

# Do Not Disturb – Sleep Challenge Report

A sleep guide for young people

**Australian Youth Digital Index**  
Translating insight into action



# Executive Summary

In 2024, the Telstra Foundation Youth Advisory Council (the Council) – based on findings from the Australian Youth Digital Index - found that sleep is a key issue affecting young Australians' wellbeing. In response, in 2025, the Council co-designed a 7-day Sleep Challenge pilot with expert input from Dr Moira Junge and Jocelyn Brewer, aiming to help young people reflect on and improve their sleep habits.

The pilot involved a diverse group of young people who set personal sleep goals, used practical tools (like sleep masks, Fitbits, and app blockers), and tracked their experiences through daily check-ins and reflection workshops.

Rather than focusing on reducing screen time, participants were motivated by feeling more refreshed, energised, and focused. The challenge highlighted that many young people are tired despite getting a reasonable amount of sleep, and that small, personalised changes – such as building a consistent routine or journaling – can make a meaningful difference.

Key takeaways include the importance of self-reflection, the need for flexible, youth-led approaches, and the value of combining individual strategies with broader advocacy for systemic change. The pilot's success has led to the development of resources for wider use, with plans to scale the model for the benefit of young people throughout Australia.



# Message from Jackie Coates, CEO Telstra Foundation



At Telstra Foundation, we're deeply committed to supporting the digital wellbeing of young Australians. It's clear that getting quality, restful sleep is an increasing challenge for young people, and they're by no means alone in this.

The 2024 Australian Youth Digital Index (AYDI) confirmed that sleep is one of the most impacted areas of wellbeing. Nearly 40% of young people reported that their digital life was negatively affecting their sleep. This matters because sleep isn't just rest - it's essential for brain development, emotional regulation, learning, and resilience. Poor sleep can lead to increased anxiety, reduced concentration, and broader impacts on health. And for young people navigating school, work, and social pressures, the consequences are amplified.

So we decided to try something different, with the help of our Youth Advisory Council and supported by sleep experts Dr Moira Junge and Jocelyn Brewer the Do Not Disturb Sleep Challenge came into being. The challenge gave young people practical, science-backed strategies to improve their sleep by changing late-night habits. From sleep masks and blue light glasses to journaling and grayscale mode, the challenge was designed to be relatable, flexible and effective.

What we learned was powerful. Sleep is social. Doing the challenge together made it easier to stick with. Small changes made a big difference. The young people participating reported better mood, focus and energy. And reflection helped, tracking sleep patterns gave them insight into what actually works for them.

We're proud to have co-created something that's not just a one and done campaign, but a conversation starter. Because better sleep isn't just about going to bed earlier - it's about creating space to really rest. And when young people lead the way, the solutions are smarter, stronger and more sustainable.



# Why Did We Do This?

Telstra Foundation's Youth Advisory Council (the Council) teamed up in 2024 to help guide the formation of the first Australian Youth Digital Index (AYDI), an online tool helping everyone – from governments to communities – see how digital tech really impacts young Australians.

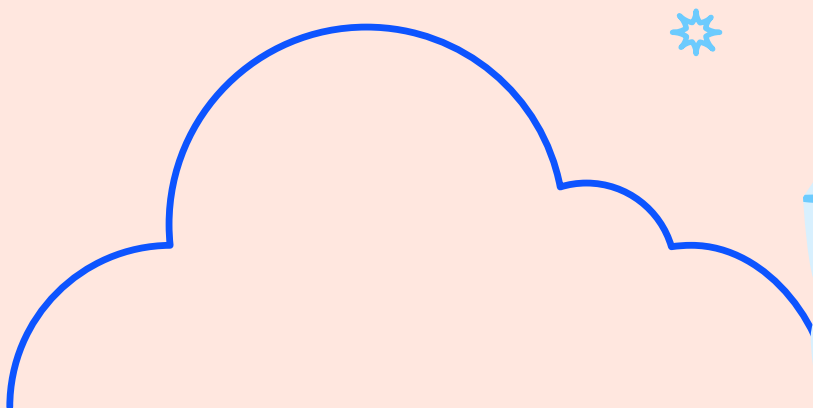
When the results came in the AYDI showed that digital wellbeing is the most pressing need for young Australian's, and beyond this, qualitative research and discussions highlighted that poor quality sleep was having a significant impact on their wellbeing.

This grabbed the interest of the Council, so in partnership with Telstra Foundation they laid the plans to look at how this issue could be addressed in 2025.

This Sleep Challenge is the result of those plans. It's a project co-designed and delivered by the Council and their collaborators and partners.

Our shared objective was for the members of the Council to engage with and challenge their own sleep patterns and behaviours and develop a process that could allow others to do the same.

The aim was to promote engagement, conversation, and awareness of sleep habits, rather than to shift sleep behaviours, which would need more time and rigour than the one week challenge allowed for.



# Who Was Involved?

## Youth Advisory Council

Telstra Foundation's Youth Advisory Council brings together a diverse group of young people aged 12 to 18 from across Australia.

The 2025 Youth Advisory Council reflects the rich diversity of young Australians – spanning regional and remote communities, First Nations young people, culturally diverse backgrounds, neurodivergence, disability, lived experiences of mental health challenges, caregiving roles, and identities across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum.

