

## Futuremakers: Brain and Mental Health

### Episode 7: Supporting the mental health of young people

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Welcome to this season of Futuremakers: Brain and Mental Health. I'm Professor Belinda Lennox, I'm a psychiatrist and a researcher here in Oxford, and this season you'll be joining me as we demystify the science behind the most complex object in the known universe, our brains, and look at the wide-reaching impacts of mental illness on individuals and society. I'll be introducing you to some of Oxford's best academic minds, working to solve the greatest challenges in brain and mental health, and I'll also be speaking to guests from beyond the university to bring their perspectives and lived experience and get a sense of the impact of what we're doing. Join us as we discover how Oxford is shaping the future of brain and mental health research..

OK, so welcome to this episode of Futuremakers where we're going to be talking about supporting the mental health of young people, and I'm really delighted to be joined by some guests from across the pond. So we have Cynthia Germanotta, who is the President and Co-founder of Born This Way Foundation, and Dr Claudia. Santi Fernandez, who's the Director of Research and Evaluation for Born This Way foundation, as well as my colleague Professor Mina Fazel, who's Professor of Adolescent Psychiatry here in Oxford. So, we're gonna be talking all things adolescent mental health. But to start with, I mean, Cynthia, could you just tell us a bit about Born This Way Foundation?

Cynthia Germanotta:

Yes, absolutely. And first thank you all for hosting us on your podcast to talk about supporting the mental health of young people, I don't think we have any greater passion than that at Born This Way Foundation and this topic and the work that we do here at Born This Way Foundation, it's deeply personal to my daughter and I, and it started with a very complex mental health journey that began in middle school.

For her, bullying, exclusion, isolation, you know many very negative and relentless things that caused a young and vibrant young girl to start questioning herself and her own value, and led to many years of mental health issues. And at that time, I think she really in recognised the immense potential of kindness or the lack of it, actually at that time in her life. And when paired with appropriate and accessible mental health resources could really have made a very significant difference in the trajectory of her mental health journey, and it became her passion to really equip young people with tools and the opportunities and the support that she wished that she had during those times of struggle, and that I think even back then, may have been a seed for the Foundation that was planted in her as a result of those difficult experiences.

And you know, as a parent, I was often at a loss as to how to support my daughter. I grew up in a very different time and community where you didn't talk about mental health. There was still a very deep and dark stigma surrounding it. But I think through the years she and I, we've learned together, we've learned ways to be there now for one another and also for others through our work. So, central to our mission is promoting kindness and mental health awareness, and I would say that we

work at that intersection and our research is conducted at that intersection of mental health and kindness.

Our mission is to empower and inspire young people to build a kinder, a braver world, and we do that under the umbrella of making kindness cool, of evaluating and validating the emotions of young people around the world, and also eliminating the stigma around mental health. And I think what's important are the principles that the Foundation was formed around, and which were really the key tenants, and one was prevention.

We've come at our work from a very preventive posture of trying to equip young people as early as possible to handle their struggles. Rather than wait for issues to occur, we're very much a youth-led organisation where their voice is ever present in our work, and they are at the table when we're developing our programmes. We are research informed, all of our programmes are research informed and we are very much a partnership-based organisation. We knew very early on that helping young people is all of our collective issue and that no one organisation could do this alone. So, we've worked alongside young people for many, many years including an incredible Youth Advisory Board of over 30 young people around the world who are really passionate about making change and they're already making a difference in their communities. They are young, amazing activists.

I'll just highlight three very, very quickly. We have Desmond, who works very, very hard and significantly on impacting the world around trans rights and advocacy. Emily, who is a Mexican-American journalist, and she founded an organisation called Cripple Media, which is the first media company that we have come across certainly run by and for young disabled people. And Leila, who is a young Liberian medical student who initiated a wonderful project that's called Help A Mother and Newborn in Liberia, and it's geared towards addressing challenges that are faced really in reducing the maternal and newborn deaths in in Liberia.

