



## From Paper to Screen: Creating the TeenCope cast

**Just how did the “TeenCope” team develop these diverse, personable, and interactive animated characters?**



According to co-principal investigator Robin Whittemore, the characters evolved over a ten-month period that included artist pencil sketches, focus groups with teenagers, collaborative meetings with the research team and the information technology team, as well as voiceovers by student actors.

“We really wanted to come up with a cast of characters where a teenager with type 1 diabetes would be able to relate to at least one of them,” stated Whittemore. “Our goal was to develop personalities that were realistic and believable to teens.”

The initial project involved brainstorming with a cast of teenagers that would cover the range of typical adolescents—different appearances, different family structures, of diverse ethnic and racial groups, some involved with sports and others with different extracurricular activities.

Once the personality of each character was identified, artist Kelsey Doherty sketched out some rough drawings, using paper and pencil, for the group to review.

“Once we had the initial sketches, our research and technology team was able to refine the details of each character,” Whittemore added. “This included things like hairstyle and color, clothing styles, and attitude.”

Doherty had scanned the initial drawings into his computer, where they were used as a template for creating the still panels or animation directly in the Adobe Flash program.

A number of teenagers with type 1 diabetes were brought in to evaluate the characters and several of the sessions. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

“The teenagers loved the characters we had developed and wanted to know more about them,” said Whittemore. “These focus group meetings encouraged us to add more personality to the characters with realistic and accurate personas.”

Teen actors were then recruited through Epoch Arts, an “arts for youth” organization in East Hampton, Connecticut, to record the voices for the characters. Doherty then combined the audio files and drawings, and created a Flash file with the voices, sound effects, and motion.

“This has been an incredibly creative and challenging process. We are really excited about the characters that we have created for teens with type 1 diabetes,” Whittemore concluded. “That is one of the premises of our research—to provide virtual role models to teenagers through the internet.”

To see samples of the TeenCope animations, please visit [nursing.yale.edu/News/Features/13](http://nursing.yale.edu/News/Features/13).

