

The Kids Aren’t Alright: A Podcast on Mental Illness in Young People

Senior Project

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Esther G. Maynor Honors College

University of North Carolina at Pembroke

By

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Mass Communications- Broadcasting/Production

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Abstract

I faced many challenges and had many triumphs while creating this project. I began by researching mental illness in adults but quickly changed my focus to adolescents and young adults after finding several articles that showed levels of mental illness in young people have been on the rise in recent years. Due to my own experience with mental health struggles, I wanted to use this project to spread awareness about this issue and provide support for other young people who are suffering from mental illness. After researching the effects listening to podcasts had on people with mental illness, I decided the best way to achieve these goals was to use the skills I acquired from my major in broadcasting and production to create a podcast. I interviewed six anonymous volunteers who shared their experiences with mental illness and what they do to cope with it.

The podcast serves as a support group of sorts for young people who are lost and struggling to deal with mental illness by letting them know that they are not alone and providing them with diverse ways to cope with it. It also provides insight for friends and family so that they can better understand and support young people in their life who may be struggling with mental health issues. Overall, my podcast had the desired effect on not only my audience but also on myself and the guests. By talking with other people who struggle with mental health issues, both myself and the guests felt comforted by our shared experience and learned new methods to cope with it.

The Kids Aren’t Alright: A Podcast on Mental Illness in Young People

The Kids Aren’t Alright (TKAA) is a podcast that explores mental health issues in young adults. The podcast sheds a light on what people can do to recognize and reverse negative mental health, how these issues affect young adults, how family and friend can help to support young people in their life who are struggling, and what can be done to prevent mental health issues from worsening. This subject is particularly important to me because I have struggled with chronic anxiety and depression for nearly eight years now. I have experienced firsthand how my mental health issues disrupt my life and my relationships. I am typically an incredibly competitive and hardworking perfectionist who loves to go on adventures with my friends and family. However, my anxiety and depression have made that extremely hard the past several years. Although these issues are always present, major episodes can cause me to shut down for days or weeks at a time. During these episodes I block everyone out, lose all motivation to do anything, stop eating and sleeping, and have constant panic attacks due to all of the important things that I have neglected while in that mental state. This results in a cycle that is extremely hard to break as well as recover from; once I have broken the cycle, I have to play catch up to make up for the time I have lost and the tasks I have neglected.

These experiences have shown me that many people are uninformed, unaware, or simply do not care about mental health and the toll it can take, especially on young adults. In the past I have been met with confusion, misinformation, hostility, and even denial when I discussed mental health or my own struggles with it. Therefore, I wanted to create this podcast to help people understand the issue and get information from reliable sources so that people who are struggling with mental health issues can better understand their condition and people who are not struggling can better understand why someone with these issues may be acting in such an irregular way. This podcast serves as a support group for people suffering from mental illness as well as a guide that family and friends can use to help their loved ones. I believe this is a prominent issue that is not understood well enough and I wanted to use this project to spread awareness of mental health issues.

This project took the form of a podcast because I believe it to be an effective platform that can be used to spread information in an entertaining and easily digestible way. As a Mass Communications major, I had the knowledge and equipment to create a professional and original series which could be published and posted online for anyone who is interested. I began this process by researching some of the main causes of mental illness in young people as well as non-medicinal treatments that can be used to mitigate symptoms. I also found studies which concluded that using podcasts to spread awareness and build a community had a positive effect on mental illness, so I decided to create a podcast of my own for the purpose of helping young people struggling with mental illness. I wanted to provide personal stories, descriptions of how the illnesses feel to those suffering, and tips to help connect to the audience and provide real-world examples. By using personal opinion and experience, I would be able to effectively raise awareness and understanding of mental health issues as well as create a sense of safety and unity for people in the audience who may be struggling themselves. Once I had the concept for my project, I created a general outline about what each episode was going to cover as well as a script for each episode that described how the content of each episode would be broken down. I then recruited anonymous volunteers to come on the podcasts as guests and describe their personal struggle with mental illness and what methods they use to cope with it. Next, I recorded my own parts for the podcast and edited all of the audio files together to make a cohesive podcast episode. Since the episodes cover unrelated topics and do not have to be listened to in chronological order, they were released all at once on the podcast website, Podbean ([The Kids Aren’t Alright | a podcast by yittsm16 (podbean.com)](https://yittsm16.podbean.com/)).

