Including how special it was learning at Maresfield Gardens given its history – though it is the people that I met and connected with as an Anna Freud student that made the experience meaningful. The kindness and encouragement from professors and staff during my time at Anna Freud, the smart and driven classmates in close proximity, exchanging notes and sharing laughs – these are special memories I constantly revisit.

After completing your studies at Anna Freud, you embarked on setting up Neurum Health. How was the idea for the Neurum app born?

It was born out of necessity; having identified a need to scalably, measurably and sustainably support every single person in a way that fits into their own unique lives, on their terms. There was a large gap; what did already exist was not addressing these growing needs. Hence our vision to bring our mind's care to life – directly where we live, work, play and learn. The primary focus is on serving the workplace.

Had you always wanted to start your own business?

I never set out to start my own business. It was just the result of wanting to solve problems and to make sure whatever we delivered was robust and durable. A concept only turns into a real business when people adopt your solution and tell other people that it's helped.

How long did it take from conception of the idea to setting up the business, to getting your first client?

We had a list of customers before the business was even live and fully operational, so there was a whole development stage of fostering relationships, co-creation and honest listening. I am forever grateful for the feedback and the patience of those involved. It took about 9-12 months of building the product up from scratch to closing our first big customer.



Megan presenting at a conference

What was the process like?

It's not glamorous. There's a lot of falling on your face, steep learning curves, personal sacrifices, disbelievers, discrimination and rejections. But like many things in life, we endure these moments and challenges and do it for the love of the cause, in the hope that we can move the needle to point at a better future for mental health.

What was the impact of COVID-19, given that the business would have been in its infancy during the pandemic?

There was without doubt a need for greater workplace mental health awareness prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, but the pandemic intensified this. With people working from home, there was the added need to be able to reach people remotely. Stress levels were heightened as boundaries in people's work and personal lives became blurred; an issue exacerbated in Hong Kong because of small living spaces.

Corporate clients obviously see the value of having a mentally healthy workforce in terms of productivity, absenteeism, morale and so on. As well as improving the bottom line, they have a social responsibility to their staff. How many corporate clients and how many users do you have at the moment?

We support some 2 million members on our platform, largely made up of organisations in the APAC region.

Do you use the Neurum app for your employees?

Absolutely!

Do you have any results from a corporate client to show an improvement in mental health since they started using the app?

Yes – for those that are happy to share their story, we publish them on our website in the hope of showing other organisations that they are in good company. We also publish in peer-reviewed academic journals along with our research partners to continuously ensure efficacy. A positive new finding we have uncovered is that supporting employee and community mental health also boosts net promoter scores (NPS); increasing the likelihood of employees recommending their workplace to friends and family whilst improving customers' perceptions of the brand. This demonstrates that mental health support is not a nice-to-have benefit but a real imperative.

What do users most like about the app?

The personalisation. Our members have rated the platform 88% relevant and useful in their experience, and qualitative feedback has shown that members feel comfortable and confident. This means they are able to find support that resonates with them and start acting on it – be it a digital programme, quick interactive tool, or seeking human professional care through an easy-to-use experience.

Do you have any feedback from users of the Neurum app about how it has made a difference to their mental health?

We had a member on our platform, who had never used or bought into mental health resources before, take their first step with us. Neurum was able to support them through their everyday betterment journey, signposting them to human support. The story comes full circle because this member went on to join our team a few years later.

The use of AI in this way is ground-breaking. Are there any concerns or limitations in using technology in this way and how do you address these?

AI is a large umbrella term and has generated a lot of great interest and optimism in the mental health realm. This is especially the case since its greater mainstream adoption recently.

AI holds a lot of promise for revolutionising mental health care, but it's not all smooth sailing. It has some deft features, like spotting mental health disorders early through behaviour and speech pattern analysis and offering round-the-clock care. It can also help bring mental health services to those living in remote areas and support health professionals in making informed decisions. Moreover, it helps in creating new treatments based on data and offers personalised care plans.