Our council members help us to gain a deeper understanding of how young people experience digital technology and its impact on their lives. The council provides crucial feedback on Telstra Foundation's projects, helps us to develop innovative ideas, and creates content that truly resonates with their peers.





## Who Was Involved? Continued

### Moira Junge, CEO, Sleep Health Foundation

Dr Moira Junge is the inaugural CEO of the Sleep Health Foundation and a clinical health psychologist with a specialty in treating sleep disorders and promoting behaviour change. She has a Doctorate in Health Psychology and is a Clinical Adjunct Associate Professor. Having spent three decades on the front lines treating mental health challenges and sleep disorders, she made the switch from intervention to prevention. Today, she's on a mission to raise awareness in the community and at all levels of government about the importance of sleep in order to embed sleep as a cornerstone of wellbeing alongside diet and exercise—long before problems become chronic. Blending scientific knowledge with real-world insight, Moira is a sought-after speaker in the media and at conferences. She cuts through complexity to deliver evidence-based and accessible strategies that resonate. She brings clarity, credibility, and urgency to one of the most overlooked pillars of mental and physical health: sleep.



## Who Was Involved? Continued

### Jocelyn Brewer, Cyberpsychology Consultant

Jocelyn is a Gadigal/Sydney-based psychologist with a special interest in cyberpsychology and staying human in a digitally colonised, AI-infused world. She is the founder of Digital Nutrition™ and MetaWell, and a sought after speaker and media commentator, with alternative, fresh perspectives on digital wellbeing. Jocelyn is a dynamic, authentic and adept keynote speaker, media commentator and MC. Jocelyn gratefully lives and works on unceded Dharug land with her daughter, partner and chooks.



# What Did We Do?

## Designing the Challenge

The Challenge was designed through shared discussions with the Council, our experts Jocelyn Brewer and Moira Junge and the input of the Telstra Foundation team (with support from our youth engagement collaborators PROJECT ROCKIT). The result was a 7-day challenge that involved:

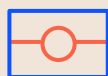
- An information and planning session with Jocelyn and Moira
- Pre- and post challenge - surveys to capture data and identify sleep types and possible strategies
- One week baselining sleep habits without interventions before the challenge week
- The provision of sleep tools to support participants to implement their strategy
- Daily reporting over 7 days of the challenge
- A reflection workshop to explore the experience

Notably, the Sleep Challenge was a pilot project designed to assess its potential benefits and experiences for young people, rather than a full research study.

## The Participants by the Numbers



**25%**  
from regional, rural,  
or remote communities.



**17%**  
are young First  
Nations peoples.



**33%**  
are culturally and  
linguistically diverse.



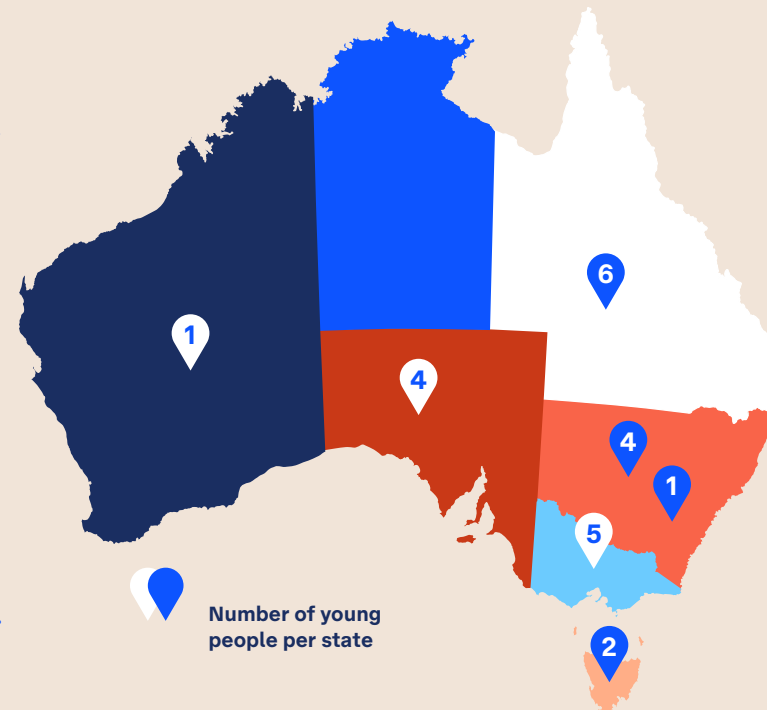
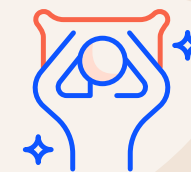
**13%**  
identified as LGBTQIA+.



**12%**  
are young people  
living with a disability



**29%**  
had lived experience  
of mental health issues.





# What Did We Do? Continued

## List of Sleep Tools

As part of the challenge, we provided the participants with different tools that could help them to implement different strategies associated with improving sleep. The following are the tools and their intended use



### How It Helps



#### Fitbit

Tracking participant's sleep quality and duration



#### Sleep Mask

Blocks out light within the bedroom that may disturb sleep



#### Alarm clock

Used as an alternative for waking up in the morning for those who chose to keep their device out of the bedroom



#### BRICK device

Temporarily 'locks' chosen apps from participant's phone



#### Blue light glasses

Reduces exposure to blue light from device screens that can limit production of melatonin



#### Room spray, shower diffuser, puzzle cube

Scented products designed to calm the mind and help the brain adjust to winding down, and a puzzle cube to distract from racing mind.

