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The Silent Illness

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Abstract

My capstone project is all based on mental health, specifically depression. I created a blog based on my own personal story, in hopes I could reach people in our community who may be personally struggling with mental health or know someone who is struggling. The purpose of my project was to be a voice for those who feel as if they have lost theirs. Mental health is a taboo subject even though therapy has come a long way in becoming normalized. The blog is a safe place for those who feel the courage to share their story or struggles with mental health, or it can be a place where a loved one or medical professional can refer them for support. It is a community of support.

How might I help normalize the stigma of mental illness? I can make the topic more publicly accepted and talked about either through the use of a blog or a social media profile that can show people that struggling with mental health is not an unusual struggle and they aren't alone in their battle.

When people are struggling with mental health and are fighting their own demons, it is still taboo to talk to others about it. To help alleviate this issue I can either start a blog and create an online presence that can support people who are going through these struggles. It can give them a safe space to come and be part of a community designed to allow them to share their struggles and grow. *Mental Health ~ Community ~ Support*

After losing someone that I loved to suicide, and being someone who struggles with depression I feel a sense of responsibility to be a voice for those who are struggling in our community.

I created a blog that is centered around my personal story. When I first started this journey I knew I wanted to use my story to try and make a difference in the community. I wrote

out my story from start to finish, the day that it all started. I then added in my own personal struggles that I have with mental health. There is this silent illness that many people don't realize even exists and I wanted to be able to educate people that depression doesn't look the same for everyone and it is okay to speak about it. I really enjoyed this article by POLYCOM, it stated “8.4% of adults in the United States, 21 million as of 2020, endure at least one major depressive episode annually.” This silent illness that I talk about is very dangerous, even though the stigma around mental illness is getting better, people have beliefs that can be dangerous. Such as, “that if depression isn’t severe and persistent—involving frequent bouts of uncontrollable weeping, emotional paralysis, and suicidal thoughts—then there isn’t a real problem and one should just tolerate pain with stiff-lipped silence. Indeed, the catch-22 of high-functioning depression is that sufferers often believe that since they can push through their sadness while barely missing a step, it would be indulgent to seek help (Amatenstein,2022).”

Being loud doesn’t make you weak. I was able to get statistics from our own community from the Crisis Intervention Team at the Ada County Sheriff’s Office. Through my findings in 2022 there was a 24.27% increase in mental health cases in Ada County. The total cases of adults increased 21.1% and in juveniles it increased by 40.1% (CIT, 2020). These numbers are showing us that mental health cases are only climbing. How do we get ahead of this crisis we are seeing in our community? I am hoping by creating a safe place for people to share their struggles, it will provide them a resource instead of turning to drugs, alcohol, and potentially the feeling of life has no purpose. It will help with the stigma around mental illness, and will show people in the community that it is okay to talk about your struggles. I thought this statement was interesting from Cambridge University, “Stigma was the fourth highest ranked barrier to help-seeking, with disclosure concerns the most commonly reported stigma barrier (Clement et al,2015).” The

dangerous part of mental illness is not talking about it and getting help. It is those in our community that we think are good mentally because of how happy they portray themselves, that are actually struggling the worst. My blog was posted and shared, I have had people comment on my blog. It has become a place where people can feel safe in sharing their own personal story.

Innovative Approach

As I get my story out online and create a place for people to discuss their own struggles, people will share different perspectives on the issues and help each other see their own issues from a different perspective.

My approach is innovative because it can span to people around the world. Being an internet based blog and forum for people to discuss their struggles makes it simple to get on and find support from people who may have gone through similar experiences.

Emotional Intelligence

As I started my research into mental illness and depression, I had a moment of self realization of what type of depression I personally deal with. It was really interesting to learn about it and better understand myself. I am more self aware and have learned ways to help overcome some of my personal struggles. I have also had some awareness of others, I have noticed in my sister that she has some similar qualities when it comes to depression. After doing some research and sharing it with my boyfriend, he has talked about being more aware of my struggles and has learned ways to navigate my depression.

Yes I do believe my approach considers the emotional intelligence of my audience. My topic is a very emotional topic, so I am sure when others read my blog it can bring up feelings and it can be emotional for them. My platform creates a safe place for people to talk about their

experiences or maybe what they are personally struggling with currently. It is a good way to express feelings and or get help through others going through similar situations.

