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## **Combining efforts: Libraries as mental health safe spaces**

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Sabrina Thomas and Kacy Lovelace

# Combining efforts

## Libraries as mental health safe spaces

In the face of seemingly insurmountable, persisting problems, what is one thing that you could do to lift that burden in your own space, in your own building, or on your own walls?

This defining question led to the creation of Marshall University (MU) Libraries Mental Health Initiative. The initiative began with an art exhibition titled: “Don’t Call Me Crazy: Resiliency through Art.” The goal of this exhibition was to encourage students, faculty, and staff to create artwork informed by mental health or to help process their own mental health. With more than 30 artists and 50 pieces filling the four floors of the library, we used this artwork to launch other aspects of the initiative.

For example, we reviewed and purchased self-help books and other mental wellness books for a special display. We created a research guide that included where to find mental health help both on and off campus, as well as national hotlines. Parred down information from this research guide was printed and placed in all study rooms, and on table tents placed throughout the library and campus. Spanning the school year, we hosted panel discussions on various aspects of mental health and wellness. The panel discussions were each livestreamed over our social media accounts. Viewers both in person and online could ask anonymous questions using a LibWizard feature.

Further, we housed these panel discussions within our institutional repository so

that they can be viewed indefinitely by faculty, staff, students, and community members.

Encouraging student success is the heart of MU Libraries’ mission and was the main goal of the MU Libraries Mental Health Initiative. We believe that the library is a central place to seek authoritative information on cumbersome topics. As more of our resources and services move online, we believe our brick and mortar buildings continue to serve as a safe place, for protected anonymity where everyone is free to seek answers without fear of shame.

We feel this acutely as West Virginia has some of the highest adverse childhood experiences (ACE) scores. ACE scores are tallies of different types of abuse in childhood. Those with higher ACE scores are at an increased risk to health and wellbeing issues throughout life.

MU is most noted for the movie *We Are Marshall*, but more recently for the documentary featuring Jan Radar called *Heroin(e)*. Huntington, West Virginia, is known nationally for alarming rates of fatal drug overdoses, substance use disorders, and abnormally high rates of depression.

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Use of our counseling services increased in the past five years, despite the student population remaining steady. While these challenges are significant, our students rise to success. Ushering students to resources and informational sources that aid their success was our primary goal when we launched the MU Libraries Mental Health Initiative.

Because education was a key element to the development of our mental health initiative, we were able to break down this area into interactive and informational components. For our interactive component, we developed a series of five panel discussions on mental health themes: “Anxiety & Depression,” “Trauma & Resiliency,” “Addiction & Recovery,” “Disordered Eating,” and “Autism Awareness.”



Montage of art from the “Don’t Call Me Crazy” exhibition.

Planning this series of discussions included many challenges that required thorough planning. We wanted to balance experts in related fields with personal experience stories. We were able to pull guest panelists from a wide variety of sources, including professionals within the university, health care and mental health professionals from local hospitals and clinics, and community members who had experience with the topic of each discussion.

During our planning sessions we realized that the sensitive nature of our discussion topics might actually discourage audience

members from participating for fear of embarrassment or judgement. To address this, we created an online anonymous question submission form using Springshare’s LibWizard software. This form allowed audience members attending in person or following the live feed, to submit their questions privately in real time. No names, email addresses, or IP addresses were collected by this form. Moderators could view the questions through the LibWizard reports page,

and could easily move between in-person questions and the anonymous online submissions. The page was set up to only be visible to users the day of the event, and the simplicity of this tool made it easy to have ready for our first discussion panel.

We started the series in September 2018 with a discussion on

Anxiety and Depression. We had 18 individuals attend asking many questions in person, and eight online question submissions. As successful as the panel was, we realized that there must be a way to make the discussions more widely accessible. To achieve this, we began working with our IT department to record each session by using audio and video technology already available in the facility. This allowed us to stream the live feed to Facebook, while recording a copy for our institutional repository, Marshall Digital Scholar (MDS). Our first attempt failed due to a battery failure, but by our third panel in

January 2019, we were able to stream and record the event in its entirety.

“Addiction & Recovery: Finding Support” became our first fully live streamed discussion panel. The topic was exceptionally timely in the midst of Appalachia’s opioid epidemic. A full one hour and 37 minutes of live streaming was captured and recorded for archiving in MDS. The live stream viewing peaked at nine users, though a total of more than 1,100 unique Facebook users have viewed the recording since the original post in January 2019. The physical attendance of this event is estimated at more than 50, 11 anonymous questions were submitted, and an unknown number of live questions were asked, making this event the most engaging of the series. The MDS archive entry for this recording has been viewed 20 times to date.

Our final two discussion panels, “Disordered Eating” and “Autism Awareness,” saw fewer in-person attendees, but have each garnered several considerable attention since they originally aired. “Disorder Eating” had a peak online viewership of eight, with 371 unique users viewing the material after the live event. The archival entry in MDS has been viewed 25 times, and downloaded once. “Autism Awareness” fell near the end of the spring semester making it a difficult time to engage our student population who were focused on final exams. As a result of this, we had far less live attendance and participation compared to past events. The original live stream had a peak viewership of six users, with a total of 148 unique users viewing the recording after the live event. Interestingly, this discussion garnered the most activity within MDS, with 30 entry views since April 2019.

