



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.

Javier Agüera



Javier Agüera is an inventor and serial entrepreneur. His past innovations include Europe's first Android phone, the award-winning Blackphone consumer privacy device, and a patent-pending dream incubation method. He is passionate about challenging how we adopt new technologies through human-centric approaches to design and business modeling. He also loves crafting interactive art experiences that help people connect to each other and themselves.

The decision to give a child a smartphone is one of the most fraught and complex ones that today's parents face. Reports come out weekly suggesting that smartphones may contribute to the current youth mental health crisis. Yet, parents lack effective tools to navigate this complex shift in autonomy and trust, and children lack the skills and habits required to inhabit a digital world built for adults.

Pandora's Way is a method and toolkit that helps parents prepare their kids (and themselves) with the skills and dispositions that they need to handle their first smart devices and enter the online world as (pre)adolescents. Families can coordinate the decision along with their community, to create a shared, memorable experience that transforms a moment into a journey of learning and growth.

Our model integrates the latest psychology, education, and behavioral science research into the archetypal framework of rites of passage – a practice that humans have used for millennia to initiate their young people into adulthood. Through Pandora's Way's, STA²RS, families create a **Safe** community where **Trust** can be built. As they progress, children complete challenges that develop their **Autonomy** and **Accountability**, with the ultimate goal of nurturing future-ready citizens through individual **Resilience** and an ethic of **Service**.



PANDORA'S WAY

PRODUCT: Pandora's Way **TARGET AGE:** 9-12

Pandora's Way helps families guide children into a healthier digital adolescence, creating a journey towards first phone ownership based on trust, agency, resiliency and service.

→ [PANDORASWAY.COM](https://pandorasway.com)



HOW WE INCORPORATE WELL-BEING COMPONENTS NOW

Pandora's Way takes a holistic approach to fostering well-being. At the very core of the experience, we use creative challenges to develop **competence** through a gamified, personalized journey. We have designed both on- and offline challenges to foster children's overall foundational needs of **safety and trust**. As they proceed through the journey, young people develop their **autonomy** and **identity** while increasing their **emotional regulation skills, accountability, and resilience**. The first version of Pandora's Way focuses on intra-family social connection, but future versions will support connections among peers and their families and communities as well.

WHAT MORE CAN OUR PRODUCT DO TO ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING?

- + The journey should inspire children as well as their parents. A clever scaffolding of incentives that engage users' sense of agency strengthens intrinsic motivation, which in turn can multiply the effectiveness of the interventions.
- + It's important that a pathway exists for youth who complete the program to become mentors and community supporters, enriching the experience for other families.
- + The parent experience will be optimized to support and align with the child's journey, to ensure that the family core can be a consistent support of the values, skills and habits that Pandora's Way is fostering.



Working in this space sometimes feels like exploring uncharted territory. But it's not! Thanks to the fellowship we learned validated frameworks and tools, and put them into practice. But more importantly, we did so along with a cohort of truly inspiring individuals that truly made us feel we aren't walking this walk alone.



REFLECTION

The context of every child is subject to a high level of variance. For example, a child in a two-household family may have different device needs than those who live in single or two-parent households. The child's temperament and motivations matter as well. We will give parents and other community members the last word in customizing the experience. Doing things in community greatly enhances potential outcomes, but forming those communities (especially aligning parents with each other) is not trivial.



LOOKING AHEAD

Pandora's Way is incorporated as a Public Benefit Company, and we are ramping up efforts to fundraise and consolidate our core team. We follow an interactive human-centered design process. One of the key talent areas we are developing is engineering expertise and advanced gamification and user experience. After this fellowship, we are prototyping our new ideas and gathering feedback before going back to the drawing board. This will allow us to test the product and attune it to the reality of user needs. Eventually these changes will make their way to our commercially available product, at which point our focus will be to provide parents with trustworthy and reliable tools. We are incorporating the RITEC framework as a baseline to measure progress of children's growth through the program, as well as essential guidelines both in our product design and business model. One of our goals is to make the toolkit accessible to every family; validating our pricing model will be key to determining how to best make it available in low-income communities.

Furthermore, as part of our social responsibility commitments, we will create content that is freely available to anyone, including non-users, as well as conduct and sponsor research studies in partnership with leading research centers.

+ As a rite of passage, Pandora's Way aims to become one of the key formative and creative milestones that every adult remembers fondly when looking back into their adolescent years. While not a solution for every family, we believe our toolkit can move the needle and potentially help many children worldwide reap the many benefits of rites of passage: a secure sense of identity, strong relationship skills, and an orientation towards service. We plan to measure this impact qualitatively but also by using new quantitative instruments like those being developed at the [Center for Digital Thriving](#) at Harvard University.

- + One of the bridges we hope to rebuild is that of community-driven educational approaches. By helping parents find alignment and synchronizing their kid's digital journey with other families, we can remove one of the biggest challenges to family well-being: the incessant battles that ensue from lack of consistency across multiple households. Furthermore, future versions will enable these micro communities to share their own interventions and learnings with others in a moderated, free marketplace and support community.
- + From a design point of view, we hope to shine light on an alternative path to solving the "tech problem" with "more tech." Pandora's Way does leverage apps and digital devices to deliver its program and assist families and their communities, but it is not a technological solution per se. Indeed, many of the activities encourage offline engagement with family and friends. To this end, we'll offer our learnings to other product and experience designers in the hope that they'll find inspiration in them and unleash a new wave of human-centered interventions.


SESAME WORKSHOP

Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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