SNAPSHOT REPORT

AN EVALUATION OF THE DIGITAL DELIVERY PILOT

SUPPORTING EXPECTING &
PARENTING TEENS PROGRAM

CONTENTS

Citation

Cultural Acknowledgment

Brave Foundation acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation as the traditional custodians of the lands on which our organisation works. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Brave's work also brings us into contact with people from diverse communities. Brave is committed to respecting the sexuality, gender, culture and heritage of each person we encounter, inside and outside our organisation.

INTRODUCTION

> ...I was newly diagnosed with postpartum depression quite bad. So I did feel like I didn't have a lots of support people around. So yeah, I was obviously pretty keen to have a support person to talk to...I don't really have, you know, a mum to call up & be like, 'hey I'm having a hard day, like, can you come over &, you know, have a chat or something?'
>
> *Digital SEPT Participant Interviewee*

In 2021, Brave Foundation (Brave) launched a Digital Delivery pilot of its flagship Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) program in recognition that young parents who were isolated by geography, disability or other circumstances were missing out on necessary supports and opportunities to achieve their aspirations and improve their own and their children's wellbeing. The full report summarises the findings of the first evaluation of the pilot project, which used a program theory-driven and mixed-method design, and is available upon request. This snapshot report replicates the full report highlights in relation to the three key evaluation questions (KEQs) addressed by the project and considerations for Brave's continuous improvement plans.

Experts "have speculated that e-mentoring can be a tremendous equity tool in bringing increased and specific forms of social capital to otherwise isolated populations."

(Garringer et al., 2019, p.8)

KEQ1

HOW WELL DOES THE DIGITAL DELIVERY OF SEPT ALIGN WITH THE SEPT PROGRAM THEORY? WHERE ARE THE POINTS OF DIFFERENCE?
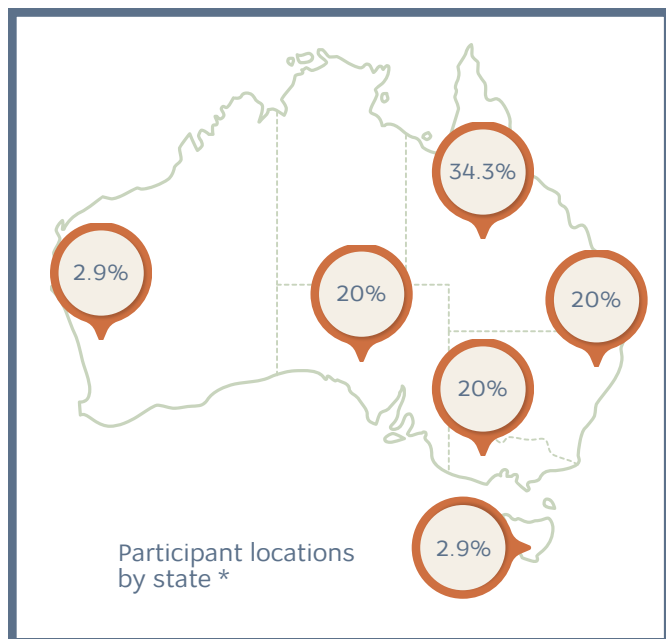
The synthesised evidence illustrates that the implementation of SEPT Digital Delivery aligns very strongly with the SEPT Program Theory. Insights relating to each program theory component are summarised below.

