

Case Study

# Aspect

Positively waking  
up the nation

2021





**Venture**

Method X Studios Ltd



**Social science discipline**

Psychology



**Aspect Members**

Zinc



**Sector**

Information Technology  
and Communications



**Route-to-market**

Start-up

# A digital platform that is promoting good mental health and wellbeing across the UK

**Historically, mental health products and services have largely only been used by the top 10% of earners. Frequent engagement with a mental health product is low, with 75% of users deleting an app after using it approximately 10 times. Traditionally, lower socio-economic groups have been excluded from the design and evaluation of digital mental health interventions.**





Launched in January [2020], Wakey! aims to tackle this challenge and increase access to wellbeing support to the mass market. The digital app is an interactive, personalised, mental well-being platform, and free to all users. Some key ways in which it promotes positive messages to users is via:

- A daily 9-minute edu-tainment breakfast show, designed to be used as an alternative to an alarm clock, which provides a dose of feel good entertainment, presented by Love Island 2019's Chris Taylor and Sink the Pink's Ginger Johnson.
- Offering key mental health advice and guidance from Dr Iain Jordan, an NHS Consultant in Psychological Medicine and Chief Scientist at Wakey!, on a range of topics.
- A chat forum for users to connect.

Founder, Deborah Coughlin, developed the idea for the app following her own personal experiences of the NHS mental health services. After accessing low cost therapy sessions with a psychotherapist and discovering mindfulness techniques, she was able to turn her life around and get well again. She wanted to create a mental health product to

encourage larger numbers to access mental health services. Zinc played a significant part in enabling her to take her idea forward and develop the app.

Wakey has two doctors heading up the scientific research behind the app, led by Dr Mariliis Öeren whose background is in behavioural change science. Working together with a mental health and forensic psychologist, Dr Shola Apena Rogers and a clinical psychologist, the application of behavioural sciences is fundamental to the design and development of the product to maximise its social impact, with social science methods including user engagement, testing and co-creation of the product being integral to its development. Using

behavioural science, the morning tv show concept is based on 'avoiding avoidance' – a key point that takes place in everyone's morning, where things can go wrong and then have huge implications for the rest of someone's day. 80% of people pick up their phones in the morning, and instead of 'doom scrolling' the app is an opportunity to insert good health and happiness into a person's morning routine, thereby encouraging them to have a good day.



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**It's vital that mental health advice and guidance gets to those who don't normally access these services, but in an accessible and attractive way through entertainment. I want people to watch the show because they enjoy it, whilst helping them to take back control of their lives and their wellbeing. We're basically taking existing mental health products which are proven to work, but taking it to a different audience – the mass market.**

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Deborah Coughlin, Founder, Wakey!

# The impact

- A 12 week feasibility study took place from January to April 2020 to track the effectiveness of Wakey! Users were assessed against six health outcomes and the study found that users reported improvements on life satisfaction; ease of getting out of bed in the morning; feeling that life was worthwhile; and self-efficacy.
- The app is helping users to get up the same time every morning, an important part of sleep hygiene which can be a detrimental factor on someone's mental health and wellbeing. A sub study of prescribed sleep content was conducted on users who had low sleep quality and struggled to get up in the mornings. The study revealed that half of the participants who watched a video covering strategies for getting out of bed and improving sleep saw improvements in their sleep hygiene during the study.
- The average annual income of users is £22,000, 60% women/40% men, 25-45 average age, top 10 jobs are teacher/cleaner/driver/shop assistant – proving that Wakey! is appealing to a wider audience, compared to other mental health apps on the market.

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**I do struggle with anxiety in social situations. This is partly due to having autism and sensory issues. For sensory I have things in place but for the anxiety, similar to Ginger (Wakey! co-host) I fake it until I make it. The mindful exercises that Wakey! taught me I apply in my life now and it helps with clarity and composure.**

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Wakey! User

# The start-up journey: key learnings

The Zinc network opened up opportunities to access the right people, funding and coaches to growth the venture. Without the support of Zinc, Deborah doesn't think that Wakey! would be in existence nor would research have been such a core element of the business.

Wakey! received funding and support which enabled it to get off the ground and ensure that the technology was rigorous and evidence based from the beginning.

The start-up was awarded a grant (coordinated by researchers at the University of Bristol) which enabled the academic team to start the research,

produce a road map for testing impact and author a paper for Wakey! which is to be released in an academic journal. They also received funding from the Wellcome Trust's Public Engagement Scheme, via Zinc.

## Key advice from the Founder:

- In order to have momentum and progress rapidly enough you need to be able to be able to move quickly in a world which is constantly changing, to ensure the business meets the needs of the market.

- Be adaptable – COVID-19 resulted in us pivoting the existing service, including introducing additional features such as online surgeries, in order to meet the needs of our audience.
- Academics have really good ideas and are a bonus to a business – they can help you develop a business/ product.

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**By combining creativity and entertainment with robust science and research, Deborah and the team behind Wakey! have created an engaging, scalable, and impactful product.**

**This is a great example of the value of combining different disciplines and skillsets: bringing together behavioural scientists, creative media producers, psychiatrists, technologists, business leaders and others to produce something fresh and exciting.**

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Rachel Carey, Chief Scientist, Zinc

# What's next for Wakey?



The start-up has changed direction since the COVID-19 outbreak and pivoted its business model – keeping financially sustainable is a key goal, with plans to gain more funding.

Another challenge the start-up is tackling is diversity issues, as currently most users are white with a lack of engagement from the BAME community. They are exploring the reasons for this and how the app can support the low represented group.

The platform has pivoted its functions over the last six months with more interactive features including online live mental health surgery sessions for users. The aim is to keep working on ensuring the product market fit is the right offering and is more applicable to users. The changes already made to the app have received a positive response from the users and is helping people through these difficult times.

The business model has also evolved from a solely business-to-customer model to also now exploring business-to-business-to-customer models, working on developing partnerships with organisations such as Uber and Trylife, to support their employees during this difficult time.

In Jan 2021 Wakey will be paused so the team can undertake a rapid test and learn period, looking at taboo, diversity, sleep and night time habits and stickiness in products for lower socio economic demographics.

# Background Information



## Deborah Coughlin



### Role

Founder



### Degree

Performance writing BA hon,  
Dartington College of Arts

### Masters:

Professional Writing, London Met

Currently studying a PG Dip in  
Psychotherapy at the Welsh  
Psychotherapy Institute.

Deborah is a founder, writer, artistic  
director, broadcaster and formerly  
contributing producer on BBC Radio  
4. She cares about feminism, mental  
health and how creative technology  
can help us live happier, healthier lives.



### Contact

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## Case Study

# Aspect

Transforming Society Through  
Social Science Innovation

Aspect (A Social sciences Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) is a network for organisations looking to make the most of commercial and business opportunities from social sciences research.

Supported by Research England's Connecting Capability Fund, Aspect members sit at the epicentre of discovery, imagination and progress in the social sciences. We draw together pioneering academics with innovative industry leaders to tackle the most complex societal challenges of our time.



Aspect is funded by Research England's Connecting Capability Fund