



Designs by Northumbria University students Mollie Driscoll, Elli Munday, Rebecca Symonds and Hannah Vance - all part of Team Design Sphere.

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Student designs support mental health charity

Interaction Design and Animation students from Northumbria University have teamed up with [Sporting Chance](#) to help promote the emotional and mental health support provided to athletes by the charity.

Set up 21 years ago, Sporting Chance works with professional sportspeople, helping them to overcome mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, as well as gambling, alcohol and drug addiction.

Having traditionally reached athletes directly through their clubs, last year Sporting Chance undertook a review of their external communications in order to connect with a broader range of sportspeople, utilising digital platforms, especially during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

As part of this review, the charity worked with staff and final year Interaction Design and Animation students from [Northumbria University's School of Design](#), setting them a brief to design an app, animation or social media campaign which would encourage athletes to seek help sooner.

Among the students taking part was Rebecca Symonds, whose team Design Sphere designed and produced [an app that sports people can use to express how they are feeling before games or performances](#). This includes a chatbot to allow them to seek help or start a discussion around their feelings.

Speaking about the project, Rebecca said: “Our team really enjoyed tackling this live brief with Sporting Chance at such a challenging time for mental health. The pandemic has really accelerated digital transformation and we really honed in on this to try and challenge the stigma of mental health among professional athletes in an almost fun and thought-provoking way through the build and design of a personalised data app.

“Users can input how they are feeling through the use of emojis and this is then fed back in an animated visual to the manager and also team mates. The use of the single emoji meant that athletes didn't have to worry about ‘what to say’ or ‘awkward conversations’ with teammates or managers. Ideally, the visual would provoke players to think for example ‘oh someone else feels anxious today, it's not just me.’ It's ultimately a talking point.

“We hope our app can break that stigma around mental health, especially among males and professional sports people, and show that you are not alone as well as give people the courage to speak up if they are struggling.

“It was a pleasure to work with Sporting Chance who provided encouraging feedback and helped us understand the complexity of this brief. I think sometimes you forget that sportspeople are people too and the pressure they are under to succeed is immense.”

Also taking part in the project was Ying Lim, whose team Connected Dots

produced a campaign entitled Out of Sight.

Using real life stories from professional athletes about their own mental health struggles, the team turned these experiences into [anonymous animated videos to be shared online](#). These were accompanied by a poster campaign which included statistics around mental health in sports as well as quotes from sports psychologists, famous athletes and anonymous athletes about their experiences.

Ying said: “We thought that hearing about professional athletes who are going through mental health struggles would help the general public realise how common the issue is, as well as letting other athletes who may be going through the same thing, feel less alone.”

Speaking about the experience of working on the project she added: “Having the opportunity to work with people outside of our own circle sounded intimidating at first, but it is something I'm glad I didn't miss out on. The extra barrier due to Covid was actually an advantage in some ways as we relied on communicating through calls and texts for a whole project. This experience will definitely be beneficial when we enter the industry, as many companies have shifted from working in a studio to working remotely.”

The projects produced by the students impressed both Sporting Chance and the Northumbria tutors, with Professor Mark Blythe describing it as among the best undergraduate work he has ever seen.

He said: “The students really rose to the challenge of working remotely during lockdown. Not only did they equal the standard of work we would normally expect, they exceeded it. They worked really hard to understand the mental health challenges that athletes face and they created some very innovative and imaginative designs.”

Alex Mills, Head of Education, Communications and Athlete Engagement for Sporting Chance said: “This has been a really productive collaboration and we are really happy with the results. We decided to work with the students at Northumbria in order to learn from young, ambitious people with a specific skillset and we were absolutely thrilled with their ideas and effort in this project. I have no doubt that the students will go on to have successful careers in this field.”

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