\* All participants also received a voucher to spend on something specific to them and participants purchased everything from white noise machines to books and puzzles to support a non-screen focussed wind down.



# What Did We Do? Continued

## Sleep Profiles

Participants were supported to identify their sleep profile. They did this through completing a short sleep survey and reflecting on the types they felt most aligned too. The sleep profiles had a range of strategies that young people could implement based on the habits that aligned with their profile.



### The Midnight Scroller

You know the feeling. You just want 5 more minutes, but it turns into 50! This profile struggles with late-night screen use, falling asleep while scrolling, and a hard time switching off mentally.



### The Sleep Procrastinator

This teen knows they should be sleeping but keeps pushing bedtime later. Maybe it's homework, maybe it's just "one more episode". Falling asleep takes a while and mornings feel rough.



### The Overthinker

Lying in bed, their brain is on full speed worrying about tomorrow's to-do list, reliving the day's dramas, or stressing over school or friendships.



### The Zombie Napper

They don't get enough nighttime sleep (less than 7 hours) and crash with long afternoon naps, making it even harder to fall asleep later. They feel tired in class and struggle to wake up refreshed.



### The Wired Owl

Your body feels on at night and sluggish in the morning. Late-night screens, caffeine, or staying up way too late make winding down hard.



### The Weekend Warrior

During the week, your sleep routine is okay, but weekends are a free-for-all. Late nights, long lie-ins, and big sleep-ins throw off your body clock so Monday feels like jetlag.



### The Napping Ninja

You nap for long stretches after school or in the afternoon, making it harder to sleep at night. Your sleep cycle is a bit out of sync.



### The Almost There

You're not doing terribly, but you're not a sleep pro yet either. A few tweaks could make a huge difference in your energy and focus.



### The Sleep Pro

You've nailed the basics! Your sleep habits are solid. Regular bed and wake times, minimal screen distractions, and you wake up feeling pretty refreshed.

# Reflections From Our Professionals



## Moira Junge Statement



“It’s been an honour for the Sleep Health Foundation to be involved in this sleep challenge being undertaken by Project Rokit in conjunction with the Telstra Foundation. There are many barriers to getting good sleep, especially in young people. Sleep is essential for growth, learning, retaining information, regulating mood and emotions, keeping physically well and reducing risky behaviours. Sleep deprived brains also struggle with creativity, focus and decision making. So, helping young people to understand these risks and empowering them to take some steps towards learning how to prioritise sleep has been a great honour. At a societal level it’s one of the most impactful things we can do for our children’s futures.”



## Jocelyn Brewer Statement



“The Sleep Challenge created a unique opportunity for young people to unpack the components and complexity of the sleep needs of humans, especially as it relates to the digitally colonised world they are immersed in. Contemporary teens have a much noisier and busier world to navigate than I did in the 90’s, with so many streams of information competing for their time and attention.

The YAC developed a bespoke toolkit of strategies to help them both optimise their sleep but also understand the impacts of cognitive (over)stimulation on getting their zzz’s. Rather than the challenge being about simply longer sleep times, it was really about:

- the way that understanding your neurobiology helps you take ownership of change,
- how a tailored approach that young people have agency over designing helps increase effectiveness and
- how small sustainable shifts and a mindset of progress over perfection amplifies long term behaviour change skills.

Young people learned that habit change isn’t a ‘set and forget’ system, but an opportunity to review and reflect compassionately on the things both inside and outside of their control when it came to optimal sleep. Supporting the group was a joy - the group explored with curiosity the strategies and shared great insights into the myriad of challenges to prioritising sleep.”

# Themes

Across the data and subsequent reflections with the participants from the Council and our sleep experts, we collectively identified five key themes to share. They are:

Reducing Screen Use is not a Motivating Factor

Young People are Tired (More Sleep May Not Be The Answer)

There is Value in Reflecting on Your Sleep

The Positive Psychological Benefits are Broad

There is Not a One Size Fits All Approach to a Good Sleep





## Theme 1: Reducing Screen Use is not a Motivating Factor

This challenge suggests that reducing screen use is not a motivating factor for young people in their goal to achieve better sleep, instead their motivation is wanting to feel better. (*“my sleep goal was to improve the time it takes to fall asleep and to improve my quality of sleep.”*).

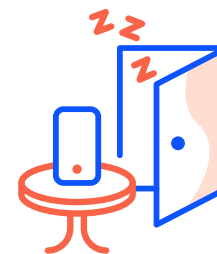
At the start of the challenge each participant set a goal and their goals focussed on getting more sleep (*“My goal is to get more of the REM sleep and deep sleep”*), or waking up feeling more refreshed (*“I’d like to start waking up feeling like I’ve had a good night’s sleep – this looks like feeling refreshed and not tired”*). It also encompassed various aspects related to their emotions and aspirations, specifically their desire to increase energy levels and enhance their focus during the most significant parts of their day. (*“not getting distracted by other tasks while in bed”*). The reduction of screen use didn’t appear in any of the participants goals.