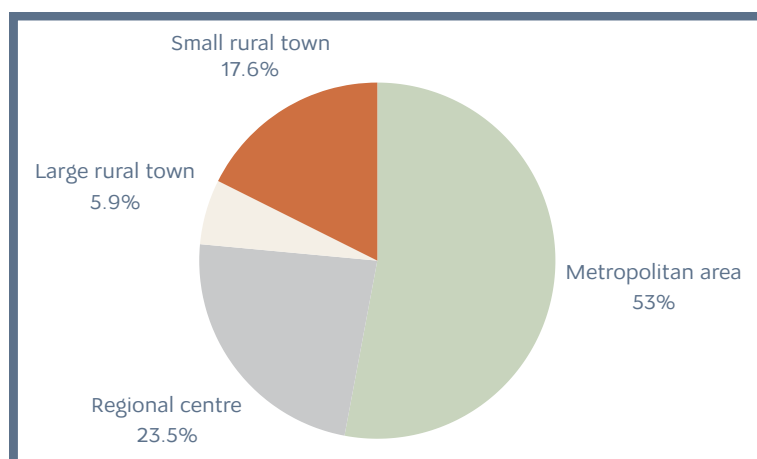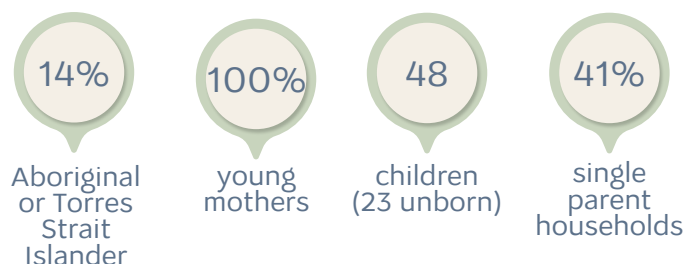## Problem, Target Group & Participant Profile

- Comparison of 35 Digital Delivery participants with 135 In-Person Delivery participants who received the SEPT program and closed in 2023 illustrates that the SEPT Digital and In-Person Delivery formats address similar participant needs and attract young parents with wide-ranging but similarly complex life experiences. However, participant needs associated with isolation have a stronger focus in the Digital Delivery program.

- A higher proportion of young parents involved with In-Person Delivery were experiencing housing insecurity at the start of the program compared to young parents in Digital Delivery but there were higher proportions of young parents with mental health difficulties in Digital Delivery compared to In-Person Delivery. Engagement with a mentor solely through digital means may be easier when a young parent's housing situation is reasonably stable and Digital Delivery may also be particularly suitable for young parents who are isolated due to mental health difficulties.

- There was no overall significant difference in the geographical remoteness of participants' communities across the Digital Delivery and In-Person formats. This was unexpected given the intended focus on young parents in geographically isolated communities but can be explained by the small numbers of In-Person place-based mentors working with young parents in remote and very remote communities and the larger numbers of Digital Mentors working in rural, but not remote areas.

Participant Snapshot

Participant locations by state *

34.3%

2.9%

20%

20%

20%

2.9%

35 young parents completed SEPT via Digital Delivery

14% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

100% young mothers

48 children (23 unborn)

41% single parent households

23% had current or past child protection involvement

30% had housing insecurity concerns

43% were affected by family violence

77% had known mental health concerns

Small rural town 17.6%

Large rural town 5.9%

Metropolitan area 53%

Regional centre 23.5%

> She [participant] didn't have adult people in her life really to help her break it down or to be a sounding board, or to point her in the right direction... She just needed someone to give her some structure within the chaos that is adult life that, you know. You're hardly ready to do adult life when you're 26 & you have a baby, let alone when you're well... you're 15 & your brain is just absolutely full of trauma, you know.
>
> *Digital SEPT Staff Member*

> ...when I was pregnant & I was, I was living in a caravan park. I only had my partner's family & also like I didn't have much support.
>
> *Digital SEPT Participant*

Program Structure, Delivery Mode & Activities

- Despite some differences in the way Mentors provide support to participants in the Digital Delivery, there is an incredible breadth to the support provided that fits with the SEPT Program Theory and is highly valued by participants who complete the program.
- Digital Delivery participants set more goals on average than In-Person participants, but they were also engaged in the program for longer, on average. In addition, the way goals are recorded in the SEPT program is inconsistent across Mentors making true comparisons between delivery formats hard to ascertain.
- Stakeholder engagement and relationship management in the Digital Delivery covers a vast geographical spread, requires a different approach and takes more time because Mentors are not place-based.