The content of our panels was incredibly important, and it was crucial that we have a place to provide more information about each of our panelists, links to each panel livestream, as well as the other resources that made up the three components of the mental health initiative: Resiliency through Education, Resiliency through Art, and Re-

siliency through Community. This initiative would have suffered without the appropriate tools to share these resources. We needed a portal where we could bring all of the educational resources together, provide information about the panels and panelists, create awareness about the resources that are already available through the library, and direct students to outside help.

Our primary tool for dissemination was the SpringShare research guide application, LibGuides. The use of these tools was imperative for proper implementation of our initiative. We heavily used SpringShare’s library platform, including LibGuides; LibInsight for recording panel statistics, LibWizard for creating surveys and allowing anonymous questions during our panels; and LibAnswers, the ask-and-answer chat widget, for connecting students, faculty, and staff, and community members with help from our research librarians at MU.<sup>1</sup>

On the homepage is the statement of rationale for our initiative, the three components of our initiative, and pertinent information about the mental health discussion panels. The Ask-a-Librarian chat widget that appears on almost every page of the research guide is also here, as it was important to us that students have as many ways to ask for help as possible.

On the “Resiliency through Education” page, there is panel information. Information about the upcoming panel was featured here originally, self-help workbooks that are available through the university’s e-book collections, information about upcoming mental health trainings at the university, a recommended reading list, relevant titles already available at MU Libraries, and subject heading guides for MU Libraries and our local public library system, as well as presentations that we have given on this topic.

The “Resiliency through Education” tab provides access to the individual pages that were created after each panel concluded. These pages include panelists’ biographies,

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Process Description, IEEE Std 24774-2012 (New York, NY: IEEE Computer Society, 27 April 2012).

6. Laura Costello, "Applying a Software Development Product Cycle to Library Technology Adoption and Development," *Journal of Library Administration* 58 (2018): 334–45.

7. Jean-François Abramic, Roberto Di Cosmo, and Stefano Zacchiroli, "Building the Universal Archive of Source Code," *Communications of the ACM* 61, no. 10 (October 2018): 29–31.

8. Van Lindberg, *Intellectual Property and Open Source* (Sebastopol, California: O'Reilly Media, 2008) chapters 8–10 and 12, <https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/intellectual-property-and/9780596517960/>.

9. Betsy Williams, Rita Kohrman, Justin Melick, Valerie Beech, and Eric Kowalik, "One Tutorial, Two Universities: How Technology

Can Be Adapted to Meet the Needs of Multiple Libraries," paper presented at the Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Annual LOEX Library Instruction Conference, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 6, 2016, [https://works.bepress.com/eric\\_kowalik/13/](https://works.bepress.com/eric_kowalik/13/).

10. "Figure D.2—System retirement SPLCM," IEEE Standard for Developing a Software Project Life Cycle Process, IEEE Std 1074-2006 (New York, NY: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc., approved 30 March 2006), 97.

11. Elizabeth Ferguson Keathley, *Digital Asset Management: Content Architectures, Project Management, and Creating Order out of Media Chaos* (Berkeley, California: Apress, 2014); Brent Furneaux and Michael R. Wade, "An Exploration of Organizational Level Information Systems Discontinuance Intentions," *MIS Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (September 2011): 573–98. **ZZ**

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*("Combining efforts," cont. from page 548)*

digital signage that we used to promote each event, statistics, the livestream link for that panel, and specific resources related to that topic. These can also be found on the "Resiliency through Community" page, but we wanted to make sure that they could be accessed by topic.

The next tab is where we have housed information about the art exhibition that was held this year: "Don't Call Me Crazy: Resiliency through Art." The art exhibition ran from January to May, with students submitting their art pieces in late November 2018. Submission guidelines were included, and that was the primary use of this page until the exhibition began. In February 2019 we obtained permission from 13 of our artists to create a digital presence for the exhibition, which is now the primary use of the "Resiliency through Art" page.

The "Resiliency through Community" page is perhaps the most important page of this guide. This is where all campus, regional, state, and national resources are compiled, and more are added regularly. On this page there's an example of the

educational resources that we posted in each study room at Drinko Library, as well as computer labs in other buildings on campus.

There is a wealth of information from general counseling resources, addiction resources, and sexual assault, dating violence, relationship violence, domestic violence, and stalking resources. We created this guide in early August 2018, and since that time it has been viewed 1,988 times, 1,380 of those in 2019.

Our goal in creating the mental health initiative is to connect people to the help that they need. Using our strengths as information professionals, libraries can be central places to seek out credible and compassionate mental health help. Librarians are uniquely qualified to build bridges of communication between people and resources. At a time when mental health concerns are rising, we can help by starting with our own walls.

## Note

1. The research guide can be found at <https://libguides.marshall.edu/mentalhealth.> **ZZ**