Things that mattered to them, upon reflection were:

- Thinking more about their sleep and having it front of mind
- Sleep routine and patterns
- Listening to their body more
- Creating time and space to wind down
- Setting boundaries around sleep time

As we see in Graph 1 (on page 14): Sleep Type and Chosen Strategies, addressing the use of screen-based technology was definitely a part of strategies across almost all of the sleep types (*“I would brick my phone to block all distracting apps and then leave the brick in another room so I wasn’t tempted to use it.”*), but even then, technology was not the central or even most widely chosen strategy at the start of the challenge (*“I use the sleep mask, the spray smell bottle, multiple alarms, the 30 mins of sunlight in the morning.”*)

This suggests that an approach to supporting young people’s well-being could be to focus less on technology, devices and how young people use them around bedtime and find strength-based approaches that motivate them in ways that connect with their interests, their goals and their personal sense of well-being.



I’d like to, in the next few weeks, improve my sleep hygiene by going to bed and waking up at a consistent time every night (9.30pm). Similarly I would like to establish a solid nighttime routine to follow every night, to instil a sense of calm and promote sleepiness, allowing me to wake up feeling refreshed.

A Sleep Challenge Participant’s Sleep Goal

# Theme 1: Reducing Screen Use is not a Motivating Factor Continued

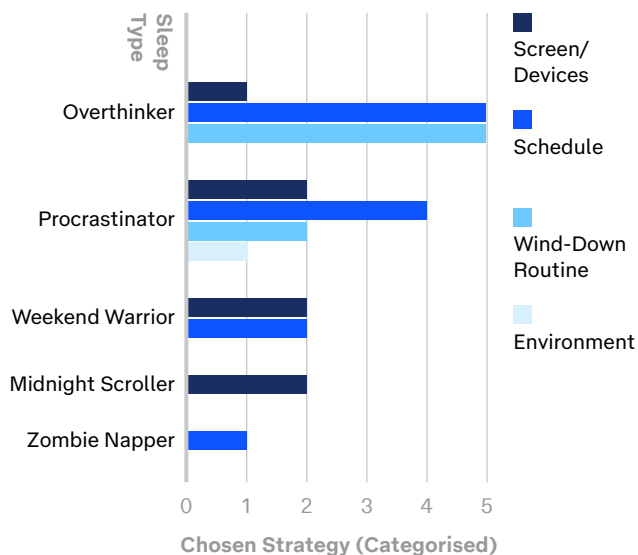


If you're lying in bed unable to fall asleep, get up and do something quiet and relaxing (like reading or listening to soft music) until you feel sleepy. (or do this on top of the covers) ... don't lie there for what feels like more than 30 minutes.

Moira Junge, CEO, Sleep Health Foundation

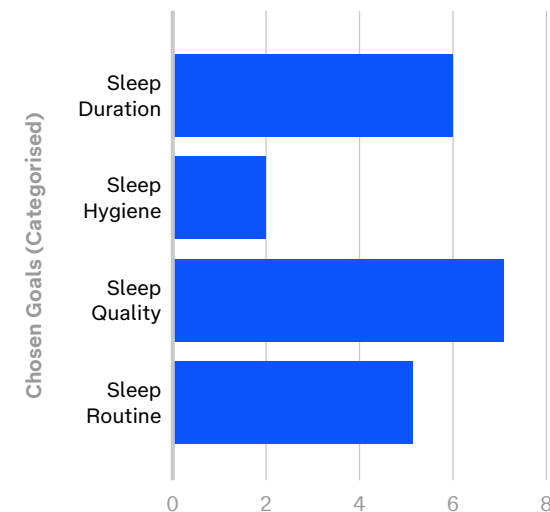


Graph 1: Sleep Types and Chosen Strategies



**Note:** As this graph shows, screens/devices weren't a common goal, but common as a strategy. They are part of the picture of improved sleep, but not the 'silver bullet'.

Graph 2: Chosen Sleep Goals



**Note:** Chosen sleep goals were categorised into 4 'types': Sleep Duration (aiming for a certain amount of sleep per night), Sleep Hygiene (balancing device use at bed time), Sleep Quality (achieving R.E.M and reducing waking up during the night), and Sleep Routine (Going to bed at a certain time, as well as implementing a wind-down routine).



## Theme 2: Young People are Tired

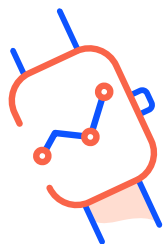
The purpose of the Sleep Challenge was to observe how a small group of young people might be affected by reflecting on their sleep patterns, both individually and collectively. (*"I enjoyed being a part of the community. It's nice to be doing the challenge while others are."*)

As indicated by the 44% of instances that young people woke up tired (see Graph 2), despite an average sleep time of 7.6 hours. All collected data showed young people are waking up early. Of the 135 instances recorded, 74 of them (or 55%) were at 7am or earlier. And, 27 instances were 6am or earlier which accounts for 20%.

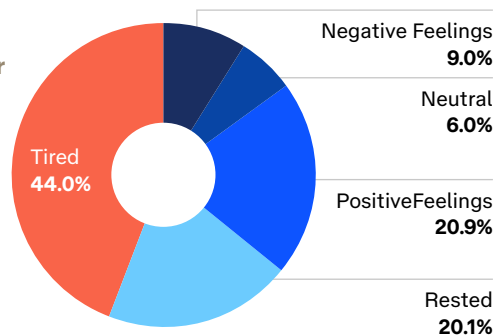
These early days and also late nights were often caused by activities that are organised outside of school hours. (*"I feel tired, but that's because I had to wake up earlier"*) Given our understanding of teenagers' biorhythms it is clear that school and activities start and end times are not considering the sleep needs of young people.