Though this project was completed successfully and achieved all of the goals I had, there were many challenges that I had to conquer along the way. The first challenge was figuring out how I could have guests share deeply personal information without legal issues. I realized that identifying them in my podcast could pose personal problems for my guest as well as legal problems for myself. I decided to use aliases instead of the guests’ real names in order to protect my guests’ identity as well as to avoid complicated legal paperwork and possibly being sued by guests who had a change of heart in the future. Another challenge was figuring out how I could interview guests who lived a long distance away. I had several guests who had really meaningful experiences and advice to share however, due to distance, I could not interview them effectively use podcasting equipment. I decided that, instead of finding new guests who lived closer, I would interview them over Zoom and instruct them on how to position their microphones. I then interviewed them virtually and recorded the meeting so that I was able to include their insight while also retaining adequate audio quality.

I originally created this podcast in hopes that it would reach other young people like me who are suffering from mental illness and help them to not feel so alone in their struggle. While I still have this goal and feel confident that it will be achieved, I also found that I was able to help a lot of my guests too. I was surprised when I received so many volunteers that I was not able to use all of them because I had worried that it would be hard to find people willing to share their story. After interviewing my guests, many of them were smiling and told me that being asked to talk about their experiences, being able to talk freely about their struggles, and being able to help other young people had a positive effect on them. They described how doing the podcast helped to make them feel heard in a society that usually encourages them to stay silent in their struggle. Creating this podcast had therapeutic effects on not only my guests, but myself as well. As I did my research, I learned a lot about the mental illnesses that I suffer from which helped me understand my condition better. I also felt comforted talking with my guests because I found that a lot of them went through/are currently going through the same struggles as me. Overall, this project helped a larger audience than I had expected and gives me hope that it will help a lot more people.

Episode 1: Anxiety Outline/ Script

• Intro music (30 sec)

• Opening monolog (2 min)

-Name

-explain what podcast for/goals is

-topic of episode

• Anxiety in young adults is triggered by many things (5 min)

-pressure from family and self to do well in school

-navigating social circles and finding true friends

-figuring out what they want to do for college/life

-seeing people thrive on social media

-feeling isolated/overwhelmed due to COVID 19

-alcohol consumption

• How it can affect day-to-day activities (3 min)

-over working to ease worry

-skipping meals and sleep

-cutting off friends and family

-being unable to leave the house

• What it is like to deal with illness (5 min)

-how it feels

-signs

-helpful tips

-preventative methods

• Sound bite (5 min)

-introduce guest (Hannah)

- interview

-commentary

• Outro (2 min)

-final thoughts

-thank guest

-tease next episode

-goodbye

-music

Episode 2: Depression Outline/Script

• Intro music (30 sec)

• Opening monolog (2 min)

-Name

-explain what podcast for/goals is

-topic of episode

• Depression in young adults is triggered by many things (5 min)

-pressure from family and self to be perfect

-navigating social circles and finding true friends

-figuring out what they want to do for college/life

-seeing people thrive on social media

-feeling isolated/overwhelmed due to COVID 19

-alcohol consumption

• How it can affect day-to-day activities (3 min)

-not participating at school/work

-neglecting responsibilities

-cutting off friends and family

-being unable to leave the house

-not being able to do basic tasks

• What it is like to deal with illness (5 min)

-how it feels

-signs

-helpful tips

-preventative methods

• Sound bite (5 min)

-introduce guest (Cole)

- interview

-commentary

• Outro (2 min)

-final thoughts

-thank guest

-tease next episode

-goodbye

-music

Episode 3: ADHD Outline/Script

• Intro music (30 sec)

• Opening monolog (2 min)

-name

-explain what podcast for/goals is

-topic of episode

• ADHD in young adults is affected by many things (5 min)

- born with it

- various kinds of neurodivergence

- can be brought on later in life by other factors

- amplified by certain situations/events

• How it can affect day-to-day activities (3 min)

-not participating at school/work

-neglecting responsibilities

-cutting off friends and family for extended periods of time

-being unable to focus on tasks

-forgetfulness

-not being able to sit still for extended periods of time

-have trouble connecting with others

• What it is like to deal with illness (5 min)

-how it feels

-signs

-helpful tips

-preventative methods

• Sound bite (5 min)

-introduce guest (Cole)

- interview

-commentary

• Outro (2 min)

-final thoughts

-thank guest

-tease next episode

-goodbye

-music

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