That being said, we must remember that the effectiveness of AI is highly dependent on the quality and diversity of the data it's trained on. There are also several challenges to be mindful of, such as data privacy and security issues, potential misdiagnoses due to biases in algorithms, and the lack of human touch in therapy, which is essential for some patients. So, while we're excited about the potential of AI in mental health care, we understand the importance of focusing on the methodology and addressing these potential issues too. Hence, our academic partnerships and continuous work on back-end systems is just as much a priority, if not more so, than front-end ones.



Megan receiving the Cartier Award from Amal Clooney

At the moment Neurum is business to business; are there any plans for business to consumer?

We ensure that we build as intentionally as possible and hope to keep growing our reach. At the moment, we serve organisations but any unused Care Credits (to book sessions with coaches and licensed therapists) can be pledged to beneficiaries of local NGOs. So far, we have worked to ensure better access to care for disadvantaged families and migrant women workers in Hong Kong. This helps create shared value and reduce inequalities to care.

What does a typical day look like for you?

Every day of the week has a different core focus which helps me stay intentional, but most days involve taking care of customers, figuring how to grow our reach and impact, and connecting with brilliant talent.

I don't have a sexy elaborate morning routine. Usually my alarm is set for 7:15am, and then it's caffeine, weight-training, an hour of picking and learning something from my 'Brain Bank' (a curated bucket of resources such as videos, articles, industry news, research papers and so on), my daily DuoLingo French course and Neurum app exercises. This morning routine sets the right tone for my day. I mostly keep Mondays for internal meetings, making sure everyone starts the week off feeling confident and aligned and getting the work that is directly in my purview sorted.

During my evenings, I'm learning and serving. You will typically find me in leadership coaching, therapy or in board meetings for KELY Support Group – a local youth mental health and substance use awareness charity.

My day is book-ended with pre-bedtime Neurum app exercises, which are recommended based on different parameters learned over time.

Of course there have been periods (and will be periods) when it's crunch time. But I keep my days as simple, intentional and sustainable as possible.

How do you take care of your own mental health?

This is my non-negotiable. I use the Neurum platform to keep a track of my mental health, and frequently use it for everyday betterment. I do this by learning skills through longer-form programmes that adapt to personal responses and quick interactive tools when something is happening in-the-moment, for example, to help me reframe my thoughts and feel centred. Currently, I'm working through a programme called 'Building an Endurance Mindset'. When I need deeper support, I've been matched with a leadership coach and a therapist to support my journey.

If you weren't the CEO of Neurum Health, what would you be doing?

My compass is set to help improve the mental health, lifestyle and wellness of as many people as possible. Neurum Health is just an extension of what I've always set out to do. Whatever the job title is, it'll be speaking to this.

What personal life goals do you have?

I promised my grandfather I'd get my PhD one day. I intend to keep my promise and have had the wonderful opportunity to publish papers since graduating, but I'm taking a different route right now. My goal is to practise the essence of this instead: to learn something new and apply something learned every day.

How did it feel to receive the Cartier Award and the Aurora Tech Award in recognition of your work?

Usually CEOs are in the spotlight for these things, but it's more a testament to the team's brilliant work. We have also received other awards for our AI-enabled services. Personally, the biggest accolades are what people say about your work when you're not in the room, like one customer recommending us to another, or a colleague encouraging another to get support.

What are your aspirations for Neurum Health?

To help as many people as possible, on their own terms, in a credible, precise and private manner.

The Neurum app is currently being used in Hong Kong and neighbouring countries in Asia. Do you plan to expand to other geographical regions?

Though our footprint is large in APAC, we do serve other regions as well. Our most recent customer is a large UK listed company.

It will be very interesting to see what commonalities and differences emerge across the globe, in terms of the mental health issues faced and the type of care sought. What challenges do you think you will face by expanding in this way? For example, how do you hope to address cultural differences so that the product is tailored for each region?