My research is valuable because it gets people to truly think about how they are feeling. The purpose of putting my story out there is so people realize that they aren't alone, and there are many people that may be feeling the way they are. There can be a community where they help each other get through whatever it is that they are going through. My project involves people's lives, anything that can help someone get through a difficult time in their life and help them realize their worth that will always be something valuable to me and others.

Creative Thinking

I came up with a blog because I spent time thinking about the best way that a college student could share a story that was available to the public. I wanted to create a space where others could share their own stories and find the support they need that could potentially change their lives.

The unique part of my approach is that it is real life stuff. I lived this and am sharing my personal experience with others in the hope that they will see how life can have its negatives but it can still be a beautiful experience.

Your Innovative Solution

My project is a forum for people who struggle with depression or know someone who struggles with it to be able to communicate with others and receive support from people who know what it's like. A community of people with experiences that show no one is going through it alone and there is help out there. The potential outcomes could be people connecting and finding support within the group which could be potentially life changing for them. My solution is innovative because it uses a free platform that people can find through a search or through

social media. They could login to the forum and find someone who has had similar experiences or share their own to receive the support they need in that moment. I think I could have found a better way to spread awareness of the forum by finding an influencer I could have partnered with. They would be able to support the mental health community by sharing the link and possibly even their story with the world and lead to an even further reaching forum. I could also use other media forms to get the information and forum in front of people. The great thing about having a free forum is that the more people that see it and participate, the faster it spreads.

Stakeholders will continue to benefit from this as a resource for them to understand the people close to them. They can also use it to refer their friends, family, coworkers or loved ones to when they see them struggling with mental health. It can benefit counselors by giving them a place to send patients to find a sense of community and possibly a tool to journal and have their feelings and thoughts written out in an anonymous scenario. I believe that the overall impact this project will have on the stakeholders will be positive. They will have a place to communicate with other stakeholders who might be trying to be supportive of their loved ones in a similar way. They might be able to find new ways to give the support their people need. And they will have a resource to give those struggling a chance to find a support system through an online community. Considering the length of time my blog has been posted, I feel as if my project has been successful thus far. The comments that I have received have been very positive and supportive.

I did an interview with my sister. I wanted to get feedback from her to see if she felt the content that was shared in the blog would be beneficial for others to hear. Would it encourage someone else to break their silence? My sister mentioned that she believes it is beneficial because it allows others to be brave to talk about their own personal experiences. Another thing

that she mentioned is it is really healthy for others to actually write out their stories, it feels very therapeutic. This blog allows them to do that in a safe place. When I interviewed my sister, she mentioned that my blog was very easy to navigate, she mentioned that my blog was well written. It felt like it was a safe place for people to be able to build a community of support.

I did a second interview with the Victim Witness Supervisor at the Sheriff's Office. She has her masters in Counseling. I wanted to get her opinion coming from a Law Enforcement perspective. Being someone who responds to the crisis calls for the County she would have good insight if she thought this approach would be beneficial or not. She was very supportive and honest when it came to my blog. She said if she was someone who went through a similar situation then it would be a good platform that someone could use to write out their story and get support. Like I mentioned before it can be therapeutic to actually physically write out a traumatic experience. She agreed that it could help someone and create a cyber support group rather than in person. She mentioned in our interview that if I want to hone in on depression specifically I could go into more detail on that. To get this blog out there to try and reach people it would need to be shared on the right social media pages so it reaches the correct audience.

I do feel like I need more time to be able to fairly evaluate if this approach was successful or not. As of now I am not sure how many are following my blog, but I do know I have received two comments. I hope by the end of this I receive more comments and shares on my blog so we can get the conversation and support started. Even though my blog has only been live for a few weeks, I currently have 13 views.

The anticipated results were for people to find a supportive community online that they can lean on for help when they or their loved ones are struggling with mental health. I feel that on a small scale the results confirmed my anticipated results. The blog being an online forum

needs time to gain popularity however, the feedback I've received thus far has been positive. If I were to change anything about how I executed this project, I would have found a few social media influencers to post the link to my blog and talk about their own personal experiences.

References

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Appendix

<https://mgould19936.wixsite.com/morgan/about>