So, I know that's quite a lot. We can go on and on, but I hope that gives you some context about the organisation. So, Dr Claudia and I actually had the fortune of meeting at the almost, near the founding of Born This Way Foundation, we met at Yale when Yale and Born This Way Foundation hosted a summit for young people, and I am just so thrilled that we have come back together now, 10 years later, to work together. So, I would just love to also have her introduce herself.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

I just want to just quickly follow up on those extraordinary young people that you mentioned there because I know because I know that you're also a Goodwill Ambassador for Mental Health at the World Health Organization. So, I just thought it's just worth highlighting a little bit about what that involves, Cynthia.

Cynthia Germanotta:

Yes, absolutely. So, you know, in, in this journey that we've taken, I've had the opportunity to build some wonderful partnerships and because I would hope that anybody in this sector would tell you, we can't do this alone. And that's one of the reasons I was truly honoured to be appointed as a World Health Organization, Goodwill Ambassador for Mental Health in 2019 and together we are advocating for mental health awareness but on a global scale and my motivation there was that they've become a leader in working with countries around the world to promote so many issues and we're at a crisis situation with mental health and as they and we say, there is no health without mental health and together, you know, both Born This Way and the World Health Organisation, we

envision a world where mental health is prioritised alongside your physical health and we work to understand the needs of how to accomplish that, particularly in countries where there's even larger stigmas, fewer budgets, you know, lower budgets, I should say, and great disparities and access to mental health care.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Absolutely we can. We yes, that's another area. I'll lodge that in my mind because I'd love to talk about that with you some more as well. But Claudia, I want to bring you in. Cynthia was saying that Born This Way is a research-informed organisation with their activities. Do you want to talk a bit about your own research in this area?

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

Sure. And I just want to also highlight, Cynthia, whenever you share the story of the beginning of Born This Way, I'm always re-inspired and it's just such a beautiful story and it's so beautiful to come full circle 10 years later to see what has been created thus far and what's to come. So, I actually started my career inside schools and inside US schools. I was a teacher, a bilingual school counsellor and a school leader for the first 10 years of my career.

And I was always drawn to youth mental health and really thinking about how to support, and this was obviously pre-pandemic, and from that interest I then transitioned to academia for the next 10 years and I completed my dissertation at Columbia University, where I focused on the implementation of school wellness policies and later completed a postdoc and became faculty at the Yale School of Medicine. My research primarily focused on the development and evaluation of interventions, digital interventions to improve mental health and to prevent substance misuse in young people between the ages, primarily of 15 and 25.

So, as Cynthia shared, my path crossed with her and the Born This Way team back in 2014, where I was a part of the Emotion Revolution, and with that, I was thrilled to join the Born This Way Foundation team at the inaugural Born Brave retreat, where they hosted young people and it was it was an incredible opportunity to really see how the organisation operates and as Cynthia shared, really practising what they preach around, youth informed research and informed work. And so today I've come full circle to rejoin my Born This Way Foundation family. And in the next decade and more, my focus now is to join the Born This Way Foundation and a laser focused commitment to youth-led, researched, informed approaches. And getting critical tools and resources into the hands of our people and the reality is, is as soon as possible, given the crisis at hand. So currently I am the Director of Research and Evaluation of Born This Way Foundation where I lead our research strategy. I oversee internal and survey initiatives and I also prepare manuscripts aligned with our mission and findings. I also remain faculty at the Yale School of Medicine and the Yale Child Study Centre.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Wonderful. Thank you, Claudia. So, at this point, I need to bring in Mina to because of course evaluating, you know, the best evidence-based practise for improving mental health and adolescence and actually describing the size of the problem. I mean, it's not a small issue, but it's something that has been occupying your mind for a long time, you know, so yeah, that's not a very good introduction anyway. Tell us what you've been doing in this area.

