

# BFB Labs, bringing digital therapy to a new generation

*As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Manjul Rathee, cofounder and CEO at BFB Labs about using ethical and immersive gaming to improve the mental health of young people.*

Temps de lecture : minute

---

10 December 2024

I started BFB Labs with the urgent goal of addressing the mental health crisis among children and young people. Half of all mental health disorders *start by the age of 14*, yet up to 70% of children don't get access to timely, appropriate support. Data from the Children's Commissioner's report in March 2024 shows that more than *a quarter of a million* young people were waiting for mental health care in England alone. Left untreated, mental health issues can escalate and become much harder to treat. We're on a mission to change this outlook.

Using engaging and accessible game-inspired technology, we're bridging the gap in mental health provision for children with anxiety disorders, whilst widening access and easing pressure on mental health services. The children who access our intervention may not meet the high risk thresholds for interventions like face to face therapy, or they may be on a long waiting list for other support. They stand to gain a huge amount from immediate access to a therapeutic intervention providing gold standard treatment - on demand - which can help them build mental resilience. Most children who access our intervention do not require follow-up care.

# Tell us about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

BFB Labs is a mission-driven mental health tech enterprise. We've created a NICE-recommended digital therapeutic intervention, called Lumi Nova: Tales of Courage, which combines Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with ethical and immersive gaming to help 7-12 year-olds manage anxiety while providing crucial data to better inform children's care journeys.

Set in an immersive game environment, the intervention recreates situations which are making children anxious through in-game simulations. These are followed by real world challenges to gradually expose children to the fears and anxieties they face and give them the tools to overcome them.

BFB Labs works with health, care and education services to widen access to mental health support. To create Lumi Nova, we collaborated with children, parents, NHS clinicians, academic institutions, and mental health experts. In addition to our technologies, we provide implementation support from start to finish ensuring seamless integration and delivery in different local systems.

## How has the business evolved since its launch?

We launched in 2015. Throughout our journey we've been laser-focused on building a best-in-class intervention to support children and young

peoples' mental health. We've hit a number of important milestones along the way: Lumi Nova is a MHRA-registered software as a medical device. It is Digital Technology Assessment Criteria (DTAC) approved by NHS England and is also recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as a first line treatment option for children with anxiety disorders.

We also provide meaningful data to our partners to inform care and population health management. We have a strong network of partners including NHS Trusts, ICBs, local authorities, schools, academic institutions and subject area experts. We've carried out multiple research studies that strengthen our evidence base and we're proud to have become one of the most progressive and credible solution providers in the child mental health space.

## Tell us about the working culture at BFB Labs.

At BFB Labs, our culture is built on inclusivity and innovation. We have a diverse, female-led team that brings together expertise from tech, healthcare, and gaming. Our commitment to making mental health support accessible drives everyone here, and it's reflected in how we work. We value multidisciplinary perspectives and focus on results that genuinely impact our users' lives. It's a culture grounded in a shared vision to empower young people in their mental health journey. Every team member knows that their work contributes to something bigger.

## How are you funded?

Our funding has been largely non-dilutive, with significant support from the NHS, through the SBRI scheme, and Innovate UK. This multi-phase

funding has allowed us to focus on product development and optimising accessibility for disadvantaged communities. We're also bolstered by academic partnerships, validating our approach to mental health interventions through NIHR-funded studies with institutions like the University of Manchester, Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust, Southwark Council, MindTech and Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Our biggest challenge is balancing the size of our mission with the commercial reality of building a healthtech company within the constraints of large healthcare systems. There are always going to be points of friction, and we won't be able to have an impact if we can't sustain ourselves commercially. But we also won't be able to have an impact if we can't operate within the structures that enable us to reach and serve communities. We're extremely passionate about the work we do to drive better youth mental health, and navigating these systems is part of the job.

How does BFB Labs answer an unmet need?

Our intervention addresses the gaping hole that is accessible and effective mental health support for children and young people with mild to moderate anxiety. By integrating evidence-based therapies within an immersive digital game, we provide early intervention in an inclusive and de-stigmatising format that young users actually enjoy and that has a significant positive impact on engagement and outcomes.

Crucially, our technology is improving access to care and outcomes for children from marginalised groups. Improvements in outcome scores for ethnic minority children are approximately 30% higher than that of the average Lumi Nova user, and we have a higher percentage of users with a disability than the national average.

## What's in store for the future?

We are committed to addressing pressing mental health needs. Our goal is to build mental resilience in children and young people, a generation at a time. To achieve this, we are developing more digital therapeutics which will deliver the high quality support we're known for, but targeting a broader range of mental health needs. We are also expanding geographically.

## What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Stay focused on the problem you're solving and put your users at the heart of everything. Building something innovative can be daunting, but understanding your mission and whom you're serving will keep you grounded. It's also crucial to be open to feedback and adapt when needed. Our journey has been full of learnings, and each one has strengthened our product and impact. Finally, surround yourself with a team that shares your vision; a passionate team is your most valuable asset.

And finally, a more personal question! What's

# your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

My day starts at 5 am with a cup of home-cooked chai (it helps ground me as it reminds me of where I grew up). I read, do a workout and then I cycle to our office. I attend a lot of meetings in the working day - both strategic and creative - so I try to eat well so that I am energised and focused in these discussions. I block a couple of hours on some weekdays to get stuck into various projects with complete focus and no distractions or discussions. I love working with our team and we all try to have lunch together, sometimes playing games or reviewing local food outlets. I usually leave work between 5-6 pm, cycle home or meet friends, followed by a homemade meal. I spend approximately forty minutes unwinding in the evening and try to get to sleep early.

When it comes to rules I live by, I try to give 70% to most things; and I will prioritise no more than one task at a time that I will give 100%. I often step away from complex challenges and revisit them at different intervals so I can apply a different lens. This allows me to examine things in a variety of ways, which in turn can lead to unexpected solutions.

Manjul Rathee is the cofounder and CEO at [\*BFB Labs\*](#).



## MADDYNEWS UK

The newsletter you need for all the latest from the startup ecosystem

[SIGN UP](#)

---

Article by Manjul Rathee