This participant also was very happy to connect via FaceTime, so I think that really helped establish rapport with this participant very quickly, when we could see each other's face & connect like that, but the majority of participants don't connect that way.
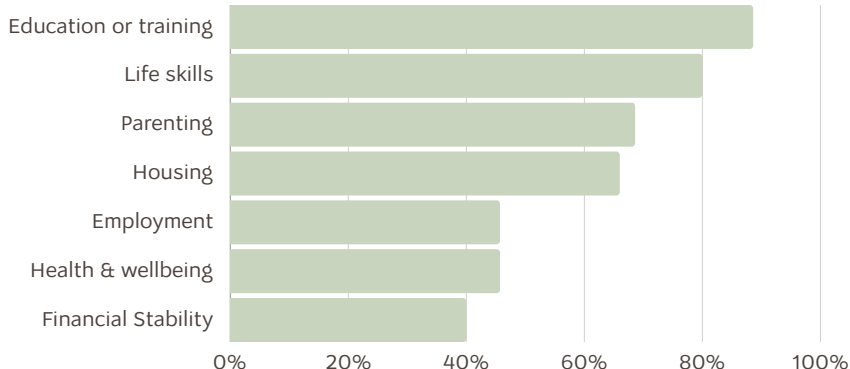
Digital SEPT Staff Member

...we have these big goals, you know moving out that was supposed to be a goal. And yeah actually the conversation became like, 'how can we actually get there?' OK so you know what practical steps to do today, tomorrow, the next day, that makes that possible for myself. Yeah, it was really really good.

Digital SEPT Participant

7.5

average number of goals per participant

13

average months in the program

Participants set at least one goal related to…

Goal	
Education or training	~89%
Life skills	~80%
Parenting	~68%
Housing	~66%
Employment	~45%
Health & wellbeing	~46%
Financial Stability	~40%

Program Experiences

- The majority of Digital Delivery participants who engaged with SEPT produced a Pathway Plan, completed the full program, and achieved at least three self-identified goals.
- The young parents who completed the end of program outcome measures reported statistically significant improvements in domains relating to personal agency, positive connections, parenting and family security.
- The quantitative and qualitative findings evidence a range of other positive outcomes relating to emotional wellbeing, housing, education, employment and family reunification.
- Although small sample sizes restrict the types of statistical tests applied, the evidence does not indicate any significant differences in outcomes between the Digital and In-Person delivery formats, except for number of goals achieved. However, this difference may be due to differences in the way goals are defined by Mentors across the delivery formats.

[Mentor's name] did give me a lot more confidence that I am doing a good job, like a better job that I realise, so I guess I kind of always have that back in the back of my mind & just having more confidence in myself.