Professor Mina Fazel:

Absolutely. Thank you, Belinda. And really interesting to learn from Cynthia and Claudia about what you've been doing and it's really, really important work, isn't it? Trying to understand and improve in the context of young people. So, I work also in researching the mental health of adolescent populations. And I've got a particular interest in schools because in a way, very much driven by what you're doing, listening to the voice of young people has to be the key part of how we work out what's best to do in a way, we call this kind of working out, what's acceptable as well as accessible.

So, it's those two things that I think have to be at the crux of what we do, it needs to be acceptable to young people and it needs to be accessible. So, I'm an adolescent psychiatrist, I have a medical degree, but I'm very, very interested in the provision of services. How can we work in a way that helps young people and is acceptable to them? And so, through that I've been running a big survey called the Oxford Student Survey, where this year we had over 40,000 students, mainly in middle school and high school, or in England as we say, secondary school, students answering quite a lot of questions to help us understand best what the issues are that are affecting them and then also the best ways to try and help them.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

And what were the main findings, Mina?

Professor Mina Fazel:

Well, we asked over 200 questions, so the main findings are so many that I could stay here for hours and talk to you about them. But what maybe I'll do is just focus on some of the areas that we changed this year. So, this is a repeated survey. We last asked it two years ago and this year we asked more about the cost-of-living crisis as we call it, or financial difficulties, we asked more about the types of services young people want, and what was quite interesting is when we asked the young people where they want to access care, how many of them said at home, actually. So, I'm an adolescent psychiatrist. We've been delivering all our work within hospital settings within community provision and now more and more at school, when actually this whole area of young people want to get at home, and that doesn't mean they necessarily want it online at home because they don't seem to, not as many want online support. They actually seem to want one on one support at home and so it just opens up a lot of doors. Is it the males? Is it the females? Is it those that are gender non-conforming? Is it those that are identifying as neurodiverse? So, with this big database we're now better able to target what we do.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah, I'm really interested in all the work that I know that all of you are doing around raising mental health awareness in young people and your experiences of, how to do that effectively and how best to reach the most vulnerable people? I don't know, Claudia do you want to, is that something you feel that you'd be able to share your experience on?

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

Absolutely. I can share about some of our programmes that Born This Way Foundation that are research informed and also in line with that mission and Mina, thank you so much for sharing your background and for the research that you do. It's fascinating and truly so wonderful to be on this podcast with you. I'm excited to learn more about your work and your findings and how they intersect with our US populations and also how they differ. So, I can speak to you know, as we know, and Mina and you know, given your background, we know that adolescence and young adulthood is

an opportune time to teach critical skills, specifically in emotion regulation decision making, because the prefrontal cortex has not been fully developed and does not fully develop until our mid-20s.

So, during this developmental stage, we know that the brain is still growing or rewiring and it allows for plasticity which is a term to use to describe that the brain is able to adapt and learn skills toward independence. So, when we think about intervening and we think about how to support young people, it's important to meet them where they're at. And so, I will speak to a couple of programmes that we have. One programme is the Be Kind 365. We learned from young people the importance of fostering kind communities as a way to support their mental health. We know from the research the importance of daily acts of gratitude, and so this digital platform allows all of us to practice intentional kindness every day to ourselves, to our loved ones, as well as to our community. And there's a ripple effect that turns into a wave when we do, so it's an invitation in this platform to integrate kindness into our daily life and really think about always, it's a reminder to send a message of gratitude to a friend or to think about an interactive way to express individual acts of kindness that can come together to build a kinder and braver world. This certainly as I mentioned, is grounded in our research and shows that practising, receiving and even witnessing kindness in our world is beneficial to young people, period. To all people, period. And and it really has an impact on all of our mental health and wellbeing so, if anyone's listening, just a little plug, you know, please visit the [BeKind365.world](https://BeKind365.world) to experience the transformational power of kindness and to really, truly engage people at every level. We have actually had corporations sign on nonprofit organisations for sign on, school districts sign on, individuals and again, as I said, it's a ripple effect that turns into a wave of kindness, in order to build a braver and kinder world.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

So, it's very much a sort of an individual focused intervention, so it's something that every individual can be aware of their influence on others and how to be sort of emotionally responsive or, yeah, kind. I mean, I like the word. But it's focused at that level. Rather than, say, at the institutional level or the more sort of social group level for, you know, for teachers for instance, the way of managing the difficult behaviour in the classroom or whatever that might be?