This reads as a question about good design, and it starts with listening without our own biases and assumptions. What we've learned over time is that there is a lot of common ground to be built upon in terms of values, behaviours and belief systems. For example, in many East Asian cultures, we do not ask: "How are you, really?" Rather we express care in unspoken actions and by asking loved ones: "Have you eaten?" Hence this is the name of our mental health podcast.

We focus on salutogenic approaches which include health investment. Hopefully we can share learnings from this side of the pond globally, as we are dedicated to educating society and promoting the broader awareness and understanding of healthy minds and habits in an inclusive and culturally relevant way.

Megan with charity group



How do you think that technology is changing the landscape of mental healthcare provision?

I view technology like a paintbrush – it's a great tool that can help augment and enhance the care journey. But it requires other domains to build and paint a positive future for mental health.

So far, technology has helped to make great strides in improving the care journey by:

- making care accessible by putting it directly into people's palms and pockets
- improving patient compliance
- personalising and augmenting the care experience.

Increasingly, there are also solutions to support clinicians and back-office work to reduce burden and gain a better understanding of the granularities in personalised medicine. Whilst these are just a few use cases, technology is not a replacement.

How do you see the use of technology in the field of mental health evolving?

I would be keen to see the guardrails (privacy and security measures within AI guidelines, and education for safe, ethical, and inclusive data and design) to become a priority alongside technological development itself. Technology is only as good as its adoptability and positive impact for people.

Anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you Anna Freud for being a supportive community to this day!

We wish Megan continued success with the Neurum app and look forward to following her professional journey as it unfolds. There is undoubtedly more to come from this remarkable alum!



Caleb and Megan

Book corner

In this section, we ask a professional to tell us about a book that has had a significant impact on them in some capacity and influenced the way they work. Our book corner for this issue is with alum Asma Syeda and her chosen book is *Educated* by Tara Westover.



Asma completed an MSc in Psychoanalytic Developmental Psychology at Anna Freud in 2019 and is currently in her fourth year of undertaking a PhD in Developmental Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University. Her research focuses on the naturalistic development of prospective memory in young children.

Originally from India, Asma says: "I moved to the UK specifically to fulfil my dream of studying at Anna Freud. When I am not reading endless academic literature, I am working through my never-ending TBR [to be read] list and I am always happy to discuss all things book-related!"

What is the book about and how did you come across it?

Like many voracious readers, I am loyal to my preferred genres. Memoirs have never piqued my interest; many seem to be thinly veiled ego trips or too tragic to endure. But here is a lesson I have learnt: trust your fellow readers' recommendations. A dear friend recommended I read *Educated* by Tara Westover, promising it would change my perspective on memoirs.

Educated tells the remarkable story of Tara Westover, who was 17 the first time she set foot in a classroom. Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, Tara spent her childhood stockpiling food for an anticipated apocalypse and being taught to avoid modern medicine.

I can fully grasp why this work received such widespread acclaim, as it not only presents a gripping narrative but also brims with finely crafted snapshots of life. Tara Westover recounts her journey in a distinctive manner, intertwining memories with subtle hints to construct a deeply personal narrative that shaped her identity. A discerning reader will observe how the overarching theme of education extends beyond conventional academic learning, as Westover rides the highs of her triumphs and the lows of her bitter defeats.

Her constant attempts to connect with her family, the abandonment, the betrayals and the tenderness with which she recounts every good memory brought me to tears. Emotions associated with people you love are so complex – irrespective of how much trauma is experienced – and her story, unfortunately (or fortunately), encapsulates this with great sentiment.

The essence of family life with her parents and siblings resonates vividly through their daily interactions. Tara skilfully intertwines tales of sibling resilience and the hardships endured under their roof, navigating a household shrouded in isolation and secrecy. She lays herself bare by offering raw and insightful glimpses into her life, unflinchingly revealing facets of herself that may surprise the reader. It is astonishing how someone lacking formal education could achieve such heights, culminating in the attainment of a PhD, and subsequently publishing such a compelling narrative.