Digital SEPT Participant

"...it provides the clarity, I think, about options that they had or they hadn't realised were available to them..."
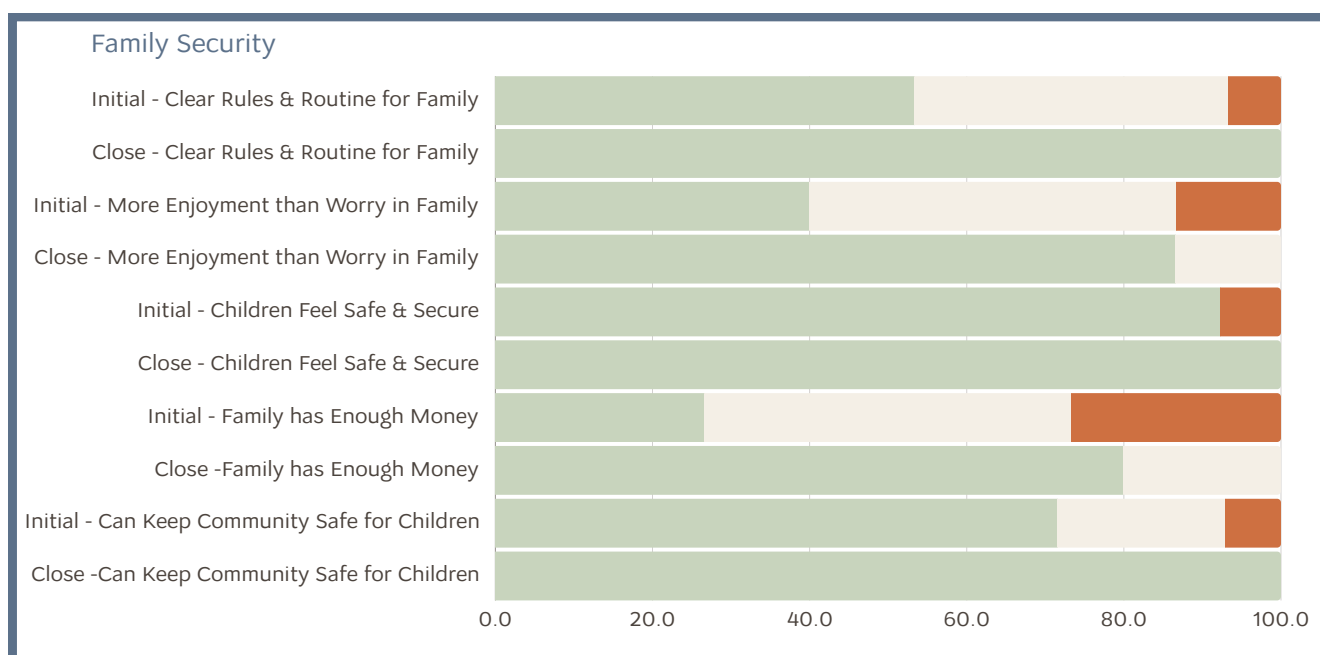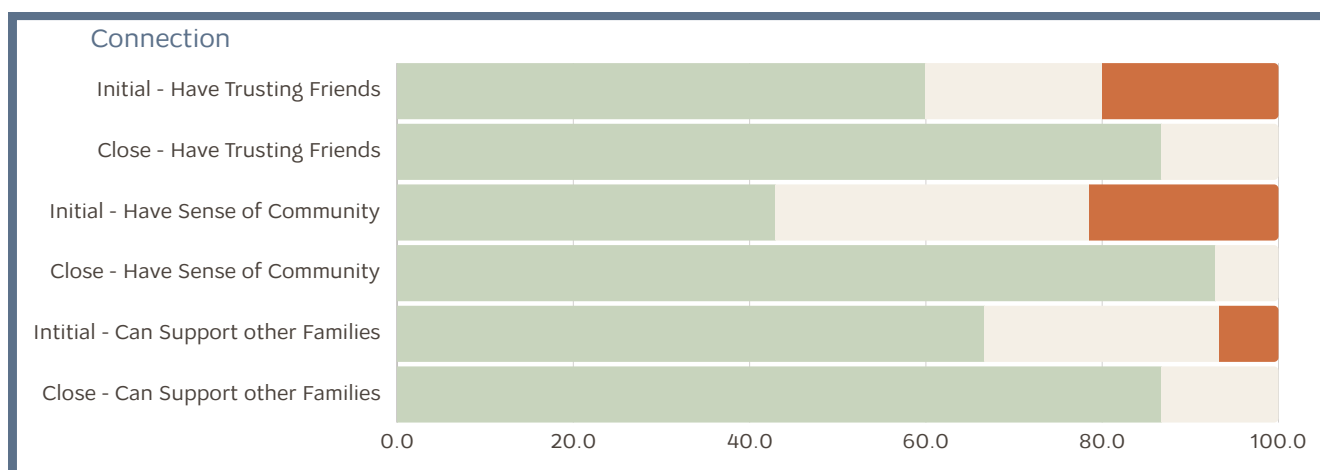
Digital SEPT Staff Member

Outcomes

Fitting with the program theory and the wide-ranging nature of the support provided by Digital Delivery Mentors, the outcomes experienced by participants cover a variety of personal and family domains related to individualised goals.

Quantitative data from Digital Delivery participants who closed in 2023 indicate that 88.6% completed the full program and almost two-thirds completed having achieved their goals. An additional 20% closed with goals in progress.

Of particular note are significant gains in areas of Connection and Family Security

Significant gains in areas of Parenting and Personal Agency were also found.