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

Well, we do know that in school climates, there are pro-social behaviours that can be learned and taught to improve school climate. And so, while we're focusing on the individual level, we do know that if a schoolteacher does implement something like this, it would have positive benefits to the overall school climate of the classroom. That would then improve classroom management and also decrease bullying, things like that to promote kindness.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah. And I mean we know that. I mean, bullying is a major influence on young people's mental health and well-being.

Professor Mina Fazel:

Well, yeah, exactly like bullying probably is one of the most important things I think that we need to be thinking about with the school. Like it has unbelievably negative effects in the short term on young people. But we know that it has an incredibly long tail as well. And so actually it has a lifelong impact and from our data and from data across the world, it's very clear that bullying seems to be present in so many different contexts at school. The majority of it still takes place in person, in schools, and actually schools can deal with this in a range of different ways. And young people

perceive the impact of the school climate, as Claudia mentioned, very differently, and so young people perceiving the school as trying to help with bullying, working hard to reduce bullying, actually has an important impact as well.

And so, I'm constantly thinking about bullying with our school partners, trying to think about what we've learned from schools that young people say it's managed well versus those that it isn't. And actually, if you know we're working in the school context, if there's one thing that can be done to improve the mental health of the population, I would say focus on bullying really, really has such a negative impact in so many ways. It's, if anything, the total opposite to kindness, you know. So, this is the total opposite to kindness and actually really important to think about both sides of this coin and what a lovely, important, empowering message it is to be kind in this context. And actually, everyone can do something if we focus on that.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

But that's such so interesting you say that. Even kids that are having a tough time if they see that their school is actively responding and has strong policies for dealing with the situation, that's better than their experience, they feel more supported or they feel better as a result, even if they're in the moment having that experience.

Cynthia Germanotta:

Yes, you know, and may I just make a comment I was, I mean first you know, thank you for, you know, as a parent I have seen the lifelong effects of bullying. It's something my daughter still talks about, and you know it really shaped her in many, many ways. And, which is one reason we studied kindness very early on because she saw that, felt that had it been more present in her life at that time, it would have made a huge difference, and one of our findings in our very early study called Kindness in Communities was that young people who report being in kind communities, living in them, studying in them, homes, schools, wherever it might be. They have higher mental health indicator scores and that got us very curious about this. This link between kindness and mental health and what was at the core of that.

And that's why, to Dr Claudia's point of, you know, the plasticity and that time frame in a young person's life where their brain is shaping is introducing these kindness practises as early as possible, and we have toolkits for schools and for students to help them do it because we know it makes a difference in in their mental health journey. So, I really appreciate Mina, you highlighting just really the long-term adverse effects of bullying and the need to really try to combat that with as many tools as we can.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Hello, I hope you're enjoying this episode of Futuremakers, Brain and Mental Health. If you'd like to learn more about our work here in Oxford, head to [ox.ac.uk/brain](https://ox.ac.uk/brain) or let us know what you think on social media using the hashtag OxfordBrain.

Professor Mina Fazel:

I have one more thing, Belinda I'd like to raise, which is we ask about loneliness as well. So, when you say you know, what we've found, you know, I keep being taken aback by the number of young people who say that they often feel lonely, and in our top two years of secondary school over the last few years, we're getting almost 40 to 50 percent of all students saying that they often feel lonely. So, it also gives us an opportunity to think about what is happening in our communities and

in the way that we're interacting, not only at school, but at home, and then in our local neighbourhoods that actually the cultural norms, the way we're living, it has changed dramatically over the last 50, 40, 30 years.

