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## Healthy Habits: Helping Others Through Gaming

By Sheri Sobrato Brisson

At age 24, I was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. At the time, I focused all my energy on getting well; I had no time for feelings. I realized much later that even after I had healed physically. It is very difficult to work through feelings surrounding a health challenge when you're in the thick of it. We tend to cope the best way we can, relying on strengths that have worked for us in the past. But the problem is, at some point, how we coped in the past just doesn't work anymore. That's when the feelings may come pouring in, and perhaps we even hit a point of crisis.

I hadn't even begun to heal emotionally. Unrelated situations triggered so many packed-away feelings and I was left trying to figure out the meaning of it all, unable to move on. I realized I had to acknowledge my fear and get through the sadness for what I had lost before I could re-engage in life again.

Medically, more and more pediatric patients are able to cope remarkably well with complex diseases. Yet despite all the medical advances, sadly there hasn't been parallel progress in helping these survivors and young patients *live with* the emotional side of their illnesses.

The complex treatments some kids and teens endure over an extended period of time take an emotional toll. Unfortunately, financial pressures mean that many hospitals are cutting back on support services. As hospital stays grow shorter and shorter, patients may not be in the hospital long enough to receive the ongoing support they need, or if they are in the hospital, they may be too sick to take advantage of it. Although many teens would likely benefit from professional support, it's often not accessible, too expensive, or is undesirable to teens. The result: Only a small portion of teens who could benefit from ongoing emotional support are receiving it.

When I work with teens, I often hear them say they feel pressure to "be brave" and "act strong" for themselves and their families. For many teens, this requires keeping their true feelings surrounding illness locked deep inside. Meaningful conversations that could help these young people find resilience along their illness journey are just not happening. This results in too much left unsaid, leaving these patients alone with their feelings.

Every sick teen deserves the chance to explore their thoughts and feelings about illness or disability. Yet, sadly, many do not have the opportunity. Some don't have the words to express themselves or even know where to start.

With Digging Deep Project, first the *Digging Deep* journal and now with *Shadow's Edge*, I want to empower young people to identify their feelings and understand the meaning of illness in their lives. From my decades of experience working directly with kids and teens for so many years, I know they all have the capacity to look their illness straight in the face gain strength though it—they just need the right tools.

*Shadow's Edge* is the first-ever FREE mobile game to build resilience in teens with serious medical conditions. The quest of *Shadow's Edge* is to restore an abandoned city through self-expression in the form of writing and graffiti. It provides a safe place for teens to learn how to communicate these thoughts and feelings and give teens the tools they need to master their situation, gain a sense of control, and take an active role in their emotional health. And it has just the edginess and coolness factor teens love!

Let's face it—kids and teens live and learn through their technology. Games can make exploring those challenging issues easier, more palatable. Games provide the player a chance to interact with the content, experiment, and practice what they learn, all within a fun and immersive environment. No game exists today for teens to reflect on their personal journey and gain skills for dealing with their health challenges. *Shadow's Edge* let's teens reflect on their experiences "on the fly," right on their



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phone or tablet, discreetly, as though they were just sending a text to someone, whenever they need an emotional boost. It is like a best friend who is always there.

Shadow's Edge is available for free download on all Android and Apple devices released from October 21<sup>st</sup>. Visit the App Store or Google Play and have your teen or young adult get in touch with their inner graffiti artist!

**Sheri Sobrato Brisson, MA** is a brain tumor survivor who discovered the importance of self-reflection during her recovery. Brisson's passion for supporting children and families with serious illness includes support group facilitation, professional trainings, and Board Member to children health organizations such as UCSF/Mt. Zion, Cancer Support Community, American Cancer Society, Okizu Foundation and Parents Helping Parents. Brisson is founding Trustee of Sobrato Family Foundation.

You can learn more about The Digging Deep Project and *Shadow's Edge* at <https://www.shadowedge.com/> and connect on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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