Parenting

	Agree	Kind of	Disagree
Initial - Comfort Talking to Professionals			
Close - Comfort Taking to Professionals			
Initial - Getting Info to Help Children			
Close - Getting Info to Help Children			
Initial - Confident Helping Children			
Close - Confident Helping Children			
Initial - Doing Best as Parent			
Close - Doing Best as Parent			
Initial - Available to Children			
Close - Available to Children			

0.0   20.0   40.0   60.0   80.0   100.0

Personal Agency

	Agree	Kind of	Disagree
Initial - I Feel Good about Self & Life			
Close -I Feel Good About Self & Life			
Initial - There are Things I'm Good At			
Close - There are Things I'm Good At			
Intial - I Have Direction & Goals			
Close - I Have Direction & Goals			
Initial - I Feel Good about the Future			
Close - I Feel Good about the Future			

0.0   20.0   40.0   60.0   80.0   100.0

■ Agree   ■ Kind of   ■ Disagree

100%

comfortable talking to their mentor

100%

felt their mentor was genuinely interested in them & their children

94%

felt their mentor encouraged them to set goals

93%

felt their mentor connected them to community support & resources

100%

felt their mentor helped them build relationships with others

100%

would recommend SEPT Digital Delivery

> She got a casual role at [workplace], which she was very excited for… She actually ended up experiencing some workplace bullying & I was very proud of her because she advocated for herself & spoke to management & flagged her concerns. She wasn't happy with the way that they responded… so she actually resigned. She then started looking for casual work again, & she's just secured another casual job…
>
> *Digital SEPT Staff Member*

67%

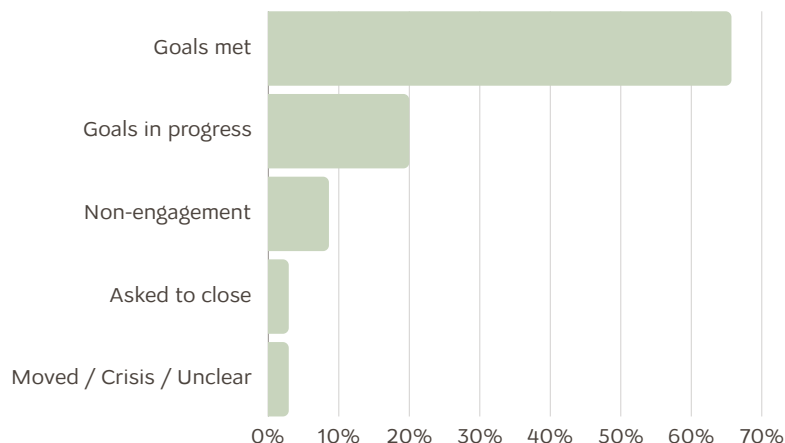goals set were achieved

97%

developed a Pathway Plan

92%

felt less stressed & more motivated

80%

enrolled in education or training or were employed

Closure Reasons

Reason	Percentage
Goals met	~66%
Goals in progress	~20%
Non-engagement	~8%
Asked to close	~3%
Moved / Crisis / Unclear	~2%

Success Factors

- Conversion of referrals to participation appears to be more challenging for Digital Delivery. Conversion rates from the start of the pilot to May 2024 were 20% lower than In-Person Delivery. This is not an indicator of program effectiveness since referred young parents have not yet engaged with the service, but it does raise questions about referring partners' knowledge of the service and how to best target the opportunity.
- Participant engagement tends to be higher when young parents have some initial motivation and a clear need for support that is not being met by others in their existing social network; however, when participant needs are extremely complex, they can overwhelm the capacity of the young parent to engage.
- SEPT Mentors occupy a unique role that requires knowledge and competence in a range of areas. Digital mentors have additional self-efficacy and skill requirements related to digital communication, adaptability, and researching new community service landscapes. Training and ongoing professional development should support this wide-ranging skillset.
- Rapport-building takes more time and the approach to building trust and connection is often through shorter, but more frequent, interactions - a point of difference in Digital Delivery. Most participants prefer to use voice only or messaging platforms that do not allow Mentors to connect with them face-to-face; nevertheless, close, authentic mentoring relationships are developed.
- Stakeholder relationships are crucial to establishing referral pipelines into SEPT and to providing outward referrals to create a village of supports for participants during and after the program. Developing mutually valued relationships with organisational stakeholders across a vast range of communities was the most demanding and time-consuming part of the pilot experience. Dedicated support to initiate and grow stakeholder relationships across the communities where Digital Delivery can add value to the existing service landscape could be worth exploring.
- Sourcing fit-for-purpose technology is particularly important for efficient and accessible service delivery in a solely digital format.
- Sustaining the impact of time-limited (i.e. 12-month) mentor support is likely to be limited if structural and systemic access barriers to other supports and opportunities are too great.