And actually, this loneliness. You know, we talk about it quite a lot despite the hyper connectivity of the world that actually young people on one level through social media are so connected with everybody, they've got thousands of friends they're interacting with and liking all the time. And yet in our survey, the numbers are the same. They often feel lonely. Takes us aback the whole time. And again, I do think that you know, the focus on kindness that you have has to be helpful in this context, because if you're not feeling the connection or the thoughtfulness of those around you, that's only going to further make you feel kind of this, this terrible loneliness I think that is constantly present it seems now in our younger generation.

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

Mina, thank you so much for bringing up that point, because that is something that we chew on and unpack and always are thinking about, OK, so how do we address this? Where, what can we do to really address the loneliness, but also just the general, the symptoms of mental health, and one programme that our team is really proud of is called the Be There Certificate. And so, we learned from our research that young people want to prioritise their mental health and they want tools to do so. But that they just don't have the confidence and they don't know how to navigate these conversations. So, to your point, it almost feels like there's this isolation, but pulling away even more and so our focus is to intervene. To give them the skills to engage. And so, in partnership with jack.org, we created the Be There Certificate and it's a self-paced course that helps increase mental health literacy. And it really, it gives young people the knowledge, the skills and the confidence in order to safely and kindly support themselves as well as their peers. Because that's the myth. That's the piece, right? Is that we have, of course, acts of kindness are part of it. But also, we want to help young people develop skills so that they can support other young people in seeking help, in identifying warning signs, and in recognising that, creating that, awareness when someone is struggling and understanding their role in supporting their peers, so it creates a connection and it addresses that isolation piece.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

I mean that sounds related to sort of, mental health first aid programmes. Is it a similar kind of thing sort of, raising awareness sort of, educating around common mental disorders and recognising in yourself as well as how to support other people experiencing anxiety and depression in particular and you know, it's got a strong evidence base, hasn't it? It's been around for, you know, good few years.

Professor Mina Fazel:

Yeah, but it might also be that beyond mental health first aid, it might just be also just the discussion with education. You know, right now we have an education system and a health system that are two almost different, they're totally different departments of government. You know, it feels like never the twain shall meet, and it might just be that we need to have a more nuanced discussion with education that actually, the outcome of education might not just be about academic attainment and your grade. And you know, but, you know, it has to be more than that. And actually, we've been talking a bit about, is education about providing the scaffolding to allow young people to make these interpersonal connections, to build their networks, to learn about themselves and others in a more structured environment, the school.

And enable to do a lot more than just learning and that we need to also have that discussion with schools as parents or as other professionals that actually the role of schools has to be beyond just the academic attainment and that we need to support schools. Especially those that do it well in rewarding them in making sure that the measures we use to judge schools also encourage the scales and the measures that are beyond just academic attainment, because this has to be an important part of it. And if we think about the pandemic, it's probably the first thing that left during the pandemic was any ability for kids to interact with those across year groups, those that are in completely different classes to do things other than pure academics initially, and actually probably that was incredibly damaging for a large number of young people.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah. So, we need to be kind at every level, actually, don't we at organisational level as well as, yeah, interpersonally. Cynthia, did you want to come in?

Cynthia Germanotta:

Yeah. I also wanted to comment. I mean, I think this is in line with what Mina was discussing with the Be There Certificate. Yes, there have been aspects of mental health first aid that have been around for a long time. This course is relatively new, it's 90 minutes freely available in English, Spanish and French, and it's more to Mina's point of, it's giving the language. We've learned a lot from our research that when youth are in time of crisis, they generally would prefer to turn to a peer, to have a conversation with, rather than an adult. Maybe a friend, a romantic partner, but they don't have the language. They don't have the confidence and they don't have the skills. So, this is not diagnostic in nature, but it does, you know, teach you that language. How to listen, ask the right questions, and direct, and connect a peer to appropriate help.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Perfect. Thank you for clarifying, absolutely. Where should we go next? What about the use of technology? I mean, I was interested in you saying, Claudia, doing research around digital tools. And I know Mina as well has also done really interesting work reviewing, I mean, because there's like an explosion in the app world of apps for mental health, but at the evidence base is kind of a bit difficult to get a grip on. Mina, do you wanna come in on that one?

