

# Serious game helps teens dealing with chronic illness foster self-inquiry

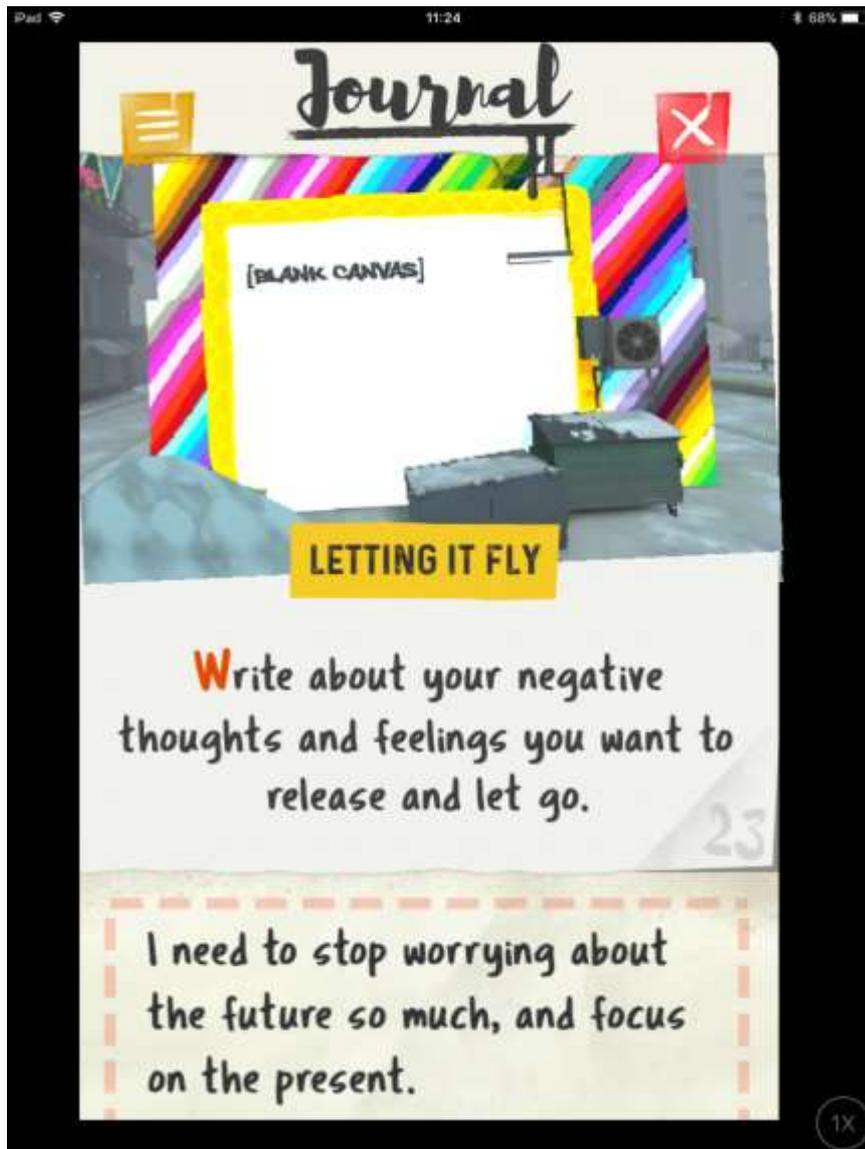
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Through a fund with Silicon Valley Community Foundation, local philanthropist Sheri Sobrato Brisson and her team launched **Shadow's Edge**, a mobile game designed to foster self-inquiry and acceptance in teenage players facing chronic illnesses and other health challenges. Brisson saw that many adolescents undergoing medical treatments could use a simple tool to help guide them through the emotional journey of illness. She and her small team -- which includes a producer, researchers, and online community experts -- created the game to lead teens towards accepting their own reality and teach them how to address their emotional needs.

"Today's teens live and learn through technology," says Brisson. "Shadow's Edge is a self-help tool for teens that allows them to decide for themselves if and when it is useful. They're in charge."

According to Brisson, serious games, which have purposes other than entertainment, have been popular in Europe for some time, yet are a relatively new concept in the United States.



Shadow's Edge grew out of *Digging Deep*, a book co-authored by Brisson and Rose Offner, and from Brisson's own experience as a 30-year brain cancer survivor. While the game uses terminology related to illness, diagnosis and treatment, prompts and questions were designed to be open-ended and broadly relatable.

Shadow's Edge takes place in a city in crisis – desolate, dark and abandoned -- but as players progress, reflect and engage with the world, the city comes back to life and fills with colors, plants, buildings and art.

Players create graffiti, which allows them to share their story while filling the city with color. The graffiti is a metaphor for self-expression, says Brisson: "Players express themselves through their graffiti in an honest way." Shadow's Edge also includes a sharing component where players can post the artwork they've created and "favorite" pieces others have made to create their personal, inspirational digital gallery. "Players can see similarities between themselves and other players and feel less alone. There is no greater power than feeling validated," says Brisson.



Since launching in late 2017, Shadow's Edge has been downloaded more than 1,000 times, and Brisson's team is aiming for 10,000 downloads by the end of 2018, with the hope of retaining a core group of engaged, active players. "Consistent use is key to building resilience," she says.

They plan to publicize the game through social media, message boards, and other places where teens are already congregating online. In future versions, there are plans to create more opportunities for safe, supportive communication options among players and increase customization options.

After witnessing the transformation of the Shadow's Edge world, players eventually reach the game's end (no spoilers!) but they are always invited to revisit specific questions and add more detail to their stories. "The game is a tool to start the discussion and build a community," says Brisson.

"I can't say enough good things about working with SVCF," she says. "I've really appreciated the expertise we have accessed through our special project fund."

*Shadow's Edge is free to download on the Apple [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).*

Link: <https://www.siliconvalleycf.org/blog/philanthropy/serious-game-uses-technology-foster-self-inquiry-and-build-community>