> I think [participant name] was just desperate for somebody to be consistent... for someone to be there... it just felt easy to be helpful, you know... that meant that the trust came quite quickly because she was so open to me being there... she knew what she wanted and she knew her goals. She knew what she wanted to see her life look like, but from where she was to where she wanted to go, she really had no idea how to do that...
>
> *Digital SEPT Staff Member*

> We are open to being quite agile with how they want us to engage with them.
>
> *Digital SEPT Staff Member*

KEQ2

HOW VALUABLE WAS THE MENTORING SUPPORT TO DIGITAL DELIVERY PARTICIPANTS & HOW DO THEIR EXPERIENCES OF THE PROGRAM COMPARE TO PARTICIPANTS WHO RECEIVED SERVICES IN PERSON?

Digital Delivery participants who provided evaluative data about their experiences were overwhelmingly positive about the support they received from their Mentors. There was no evidence to indicate that the quality of the experiences or support received by Digital Delivery participants was different to participants involved in In-Person delivery.

KEQ3

HOW EFFECTIVE IS DIGITAL DELIVERY IN PRODUCING THE OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED IN THE PROGRAM THEORY COMPARED TO IN-PERSON DELIVERY?

The absence of data from young parents who prematurely withdrew from the program or who did not respond to the end-of-program measures requires Brave to temper claims about program effectiveness. However, the converging qualitative and quantitative evidence collected to date indicates SEPT Digital Delivery is an effective program. In addition, the evidence suggests Digital Delivery is at least as effective as In-Person delivery for participants who engage with the program.

CONCLUSIONS

Considerations for Continuous Improvement

In light of the insights gleaned from this project, the project team encourages consideration of the following key points for organisational decision-making and continuous program improvement where resourcing and capacity allow:

- The additional reach Digital Delivery provides, and the current evidence of impact suggests there is substantial merit in continued delivery of SEPT in a digital format where placed-based, in-person delivery of SEPT or a similar service is not available or where, due to isolation, disability or circumstance, digital access to mentoring support is needed.
- Relational engagement is different and seemingly slower to develop in Digital Delivery; it would be worthwhile to examine whether programmatic changes (e.g. to program length, intensity, or to enable suspensions) or additional strategies could help to ensure participants have sufficient engagement with their Mentors prior to completion.
- Additional support for stakeholder engagement activities related to Digital Delivery may create efficiencies and enable scaling opportunities that are currently constrained by the reliance on Mentors to initiate, develop and maintain relationships with an extensive network of referral partners while simultaneously managing participant caseloads.
- Mentors expected to offer support digitally would benefit from clear role expectations regarding the unique aspects and skillsets required for digital mentoring practice.
- Relatedly, onboarding training and ongoing support focused on the unique skills required for digital mentoring would be a useful complement to existing professional development supports.
- Fit-for-purpose technology, particularly for e-signing required documentation, would address a significant pain point for staff and may help reduce a participant engagement barrier.

> To have someone who was rooting for my family & I [was the most significant change I experienced]. Someone I could trust, my mentor cared so much about my baby & I. I could ask any question & be able to receive helpful advice. Issues I didn't even know where to begin my mentor was able to break it down hurdle by hurdle, & helped me achieve my goals. My confidence grew. I grew as a person! I can place healthy boundaries for my baby & I. I can advocate for my family. I can communicate clearly. I can encourage other Mothers & friends! So blessed to of had my mentor, truly life changing.
>
> *Digital SEPT Participant Survey Respondent*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lived Experience