Professor Mina Fazel:

Absolutely. Like it's so interesting, isn't it? So, there are so many apps that all our funders often say, you know, every other funding application has a developer, a new app to address it. And you can see the attraction of it. Isn't it like, we know that many more young people want support than maybe professionals that are available to provide that support, so is the digital route an answer to that? But in a big review we did, looking at mental health apps that have developed, been developed for young people's mental health, what we saw was that there seems to be this big gap that not that many of them have good evidence that they work. But for those that have evidence that they work, not many of them actually last that long in the real world. So, there are so many barriers I suppose, to really working out the role of these apps for young people. I don't think it's clear that it's definitely not going to be the answer for all kids. It's likely to play a role for some kids, maybe some particularly marginalised kids who might find it difficult to access support elsewhere. But. Right now, the evidence base isn't straightforward when it comes to whether we should pour many more resources without actually thinking a little bit more carefully and actually coming back to one of the first points that was being discussed around the voice of young people. Actually, what we saw was



very few of these apps that have been developed, have really, truly taken the co-production part of this to heart so really had young people involved and maybe that's the reason why then we don't necessarily see them surviving long term.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Claudia does that chime with your experience?

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

Yes, on so many levels, the digital interventions, it's a complex world and it's also very expensive and so you have to walk before you run, and it's an iterative process that you have a prototype, you build, you expand from there and so. Two specific interventions that I, one I just wrapped up and then one I actually have a publication that showed some improvement in cognitive reappraisal, which is an emotion regulation skill. But again, these are theory informed, these are projects that are co-created with young people. I had a Youth Advisory Board. But it just takes time to build and expand and I think that's the space where research, and that's part of my work with the Born This Way Foundation, is really thinking about these approaches and disseminating them, because to me, in this point, often times there's so much thought that goes into the development of these interventions. And then they stay on a shelf, and they don't really go anywhere. So how do we get them out. How do we focus on implementation science? Cynthia and I have talked about this, about implementation and how it takes, 17 years on average for, you know, something to get implemented. So how do we reduce that time and thoughtfully implement these interventions so that we have a big bang for our, for the thoughtfulness that goes into the development of these projects. So, Mina, you mentioned three things that are pillars of Born This Way Foundation. Co-creating with young people is absolutely something that is central to our work and also making sure that everything that we do is informed by their needs, and we're meeting them where they're at so finding ways to do that.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah, completely vital. And I suppose, but coming back that, the potential opportunity of reaching marginalised people, of reaching people in parts of the world with no mental health services at all, you know, I mean, it's got to be, it's got to be part of the future hasn't it?

Professor Mina Fazel:

It's difficult. You know, I think it's got, you know, it's just difficult. So, we have also asked are young people you know, when they've had distress where have they sought help? So, the vast majority don't go anywhere. For those that go somewhere, actually friends are really high up there. So actually, a lot of what was discussed before about the role of friendship, supporting friends. Teaching young people how to help each other is really essential. Less than 10% turn to online or digital sources of support at their times of greatest distress, so it might be because there isn't the right thing online, or it just might be that at your times of most distress you might just want another human there. So, I sort of get the fact that actually this is not an easy place for us to be innovating successfully. So, I think we've got to learn about it. We've been doing a bit of research in lower resource settings around the digital offer as well, and actually data is such an important problem that actually, they weren't accessing anything online because they didn't have a phone that was their own, might not have been private enough, they couldn't get on Wi-Fi. So, there are so many barriers still that, digital interventions might have a role, but I think we're very, very far from knowing what that is yet.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

OK, where next? What's really exciting each of you about, I mean, forget 17 years, Claudia, we don't have time for that! What about the next few years? What do you think are the next big things coming down the line, Cynthia?