The findings indicate that systemic issues affecting young people's well-being and sleep deserve deeper exploration beyond focusing solely on individual actions or behaviour change.

However, the challenge definitely helped young people reflect and consider the impact of poor sleep and what they might do to improve it. (*"The challenge has really shown me that I'm tired because of my crummy sleep schedule and that I can improve it"*).

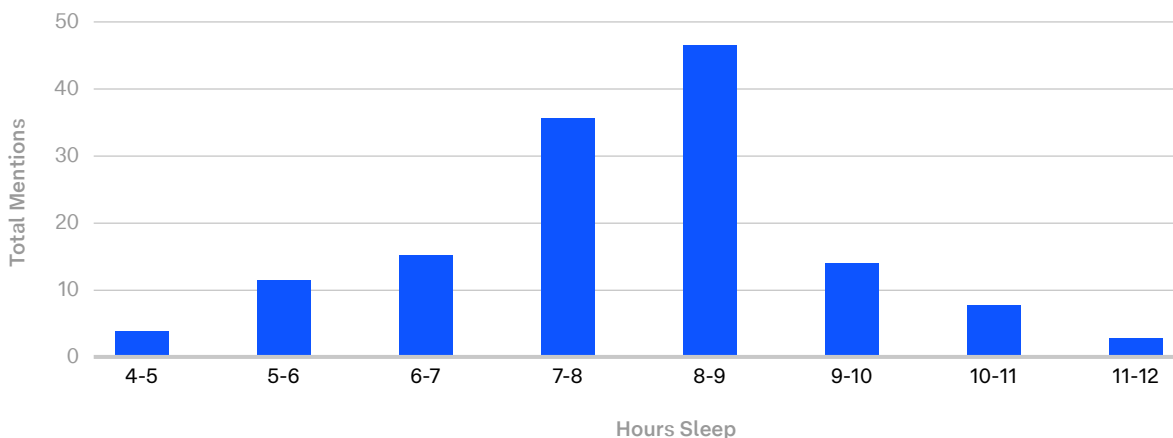


**Graph 3:**  
Feelings after waking up



**Note:** Members reported feeling 'tired' almost 0% of the time during the challenge.

**Graph 4: Hours spent asleep**

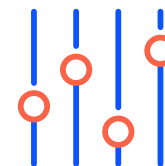


**Note:** Members were mostly sleeping between 7-9 hours a night, – within the recommended amount of sleep for teens. This data set does not represent sleep 'quality'.



(I learned) That I spend longer lying in bed without falling asleep than I thought I did and that I'm more inclined to go to bed later and wake up later. I feel that when I do this, I've had better quality sleep and feel better and less exhausted when waking up, probably like most teenagers. Unfortunately, our current society doesn't really allow for that.

Sleep Challenge participant



## Theme 3: There is Value in Reflecting on Your Sleep

The Sleep Challenge has highlighted, what we probably already know, that young Australians are tired a lot of the time. (*"I feel ridiculously tired ... I need more of a routine"*).

Jocelyn Brewer's analysis of the final data indicated that one outcome of the Sleep Challenge was participants' increased self-awareness and recognition. She noted that participants demonstrated greater awareness of their sleep patterns:

- Participants consistently reported heightened awareness of their patterns and habits (*"I've learned that there are things I can control about my sleep, even though I am a poor sleeper."*)
- Many discovered the significant impact of seemingly minor behaviours (like phone use) on sleep quality (*"I have learned that getting rid of habits like scrolling on my phone are too difficult to immediately stop within a 7 day period. However, gradually reducing how long I scroll each night has helped me."*)
- Recognition of the connection between sleep and daytime energy and focus. (*"I have learnt that sleep can vary due to various factors such as natural light, what you eat and study habits."*)



Pattern Identification:

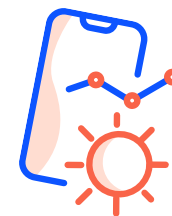
- Participants began identifying personal sleep strengths and weaknesses (*"I've noticed that I spend longer lying in bed without falling asleep than I thought I did and that I'm more inclined to go to bed later and wake up later."*)
- Discovery of individual "sleep personalities" and what works best (*"My sleep quality absolutely improves when I turn off my phone and disconnect. As well as turning the lights off to promote melatonin."*)
- Understanding of how external factors (stress, social events, work) affect sleep patterns (*"I feel like it's very interesting to take a more intentional look into my sleep and what I might be able to do to help me sleep better."*)

The resources provided, in terms of sleep strategies and tips for how to change behaviours or address sleep challenges were very useful for young people. (*"The strategies worked as they allowed me to relax and reflect before going to sleep clearing my head."*)



I learned that sleep is such a complicated and nuanced thing that can be affected by many different factors. I also learned that my sleep habits are super hard to change or break and take a lot of time and mindful effort.

Sleep Challenge participant



I've learnt that I usually hit my R.E.M sleep during 3 o'clock at night, and I learnt that my constant stressing causes an increase in cortisol which puts your body in "fight or flight" mode. Making you stay awake for longer. Using sleep strategies has helped calm that.

Sleep Challenge participant



## Theme 3: There is Value in Reflecting on Your Sleep Continued



Recognise that emotional benefits may lag behind sleep improvements, the challenge was short (sleeping is for life!), the benefits take a while to catch up!