Brave gratefully acknowledges the young parents, mentors and other Brave staff members who gave their time and shared their expertise to support this research.
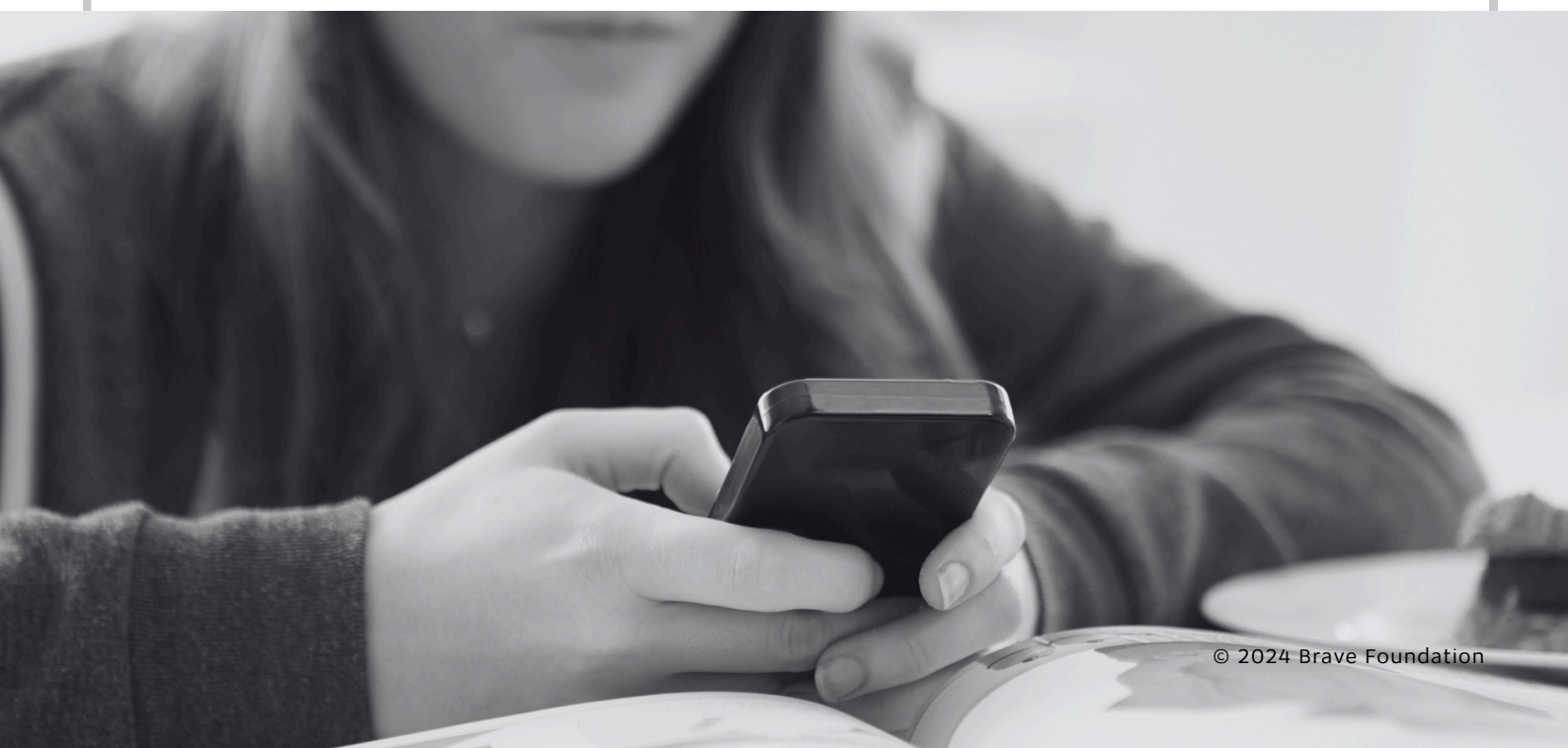
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Garringer, M., Kaufman, M., Stelter, R., Shane, J., & Kupersmidt, J. (2019). E-Mentoring. Supplement to the Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring. MENTOR. https://www.mentoring.org/resource/e-mentoring-supplement-to-the-elements-of-effective-practice-for-mentoring/

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