Cynthia Germanotta:

Something we're very excited about is, you know, in addition to our own programming, we care a great deal about other people's programming and the ability to scale and amplify that. So, it's really central to our own mission to invest in other organisations that support youth mental health and help them scale, and also recognise the urgent work that they're really doing and because of maybe their size, community limitations, they just don't have, you know the appropriate resources, so something we spent quite a deal of time studying and also talking to organisations when we visited them would be, what are your unmet needs and the answers were astounding. I mean they were not just mental health, but they were things that greatly affect mental health. Whether it is, you know, food insecurity, housing, feminine hygiene products, like that was actually the impetus for this programme that I'm going to discuss.

But so, something we're excited about is investing in grassroots, community-based organisations that are doing great work but that need to scale. So, we have launched a programme called Kindness in Communities, the KIC Fund. And last year we invested \$1,000,000 in supporting 22 local nonprofits in cities across the country that are in some way, shape or form supporting mental health, and we're very excited about it. I mean, we believe that this kind of a partnership where we can help one another, grow and amplify will be really important. There are two that I think are worth noting that are near and dear to our hearts. One is on the outskirts of Washington DC, that's called Civic Suds and they are serving disadvantaged families by transforming laundromats into spaces of learning and growth. And, you know, laundromats. They're everywhere. They're often overlooked, but they have identified a number of community-based needs, whether that's food deserts, resource deserts. And they aim to provide resources actually in those public spaces, like laundromats and also others. And you know, Mina, to your point, I know it was on the digital front, but young people were part of the co-creation of this programme. So Civic Suds is one of the organisations that we work with. Another is called the Sam & Devorah Foundation for Trans Youth in New York, based from a tragic story where they lost a family member who died by suicide and have since worked to build an organisation that empowers trans and non-binary youth as well as adults through leadership programmes, through mentorships, through camps.

So these are just a few examples of, actually there's way more than 22, that we have invested in and so that's something we're excited about for the future. Another thing that we're excited about is global expansion for us, and being able to scale our programmes globally, not only things like the Be There Certificate, but the Kindness in Community fund on a global basis, but also back to digital platforms, we're studying that very seriously and looking at it again from a prevention perspective of, you know, what will resonate with young people to help them before the onset, or there could be an onset of mental health issues clearly, but things to help them integrate into their daily life to be better equipped. So those are a couple of things that we're excited about and Dr Claudia, I don't know if you want to add any others.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Well, it's a huge agenda. You're not gonna have a quiet time of it anyway.

Cynthia Germanotta:

We're not going to have a quiet time and that's just fine with us.

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

The passion drives us.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Claudia, what about you?

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

So I would say that you know, I think Cynthia beautifully described the future of some of our programmes, and with our research we are expanding our programme in research and we are collaborating and working with, you know, our plans are to collaborate and work with scientists who really focus and conduct research around the nuances that that really, that are related to mental health among our young people. We know that there are so many layers to mental health. And that one size does not fit all and that we need to meet those needs differently. And so, our hope is to partner, collaborate with scientists who are focused in this area and work with them in the research that they do to build a kinder and braver world.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Wonderful. And it's also applied, isn't it? So, it really is about, you know, we know what works and how to implement it and make it work for the most people in the quickest possible times. It's real, you know, life-changing research, it's not just sort of sitting in an ivory tower and thinking about things at all, is it.

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

Thank you for saying that, Belinda, because the only type of research that I conduct is applied, and it is because it's very important to me as a, as a former educator inside schools, we don't have time to waste and so we need to make sure that this work, that our efforts are supporting young people. So that's really, truly all research that we conduct, the Foundation, all research that I conduct has been and will always be applied.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Thank you. Mina, what's on the cards for you?

