

Teenagers' use of a web resource for sharing experiences when a parent has cancer

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Background

There is a gap in information and support aimed specifically at children who have a parent with cancer and there is a particular lack of services facilitating peer support.

The internet is a medium actively used by young people and would seem an appropriate tool for providing peer support for this vulnerable and often lonely group.

We launched www.riprap.org.uk in 2003 as an information and support resource for 12 – 16 year olds who have a parent with cancer. It is a highly interactive website addressing a range of issues relating to living with cancer in the family. Among the many features, users are able to submit their own personal stories to the site.

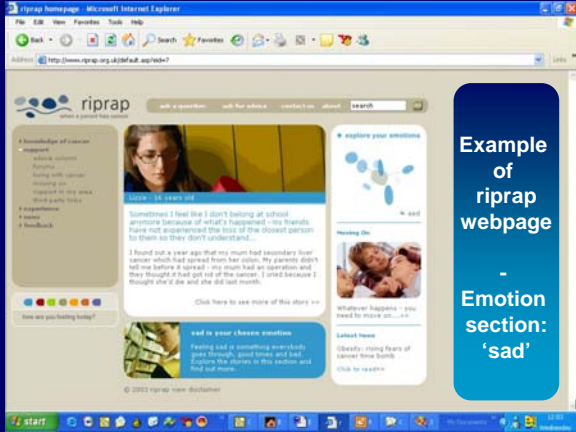
Aims

To investigate the use of riprap as an online platform for sharing experiences between teenagers who have a parent with cancer.

This is part of a larger study evaluating all the interactive sections of the website.

Methods

- Content analysis of case stories submitted by teenagers
- Data analysis of feedback forms from riprap users
- Content analysis of informal feedback from teenagers
- Data analysis of website traffic statistics



Website development

We collaborated with a leading London based multi media company in order to deliver a national information and support service through a website of outstanding quality

Results per June 2007

We have had 335,539 visits to the website since the launch 29 May 2003 and we currently have an average of 655 visits per day. The statistics show that the stories section is the most visited part of the site.

Submitted stories: N=107

Age	Gender	
	Girls	Boys
< 12	14	2
13	18	3
14	17	1
15	21	2
16	12	0
17	6	0
18	4	1
19 +	6	0
	98	9

Emotional categories	Count
Anxious	66
Sad	48
Positive	16
Confused	11
Guilty	8
Angry	9

Aspects of parent's cancer	Count
Mum has cancer	63
Dad has cancer	33
Both mum and dad have cancer	2
Others have cancer	9
Diagnosis / Treatment stage	32
Advanced stage	28
Parent is dying	10
Parent has died	28
Parent in remission / Recovered	4

Top 10 content characteristics of stories

- Receiving bad news
- Describing anxiety and uncertainty
- Watching parent deteriorate
- Praising parent
- Providing peer support
- Problems at school and with friends
- Anticipated loss of parent
- Bereavement and grieving
- Denial / bottling up emotions

Sample feedback

Alison, 11 years old:
"I lost my mum to cancer when I was 10. The website has helped me because I always felt on my own but reading stories on the site about children who have coped with cancer in their family just like me has made me see things differently. Thanks riprap"

Conclusion

Riprap has an increasing number of users and is proving to be an important source of peer support for this vulnerable, neglected and often isolated group of children.