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RESEARCH WEEK PROPOSAL

Research Problem Statement

According to a study done by the World Health Organization, over 5,000 adolescents in the United States die by suicide, while over 600,000 require some sort of hospitalization for self-injury every single year. This study shows that suicide is the leading cause of death for girls 15-19 worldwide and it is often commonly linked to a mental illness or some sort of disorder. Another study done by the Child Mind Institute shows that adolescent girls are twice as likely to experience depression than boys. While this is the most accurate information I was able to find, the numbers of teens who deal with depression, self-injury, and suicide are probably a lot higher, but are unreported because of the stigma and shame that surrounds mental illness. So why is this such a problem for young children? And how can we create an event or a safe environment where children can not only learn about their illness but meet other children who are facing the same issues as them. I decided to create a mental illness retreat for both children and teens to attend called "Exhale-learning to be okay;" so that they could learn more about their diagnoses, how to better deal with it, and meet others who are facing the same problems so that they could fight together instead of alone.

Communication Objective

My goal in this project was to try and depict the feelings that come along with having a mental illness and make it something that was relatable through both visual images and the event itself. By creating this event, I wanted children to be connect with others dealing with the same things as them. When you're dealing with a mental illness it often feels as if the illness is so much bigger than yourself, but when you know you're not the only one dealing with the illness, it makes you feel like you actually have a chance at overcoming it. By creating a support system through a camp where you can connect with others your age, it creates a safe environment for children to feel like they have someone to talk to other than their parents about their struggles. Many children and teens rather rely on their peers than parents to talk through issues they are facing. Oftentimes parents will struggle to understand the issue at hand and some, even deny their children have a problem. The goal of this retreat is to communicate to children that it's okay to not always feel okay and that they won't always feel the way they do now.

How it was produced

My design process to create this event took a lot of time and planning. First, I started researching to find statistics and to know that there was actually a problem that needed to be solved. To gain inspiration for my visuals, I talked to several friends who have experienced mental illness and also took inspiration from my own experience. I then started visual research to try and figure out how to accurately and effectively represent what dealing with a mental illness feels like. A lot of my inspiration came from David Carson, a designer who really pushed the boundaries with design. Several of his pieces of work included numerous overlapping

words, letters, and images with no visual direction or planning really. To be honest, his designs look completely chaotic which is often like all of the thoughts spinning in your head when you deal with something like depression or anxiety. I created a visual moodboard by gathering images from both Google and Pinterest that consisted of: colors, David Carson's designs, font inspirations, others' depictions of what a mental illness feels like, and even some work from the Bauhaus art movement. From there, I sketched several solutions and went to the computer to digitize several iterations to eventually arrive at a visual solution to my problem. I used programs such as Adobe Illustrator and Adobe InDesign to produce all of the visuals and layouts for this research project.

Visual Solution

My visual solution for this problem included light pastel colors throughout the campaign materials to accurately represent the audience that I was trying to target in this mental illness retreat. I created all of the visuals in Adobe Illustrator and wanted to give them a very hand drawn appearance as if it was created by a child. I placed some textures on the visuals, so that it would look like they were drawn with crayon or colored by a child. The main visual consisted of three balloons that were outlined in black with scribbles of color, so that it looks like a child colored them outside the lines. Another visual I had drawn were several clouds. The clouds contained words, phrases, and thoughts that often go through someone's head that deals with a mental illness. The words themselves were both handwritten and edited in Illustrator. I also found a font that looked as if it was hand written and used that throughout the branding as well. The Research campaign for the mental illness retreat included a poster, itinerary, mailer with information on the retreat, and a personal invite to the event. Each individual piece of the campaign included various combinations of the visual elements that I created.