Professor Mina Fazel:

Well, first, can I say how exciting it is to hear what Cynthia and Claudia were saying because on so many levels, you're demonstrating, I suppose, first of all that there is so many important initiatives taking place around the world and you know, I want to go and learn about this laundry thing. That's what's exciting me right now, Belinda, actually. But anyway, so there are so many important initiatives that are being done with young people, but the fact that the organisation is also trying to measure the impact and has a research arm is unbelievably important. Because otherwise if we don't measure it, we don't really know what's happening and then we actually moving forward 20 years, we might not be any further forward. So actually, I think that there is also a sea change like more and more organisations like yours are starting to engage with the research agenda in a way that is non-threatening, that is actually highlighting the importance of gathering data so that we can

all be confident that what we're doing is valuable in making the change as it is. So, I think I'm really heartened.

I am also excited, Belinda, that I do think this is kind of one of, you know a really, really impressive example of how this is happening where so many people are concerned, anxiously concerned about what's happening for young people, trying to find ways to improve it. But actually, we have to evaluate it. And measure it and be convinced that you know, it's likely that it's going to help some people. It might not help all, so let's learn which ones. Let's learn more about how it helps them. Let's you know, change it a bit, but it's only if we do this in a curious, open way that actually long term, we'll be able to move forward. You know your organisation, Cynthia will then have an impact on other organisations as well, that it, kind of, you know, that's what we want, isn't it? To be learning as much as possible. So, I think that's really heartening, really important. And, you know, quite exciting as well.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Now I completely I'm also blown away a bit starstruck and completely excited to hear, you know our discussion over the last 45 minutes, but I do want you mean to mention the Brain Waves project and the development for schools, mental health, that I know that is also a really exciting development over the next couple of years.

Professor Mina Fazel:

Yes. Well, thank you. So, I'm involved in a project with a few other researchers here at the University of Oxford and also partners in organisations that develop educational materials to schools, to work much more closely with education to understand the mental health needs of young people. So Brain Waves wants to study a very large number of adolescents, in the tens of thousands over time, because on some level we can't actually learn about some of the important risk and protective factors unless we do that type of longitudinal research. But we're marrying that proposal with, you know, developing a platform where we can test in a much more interactive and applied way, similar to something that we were talking about, interventions for the school partners. So, we are partnering with schools in a very interesting way with educational learning, as well as mental health interventions to study them. So that's a really important project that we're just at the outset of and we hope it will be the beginning of maybe one, two, three decades of work just to slowly, consistently really try to understand all these little bits and actually come out of it at the end with a much better understanding of what's happening to kids. Because given how many young people go to school, almost everybody does, it's actually quite embarrassing how little we know about what actually helps them in that environment. So, it's really trying to to talk to that as well.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Wonderful. Does anyone want to talk about anything else? We've had quite a good discussion, I think.

Dr Claudia-Santi F. Fernandes:

Definitely. And I just want to say Mina, thank you for the work that you're doing inside schools. Schools are, of course near and dear to our hearts and your ethos is similar to ours in the approaches, we partner for impact and that's the goal. We can't do this alone. So, we are partnering for impact and it's beautiful to see others also partnering for impact.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

No, I mean it is so inspiring to listen to you. I also, I really love the sort of the bottom-up community driven development. I also love the idea of that laundromat. I mean, absolutely wonderful. Well, all of it. I mean, God, the inspiring people that you were talking about at the beginning. Your partners, Cynthia. I mean, you know, what extraordinary young people. Yeah. It'd be great to raise them up and promote them, and I know you do it already, so you don't need us.

Cynthia Germanotta:

We do. We all need each other.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Well, we can help each other. Certainly. Yeah, absolutely. OK, thank you very much.

Professor Mina Fazel:

No problem. I'm always happy to talk about these subjects.

Cynthia Germanotta:

You as well, and just, you know, thank you on behalf of our team, my daughter, all of us, for inviting us for highlighting this topic.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

I hope you enjoyed this episode of Futuremakers, Brain and Mental Health. You can find more episodes of future makers wherever you get your podcasts and more on Oxford's research at [ox.ac.uk/brain](https://ox.ac.uk/brain). Thanks for listening.