Jocelyn Brewer, Psychologist



Post challenge reflections:

Participants identified their sleep type during their week of baselining and then assessed their type again at the end of the challenge. Here's what we observed:

- 57% of participants had one or more changes to their sleep type from baseline to completion (12 out of 21)
- The most common sleep type in the final survey was the Sleep Procrastinator
- The number of participants who had the same sleep type in both the baseline and final survey was 9 of 21

Most common strategies participants stated they would continue post-challenge were:

1. Reducing/limiting device use (digital sunset, bricking phone, avoiding screens)
2. Light blocking tools (Blue light glasses/filters, and sleep masks)
3. General evening routine/consistency (reading, journaling, wind-down routine)



## Theme 4: The Positive Psychological Benefits are Broad

The data has demonstrated that there are a range of potential positive benefits for young people's wellbeing, growth and development through participating in a sleep challenge.

Participants reported positive emotional outcomes like increased energy and alertness during the day (*"I've felt more alert and haven't been as tired during the day which is great."*). Improved mood and reduced irritability (*"I think that it has kept me a lot calmer"*).

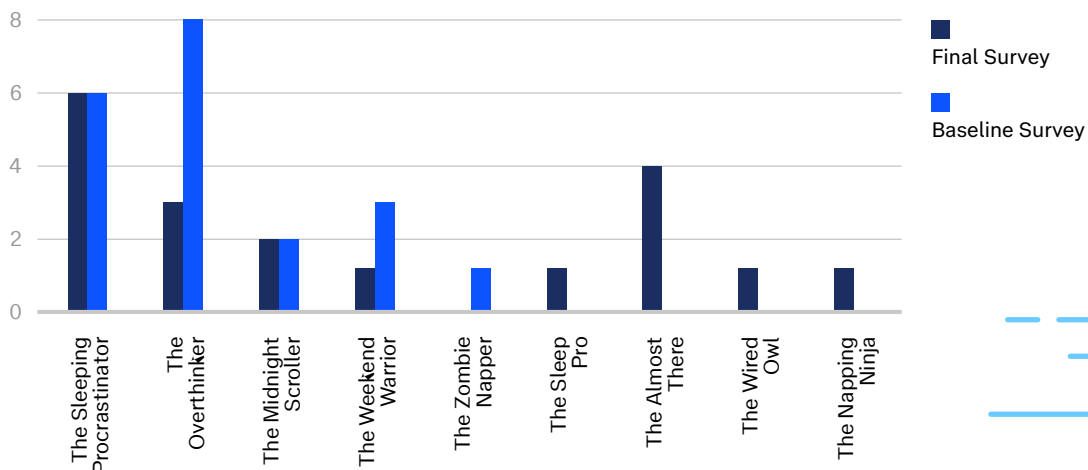
We also clearly saw many participants developed a growth mindset about sleep, viewing sleep and sleep habits as a skill to be developed rather than a fixed characteristic. (*"I now know that there are things I can control about my sleep, even though I am a poor sleeper."*)

Participants were building self-efficacy through their successful experiences with sleep strategies that built confidence in participants' ability to control their sleep quality. (*"I feel like it's very interesting to take a more intentional look into my sleep and what I might be able to do to help me sleep better."*)

We also found that the challenge promoted more intentional and mindful approaches to bedtime routines and sleep preparation. (*"I feel like it's very interesting to take a more intentional look into my sleep and what I might be able to do to help me sleep better. I feel as though staying off my phone and reading instead is helping my sleep slightly, but it may be worth trying something that is not as stimulating."*)



Graph 5: Self Identified Sleep Types (Before & After Challenge)



**Note:** Members self-identified their sleep type at the beginning of the challenge which helped them in choosing strategies to achieve their sleep goals. They then reflected on what type they felt they were after the challenge. The 'overthinker' was the most common sleep type identified, which encompasses feelings of anxiety, worry and an over-active brain at bedtime. But, the challenge appeared to help address this by reducing the numbers who identified as "The Overthinker" significantly.

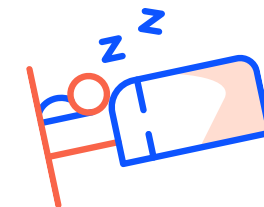


I will continue to use journaling and the evening reset because they have helped me immensely in not only managing my sleep but also staying organised for the day coming and make sure that I'm not too stressed.

Sleep Challenge participant



## Theme 5: There is Not a One Size Fits All Approach to a Good Sleep



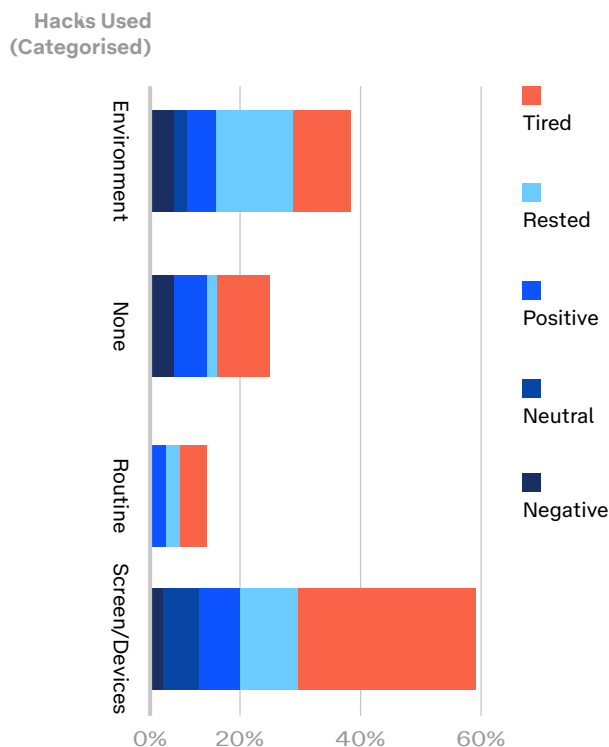
When it came to identifying sleep types, goals and strategies for the challenge, the young people experimented with a wide variety of solutions.