When did you read it?

I read *Educated* during a surprisingly apt time in my life. I was going through a difficult time with my PhD research and grappling with my favourite imposter syndrome questions: Can I do this? Am I worth this effort? Do I really have what it takes? Reading *Educated* helped me realise that, while I may not have the tenacity to teach myself trigonometry, I should recognise my achievements. Tara's will and grit inspired me to rely on my own strengths, to stop worrying about my potential and to simply be proud of how far I have come.

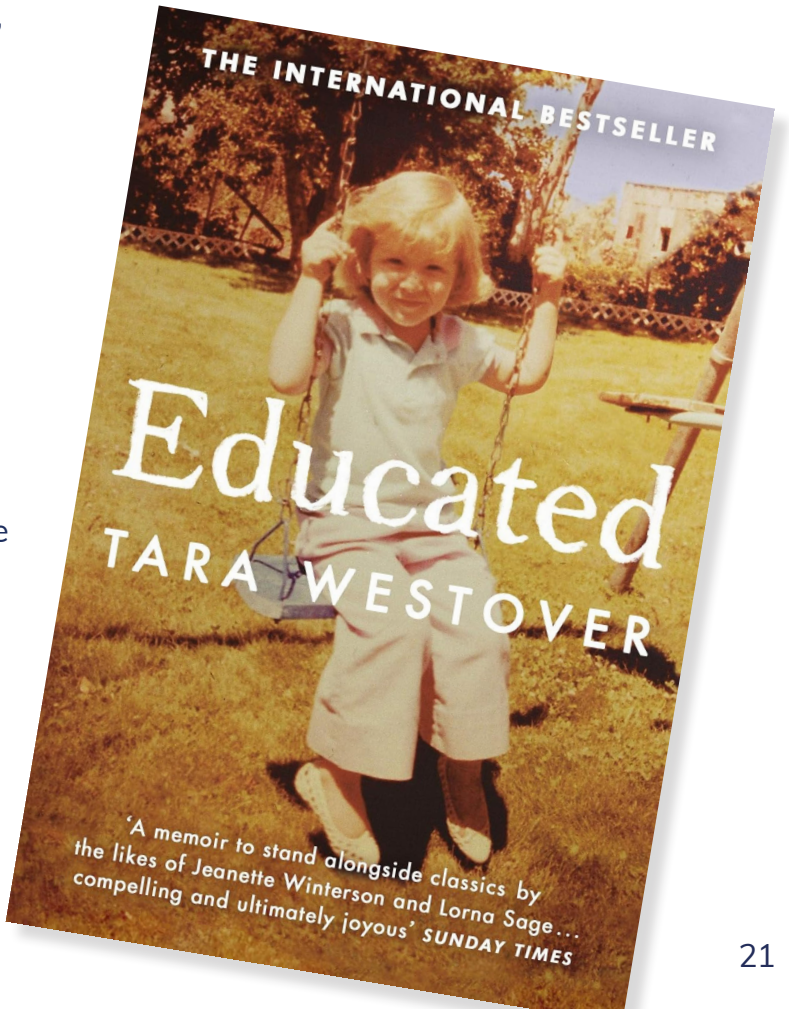
Why did you choose this particular book for the book corner? Did it help you and if so, how?

As the first woman in my family even to consider applying for higher education, let alone pursuing it abroad, *Educated* resonated with me deeply. While Tara's struggles are far more nuanced and challenging than mine, I felt drawn to her journey of pursuing what she knew she wanted. Often, I feel like I am fighting two wars: one to prove myself for taking such a risk – leaving my home and moving so far away; and another, to secure my seat at the table here, making sure my voice is heard. It makes me wonder: will I always feel the need to prove that I am deserving of what I have?

From Tara's story, I have learned that simply being in my position is a privilege. The ability to have a support system, to ask questions without caution, to access information – these are things we often take for granted, yet they speak to our immense place of privilege. It is so easy to get lost in the formality and routine rigamarole of academia, but it is time we look at students beyond their numbers and recognise the struggle behind every student's potential.

