

Meet SPOKE, and make looking after your mental health as easy as listening to your favourite music

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Ariana Alexander-Sefre, Co-CEO and Founder SPOKE about the power of intentionally created music, secret and mindful gigs and the importance of normalising emotional literacy and articulation.

I previously ran a business in the wellness space and was aware of the vast number of mental wellness tools available. A few years ago everything changed when my brother's best friend and two close friends tragically took their own lives – I became aware of the silent epidemic of male suicide. I was angry at the state of society – why wasn't mental health being presented in ways that would resonate with more people? It's limited to a culture that is either yogi or clinical, something that sadly does not appeal to millions of people, especially young men.

I questioned why all mental and emotional health support looks, sounds, and feels the same. Ironically, I also discovered that the very people who *can* connect with young men and other underrepresented young people – musicians, cultural leaders, influential voices – have no aggregated platform or validation process to use their voice in the most impactful way.

SPOKE was born out of a desire to create a wellness home for Gen Z. We recognised that we could help and support young people from all walks of life through an engaging platform tailored just for them.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

SPOKE is the UK's no.1 music-led mental wellness app. We are 100% driven by the UK's best artists (producers, lyricists, singers, etc) and are backed by a team of neuroscientists and psychologists.

We have proven that intentionally created music and audio can serve as a highly effective preventative mental well-being tool for the millions of people missed out by traditional 'wellness'. Our mission is to prove that looking after your mental wellness can be inspiring, creative and culturally relevant to youth today.

The app is deeply personalised, we help our users with everything from sleep to heartbreak, confidence and focus. For any time of day, every mood and every intention. We hit the spot every time and our users resurface after a session feeling more connected, creative and with perspective.

We believe in a world where:

Looking after your mental wellness is inspiring, vibe-y and fits into our lifestyle. It isn't a chore, it's as easy as listening to your favourite music

Artists (aka the world's natural healers) finally have a validated and aggregated way to become scientifically-verified ambassadors of mental and emotional health support

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

We launched in Nov 2021, and since then we have grown to over 150 unique sessions, a smart personalisation algorithm, tens of thousands of super fans and a system for music creation that puts positive mental health at the core.

We have also created London's first and only secret, mindful gig series which have been a huge success and will be scaled across the UK and US over the next year.

Tell us about the working culture at SPOKE?

Our culture is still very 'startup-esque', we are a small team, but the fundamental energy is that of creativity, imagination and communication. We learned that poor communication can kill a company culture. So we prioritise open dialogue and in-person discussions when talking about important topics. We encourage our team to share how they feel. We strive to normalise emotional literacy and articulation; two important facets of strong emotional health in a person.

Creativity and imagination are at our core, we work with incredible artists who are our world's natural healers. In order to see systemic change we need to imagine new realities. I believe that imagination is a value that should be baked into any team who are trying to make changes in the world.

How are you funded?

We are backed by VCs including three of the world's best impact funds (Bethnal Green Ventures, Ada Ventures and Goodwater Capital) and angel investors including Tom Adeyoola, Marla Shapiro, Ed Zimmerman and Nikhil Shah. We are very proud of the talent, passion and compassion that exists in our investor portfolio, they have been immensely supportive as we gear up our growth.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

At the beginning, for every 10 decisions, 5 or more might be a mistake (learning curve). The more decisions I make, the better I get at making them. I think a good ratio is 0, 1 or max 2 mistakes for every 10. I am not there yet but I have definitely improved. The faster you can move and learn, the better. Do not get paralysed with fear of making the wrong move as it leads to inertia.

How does SPOKE answer an unmet need?

Current mental health products (and there are thousands) look, feel and sound very similar. They are 'clinical' or 'yogi'. There are hundreds of millions of people who do not connect with these cultures, and therefore do not pick up early, preventative mental health practices.

SPOKE is different because we work directly within the creative world – where people hold most cultural leverage for young people. We essentially help artists use their influence and talent for the most positive social impact. We have a way we work with artists that is totally different from the industry, and is geared toward impact. We are the world's first validated platform for artists to become scientifically-backed ambassadors for good mental health.

What's in store for the future?

We're gearing up for an exciting future. Our goal is to expand our reach in the coming year and take our mental health solution global.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

To know that a good idea with a talented and driven team is worth more than any person's money. I think more early-stage founders should adopt this mindset and realise that the most valuable asset for our future is imagination, innovation and thinking about how systems can evolve. Perspective is a luxury for too many people, but as a founder it is so important as it keeps your eye on what really matters.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I sleep as much as physically possible, I'll go to bed as early as I can (which unfortunately isn't often or regular) and if I can sleep until 7:30 or 8am I do it. I've realised that good long deep sleep makes everything better – mood, gut health, skin, energy levels, enthusiasm and positivity. I also am actively trying to work on balance by having creative rest often; listening to music, going to

art galleries, going into nature.

Ariana Alexander-Sefre is Co-CEO and Founder SPOKE.

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