Many young people chose goals relating to improving sleep quality, duration and their bedtime routine, and because of this, it was clear there was no 'common' or widely used approach. (*"I enjoyed trying out new techniques and seeing what worked best for me. I found it difficult to remember to do everything sometimes or stay off devices when I had heaps to do"*).

Over the course of the 7-day challenge, participants indicated that competing priorities and emotional challenges affected their capacity to maintain consistent strategies. Consequently, they adjusted their sleep approaches in response to their evolving challenges and needs. (*"I feel as though whenever I work late I get a poor sleep. I think staying off my phone/laptop is helping but can be difficult at times especially when I'm working late as I still have things to do after work"*). (*"I noticed that when I use the sleep mask by itself I don't sleep for as long. But when I combine it with another strategy – like the sleep spray or unwinding with the puzzle cube – I can sleep for longer, especially with less interruptions to my rest"*). The need for constant adaptation was evident from the majority of participants reporting 'tired' feelings the morning following implementation.

Screens and device use were the most frequently mentioned topic in daily check-ins, but young people described varying approaches to managing their screen time which they partnered with other strategies. (*"... my issue with my sleep was that I would procrastinate and push back the time I said I would try to go to sleep again and again. Limiting distracting apps meant that there wasn't really a reason for me to do this because I wasn't engaged or distracted. Including a bit of routine like showering before bed to wind down and distance myself from screens helped as well, once you start falling into a pattern the routine gets easier."*)

**Graph 6: Daily strategies used (categorised) and reported feelings morning after implementation**



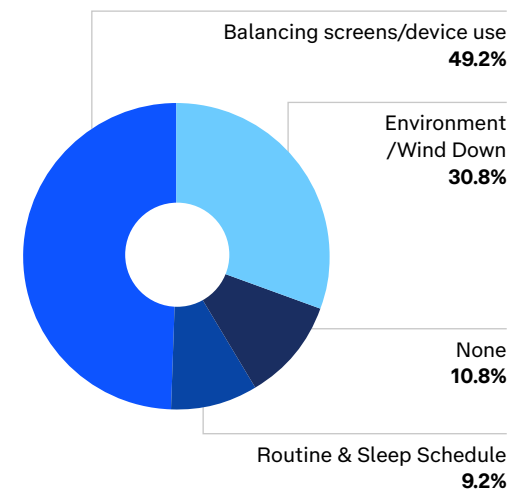
**Note:** : The young people experimented with a range of different strategies that supported their sleep goals, which we have categorised into 4 main groups. It is clear that despite the strategy implemented, the young people reported feeling 'tired' across the board. We recognise a 7-day challenge is not a sufficient amount of time to alter sleep quality long-term.



Starting with small steps can make a big impact on your sleep journey.

Sleep Challenge participant

**Graph 7: Strategies used on daily basis**



# Reflections From the Young People



## Lilly, 14

During the sleep challenge, I noticed how much my phone and late-night screen time was affecting my sleep. At first, it was harder to switch from my phone and doom scrolling to reading. However, after a few days I noticed that falling asleep was easier and instead of scrolling and not feeling sleepy after reading for an hour or two I was feeling sleepy.

To switch from my phone to my book I was using a brick device and shutting down my apps like YouTube and Instagram to help switch to a book then playing some quiet music on Spotify to help me fall asleep. One thing that I found the most interesting was despite only running this challenge for a week was how much better I was feeling once I woke up in the morning. Before when I woke up for school, I wasn't feeling great and throughout the day I was still feeling tired but after the challenge I noticed I was feeling fine when I woke up and was no longer as tired during a day. I am going to continue to use these sleep tactics to better my sleep.

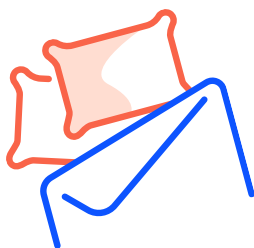


## Ameera, 14

I was really excited to take part in the Sleep Challenge, as I've always struggled with sleep due to overthinking, insomnia, and the stress of upcoming assignments or tests.

When I received my sleep kit, I loved the thoughtful items included such as the sleep mask, shower steamer, Fitbit, and journal. Before the challenge began, I completed the sleep profile survey and, unsurprisingly, was identified as "The Overthinker." I explored some of the strategies recommended for my profile, such as journaling, creating a to-do list, using the sleep mask, and bedroom stretches/ yoga. From these, I chose three strategies to focus on consistently throughout the week, this included journaling, using the sleep mask, and a nightly wind-down routine.

