



2024 CASE STUDY

The 2024 Well-Being by Design Fellows participated in a four-month professional development program for designers and producers of interactive kids' technology and media. They met online to workshop their current projects, network with other fellows, and gain insights from research and industry leaders as they worked to incorporate principles of well-being into their designs. We are delighted to share highlights from each fellow's experience.

Kimberly Dowd



Kimberly Dowd has over a decade of experience in UX Research. She has worked at global brands including Fidelity Investments, the Boston Bruins, and Sevilla FC in Spain. Most recently prior to Google, Kim was a UX Research Director at a design agency where her research ranged from helping people quit smoking to coaching NFL players on mindfulness. She's spent the last six years at Google, with a current focus on improving the digital lives of kids and families.



PRODUCT: Google Search

TARGET AGE: Products that work for the whole family, from kids to caregivers

→ **GOOGLE FAMILIES**

Google's mission is to make the world's information universally accessible and useful.

Researching and building a great search experience means looking at the needs of the whole family — from young people to parents to caregivers. Partnering with the Cooney Center throughout this fellowship was an incredible opportunity to learn from other fellows and all of the guest speakers and to take a deep dive into designing for kids and families with well-being at the core.

UX: UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE INTERACT WITH TECH AND EACH OTHER

At its core, user experience (UX) research is about championing users. We constantly push the boundaries of investigating how people interact with technology and each other. This pursuit aligns perfectly with Google's ambitious mission: to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. Achieving true accessibility necessitates deep understanding: how does accessibility vary for a child as they're learning to navigate the world? How about for different ages, countries, family dynamics, and more? Such a bold mission means there's always room to uncover the hidden complexities of user needs to provide truly inclusive information for everyone.



ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING WITH YOUTH

As with so much in UX Research & Design, it's about getting perspectives from the right balance of people. On one hand, this fellowship brought experts who taught us some of the best ways to measure success for kids and families (e.g., the RITEC framework developed by LEGO Group and UNICEF). Equally important, we spoke to another type of expert - members of the Youth Design Team, who are expert at being kids.

Here's some inspiration I plan to bring back to my team members:

Quantifying well-being with the RITEC framework:

My biggest challenge in this space has always been quantifying something that feels so challenging to define and articulate - What is well-being? How do you measure it? I plan to use the [Responsible Innovation in Technology for Children \(RITEC\)](#) initiative — focusing on concepts like creativity and autonomy to explore measurement.

Shifting to a values lens audit: Our friends at Scratch reminded us to do a values lens audit. It's amazing how shifting from value to values makes a difference: "How does this strategy align with our values?"

Discuss design tensions with youth advisors: It's a myth that we need to steer away from tough questions with youth. As Dr. Amanda Third reminded us in her talk, "Children know much better what it's like to be children today than adults." I plan to continue to directly addressing design tensions with youth, rather than tiptoeing around them.



The Well-Being by Design fellowship ignited my passion for designing products that truly enhance children's well-being. Building and measuring well-being can be tough. But we tackled some of the complexities of well-being through frameworks that empower us to drive real change in products. It's been such an incredible experience learning from a leader in the space of designing for children and well-being, and brainstorming some pretty complex ideas with guest speakers, and fellows throughout this experience





LOOKING AHEAD

What I loved most about the Well-being by Design Fellowship was being able to learn from the best and brightest working on well-being for kids! I was inspired by industry leaders like Dr. Sonia Livingstone, whose talk on free play reminded us, “The cardboard box is the emblem of free play. You give an expensive gift & kids play with the box instead, using their agency & imagination.” Livingstone’s “cardboard box” metaphor – kids prioritizing free play over expensive toys – resonated deeply. It sparked a question: **What’s the internet’s “cardboard box”?** Where is this space where the web is useful for kids to learn, play, and grow? Inspired by this, I’m continuing to explore how digital platforms can best foster imaginative play and healthy development in children.

Building on the well-being conversation: This fellowship has fueled ongoing discussions focused on improving well-being for kids’ lives. I’m excited to share with folks who haven’t had the opportunity to take part in this fellowship, continuing to evolve the conversation on how to best measure well-being when designing for kids with the extended network of UX professionals at Google.

Beyond Google: I look forward to including these concepts in upcoming guest lectures at universities, focused on user experience, product management, and marketing programs. This will equip future designers and product leaders with the tools to prioritize children’s well-being in their work.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

For more information about the Well-Being by Design Fellowship program, please visit joanganzcooneycenter.org/fellowship2024