Why did it make a lasting impact on you?

For me, what is interesting is how memory functions in this book. Although Tara is a somewhat unreliable narrator, she never avoids this fact. Her chapters are peppered with footnotes that state varying viewpoints (siblings, ex-partners, family friends) and perspectives from different people in her life. It was refreshing to read a book by someone who might be aware of other realities but chose to speak about her own. Obviously, all memoirs have creative licence – gaps filled in, personalities amplified, situations inflated, meaning assigned with the clarity of hindsight – but in *Educated* it is more than this. Westover cites several different sources who have vastly differing recollections of events. She makes note of these situations as they arise in the book, but there is a short chapter after the acknowledgments called 'A Note on the Text' that was the most fascinating part of the book to me.



In your opinion, who would the book appeal to and why?

I believe everyone in academia should read this book. Whether you are a new student, a seasoned lecturer, a world-class professor, or simply thinking about enrolling on a course, please read this book! It provides such a clear and grounding perspective on what a tremendous difference an education can bring to an individual. Going from starting life as a child without even a birth certificate to attaining a PhD is certainly no small feat.

Is there anything else you would like to say about the book?

It is hard to read Tara's book and not wonder how many voices there are that fight for the basic right of education. How would Tara's story have played out if she were a refugee? Or if she was not white? Are there advantages she had that we tend to overlook? Are there hundreds of Taras in search of their education? What can we do to help them attain such a fundamental right?

Thank you to Asma for her thought-provoking review of *Educated*. The themes in the book – particularly those of human resilience and the importance of education – clearly resonated deeply with her.

If you would like to share your thoughts on this book, email us at alumni@annafreud.org.

Alternatively, if you would like to talk about a book that has been instrumental in your life in some way, you could be our next 'Book Corner' writer – please get in touch!



Training, events and offers

We run a variety of courses and webinars, many of which may be relevant to your field of work. To see the full range of training courses – some of which are free, visit our training and events pages. An upcoming course by the UK Trauma Council is listed below.

We also have a wealth of resources that you can download from our website.

Traumatic bereavement: supporting children and young people at school or college their children - 14th November 2024

This evidence-based training has been developed by experts from the UK Trauma Council and is delivered by the Clinical Co-Lead of the Traumatic Bereavement resource portfolio.

The way that a child or young person experiences or understands the death - the meaning they make of it - can result in it being experienced as traumatic. The trauma gets in the way of the typical process of grief and blocks the child or young person's ability to process the loss. This can result in difficulties that can be severe and long lasting. Traumatic bereavement may be easily missed or misunderstood, meaning that children's difficulties are not recognised. It is vital that these children are identified and given appropriate help and support.

Delivered online, this session will introduce traumatic bereavement, explain how it differs from more typical grief, and explore practical approaches to support children and young people in education settings who may have experienced a traumatic bereavement. The aim is to train SENCOs, mental health leads and pastoral leads in education settings to recognise and support children and young people who may have experienced traumatic bereavement. This training is also suitable for early years and foundation stage practitioners and frontline education staff working with children 2-6 years.

Find out more about this course and book your place.

Sometimes Happy, Sometimes Sad: An Early Years in Mind story and guide

Anna Freud and educationalist Laura Henry-Allain MBE have published a free digital book to help educators, parents and carers have important discussions about mental health with young children.

The story also champions diversity and represents people from different backgrounds, touching on gender, race, and disability. Ensuring all children see themselves represented in conversations about mental health was a priority for the team due to inequalities in accessing support.

Through the Thinking Differently manifesto, Anna Freud is calling for a renewed focus on prevention and early intervention to close the gap in children and young people's mental health. This includes increased support for community-based early intervention services that benefit early years children, such as family hubs.

Sometimes Happy, Sometimes Sad can be downloaded for free on Early Years in Mind, Anna Freud's online network for early years practitioners.





Anna Freud