My wind-down routine included preparing for the next day by packing my school bag and setting out my uniform, avoiding screens for 30 minutes before bed, and taking a hot shower. During the first few days, it was difficult



to stick to these habits especially as I had a busy week of tests and assessments but with persistence, they gradually became easier. Journaling quickly became the most effective and enjoyable strategy for me. I realised that once I put my worries and fears onto paper, they felt less overwhelming and intimidating. This made me less anxious and helped me approach the next day with clarity. Overall, the Sleep Challenge encouraged me to adopt simple but powerful habits that improved my sleep and wellbeing.

Once the challenge came to an end, we had a 'debrief' meeting that gave me so much insight into how others experienced this challenge, the science behind the strategies, and why consistency is vital for our sleep. Our sleep advisors, Jocelyn and Moira had explained how we as humans struggle so much with consistency, especially when it comes to sleep. I found that really insightful as I've always struggled with routines and sleep consistency. Overall, I really enjoyed participating in this challenge. It helped me better understand what type of sleeper I am, gave me many strategies to reduce my sleep anxiety, and gave me an insight on what a healthy, sustainable sleep schedule looks like.





# Impact

The Telstra Foundation supported the Youth Advisory Council to share the Challenge more broadly and as a result, the Challenge has had an impact beyond the individual impact on participants.

This includes:

Development of a Sleep Challenge Guide by Telstra Foundation based on the pilot.

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A Telstra Foundation blog sharing the Challenge

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Telstra employees have engaged in their own sleep challenge, inspired by the Telstra Foundation Youth Advisory Council

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Telstra Foundation partner, PROJECT ROCKIT, will be turning the pilot into a Sleep Challenge resource that can be used by schools and communities

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# Conclusion

The Youth Advisory Council Sleep Challenge has shown us that when young people are given the space, tools, and trust to explore their own wellbeing, remarkable things can happen. Over just one week, nineteen young people from all walks of life came together with curiosity, honesty, and a willingness to try something new. Their reflections remind us that sleep is deeply persona - shaped by routines, pressures, and the world around us - but also that small, mindful changes can make a real difference.

This project was never about perfection or quick fixes. It was about starting a conversation, building self-awareness, and empowering young people to take ownership of their sleep and, by extension, their wellbeing. The courage and openness shown by every participant, and the wisdom shared by our sleep experts, have laid the groundwork for a model that can be shared and scaled.

Importantly, the challenge highlighted that digital technology can't be solely characterised as a barrier to good sleep, but is a complex part of young people's lives. For many, screens and devices are woven into daily routines, social connections, and even relaxation. The most meaningful changes came not from removing technology altogether, but from helping young people reflect on their habits, set boundaries that work for them, and use digital tools more intentionally – whether that meant removal at sleep time, app blockers, or simply choosing when to switch off.



Sleeping is a concept many of us ignore and skim over but this challenge has taught me that it is such a vital and complex part of everyday life and how simple changes can help you get the most out of your sleep every night.

Sleep Challenge participant

Most importantly, this challenge has reinforced the value of listening to young people and designing with them, not just for them. Their voices, insights, and lived experiences are the key to creating solutions that truly work. As we look ahead, we hope this pilot inspires others – schools, families, and communities – to keep the conversation going and to support every young person in finding their own path to better sleep and brighter days.

Helping young people simply engage and think about their sleep habits is important.

What is the role of their digital use in this?

# The Method

## Participants:

21 members of the Telstra Foundation Youth Advisory Council (YAC), aged 12–18, representing diverse backgrounds and regions across Australia.

### Study design

A 7 day, youth led pilot designed to increase sleep literacy and agency among young people by:

1. Prompting self reflection on sleep
2. Trialling simple, evidence informed strategies
3. Capturing short cycle feedback on what felt helpful

Participants completed daily surveys and both a baseline and a final survey were completed 7 days before and after the Challenge.

### Measures:

Quantitative data (bed/wake times, morning feeling, strategy use) and qualitative reflections (open-text responses, group discussion) were collected to assess engagement, feasibility, and perceived benefits.

### Governance and ethics

- **Youth led with expert oversight:** Co-designed by the Telstra Foundation Youth Advisory Council with input from Dr Moira Junge (Sleep Health Foundation) and Jocelyn Brewer (cyberpsychology) and facilitated by PROJECT ROCKIT
- **Consent & safety:** Participation was voluntary. For under 18s, parental/guardian awareness and consent processes were followed as applicable. Data was de-identified for reporting. The pilot did not provide medical advice, diagnose conditions, or replace clinical care
- **Scope:** A wellbeing pilot (not a clinical intervention or research project). The aim was engagement and feasibility, not behaviour change or efficacy

### Safeguards and escalation

- Clear guidance on when to seek help and signposts to trusted services
- Participants could modify or stop strategies at any time
- No sleep restriction tasks; emphasis on gentle, additive habits (light, routine, wind down, tech boundaries)

### Known limitations

- Short duration (7 days) limits habit consolidation and delayed benefits.
- Self report may over/under estimate duration/quality; trackers were optional.
- Single cohort (YAC) and no control group; not generalisable.



That quantity of sleep doesn't necessarily equate to quality or restful sleep. That sleep is an individual spectrum and what is good for one is not good for another.

Sleep Challenge participant



You don't need to make sure you're getting up early/late, you need to make sure your sleeping on time and sleeping when your body wants to.

Sleep Challenge participant

