



CASE STUDY

The 2025 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.

# Rubin Soodak



Rubin Soodak is a creator of digital things for learning and empowerment. As an Interactive Producer at Fred Rogers Productions, he leads games and web production for the preschool series *Alma's Way* and other brands across digital platforms. He believes that good stuff for learning must listen to and trust learners, meeting them where they are in order to take them where they want to go.

**PRODUCT:** Upcoming web and mobile learning games from Fred Rogers Productions, with focus on three games currently in production for *Donkey Hodie* and *Alma's Way* on the PBS KIDS platform.

**TARGET:** *Donkey Hodie*: 3-5 years old,  
*Alma's Way*: 4-6 years old

→ [FREDROGERS.ORG](https://www.fredrogers.org)



Fred Rogers Productions builds on the legacy of Fred Rogers by creating quality children's media that models an enthusiasm for learning and earns the trust of parents and caregivers. We believe it is never too early for kids to discover the fun of following their curiosity, while they learn meaningful life skills along the way. Our games, websites, and apps get kids involved and make it fun for them to learn and grow.

Our games are rooted in celebrating the wonder, challenges, and possibilities of childhood. They build upon the goals of each of our shows by providing children with opportunities to practice core skills from each series. Our games cover learning domains such as flexible thinking, persistence, problem solving, self-awareness, social awareness, compassion, and more. As of May 2025, Fred Rogers Productions has produced 86 educational games that have garnered over 2.9 billion plays across web and mobile.



### WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

Our games are safe, equitable, and accessible. They encourage autonomy and empower players to strategize by providing opportunities to make meaningful choices during gameplay. All of our games are also playtested with a diverse pool of children across home, school, and informal learning contexts. This helps us ensure that our games are challenging but within grasp for players, helping them develop a sense of confidence as they engage with each game's subject matter. Our games also model social awareness skills and, when played with others, can provide children the opportunity to practice these skills in their own co-play experiences.

### HOW CAN MY PRODUCT BETTER ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING?

- + Our games can better support young children's self-discovery and identity development. We can do this by encouraging experimentation with gameplay strategies and settings, which will give our players a chance to realize their digital preferences while also encouraging them to recognize and embrace their idea of fun.
- + Our games can afford more opportunities for creativity. We can do this by providing enough structure for motivation without limiting open-ended play. Not every game needs to be on rails towards a goal; sometimes it's okay for players to skip steps, go backwards, and even try to "break" the game.
- + Our games can go beyond playtesting by embracing co-design at the start of future projects. Co-designing with our target audience can help us discover core mechanics to build around, as well as help our games better reflect the lived experiences, goals, and language of our audience.

### REFLECTION

I gleaned two guiding insights from the speakers and Youth Design Partners during this fellowship. The first is that not everything needs to be made just because we see an opportune application in children's lives. Sometimes reducing harm means making and doing less, not more. The second is that good design for children's well-being is applicable to designing for everyone's well-being. In our sessions together, I found myself saying, "I struggle with that too!" or "That's just like how I feel using that technology!" I think we have an opportunity with well-being design to help everyone, not just children, navigate a world in which our most ubiquitous digital platforms are actively harmful to our well-being.

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*I think good well-being design recognizes that sometimes we need to remove things and embrace lower tech for the sake of our audience's well-being.*

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### LOOKING AHEAD

Fred Rogers Productions is currently working on three games for the PBS KIDS web and app platform.

The first game, for the puppet series *Donkey Hodie*, is currently in production and will be released in Summer 2025. The game will feature a new tricky puzzle each day, designed to help children ages 3-5 practice persevering through failure. The game is motivated by the mission of the *Donkey Hodie* series: empowering children to overcome the frustrations and challenges they face in their daily lives with confidence, capability, and silliness.

The second game, also for *Donkey Hodie*, is inspired by the show's recent introduction of Jeff Mouse, an avid nature lover and photographer who was born with congenital muscular dystrophy. The game will be inspired by Jeff's introductory episode, "Hee-Hee Hider Seekers," and will be informed by advisor input from Disability Belongs.

The third game, for the animated series *Alma's Way*, is currently in pre-production while Fred Rogers Productions conducts formative research with Bridge Multimedia into the game design needs and preferences of children with fine motor disabilities. This research will inform the game's design and accessibility features.

In addition to these three games, Fred Rogers Productions is exploring ways to bring more player and parent co-design sessions into our games pre-production process.

### POTENTIAL IMPACT FOR KIDS (USERS) AND THE FIELD

- + Through this fellowship, I developed a newfound interest in helping children awaken their digital preferences from both a digital literacy and accessibility lens. As we continue pre-production for our upcoming *Alma's Way* game, I plan to incorporate well-being design to support our audience in this digital self-actualization. This could potentially help prepare our large audience of 4-6 year olds on the PBS KIDS platform to navigate the increasingly complex and dangerous digital world.
- + This fellowship has also had an impact on the tools I use in the early stages of our projects. For instance, I plan to incorporate the RITEC framework and Playful by Design toolkit when evaluating early concepts and designs of future games. While learning about these tools, I have also begun discussing well-being more openly with our production partners, which will lead to even more investment in and alignment towards production choices for the sake of child well-being.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

For more information about the Well-Being by Design Fellowship program, please visit [joanganzcooneycenter.org/fellowship2025](https://joanganzcooneycenter.org/fellowship2025)